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Unveiling the Industry and Academia Gap in the Nepalese Hospitality Industry

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the gap between industry and academia in the Nepalese hospitality industry and identify the root cause factors to mitigate this gap. An exploratory research design has been used in this study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with employees from the hospitality industry. The study sample consisted of seven employees from the hospitality sector using a convenience and purposive sampling method. Thematic analysis was utilized to identify the sub-themes and themes. The findings show that graduates are not adequately prepared regarding knowledge, ability, attitude, industry-specific trends and development skills (industry-academia expectation gap), communication and critical thinking, collaboration between academia and industry, and resource constraints are the significant gaps identified between industry and academia. This study emphasizes the collaborative engagement of industry and academia to bridge the industry-academia gap. Based on the findings of this study, academia, and industry might work together to strengthen the identified key factors and reduce the gap between them. Further, this study fills the gap between industry and academia in the Nepalese hospitality industry and adds value to theoretical and empirical knowledge.

1. Introduction

The hospitality industry is one of the largest industries worldwide (*Global and Regional Tourism Performance*, 2019). In this connection, prior research has found that hospitality education is a highly demanded-discipline because of its practical orientation (Kumar & Khan, 2021). As

a result, the hospitality education sector is one of the most significant suppliers of students in the hospitality industry. It creates many job opportunities for lower-level employees to the top level of the organization in the market. However, prior research has mentioned that the hospitality educations cannot produce the competent candidates for the hospitality industry (Cobanoglu & Moreo, 2001; Kumar & Khan, 2021; Vasconcelos et al., 2022). For example, Kitterlin-Lynch et al. (2015) mentioned that graduate students' unemployment rate is around 6 percent. Further, after COVID-19, the unemployment rates of graduate students have increased. Moreover, there is a tension in a balance between theory and practice (Ruhanen, 2006). In addition, many things have changed, which is more challenging for the hospitality education sector after COVID-19. Hence, from the above premises, it can be said that educators should change the course to meet the demands of the industry. And the scenario of Nepal is no more different than this viewpoint. The hospitality industry is one of the fastest-growing sectors in Nepal, contributing significantly to employment and economic development. However, there exists a substantial gap between academic curricula and industry expectations (Cobanoglu & Moreo, 2001); despite the presence of numerous educational institutions offering hospitality management programs, while hospitality education aims to equip students with theoretical knowledge, industry stakeholders often find graduates lacking in practical skills, adaptability, and real-world experience (Jenkins, 1999).

The gap between industry and academia has repercussions for a nation. The paucity of information shared between practitioners and education is the primary cause of the gap. Prior research has mentioned that researchers focus on publishing the article rather than solving the industry need (Cobanoglu & Moreo, 2001). Moreover, in many cases, hospitality practitioners cannot point out the need for the students to cope with industry. This has come from informal communication with hospitality education faculties. Hospitality industry leaders cannot ignore candidates with adequate educational backgrounds (Zhong et al., 2013). Despite these realizations, research and practice are still unable to go hand in hand (Cobanoglu & Moreo, 2001). Recognizing the significance of the relationship between academia and industry, this study tries to identify the factors that can mitigate the academia-industry gap. Previous research has mentioned that leadership skills (Sisson & Roberts, 2023), soft skills (Vasconcelos et al., 2022), internship (Lingadkar & Sankaranarayanan, 2023), IT skills (Bilgihan & Wang, 2016; Hsu & Leung, 2022), gender issue (Je et al., 2023), and Knowledge, Skill, and Ability (KSA) (Kitterlin-Lynch et al., 2015) are the lacking factors for lacuna between academia and industry. In addition, it can be assumed that bringing together the hospitality industry leaders and teaching faculties can mitigate the industry-academia gap (Sharma & Sharma, 2019).

Previous research has mentioned that teaching capacity in the education sector is lacking (Cobanoglu & Moreo, 2001; Sisson & Roberts, 2023), which could be one of the reasons for the gap between industry and education sectors. Moreover, gender inequalities also create the problem (Je et al., 2023). Sisson and Roberts (2023) have indicated that students, faculties, and industry professionals should go hand in hand, irrespective of gender inequalities (Je et al., 2023), to fulfill the industry's expectations. In addition, technology-savvy candidates

have a broad avenue for employability, but the hospitality education sectors are not able to provide the IT skill to the students (Bilgihan & Wang, 2016; Hsu & Leung, 2022). Similarly, extensive internships can bridge the gap (Lingadkar & Sankaranarayanan, 2023); however, internships are provided only for offering rather than focusing on skill, knowledge, and ability development. Vasconcelos et al. (2022) highlighted the significance of soft skills in the tourism industry and the role of academia in imparting soft skills in their curriculum.

