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Employees' use of mobile devices and their perceived outcomes in the workplace: A case of luxury hotel



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ABSTRACT

This study attempts to identify employees' perceptions of using mobile devices and their perceived job performance when they use the mobile devices for their work at a hotel. Adopting the concept of self-efficacy from Bandura's social cognitive theory as a theoretical background, this study expands its conceptual framework by including two exogenous variables: job relevance and self-efficacy, facilitating condition as a moderator, and three endogenous variables: perceived job performance, job satisfaction and employee retention to scrutinize employees' psychological acceptance of the mobile device in the workplace. Findings of this study indicate that employees feel confident to use a mobile device at the hotel, think the mobile device is a relevant tool for performing their work better and ascertain the use of the mobile device improves their job performance, leading to increasing job satisfaction as well as retention with the current organization longer. Interestingly, no significant differences are found in employees' perceptions and psychological behavior of using mobile devices in the hotel by their job position and department. Discussions and suggestions for future research are provided.

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1. Introduction

The ubiquitous use of mobile devices (e.g., Apple iPhone, Android-based smartphones, Apple iPad, Samsung Galaxy Tab, etc.) has been restructuring hotels' digital communication environments, allowing their operational systems to communicate with mobile applications (Resort Data Processing, 2014). Many leading hotel chains (i.e., Accor, Hilton, Marriott, Starwood, etc.) are establishing more efficient and customer-focused digital communication environments by letting guests check-in/check-out by using their smartphones or tablets (Fellah, 2014; Rauch, 2014). In particular, Accor, a French hotel group, plans to allow its employees to use mobile devices for their work in its hotels to better manage guests' needs (Fellah, 2014). As guests are better able to control their entire hotel stay from the convenience of their smartphones or tablets (Chan, 2014), more hotels plan to have their employees digitally connected with guests for better personalized service via this handy, convenient technology.

Before Accor's announcement to adopt mobile devices for its employees, hotel chains such as Hyatt had already implemented the BYOD (bring-your-own-device) policy for their employees to access the company's cloud-based tools such as Dropbox, Apple iCloud, Google Drive, or Microsoft SkyDrive for internal communications (Mearian, 2012). While the BYOD plan has limited features with respect to employees' internal communications, Accor's mobile device plan focuses more on communicating with guests through mobile devices to promote the hotel chain's operational efficiency and high-quality digital service. Thus, it is evident that many hotel chains are developing or implementing their own digital communication strategies by adopting mobile devices not only for their own internal communications, but for enhancing their guests' digital experience.

As mobile devices have become a necessity of people's daily lives, more studies (e.g., Kim et al., 2008; Morosan, 2014; Morosan and DeFranco, 2014) have paid increasing attention to assessing travelers' acceptance of mobile devices for their purchase decisions in the context of airline services, private clubs and travel. In general, customers seem to have favorable attitudes toward using mobile devices for their purchase decisions as long as they find it convenient, instant, interactive, and responsive. However, little research has been conducted to examine employees' perceptions when hotels implement mobile device usage for employees' work.

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Hotel management and industry experts in mobile technology assert that mobile devices offer convenience, effective communication, and ease-of-operations for all of their key stakeholders such as guests, employees, and suppliers, which ultimately benefits the entire organization (Fellah, 2014; Resort Data Processing, 2014).

Responding to the industry's upcoming trends and investment in its digital communication, this study aims to identify how employees react to a hotel's current mobile communication strategy, in particular, allowing them to use mobile devices for their work. More specifically, this study attempts to answer the following research questions in order to understand employees' perceptions of using mobile devices at work, and in order to assist hotels in developing employee-focused mobile communication strategies.

- (1) If hotel employees are allowed to use mobile devices for their work, would they be capable of using mobile devices for their work?
- (2) What would be employees' overall perceptions of using mobile devices for their work and, if any, what would be their expected outcomes after using them?
- (3) Would employees' perceptions of using mobile devices vary by their job position, affiliated department, and previous experience with using mobile devices?
- (4) What would be major purposes for employees to use mobile devices?
- (5) What key factors should be considered when developing hotels' mobile communication strategies?

