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Explorative Study on Recruitment Techniques within Small and Medium Enterprises: Evidence from Pakistani Tourism Industry

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Abstract

Small and medium size hotels/businesses are the backbones of tourism and hospitality industry throughout the world. In developed and developing economies, it plays a significant role in job creation and economic development, thus a vital to improve the economic performance. However, in Pakistan the importance of SME hotels and the role that these hotels play is always being ignored. The main reason is that SMEs hotels recruitment practices are not systematic and lack consistency as these are based on the understanding of owners-managers who have little or no expertise in the subject. Keeping this gap in mind the researcher therefore tried to explore SME hotels recruitment techniques. Therefore, the study investigates the nature of recruitment practices adopt by SMEs hotels in Pakistan. For research methodology, qualitative research approach was used based on the constructivits's philosophy. The primary data was collected through nine (09) semi-structured interviews involving General, Human Resource and Departmental managers in three (3) medium hotels in Islamabad. The interview results specified that SME hotels in Pakistan used mostly informal recruitment practices, and sometimes also used formal recruitment practices when the need highly skilled workforce.

Key words: Recruitment Techniques; Pakistani SMEs; Hotel industry

Introduction

In the past few years, tourism and hospitality industry are growing enormously which results to improves the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of a country and generate more employment than any other industry. According to Khan and Khan (2012), activities related to travel and tourism counted itself over 230 million jobs globally. Parveen (2008) specifies that for many under-developed countries tourism and

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hospitality industry is considered as a revenue generated industry. Similarly, in Pakistan, as specified in World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC, 2017) the contribution of travel and tourism towards the GDP in Pakistan in 2016 was 2.7%, whereas contribution towards job was 2.3%. Additionally, it has been predicted that travel and tourism industry in Pakistan has the potential to increase its GDP figure from 2.7% to 5.1% and employment generation from 2.3% to 2.5% by the end of 2017 if properly managed. Considering this importance, the industry has attracted the attention of academics, business tycoons and economic analysts (Huda et al., 2012). SME hotels in Pakistan have the potential to contribute and help to change the economic fate of its country within a very limited span of time, however, it is important to emphasise on its development. Though, as mentioned above in Pakistan Small and Medium Enterprise (SMEs) hotels are overlooked and all preference has been given to large hotels (Khan & Khan, 2012). Vencatachellum and Mathuvirin (2010) argue that effective Human Resource Management (HRM) practices have become crucial to the success of the SMEs and their larger counterparts in hotel industry. Therefore, study investigates overwhelming feature in SME hotels in Pakistan. The main objective of research is to explore the current recruitment practices adopted by SME hotels in Pakistan.

Recruitment Practices within Small and Medium Enterprises

Recruitment practices within SMEs and their larger counterparts are the key approaches to obtain appropriate qualified workforce (Chan & Kuok, 2006). Zheng (2009) argues that the recruitment process provides the skilled workforce to fulfil the vacant posts to run the organizational business

According to Jassel (2012) recruitment is the process that any organization carried out with the purpose of attracting and identifying potentials applicants for the vacant position. This view is confirmed by Appiah et al. (2013) who state that the process of recruitment and selection encompasses picking the right candidate from the pool of applicants who can successfully perform their job. Bohlander and Snell (2010) also support this view by stating that the main purpose of recruitment process is to generate a group of skilled individuals that can apply for the vacant job.

However, AL-Balushi, (2008) illustrates that the hotel industry not only in UK but throughout the world appears to have a recruitment problem associated with a

poor image as an employer. Similarly, Cullen and Farrelly (2005) argue that attracting and recruiting the best employees is critical to success in all sectors and to all types of organisations, regardless of size. Appiah et al. (2013) state that recruitment is crucial for the existence of the SME firms, because a viable recruitment practices attract good applicants to the firm. Moreover, the reputable systems within a SME firms will also give a sense of security to the employees.

On the other hand, Hornsby and Kuratko (2003) conclude that ineffective recruitment of personnel and inappropriate selection can negatively affect the performance of SMEs. Thus, the management of human resources is assuming to play a vital role for the economic performance of these enterprises. In developed and developing economies, SME hotels have big potential for growth in the tourism and hospitality industry. However, they must recruit and select qualified people on the right positions to deliver good services to the customers, which as a result attain organizational objectives.

