

Comparing hotels' employer brand effectiveness through social media and websites

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This research explores hotel companies' employer branding (EB) through the internet. Many countries in the world will face a gap between the demand for talent in the hospitality and tourism industry and the available talent pool. Previous research found that, in an industry with high labour turnover and rather negative public image as an employer, EB approaches can be used to attract potential employees in a more targeted manner. The impact of on-line tools for companies to present themselves as a good employer brand is now crucial. For this study the online employer brand presence and effectiveness of 4-star and 5-star hotels are compared. Using content analysis, the presence of companies' employer brand and the appreciation for their employer brand message was assessed. The brands involved are: Hilton, Doubletree, Radisson Blu, Park Plaza, Marriott, Crowne Plaza, Novotel, Holiday Inn and NH. The online presence of each brand was evaluated through their corporate career website, brand Facebook page and brand LinkedIn page. Results show that all brands have the possibility to improve their employer brand online profiles, while for all of them specific attention needs to be given to the consistent use of the channels. From a maximum score of 115 for a perfect online employer brand profile, the highest score was 64 and the lowest 37.

Keywords: employer branding, employer brand message, Millennials, Facebook, LinkedIn, hospitality industry, talent

Introduction

Attracting and retaining team members in the hospitality industry has become critical for success, and a strong corporate/consumer brand reputation is no longer enough to attract and retain these team members. The hospitality industry has a large proportion of unskilled jobs, which makes it difficult to attract young, well educated people for operational jobs (Gehrels & De Looij, 2011). The labour market has become more competitive as a result of the influence of social media and brand exposure, together with increasing workforce turnover. Team members want to be valued more by employers (TDP, 2014). Employers must be ahead of the competitors, and employer branding can be instrumental in this. Employer branding is the "image of the organisation" as perceived by the team members, candidates and other stakeholders. It helps to differentiate a firm from its competitors as an employer (Malati & Seghal, 2013). Hotel corporations have started to recognise the importance of employer branding, and this employer branding research project has been implemented as a result. Many new hotels will be opening over the next years and companies will want to attract top talent, which makes it essential to present a strong employer brand. This research aims to investigate how an effective online employer branding competitor benchmark can be organised. For the purpose of discovering what an effective on-line employer branding profile looks like, a selection of hotel companies are compared.

Background

Employer branding can be defined as a combination of marketing and recruitment practices allowing customers,

employees and other stakeholders to recognise the desired organisational image (Wallace et al., 2013). In other words, the employer brand represents an organisation's image as perceived by actual and prospective employees. A company with an effective employer brand is more attractive among potential employees than those with lower employer brand perceptions (Gehrels, 2016). Employer branding helps organisations to present employees as "brand ambassadors" when employees share their recognition stories over external social networks and in doing so contribute to a positive employer image. Positive stories tend to enhance the organisation's potential employee candidate pool by being recognised as a great place to work (FERENCE, 2012). When an employer brand is implemented this has a number of advantages, because it:

- helps in recruiting and retaining top talents for the company, resulting in better service and productivity
- creates substantial credibility for the company
- decreases the difficulties and costs of recruiting
- increases the number of suitable candidates
- enhances the company's reputation
- energises the current employees to achieve the organisation's goals, and
- leads to a higher degree of company loyalty, improving employee retention (Johnson & Roberts, 2006).

Employer branding is used as a recruiting strategy to position a company attractively and make it a top-of-mind company for applicants (Randstad, 2014). CEB (2014b, 12) confirms this and describes employer branding as the "efforts undertaken by employers to manage labour market perceptions". The employer brand is influenced by the consumer brand and the corporate brand. Building a strong employer brand is important, while proactive employment brand management

will improve recruiting effectiveness (China HR Executive Board, 2008). Research done among companies worldwide by LinkedIn shows that the employer brand is valued as top priority by 62% of companies. As a result of this, companies are focusing more on creating employer branding strategies, whereby outbound channels like online professional networks and social media are used (LinkedIn, 2015). A consistent employer brand message is needed as part of the process to set up an employer brand (Gehrels & Altan, 2015).

