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Social media usage in hotel human resources: recruitment, hiring and communication

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study is to explore the use and non-use of social media (SM) by North American hotels for human resource (HR) activities.

Design/methodology/approach – This exploratory study used an online survey and a sampling frame of 1,711 North American hotels with 300 or more rooms, excluding economy properties. With a response rate of 17.1 per cent and a defined population, data were weighted to reflect the midscale, upscale and luxury market classes.

Findings – Slightly more than half of North American hotels use SM for HR activities. Higher service level hotels are related to SM HR use generally; midscale properties report higher usage for internal communication. Use of SM in hotel HR is more focused on marketing versus recruitment activities.

Research limitations/implications – The generalizability and, therefore, implications are limited to North American hotels, midscale or higher with 300 or more rooms. Future research should complement this broad-based study by delving more deeply into rationale for HR communication over hiring functions for SM and its overall adoption for HR in the hospitality industry.

Practical implications – This study provides an understanding of how SM is being used and its perceived usefulness across a variety of HR activities. The findings will inform the application of SM for hotel HR purposes.

Originality/value – This is the first empirical study about SM and HR practices in the North American hotel industry.

Keywords Hotels, Recruitment, LinkedIn, Social media, Hiring, Human resources

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Social media (SM) is changing human interaction and the way in which individuals access personal information in the expanding online environment. SM is an example of a *discontinuous innovation* – a new product that establishes new behavior patterns (Assael, 1984) – and is influencing the way human resource (HR) professionals recruit, screen, hire and terminate employees (Brandenburg, 2008; Brown and Vaughn, 2011; Clark and Roberts, 2010; Davison *et al.*, 2011; Slovensky and Ross, 2011). As noted by Davidson *et al.* (2011, p. 1), "Technology is now set to revolutionize the way HR management is conducted". Preliminary research suggests that despite growing use and

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interest in SM platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, there is ambiguous understanding of the term "social media". Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) describe SM as a group of Internet-based applications that operate on the foundations of Web 2.0 and user-generated content (UGC). Driven by the technical (e.g. increased hardware capacity and access to Internet), economic (UGC creation tools) and social (e.g. Generation Y engagement with technology) influences of Web 2.0 (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010), the adoption of SM has been exponential. Recent data show the majority of Internet using males (63 per cent) and females (75 per cent) are using an SM platform (Pew Internet, 2012). Although SM applications were originally developed for social reasons, businesses are now using these applications to interact with customers and potential employees in the online space.

Recent HR research suggests use of SM for recruitment and screening of new employees; however, many of these studies are outside the academic realm, and no studies address the topic from a hotel perspective. Consequently, data reported across studies are quite varied. For example, a study by Jobvite (2011), conducted with a sample of 800 HR and recruiting professionals, reported that the majority of companies are using SM to recruit (89 per cent) and screen candidate profiles (45 per cent), whereas a 2011 survey of 541 randomly selected HR and recruiting professionals conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) reported that significantly fewer companies use social networks to recruit (56 per cent) and screen candidate profiles (18 per cent) (SHRM, 2011a). Although these findings are a general starting point, there is a gap in the literature related to understanding non-use of SM and hotel industry usage of SM for HR purposes.

In research about SM and HR, conducted by Slovensky and Ross (2011), theoretical reasons as to why managers should also use SM when hiring are balanced with arguments to suggest caution when using SM for hiring (fairness, privacy, legal and ethical reasons). Although their conceptual study identifies some risks that could be identified as reasons for non-use, no empirical studies have reported reasons as to why HR managers are not using SM. With adoption rates that range from 79 to 56 per cent (CTHRC, 2011; SHRM, 2011b), there are a significant number of HR managers not using SM. Understanding HR managers' reasons for non-use represents a gap in the literature.

It is also important to situate usage of SM for HR purposes in the hotel industry, as it has employment characteristics that set it apart from other industries. Because service plays an important role in hotels, the industry has unique characteristics of employment and workforce that include high labor costs, high labor turnover, unskilled and semiskilled nature of most jobs and a high proportion of seasonal part-time employees (Kusluvan *et al.*, 2010). In a study to identify the most troubling issues for managers in hospitality, HR issues were the most frequently identified area of concern by managers (57 per cent) (Enz, 2001). A later version of the same study was done in 2008, offering further insights (Enz, 2009). Amongst the list of nine HR concerns, the two most important areas of concern were attraction and retention of employees (Enz, 2009). Because of the far-reaching, relatively new and constantly evolving nature of SM, no definitive standard of usage for hotel HR exists, despite its potential functionality for recruitment and retention purposes.