Furthermore, Case-based teaching and learning can fill the gap between industry and academia. In addition, industry uses research for decision-making, whereas education uses research to add to the body of knowledge (Khan, 2019). If the study conducted by the education sector helps solve problems and decisions, then the lacuna between academia and industry will be minimized.

The leadership styles of the faculties determine whether to implement leadership pedagogy in the hospitality education sector (Sisson & Roberts, 2023). In this connection, Sisson and Roberts mentioned that among various leadership studies, the faculty's transformational leadership style helps students implement leadership pedagogy in the education sector. This has come out from Sisson and Roberts' research. The best classroom experience with the help of faculties can determine the quality of students (Bennis & O'Toole, 2005). However, faculties focus on assignments and exams rather than solving real-world problems (Cobanoglu & Moreo, 2001). Better qualities of faculties are necessary to develop the leadership capacity of the students to cope with the dynamic environment of the industry (Sisson & Roberts, 2023). Leadership training is one of the significant predictors of successful employment in the hospitality industry (Gursoy & Swanger, 2005).

Previous research has identified some of the determinants of the gap, but both sides take limited action, i.e., academia and industry (Cobanoglu & Moreo, 2001; McCartney & Kwok, 2023). In addition, from the aforementioned determinants of an academia-industry gap, this study aims to identify the root cause factors for bridging academia-industry gap and suggest immediate action to the education and industry sectors.

Despite the existing literature review, some significant literature review has been summarized in Table 1. Moreover, in this study, recently updated information has been incorporated based on the Scopus database.

In this study, Scopus searched the keywords "Industry" AND "Academia" AND "Gap" and found that the total numbers of research published are 3071 documents related to industry and academia. Out of the 3071 published documents, the United States published 897, the United Kingdom published 396 documents, China published 347 documents, and 263 documents published by India, as shown in Figure 1.

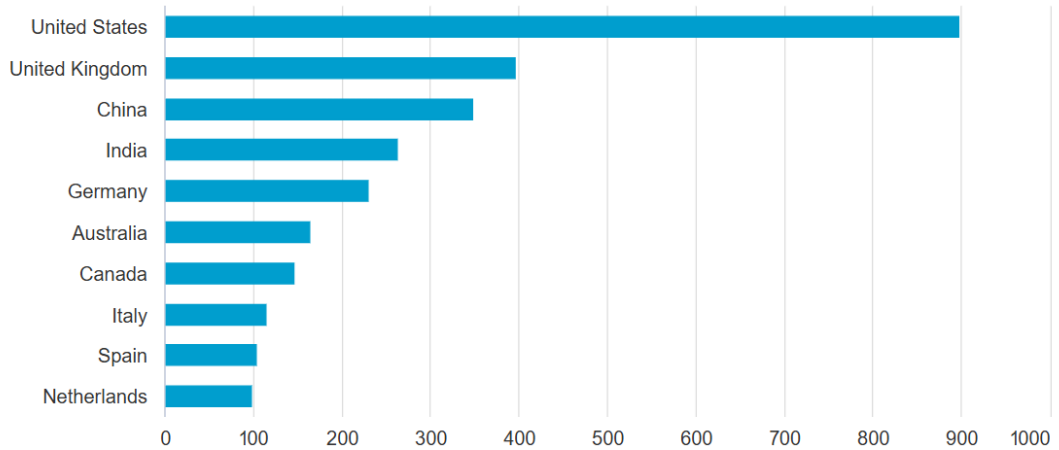
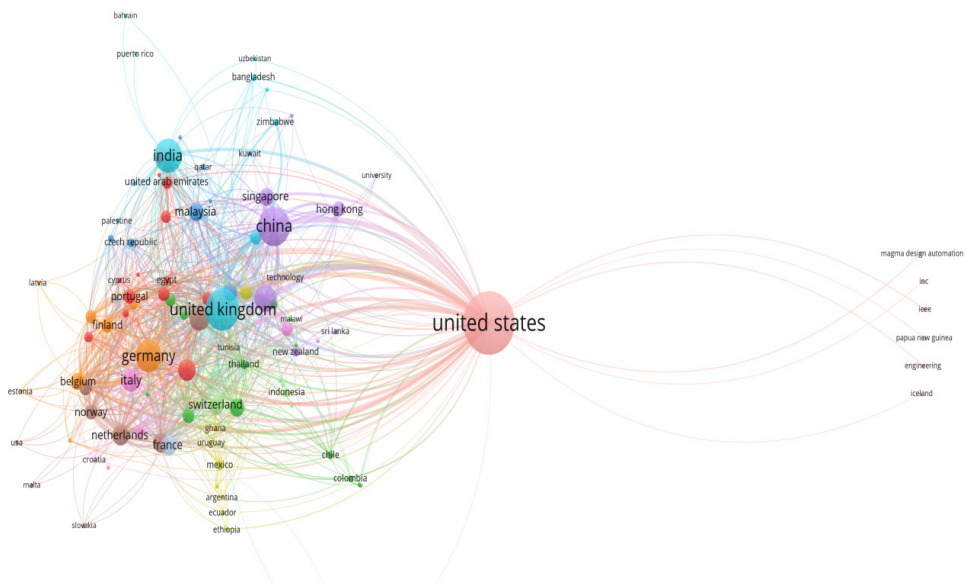


