Chapter 59

Investigating the Impact of Social Media on Gen Y Employees' Engagement:
An Indian Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The study examines the influence of social media on Gen Y employees' engagement. Hypotheses are developed to explain the influence of social media on Gen Y employees' engagement. A sample of 256 Indian Gen Y employees from IT industry participated in the survey. Structural equation modeling is used to test the research hypotheses. Findings reveal that social media has a significant positive effect on Gen Y employees' engagement. It is revealed that social media moderates the relationship of HR practices (communication, collaboration; knowledge sharing and recognition) and engagement in Gen Y employees. While the scope of this study is limited to IT industry and results may not generalize to different industries in different regions. Hence, future studies should test the given hypotheses in different industries of different regions. The findings suggest that organizations should incorporate social media into their HR strategy. The study is one of the first to date, to empirically test the effect of social media on Gen Y employee engagement.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last few years, employee engagement has become a key area of concern for organizations. One of the reasons behind this is the changing workforce dynamics, characterized by the multi-generational nature of the current workforce comprising of three generations namely Baby boomers (1946-1960), Gen

X (1961-1980) and Gen Y (1981-2000). This diverse workforce presents new challenges for organizations form the talent management perspective. While Baby boomers are approaching their retirement and Gen X also will follow within few years, by 2030, it is predicted that Gen Y will account for nearly three quarters of the global workforce. Therefore, Gen Y is both the present and future of the workforce; however, research suggests that Gen Y employees are tougher to engage than the earlier generations (Anderson, 2011). Hence, engaging Gen Y employees has become a grave talent management issue for organizations.

More importantly, there is growing evidence that Gen Y is different in terms of workplace attitude, values, and preferences; hence it is forcing organizations to re-think their working practices commensurate to the distinct psychological profile of Gen Y employees (Naim & Lenka, 2016). The extant research also indicates that different generations of employees tend to have unique engagement drivers (Gilbert, 2011). This builds a compelling case for organizations to design an effective engagement strategy. The past literature reveals that being grown up in technologically sophisticated era, Gen Y employees are techno-savvy and harbor a strong tendency for use of technology such as social media (Lowe, Levitt & Wilson, 2008). This has prompted us to explore the case of social media, which holds high influence in lives of Gen Y employees. In addition, social media (a class of online communication tools) possesses a remarkable ability of creating and sharing user-generated content. This has been shown to have a strong bearing on communication, information transfer, and collaboration within organizations (Vouri, 2012). Further, this study is a response to Bolton et al.'s (2013) call to examine the effect of organizational use of social media on engagement, commitment and loyalty. Additionally, social media has been studied to engage external stakeholders particularly, customers, but its potential to engage internal customers i.e. employees is still an unexplored territory. On this backdrop, this paper investigates the impact of social media use on engagement of Gen Y employees.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media

Technological revolution has been the defining characteristic of the last few decades. The emergence of internet and social technologies has been the dominant force, in particular the rise of social media. The term 'social media' firstly appeared in press in 1997 (Bercovici, 2010). Social media comprises of online communication channels such as social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter, Linkedin), Blogs, discussion forums, Content sharing sites (Youtube, Flickr), Internal networking tools (Yammer). These tools primarily use ability to create user-generated content i.e. allowing users to create, edit, and share their content. Social media includes unique platforms that encourage active participation in the creation, modification, and communication of user-generated content (Universal McCann, 2008).

In academic literature, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) have conducted the seminal work on conceptualizing the social media. They defined it as a group of internet based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of web 2.0 and that enable the creation and exchange of user generated content. According to Cavico et al. (2013), "social media consists of web-based internet networks where users can share information and communicate with other users in a collective manner" (p. 25). Smith (2012) conceptualized social media as "social interactions using technology (such as the internet and cell phones) with any combination of words, pictures, video, or audio" (p. 24). Social media

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