Hotels worldwide are classified into distinct market classes; however, these classification systems vary by country, and there is no international standard. Market classification is the grouping together of hotels providing a similar range of services and

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facilities, which is not to be confused with hotel grading, which denotes a quality assessment (Vine, 1981). Hotel market classes range from economy to luxury, each providing differing levels of service to their guests; consequently, HR needs for different market classes may differ. The purpose of this exploratory research is to understand the broader story of SM use and non-use by North American hotels across market classes for HR purposes. Specifically, this paper explores:

- usage of SM platforms in HR practices with current and potential employees;
- use and usefulness of SM across stages of hiring and level/type of employee;
- non-use of SM for hotel HR;
- attitudes toward using SM for hotel HR purposes; and
- potential relationships between hotel market class and SM use for HR.

Literature review

As an emerging field, there is little previous academic research or empirical study focusing on SM in an HR context, and even less in the hotel industry. For this reason, the literature review focuses more on SM in an HR context than looking at it from a hospitality context. Of the few studies accessed, one had a broader scope addressing SM use for tourism business purposes with a small focus on SM for HR (CTHRC, 2011), whereas another looked at the phenomena from the job candidate's perspective versus an employer's perspective (Madera, 2012). Current research mainly illustrates the prevalence, benefits and detriments of SM and HR as a trend related to the recruitment and screening process of potential employees. According to the SHRM (2011b) survey, responding HR professionals indicated use of LinkedIn (95 per cent), Facebook (58 per cent) and Twitter (42 per cent) for recruitment purposes, primarily targeting non-management salaried employees (82 per cent) and other management positions, excluding upper management (77 per cent). Furthermore, of the 18 per cent of HR professionals using SM to screen candidates, 30 per cent reported using information from SM to disqualify a candidate. These HR professionals also reported using LinkedIn (85 per cent), Facebook (78 per cent) and Twitter (11 per cent) to screen candidates for upper management (41 per cent) and non-management salaried positions (26 per cent) (SHRM, 2011b).

Although skepticism of SM's place in the business world exists, benefits related to recruitment, branding and costs are becoming strong countervailing factors. SM can be a helpful method for generating referrals with respect to recruiting the candidate (Smith and Kidder, 2010) and has surpassed online job boards as the preferred way to acquire talent (Brotherton, 2012). HR managers are maximizing the function of SM through the use of their employees' social networks as a cost-conscious approach known as "social recruitment" (Doherty, 2010). This preference is, in part, because of the expansion of the talent pool through online networks, such as LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter, which facilitate global versus local recruitment (Brotherton, 2012).

The hospitality industry is characterized by, "[…] a poor reputation as a source of permanent employment, offering low pay, anti-social working hours, menial work, and limited opportunities for career progression" (Barron, 2008, p. 731), which has resulted in high turnover and a great challenge for the industry to attract, recruit and retain superior employees. As such, an expanded talent pool may become especially important for accessing Generation Y candidates, i.e. those born between 1979 and 1994 (Barron,

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2008). This generation thinks and behaves differently toward careers than previous generations (Barron, 2008). Attitudes and characteristics germane to Generation Y candidates, such as increased desire for work–life balance, participatory versus results focus, task variety seeking, immediate and continual need for recognition, limited commitment and extreme technology literacy, present a unique challenge for the hospitality industry, demonstrated in the softening supply of trained and motivated candidates (Barron, 2008). Talent management (TM), which is a commitment to implementing an integrated, strategic and technologically enabled approach to HR management, has been examined in the hospitality industry by Hughes and Rog (2008). Their work was prior to the recent mainstream adoption of SM for business purposes and, consequently, did not address SM and its use for TM. More recently, Davidson *et al.* (2011) noted that the impact of SM on hospitality-related HR practices and employment has still not been adequately addressed by the industry or academic research.

Generation Y candidates are selective in the way they prefer to receive information, with an increased preference for interactive and engaging methods (Barron, 2008). Online studies show that 92 per cent of young adults aged 18-29 years are using an SM platform (Pew Internet, 2012), and that one in every 5 minutes spent online in 2011 was spent on an SM site, making SM the top online activity globally (Comscore, 2011). The high level of engagement that Generation Y has with SM could present a competitive opportunity for HR managers to incorporate SM into their HR operations, thereby adapting to this generation's preferences to ensure current and future HR needs are met.