The most effective tool for communicating a brand amongst Millennials is the use of social media (Kaur et al., 2015), and these serve as an inexpensive and easily accessible source for collecting background information on job applicants and current team members for a company (Clark & Roberts, 2010). The most effective employer branding tools are Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and companies' websites (LinkedIn, 2015).

LinkedIn is busy building a strategy to attract Millennials. Twitter is used for recruitment and to share company information, despite being more limited due to the fact only 140 characters can be used to share values and information. Facebook is generally perceived as more engaging because visuals and familiar language are used (Parker, 2015). Facebook is an important recruitment tool due to the 1.55 billion users, whereas LinkedIn has 369 million users (Statista, 2015a, 2015b). Job seekers still use organisations' own career websites as the main channel during job searches, with a frequent user percentage of 42%, while LinkedIn counts for 38% and Facebook and Twitter for 35% (CEB, 2014c).

Employer review sites can also affect an employer brand since job seekers get an inside look into a business. Sites like Glassdoor allow workers to write about working for a company, similarly to Careerbliss, LinkedIn, Vault and Indeed (Marks, 2014). Critical, but maybe not fully unbiased comments can be found on the impact of social media in recruiting. Hanigan (2014) sees online recruitment and LinkedIn in particular as ineffective because using head hunters would be more efficient. In Hanigan's view, head hunters supply companies with right-fit candidates whereas LinkedIn allows access to thousands of uninterested and unqualified potential candidates. CEB (2014c) confirms the importance of social media as a recruitment channel but asserts that it is crucial to promote the employer brand because applicants check at least three channels where a brand is promoted. This notion of job seekers checking many channels before applying signals that consistency in the message that a company conveys in different channels is very important in order to provide one clear employer brand message to a potential candidate. Millennials spend half of the time on learning about an organisation before they apply for a job, which is much more than other generations do (LinkedIn, 2015). A major 62% of Millennials visit social media sites to find more information about a company and its job vacancies. and they particularly value information such as pictures and posts about people in a company, employees participating in unique company festivities, meetings, and so on (White, 2015). Furthermore, applying for a job must be fast and easy (CEB, 2014e). Since almost all job seekers use online tools and the impact of these channels is enormous, companies must focus on their online tools to present themselves as a good employer brand. Benchmarking their online presence for the labour market through social media and websites is crucial for companies to define their relevance. Therefore this study

looks at the online profile of hotel companies in terms of communicating their employer brand message.

Method

A competitive, qualitative online content analysis was carried out. Online content analysis is a relevant research tool for this study because the rapidly increasing amount of information online can influence applicants' views on a company that they are searching for (Lai & To, 2015). Qualitative content analysis allows researchers to understand social reality and emphasises an integrated view of texts and their content (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2007). For this analysis of the online channels, summative content analysis was performed using keywords put into a coding diagram (Hsie & Shannon, 2005). With schematic diagrams a clear overview was created of how the selected hotel brands in Europe make use of the available social media channels and their own websites. First, all channels were checked one-by-one for each brand in order to see which channels they are using and how they make use of them. A coding diagram was then designed with the help of the employment website Scorecard and the Project Plan of CEB (2015a, 2015b). Besides that, the Blu Ivy Group's (2013) recommendations on how to benchmark an employer brand were used in order to define the correct keywords. The coding diagram (Appendix 1) has scores from 1 (very low) to 5 (very high) to score the relevant variables that assess the effectiveness of channels used when promoting a company's employer brand.

The brands that were analysed are Hilton, Doubletree, Radisson Blu, Park Plaza, Marriott, Crowne Plaza, Novotel, Holiday Inn and NH. The online presence of each brand was evaluated through their corporate career website, brand Facebook page and brand LinkedIn page. The data collection was set on 11 December 2015. Keywords based on the literature review were used in the exploration of the different channels.

