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How internship environmental factors affect students' career intentions in the hotel industry through the reflective thinking processes

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ABSTRACT

Based on the social cognitive theory and reflective thinking theory, this study constructs a research model to examine the roles of different internship environmental factors (skills variety, learning opportunities, supervisor support, and interpersonal relationships) influencing students' career intentions through the reflective thinking processes. The results of a survey in Hong Kong and Macau indicate that only interpersonal relationships affect habitual action, four factors affect understanding, but supervisor support does not affect reflection and critical thinking. For career intentions, all the reflective thinking levels except habitual action have a significant effect but understanding has the greatest effect.

1. Introduction

Student internship is a requirement for most university programmes in hotel management. In today's competitive society, students who participate in internships can obtain a good sense of what it would be like to work for corporations in the industry by acquiring practical skills through hands-on experience and by making connections in the workplace, as a preparation for their future career (Kim & Park, 2013, p. 4). However, the internship is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, students understand the operations of the hotel industry and are willing to stay to work in the hotel industry after graduation (Giousmpasoglou & Marinakou, 2021). On the other hand, some students give up working in the hotel industry due to bad experiences during internships in different departments of the hotel (Qu et al., 2021). In the hotel industry, students are the major source of manpower (Koc et al., 2014). Therefore, it is important to find out the factors that affect students' career intentions during their hotel internship journey.

For the factors affecting hotel students' internship experience, previous studies focused on three areas, the benefits of internship stakeholders (Yiu & Law, 2012), the design of internship programs (Stansbie et al., 2013), and internship students' attitudes toward internships and future careers (Chen et al., 2018; Farmaki, 2018). Most previous studies have examined which internship factors influence student satisfaction with and the value of an internship. Only a few studies have been taken on the area of how it affects their career intentions. These factors include skills variety (Wang & Lin 2018), interpersonal relationships (Song & Chathoth, 2013), supervisor support and learning opportunities (D'abate et al., 2009). Griffin et al. (2010) found that internship training has reflective

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elements in the training process. In fact, reflective thinking theory is one of the major theories of education and learning experience. Reflective thinking consists of different levels and is affected by different elements (Satjatam et al., 2016). When students take an internship, different internship factors may affect their reflective thinking process. In addition, reflective experiences during training may affect students' career intentions (Oodio et al., 2014). Therefore, the internship factors may affect students' career intentions through the reflective thinking processes. However, there is limited research on studying the reflective elements that turn students' internship experiences into students' behavioural intentions. As an internship serves as a part of the learning experiences, it will become a significant contribution to both theory and industry that the elements involved from hotel internship reflective experiences to career intentions through a learning aspect.

The aim of this study is to find out the impact of different internship factors on the reflective thinking process and the influence of different reflective thinking elements on students' career intentions. The theoretical contributions of this research are as follows. Firstly, this research fills up the research gap in finding out the relationship between internship factors and career intention by reflective thinking from the perspective of students. Secondly, it serves as a pioneer by using reflective thinking theory on practical education outcomes which is an internship at different levels with different internship factors. Finally, this research provides solid information and recommendation for the hotel industry as an appropriate solution of retain manpower after taking an internship by comparing different internship factors and different levels of training experience.

2. Literature review

2.1. Internship in the hotel industry

The internship has become an essential part of the curriculum in higher education because it helps students understand and adapt to the changing needs of the labour market (Kim & Park, 2013). The internship for students is "a short-term period of practical work experience wherein students receive training as well as gaining invaluable job experience in a specific field or potential career of their interest" (Zopiatis & Theocharous, 2013, p. 34). As the gateway between the classroom and the real world, the internship provides the student with deeper insight into their personal growth, attitudes, and behaviours (Gupta et al., 2010). With this experiential learning activity in a professional setting, students gain industry-related experience and skills and enhance non-cognitive skills such as time management, and self-management (ChanLin & Hung, 2015). At the same time, internships enhance students' management of career expectations and lay the foundations for future professional success in hands-on industries (Zopiatis et al., 2021). The hotel industry, as a service industry with close contact with people, will require employees to have a high level of practical experience to deal with unexpected problems in the service process. An internship in hotels can help students learn and accumulate practical experience.

Currently, there are two common types of internships for hotel management students in higher education: on-campus internship programs and off-campus internship programs (Ren & McKercher, 2021). On-campus internships are where teachers train students in professional skills in simulated hotel settings such as front office and guest rooms. Off-campus internships mean that the university engages in teaching partnerships with hotels and places students in authentic hotels. On one hand, students will face more significant challenges in dealing with diverse customer needs, managing relationships, and resolving unexpected emergencies in off-campus internships. Not all universities have established on-campus training facilities, therefore, the majority of hotel interns will receive their industrial experience from off-campus internships (Wang et al., 2014). The hotel internship in this study focuses on off-campus internship programs.