Some studies suggest that SM should be integrated and should supplement existing recruitment strategies versus replacing them (Hunt, 2010), and that SM is no longer separate from any business function and, consequentially, has the potential to be integrated into daily activities, contribute to success across a variety of business objectives and impact the bottom line (Berkowitch, 2010). Findings from Pelit *et al.* (2011) suggest that relations with colleagues, convenient communications and management feedback are drivers of employee satisfaction, all of which could be supported by SM. However, the use of SM requires strategy for the differing platforms (e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn) (Hunt, 2010) and differing audiences (e.g. current employees vs potential employees) to reap its benefits. Kofman (2011) describes one such internal benefit as "social HR", whereby SM enhances organizations as a consequence of collaboration and connectivity, as well as the oft-cited external benefit to communicate broadly with potential talent (Kofman, 2011). SM has capabilities beyond the identification of potential candidates, as a driver to attract, brand and retain employees, while leveraging each employee network for further growth (Berkowitch, 2010).

Use of SM in an HR context is not without its drawbacks. Detriments of SM are seemingly magnified in an HR context, such as legal and ethical issues, lack of formal policies for use and issues of relevancy and reliability of information obtained from SM (Slovensky and Ross, 2011; Smith and Kidder, 2010; Taleo Business Edition, 2010). Individuals' SM profiles are typically made for social reasons, and therefore, information uncovered about a candidate could be unrelated to work performance and seen negatively by the candidate as an invasion of privacy (Slovensky and Ross, 2011). The degree of legal risk is somewhat unknown but can arise from exposure to protected candidate characteristics such as age, disability or sexual orientation. Furthermore, because SM platforms do not reflect the demographics of the general population, organizations relying heavily on these platforms may have a disparate impact and risk

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for not ensuring all groups have an equal opportunity for employment (Taleo Business Edition, 2010). Additionally, because of the ease at which fake profiles and inaccurate tags and posts can be made, companies may not be able to rely confidently on SM profiles and activities as a basis for screening (Slovensky and Ross, 2011; Smith and Kidder, 2010).

In the previously mentioned SHRM study, 56 per cent of organizations indicated that they do not have a policy regarding the use of SM sites. Furthermore, 29 per cent reported that their organization plans to implement a policy within the next 12 months showing a growth in adoption (SHRM, 2011a). Organizations that are not using SM for screening candidates express concerns about legal risks including discovering information about protected characteristics (66 per cent), the inability to verify information from an applicant's SM profile (48 per cent) and information on job candidates from SM profiles may not be relevant to work-related potential (45 per cent) (SHRM, 2011a). The explosive growth of SM usage and tools has made it difficult for some HR managers (and job candidates) to keep pace (Brotherton, 2012). The speed of advancements has created an additional concern for HR managers to understand which SM applications will meet their specific HR needs (Brotherton, 2012).

Method

Given the nascent stage of SM and HR research in the hospitality field, this exploratory study used an online survey. This allows for breadth of data collection to create a picture of the current situation by engaging a large number of HR professionals from across North America to participate in a timely, efficient and confidential manner. A combined directory of Canadian and American hotels consisting of 300 or more rooms ($N = 1711$) served as the sampling frame. The hotel directory was provided by Smith Travel Research (STR), a leading supplier of data for the hospitality industry. The sampling frame excluded economy hotels and those under 300 rooms on the rationale that hotels of that size and service level would not have a dedicated HR manager and, thus, would not be eligible to participate in the study, which was borne out in the pilot testing that included all hotels classes with a minimum of 250 rooms.

