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TAJ GROUP OF HOTELS AS BRAND EMPLOYER: A SELECTIVE STUDY OF STUDENTS AS JOB ASPIRANTS AT ALIGARH, INDIA

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Abstract *In an economically unstable and volatile, national and international scenario, organisations need every weapon in their arsenal to attract and retain their most valuable asset i.e. human resource. That weapon is undisputedly brand building. Employer brand has emerged as a tool that retains human resource and helps in moving ahead without any hurdle and hiccups. Taj Hotels is one of the biggest business houses in India which provides food to thousands of people not only within the country but outside India as well. This paper tries to give an idea about Taj Hotels' brand image as to why people aspire to work with this group, particularly freshers. The results indicate some preference to financial benefits by Post-graduate diploma students and preference to non-financial benefits by post-graduate degree students at the entry level positions.*

Keywords: *Brand, Employer, Job Aspirants, Taj Hotels*

1. INTRODUCTION

In search of a great place to work, job aspirants and employees are regularly looking beyond salary and perks to other factors that includes career prospects, what the organization stands for and how the organization serves its customers and the society. Therefore every organisation needs to look at those things that attract and retain employees to work for their organisation .The workforce today is changing significantly. Mobility of highly skilled international workforce is on the rise and younger generation is now also an important part of an organisation .In addition to this, there is an increased emphasis on knowledge workers. With these things in mind, every organisation is looking for efficient employees. Policy makers should try to make innovative strategies to attract and retain branding for the best and the brightest talent. On the other hand talents; that most organisations are seeking to attract, engage and retain are not looking for stimulating career anymore; they are looking to boost their personal brands. (Employer branding-building your competitive advantage, 2011)

In today's global scenario, when there are euro and rupee crises, only those organisations are going to survive that recruit and retain most knowledgeable workers. With today's volatile economic conditions, no organization can afford to overlook the value of top rated employees. Employer branding management has become a board level concern and a key component of the goodwill of any organisation. Brand image serves to identify and distinguish an employer from its competitors. The challenge today is to create a strong and distinctive image (Kohli and Thakor, 1997).Successful brand building strategies create a distinctive market position for a company. The very nature of hotel/tourism industry and the business calls for highly engaged employees. While various hotel chains offer high quality products, the success of the chain is determined by service excellence, warmth and the art of hospitality that is extended to a guest. Therefore consistent delivery of service depends on highly talented employees who need to be continuously engaged and energized. (8th Corporate Sustainability Report, 2010 - 2011)

Taj Hotels, Resorts and Palaces comprising the Indian Hotels Company Limited (IHCL) and its subsidiaries is recognized as one of world's largest and finest hospitality companies. IHCL is one of twenty-five organizations in the world to win the Gallup Great Workplace Award in 2009-10 as well as in 2010-11 which recognizes organizations that best engage their employees. Incidentally, IHCL is one of the only two Indian companies to win the award twice. Eminent management institutes like Harvard and Cornell (the world's premier hotel management institute) have used IHCL as a case study, showcasing its brand architecture. Credit Suisse Research Institute has also recognized IHCL as the only hospitality brand in its global study "Great Brands of Tomorrow" based on the successful emergence

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of three new brands which help to provide scalability and market leadership. (8th Corporate Sustainability Report, 2010 - 2011).

2. OBJECTIVES

High levels of labor turnover in hotel industry provides a constant challenge for employers , limits their ability to maintain a skilled workforce and results in enhanced costs. Research has demonstrated that effective employee engagement increases levels of trust and reduces turnover .The hotel business is a labor-intensive and quality-driven service industry. The competitiveness and productivity of the industry depends primarily on the skill levels and professionalism of its employees. According the TT Competitive report (as cited in Jacqui, B. & Candida, B. 2008), good management of human resources is one of the key drivers for competitiveness across the industry as brand employer.

Therefore the study was conducted with the following objectives in mind:

1. To bring to light the significance of employer branding in present era**.**
2. To study the perception of Post-Graduate degree students of Master of Tourism (M.T.A), Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh towards Taj group of hotels as brand employer.
2. To study the perception of Post-Graduate diploma students of Foodcraft Institute (FCI), Aligarh towards Taj group of hotels as brand employer.
3. To compare the perception of both respondents' regarding brand employer and draw inferences regarding the possible factors that affect their perception.
4. To offer valuable suggestions to the managers in hotel industry so that they are able to carve out more effective strategies in order to employ, retain and attract well-equipped human resource.

