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Hotel Recruitment Website Design, Aesthetics, Attitude toward Websites, and Applicant Attraction

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ABSTRACT

Despite the prevalent use of recruitment websites, little is known about the impact of recruitment websites on job seekers’ attraction. This study evaluated four large hotels’ recruitment websites in terms of website design characteristics and aesthetics, and measured job seekers’ attitude toward the hotel recruitment websites and attraction. The four hotels included were Hilton, Hyatt, IHG, and Starwood. The results indicated that Hilton’s recruitment website received the lowest score for website design characteristics and aesthetics, the least positive attitude, and the most negative attitude toward the recruitment website. Consequently, job seekers indicated that they were the least interested in applying for a job at Hilton.

Keywords: E-recruitment, website design, aesthetics, hotel, attraction
Hotel Recruitment Website Design, Aesthetics, Attitude toward Websites, and Applicant Attraction

Introduction

Since the technology and computer revolution, most organizations have utilized the Internet to share company information, promote and sell products, and recruit job applicants. The Internet has undoubtedly changed everyone’s daily life, including job seekers’ behavior for finding job opportunities and applying for a job. For instance, according to Nakamura, Shaw, Freeman, Nakamura, and Pyman (2007), Monster.com received more than 18 million distinct visitors during a single month in 2004, and approximately 92% of the largest corporations in North America had employment sections on their websites in 2000. In addition, these authors found that 91% of survey participants 25 to 34 years old reported using an Internet jobsite in 2007 while 41% of the same age group reported successfully using the Internet in finding their current or most recent job in 2007.

Despite the importance and prevalence of the use of the Internet, very little is known about how recruitment websites would affect job seekers’ attitude and attraction. A few studies on website recruitment were found at the time of writing this paper. Cober, Brown, Keeping, and Levy (2004) proposed a conceptual model to explain relationships among website design, usefulness, website attitude, organizational image, and applicant attraction. Meanwhile, Allen, Mahto, and Otondo (2007) empirically tested a part of the conceptual model proposed by Cober et al. (2004). Allen et al. (2007) found that job information and organization information obtained from websites resulted in positive relationships with attitude toward websites and organizations. Williamson, Lepak, and King (2003) identified a relationship between perceived website usability and organizational attraction. Backhaus (2004) examined the contents of job
advertisement placed on Monter.com. However, the few studies mentioned herein failed to examine an important factor in technology motivation: website design characteristics and esthetics. Furthermore, no study has examined recruitment websites in hospitality. Therefore, the current study aims to explore hotel recruitment website design characteristics and aesthetics as well as examine relationships among recruitment website design, aesthetics, attitude toward websites, and applicants’ attraction among four large hotel corporations.

**Literature Review**

When companies first started using the Internet to promote and sell products, the Internet was perceived as primarily appropriate to meet utilitarian needs (Bridges & Florsheim, 2008), such as product information and ease of online order (Benjamin & Wigand, 1995). However, Bridges and Florsheim (2008) argued that the utilitarian needs no longer drive consumers’ buying behaviors as consumers have become more experienced online buyers. Szymanski and Hise (2000) suggested that, when consumers become more experienced, they increasingly value the hedonic aspects of a website; as a result, the hedonic characteristics of a website increase consumers’ satisfaction. Given the findings in consumer behavior literature, we could argue that hedonic aspects of recruitment websites could influence job seekers’ attractiveness to an organization as an employer. The current study discusses website design and aesthetics as hedonic and utilitarian characteristics of recruitment websites.

**Aesthetics**

Merriam-Webster (2011) defines aesthetics as the branch of philosophy dealing with such notions as the beautiful, the ugly, the sublime, the comic, etc., as applicable to the fine arts, with a view to establishing
the meaning and validity of critical judgments concerning works of art, and the
principles underlying or justifying such judgments.

Meanwhile, website aesthetics include features such as color, fonts, pictures, and the use of white
space (Cober et al., 2004). Website aesthetics provide vivid experiences and affect initial
attitudes toward a website (Schenkman & Jonson, 2000; Tractinsky et al., 2000).