Results

All brands accessed in this research have a corporate career page with a career section where vacancies of all their different brands can be found on separate brand pages. On LinkedIn, all brands except for one have a brand page, but none of these brand pages has a career page section. All brands, except for one have career pages on their corporate LinkedIn page. Facebook is used by all chains in this research and all of them present corporate brand pages and specific hotel pages. All hotels have a corporate Facebook page, while Hilton Worldwide, Marriott, IHG, and Accor are equipped with a corporate Facebook career page. Regionally specific brand Facebook pages can be found for NH, Holiday Inn, Novotel, Marriott, and Hilton. For both LinkedIn and Facebook, specific hotel pages can be found for all brands. Most hotel brands in the research have created a LinkedIn hotel page but do not use it actively. Scores were assigned to the hotel brands based on the online consistency between LinkedIn, Facebook and career pages. It turned out that the number of likes on the hotels' Facebook sites is significantly higher than the LinkedIn connections. Facebook likes range from 135 000 to 2.2 million, while the number of connections on LinkedIn range from 2 400 to 58 000. As an example, Figure 1 gives an overview of employer brand presentations in the different channels

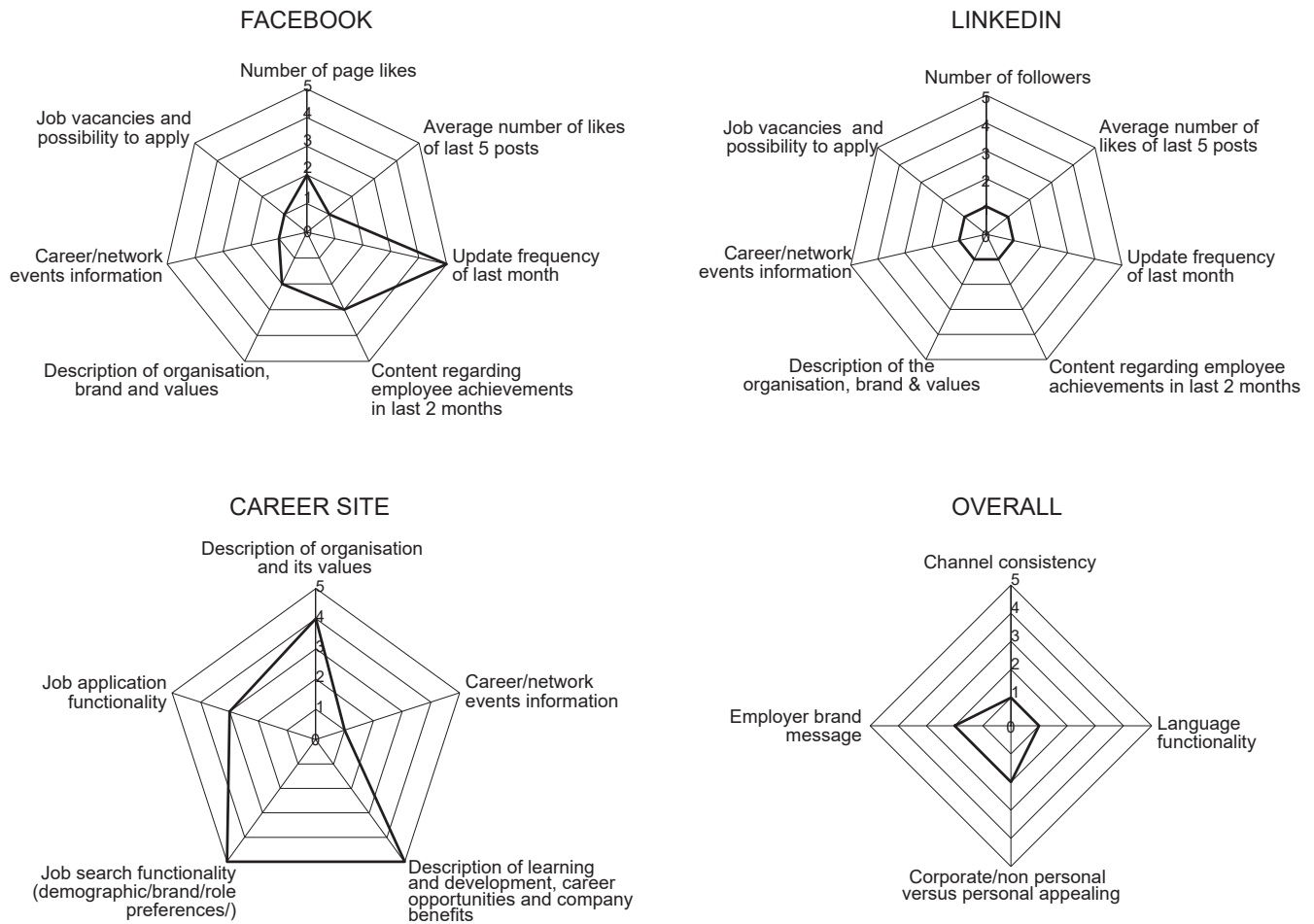


Figure 1: Employer brand presentations of company X

and their consistency for the hotel company that initiated this research project (anonymised and noted as company X).

On Facebook, company X scores high on the update frequency and on content regarding employees. The brand provided up to ten messages on employee achievements over the previous two months. The brand could improve its online profile by adding information on the brand and its values, job vacancies, and information about network events. The information section of Facebook shares interesting brand information. However, only the specific brand and legal information for Germany are described in this Facebook section. Furthermore, the brand