Gold (2007) concludes that the use of suitable recruitment methods considerably affects the performance of employees and organizations. The approach to recruitment of employees in SME hotels may be formal, informal or both (Cetinel et al., 2009). For example, a formal or organised recruitment process according to Cetinel et al. (2009) comprises of ascertaining the job position, developing a job description, conducting a job analysis, developing a person specification for the job, advertisement, advertising the vacant job internally and/or externally. The literature asserts that most SME hotels adopt an informal methods or processes (Huda et al., 2014). For example, the findings of Lajara and Garcia (2013) illustrate that in the hotel industry the use of formal approaches are limited because the hotel HR managers mostly prefer informal methods when recruiting their employees. Yang and Fu (2009) also found in their research that when the management of the hotel industry recruiting and selecting their employees so they overreliance on informal staffing approaches. Informal recruitment methods in SME hotels include word-of-mouth from family/friends and politicians, employee referral, walk-in recruitment and internal employee recruitment (Thelin & Boluk, 2012). In contrast, Nivethitha et al. (2014) identify newspaper advertisement, consultants, internet recruitment and recruitment agencies as formal recruitment methods.

The informal methods include unplanned one-to-one selection interview and contact-based selection, and the formal methods include panel interview, application form, reference check, psychometric test, communication test (Bliss, 2007). Previous studies such as Jassel (2012) and Connolly and McGing (2007) specify as well that the most preferred methods are based on informal approaches. However, Bliss (2007) argues that due to the HRM challenges that many organizations face, the management of many organizations have decided to adopt their own recruitment strategies which suits their organizational circumstances.

Research Methodology

Since this is the first explorative study on recruitment practices on SME hotels in Pakistan the researcher believes that in-depth semi-structured interviews are appropriate. The main reasons for using the semi-structured interview approach, include, the fact that, most questions in semi-structured interviews can remain open to a certain degree to allow the respondents to answer more in their own terms and provide information as they wish. Also, it would give the researcher a certain degree of flexibility to include supplementary questions during the interviews when issues worth exploring arise or for the purpose of gaining a deeper insight into the content and meaning of the managers' answers related to the research questions.

The Semi-structured interview plan – key themes and examples of specific questions

After identifying the potential participants for the interviews, the semi-structured interview schedule in Table 1.1, below was prepared, comprising of a list of key research themes and examples of specific interview questions. For example, under the key research theme 'recruitment practices' the sub-theme is 'formal and informal methods; and key factors' influencing the decision to choose a particular recruitment method'.

Table 1.1: Semi-structured Interview Plan - key themes and examples of specific questions

Main Themes	Sub-themes	Example of Specific Interview Questions
Recruitment	Formal	*What kinds of formal methods do you use for*

| practices: methods and key factors influencing decisions on which methods to use | methods and key factors | _recruitment?_ _What are the problems and benefits of using such methods?_ _What challenges do you think your hotel is facing while recruiting employees?_ |
| | Informal methods | _What kinds of informal methods do you use when recruiting employees?_ _What are the problems and benefits of using such methods?_ _What challenges do you think your hotel is facing while recruiting employees?_ |

Source: Researcher

Procedure for Qualitative Data Analysis – manual and NVivo content analysis

There are many types of qualitative data analysis procedures, such as content analysis, domain analysis and thematic analysis, which can be carried out by using either computer software (e.g. ATLAS.ti, QSR NVivo) or by using a manual approach (Gray 2009; Jennings 2010). Clark and Braun (2013) defines content or thematic analysis as a qualitative analytical methodology that identifies, analyse, reports and present themes within data, it helps to organise and describe data in detail and interpret various segments of the research area.

