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Pepperdine University

Graduate School of Education and Psychology

EXAMINING EMPLOYER-BRAND BENEFITS THROUGH

ONLINE EMPLOYER REVIEWS

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Global Leadership and Change

by

Patricia Callanan Coaley

April, 2019

Paul Sparks, Ph.D. – Dissertation Chairperson

This dissertation, written by

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under the guidance of a Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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DEDICATION

In order to make good in your chosen task, it's important to have someone you want to do it for. The greatest moments in life are not concerned with selfish achievements but rather with the things we do for the people we love and esteem, and whose respect we need.

—Walt Disney, *The Quotable Walt Disney*

First and foremost, this dissertation is dedicated to my family. From a young age, my parents and grandparents encouraged me to nurture my curiosity, courage, and conviction. They instilled in me the importance of education and the value of being true to my passion and vision. This one is for you!

To my husband – thank you for supporting my "bucket list" adventure back to school and keeping me fed during my endless hours of computer time, and being my trusty proofreader. To my kids, thanks for adjusting your schedules so I could work on homework. And to my grandkids, especially Logan, who kept asking if I was done with my homework… guess what? My very long paper is finally complete! Thanks for keeping me in check!

Sincere appreciation to my friends, especially my Yellow Pants Project peeps, who kept our vision of youth leadership training alive while I plowed away through school. I could not have done it without you! Special thanks to Paul Speirs-Hernandez for being my "second coder" once again – first during my master's program research and now, 25 years later, my doctoral studies. "Love you, Will. Grace."

The spirit of two scholars also carried me along my Pepperdine journey: Dr. Anthony Ferri and Stephen Todd Jordan. Like my grandparents who watched me from the heavens, I know you both were with me along the way. I dedicate this work to your memory.

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ABSTRACT

Social media is rising in popularity as a credible source of information for consumers worldwide. Access to online product reviews appears limitless, and consumer voices are now influencing purchasing behavior far beyond the reach of traditional marketing campaigns. Joining the Internet influencers is a relatively new platform for sharing opinions, employer-review websites. Comments from current and former staff on employer review sites such as Glassdoor and Indeed offer a glimpse into company culture and the employer brand (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). This qualitative, phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of hotel/casino resort employees through an examination of employer reviews posted on the Glassdoor and Indeed web pages of four Las Vegas gaming corporations. A thematic analysis of 1,063 employer reviews was conducted to identify the trio of employer-brand benefits (e.g., functional, economic, and psychological) drawn from Ambler and Barrow's (1996) employer-brand equity theory. Themes related to social identity theory (Tajfel, 1974), signaling theory (Spence, 1973), and the instrumental-symbolic framework (e.g., Lievens & Highhouse, 2003) were examined in this study.

Two questions guided the research: (1) Which employer-brand benefits, if any, cited in the employer reviews of hotel/casino resorts are most frequently associated with positive and negative employee sentiment? (2) What is the relationship between employer benefits (e.g., functional, psychological, and economical) and the overall employee rating given by the reviewer? The results revealed that all three of Ambler and Barrow's (1996) employer-brand benefits appeared in the employer reviews as both positive and negative attributes of employment, with psychological and economic benefits most frequently referenced. Specific to employment in the Las Vegas hotel/casino resort industry, reviewers who gave high employer

ratings were quite positive about economic benefits (i.e., salary and wages, unspecified benefits, and the free meal in the EDR) and psychological benefits (i.e., co-worker interactions and company atmosphere), while reviewers who gave their employer low ratings were disappointed with their position's economic (i.e., salary and wages), psychological (i.e., management behaviors, work schedule, and company atmosphere), and functional (i.e., promotional opportunities) benefits. The findings from this study have implications for both marketing and HR practitioners, and this study contributes to the growing body of employer-branding literature.

Chapter 1: Introduction

With the adoption of the Internet as a trusted facilitator for buying and selling goods and services, Internet users can now effortlessly research, purchase, and review virtually any product or service, including vacation destinations, with just the click of a mouse (Chen & Law, 2016; Lee, Shin, Park, Kim, & Cho, 2017; Sparks & Browning, 2010; Wang, Peng, Xu, & Luo, 2018). This shift in purchasing behavior has required hotel marketers to reevaluate their advertising strategies, especially since travel sites such as Expedia were launched in the mid-1990s (Schuckert, Liu, & Law, 2015). Online booking systems not only provide ease of use for the consumer but have also introduced the customer-review feature, a hallmark on major travel sites (Law & Chen, 2000; Schuckert et al., 2015; Sparks & Browning, 2011). Consumers may perceive electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) as a credible source of company-independent reviews, while hotel marketers, on the other hand, regard this unfiltered content as a potential risk to their organizational brand and reputation (Schuckert et al., 2015).

Similarly, online advancements have brought about changes in the field of human resources management (HRM) with the advent of employer-review platforms (Marinescu, Klein, Chamberlain, & Smart, 2018; Money, Saraeva, Garnelo-Gomez, Pain, & Hillenbrand, 2017; Simmons, 2017). Websites such as Glassdoor, Indeed, Vault, and LinkedIn have opened the door to global recruitment services, allowing employers to market career opportunities and review resumes of potential candidates from around the world (Dabirian, Kietzmann, & Diba, 2017; Glassdoor, 2018b; Ladkin & Buhalis, 2016). These platforms also allow current and former employees to post reviews expressing positive and negative workplace experiences, along with salary information and management ratings. In this era of social-media abundance, online employer reviews are becoming a popular source of credible recruitment information for job

seekers (Van Hoye, 2014). Moreover, like their marketing counterparts, HRM practitioners now face the challenge of protecting their employer brand and reputation from the eWOM posted on the worldwide stage of social media (Keeling, McGoldrick, & Sadhu, 2013).

With the convenience of the Internet, HRM practitioners can expand employer-recruitment strategies beyond local or regional applicants to pursue candidates from around the world. Thus, the influence of eWOM on the employer-selection process extends beyond the reach of HRM practitioners (Van Hoye & Lievens, 2007a). This rising effect of eWOM adds a sense of urgency to marketing and HRM practitioners' efforts to understand the impact of online reviews on employer brand (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Cable & Turban, 2001; Ingrassia, 2017). Also, eWOM posted on employer-review sites, which are designed to capture the opinions of current and former personnel, may offer a glimpse into employer-brand benefits from the employee viewpoint, thus allowing HRM practitioners an alternative source for auditing job satisfaction (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959; Ingrassia, 2017).

HR recruitment strategies are implemented to generate employer familiarity, which leads to increased knowledge of the employer brand (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Cable & Turban, 2001; Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). Ambler and Barrow (1996) introduced the term "employer brand" to denote "the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company" (p. 187). According to Ambler and Barrow (1996), the concept of employer branding arises from the field of marketing and the consumer-brand management theories of Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993). Aaker (1991) argues that the most valuable intangible asset of an organization, besides its employees, is the company brand. Keller (1993) posits that a positive association with a company brand leads to higher consumer affinity toward a product or service. As such, the more highly regarded the brand is,

the more brand equity is accumulated in the mind of the consumer. Ambler and Barrow (1996) theorize that employer branding adheres to the same principles as consumer branding. Companies now use an amalgam of marketing campaigns, recruitment strategies, and firsthand employment experiences to create this employer brand (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Ingrassia, 2017; Tanwar & Prasad, 2017; Van Hoye, 2014).