3. METHODOLOGY

The paper is based on primary and secondary data both. Secondary data was gathered from various sources like websites, reports and national dailies. Primary data was collected through focussed survey conducted on hundred students of Master of Tourism Administration (MTA), Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh and PGDAOM, PGDTTM (Foodcraft Institute, Aligarh). An opinion survey of eight statements was administered to the sample by the researchers to gauge the overall perception of job aspirants towards Taj group of hotels as a brand employer. Response to each statement was evaluated on three point scale of agree, disagree or cannot say. Opinions have been assessed through statistics using frequency and percentage of respondents on each statement. Independent T-test has been used to compare the two means of the aforesaid sample groups. Job aspirants were divided into two categories and their responses were compared to understand the differences in their perception of a brand employer in tourism industry. Using random sampling, 30 students from MTA (previous and final year), A.M.U and 42 students from PGDAOM, PGDTTM, F.C.I (Aligarh) were selected for the study.

4. HYPOTHESES

1. Ho There is no significant variation among the responses of MTA and PGDAOM, PGDTTM students at Aligarh on the basis of non-financial factors affecting brand image of Taj Hotels.

H1 There is significant variation among the responses of MTA and PGDAOM, PGDTTM students at Aligarh on the basis of non-financial factors affecting brand image of Taj Hotels.

1. Ho There is no significant variation among the responses of MTA and PGDAOM, PGDTTM students at Aligarh on the basis of financial factors affecting brand image of Taj Hotels.

H2 There is significant variation among the responses of MTA and PGDAOM, PGDTTM students at Aligarh on the basis of financial factors affecting brand image of Taj Hotels.

5. DESCRIPTION OF RESPONDENTS

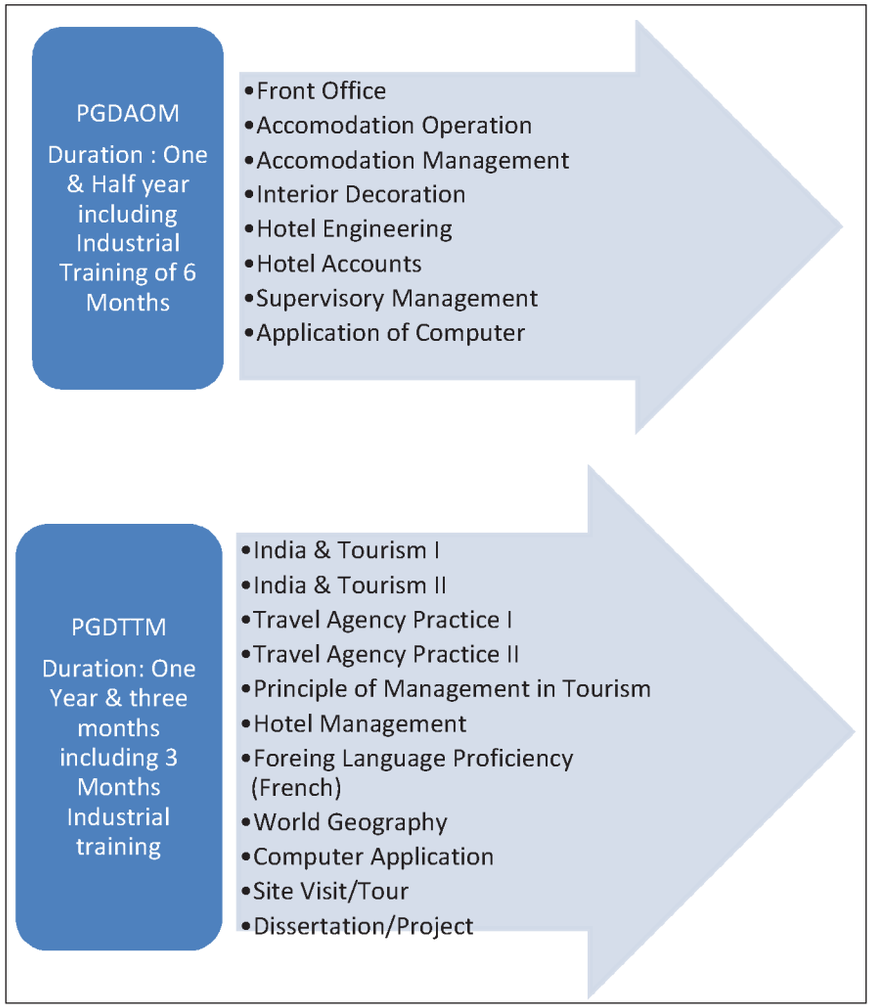
The first category of respondents that have been chosen as sample for the study are thirty students of Master of Tourism Administration (M.T.A), Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh India. M.T.A is a two year, regular, professional master degree course in tourism management. The program overview is:

Source: Training and Placement Brochure,2012-13, MTA, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh.