**Website Design Characteristics**

Website presentation is critical to attracting and motivating viewers’ attention as well as
time spent on the websites (Cober et al., 2004). In addition, given that the physical store’s image
plays a vital role in consumers’ purchase decision (Nevin & Houston, 1980), website design has
become increasingly important for consumers’ satisfaction and purchase intentions. Liu, Arnett,
and Litecky (2000) proposed key design factors, including information quality, service quality,
playfulness, system design quality, and system use. Liu et al. (2000) found that the website
design factors affected positive attitude toward the website.

Chen and Wells (1999) found 16 website design characteristics based on 141 adjectives.
According to their study, web users evaluate websites based on 16 characteristics—namely, fun,
exciting, cool, imaginative, entertaining, flashy, informative, intelligent, resourceful, useful,
helpful, messy, cumbersome, confusing, irritating, and knowledgeable—that were categorized
into three factors: entertainment, informativeness, and organization. Their study found that
entertainment was positively related to attitude toward websites.

Studies evaluating hotel websites found that hotel consumers evaluated hotel websites
based on site navigation, visual attractiveness, and information content (Perdue, 2001), usability
(Au Yeung & Law, 2004; Law & Hsu, 2005), and functionality (Chung & Law, 2003). Findings
in previous studies confirmed that hotel website design was positively related to hotel consumers’ satisfaction (Bai, Law, & Wen, 2008).

**Attitude toward Website**

Attitude toward websites was initially researched in conjunction with technology users’ acceptance of a particular technology as well as online consumers’ purchase behavior. In addition, scholars in recruitment have utilized attitude toward websites to measure job seekers’ attitude toward organizations and their intention to apply for available positions. For example, Cober et al. (2004) proposed that job seekers’ attitude toward recruitment websites would influence the job seekers’ perceived image of a firm, which would subsequently affect the job seekers’ attraction to the firm. In addition, Allen et al. (2007) found that attitude toward websites positively related to attitude toward organizations.

**Applicant Attraction**

The main purpose of recruitment is to attract more qualified applicants to apply for a job. Many studies have found that attracting and retaining superior employees can provide companies with a sustained competitive advantage (Lado & Wilson, 1994; Pfeffer, 1994; Wright, Ferris, Hiller, & Kroll, 1995). Organizations that attract more qualified applicants have a stronger competitive advantage, which ultimately leads to a larger applicant pool (Lado & Wilson, 1994; Murphy, 1986). According to a study by the Society of Human Resource Management, the average cost per hire from a job website ($377) was significantly lower than the cost per hire from a major metro newspaper ($3,295) (Schweyer, 2004). Despite the importance of applicant attraction and the prevalent use of recruitment websites, little is known about the impacts websites have on job seekers’ attractiveness to a firm.
Method

Data Collection

We recruited participants from undergraduate students enrolled in hospitality courses at two universities in the Midwest and the Southwest. A total of 249 students were asked to visit a website containing the survey instrument and complete the online survey. Of the 249 participants, 201 completed the survey, resulting in a response rate of 81%. When participants logged on to the survey site, they were instructed to navigate to one of four hotel’s recruitment websites. The survey site was designed to assign one of the four hotel websites to participants randomly. The four hotels included are Starwood, IHG, Hyatt, and Hilton. Table 1 shows the URL used for the hotel websites.

Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hotel</th>
<th>URL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hyatt</td>
<td><a href="http://www.explorehyatt.jobs/index_flash.php">http://www.explorehyatt.jobs/index_flash.php</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Measurement

Aesthetics. Aesthetics was measured using seven items adopted from Sutcliffe’s (2002) study. Participants were asked to rate the website (1 = very poor, 5 = excellent) according to seven items: use of color, symmetry/aesthetic design, structured layout, pleasant design, choice of media, creative design, and use of special design.
**Website design characteristics.** Website design characteristics were measured using 16 items adopted from Chen and Wells’ (1999) study. Participants were asked to rate the website (*1 = very poor, 5 = very good*) based on these 16 items.