Company-sponsored recruitment materials such as career websites, employment fairs, and college campus visits offer job seekers a look at an organization's employer brand through the carefully crafted lens of marketing (Backhaus, 2016; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Lievens & Slaughter, 2016; Van Hoye & Lievens, 2007a). The advantage of company-dependent resources is that HR and marketing practitioners can control the message (Van Hoye & Lievens, 2007b). Recruitment collateral produced in-house, or through a contracted advertising agency, preserves the desired image of satisfied employees and robust opportunity, which in turn promotes organizational attractiveness (Van Hoye & Lievens, 2007a). While recruitment advertising facilitates organizational attractiveness among recruits, Van Hoye and Lievens (2005) found that WOM from a friend or family member is more credible and equally improves company appeal more than company-sponsored materials. In a subsequent study of Internet recruitment strategies, Van Hoye and Lievens (2007a) noted that eWOM from sources outside the organizational were more believable than company-produced employee testimonies. Recruitment advertising ensures that job-seekers are exposed to the company-perceived employer-brand benefits, which may not reflect the actual employee experience (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). As Dabirian et al. (2017) note, "employer brand cannot be controlled by the firm; its beauty lies in the eye of the beholder" (p. 2). Therein lies the challenge for marketing and HR professionals who are hired to disseminate an employer-brand image that may run counter to candid employer reviews.

While company-distributed information forms organizational attractiveness, company-independent sources with online user-review functionality may also influence employer brand (Castellano & Dutot, 2017; Lin, 2015; Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2018; Sparks & Browning, 2010). The launch of Web 2.0 near the turn of the century granted Internet users the capability to voice their opinions on products and services in a global forum (Chen & Law, 2016). In turn, consumers seeking recommendations have round-the-clock access to a wealth of information at their fingertips (Law, 2000). The travel sites TripAdvisor and Expedia were notable early adaptors of user-generated comments to influence consumer behavior (Law, 2000; Law & Chen, 2000; Sparks & Bradley, 2017). The popularity of these platforms has grown over the last two decades, with TripAdvisor hosting over 660 million traveler reviews and Expedia boosting over 40 million (Expedia, 2018; TripAdvisor, 2018). Filieri, Alguezaui, and McLeay (2015) note that acceptance of traveler reviews as a credible source is linked to the perceived authenticity of the content. Readers feel a sense of empowerment when they browse genuine travel experiences, as distinct from reading marketing materials. As such, the power of eWOM posted on travel sites, and the marketing challenges of negative reviews, may send a signal to HR practitioners that comments on employer-review platforms must not be overlooked (Simmons, 2017).

Employer-review sites, such as Glassdoor and Indeed, are company-independent sources where current and former employees share employment experiences via eWOM (Dabirian et al., 2017; Glassdoor, 2018b; Ingrassia, 2017; Lievens & Slaughter, 2016; A. Xu et al., 2016). In comparison to consumer-review platforms, employer-review sites offer an innovative approach to exploring employee opinions of the employer brand, as opposed to company surveys or focus groups. Organizational leaders often desire feedback from their employees to better serve their customers (Simmons, 2017). However, this is not the only reason to seek employee feedback;

employee opinions can also be embraced as the origin of employer brand, which ultimately leads to employee loyalty and engagement (Dabirian et al., 2017). Employee sentiment may also impact employer reputation, which informs the decision-making process of job seekers (Cable & Turban, 2001; Linn & Kenning, 2014; Van Hoye & Lievens, 2007a). Thus, negative employer reviews may affect an organization's ability to attract and retain quality talent (Simmons, 2017).

Background

The general problem is that employer reviews, like consumer reviews, are unfiltered and public-controlled sources of information written with limited verification measures or opportunities for recourse (Glassdoor, 2018a; Ingrassia, 2017; Serwin, 2017). An online source for sharing workplace conditions means that disgruntled employees, like disgruntled customers, will post unfavorable reviews, whereas shrewd employers, like cunning marketers, may incentivize their employees to submit favorable reviews (Dwoskin & Timberg, 2018; Glassdoor, 2018a). To minimize deceptive posts and user bias, the employer review website Glassdoor has implemented two policies: (1) the "Give to Get" (GTG; Marinescu et al., 2018, p. 3) policy, and (2) the Fraudulent Reviews policy (Glassdoor, 2018a; Glassdoor, 2018b).

When Glassdoor launched in 2007, the GTG policy was incorporated into its business plan as a measure to protect against fraudulent content (Green, Huang, Wen, & Zhou, 2017). Before posting a review, all Glassdoor users must undergo an authorization process that includes email authentication and human validation from a site administrator (Glassdoor, 2018b). While Glassdoor users can post reviews without providing personal career information upon first visiting the site, the user will be required to *give* additional data after surfing multiple areas of the site in order to *get* more platform access (Marinescu et al., 2018). In a study examining the effectiveness of the GTG policy for limiting review bias, Marinescu et al. (2018) found that

reviews posted before users submit to the GTG policy are slightly more polarized, with a 1.4% increase in 1-star ratings and a 4.3% increase in 5-star ratings.

Glassdoor's Fraudulent Review policy establishes guidelines for monitoring review frequency to ensure that individual and company users avoid misuse (Glassdoor, 2018a). Users are limited to posting one review per year, per employer. If a user is found to have posted multiple reviews on a company page, then the user content will be deleted, along with the user's account. Organizations are also prohibited from incentivizing employees for positive reviews. The Glassdoor site is programmed with proprietary algorithms and filters set to search for company-sponsored reviews. If an organization is found in violation of the anti-enticement policy, then all reviews associated with the company breach will be removed (Glassdoor, 2018a).

Despite the possibility of encountering deceitful or falsified posts, Internet users have come to accept eWOM as a credible source of information (Breazeale, 2009; Kusumasondjaja, Shanka, & Marchegiani, 2012; Melián-González & Bulchand-Gidumal, 2016). Wang et al. (2018) argue that source credibility is associated with the receiver's perception of the communicator's reputation and trustworthiness. The "wisdom of the crowd" (Filieri et al., 2015, p. 182), as denoted in the sheer volume of reviews posted on sites like TripAdvisor and Glassdoor, lends status and perceived credibility to online review platforms. These sites also provide realistic advice based on experience, which builds confidence in user content (Filieri et al., 2015). However, Ingrassia (2017) contends that although employer-review platforms offer HRM practitioners a resource for listening to employee concerns, the integrity of the content remains open to scrutiny. Like its predecessor, "traditional word of mouth" (Stauss, 1997, p. 28), eWOM should be evaluated for credibility based on who is sharing the information and what motivates them to share it (Litvin et al., 2018).

The power of source credibility has been a topic of study dating back to the years *B.S.M.* (Before Social Media) when Hovland and Weiss (1951) first examined the effect of trustworthy and untrustworthy newspaper and magazine stories on reader retention. Although the participants in the Hovland and Weiss (1951) study did not retain additional information based on their trust in the medium, the researchers did note that those sources deemed trustworthy by the reader were linked to a significant shift in favorability toward the content. Nearly twenty years later, Berlo, Lemert, and Mertz (1970) sought to understand which source attributes shape the receiver's perception of credibility, advancing Hovland and Weiss's (1951) pioneering work. Berlo et al. (1970) observed that a feeling of safety between the recipient and the communicator moderated trust in the spokesperson. The researchers also noted that the communicator's perceived credibility, or the "it" factor (Berlo et al., 1970, p. 563), could sway the receiver's opinion in an instant.