Course Structure (MTA)

Source: Training and Placement Brochure, 2012-13, MTA, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh.

The second category of respondents that have been chosen are twenty students of Post-Graduate Diploma In Accommodation Operation and Management (PGDAOM) and seventeen students of Post Graduate Diploma In Travel And Tourism Management (PGDTTM) at Foodcraft Institute Aligarh, an autonomous institute under the aegis of Ministry of Tourism, Government of India . It is located in the campus of the renowned central university of India, Aligarh Muslim University. The details of these two courses are as under:



Source: Prospectus, Foodcraft Institute, University Polytechnic Campus, Aligarh.

Students of aforesaid courses have been chosen as sample for the study because having studied various aspects of hotel and tourism industry, these students have an insight into implications of being a hotel/tourism employee and they are strong potential future employees of this industry. The choice of sample group is also based on the fact that the students of these courses undergo industrial training as a necessary and assessed component of the course which gives them general awareness of the situation of a hotel/tourism employee. Aligarh is famous as Muslim University is located here. Employers in Delhi view Aligarh as a potential talent market as this university is among the top ten institutions of India (Times Higher Education (THE) Magazine, U.K. n.d.) and also because of its proximity to the capital city.

6. DISCUSSION

Response of MTA (AMU) & PGDAOM, PGDTTM (FCI) Students

6.1 Perception of MTA students:

Responses on whether Taj group of hotels is employee-friendly or not, MTA students, as shown in Table 1, agree to the statement more than disagree. Out of 30 MTA student respondents on this statement, 63% agree that Taj group of hotels is an employee-friendly organisation while only 13% students disagree that Taj group of hotels is an employee-friendly organisation. 24% are not sure about whether Taj group of hotels is employee- friendly or not.

While 90% MTA students strongly agree with the statement that getting a job in Taj group of hotels is a passport to success in their future, merely 3% feel that doing a job there is not going to be good for them in future. 7% cannot decide on this statement. 64% MTA students feel that they are attracted towards Taj group of hotels' as an employer because of their impressive pay-scales while 23% students are not attracted towards Taj Hotels as an employer only because of their pay-scales.13% cannot say anything about this statement. On joining Taj group of hotels, 84% MTA students agree that there will be overall competence development in them as a

Table 1

S.No	Statements	Responses from	Respondents		Agree		Disagree		Can't say	
			No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1	You wish to join Taj group of hotels because as an employer, they have a reputation of being employee friendly.	MTA	30	**100**	19	**63**	04	**13**	07	**24**
		FCI	42		20	**48**	00	**00**	22	**52**
2	Being associated with a brand name like Taj group of hotels will be a passport to success in your career progress always.	MTA	30	**100**	27	**90**	01	**03**	02	**07**
		FCI	42		33	**79**	03	**07**	06	**14**
3	You are sure that Taj group of hotels aim at overall competence development of an employee through various and regular training programs etc.	MTA	30	**100**	25	**84**	01	**03**	04	**13**
		FCI	42		29	**69**	01	**02**	12	**29**
4	You feel you will get 'job security' by being an employee of Taj group of hotels.	MTA	30	**100**	14	**47**	02	**06**	14	**47**
		FCI	42		20	**48**	05	**12**	17	**40**
5	You feel you will upgrade your market value as an employee by working with Taj group of hotels.	MTA	30	**100**	26	**87**	01	**03**	03	**10**
		FCI	42		30	**71**	02	**05**	10	**24**
6	Taj group of hotels attracts you as an employee because of their impressive pay-scale.	MTA	30	**100**	19	**64**	07	**23**	04	**13**
		FCI	42		33	**79**	03	**07**	06	**14**
7	You will choose Taj group of hotels over an organisation of lesser market significant even if it makes a higher salary offer.	MTA	30	**100**	16	**53**	07	**23**	07	**23**
		FCI	42		00	**00**	39	**93**	03	**07**
8	You aspire to join Taj group of hotels because of their regular and systematic financial policies and procedures regarding increments and other monetary benefits.	MTA	30	**100**	21	**70**	02	**07**	07	**23**
		FCI	42		18	**43**	04	**09**	20	**48**

Source: Compiled and computed from the responses to the questionnaires furnished to MTA and PGDAOM, PGDTTM students for the study at Aligarh.

worker while merely 3% disagree to this. Remaining 13% respondents are not sure about their answer.