Figure 1. Top 10 Countries published article on Industry-Academia Gap
 Source. Authors' compilation of Scopus database

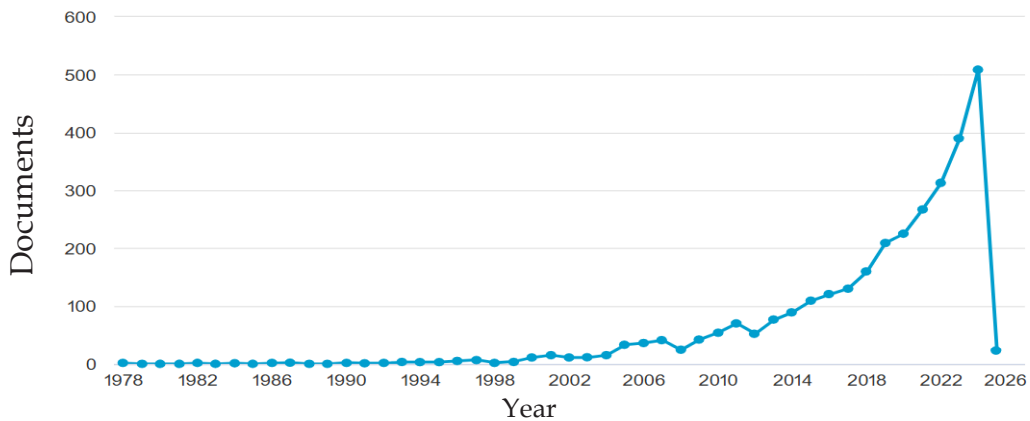
More specifically, the details of the countries that published the documents related to the academia-industry gap are shown in Figure 2. The snap of the counties (Figure 2) was captured using a VOS viewer.

Figure 2
 Country Wise Map Based on Bibliographic Data of Industry-Academia Gap



Every year, the number of published articles related to the industry-academia gap is increasing, but it is not solving the industry’s needs (Cobanoglu & Moreo, 2001). For instance, the Scopus database shows that the total number of articles published in 2023 was 390, in 2022 was 313, and in 2021 was 267, as shown in Figure 3 for details. Building upon this information, it can be assumed that there is scant agreement between academia and industry relationships in the research community and in real-world scenarios.

Figure 3
Number of published article (year wise)



Source. Authors’ compilation of Scopus database

Table 1
Review of Literature Review

Authors	Objectives	Methodology	Finding
Sisson and Roberts (2023)	This study examines the prominent leadership style demonstrated by faculty who incorporate leadership pedagogy into their teaching.	Exploratory Research Design has been used. The researchers surveyed hospitality management faculty.	The findings reveal that transformational leaders, indicating leadership integration, are highly significant.
Barrows and Walsh (2002)	To examine the differences between industry and hospitality education.	Data were collected from North America, and a survey was collected from club managers about the significance of academia-industry linkage.	It concludes by proposing a research framework that helps to maintain harmonious collaboration between academia and industry.