This perceived it-factor lies solely in the judgment of the individual receiving the communication. Consequently, it is possible for a trusted peer, friend, or family member to become an informal social influencer (Berlo et al., 1970; Van Hoye & Lievens, 2007b; Van Hoye, Weijters, Lievens, & Stockman, 2016). Fisher, Ilgen, and Hoyer (1979) investigated the effects of external influencers on the employer-selection process from an applicant viewpoint. The researchers found that current employees who furnished potential employees with employer knowledge were found more credible than recruiters presenting company-endorsed material (Fisher et al., 1979). The increased trustworthiness in employee remarks was attributed to the balanced information (e.g., both positive and negative) exchanged in the conversation. In the same study, the strictly positive material disseminated on behalf of the company was deemed less convincing (Fisher et al., 1979).

Whereas traditional WOM is generally communicated in private, interpersonal conversations with trusted acquaintances, eWOM resides on social media platforms with the capacity to influence millions of anonymous users worldwide (Brandtzaeg & Følstad, 2017; Cervellon & Lirio, 2016; Huete-Alcocer, 2017; Wang et al., 2018). As such, one's personal network of social media connections develops into a trusted authority on topics ranging from child-rearing to politics. This shift in knowledge acquisition from controlled, company-driven advertising to unconstrained, opinion-powered reviews gives consumers a voice, as well as unlimited data for decision-making (Chu & Choi, 2011). According to Chu and Choi (2011), social media provides a forum where users not only seek and receive information but play a part in sharing their thoughts and wisdom. The wealth of online product reviews offers a distinct advantage to the consumers, but these reviews are problematic for marketing practitioners, including those working in the hotel/casino resort industry (Baka, 2016).

Protecting brand equity in the social media ecosystem poses a challenge for hotel/casino resort marketers when sites such as Expedia and TripAdvisor have worldwide recognition for their traveler reviews (Chu & Kim, 2011; Ong, 2012; Sparks & Browning, 2010; Stringam & Gerdes, 2010). Keller (1993) defines brand equity as the intangible value consumers perceive a brand offers, which influences purchasing behavior. For example, both Motel 6 and Best Western offer travelers a room product at an economy price, yet vacationers may have unfavorable opinions about Motel 6 based on their beliefs associated with the brand. Thus, one hotel brand has more brand equity than the other brand. Managing brand equity on travel sites goes beyond the creation of property profile pages and rate management. Monitoring travel review sites for guest feedback or issues is required to sustain the brand image (Sparks & Bradley, 2017). While some property operators choose not to respond to guest comments, others

do so frequently (Park & Allen, 2013). Park and Allen (2013) observed the review response rates of 34 high-end hotels and noted a median response rate of 18% for all hotels, with seven of the property operators responding to none of the comments and one responding to nearly 100%. Those property operators who responded with frequency did so to problem-solve and encourage brand loyalty (Park & Allen, 2013). The quality of the property liaison's responses to online critics not only affects those reviewers' likelihood of returning; it also affects the company's brand image for future vacationers (Sparks & Bradley, 2017). Therefore, in the tourism and travel industry, it is important to provide proper training in best practices for responding to guest feedback in online forums (Ong, 2012).

Just as marketing practitioners maintain brand reputation by tracking and responding to consumer reviews, HR practitioners may be similarly compelled to monitor employer brand on social media (Aureli & Supino, 2017; Baka, 2016; Ingrassia, 2017; Litvin et al., 2018). Ambler and Barrow (1996) first introduced the application of a marketing framework to HRM with the development of the employer-brand concept. Cable and Turbin (2001) proposed utilizing marketing principles to enhance HR recruitment since both disciplines require persuasive messaging. Van Hoye and Liven (2007b) furthered the call for the integration of marketing and HR models to stimulate organizational attractiveness. As distinct from internal marketing campaigns, which express a set of espoused company values, employer brand is a manifestation of the employees' day-to-day work experience. Employer brand reflects the voice of the employee and how they feel about their employer, as opposed to the employer's own perspective (Dabirian et al., 2017).

Strategies for monitoring employer brand have moved beyond internal surveys or employee suggestion boxes with the launch of sites like Glassdoor and Indeed, which provide

forums for workers to express their opinions outside the confines of the organization (Dabirian et al., 2017; Marinescu et al., 2018; Pitt, Botha, Ferreira, & Kietzmann, 2018). While employee eWOM may be a viewed as a respected source of information for job-seekers, freedom of expression on employer-review platforms may pose problems for employers (Cervellon & Lirio, 2016; Melián-González & Bulchand-Gidumal, 2016). As Simmons (2017) noted, maintaining employer brand online is like managing a "ticking time bomb" (p. 1), particularly since negative reviews have been found to influence the decision-making of applicants between the ages of 18 and 34. Although the potential threat of losing candidates due to poor online ratings raises valid concerns for company leaders, it is also possible for employer reviews to enhance employer brand. If HR practitioners apply the practice of auditing employer brand in social media, then employer reviews could become another HRM tool for monitoring job satisfaction (Cable & Turban, 2001; Ladkin & Buhalis, 2016).

Problem Statement

The relationship between employee and consumer satisfaction has been a topic of interest in marketing and human resources for over 20 years, and most research in this area supports the claim that satisfied employees produce satisfied customers (Heskett, Sasser, & Schlesinger, 1997; Hogreve, Iseke, Derfuss, & Eller, 2017; Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1996). In companies that offer customer service as their primary product, employee interactions are particularly important for forming the brand image (King & Grace, 2009; Knox & Freeman, 2006; Mosley, 2007). As such, hotel/casino resort employees play an essential role in the guest experience. However, the typical tendency among service organizations has been to prioritize operational efficiencies at the expense of human capital, thereby overlooking the importance of employer-brand management (Knox & Freeman, 2006). Hence, HR practitioners in hotel/casino

resorts may not recognize the influence of employer-brand benefits on employee job sentiment (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Knox & Freeman, 2006; Matzler & Renzl, 2007).

From a researcher perspective, Ambler and Barrow (1996) argue that the principal advantages of working for a specific employer can be divided into three categories of employer-brand benefits: (1) functional, (2) economic, and (3) psychological. Each benefit fulfills a desired need of employment, and the level of satisfaction depends upon the individual. Tanwar and Prasad (2017) observed that IT employees in India perceived compensation as an essential benefit of employment, but these employees also regarded a positive work environment as a more important motivator. In a study of employer branding practices among three resorts in India, Sehgal and Malati (2013) found that the hotel with the highest scores for employee benefits also financially outperformed the other two properties. Thus, employer brand may provide an opportunity to differentiate the service industry product from its competitors while enhancing financial performance (Sehgal & Malati, 2013). With greater awareness of the employer-brand benefits associated with positive or negative sentiment among service industry employees, both HR and marketing practitioners in hotel/casino resorts may contribute to improving employees' job satisfaction as well as the company bottom line (Dabirian et al., 2017).