Adopting the concept of self-efficacy from Bandura's social cognitive theory (1986a) as a theoretical background, this study developed its conceptual framework to measure employees' perceptions of using mobile devices for their work in a hotel. Based on the theoretical structure of employees' self-efficacy with respect to using mobile devices and their perceived job performance, this study expands the aforementioned conceptual model, incorporating three independent or moderating factors: employees' self-capability (self-efficacy) (Compeau and Higgins, 1995), task-relevant factor (job relevance) (Venkatesh and Davis, 2000), and external support (facilitating conditions) (Lewis et al., 2003; Thompson et al., 1991), and three endogenous variables: perceived job performance (Compeau and Higgins, 1995), job satisfaction (Childers et al., 1980), and employee retention (Frey et al., 2013) to scrutinize employees' psychological acceptance of mobile devices in the workplace.

2. Research background and theory development

2.1. Employees' use of mobile devices in the workplace

The Pew Research Center (2015) indicated that more people have been using mobile devices, in particular, smartphones. In the U.S., about two-thirds of Americans currently own a smartphone. Consumers are becoming more dependent on mobile devices than on traditional computing devices – desktop computers or laptops – for performing their daily activities. The prevalence of using mobile devices has led companies to develop and restructure their mobile communication strategies for their operational efficiency and effectiveness (Bott et al., 2010).

As the majority of hotel employees are equipped with mobile devices, their capability of using them not only for personal communications, but also for work-related activities is assumed to be high (Cisco, 2012). Ricca (2013) stated that more than one-third of the hotel industry's employees consisted of Generation Y or Millennials, born between the early 1980s and the early 2000s, who are tech-savvy and digital natives. Considering the characteristics

of the current workforce in the hotel industry, most employees are believed to be ready to use mobile devices for their work. In responding to the changes in the current workforce, hotels should seriously consider accommodating employees' technological needs to retain and attract the new generation of employees who will appreciate the use of mobile devices in their workplace (Chia, 2012).

Mobile research firms (i.e., Nielsen, Forrester) strongly purport that enabling employees to use mobile devices significantly increased their productivity and engagement with customers (Cisco, 2012; Rapid7, 2013). Hotel employees can efficiently perform various work-related tasks at any places by building more personalized and interactive relationships with their customers, compliant with hotels' cohesive mobile strategies. However, the overall effects of emerging mobile devices on work-related outcomes such as performance, productivity, satisfaction, and retention have not been thoroughly and empirically examined (Bott et al., 2010). Nevertheless, the expected benefits of using mobile devices have been discussed in a recent study, including increased employee responsiveness and decision-making speed, resolving internal issues faster, and increasing employee productivity (Cisco, 2012).

Indeed, it is a timely topic to identify how employees perceive their mobile device usage in the workplace and their subsequent outcomes related to their jobs by adopting Bandura's social cognitive theory (1986a). For the purposes of a successful launch involving a company's mobile communication strategy, each company tends to fully support its employees' mobile usage in the workplace (Cisco, 2012). Thus, a company's support toward employees' mobile use in the workplace will moderate the relationship between employees' perceptions and their subsequent psychological behavior. By reviewing employees' perceptions, such as their self-efficacy and job relevance first, this study attempted to identify the overall framework for employees' mobile device usage in a hotel context.

2.2. Self-efficacy

In the hospitality industry nowadays, digital natives (i.e., Generation Y and Millennials) are becoming a key workforce (Erdem and Crinson, 2015) who are able to work with mobile devices in their workplaces, compared to other generations, given that they are the generations who have always been connected to the technology that we have today (Geck, 2006). Referring to the characteristics of the current workforce, it would be appropriate for the hospitality industry to consider adopting mobile devices in their daily work environment as a means of improving employees' job performance, which ultimately results in enhancing guest satisfaction (Erdem and Crinson, 2015). However, few empirical studies have examined the level of employees' competency in using mobile devices for their work as a way to measure their potential acceptance of mobile devices.

According to Bandura's social cognitive theory (1986a), individual behaviors are determined reciprocally by environmental influences and cognitive/personal factors. In particular, Bandura viewed people's cognitive/personal factors as strong beliefs in their ability to perform a particular action, which is referred to as self-efficacy. The concept of self-efficacy encompasses people's judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to accomplish designated types of performance (Bandura, 1986b, 391). By adopting the concept of self-efficacy into a computing context, researchers (Burkhardt and Brass, 1990; Compeau and Higgins, 1995) have developed computer self-efficacy via the accomplishment of a task to measure people's perceptions of their ability to use a computer. Compeau and Higgins (1995) asserted that individuals' higher computer self-

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