Kumar and Khan (2021)	This study aims to determine the gap between tourism academicians and industry professionals.	The study is based on a questionnaire survey conducted on 258 out of which half respondents are from academic respondents and half respondents are from industry professionals in India.	The results suggest that academics are delivering a moderate level of tourism education. Nonetheless, industry professionals believe that graduates lack the knowledge and skills needed to meet industry demands.
Bilgihan and Wang (2016)	This research aims to assist in how technologies can be leveraged as a competitive advantage across different levels from the managerial standpoint of hospitality organizations.	In this study, interviews were conducted. The respondents included vice presidents, CEOs of hospitality technology provided, and scholars specializing in hospitality IT research.	This study's finding is that securing competitive advantage through IT integration is the most important.
Vasconcelos et al. (2022)	This paper aims to identify the significance of soft skills factors in the tourism industry.	This study identified five courses and challenged students to write research papers to mitigate the gap between academia and the industry. Moreover, interviews were conducted with stakeholders from different tourism subsectors.	The findings of his study suggest that interdisciplinary courses and the joint effect of academia and industry could reduce the gap.
Anderson and Sanga (2019)	This article examines the collaboration in between tourism industry - educational institutions relationship in providing tourism education.	The study employed FGD and interviews involving representatives from tourism industry and training institutions, with 356 participants.	It was revealed that key methods of collaboration in delivering tourism education include internship, training, employment, and financial support. However, language barriers, insufficient training facilities, paucity of qualified academicians, poor curriculum, and limited opportunities for internship and job placement are significant challenges for skill enhancement.

2. Research Methods

The ontology of this study was multiple, and it followed the interpretivism paradigm philosophy. This study has an exploratory research design. A domestic industry expert from the Nepalese hospitality industry answered the questions. In this study, the target population includes the employees and employers who worked in the Soaltee Hotel, Kathmandu. The seven respondents were selected from the researchers' network through convenience and judgmental sampling methods. Face-to-face interaction was conducted with the respondents to collect the data. In this study, ten open-ended questions were asked through interview methods. This study was carried out from November 2023 to January 2024. Moreover, the NVivo 2014 software was used to analyze the qualitative data. The Scopus database was used to compare and contrast the findings of this study with the previous studies. Trustworthiness was important in this study (Sood et al., 2017). Sex, position, and age group were considered as demographic information in this study. The interview questions for his study were designed based on a literature review (KC, 2022). An audio recording was used with the respondents' permission (KC, 2022).

Initially, the interview files were loaded in the NVivo software to analyze the data. Then, each statement was read carefully to identify the maximum possible code/theme to fulfill the objectives of this study. Based on the responses, a total of 52 codes and 86 references were identified from File 1. Similarly, 61 codes and 104 references from File 2, 63 codes and 108 references from File 3, 55 codes and 90 references from File 4, 49 codes and 80 references from File 5, 51 codes and 84 references from File 6, and 76 codes and 72 references from File 7 were captured based on interview. Moreover, these references were used to generate word clouds for further analysis. In addition, crosstabs were used to connect the relationship between demographic information and study variables.

3. Results and Discussion

The qualitative interview was conducted and analyzed through crosstab and word cloud. The cross-tabulation helps to compare the results of three variables. In Table 2, the variables used were sex, position, and the studied variables. Similarly, sex, age group, and variables were analyzed, as shown in Table 3.

Table 2*Crosstab between Sex and Position*

Person	Sex = Male (4)			Sex = Female (3)		
	Position =	Position =	Position =	Position =	Position =	Position =
	Assistant (1)	Officer (2)	= Manager (1)	= Assistant (1)	Officer (1)	= Manager (1)
1. Entry	1	2	1	1	1	1
2. Feedback	1	2	1	1	1	1
3. Areas	1	2	1	1	1	1
4. Lacking skills	1	2	1	1	1	1
5. Practical Skills	1	2	1	1	1	1
6. Improvement	1	2	1	1	1	1
7. Collaboration to support graduates	1	2	1	1	1	1
8. Curriculum Improvement	1	2	1	1	1	1
9. Collaboration to bridge the gap	1	2	1	1	1	1
10. Challenges	1	2	1	1	1	1
Total (unique)	1	2	1	1	1	1