To date, previous employer-branding research has primarily concentrated on organizational attractiveness during the recruitment process, and the vast majority of the research subjects have been convenience samples of college students (e.g. Arachchige & Robertson, 2011; Cable & Turban, 2001; Van Hoye & Lievens, 2007b; Wayne & Casper, 2012). Little research has examined employer brand from the perspective of current or former employees, and even fewer employee-centric studies explore employer-brand benefits (Dabirian et al., 2017;

Lievens & Slaughter, 2016; Tanwar & Prasad, 2017). Dabirian et al. (2017) were among the first researchers to examine employee comments on social media for employer branding references. The researchers analyzed 38,000 employer reviews posted on Glassdoor and identified seven categories of employer-branding value propositions: (1) social, (2) interest, (3) application, (4) development, (5) economic, (6) management, and (7) work/life balance. While the content for analysis in the Dabirian et al. (2017) study was vast, so was the expanse of industries within the sample. The researchers examined comments posted on the pages of 10 companies with the highest scores on Glassdoor and 10 companies with the lowest scores. The organizations represented in the sample comprised a variety of fields, including IT, retail, healthcare, travel, real estate, and food production. As such, the researchers recommended further study within one specific industry, in addition to an in-depth examination of which employer-brand propositions are referenced as positive and negative (Dabirian et al., 2017).

Due to the steadily declining U.S. unemployment rate (averaging 4.4% over the last two years), a shortage of skilled talent in the labor market may raise organizational concerns (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). Employer branding may offer HR and marketing practitioners a strategy to differentiate their organizational attributes from those of their competitors, thus attracting and retaining human capital (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Davies, Chun, da Silva, & Roper, 2004; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). Yet little is known about the role that employer branding plays in the retention of employees (Jiang & Iles, 2011; Wilden, Gudergan, & Lings, 2010). To advance the study of employer brand and retention, Priyadarshi (2011) suggests that future research should explore employee perceptions of organizational attributes which contribute to job satisfaction. One way to gauge workplace sentiment is to audit employee WOM (Harris & Ogbonna, 2013). As such, exploring employer reviews may reveal drivers of employee

retention. Additionally, employee feedback publicly available on the internet provides researchers, as well as practitioners, with data for use in validating the theoretical perspectives for employer branding.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study is to explore the employer-brand benefits referenced in online employer reviews of hotel/casino resorts. This study examines staff eWOM posted on the Glassdoor and Indeed pages of four hotel/casino resort corporations headquartered in Las Vegas. The comments shared on the identified social media platforms provide a glimpse into the lived experience of hotel/casino resort employees working in Las Vegas. This study also investigates which employer-brand benefits, if any, are associated with job satisfaction as represented in the overall employer rating submitted by the employee reviewer. The findings from this research support HRM and marketing practices for maintaining employer-brand image, as well as offering insight into what contributes to a positive employment experience for improved retention. This study follows an innovative approach of data analysis to advance research in both the marketing and HR theory associated with employer branding through the examination of online employer reviews.

Research Questions

In a seminal study, Herzberg et al. (1959) proposed a simple research question to answer the complex issue of workplace motivation: "What do workers want from their jobs?" (p. xiii). Nearly 60 years later, this question is still up for debate, and it is further addressed in this study (Dabirian et al., 2017). Specifically, this study investigates the following two questions:

1. Which employer-brand benefits, if any, cited in the employer reviews of hotel/casino resorts are most frequently associated with positive and negative employee sentiment?

2. What is the relationship between employer benefits (e.g., functional, psychological, and economical) and the overall employee rating given by the reviewer?

Significance of Topic

Before the rise of social media, employer branding was primarily a company-sponsored, controlled recruitment and retention strategy touting the advantages of employment (Dabirian et al., 2017). The brand image created through skillful marketing captured the organization's espoused values using external collateral, such as corporate brochures and recruitment literature, and internal campaigns, such as back-of-house posters and company newsletters (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Ewing, Pitt, de Bussy, & Berthon, 2002; Mosley, 2007). These polished presentations attempted to establish a brand of idyllic employment that may or may not align with a current or former employee's reality (Dabirian et al., 2017). WOM, considered one of the oldest forms of information and opinion sharing, then enters the equation via a trusted influencer, who may have the credibility to shift the carefully crafted organizational message (Arndt, 1967b; Lievens & Slaughter, 2016; Van Hoye & Lievens, 2007b).

With the advent of the Internet and the evolution of WOM to eWOM, HRM practitioners, like their marketing colleagues, are facing the challenge of unfiltered reviews impacting brand image. However, in the HRM scenario, the trusted influencers include comments generated out of the mouse of employees. This study contributes to the fields of both HRM and marketing— two disciplines that will need to collaborate in order to sustain credible employer brands in the digital age (Keeling et al., 2013). The outcome of this study encourages HRM practitioners to

incorporate social media listening, the act of closely observing online conversations for insight and solutions, as opposed to social media monitoring, the process of noting how many times a brand is mentioned, into ongoing retention strategies (Biswas & Suar, 2013; Reid & Duffy, 2018). From a research perspective, this study contributes an innovative method for examining employer-branding theory and highlights eWOM as a potential source for expanding the field of study beyond recruitment strategy and college settings (Dabirian et al., 2017).

Definitions

This study examines the topic of employer-brand benefits and job satisfaction through the conceptual framework of Ambler and Barrow's (1996) employer-brand theory, which is rooted in Keller's (1993) theory of customer-based brand equity. Therefore, this study references marketing terms applied to HRM strategy (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Theurer, Tumasjan, Welpe, & Lievens, 2016). Definitions of key terms for this study are provided below:

- *Brand Equity:* the outcome of marketing the unique attributes of a specific brand, which differentiates the brand name from like products or services (Keller, 1993).

- *Employer-brand benefits:* the economic, functional, and psychological employment benefits associated with a particular employer (Ambler & Barrow, 1996).

- *Job satisfaction/dissatisfaction:* "a function of the perceived relationship between what one wants from one's job and what one perceives it as offering or entailing" (Locke, 1969, p. 10).

- *Word of mouth (WOM):* verbal communication between individuals and one person, or persons, who are perceived as independent sources of information about a product, service or organization (Arndt, 1967b; Bone, 1995).

- *Electronic word of mouth (eWOM):* an individual's opinion, shared with a vast audience on the Internet, which is perceived as an independent source of information about a product, service or organization (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004; Singh, 2000).

- *Social media listening*: the activity of surveying social media content for specific trends, issues, opinions, products or services and applying the insights to create opportunities, content, experiences, or solutions (D. Jackson, 2016).

- *Social media monitoring:* "the active monitoring of social media channels for information about a company or organization" (Financial Times, 2018).

- *Hotel/casino resort:* a full-service hotel that offers licensed casino activity, such as slot machines and table games, and remains open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. May also be referred to as a gaming resort.

Theoretical Framework

This study is primarily guided by two theoretical frameworks grounded in the marketing psychology of human incentives (D. A. Aaker, 1991). These are Keller's (1993) customer-brand theory and Ambler and Barrow's (1996) employer-brand theory. In early studies of effective marketing, noted 19th-century psychologist Harlow Gale sought to understand which elements of advertising motivated consumers to notice a print ad (Eighmey & Sar, 2007). Newspapers and magazines were the primary media in the 1800s. Hence, Gale's research focused on the conscious and unconscious effects of design layout and buyer intent (Eighmey & Sar, 2007). According to Eighmey and Sar (2007), Gale's scientific efforts set the benchmark for the psychology behind advertising and the significance of brand knowledge.