A two-stage informed consent process was used to secure participation. Potential participants were first contacted via telephone to ensure that the property had a dedicated HR manager. HR managers were provided with a description of the study purpose followed by a request for permission to send more detailed information on the study and a link to the online survey via e-mail. The questionnaire was designed to determine usage and usefulness of SM for common HR purposes across the spectrum of sourcing, recruiting, screening, hiring and terminating employees (SHRM, 2008), as well as attitudes toward SM use for HR purposes (Brotherton, 2012; Hunt, 2010; Slovensky and Ross, 2011; Smith and Kidder, 2010; Taleo Business Edition, 2010). Additionally, reasons for non- and discontinued use were queried. Classification questions included demographic information on the HR manager and hotel characteristics (e.g. number of rooms, number of employees, market class). Hotel size categories were based upon those from STR defined as large (300-600 rooms), major (601-1499 rooms) and mega (1,500+ rooms). Hotel market classes referenced STR classifications based on room rate relative to hotels in the same geographic area, encompassing midscale (midscale hotels with and without food and beverage services) and upscale (luxury, upper upscale and upscale

hotels). Questions were mainly closed-ended with the opportunity for additional comments, allowing the survey to be completed in approximately 10 minutes.

From the $N = 1{,}711$ hotels in the sample, 11 had closed operations or had disconnected telephone numbers, and a further 81 properties had no HR manager on site. Of those 1,619 remaining properties, 277 responses were received resulting in an effective response rate of 17.1 per cent. As an anonymous online survey, it was not possible to check for non-response bias; however, prior to analysis, data were weighted by hotel market class to ensure that results reflected the reality of the industry composition where midscale, upscale and luxury properties are 14.7, 70.3 and 15.0 per cent, respectively. Consequently, the data were weighted by 2.083 for midscale, 1.233 for upscale and 0.409 for luxury properties.

The extent and purposes of SM use in a hotel HR context as well as consideration for possible influences (i.e. size, affiliation) and, specifically, market class on SM usage were explored using descriptive and inferential statistics relevant to the level of data. Additionally, a content analysis of open-ended replies was conducted to describe reasons for SM non-use by HR managers.

Findings and discussion

Profile of respondents

The majority of respondents ($n = 164$) reported using SM platforms for HR activities (56.3 per cent); however, 43.7 per cent reporting non-usage is also a sizable proportion. Responding HR managers were mainly female (80.5 per cent), between 26 and 45 years of age (65 per cent), and many of whom (43 per cent) have worked in HR for over 10 years. Almost all of the HR managers (95.2 per cent) use SM outside of work. When considering HR manager characteristics and SM use for HR purposes, only age displayed a significant relationship. Managers over 45 years of age are less likely to use SM for HR purposes ($\chi^2 = 10.072$, df = 4, $p = 0.039$). No relationship was evident for how long they had worked in the HR field or for personal SM use.

Responding hotels were based in Canada (16.9 per cent) and the USA (83.1 per cent). Respondents were employed in corporately owned and operated properties (34.2 per cent), followed by franchised (33.8 per cent) and independently owned and operated properties (19.0 per cent). Potential relationships between hotel characteristics (i.e. size, affiliation, market class and number of full-time employees) and SM use were examined, and results are provided in Table I. No significant relationships were found between SM use and hotel size, affiliation type or number of full-time employees. Although there was not a statistically significant relationship between SM use and hotel market class ($\chi^2 = 5.753$, df = 2, $p = 0.056$), it approached significance and showed a pattern of hotels with increased service levels (i.e. upscale and luxury) as more likely to use SM for HR purposes. The majority of responding upscale (65.3 per cent) and luxury (68.7 per cent) hotels and a considerable proportion of midscale (43.8 per cent) hotels were categorized as large (300-600 rooms). The number of full-time employees for upscale and luxury hotels ranged from fewer than 125 to more than 501, whereas midscale properties ranged from 125 or fewer to 500 full-time employees. Additionally, half (49.9 per cent) of HR managers reported starting to use SM for HR between one and two years ago and 33.3 per cent reported starting use more than two years ago.

The profile of respondents suggests that age is a factor in the very recent use of SM for HR purposes, which concurs with general usage patterns for SM. Based on findings

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Table I. Hotel characteristics and use of SM for HR purposes

Hotel characteristics	Total *n*	Use of SM *n*	Use of SM (%)	Non-use of SM *n*	Non-use of SM (%)	χ^2
Hotel location						0.834
Canada	50	31	62.0	19	38.0	
USA	242	133	55.0	109	45.0	
Hotel ownership type						1.738
Corporately owned and operated	99	54	54.5	45	45.5	
Franchised	99	61	61.6	38	38.4	
Independently owned and operated	56	29	51.8	27	48.2	
Other	38	21	55.3	17	44.7	
Hotel size						0.830
Large 300-600	185	101	54.6	84	45.4	
Major 601-1,499	55	33	60.0	22	40.0	
Mega 1,500+	8	4	50.0	4	50.0	
Number full-time employees						1.242
125 or fewer	90	53	58.9	37	41.1	
126-250	116	62	53.4	54	46.6	
251-375	29	16	55.2	13	44.8	
376-500	27	14	51.9	13	48.1	
501 or more	29	18	62.1	11	37.9	
Market class						5.753*
Luxury	17	12	70.6	5	29.4	
Upscale	153	93	60.8	60	39.2	
Midscale	120	58	48.3	62	51.7	