2.2. Social cognitive theory

Social cognitive theory is a psychological theoretical framework for explaining human behaviour introduced by Bandura (1986), which derives from social learning theory (Bandura, 1998). The social cognitive theory explains individuals' cognitive functions and proposes a conceptualization model with the rule of triadic reciprocity (Bandura & Cervone, 1986). This model is used to identify the interplay relationship among personal, environmental, and behavioural elements. In other words, each element in this model is influenced by the other two elements (Bandura, 1986). Currently, the social cognitive theory has been used extensively in the fields of occupation, education, organization, information systems, and social networks (Bandura, 2001a; Lu et al., 2015; Lucas et al., 2013). Meanwhile, the major of research about social cognitive theory follows the logic of environmental factors - personal factors - behavioural factors. In addition, the social cognitive theory also highlights the energetic nature of human beings. A central feature of the agency is self-reflection, an important aspect that distinguishes humans from animals (Bandura, 2001b). This metacognitive activity of self-reflection is where individuals judge the accuracy of their present and future thinking through the outcomes of their actions, the experiences and beliefs of others, and previous knowledge. However, there is limited research to combine the general logic and human agency of social cognitive theory for studying the psychological mechanisms of interns on students' career decision-making after completing hotel internship programs. Therefore, this study considers the internship factors are environmental factors in experiential learning. Meanwhile, these factors will affect self-reflection (as a personal factor), and self-reflection will affect students' career intention (as a behavioural factor).

2.3. Internship environmental factors

There is a stereotype among the public about hotel internships, where students enter hotels to do some simple and repetitive work (Xiao & McKercher, 2021). However, in recent years, with the increasingly fierce competition in the hotel industry, hotels have been

paying more attention to the cultivation of college students during internships (Kim & Jeong, 2018). In particular, they prefer to let students learn more challenging skills and experience more new things. Therefore, *skills variety* and *learning opportunities* grow to be important internship environmental factors of hotel internships. At first, skills variety can be understood as a job internship having numerous different skills and fewer repetitive tasks (Wang & Lin 2018, p. 4). When there is an internship with more incredible skills variety, the intern needs to put more effort into the internship and therefore perceive the higher meaningfulness of the internship (Behson, 2012).

Secondly, the learning opportunities provided by an internship organization mean that the job offers many opportunities for employees to learn new things (D'abate et al., 2009). For interns, the learning opportunity is the opportunity to learn new things outside of the classroom and the possibility to learn information and knowledge about other hospitality and tourism jobs (Felicen et al., 2014). These opportunities would help students to foster their innovation in the internship, such as the innovation of service processes and content to promote service quality.

In addition, the existing educational research shows that student learning is influenced by teachers' attitudes. As a form of experiential learning, a hotel internship is a special classroom for interns. Hence, the supervisor is a mentor in the internship and their attitudes would affect interns' learning. *Supervisor support* refers to interns' perceptions of how supervisors value their input and care about their well-being (To & Lung 2020). In the study discussing Chinese interns' career development, To and Lung (2020) found that supervisor support can directly influence interns' perception and satisfaction with internships and indirectly affect interns' behavioural intentions.

Furthermore, interns' good *interpersonal relationships* with their co-workers in hotels can ease the interns' stress of the change from school to the organizational environment and allow interns to learn more about the industry from the staff of the organization (Qu et al., 2021). Hence, interpersonal relationships could be described as the fundamental relationships that interns establish and maintain with other co-workers in the organization to integrate into the organization (Song et al., 2012).

This study applies the above four environmental factors (skills variety, learning opportunities, supervisor support, and interpersonal relationships) related to hotel internships to evaluate the interns' authentic learning outcomes in hotel experiential learning.

2.4. Reflective thinking

Educational psychology views reflective thinking as a higher-order thinking skill to understand individuals' complex mental states in the teaching and learning process (Orakci, 2021). The concept of reflective thinking was "active, persistence, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the conclusion to which it trends" (p.9), which was introduced initially by Dewey (1933). In other words, individuals will use this activity of reflective thinking to evaluate their knowledge and experiences in order to understand current complex or unstructured ideas and to prepare for the next planning and behavioural process mentally (Ghanizadeh, 2016). In recent years, reflective thinking has been widely studied in the field of education and learning, which includes traditional classroom learning as well as hands-on learning in professions (e.g., medicine, accounting, and linguistics) (Asakereh & Yousofi, 2018; Tsingos-Lucas et al., 2016). The studies of reflective thinking focus on the antecedents and consequences of reflective thinking from the perspectives of teachers and students (Asakereh & Yousofi, 2018; Roohani & Haghparast, 2020). The antecedents of reflective thinking include not only internal factors such as prior knowledge, self-efficacy, and perceived value (Phan, 2014a; 2014b) but also external factors such as learning environment and tools (Hong et al., 2011; Oner & Adadan, 2016). Kember et al. (2000) proposed an accessible scale of reflective thinking with four levels from low to high, namely *habitual action*, *understanding*, *reflection*, and *critical thinking*.