scores low (2) on number of page likes and on average number of likes per post (1). Company X's LinkedIn page does not exist under its Hotels & Resorts presence, but only at Hotels Europe. Another confusing LinkedIn section can be found under Hotel X Limited, which presents incorrect information. The pages lack attention and provide no (correct) brand information at all, and therefore score 1 on all criteria. Only the LinkedIn page of the corporate Hotel X Group is actively used. Company X has a clear and informative career site. The job application functionality is easy to understand, and role, brand and demographic preferences can be chosen. Applying for a job is more difficult (2) and takes more than ten minutes, since an account needs to be created

first. A maximum score is achieved for the extensive description of learning and development, career opportunities and company benefits. Lastly, the description of the organisation and its values can only be improved by adding information about brand-specific values.

As can be seen in Figure 1 (an overview of the consistency of company X's online presence), the three channels, Facebook, LinkedIn and the career site are not consistent and are assessed with a channel consistency score of 1. Hotel X provides different information about the brand and corporate company on each channel, and makes use only of English as the language on all pages and therefore scores 1 for language functionality. A higher score could have been achieved if more languages were available. Facebook has the option to change the region and share information on the brand for that specific region, in the regional language. Company X's Facebook page has a personal and appealing feeling, with personal reactions to questions or comments. However, Facebook is the only appealing and personal channel, since LinkedIn shares no information and the career site has a corporate feel to it, hence this scores 2. The employer brand message also scores 2, as it can also be found only on the career site and currently focuses only on the corporate employer brand, not on the specific hotel brand within that.