Keller (1993) posits that brand knowledge is an outcome of brand awareness and image, which influences a positive, or negative, consumer response. Whereas brand awareness refers to a buyer's ability to recall and recognize a particular product or service, brand image characterizes the benefits or "personal value consumers attach to the product or service attributes" (Keller, 1993, p. 4). Brand benefits represent the economic (price and quality), functional (goods and services), and psychological (symbolism of ownership) advantages that motivate consumer intent (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Keller, 1993). As such, Keller's (1993) customer-brand equity theory conveys the duality of brand awareness and image to establish, or diminish, brand equity and the likelihood that consumers will purchase a product or service (see Figure 1).
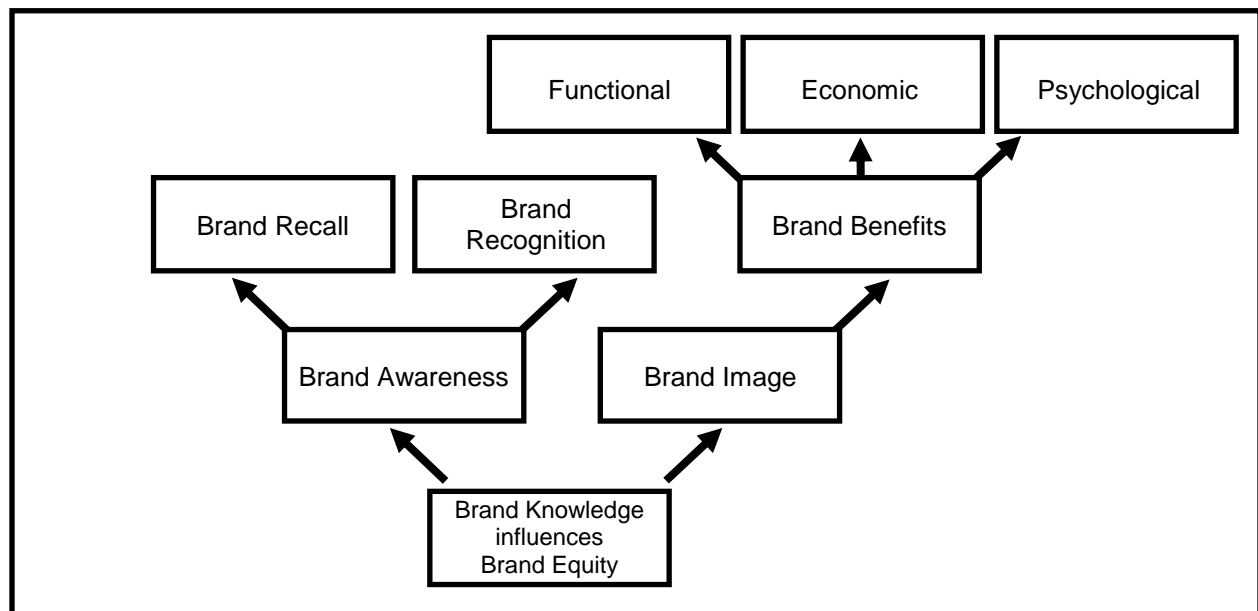
Figure 1. Brand knowledge. Adapted from Keller's (1993) customer-brand equity theory and Ambler and Barrow's (1996) employer-brand concept.

Assessing Keller's (1993) customer-brand equity theory for use outside the constraints of advertising, Ambler and Barrow (1996) proposed employer-brand equity theory as a parallel model for HRM (see Table 1). Analogous to customer-brand equity, employer-brand equity is

formed in the minds of current, former, or potential employees through exposure to

organizational marketing and human resource practices (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). Employer-

brand knowledge then becomes the by-product of personal experience with employment

practices and workplace conditions. As such, exposure to company-brand awareness, image, and

perceived economic, functional and psychological benefits influences employee recruitment and

retention (Ambler & Barrow, 1996).

Table 1

Three Benefits Associates with Brand Equity

Consumer (External Brand)	Benefits	Employee (Internal Brand)
Goods and Services	← Functional →	Opportunities for Growth and Development
Price and Quality	← Economic →	Monetary or Material Rewards
Image and Sense of Well Being	← Psychological →	Sense of Belonging or Purpose

Note. Comparison of consumer and employer-brand benefits adapted from Keller (1993) and Ambler and Barrow (1996).

The concept of employer-brand equity as a significant benefit in employee recruitment

and retention has emerged in human resource practice within the last ten years, yet this topic has

been studied in multiple academic disciplines for nearly three decades (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004;

Theurer et al., 2016). HRM, marketing, and psychology scholars have examined aspects of

employer branding through the lens of theoretical models and concepts, contributing factors to

employer knowledge, or conceptual strategies and activities for application (Theurer et al.,

2016). However, the vast majority of researchers have focused on whether and how employer

brand influences recruitment, with scant attention to the influence of employer brand on retention

or turnover (Theurer et al., 2016). In addition, few scholars have reported the effects of

company-independent WOM and employer image or addressed eWOM as a source of workplace feedback (Cable & Turban, 2001; Dabirian et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2017; Lievens & Slaughter, 2016; Van Hoye, 2014). Furthermore, only a limited number of researchers have approached the subject of employer brand by analyzing online employer reviews (Dabirian et al., 2017; Ingrassia, 2017; Lievens & Slaughter, 2016).

In addition to brand equity theory, three, relevant theoretical perspectives frequently applied within employer-branding research will be referenced in discussion; (1) social identity theory (Tajefl, 1974), (2) signaling theory (Spence, 1973), and (3) the instrumental-symbolic framework (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). Social identity theory in the context of the employment experience links an individual's attraction to an organization with one's need for social fulfillment (Tajfel, 1974). In the staff retention scenario, a worker remains with a company if the workplace environment corresponds with the group identity the employee wishes to maintain. If the employee, or employer, senses a mismatch, then separation from the group may occur (Tajfel, 1974). Signaling theory is related to social identity theory in that the employee receives cues from organizational policies, procedures, or behaviors which they interpret as favorable or unfavorable signals about the company (Rynes, Bretz Jr., & Gerhart, 1991; Spence, 1973). Depending on how the employee perceives these signals, they will either remain or depart from the organization.

The instrumental-symbolic framework, like the employer-brand concept, is based on Keller's (1993) brand equity theory (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). Instrumental employment attributes are comparable to employer-brand benefits (i.e. economic, functional, and psychological). Symbolic attributes are human traits which potential, current, or former employees attach to the employer image. Lievens and Highhouse (2003) assert that job seekers

assess potential employers based on the organizational traits which align with the applicants' self-image. For example, Google is a company which people may perceive as creative and innovative, while Bridgestone may be thought of as dependable and rugged. As such, persons who see themselves as creative and innovative may be drawn to applying to Google, and individuals who perceive themselves as dependable and rugged may apply at Bridgestone. Thus, the persona associated with an organization draws interest from applicants with a similar self-image.

This study examines job satisfaction as noted in the overall employer rating the reviewer assigns to the company. Understanding what motivates employees has been a focus of research since the early 1900s, and it continues to be a looming question for organizations seeking to improve employee engagement and productivity (Eberle, 1919; Hamelink & Opdenakker, 2019). Herzberg et al. (1959) advanced the motivation-hygiene theory as a framework for interpreting what workers desire from their employment experience. Motivating factors were identified as aspects inherent to the job, such as responsibility, growth and recognition, leading to job satisfaction (Herzberg et al., 1959). Hygiene factors are associated with compensation, workplace atmosphere, and interactions with fellow employees (Herzberg et al., 1959). According to Herzberg et al. (1959), hygiene factors prevent dissatisfaction but do not lead to increased satisfaction. Therefore, motivating factors are job satisfiers, while hygiene factors are related to dis-satisfiers.