Table 1.2 the Pre-Coding System for analysing the Interview Transcripts – based on the hierarchical relationship between the research themes

Level 1 themes/Codes – Single Code	Level 2 themes/Codes – key research / objectives (two codes combined)	Level 3 themes/Codes – key research / objectives (three codes combined)
Theme 1 (RP) Recruitment practices	Different types of recruitment (RP-type; RP-formal; RP-informal)	Specific examples of recruitment practices (RP-type-formal/newspaper; RP-type-informal/word-of-mouth; RP-type-formal/open). **Note:** Formal recruitment/open search (1) Newspaper

| | | advertisement; (2) Consultants; (3) Internet recruitment; (4) Recruitment agencies; Ascertaining the job position; Developing a Job description; Conducting Job analysis; Developing a person specification; Advertising the job internally and/or externally. Informal recruitment/close search (1)Word-of-mouth from family/friends and politicians; (2) Employee referral; (3) Internal employee recruitment; (4) Promotion from within; (5) Employee transfer and job rotation; (6) Walk-in recruitment. |
| | Different factors influencing the choice of recruitment practices (RP-factors) | Different factors influencing the choice of recruitment practices (RP-types-factors; RP-formal-factors; RP-informal-factors) Note: Recruitment factors /Factors impacting on recruitment (1) Image and culture; (2) location; (3) finance; (4) size; (5) skill shortage (6) political and (7) social. |

Source: Researcher

Findings and Discussion

A study by Thelin and Boluk (2012) on SME hotels claims that small hotels do not have a formal policies and practices. As a result, SME hotels with running HR department were included in this study, to identify whether they used the formal or informal practices. Despite of the functioning HR department in the hotels, managers the absence of effective practices. The selected hotels with limited financial and skilled resources and cultural impact, claimed to be restricted in developing and implementing effective practices. Although hotel managers show willingness for the need of effective practices. However, lack of professional HR skills does not allow SME hotels in Pakistan to implement systematic recruitment processes and practices. Based on the findings of the explorative in-depth interviews a range of RST methods were identified and discuss below:

Theme# - Recruitment practices (RP), *methods and resources used by SME Hotels in*
Pakistan

In every organization, managers do their level best during the recruitment process to use several approaches at their disposal to attract and retain competent individuals with skills that give the organisation a competitive advantage. However, recruitment methods vary according to the industry, organisation or the type of position that needs to be filled. In terms of recruitment, practices of SME hotels, the literature suggested that SME hotels used more informal methods because this method is having some advantages to SMEs such as reduced the cost of recruitment and turnover (Mohammad, 2015). This happens because the hotel industry in Pakistan lacks enough hospitality specialists and lack of skilled employees. In this context, Khan and Khan (2012) also concluded that tourism and hospitality industry of Pakistan facing the challenges of skilled management and employees. As one participant states:

> *"A black spot in our RS process is the involvement of external people (family/friends, politicians) due to which it's very hard for the management to recruit and select effective applicants" (GMHa).*

The results of the semi-structured interviews indicated that owner and management of the hotel are bound to recruit friends, relatives and other people such as appointee of politicians. These people pressurise hotel management to recruit their appointee. Therefore, when the pressure arrives from either family/friends or Politian's, the management cannot refuse them due to cultural and political reasons. As the HR manager concluded that:

> *"I have received a recommendation for one employee, of the GM older brother for a supervisory position in the front office. The recommended person was not applicable for that position because he doesn't have any experience in the field nor he has any hotel related qualification but as he was recommended by the boss brother, so I don't have any option" (HRMHc).*

One other hotel manager concluded:

> "Some employees hired by our hotel is not even been through the interview, last month the higher management hired one employee and

send it to me with the message that provide him training about the front office desk. I mean nobody asked me that we are hiring someone who will be a member of your team" (DMHa).

In this context one of the managers concluded.

> *"Some time when employee is selected, he is not even go through the recruitment and selection process which is not fair, but we cannot do anything in this regard" (DMHb).*

The literature also suggested that in SME hotels the recruitment practices are created through informal procedure where the influence of friends/family or any other contacts are given more preferences (Thelin & Boluk, 2012). Similarly, Zinyemba (2014) state that nepotism and favouritism mean unfairly giving the best jobs to members of the family and friends when the person is in a position of power. Mangi et al. (2012) stated that in Pakistan, nepotism and favouritism happens when the people in higher management positions influence the recruitment process. The highest management takes the benefit of their positions in order to favour friends and relatives. Hence, in such situation the organization advertise a vacant post just to fulfil the procedure and requirement however; the applicant is already selected in advance. Such situations make recruitment process in SMEs in Pakistan as an unstructured and unnecessary process.