Note: $*p = 0.056$

by Pew Internet (2012) that 92 per cent of adults aged 18-29 years are using SM, and characteristics related to Generation Y candidates, such as a preference for interactive and engaging methods of communications (Barron, 2008), it could be argued that SM is a channel for engaging a younger employee demographic.

SM use and usefulness for hiring activities

On a scale of never (1) to always (5), a sizable proportion of HR managers reported that they frequently/always use LinkedIn (mode = 4, 43.5 per cent) Facebook (mode = 3, 31.5 per cent) and Twitter (mode = 1, 20.6 per cent) platforms for HR activities. However, it is important to note that the majority of respondents indicated that they never use Twitter (53.9 per cent) in this context. Furthermore, a sizeable majority never uses subscription-based services for heavy users such as Facebook Marketplace and LinkedIn Talent Advantage, or very new or video-based sites, such as Google+ and YouTube.

The purposes for which SM was used by HR managers were almost exclusively for raising awareness of their hotel and attracting people to apply, and least often (never and almost never) for the hiring decision, interview, reference checking and preliminary screening (Table II). Based on one-way ANOVA results, this did not differ by hotel

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market class except for interviewing where luxury properties more often use SM for interviewing than midscale properties. However, given the low means, it is still rare in this context (Table III). Raising awareness of the hotel property was approaching significance, showing a pattern where midscale properties use SM frequently for this purpose (M = 3.96, p = 0.099).

In addition to use, usefulness of SM for common hiring activities was examined. HR professionals reported that SM was most useful for communicating directly with potential candidates (M = 3.49, SD = 1.22, Mode = 4) as well as for sourcing and identifying candidates (M = 3.44, SD = 1.02, Mode = 3). Viewing online SM profiles of candidates who have applied for work was rated as useful by 44 per cent. SM's usefulness for screening candidates who have applied for work received the widest range and lowest ratings (Table IV). When these hiring activities were examined by market class of hotel, ANOVA tests showed no significant relationships.

Similarly, SM use for recruitment of particular levels of employees was considered. Approximately half of the HR managers found SM to be useful/very useful (4 or 5 on the 5-point scale) for recruiting employees across the levels from part-time frontline to management (Table IV). Similar to findings from SHRM (2011b), SM usefulness was higher for recruiting lower-level employees (mode = 4) than supervisory- or management-level employees (mode = 3). Although the mode for recruitment of seasonal employees was 5 (very useful), the frequency distribution shows a diversity of opinion with regard to usefulness of SM for this employee type. Furthermore, ANOVA tests revealed no relationships between market class of hotel and use of SM for recruitment of employees across the levels from part-time frontline to management.

HR managers were also asked whether they use SM for HR purposes with their current employees, specifically if they have used SM to discipline or terminate an

			Never		Almost Never		Sometimes		Frequently		Always	
Stages of hiring	M	SD	*N*	(%)	*n*	(%)	*n*	(%)	*n*	(%)	*n*	(%)
Raise awareness	3.72	1.109	12	7.0	8	5.0	36	21.9	67	41.1	41	24.9
Attract applicants	3.68	1.040	8	4.8	12	7.1	41	25.2	68	41.6	35	21.4
Preliminary screening	1.74	1.092	98	61.1	25	15.6	22	13.5	12	7.4	4	2.3
Reference checking	1.58	1.034	114	71.4	16	9.8	16	10.0	12	7.2	2	1.5
Hiring decision	1.49	0.853	110	68.8	29	18.3	14	9.0	5	2.8	2	1.0
Interview	1.45	0.901	119	75.1	17	10.7	15	9.3	6	3.6	2	1.3