This study advances the theory of employer branding and the significance of employer-brand benefits while exploring the interrelationship of social identity theory, signaling theory, and the instrumental-symbolic framework. Through a qualitative thematic analysis of employer reviews posted on the pages of gaming corporations in Las Vegas, this research presents an

exploratory view of workplace sentiment in a 24/7 business, providing a granular assessment of employee perceptions within this unique sector of the service industry (Dabirian et al., 2017).

Assumptions

Based on the research available, HRM and marketing scholars and practitioners commonly perceive employer branding as an employment attraction strategy, as opposed to an employee retention concept (Jiang & Iles, 2011; Theurer et al., 2016; Wilden et al., 2010). Consequently, employer-review sites are generally viewed as recruitment resources, rather than employment feedback mechanisms (Ingrassia, 2017). In this study, the researcher assumes that if HRM practitioners in the Las Vegas hotel/casino industry are noticing roughly the same level of turnover as the national average for the hospitality industry (74%), then social media listening may provide useful information to help employers improve their brand image and improve retention (BLS, 2018; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Priyadarshi, 2011).

This study relies on the assumption that the eWOM to be examined are credible and reliable. However, the researcher acknowledges that this assumption may limit the study's validity for the following reasons. The eWOM posted on employer-review sites are submitted by anonymous users who self-identify as current or former employees of said company. No verification of previous or present employment is required. Also, the employer-review platforms do provide a possible avenue for retaliation by a disgruntled employee, or on the opposite end of the spectrum, an opening for self-promoting the company from a paid internal source (Ingrassia, 2017). Competitors may also take advantage of the opportunity to pose as a current or former employee to steer potential recruits away from a rival organization (Ingrassia, 2017).

Limitations

One of the fundamental limitations of this study is also one of its key assumptions. The researcher is limited to trusting that the eWOM on employer-review sites is accurate, unbiased information grounded in the reality of the employer-brand. It is not possible to triangulate the eWOM data with actual results from an employee survey administered internally by Las Vegas hotel/casino corporations, because the survey data is not publicly available. A request to assess employees from one of the hotel/casino resort companies was denied due to confidentiality concerns. As such, data from two online sources was explored. A second limitation of this study is the generalizability of results. Since the data is reflective of employee opinions of Las Vegas hotel/casino resorts the results may not be applicable to other gaming resorts outside of Las Vegas. Additionally, the findings may not represent hotel companies without the amenities offered at the Las Vegas corporations under examination, such as casinos and entertainment. Lastly, the anonymous reviewers self-identified as current and former employees, and it was not possible to verify employment status claims.

Researcher Bias

The ability to self-reflect upon one's bias toward a subject, and to state that bias openly and honestly, is a core competency of a qualitative researcher (Creswell, 2014). The researcher acknowledges her bias as it relates to employment in the Las Vegas hotel/casinos. The researcher served as a marketing executive for 15 years, and a corporate HR executive for seven years, at one of the corporations under examination. During her career in the gaming industry, the researcher was exposed to feedback from employees at all levels of the organization. She intends to refrain from imparting her preconceived notions formed from previous social exchanges and maintain the impartiality required for conducting a phenomenological study (Giorgi, 2012).

Summary

The research surrounding employer branding has predominantly emphasized the concept as a recruitment strategy, with limited attention to its implications for employee retention. This study seeks to bridge the gap in scholarship through an examination of employee eWOM for employer-brand benefits closely connected to employee satisfaction. With social media permeating everyday life, HRM and marketing practitioners may be obligated to reevaluate their employer-brand management strategies (Gossett & Kilker, 2006; Keeling et al., 2013; Kluemper, Mitra, & Wang, 2016). Researchers may also benefit from exploring social media as an approach for understanding organizational attractiveness as well as employee satisfaction (Cable & Turban, 2001).

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Conceptual Frameworks

Introduction

From the rise of personal computer usage in the early 1980s, to the introduction of the Internet in the 1990s, to the unveiling of smartphones in the 2000s, human connectedness has stretched beyond physical boundaries to the sphere of cyberspace (Carr, 2013). The ability to communicate globally has become a fundamental tool for companies desiring to expand market share in multinational locations (G. Martin & Hetrick, 2009). The interconnected world has also given a voice to individuals who may not have been heard before the digital age (Breazeale, 2009). With the touch of a button or click of a mouse, consumers can influence the purchasing behaviors of others from around the world. The effect of eWOM is challenging marketing practitioners to reinvent traditional offline advertising strategies for online placement (Chu & Choi, 2011). More importantly, organizations are being confronted with the issue of protecting their brand from any ill effects of eWOM (Rauschnabel, Kammerlander, & Ivens, 2016).

Employees have also been given a voice on the Internet since the launch of employer review sites (Ingrassia, 2017). In the past, employee feedback may have been encouraged through company-controlled surveys or suggestion boxes. However, platforms like Glassdoor and Indeed have provided a forum for employees to share insights about employer brand and the benefits of the employment experience. While these websites provide eWOM for potential applicants to use in the career decision-making process, the information posted by employees may put a company's employer brand at risk (Pitt et al., 2018). As such, HR practitioners and marketing teams may face similar obstacles when it comes to protecting the company brand.

This literature review presents a historical account of the influence of WOM before the Internet, followed by a summary of the birth of the Internet and the dawn of eWOM. To provide

an overview of the impact of eWOM on consumer behavior, a discussion regarding online review platforms addresses the challenges that the hotel industry has faced as a result of the introduction of travel review sites. This review of research regarding travel-review sites provides a foundation and point of comparison for emerging research on employer reviews. An introduction to employer review sites and the impact of eWOM on employer brand is also presented. Lastly, literature highlighting the value of employer branding and the theoretical frameworks supporting this concept for use in HRM is discussed.

Word of Mouth before Social Media

In the field of advertising, WOM is considered one of the oldest forms of communication for shaping consumer attitudes about a service or product (Arndt, 1967b). Arndt (1967b), a pioneer scholar of WOM advertising, defined the process as "oral, person-to-person communication between a receiver and a communicator whom the receiver perceives as non-commercial, concerning a brand, product or service" (p. 3). This informal exchange of opinion is channeled through personal recommendations or references from a communicator whom the receiver deems credible (Arndt, 1967b). The authentic appearance of WOM advertising creates a perception of impartiality, thus differentiating this practice from a recognizable advertisement (Arndt, 1967b).

Published accounts of WOM advertising date back to the 1930s, with stories of "professional rumor mongers" (Arndt, 1967b, p. 4) working for shadow campaigns to promote product awareness or smear a competitor's reputation. These contracted conspirators were deployed to public areas around the country, such as sporting events or mass-transit stations, to engage in blaring conversations and spread sponsored information to anyone within hearing distance (Arndt, 1967b). The tobacco company Liggett and Myers was the target of a "whisper

campaign" (Arndt, 1967b) alleging that its Chesterfield cigarette factory employed a leper (Harrald & Watkins, 2010). The owners were also rumored to have contributed millions of dollars to fund Hitler (Arndt, 1967b). Both allegations were deemed untrue and attributed to a competitor's desire to damage the Chesterfield brand (Harrald & Watkins, 2010). Although Liggett and Myers offered a reward for information leading to the source of the rumor, no culprit was identified, and the brand suffered a 10-year financial loss before recovering (Harrald & Watkins, 2010).