**Attitude toward websites.** Attitude toward websites was measured (*1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree*) using 8 items adapted from Compeau, Higgins, and Huff (1999) and Hsu and Chiu (2004). A sample item is “I like working on this website.”

**Applicant attraction.** Job applicants’ attraction to a company was measured (*1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree*) using three items adapted from Nguyen and Leblanc (2001). A sample item is “I would encourage friends and relatives to apply to this company.”

**Data Analysis**

We employed exploratory factor analyses (EFA) with a Varimax rotation for website design characteristics, aesthetics, attitude toward websites, and applicant attraction. Although all of these variables demonstrated a good level of reliability in previous studies, we conducted EFA instead confirmatory factor analysis because we modified questions for hotel recruitment websites and administered the questions with undergraduate students enrolled in hospitality courses. The averaged scores for each factor were used to examine group differences among the four hotels. Cronbach’s alpha was calculated to determine the reliability level of each factor. A general linear model analysis was employed to test the group differences in website characteristics, aesthetics, attitude toward websites, and applicant attraction.

**Results**

**Demographic Profiles**

Table 2 summarizes the average ages, average number of years of owning a personal computer, average hours of surfing on the Internet per day, gender, work experience, experience...
in online job searches, and current job search. Participants’ average age was 22.79 years. The participants had owned a personal computer for about five years on average and spent about five hours surfing the Internet daily, including for school work. The majority of the participants were female (63%) and did not have previous work experience at hotels (71%). However, approximately 70% had searched for hotel job information online and 51% of them were actively searching for a job at the time of the survey.

Table 2.

Demographic Profiles for Participants in Each Hotel Website

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hotel</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>YR of Owning Computer</th>
<th>HR of Surfing</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Work Experience</th>
<th>Job Search Experience</th>
<th>Actively Job Search</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hilton</td>
<td>22.71</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>4.69</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyatt</td>
<td>22.97</td>
<td>5.28</td>
<td>5.66</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IHG</td>
<td>22.41</td>
<td>4.92</td>
<td>4.26</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Starwood</td>
<td>23.16</td>
<td>5.26</td>
<td>5.75</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand</td>
<td>22.79</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>5.01</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Exploratory Factor Analysis for Study Variables

An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with a Varimax rotation of 16 questions related to website design characteristics revealed a three-factor solution, which was consistent with Chen and Wells’ (1999) findings. An examination of the Kaiser-Meyer Olkin measure of sampling adequacy suggested that the sample was factorable (KMO = .90). The three-factor solution (factor loadings > .72) explained 73% of the total variances. The three factors were defined as entertainment, informativeness, and disorganization. The reliability test showed that all three factors had a good level of Cronbach’s alpha. To examine differences among the four hotels in
terms of website design characteristics, we averaged individual items for each factor and used the average score for further analysis.

Another EFA with a Varimax rotation of seven questions of aesthetics revealed a one-factor solution. An examination of the Kaiser-Meyer Olkin measure of sampling adequacy suggested that the sample was factorable (KMO = .91). The one-factor solution (factor loadings > .80) explained 70% of the total variances. This factor was defined as aesthetics, and an average score was used for further analysis. The Cronbach’s alpha for aesthetics was .92.

The EFA of eight questions of attitude toward websites revealed a two-factor solution (KMO = .85). The two factors explained 77% of total variances (factor loading >.80). We named the two factors positive attitude (6 items, $\alpha = .93$) and negative attitude (2 items, $\alpha = .73$).

The EFA of three questions of applicant attraction yielded a one-factor solution (KMO = .70). The one factor explained 83% of total variances (factor loading >.85). We called this factor applicant attraction ($\alpha = .90$).