Table II. Frequency of use of SM across stages of hiring

Stages of hiring	Luxury	Upscale	Midscale	*F*	*p*
Raise hotel awareness	3.72	3.57	3.96	2.345	0.099
Attract people to apply	3.66	3.59	3.82	0.871	0.420
Preliminary screening	2.14	1.66	1.79	1.072	0.345
Interview	1.93^{A}	1.51^{AB}	1.26^{B}	3.177	0.044
Reference checking	1.76	1.60	1.50	0.368	0.693
Hiring decision	1.59	1.42	1.57	0.597	0.552

Note: Scheffé's tests: means that do not share a superscript are significantly different at $p < 0.05$

Table III. SM use across the hiring stages by market class

Table IV. Usefulness of SM

Use of social media	M	SD	Not at all useful 1 *n*	(%)	2 *n*	(%)	3 *n*	(%)	4 *n*	(%)	Very useful 5 *n*	(%)
HR activities												
Source and ID candidates	3.44	1.018	4	3.3	15	12.2	47	38.0	36	29.7	21	16.8
Communicate with candidates	3.49	1.225	7	9.3	8	9.8	21	26.9	24	30.1	19	23.9
View candidates' profiles	3.37	1.164	4	4.9	14	19.1	24	31.6	17	23.0	16	21.3
Screen candidates	2.89	1.302	11	19.6	10	18.8	15	27.1	12	22.6	7	12.0
Recruitment of employees												
Full-time frontline	3.68	1.031	0	0.4	14	14.2	30	29.1	31	30.0	27	26.3
Part-time frontline	3.59	1.090	2	1.8	15	16.3	26	28.1	27	28.7	23	25.1
Management level	3.56	1.039	0	0.0	19	17.8	35	32.1	29	26.8	26	23.4
Supervisors	3.47	1.125	2	2.5	19	19.6	28	29.3	25	25.6	22	23.0
Seasonal	3.36	1.344	9	12.0	12	15.3	18	23.5	17	23.0	20	26.3

employee, enhance employee engagement or if they have created a Facebook or LinkedIn group for employees to connect. There was a significant relationship between hotel market class and Facebook group use. Specifically, midscale properties were more likely to have a Facebook group for employees to connect than a luxury property ($\chi^2 = 8.993$, df = 2, $p = 0.011$).

The above-mentioned findings relate to channel choice, marketing function and SM usefulness in select HR activities. Results suggest that SM platform and purpose for use are important factors when making strategic decisions about the use of SM for hotel HR purposes. Channels such as LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter are used more so than Facebook Marketplace, Google+, YouTube and LinkedIn Talent Advantage, which are barely used. Employing generic SM rather than SM refined for business application illustrates just how nascent SM is in this context. Based on the reported purposes for which SM is used by HR managers, it could be argued that SM is mostly an awareness-raising marketing tool that is used to attract people. Although the marketing purposes for SM are commonly accepted, the marketing functions for SM and HR have not been identified previously. Similarly, the usefulness measure for SM in HR identified marketing-related functions. Purposes such as communicating with candidates and sourcing/identifying candidates scored higher than other factors. These findings for both use and usefulness of SM platforms suggest that SM for hotel HR is mostly focused on marketing-related functions.

With regard to different uses of SM by market class, the results suggest that midscale properties are the most frequent users of SM to raise awareness for future employees and engage current employees. Doherty (2010) referred to this "social recruitment" as a cost-conscious approach, which is borne out by these results of more frequent use by midscale hotels versus luxury properties. The SM use with current employees can be seen as internal marketing or "social HR" (Sambhi, 2011) that focuses on enhancing organizational culture and function. With midscale properties having a lower average daily rate than luxury properties, managers need to be more creative in their use of resources. Hotel HR managers for midscale properties may see SM as a financially efficient way to raise awareness and engage employees.

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Non-users of SM for HR

For the 43.7 per cent of hotels that did not use SM for HR purposes ($n = 127$), they were categorized as:

- not using but considering the use of SM for HR purposes (55.9 per cent);
- not using and not considering the use of SM for HR purposes (39.4 per cent); or
- not using because the hotel stopped using SM for HR purposes (4.7 per cent).

Content analysis of open-ended comments ($n = 79$) elucidated these reasons.