Literature covering paid rumor mongers seemed to waver in the post-war 1950s, as a new WOM-advertising tactic, the promotional teaser, was ushered in along with the rise of television viewing (Arndt, 1967b). To generate consumer WOM around a product, companies would launch promotional teasers to feed the commercial audience just enough curiosity to stimulate conversation. Before Ford Motor Company's reveal of the Mustang at the 1964 New York World's Fair, the automotive giant ran 30-second television commercials featuring a stampede of wild horses in the desert (NewYorkWebcast, 2009). The voiceover in the ad simply stated, "The Mustang is coming, April 17," and the commercial ended with a three-second silhouette shot of the car (NewYorkWebcast, 2009). The ad's limited exposure of the actual vehicle was a deliberate marketing strategy to stimulate WOM (Arndt, 1967b).

WOM advertising also differs from a paid advertisement in that the sponsor of the campaign controls where and when the ad runs, whereas WOM relies on uncontrolled interpersonal communication for dissemination (Arndt, 1967b). As such, advertisers learned early on that positive WOM, though a cost-effective alternative to paid commercials, can become distorted in translation and do more harm than good to the brand (Arndt, 1967b). Arndt (1967b) noted that some companies' hesitation to use WOM advertising was based on the lack of

empirical data to support the use of this communication process. Limited research on the commercial use of WOM advertising or the influence of WOM on purchasing behavior was available prior to Arndt's (1967a) work. Thus, Arndt (1967a) was motivated to confirm the assumption that WOM advertising was a dominant force of persuasion behind American consumerism.

To explore whether WOM advertising had a direct influence on purchasing behavior, Arndt (1967a) conducted an experiment involving the spouses of students living in a campus apartment complex for married couples. Arndt (1967a) sought to understand whether conversations among the wives about a new product would lead to the purchase of the item within a short period. Coupons for the new product were sent to the spouses, who were then interviewed within three weeks' time so WOM interactions would be easier to recall. Not surprisingly, the results indicated that positive WOM increased the participants' probability of purchasing the product, while negative WOM decreased this probability (Arndt, 1967a). Arndt (1967a) observed that the reported dialogue surrounding the purchase of the new product was a process of opinion-sharing in which potential buyers mutually expressed the philosophy, "If you'll buy, I'll buy" (p. 295). The outcome of this research highlights the importance of peer interaction and source credibility in the WOM process.

WOM source credibility. In the field of brand management, WOM is a derivative of two channels of communication; (1) Company-dependent sources and (2) Company-independent sources (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016; Lin, 2015; Van Hoye & Lievens, 2007a). Company-dependent sources include artifacts in which the organization directly controls the message, such as company-sponsored commercials, websites, print collateral, and events (Van Hoye & Lievens, 2009). Company-independent sources are entities understood to be outside of the organization's

control with the potential to directly influence public opinion (Van Hoye & Lievens, 2009). WOM is generally recognized as a company-independent source that can positively or negatively impact organizational brand (Van Hoye & Lievens, 2009). However, in the case of rumor-mongers or falsified non-affiliation, the integrity of WOM comes into question. As such, it becomes important to consider the issue of source credibility.

When a source (such as a media channel, person, or group) possesses the power to influence consumers' decision-making processes, marketing strategists may desire to know what makes this entity appear trustworthy. When television was in its infancy, Hovland and Weiss (1951) conducted an experiment to explore how readers determined that a print source was trustworthy and examined the impact of source credibility on reader knowledge acquisition and opinion-forming. The researchers asked subjects to read articles about controversial issues, then rate the magazine or newspaper for trustworthiness. The publications pre-selected for review included a set of well-known magazines and newspapers, along with a group of virtually unknown sources. Within both groups, the researchers printed identical articles to gauge whether source identity influenced reader opinion and knowledge retention (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). For example, a story about the effects of antihistamines was circulated as an article from a biomedical journal, as well as printed in a generic home magazine. Students were then instructed to read passages from several magazine and newspaper articles and choose which source was more credible.

Hovland and Weiss (1951) found that the low-credibility sources were perceived as less fair when they covered controversial issues. The readers also perceived the authors' views as less justifiable when these were presented in untrustworthy publications, even though the articles were the same in both instances. However, the researchers did observe a significant shift in

reader opinion based on the attributed source, with a more significant change in attitude occurring when the publication had perceived high credibility (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). Retention of knowledge was found to be independent of trustworthiness. The participants' level of comprehension regarding the issues presented in each article was the same regardless of source credibility. Thus, the researchers concluded that readers' trust in the publication affected their perception of the author's motivation for positioning an argument and thus contributed to shaping readers' opinions (Hovland & Weiss, 1951).

The Hovland and Weiss (1951) experiment presented data to support the theory that source image may influence the level of perceived source credibility (Berlo et al., 1970). Receivers of communication are more likely to accept opinions and ideas from individuals or organizations that they deem to have the *it* factor, described in varying terms such as charismatic, personable, moral, and respected (Berlo et al., 1970). Entities with perceived higher levels of *it* are more likely to be viewed as trustworthy (Berlo et al., 1970). Berlo et al. (1970) queried individuals in Michigan to identify which characteristics contribute to the *it* factor and determined that three factors influence source image: (1) Safety, (2) Qualification, and (3) Dynamism. Each of these three constructs has a corresponding list of attributes, both positive and negative, for measuring source image. For instance, an individual who is perceived as just, kind, friendly, and honest may communicate feelings of safety that influence the receiver to construct a positive source image. On the other hand, an organization whose actions appear unjust, cruel, unfriendly, or dishonest may convey an unsafe image, leading to source distrust (Berlo et al., 1970). Source qualification reflects the degree to which the entity is regarded as trained, experienced, skilled, qualified, or informed on the subject being communicated, while dynamism

refers to the intensity with which the source is invoked to get the message across (Berlo et al., 1970).

Berlo et al.'s (1970) work demonstrates that receivers filter messages through several criteria before deciding to embrace or reject a communicated message. In the field of marketing, recognizing the complexity of source credibility may assist advertisers with the selection of communication channels, such as trusted spokespersons or appropriate media networks. Source credibility has also been reported as an influencer in the job recruitment process (Fisher, et al., 1979; Van Hoye & Lievens, 2009). One of the first investigations of source credibility from a job-seeker's perspective was Fisher et al.'s (1979) study of student perceptions of recruitment information sources.

In the pre-social media world, college students seeking information on potential employers may have sought guidance from sources affiliated with an organization, like on-campus recruiters or current employees, or individuals within the student's circle of influence, such as a friend or professor (Fisher et al., 1979). What was not known at the time of the Fisher et al. (1979) study was which of the four sources (recruiter, current employee, friend, or professor) appeared the most credible to the student. More specifically, Fisher et al. (1979) wanted to know which of the four sources the students perceived as likable, trustworthy experts. The researchers also sought to establish whether these sources influenced student decisions to take a position at a company.

Using a student sample from Purdue University, Fisher et al. (1979) randomly distributed a set of eight mock interview questions. The students were instructed to read the document as if they were the person inquiring about the job and imagine that the answers were being provided by one of four pre-assigned sources: a recruiter, a current employee, a friend, or a professor.