As the lowest level of reflective thinking, habitual action has been described "what has been learned before and through frequent use that is performed automatically or with little conscious thought" (Kember et al., 2000, p. 385). This means that the learner is involved in routine activities, such as typing on a keyboard. In the workplace, habitual action is generally understood as the basic skills that interns or employees need to acquire for the jobs. For example, the basic skills that interns or employees need to acquire in the hotel industry are expressed as system operation, food service, and so on.

The second level of reflective thinking is understanding, which means that individuals learn directly from existing knowledge without evaluating it (Kember et al., 2000, p. 385). Book learning is a common type of understanding activity. In the classroom, it promotes a better understanding of textbook knowledge (McNeil et al., 2015). In the workplace, students usually apply what they learn from the textbook without changing. As for interns and employees in the hotel industry, the understanding activities mainly are learning directly from their supervisors' instructions and handbooks.

The third level is reflection, which can be described as "the process of internally examining and exploring an issue of concern, triggered by an experience, which creates and clarifies meaning in terms of self, and which results in a changed conceptual perspective." (Kember et al., 2000, p. 385). Compared to the former level of reflective thinking, individuals' reflection further evaluates their strengths and weaknesses in the workplace and finds the optimal solutions to deal with problems. The highest level of reflective thinking is critical thinking, which can be interpreted as a process that helps individuals understand the causes of their perceptions, feelings, and behaviours (Ghanizadeh & Jahedizadeh, 2017, p. 211).

Critical thinking focuses on exploring the meaning of the practical experience and the change in an individual's values and beliefs after the practical experience, which may influence the individual's performance in subsequent activities (Mezirow, 1997). Although it is not easy for everyone to engage in higher-order reflective thinking due to the differences in individuals' thinking patterns and social cognitive practices, these two higher-order reflective thinking are easier to be stimulated when learners meet the challenging tasks and are aware of a greater agency to try their best to solve the problems (Mitchell, 2008).

At the same time, previous research has examined reflective thinking as a second-order variable, rarely specifically exploring the

four degrees that reflective thinking encompasses (Phan, 2014a). Therefore, there is a necessity to consider different degrees of reflective thinking for evaluating their effect on students' making the career selection.

2.5. Relationship between internship environmental factors and reflective thinking

Previous studies of reflective thinking indicated that the learning environment is essential in stimulating an individual's reflective thinking. For example, Sabariego Puig et al. (2020) argued that an individual's reflective thinking requires training and an appropriate learning space and environment. For interns in the hotel industry, skills variety, learning opportunities, supervisor support, and interpersonal relationships provide an environment with autonomous learning that may stimulate students' reflective thinking. Therefore, according to the social cognitive theory, the hotel internship factors are environmental factors, and reflective thinking is a personal element, thus, the following hypotheses are proposed.

- H1. The hotel internship factors ([a] skills variety, [b] learning opportunities, [c] supervisor support, and [d] interpersonal relationships) affect interns' habitual action.
- H2. The hotel internship factors affect interns' understanding.
- H3. The hotel internship factors affect interns' reflection.
- H4. The hotel internship factors affect interns' critical thinking.

2.6. Career intention in the hotel industry

Behavioural intention is widely used by social psychologists in the human study of future behaviours. Warshaw and Davis (1985) described career intention as the extent to which an individual has formulated conscious plans to perform or not perform in a profession in the future. An individual's career intention would be affected by different groups and environments, such as educators, industry supervisors, parents, and internship conditions (Amissah et al., 2020). The existing research showed that students' internship satisfaction plays a vital role in interns' future career intentions (Qu et al., 2021). Students are likely to form negative attitudes toward the hotel industry when they have unsatisfied internship experiences, and they will be discouraged from working in this industry. However, the existing research has not explained the relationship between interns' intrinsic thinking patterns and career intention after the internship.