Table 3*Crosstab between Sex and Age Group*

Person	Sex = Male (4)			Sex = Female (3)	
	Age Group =	Age Group =	Age Group =	Age Group =	Age Group =
	20-30years (2)	31- 40 years (1)	Above 40 (1)	20-30years (2)	Above 40 (1)
1. Entry	2	1	1	2	1
2. Feedback	2	1	1	2	1
3. Areas	2	1	1	2	1
4. Lacking skills	2	1	1	2	1
5. Practical Skills	2	1	1	2	1
6. Improvement	2	1	1	2	1
7. Collaboration to support graduates	2	1	1	2	1
8. Curriculum Improvement	2	1	1	2	1
9. Collaboration to bridge the gap	2	1	1	2	1
10. Challenges	2	1	1	2	1

The word cloud helps to identify the variable that can be used to mitigate the gap between industry and academia. Moreover, the data were analyzed using NVivo software. The following sections describe the respondent's opinions on a given question.

RQ1: How can hospitality interns or graduates enter your industry?

Respondents mentioned that 33.33 percent of the respondents entered the industry through training. 33.34 percent of the respondents enter the industry through direct applications. 8.33 percent of the graduates or interns enter through networking. Likewise, 8.33 percent of the interns/graduates enter the hospitality industry through company trainee programs. The word cloud was explored based on eight references from NVivo, as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4

Word cloud analysis of the graduates entering the industry



RQ2: What feedback do you typically give hospitality interns or graduates about their competencies?

38.01 weighted percentage of respondents describe effective communication, abilities, dynamic nature, and problem-solving as the feedback often provided by industry experts to the interns/graduates. Similarly, 8.7 percent of the respondents said that professional attitude is the primary competencies that the graduates require. 14.19 percent of the respondents said that hands-on experience, applying theoretical knowledge in real-world scenarios, and technical skills are required for hospitality graduates. The word cloud was explored based on 38 references, as shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5

Word cloud analysis of the feedback given by the expert



RQ5: What specific practical skills do you think should be included in hospitality programs?

The themes that emerge from the questions are situation-handling skills, Professional terminology, Case study, sales and marketing skills, entrepreneur skills, adaptability, pressure handling, occupation safety, and health, among others. The word cloud was explored based on 43 references, as shown in Figure 8.

Figure 8

Word cloud analysis of the specific required subjects.



RQ6: Do you have any recommendations for improving the education provided by academic institutions to better equip students for the hospitality industry?

One of the suggestions provided by the experts is to partner with hospitality industries to update the curriculum and incorporate current industry practices. Moreover, soft skills training, such as leadership skills and cultural competencies, ERG and sustainable practices, internships, and feedback from stakeholders, are some of the suggestions provided by hospitality experts. The word cloud was explored based on 31 references, as shown in Figure 9.

Figure 9

Word cloud analysis of the suggestion provided by the expert.



RQ7: How can academic institutions and the hospitality industry collaborate to support the continuous professional development of graduates?

21.43 percent of the respondents said that internship and placement partnerships are the most important for continuous professional development for graduates. Similarly, respondents indicate that guest speakers and workshops, mentoring programs, networking, and constant feedback ensure continuous professional development for graduates. The word cloud was explored based on 25 references, as shown in Figure 10.

Figure 10

Word cloud analysis of the working together between industry and academia to ensure the development of graduates.



RQ8: How can the curriculum be improved to better align with the needs of the hospitality industry?

12.07 percent of the respondents mentioned the environmental adaptability of the curriculum, and 41.72 percent of the respondents noted that case study and pressure handling courses need to be incorporated into the curriculum to meet the demands of the hospitality industry. Similarly, personal branding, sales and marketing skills, entrepreneur skills, and practical hospitality orientation need to be incorporated into the syllabus to meet the demands of the hospitality industry. The word cloud was explored based on 36 references, as shown in Figure 11.

Figure 11

Word cloud analysis of the curriculum improvement



RQ9: What types of collaboration between the hospitality industry and academia to bridge the gap?

Collaboration, feedback mechanisms, joint research projects, Memorandum of Understanding, internship and apprenticeship programs, expert lectures and workshops, and updated curricula between academia and industry are significant collaborations between the hospitality industry and academia to bridge the skill gap. The word cloud was explored based on 31 references, as shown in Figure 12.

Figure 12

Word cloud analysis of the collaboration between industry and academia



RQ10: What are the key challenges bridging industry and academia?