Word-of-mouth recruitment as an informal recruitment method

The findings of the semi-structured interview specify that SME hotels used both formal and informal methods of recruitment, however the most preferred method is informal word-of-mouth either through family/friends, existing employees or through political influence. These findings are consistent with the findings of Appiah et al. (2013) and Cassel et al. (2002) who states that in SMEs the most suitable method of recruitment is word-of-mouth of recruiting employees for different positions. Carroll et al. (1999) also expressed the same views that in most SME hotels and catering sectors employing friends/family are very common recruiting practices. However, Carroll et al. (1999) further argue that word-of-mouth recruitment is some time in the benefit of employers because they view word-of-mouth to reduce employee turnover. Chen et al. (2005) provide the reason(s) of using word-of-mouth recruitment. For

example, the manager believes that it saves time and money and managers trust the person who referred the candidate. As one of the managers specified that:

> *"I used word-of-mouth as a recruitment method to select employees because it's cheap and time saving" (HRMHb).*

Opatha (2010) also concluded that using word-of-mouth recruitment is free of cost, which helps SMEs. Similarly, Gamage (2014) found that in 171 SMEs in America their most relied method of recruitment is word-of-mouth. One of the interviewed participant replies:

> *"I have recruited about six employees in the past nine months; out of those nine, two were someone who was recommended by a friend used to work with me in my previous job. The other three was selected through political influence who has been recommended by one of the MPA (member of provincial assembly) and the last one is through my cousin recommendation" (HRMHa).*

These findings are consistent with the literature where Zinyemba (2014) specify, SMEs normally follow an informal method of recruitment in the shape of word-of-mouth where they give unnecessary favours to their relatives or friends.

Employee referral recruitment as an informal recruitment method

The other recruitment method, which has revealed from the interview, was employee referral recruitment as a source of recruitment in the medium-sized hotels. As one-manager states:

> *"If the existing employees recommend any person for job, we recruit that person because existing employee's recommendation make things much easier. As the existing employee's give a lot of information to the new candidate about the job which they will perform in future… employees knew that if they recommend any unfit person, that will impact on their reputation in the organization as well" (GMHc).*

The literature states that the organisations considered their current employees very useful source of recruitment because it is cost effective (Mani, 2012). Furthermore, the applicant referred by the existing employees are most probably be a good match for the vacant position and cost nothing for the organisation. In addition, the current employees provide the new candidates a more detailed, correct

information about the working conditions and the requirements of the job. Thus, Nivethitha et al. (2014) illustrate that those applicants who are interested and feel that they are fit for the position are more likely to proceed for the selection. On the contrary, if the candidates fell that they are not fit for the vacant post, so they never join the organization, as there is an involvement of third person in between the candidate and the organization, the manager specified:

> *"I believe that employee recommendation is very beneficial in certain positions because the existing employee provide plenty information about the position which aware the new applicant about the pros and cons of the job" (HRMHb)*

Similarly, Breaugh (2008) conclude that employees recruited through existing employee perform better, impact on reducing employee turnover and get more management appraisal contrary to those employees who recruited through formal recruitment.

Internal employee's recruitment as an informal recruitment method

The findings of the interviews also reveal that internal recruitment is also given preference while recruiting the candidates for the vacant position. This is the case when the hotel decided to recruit candidates for the vacant post and therefore, the first consideration is given to the existing employees. Internal recruitment provides opportunities for better development and utilization of existing human resources in the organization. In this context, Armstrong (2000a) mentioned that when the post arises in organisation, so the priority should be given to the existing employees which may results into high employee motivation, similarly, one interviewed manager stated:

> *"When the post arises in the hotel, the management start looking internally first to promote the existing employees…. because we know the capability and the skills of our internal employees. So, it is better to recruit from internal sources rather than looking outside in the market." (GMHc).*

One other manager concluded:

> *"Our internal recruitment is taking place mostly by either advertising on the notice board or word-of-mouth spreading through departmental managers" (HRMHa).*

In a similar vein, another hotel manager replies:

> *"When the employees recruited internally so there is not much headache to find out about their performance, behaviour and their plus and minus points…. we understand what type of training individual employee needs to perform better" (DMHa).*

These findings are in line with Darkoh (2014) who stated that when the organisation chose internal recruitment method, the management announce the job inside and place it in the notice board to informed employees about the vacancy. He further explains that Job posting is an open announcement for all the existing employees in order to inform the employees about the vacancy, therefore, if anyone is interested, they can apply for the vacant position.