As typical experiential learning, the internship has one of the most critical parts is purposeful reflective thinking for assessing what has been performed or what the interns believe will happen in the future (Rodgers, 2002). Meanwhile, reflective thinking allows interns could summarize the current experience and take it into the next stage of their decision-making and practice (Kholid et al., 2022). Surprisingly, no studies have verified the relationship between interns' reflective thinking and career intention. Referred to Smallman and Roese's (2009) viewpoint that human counterfactual thinking would facilitate their behavioural intentions, which showed that human particular thinking patterns influenced individual behavioural intentions. According to the social cognitive theory, reflective thinking is a personal element, and career intention is a behavioural factor, thus, the following hypotheses are proposed.

- H5. Interns' reflective thinking ([a] habitual action, [b] understanding, [c] reflection, and [d] critical thinking) affects their career intention after the internship.

Based on the above discussion, this study proposes a research model that aims to provide explanations for the mechanism in the relationship between hotel internship factors, reflective thinking, and career intention (see Fig. 1).

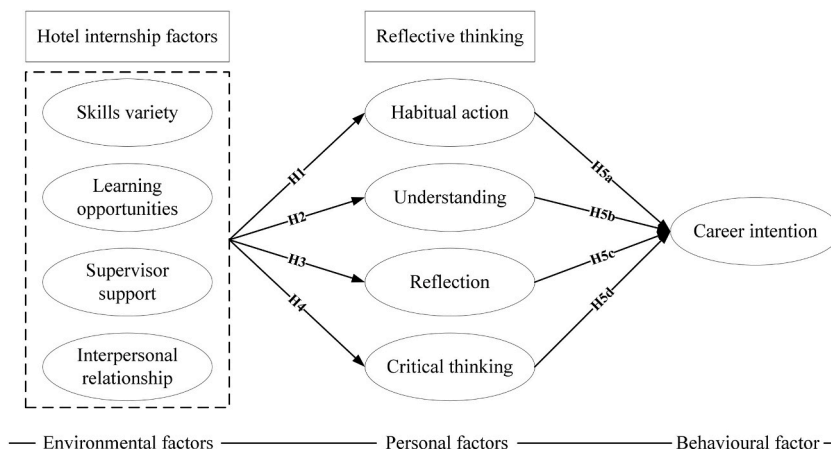


Fig. 1. The research proposed model.

3. Methodology

3.1. Measurement and questionnaire design

Measurements of interpersonal relationships (5 items) were modified from the scale of Song and Chathoth (2013), and measurements of skills variety (3 items) were modified from the scale of Wang and Lin (2018). Learning opportunity (3 items) and supervisor support (3 items) were adapted and revised from D'abate et al. (2009). Besides, a 16-item reflective thinking scale was modified from Kember et al. (2000). At last, career intention was revised from the scale of Chan et al. (2018). There are 34 questions for seven constructs.

And then, the questionnaire consisted of three sections. Section one contained a single screening question, "Are you an intern in the hotel industry?" to determine suitable respondents. When it was determined that the respondent was an intern in the hotel industry, the respondent was eligible to participate in the survey. Section two concluded nine constructs of the research model. Respondents were asked about their level of agreement on a 7-point Likert-type scale (where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree). At the same time, the conceptually distinct questions were placed at intervals of constructs, which were recommended by Podsakoff et al. (2003) to reduce common method bias. Section three comprised the demographic information on the respondents, such as age, gender, and grade. The questionnaire in English was translated into Chinese wording and back into English to check accuracy. Next, a face-to-face pilot test of 60 interns in the hotel industry was tested on 15 February 2022. The results confirmed the content validity of the questionnaire and that all interns did not have any questions about the survey.

3.2. Sampling and sample profiles

Hong Kong and Macau have many high-quality teaching hotels (King & Tang, 2020). These teaching hotels not only have sizeable commercial hotel facilities and professional operation systems but also have the ability to provide relatively mature internship teaching programs (Tse, 2012). Internship coordinators of hospitality and tourism departments at ten universities in Hong Kong and Macau were contacted through phone calls or emails. After getting help and approval from their departments, four assistants with professional qualifications went to the universities and distributed questionnaires. Students with previous internship experience were selected as respondents in this survey. Students were first informed of the outline of the survey, and it was completely voluntary, confidential, and anonymous. To keep the respondents' confidence, respondents were not asked to sign a consent form, and they were informed that their consent to the study is obtained once they continue to participate in the survey. Meanwhile, if they feel uncomfortable, they could withdraw from the survey at any time. Sampling was started from 20 February to 20 March 2022. When the respondents finished the questionnaires, they received small gifts as rewards. The total number of copies collected was 450, but 40 questionnaires were unusable because they were not completed or used the same scale to assess all items. Therefore, there were 410 useable questionnaires for data analysis.