Table 3 presents means, standard deviations, correlation coefficients, and reliability figures for the variables, which were used to examine the hotels’ differences. Website design characteristics and aesthetics were significantly correlated with job seekers’ attitude toward the website. All six variables—namely, entertainment, informativeness, disorganization, aesthetics, positive attitude, and negative attitude—were significantly correlated with applicant attraction.
Table 3. Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations, and Reliability for Study Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>α</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Entertainment</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Informativeness</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Disorganization</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>-.29</td>
<td>-.53</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Aesthetics</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>-.72</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>-.47</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Positive Attitude</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>-.80</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>-.31</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Negative Attitude</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>-.33</td>
<td>-.48</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>-.35</td>
<td>-.37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Attraction</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>-.43</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>-.23</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>-.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: All correlation coefficients were significant at the .001 level.

General Linear Model Analysis for Group Difference

Table 4 provides the results of the general linear model analysis, highlighting the differences of the seven variables among the four hotels. The participants indicated that Starwood’s recruitment website was the most entertaining (M = 3.58), followed by IHG (M = 3.37), Hyatt (M = 3.30), and Hilton (M = 2.98). Hilton’s website was significantly less entertaining than that of IHG or Starwood. Hyatt’s recruitment website was the most informative (M = 4.17), followed by Starwood (M = 4.15), IHG (M = 4.02), and Hilton (M = 3.84). Hilton’s website was significantly less informative than that of Hyatt or Starwood. Starwood’s (M = 4.05) and Hyatt’s (M = 4.04) websites were considered more aesthetic than Hilton’s website (M = 3.58). The participants had the most positive attitude toward Starwood’s (M = 3.53) website and the least positive attitude to Hilton’s website (M = 2.99). The participants had a significantly stronger negative attitude toward Hilton’s website (M = 3.12) than those of Starwood (M = 2.65), IHG (M = 2.59), or Hyatt (M = 2.55). The respondents considered Starwood to be the most
attractive employer ($M = 3.83$), followed by Hyatt ($M = 3.67$), IHG ($M = 3.60$), and Hilton ($M = 3.29$).

Table 4.

General Linear Model Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Hilton</th>
<th>Hyatt</th>
<th>IHG</th>
<th>Starwood</th>
<th>F-value</th>
<th>$p$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>2.98$^{a,b}$</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>3.37$^a$</td>
<td>3.58$^b$</td>
<td>5.44</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informativeness</td>
<td>3.84$^{a,b}$</td>
<td>4.17$^a$</td>
<td>4.02</td>
<td>4.15$^b$</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>.043</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disorganization</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>.109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetics</td>
<td>3.58$^{a,b}$</td>
<td>4.04$^a$</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>4.05$^b$</td>
<td>5.20</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Attitude</td>
<td>2.99$^a$</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>3.53$^a$</td>
<td>4.59</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Attitude</td>
<td>3.12$^{a,b,c}$</td>
<td>2.55$^a$</td>
<td>2.59$^b$</td>
<td>2.65$^c$</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attraction</td>
<td>3.29$^a$</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>3.83$^a$</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>.011</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Means with same letters were significant at the 0.05 level.

Conclusion

This study was the first to explore job seekers’ evaluation of website design characteristics and aesthetics as well as examine differences of the website design characteristics, aesthetics, attitude toward websites, and applicant attraction among four large hotels’ recruitment websites. Respondents of this study indicated that Hilton’s recruitment website was the least entertaining and informative as well as the most unorganized. In addition, Hilton’s recruitment website was considered to be the least aesthetic. Therefore, Hilton’s recruitment website received the least positive and the most negative attitude from participants. As a result, participants were the least interested in applying for a job at Hilton. On the other hand, Starwood’s recruitment website received the highest evaluation for entertainment, informativeness, and aesthetics, which led to the strongest positive attitude and the weakest negative attitude toward Starwood’s
recruitment website. Ultimately, the participants indicated that they were the most interested in applying for a job at Starwood.

This study’s findings imply that design characteristics and aesthetics of a recruitment website influence online job seekers’ perceived attitude toward the website and further affect the job applicants’ attraction. Hotels should consider their recruitment websites as not only sharing job opportunities and information, but also providing a fun and interesting experience. Hotels should remember that their recruitment website could attract more job seekers and ultimately motivate them to apply for a job.

References


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