The most frequent reason, "not using but considering the use of SM for HR purposes" was characterized by three themes: *attract talent*, *recruitment* and *popularity of SM*. The theme to attract talent referred to reaching a new pool of employees for the hotel. Comments included statements like "attract new applicants", "connect with the next generation" and "reach individuals". Somewhat similar to the attract talent theme, many managers referred to considering the use of SM for recruitment purposes. The key difference between the two themes was the specific use of the word recruitment. Examples of recruitment comments included "to explore other avenues for recruiting" and "gain exposure and to enhance our recruitment efforts". The final theme identified for the consideration of SM for HR purposes was related to SM's popularity, and because of its popularity and subsequent reach, they are considering usage. Examples of comments included "it's popular and we need to explore all options" and "social media accesses several million people".

For those hotels that are not considering the use of SM for HR purposes, comments reflected two themes. The first theme was *no need* exemplified by reasons such as "the sources we currently use seem to be working for us" and "it is not that we will never consider it but at this time it has been unnecessary". Such responses suggest that the status quo or current strategy is sufficient, and there is no need to investigate other options. The second theme for not considering the use of SM related to *corporate reasons*. Examples include "social media is used only at the global level for recruiting" and "currently our company doesn't use social media for recruitment".

The final category was stopped use of SM, and only six hotels indicated this reason. The most insightful finding from the analysis of comments was the direction of corporate office making it difficult. This *corporate* theme was also considered a prominent reason for not considering SM for HR. Although not a major theme, some hotels considering the use of SM for HR purposes mentioned waiting for corporate direction. Previous statistical analysis did not show type of ownership (e.g. independent, corporate) as related to SM HR use; however, with corporate reasons for not using it mentioned in all three non-use contexts, this may warrant further investigation.

Attitudes toward SM use for HR

All respondents (SM users and non-users) were asked to rate six statements on a 7-point agree-disagree scale to assess attitudes toward the use of SM for HR purposes. Statements were based on previous literature (Brotherton, 2012; Hunt, 2010; Slovensky and Ross, 2011; Smith and Kidder, 2010; Taleo Business Edition, 2010). Table V presents the mean ratings of attitude statements for users and non-users. Overall, there is highest agreement for SM as a cost-effective HR tool. HR managers appear less convinced that "SM should have a central role in the hiring process". As might be expected, the results indicate that non-users agree more with the negative statements regarding SM than SM

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Attitudes	Users M	Users SD	Non-users M	Non-users SD	Standardized canonical discriminant function coefficients[a]
Keeping up with the growing use of SM is difficult for HR managers	3.51	1.639	4.26	1.576	0.634
SM is a cost-effective tool for HR purposes	5.20	1.398	5.01	1.447	−0.020
SM is more effective for recruiting hotel employees than more traditional methods such as newspaper advertisements and job Web sites like Workopolis	4.14	1.681	3.80	1.584	−0.241
Use of SM by hotels for HR purposes has too many ethical and privacy issues related to it	4.19	1.739	4.76	1.633	0.224
SM should have a central role in the hiring process	3.55	1.640	3.42	1.425	0.082
Use of SM in HR is a fad	2.56	1.429	3.27	1.605	0.587

Actual group	Group centroids	*N* of cases	Predicted group membership[b] User		Non-user	
User	−0.301	164	119	73.0%	44	27.0%
Non-user	0.386	127	65	51.3%	62	48.7%

Notes: The 5-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree); [a]a positive coefficient is interpreted as more characteristic of a non-user; [b]percentage of grouped cases correctly classified: 62.4%

Table V. Discriminant analysis: attitudes toward SM use for HR purposes

users. For instance, the difficulty in keeping up with SM's growing use ($t = -3.979$, df = 289, $p = 0.00$), its ethical and privacy issues ($t = -2.848$, df = 288, $p = 0.05$) and the notion that SM is a fad ($t = -4.008$, df = 289, $p = 0.00$). Regarding SM being more effective for recruiting than traditional methods, there was less agreement, and the results comparing users and non-users are approaching significance ($p = 0.075$) with higher agreement from SM users. Because age was significantly related to SM use, a follow-up analysis controlling for age was conducted that confirmed the above results ["keeping up", (F, 1, 240) = 10.65, $p = 0.001$); "ethical issues", (F, 1, 240) = 6.275, $p = 0.013$); "fad", (F, 1, 237) = 12.237, $p = 0.001$)].

A discriminant function analysis was also used to investigate SM use or non-use in HR based on managers' attitudes toward SM. Table V displays these results showing two of the three significant attitudes – "keeping up with the growing use of SM is difficult for HR managers" and "use of SM in HR is a fad" – with high positive weights, confirming their greater contribution to distinguishing between SM for HR users and non-users. As only 62.4 per cent of cases were classified correctly based on attitudes, this does not appear to be a major factor in whether hotels actually use SM for HR purposes.