The socio-demographic information of the respondents is shown in Table 1. Since there are more female interns than male interns in hotel internship programs, this study shows that 60.7% of total respondents are female, and 39.9% are male. The largest category of interns' grade level is senior (33.7%) in the four-year school, and 32.4% of respondents are junior students. The majority of respondents had internships between three and six months (43.7%), and 30.0% had spent one and three months in their internship.

4. Findings

4.1. Reliability and validity analysis

Partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS version 3.0 was used to test the proposed research model (Ringle et al., 2015). The values of mean, standard deviation, and PLS factor loading of each construct were presented in Table 2. The PLS factor loadings range from 0.800 to 0.924, which are greater than the minimum value of 0.70 (Henseler et al., 2009). The values of Cronbach's alpha for nine constructs range from 0.838 to 0.938. Furthermore, the values of composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) exceed the minimum standard of 0.70 and 0.50, respectively (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al.,

Table 1
Sample profile (n = 410).

		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Males	161	39.3
	Females	249	60.7
Year	Freshman	58	14.1
	Sophomore	81	19.8
	Junior	133	32.4
	Senior	138	33.7
Length of internship	<1 month	42	10.2
	1–3 months	123	30.0
	3–6 months	179	43.7
	>6 months	66	16.1

2010). All the constructs meet the acceptance criterion of construct reliability and convergent validity.

Table 3 shows that the correlation between pairs of constructs is less than the square root of AVE, while all the Heterotrait-Momotrait (HTMT) ratio values are less than the threshold criterion of 0.90 (Hair et al., 2017). Therefore, the results describe adequate discriminant validity. In addition, the values of the variance inflation factor (VIF) for each independent construct (ranging from 2.043 to 2.423) are lower than the recommended criterion 3.3, indicating that there is no multicollinearity problem in this study (Kock, 2015).

4.2. Results of PLS-SEM analysis

There are 410 cases and 5000 samples which are applied for bootstrapping to examine the path coefficients' significance of this research model. The values of R-square for habitual action, understanding, reflection, critical thinking, and career intention are 0.094 (weak), 0.621 (substantial), 0.563 (substantial), 0.560 (substantial), and 0.532 (substantial), respectively. As shown in Table 4, the path coefficients of four hotel internship factors on interns' habitual action are 0.121 (skills variety) (t-statistics = 1.507), -0.081 (learning opportunities) (t-statistics = 1.001), 0.065 (supervisor support) (t-statistics = 0.671) and 0.217 (interpersonal relationship) (t-statistics = 2.130), only supporting the hypothesis H1d. The path coefficients from the four hotel internship factors to interns' understanding are 0.207 (skills variety) (t-statistics = 2.958), 0.264 (learning opportunities) (t-statistics = 3.834), 0.243 (supervisor support) (t-statistics = 3.119), and 0.212 (interpersonal relationship) (t-statistics = 2.806), indicating that hypotheses H2a, H2b, H2c, and H2d are supported. The path coefficients from the four hotel internship factors to interns' reflection are 0.175 (skills variety) (t-

Table 2
Reliability and validity of the constructs.