Regarding job security in Taj group of hotels, 47% MTA students feel that they will be secured once they are employed at Taj hotels while equal numbers of students are not sure about this statement. Only 6% disagree with the statement that they will get job security as an employee at Taj group of hotels. On being asked whether they will give priority to Taj hotels in comparison to lesser significant organisations' offering higher salary, 53% MTA students agree that they will join Taj while 23% students say they will join the lesser significant organisation on account of a better salary offer. 23% respondents cannot say anything about this statement.

70% MTA students agree with the statement that they are attracted towards Taj group of hotels as an employer because of their sound financial policies while 23% cannot decide whether they will join Taj group of hotels on the basis of their sound financial policies. 7% respondents disagree with the statement. On the statement, whether their market value as an employee will improve after joining Taj hotels, 87% MTA students agree while negligible 3% students disagree with the statement. Remaining 10% respondents cannot say anything.

6.2 Perception of FCI students:

Table 2 shows that 52% FCI students cannot say anything about the statement that Taj hotels has a reputation of being an employee- friendly employer while 48% students agree with the statement that Taj hotels is an employee- friendly employer. On the statement whether being associated with Taj hotels is a passport to success in their career progress, 79% students agree while 14% cannot say anything. 7% students disagree with the statement. On being asked whether impressive pay- scales offered at Taj hotels makes them attractive as an employer, 79% FCI students agree with the statement while 7% disagree with the statement. Remaining 14% students cannot say anything about this statement. 69% FCI students agree with the statement that there will definitely be overall competence development in them if they work for Taj hotels while 29% are not sure about this statement. Only 2% disagree with the statement.

On the statement whether after joining Taj hotels, they will get job security, 48% FCI students agree while 40% cannot say anything remaining 12% students disagree with the statement. On the query, that they will prefer Taj hotels over an organisation of lesser market significance offering higher salary, 93% FCI students strongly agree with it while the remaining 7% cannot say anything. 48% FCI students cannot say anything on the statement that they will join Taj because of its regular and sound financial policies while 43% students agree with the statement. 9% students disagree with the statement.71% FCI students agree with the statement that working at Taj hotels will enhance their market value as an employee while 24% students cannot say anything about this. 5% FCI students disagree that their market value as an employee will improve by working with Taj Hotels.

7. RESULTS (HYPOTHESES TESTING)

Group Statistics: Non financial aspects: Table 2

	group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
totalavg	1	30	2.540000E0	.6195660	.1131168
	2	42	2.309524E0	.7891983	.1217759

Independent T-test compares the two group means. It is useful to know what the mean value are (Students of MTA=2.540, Students of FCI = 2.309)

The significance value of Levene Test is lower here (smaller than 0.05), so equal value not assumed is taken into consideration for both the groups (p =0.032). A significance value of 0.170 (greater than 0.05) indicates that there is no significant difference between the two group means. Furthermore, the confidence interval for the mean difference contains zero within its range. This also indicates that the difference is not significant.

If the significance value is high (typically greater than 0.05) and the confidence interval for the mean difference contains zero, then we cannot conclude that there is a significant difference between the two groups.

Conclusion

Based on the results of independent t-Test (p=0.170>0.05), the null hypotheses cannot be rejected (Ho1). Therefore, conclusion is that there was no significant difference between the selected sample groups of FCI and MTA students on non- financial factors.

Independent T-test compares the two group means. It is useful to know what the mean value are (Students of MTA=2.4222, Students of FCI=2.175).

The significance value of Levene Test is lower here (smaller than 0.05), so equal value not assumed is taken into consideration for both the groups (p =0.008). A significance value of 0.139 (greater than 0.05) indicates that there is no significant between the two group means. Furthermore, the confidence interval for the mean difference contains zero within its range. This also indicates that the difference is not significant.

If the significance value is high (typically greater than 0.05) and the confidence interval for the mean difference contains zero, then we cannot conclude that there is a significant difference between the two groups.

Conclusion

Based on the results of independent t-Test (p=0.139>0.05) the null hypotheses could not be rejected (Ho2). Therefore there was no significant difference between the selected sample groups of FCI and MTA students on financial factors.