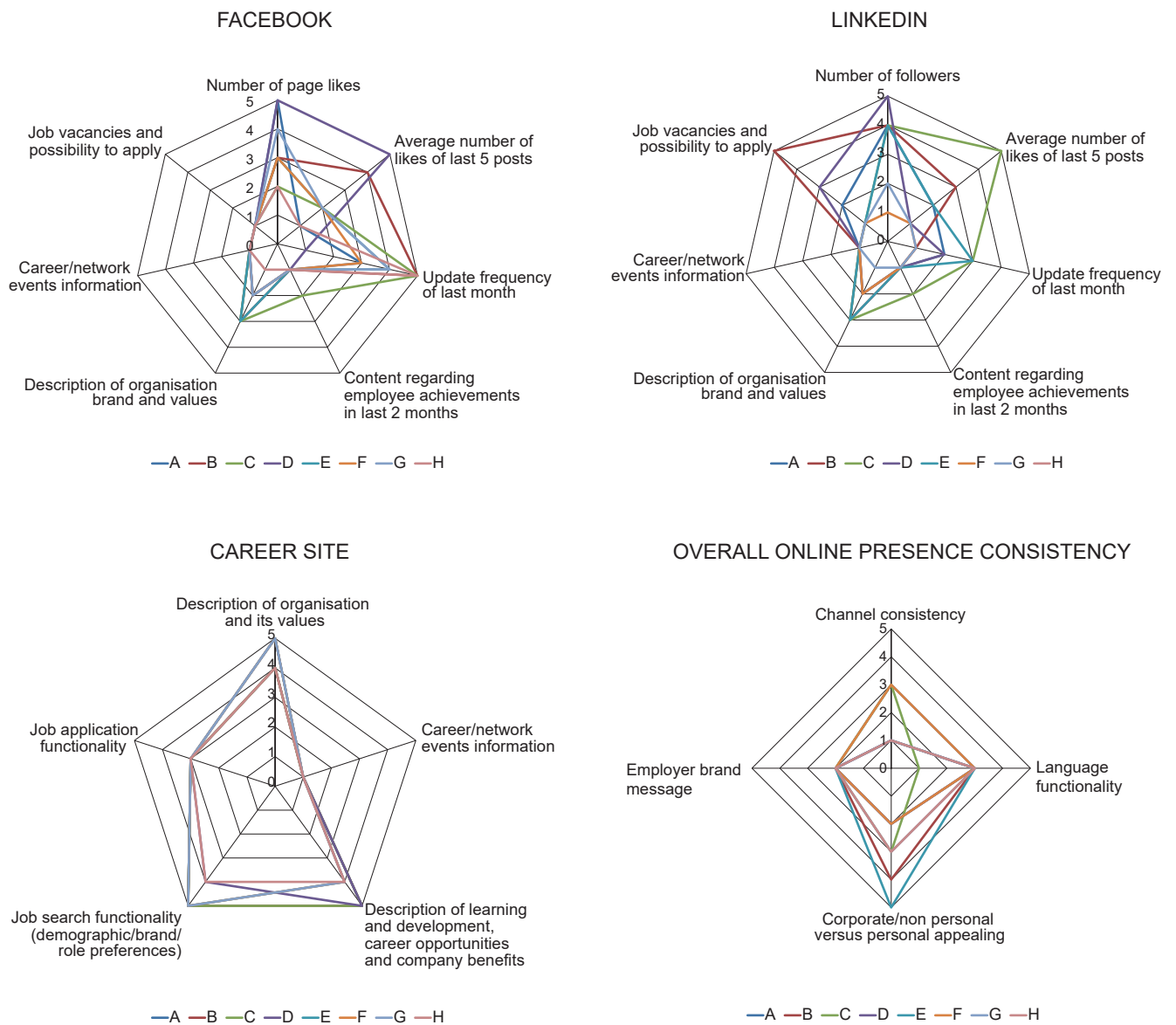


Figure 2: Employer brand presentation for all companies in the research

Figure 2 shows the employer brand presentation for the complete competitive set of hotel companies compared for this research. On Facebook, information regarding career and network events scores 1, and no information is provided on job vacancies and possibilities of applying for a job. A wide range can be seen in the number of page likes, and in the likes for the previous five posts. The number of page likes varies from 146 000 to 2.2 million, whereas the average likes per post vary from 2 to 742. None of the brands score well on content regarding employee achievements. One company scored the highest (3) but had only uploaded up to four posts regarding employee achievements in the past two months. Besides the limited content on employee achievements, brands provide limited information on the organisation, the brand and its values.

On LinkedIn, employer brands are not posted frequently. Two companies had posted up to ten messages in the previous month. Only one company had posted more than one message

regarding employee achievements in the previous two months on LinkedIn, and the rest of the brands shared no information on employee achievements at all. Job vacancies on LinkedIn were only shown on the pages of two companies, but most of the vacancies had expired already, leaving no possibility to apply for them anymore. Three companies had no likes on their last posts, since they did not even have a minimum of five posts, or their posts were about expired job vacancies. Another three companies provided a corporate and brand-specific description, while the rest of the brands only presented a corporate description or no description at all. Surprisingly, one (international) company had no brand LinkedIn page at all, which is the reason it is not included in the radar diagram (Figure 2, Overall online presence consistency).