Construct/Item	Mean	S.D.	Factor Loading
Skills variety ($\alpha = 0.838$, CR = 0.902, AVE = 0.755)			
SV1 My internship requires me to do a variety of things but not a single one.	5.32	1.226	0.851
SV2 My internship requires me to use several complex or high-level skills.	5.13	1.313	0.874
SV3 My internship is not quite simple and repetitive.	5.14	1.454	0.881
Learning opportunities ($\alpha = 0.882$, CR = 0.927, AVE = 0.809)			
LO1 My internship helped me learn new knowledge.	5.46	1.316	0.910
LO2 My internship taught me a lot of things that I would never have been able to learn in the classroom.	5.44	1.267	0.907
LO3 My internship provided me with a chance to learn a lot about the field of hotels.	5.51	1.318	0.881
Supervisor support ($\alpha = 0.855$, CR = 0.912, AVE = 0.775)			
SS1 My supervisor helped make my internship a pleasant experience.	5.22	1.241	0.878
SS2 My supervisor acted as a mentor to me while I was interning.	5.08	1.373	0.874
SS3 My supervisor provided me with enough support while I was doing my internship.	5.31	1.219	0.890
Interpersonal relationship ($\alpha = 0.906$, CR = 0.930, AVE = 0.728)			
IR1 My internship helped me to get on well with others in this organization.	5.34	1.170	0.871
IR2 My internship made me feel people in this organization care about me.	5.22	1.228	0.862
IR3 My internship helped me to know most people in this organization respect me.	5.33	1.23	0.853
IR4 My internship helped me to get a lot of good friends in this organization.	5.27	1.335	0.827
IR5 Overall, my internship helped me to have established good "guanxi" (interpersonal relationships) with most other people in this organization.	5.38	1.278	0.852
Habitual action ($\alpha = 0.848$, CR = 0.897, AVE = 0.686)			
HA1 When I am working on some activities of the internship, I can do them without thinking about what I am doing.	4.06	1.218	0.858
HA2 In this internship, I do things so many times that I started doing them without thinking about it.	4.11	1.165	0.815
HA3 As long as I can remember the handout material for an internship, I do not have to think too much.	4.02	1.276	0.837
HA4 If I follow what the supervisor says, I do not have to think too much in this internship.	4.12	1.242	0.800
Understanding ($\alpha = 0.896$, CR = 0.928, AVE = 0.763)			
UN1 This internship requires us to understand concepts taught by the supervisor.	5.22	1.214	0.884
UN2 To pass this internship I need to understand the content about the hotel industry.	5.37	1.243	0.852
UN3 I need to understand the material taught by the supervisor in order to perform practical tasks.	5.25	1.331	0.879
UN4 In this internship, I have to continually think about the material I am being taught.	5.26	1.403	0.880
Reflection ($\alpha = 0.886$, CR = 0.922, AVE = 0.746)			
RF1 I sometimes question the way others do something and try to think of a better way.	5.27	1.249	0.864
RF2 I like to think over what I have been doing and consider alternative ways of doing it.	5.29	1.304	0.871
RF3 I often reflect on my actions to see whether I could have improved on what I did.	5.31	1.249	0.879
RF4 I often re-appraise my experience so I can learn from it and improve for my next performance.	5.27	1.197	0.840
Critical thinking ($\alpha = 0.891$, CR = 0.924, AVE = 0.754)			
CT1 As a result of this internship, I have changed the way I look at myself.	5.28	1.213	0.883
CT2 This internship has challenged some of my firmly held ideas.	5.31	1.274	0.892
CT3 As a result of this internship, I have changed my normal way of doing things.	5.20	1.251	0.860
CT4 During this internship, I discovered faults in what I had previously believed to be right.	5.18	1.264	0.837
Career intentions ($\alpha = 0.938$, CR = 0.956, AVE = 0.843)			
CI1 I wish to enter the hotel industry following graduation.	5.03	1.399	0.924
CI2 I intend to enter the hotel industry following graduation.	5.01	1.419	0.920
CI3 I have always planned to enter the hotel industry following graduation.	4.95	1.505	0.919
CI4 I intend to enter the hotel industry rather than other industries.	5.07	1.519	0.910

Note: α = Cronbach's Alpha, CR = Composite Reliability, AVE = Average Variance Extracted, FL = PLS factor loading.

Table 3
Discriminant validity.

	SV	LO	SS	SR	HA	UN	RE	CT	CI
Skills variety	0.869	<u>0.691</u>	<u>0.775</u>	<u>0.735</u>	<u>0.299</u>	<u>0.760</u>	<u>0.705</u>	<u>0.759</u>	<u>0.720</u>
Learning opportunities	0.594	0.899	<u>0.688</u>	<u>0.745</u>	<u>0.205</u>	<u>0.757</u>	<u>0.742</u>	<u>0.708</u>	<u>0.622</u>
Supervisor support	0.656	0.598	0.880	<u>0.740</u>	<u>0.277</u>	<u>0.769</u>	<u>0.667</u>	<u>0.685</u>	<u>0.646</u>
Interpersonal relationship	0.641	0.666	0.652	0.853	<u>0.323</u>	<u>0.752</u>	<u>0.758</u>	<u>0.728</u>	<u>0.625</u>
Habitual action	0.255	0.175	0.238	0.283	0.828	<u>0.289</u>	<u>0.333</u>	<u>0.320</u>	<u>0.321</u>
Understanding	0.659	0.673	0.674	0.678	0.252	0.874	<u>0.757</u>	<u>0.776</u>	<u>0.711</u>
Reflection	0.607	0.657	0.581	0.680	0.290	0.675	0.864	<u>0.792</u>	<u>0.705</u>
Critical thinking	0.657	0.627	0.598	0.655	0.279	0.694	0.704	0.868	<u>0.706</u>
Career intention	0.639	0.566	0.578	0.577	0.290	0.652	0.643	0.646	0.918

Note: Underline font = Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio, Bold font = Square-root of the AVE.

Table 4
Results of PLS-SEM analysis.