8. FINDINGS

The results of the test, although show no significant variation among the responses of the two sample groups but the responses of PGDAOM ,PGDTTM students at FCI, Aligarh as shown in Table 1 clearly shows inclination towards financial benefits as a greater preference over non-financial benefits in choosing an employer. It can be inferred that though there is no significant difference found statistically but the responses in Table 1 show noticeable difference. On

Independent Samples Test: Table 3

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
totalavg	Equal variances assumed	4.815	.032	1.332	70	.187	.2304762	.1730122	-.1145857	.5755381
	Equal variances not assumed			1.387	69.317	.170	.2304762	.1662070	-.1010707	.5620231

Group Statistics: Financial aspects: Table 4

	group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
totalavg	1	30	2.422222E0	.7777230	.1419922
	2	42	2.174603E0	.5371716	.0828874

inclined towards career progression and improved market value as an employee by working with Taj hotels. Though financial factors like impressive pay scales and sound financial policies of Taj group of hotels have an effect on their brand image as an employer on both sample groups, non-financial factors like being employee-friendly, market value upgradation as an employee affect MTA students far more than the FCI students at Aligarh. FCI students give a clear response on the question that they will join any other organisation other than Taj hotels which offers them higher salary whereas majority of MTA students show their choice as Taj Hotels on same question. This is clearly indicative of the fact that strong preference is given to non-financial benefits by MTA students in joining a brand employer like Taj. FCI students response on this question tilts their balance significantly towards preference to financial incentives only unlike MTA students. This may be attributed to the fact that diploma courses focus more on building technical capabilities in select disciplines rather than adoption of a holistic approach towards developing students in sync with the ever changing managerial and leadership scenario worldwide. This is also indicative of the possible link between financial benefits as the major basis of decision of students studying select or technical disciplines in tourism and hospitality institutions in selecting an employer. This also indicates the possible link between holistic benefits as the major basis of decision of students studying managerial courses in selecting an employer.

9. SUGGESTIONS

Reforms that are designed especially for the overall well-being of the workforce at Taj group of hotels can specially emphasise on needs of employees keeping in mind their educational background. Employees who are inclined towards financial benefits should be accordingly provided in order to achieve greater retention. Those who are inclined towards non-financial benefits can be accordingly provided with. The hierarchy of needs of the potential and existing employees of Taj group of hotels have to be ascertained and then incentives have to be provided in accordance with their needs so that attrition level is lowered and employee engagement is enhanced. The managers have to identify the specific needs of different sets of employees and engage them by providing what they actually require rather than what the organisation assumes as employees' requirements. Initial packages that include financial and non-financial incentives both for entry level positions can be redesigned keeping in mind the above mentioned results so that brand image of Taj group of hotels among student job aspirants is further enhanced and the organisation attracts and lifts the best talents across various campuses in the country.

10. SIGNIFICANCE

This study provides new insight for practical business management as it was conducted on job aspirants. It will help the managers in hotel industry to carve out more effective strategies to employ, retain and attract well-equipped human resource. Brand manager's primary task is to maximize the goodwill of the organization and this cannot be done without a sustainable HR pool. To achieve this, the present study provides the managers with a more comprehensive understanding on attracting and retaining human resource of different kinds, based on their educational background. The study, therefore, is a gateway for managers' leading towards judging the expectations of potential employees with different degrees and diplomas at entry level positions , from a brand employer.

11. LIMITATIONS

Since the study covers the area of Aligarh(B grade city) and job aspirants from core tourism and hotel courses only, the choice of sample was limited as there are no private or government educational institution run courses on tourism and hotel studies unlike Delhi or Mumbai(A grade cities)

Independent Samples Test: Table 5

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Totalavg	Equal variances assumed	7.407	.008	1.599	70	.114	.2476190	.1548440	-.0612077	.5564457
	Equal variances not assumed			1.506	48.175	.139	.2476190	.1644144	-.0829272	.5781653

where the sample availability is much greater. Secondly, the sample under consideration could not have risen by any means as the course intake in both the categories is not very high. The study is not aided or funded by any institution, hence due to paucity of resources, sample group could not be enlarged.

12. CONCLUSION

This study provides new insight for practical business management as it was conducted on job aspirants. It will help the managers in tourism industry to carve out more effective strategies to employ, retain and attract well-equipped human resource. Brand manager's primary task is to maximize the goodwill of the organization and this cannot be done without a sustainable human resource pool. To achieve this, the present study provides the managers with a more comprehensive understanding on attracting and retaining human resource. The study therefore, is a gateway for managers' leading towards judging the expectations of potential employees from a brand employer.

13. FUTURE RESEARCH

Future researches can include a larger variety of respondents from different courses on travel and hospitality in various cities as well since like all hotels, Taj group too inducts a variety of candidates for its different departments at various locations in India.

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