Some companies, like DoubleTree and Hilton Hotels and Resorts, as well as Crowne Plaza and Holiday Inn, share a corporate career page, which is the reason their scores

are the same in the radar diagram. What stands out in this radar diagram is that all brands lack information on career/network events. One company did show a tab for career/network events on its career site, but disappointingly there were no events mentioned in this category. Regarding the job application functionality, all brands score a 3, which means it is possible to apply. Applying, however, takes at least ten minutes. For every brand an account needs to be created first before it is possible to apply, without letting the candidate know what to expect from the required personal login data they provide. Descriptions of learning and development and company benefits as well as the job search functionality, and descriptions of the organisation and its values score high for all brands. The only difference in the job search functionality score is that some brands have an extra possibility to search for brand-specific vacancies besides the role and demographic preferences.

Figure 2 shows relatively similar results for the online presence consistency of the channels of the competitive hotel company set researched here. Most companies have very similar results (1–3 out of 5), while only one company offers three appealing and personal channels and therefore scores 5 on corporate/non-personal versus personal appealing for its on-line presence. For most of the brands, only Facebook provides an appealing outlook. Overall, LinkedIn pages lack information and posts for most brands and can therefore not be defined as appealing or personal. The career sites of the corporate brands are not appealing or personal for most brands, with the exception of three quite global brands. The employer brand message is shared only on the career page by all companies in this research, while two have no brand-specific employer brand message. The rest of the brands do have an employer brand message for their different brands. None of the brands exceeds a language functionality score over 3, and on only one of the channels can the language be adapted to regional languages. A high score on language functionality could have been achieved if a page contained regional language options on all channels. Some brands provide an option on Facebook where the region can be chosen and the language is adapted to this region.

Total online employer profile scores

Although the results are kept anonymous on all the different elements of the companies' on-line presence in terms of employer branding, the overall results are presented connected to the specific companies that were researched. Figure 3 shows that NH Hotels has the weakest online profile score (37 out of 115), followed by Park Plaza with a score of 46, while Doubletree performs strongest (64 out of 115).

It is important to note that the overall scores of all the hotel companies in this research in terms of on-line employer profile are not optimal. The highest scoring company still has only 64 out of a potential maximum score of 115. All the companies perform below average on their online profiles and none of them share information related to recruitment and the employer brand on Facebook – no information is available on job vacancies and career/network events. The results show that all the companies have a presence on LinkedIn, but the number of posts there is limited. Some brands have no employer brand related information available on LinkedIn at all. Furthermore, LinkedIn pages have hardly any correct information and

information on job vacancies is not always available. The possibility of applying for a job is even rarer. Concerning the career sites, the corporate chains have a career site, which appeared to be the only channel where the employer brand message is shared. Most of the brands have an employer brand message specifically per brand available on the career site, although three companies still lack a specific employer brand message. Channel consistency, sharing the same information on Facebook, LinkedIn and the career page, is clearly still relatively low when looking at the figures presented here.

Conclusions on the channels used and online presence consistency

Since the employer brand message is shared through different online channels, it is important to score high on channel consistency (CEB, 2014c). Job candidates check at least three out of the 11 channels where the employer brand is communicated when they are investigating companies for potential employment. In this study, the results show that there is no consistency of online presence between Facebook, LinkedIn and career sites for any of the investigated brands. If companies' channels are not consistent, potential employees may back off because they lose trust. Millennials are attracted to social media and the information that is shared on social media is important to them. They value pictures, posts about people who work for the company, meetings, and so on (White, 2015). Furthermore, an appealing website is important. Millennials need to connect with colleagues and managers in order to become loyal, and engagement is the key for this generation, so an appealing feel to the online channels is really important (Rosethorn, 2012). The channels of the hotel companies in this research are not yet appealing enough, however, with only two companies scoring 4 and 5. Most channels score only 2.