Walk-in recruitment method as an informal recruitment method

During the interview, it was also revealing that walk-in recruitment is also preferred as a source of recruitment method in the medium-sized hotels. As the general manager of one of the hotels mentioned:

> *"Generally, when we recruit the applicants, those are considered the best people for us who contact directly either through telephone or walk-in to the hotel…. As it is hard to recruit hospitality related individuals in Pakistan therefore, we used those recruitment practices now and again which are more convenient and inexpensive as end of the day we have to train them regarding the work which the employees will perform in the hotel anyway" (GMHb).*

One other manager in this regard stated:

> *"Our front-line manager was recruited through walk-in, recruitment method and we pleased that he contacted us straight away because he deserved the post as he got hotel qualifications and practical experience from the UK. We need individuals like him who got hotel qualification and at the same time experience working in the hotel….*

> *it's very hard in Pakistan for hotel managers to find people with the correct qualification and experience" (HRMHc).*

Similarly, one hotel manager states that:

> *"I personally believe that it is very important and also in the favour of our hotel that the management shouldn't rely solely on internal or contact-based recruitment, the management should emphasis to external recruitment as well because we never know that we might get very talented candidate which we not find internally. Moreover, I think that formal recruitment is also very important because this type of recruitment is open for everybody. I understand that due to the lack of resources we are not able to adopt formal recruitment all the time, but I think the higher management should allocate some fund for formal recruitment because this open the door for more qualified qualified applicants" (DMHc).*

These findings are consistent with the literature where Zinyemba (2014) concluded that SMEs mainly recruit employees by promotion within, walk-ins, word of mouth, relatives and friends, newspapers, employee's reference, temporary recruitment, employment agencies, transfers, advertising and previous applicant. As the literature reveals internal recruitment boosts the employees' morale, promotes loyalty and enhances employee relations in organisation (Moriones & Angel, 2006).

Conclusion Implication

As discussed above the key aim of the study is to explore the recruitment practices in SME hotels in Pakistan. As such, we found the evidence from the results that although SME hotels operators in Pakistan considered HR practices to be important however, due to their internal organisational problems little value is given to develop formal HR practices as such they are often neglected. Additionally, this study explains that the sectors are different in terms of their HR practices and methods, and that the current methods need to be challenged as to their value and appropriateness in different hospitality contexts. As such the researchers hopes that this study will contribute to the recruitment debate, helping to refine and improve the types of recruitment practices and methods employed across the different sectors of the hospitality industry in Pakistan. Precisely, it was clear from the results that formal

recruitment practices are not given due attention, as in that case more financial resources would be used. Therefore, alternatively informal recruitment practices are used based on the argument that informal practices do not require any financial resources. The results of this study offer several key implications for SME hotels owners/managers in order to improve their business performance. As the literature suggests that effective recruitment practices lead to positive outcomes (Thelin & Bolul, 2012). Thus, formal recruitment practices in SME hotels would improve employee knowledge, motivation and finally help in their work performance. Moreover, effective RST practices also impact on improving financial performance. This specify that whether large or SMEs employees are the main resources of organisational productivity. Thus, as mentioned above for the development of SME hotels valuable employee are very necessary therefore, the owners/managers shouldn't underestimate the importance of human resources.

Moreover, there are certain other implications for owners/managers of SME hotels in the implementation of proper recruitment practices and methods and how these methods affect hotel and employee performance. For instance, the current study gives useful insights for owner/managers of SME hotels about the existing practices and methods of recruitment in Pakistan. The findings of the study provide a comprehensive list of different practices and methods of HR which are required to achieve the anticipated level of recruitment practices and methods. SMEs' owner/managers can use these RST practices and methods to examine currently employed recruitment methods, identify problematic areas in HR practices, to properly implement these practices, and can take measures to correct these practices for achieving high levels of both employee and hotel performance.

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