38.22 percent of the respondents said the academia-industry gap is a significant challenge between industry and academia. Similarly, 21.82 percent of the respondents said that the significant challenges are inconsistent or limited industry involvement. 14.54 percent of the respondents mentioned that the communication barrier is a significant challenge between industry and academia. Likewise, the remaining respondents mentioned that resource constraints, feedback mechanisms, and academic curriculum are significant challenges linking industry and academia. The word cloud was explored based on 25 references, as shown in Figure 13.

Figure 13

Word cloud analysis of challenges between industry and academia



to real-world scenarios are either inadequate or poorly structured, which further can be enhanced with more industry tie-ups and exposure to the real industry and experiential learning from the experts and frequent visits to hospitality-related industries for more hands-on learning with exposure visits will help the students to grow and nurture their talents to explore for better future. Mandatory internships with structured evaluation criteria should be introduced. Establish industry-academia partnership programs where students can gain hands-on experience through apprenticeships. Honesty and integrity are the keys to evaluating candidates from industry and academia.

While academic instructors are well-versed in theory (Cobanoglu & Moreo, 2001), many lack direct industry experience (Ruhanen, 2006). This affects the relevance of their teachings and limits students' preparedness for real-world challenges (Cobanoglu & Moreo, 2001; Sisson & Roberts, 2023); further, it can be enriched with occupational skills gradation, and time-to-time faculty development programs, pieces of training, and workshops will definitely help to face the real world expectations and help the students to face the real world to find the solutions. Encourage faculty to gain industry experience through sabbaticals, consulting roles, or industry immersion programs. Conduct workshops and training programs in collaboration with industry experts.

One of the major reasons for the academia-industry gap is the lack of research (Cobanoglu & Moreo, 2001; Khan, 2019). Jenkins (1999) has mentioned that academic work and study are insufficient to solve the industry problem. That could be why hospitality education in Nepal has limited engagement in research and innovation. Industry-driven research could provide insights into trends and help update curricula to meet market demands, and timely exposure and experience with the latest trends, technology, and data can definitely enhance the gap to fulfill and take the proper steps forward for better outcomes and productivity for both the industry and academia. Institutions should invest in hospitality research that addresses industry challenges and encourage students to undertake research projects in collaboration with businesses.

Many hospitality businesses in Nepal do not actively collaborate with educational institutions, which is crucial in this knowledge-based economy (Elnasr Sobaih & Jones, 2015; Ruhanen, 2006). This lack of interaction leads to mismatched expectations and skill sets, which is still ongoing as, In my experience, it feels that both industry and academia lack the knowledge of exposure and knowhow of the hospitality academic operations and industry really makes the researchers think that, do not care to upgrade and invest to uplift their standards by often looking for better institutions or support to develop new talents to retain for better customer experience and contribute at large. Organize regular industry panels, guest lectures, and networking events and establish advisory boards with industry professionals to guide curriculum development.

Nepalese hospitality institutes and academia are more stressed on imparting technical knowledge and skills in their curricula as well in their operations and executions (Cobanoglu

& Moreo, 2001); what the researchers personally feel is students are there to learn and hospitality educators are there to enhance their skills not relating to the subjects in fact able to create the lifelong learners and be the student of life to understand and solve the real world problems of thinking critically and solutions orientation with more case studies. The emphasis should be on more of softer skills and beyond in shaping their right attitude and forming the characters to grow a forward-thinking mindset to develop in the industry set in return, the industry professionals to have a mentality of coaching, mentoring, and guidance to enhance the available right skill and knowledge to develop further with relevant experience will definitely build the needful confidence to take next level.

4. Conclusion and Implication

This study follows the qualitative data collection approach, which helps get in-depth information. However, the sample size of this study is small. As a result, it cannot be generalized to the population. Hence, future research could conduct similar types of research by using a quantitative approach. Moreover, the future researcher could develop the instrument based on the findings of this study. In this study, the researchers did not assess how the academia-industry gap affects the economy. Future researchers could look at the effect of the academia-industry gap on the overall economy. Future researchers could conduct a comparative study between before, during, and post-COVID-19 impacts on the hospitality industry. Further, this study could help both sectors (education and industry) assess the root cause of the academia-industry gap. Prior research has mentioned that academic work and study have a limited impact on the industry (Jenkins, 1999); therefore, collaboration in research by the academician and the professional could fill the gap between academia and industry.

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