Another interesting finding is that brands do not actively post about employee achievements on their Facebook and LinkedIn pages, scoring only 1 or 2 on content regarding employee achievements. The one brand that posts most actively on its Facebook channel was the only brand that scored 3. The lack of messages shared about employee achievements causes loss of interest for Millennials. Another conclusion that can be derived from the results is the incompleteness of the employer brand message communication. Organisations need to select a differentiated and attractive message before it is communicated (CEB, 2014a). All brands share an employer brand message on the corporate career site but a brand-specific message is communicated only for some brands. Because the brands currently communicate their employer brand message only on their (corporate) career site, it makes it difficult to attract talent. The employer brand message must be communicated for each specific brand because each brand is different to work for and the employer brand needs to be communicated consistently on all (online) channels. A clear and attractive employer brand message on all channels will convince and encourage talented people to apply for a job.

According to Bersin (2012), LinkedIn is an important channel for job seekers since it has the number one position in the world as a professional network. However, in practice, LinkedIn and Facebook are not used as effectively as they can be by the brands. None of the brands provides job vacancy

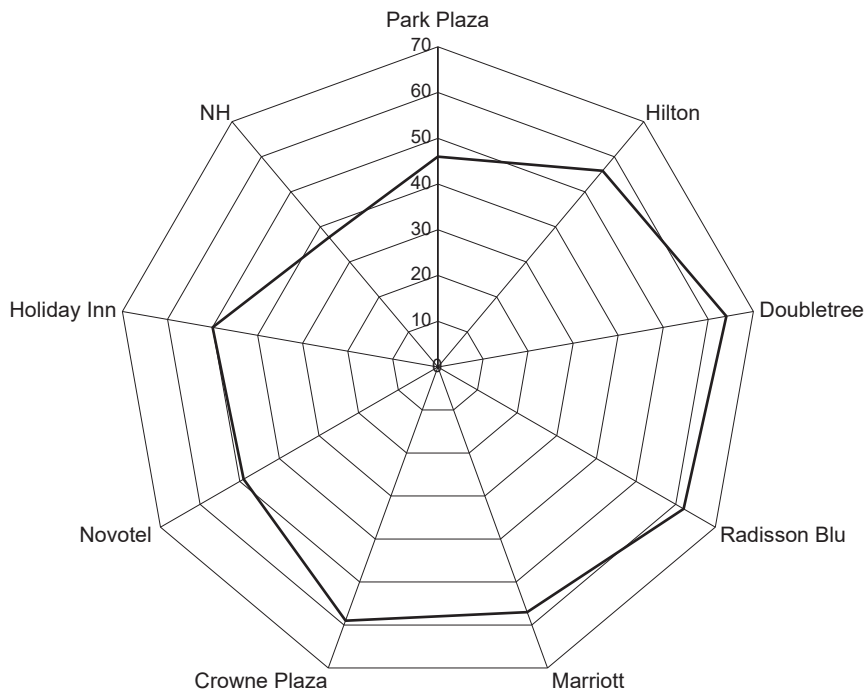


Table 1: Total on-line employer profile scores

Employer	Total brand score
Doubletree	64
Radisson Blu	62
Crowne Plaza	59
Marriott	57
Hilton	56
Holiday Inn	50
Novotel	49
Park Plaza	46
NH	37

Figure 3: Total online employer profile scores

information on Facebook, and on LinkedIn only one company features the possibility of applying for a job. Facebook has more influence regarding followers of the page than LinkedIn. Although LinkedIn is the number one professional networking site, most of the companies do not actually use LinkedIn as a recruitment tool, and Facebook is at least as important to use as recruitment channel. Facebook is used by many more people than LinkedIn, but neither of these channels shares an employer brand message or job vacancies. At the career sites, all brands show their learning and development, career opportunities and company benefits, which can be seen as a positive factor (CEB, 2014d) since Millennials value future career opportunities, growth and development.