Hypothesis		β	p-value	f-square	Result
H1a	Skills variety → Habitual action	0.121	0.132	0.008	No
H1b	Learning opportunities → Habitual action	-0.081	0.317	0.004	No
H1c	Supervisor support → Habitual action	0.065	0.502	0.002	No
H1d	Interpersonal relationship → Habitual action	0.217	0.033	0.022	Yes
H2a	Skills variety → Understanding	0.207	0.003	0.053	Yes
H2b	Learning opportunities → Understanding	0.264	0.000	0.090	Yes
H2c	Supervisor support → Understanding	0.243	0.002	0.072	Yes
H2d	Interpersonal relationship → Understanding	0.212	0.005	0.050	Yes
H3a	Skills variety → Reflection	0.175	0.007	0.033	Yes
H3b	Learning opportunities → Reflection	0.289	0.000	0.093	Yes
H3c	Supervisor support → Reflection	0.085	0.311	0.008	No
H3d	Interpersonal relationship → Reflection	0.321	0.000	0.100	Yes
H4a	Skills variety → Critical thinking	0.294	0.000	0.092	Yes
H4b	Learning opportunities → Critical thinking	0.222	0.001	0.055	Yes
H4c	Supervisor support → Critical thinking	0.113	0.138	0.013	No
H4d	Interpersonal relationship → Critical thinking	0.245	0.003	0.058	Yes
H5a	Habitual action → Career intention	0.075	0.140	0.011	No
H5b	Understanding → Career intention	0.294	0.000	0.083	Yes
H5c	Reflection → Career intention	0.251	0.000	0.058	Yes
H5d	Critical thinking → Career intention	0.244	0.001	0.053	Yes

Note: Red colour = not significant.

statistics = 2.689), 0.289 (learning opportunities) (t-statistics = 4.187), 0.085 (supervisor support) (t-statistics = 1.014), and 0.321 (interpersonal relationship) (t-statistics = 3.787), thus only hypotheses H3a, H3b, and H3d are supported. The path coefficients from the four hotel internship factors to interns' critical thinking are 0.294 (skills variety) (t-statistics = 4.409), 0.222 (learning opportunities) (t-statistics = 3.340), 0.113 (supervisor support) (t-statistics = 1.484), and 0.245 (interpersonal relationship) (t-statistics = 3.016), thus only hypotheses H4a, H4b, and H4d are accepted. Meanwhile, the path coefficients from the four-level of interns' reflective thinking to career intention are 0.075 (habitual action) (t-statistics = 1.475), 0.294 (understanding) (t-statistics = 3.911), 0.251 (reflection) (t-statistics = 4.130), and 0.244 (critical thinking) (t-statistics = 3.402), thus only accepting hypotheses H5b, H5c and H5d. Additionally, the f^2 effect size value is applied to evaluate whether the omitted exogenous construct substantially impacts the endogenous constructs. However, the f^2 effect size values of hypotheses H1a, H1b, H1c, H3c, H4c, and H5a are less than the threshold value of 0.02, indicating no significant effect (Hair et al., 2017).

5. Discussion and conclusions

5.1. Discussion of results

This research attempts to measure the impact of different internship factors on the reflective thinking processes and the influence of different reflective thinking elements on students' career intentions. The results indicate that habitual action is only affected by interpersonal relationships. Habitual action is about basic practices such as making beds. Students have learned basic skills in school. They need to put them into practice. Therefore, skills variety, learning opportunities, and supervisor support do not help students to make habitual actions. However, hotel work is people-oriented, and students need to work alongside other staff, so maintaining good communication with other staff is important to their day-to-day work (Basalamah et al., 2021).

The source of understanding is mainly due to learning opportunities, followed by supervisor support, interpersonal relationship, and skills variety. During internship practices, if students have more chances to explore what they learn in school in practice, they would understand the reality of operations more. Supervisors assign jobs to students and teach them how to work. In terms of

interpersonal relationships, since hotel jobs involve interaction with others, interns should understand how to do the jobs by cooperating with other staff. Therefore, high-quality interpersonal relationship supports interns' understanding of doing the hotel jobs as mentioned by Carmeli et al. (2009). Some hotel jobs are not simple, they involve the application of various skills. Interns working in restaurants need to know how to open the wine. Therefore, these four factors influence students' understanding of hotel work.