Findings from the open-ended comments reveal that corporate policy likely plays a more dominant role than individual HR manager attitudes. Additionally, the highest agreement for SM as a cost-effective HR tool is consistent with the midscale vs luxury hotels' more frequent use of SM for communication. Because of the lower average room

rate of midscale hotels versus luxury hotels, the midscale hotels appear to be more aggressive in their use of SM for HR marketing-related purposes.

Conclusion

This is the first empirical study about SM and HR practices in the North American hotel industry. The conceptual cornerstones of this research are threefold. First, it draws upon the benefits and risks of SM use in HR generally. Second, it situates in the context of hotels and their unique market classifications and operational characteristics. Third, it considers attitudinal as well as sociodemographic and professional (i.e. years working in HR) as potential influences on use/non-use and usefulness of SM in HR. This research has both practical and theoretical implications.

Practical implications

Current research on specific usage of SM within a hotel HR context is scarce, and this study has brought preliminary practical insights into the North American hotel industry. Key insights for SM in a hotel HR context are related to non-users, usefulness and marketing.

Although slightly over half of North American hotels use SM for HR purposes, another 24 per cent are considering it, suggesting an impending increase in SM presence, and even more reason to research the topic specifically for the hotel industry. Advice for non-users who are considering using SM for HR purposes relates to findings from the use and usefulness categories. From an SM use perspective, the most used platforms are LinkedIn and Facebook, where SM is most relevant to engaging the younger employee and raising the awareness of the hotel for attracting future employees. From a usefulness perspective, existing hotel HR managers find SM most useful for communicating directly with and sourcing candidates, raising the awareness of the hotel and engaging younger employees. For the one in four non-using hotels that are considering the use of SM for HR purposes, this research provides guidance for the most important uses when starting to use SM for HR purposes. Furthermore, education should focus on issues related to the difficulty of keeping up with growing use and impressions of SM as a fad.

Higher preliminary screening and higher perceived usefulness for recruiting are two findings that might reflect the unique characteristics of hotels (e.g. high seasonal labor needs and high turnover). First, based on comparing results against the 2011 findings from the Society of Human Resource Management, hotels use SM for preliminary screening slightly more than general HR professionals (23 vs 18 per cent). Second, based on comparing results to the 2012 Canadian Tourism Human Resource Council (CTHRC) study, overall results of hotels for the usefulness of SM for recruiting were significantly higher for hotels than the CTHRC respondents.

Although the uses of SM for hotel HR are wide-reaching, no standard guidelines for use or usefulness have been previously identified by research. This study clearly identifies the use of SM for hotel HR marketing and communications purposes. By focusing the development of standard guidelines related to the use of SM for areas like raising awareness, attracting applicants and communicating with candidates, hotels can avoid the legal pitfalls that come with privacy concerns. Because attracting talent has been consistently identified as one of the troubling issues for the industry (Enz, 2009), this amplifies the importance of the research findings. It is also recommended that

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hotels should focus on the use of SM for communications purposes to assist in retaining employees.

Theoretical implications

Most of the academic literature related to SM use for HR purposes was conceptual in nature and identified the benefits and risks for screening or recruitment purposes. The use and usefulness analysis identified a polarity in the types of SM HR activities. Activities related to marketing and communications functions scored much higher than activities related to hiring functions. This finding suggests that SM in hotel HR is used more as a marketing and communications platform than a hiring platform. When you consider the risks associated with the use of SM to screen job applicants identified by Slovensky and Ross (2011), limiting the use for marketing and communications purposes eliminates legal issues. From a theoretical implications perspective, this suggests the need for marketing or communications theories to better understand the use of SM in an HR context.

Future research

Although findings of this research are limited to larger North American midscale and above hotels, they will nonetheless add to the growing literature on SM use in HR and, specifically, within hotel HR. This research has identified SM as a tool for HR marketing and communications. Future research should explore SM and its internal communications/marketing importance to employee retention and satisfaction, as well as the effectiveness of the social recruiting concept in a hotel HR context. Because of the complex legal and privacy issues related to SM for HR purposes, a more clear understanding for the best uses of SM for HR purposes is required.

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