It is especially important for companies in the hospitality industry to show their developments on all the available channels, since the hospitality industry has challenges in finding talent (Gehrels & de Looij, 2011). Unfortunately, developments, opportunities and benefits are shared only on the career sites. More on these topics should also be shared on Facebook and LinkedIn, since Millennials check more channels than only the career site. Additionally, Millennials are not really attracted by the application functionality of the career sites. The career sites of all brands are very time consuming, taking at least ten minutes to apply, as an account needs to be created first after the right vacancy is found. Brands are not really appealing with their application functionality, especially since the only recruitment channel for most brands is the time-consuming career site. Apart from that, none of the brands actively publish any conference, network or career events of the company on the channels. This is a missed opportunity since 86% of Millennials prefer to see information about events with career networking and job opportunities (Schawbel, 2015).

All brands use more or less the same pages on social networking sites and the career pages. Brand pages for Facebook and LinkedIn are used by all brands, except for one. None of the brands makes use of a career section on their LinkedIn brand page but only on the corporate page, or not even there. It is only the hotel chains that present career sites. None of the brands in this research stands out regarding their online employer profile. The total brand scores vary from 37 (NH Hotels) to 64 (Doubletree), while most brands scored around 60. Facebook and LinkedIn show variations in online profile quality between the different brands, even when the brands are in the same hotel chain. The social networking sites of the brands do not meet the requirements and interests of Millennials, and will make it difficult to attract talent. There is no online profile consistency for any of the brands. There is no brand that shares the same information on all three channels, and the channels are not really personal and appealing. Only Crowne Plaza has an appealing feel to all three channels and would therefore gain most trust from Millennials. All elements considered, the hotels in this research are not performing well in terms of the online profile as part of their employer brand message, and definitely need to improve.

Recommendations

All companies really need to improve their brand LinkedIn page. As emphasised by Bersin (2012), LinkedIn is an important channel for job seekers, and in order to be ahead of competitors, hotels should be up to date, interactive and informative on their LinkedIn pages. Job candidates check at least three channels of a potential employer for their employer brand (CEB, 2014c). Since none of the brands have a consistent online presence on the different channels, they

should make sure to share consistent brand and employer-specific information on their channels. Furthermore, since all brands share the employer brand message only on their career site, they can improve by sharing the employer brand message on all channels. The channels should therefore be updated consistently, after a clear brand-specific message is created. Schawbel (2015) mentioned the importance of publishing conference, network and career events in order to attract Millennials, but none of the brands promotes these events on their online channels. Time and effort should be invested in organising these events and communicating them effectively.

Millennials see social media as an important tool to gather information and to apply for a job (LinkedIn, 2015), while they spend less time on gathering company information and applying for a role (CEB, 2014). Facebook and LinkedIn provide no job application functionality at all, and it is time consuming to apply for a job on the career sites of all brands. Hotel companies should increase their career site job application functionality and make it easier and less time consuming. Besides that, the application function should be added to LinkedIn and Facebook in order to attract Millennials. Hotels can differentiate themselves from their competitors, but even more importantly from businesses in other industries, by emphasising the benefits of working for the company. Company benefits should be attractive and highly visible on all channels, since learning and development opportunities and other company benefits are currently only mentioned on the companies' career sites.

Further research

For further research it would be valuable to look at how the actual employee value propositions as mentioned by Duraturo (2011) differ between hotel companies, to see in which elements competitive advantages occur. Besides that, it would be interesting to continue finding out how the Millennial generation values companies' online presence as employer brands.

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Appendix 1: Coding diagram

Structure of coding diagram	1	2	3	4	5
Facebook analysis					
Number of page likes					
Average number of likes for last five posts					
Update frequency over last month					
Content of information in last two months regarding employee achievements					
Description of the organisation, the specific brand and its values					
Career/network events information					
Job vacancies available and possibility to apply for a job					
LinkedIn analysis					
Number of followers					
Average number of likes for last five posts					
Update frequency over last month					
Content of information in last two months regarding employee achievements					
Description of the organisation and its values					
Career/network events information					
Job vacancies available and possibility to apply for a job					
Career site analysis					
Description of the organisation and its values					
Career/network events information					
Description of learning and development, career opportunities and company benefits					
Job search functionality (Demographic/brand/role preferences/)					
Job application functionality					
Consistency of online presence (three channels)					
Channel consistency					
Language functionality					
Corporate/non-personal versus personal/appealing to feeling					
Employer brand message					