It is very interesting that interpersonal relationship has the greatest effect on students' reflection process, followed by learning opportunities and skills variety. The level of reflection is the mixture of experience and knowledge plus the evaluation of the trainee. Therefore, communication contents with other staff in hotel work become a source of knowledge. Students who have a better source of relationships would know better and alternative ways of doing hotel work. When students learn new knowledge, they need to evaluate and turn to the best learning result (Tiessen (2018)). Learning opportunities involve working in different departments. Interns have more chances to face different problems when working in different departments. Interns need to consider different skills to deal with different problems. For example, when handling customers' complaints, interns need to evaluate the nature of the complaints before responding. Therefore, learning opportunities and skills variety provide interns with the necessary conditions to think in different ways to solve problems. However, supervisor support does not affect students' reflection. Supervisor support is a relatively passive learning element for hotel interns. Interns' reflection is up to their exploration of themselves.

The skills variety has the greatest effect on student's critical thinking, followed by interpersonal relationships and learning opportunities. If students know different skills from different positions during an internship, they could think critically about how to complete a task in different ways. When there is a problem, making critical judgement involves interaction with other employees. Because it requires considering the relationship with peers (Edmans, 2012). Learning opportunities allow interns to work in different positions, so interns will face different problems. Learning opportunities provide interns with more chances to stimulate their critical thinking to solve problems. Similarly, interns need to solve problems by themselves, so supervisor support does not help them to stimulate critical thinking.

For career intention, understanding hotel operations is the most important element, followed by reflection and critical thinking. The habitual action does not affect interns' career intentions in hotels. Some hotels may just want to train interns' ability to work (without thinking) in hotels, but it cannot make interns make a decision to work in the hotel industry even if they have the ability. Interns learnt the theories in the classrooms, they want to understand how to put them into real practice. Knowing how to work encourages interns to work in the hotel industry. Reflection and critical thinking are the upper levels of reflective thinking. Interns in their current positions are still under supervision, they are seldom involved in handling in-depth work. Although higher levels of reflective thinking can affect their career choice, most interns start their position as juniors, so their influences on career intentions are less than understanding.

5.2. Theoretical implications

There are various contributions to existing areas of knowledge from this research. Firstly, this study highlights the importance of reflective thinking in the learning processes rather than discussing only the satisfaction with internships (Armah & Armah, 2021; Chen et al., 2018). Previous research has tested the factors associated with reflective thinking where reflective thinking was treated as a second-order variable (Jang et al., 2021; Orakci, 2021). This research serves as a pioneer to consider the four levels of reflective thinking as a mechanism to evaluate the effects of different internship factors on influencing students' career intentions. It contributes to education research by providing a systematic framework for researchers' work in the area of experiential learning.

Secondly, this study identified four internship environmental factors and examined their role in making students engage in reflective thinking processes. Traditional internship programs focus on knowledge transfer and skill development (Moon, 2018). However, the results of this study highlight the importance of building interpersonal relationships. This study contributes to education research by providing internship factors for researchers to take further studies in other service industries.

5.3. Practical implications

Based on the research results, there are a few suggestions for hotels to improve students' intention to join the hotel industry after training. Firstly, hotels should develop training programs with non-routine with changeable positions. Students can learn different things throughout the internship period. Students have more opportunities to explore more in the work environment, therefore, they may find job tasks that are suitable for them when they combine what they learn in the classroom and what they learn in reality.

Secondly, to enhance interpersonal relationships, hotels should emphasize teamwork, so staff involving on-the-job training play a role as team members in the work process. Hotels should provide more activities or training in the areas of team building and off-work leisure activities to strengthen the staff-trainee relationship and develop a sense of belonging. Also, staffing in many hotels is international. Employees come from different countries such as China and other Asian countries. Regular staff dinner gatherings and outings and training based on teams create bonding among them. Once the interpersonal relationships have been improved and therefore, internship participants will be more likely to stay in the hotel industry.

Supervisors play an important role as a mentor to help students to understand their job more clearly. Although supervisors are professionals in hotel operations, they may not be familiar with the training processes. Appropriate training should also provide to supervisors to let them equip with mentorship skills.

5.4. Limitations and future research

Like all studies, this study has a few limitations for further investigation. There is a limitation in data collection. Data were collected at the universities in Hong Kong and Macau. However, internship programmes are conducted around the world. Further studies are recommended to investigate the research model in other countries. Also, further studies can be conducted to compare the results from east to west of the world. The research framework aims to study the relationship between four internship factors and students' career intentions through the reflective thinking process, further research is recommended to discover any personal factors such as openness that may moderate the above relationships.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Kenneth Shiu Pong Ng: Conceptualization, Writing – original draft. **Yun Rao:** Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft, revision of the manuscript. **Ivan Ka Wai Lai:** Conceptualization, Supervision, Writing – original draft, revision of the manuscript. **Ying Qi Zhou:** Data curation, revision of the questionnaire.

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