After reading the communication, the students were asked to rate their trust in the source, along with how knowledgeable and likable they perceived the individual to be. The results indicated that current employees or the students' friends were perceived to be the most trusted sources of employer information (Fisher et al., 1979). Friends were viewed as the most knowledgeable source, while recruiters were viewed as the least trusted or likable. Positive information about the employer mainly influenced student decisions to take a position at the organization, as long as the favorable opinion was not attributed to the recruiter (Fisher et al., 1979).

The Fisher et al. (1979) study involved student imagination and the potential to work at a simulated organization. Thus, the results may not apply in a real-world scenario. However, this research does offer insight to into source credibility and the influence of WOM on recruitment strategies. When envisioning their friends sharing opinions, the students in this study found friends' WOM far more credible than WOM from the company-sponsored recruiter. Fisher et al. (1979) suggest that if organizations want to promote their employer brand using WOM, then sharing honest personal accounts (both favorable and unfavorable) from employees may be more influential than using a company recruiter's marketing script.

In the Internet age, Van Hoye and Lievens (2009) explored source credibility of company-independent sources using a sample of potential applicants seeking positions with the Belgian Defense. Consistent with the findings of Berlo et al. (1970) and Fisher et al. (1979), Van Hoye and Lievens (2009) observed that prospective applicants were more receptive to WOM recommendations from sources with qualifications or expertise relative to the job or organization. Consistent with Fisher et al.'s (1979) findings, Van Hoye and Lievens (2009) observed that close acquaintances like friends and family were regarded as a credible source of information. Van Hoye and Lievens (2009) also found that potential job applicants were more

likely to apply for a position in the Belgian Defense if they received favorable WOM about the position. Again, these findings are similar to Fisher et al.'s (1976) results showing that positive WOM influences organizational attractiveness from an employment standpoint, beyond traditional recruitment practices.

Whereas determining source credibility during the WOM communication process may require the receiver of information to mentally filter messenger attributes associated with trustworthiness, Van Hoye and Lievens (2009) suggest that recipient personality is also a significant variable. Potential Belgian Defense applicants who identified themselves as extroverts reported devoting more time to seeking positive WOM about the job than seeking negative WOM (Van Hoye & Lievens, 2009). Prospective applicants who self-reported a conscientious personality were more likely to gather both positive and negative WOM for consideration. Thus, WOM source credibility is not merely a function of the communicator's attributes. Various factors, including receiver personality, may contribute to perceived source trustworthiness. A new influence to add to the complexity of the WOM process is the rise of social media, which has introduced an innovative medium for WOM in the form of user-generated comments. The influence of social media applications on human behavior and decision-making is an area of study in its infancy, thus offering scholars new research opportunities in the digital age.

Electronic WOM and the Dawn of Social Media

Social media platforms began to gain popularity in the early 2000s with the launch of social networking sites (SNS) such as Friendster (launched in 2002), MySpace and LinkedIn (launched in 2003), Facebook (launched in 2004), and Twitter (launched in 2006; Morrison, 2015). The sphere of social media then expanded to include websites hosting collaborative

projects, such as Wikipedia, and blogs, which are similar to personal sites (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Content communities such as Flickr, YouTube, and Slideshare then appeared, offering functionality to share rich media in the form of videos and photos. Virtual games and virtual worlds created a social space where players assume the form of avatars as they interact with other users and residents (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). As of October 2018, Facebook is ranked the number one social media platform in the world with 2.2 billion monthly users, followed by YouTube with 2 billion and WhatsApp with 1.5 billion users (Statista, 2018).

If Web 2.0 represents the foundation of social media, then user-generated comments (UGC) are the user actions which sustain platform relevance (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Although no clear definition of a UGC exists, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) sponsored a report that proposed three criteria: (1) the content is posted online for public viewing, (2) a small amount of creativity is evident, and (3) the material appears to be the creation of a non-professionals outside the scope of employment (Vickery & Wunsch-Vincent, 2007). In short, UGC represents Internet user activities, undertaken outside of a user's professional capacity, involved in the creation and exchange of collective knowledge online (O'Reilly & Batelle, 2009). As such, social media is defined as the Web 2.0 applications built to host a collaborative environment for UGC (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

According to the OECD, UGC includes the uploading or sharing of images, photos, audio, video, text (e.g., books and articles), and personal reviews and opinions (Vickery & Wunsch-Vincent, 2007). In 2017, SNS attracted 2.6 billion users, and that number is projected to reach over 3 billion by 2021 (Statista, 2018). China is ranked as the country with the highest social media usage, reporting nearly 600 million users, followed by India with just under 200 million users (Statista, 2018). The U.S. is ranked third with 209 million SNS users, with

Indonesia (96 million) and Brazil (90 million) completing the top five list (Statista, 2018). On average, a U.S. Internet user spends 21% of their online time on social media via a smartphone app (Statista, 2018). Since social media is a relatively new phenomenon, studies examining the influence of eWOM on decision-making and public opinion are limited in scope, requiring researchers and practitioners to swiftly adapt to the medium (Chen & Law, 2016; Dabirian et al., 2017; Huete-Alcocer, 2017).

   The eWOM evolution. In 1982, Faberge launched a commercial for its Organics shampoo featuring actress Heather Locklear, whose cleverly scripted product endorsement sums up the holistic process of WOM: "I told two friends about it, and they told two friends, and so on, and so on, and so on" (TheRetroTimeMachine, 2013). What the advertisement did not mention is that product dissatisfaction tends to spread at a much more rapid pace than two acquaintances at a time (Stauss, 1997). With the dawn of eWOM, Stauss (1997) forewarned that the casual, face-to-face conversations symbolic of traditional WOM would be amplified exponentially. Dissatisfied consumers would take to the web and share the good, bad, and the ugly of products and services via eWOM. Complaints, which were traditionally heard in the isolation of a phone call, letter, or in-store interaction, would now be subject to global awareness beyond the limits of an organization's four walls (Litvin et al., 2018; Sparks & Browning, 2010).

   Building upon Stauss' (1997) early observations, eWOM can be described as an individual's opinion, shared with a vast audience on the Internet, which may be perceived as a credible, unbiased, independent source of information about a product, service or organization (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Singh, 2000). The process of eWOM is not merely a manifestation of the traditional WOM communicated electronically. Several nuances differentiate these two forms of message exchange (Huete-Alcocer, 2017). Huete-Alcocer (2017) posits that eWOM

differs in source credibility since some UGC comments are anonymously shared online, while WOM is commonly an interpersonal exchange with a friend, colleague or family. Although eWOM can be communicated in real time through private messages, similarly to WOM, eWOM can also appear as written text or videos available for public viewing on demand (Huete-Alcocer, 2017). As alluded to in the Organics shampoo commercial, traditional WOM is a mechanism for passing information between a small group of people, which over time, may reach the masses. A review posted on social media, on the other hand, has the capability to reach millions in a matter of seconds, depending on the platform (Huete-Alcocer, 2017). Moreover, WOM requires an effort to reach out or meet up with designated individuals to share information, whereas eWOM is as simple as posting a comment (Huete-Alcocer, 2017). As such, spontaneous WOM conversations, which may once have been fleeting in people's memory, are now amplified through UGC in cyberspace.

The ease of social media accessibility has empowered Internet users with the capacity to promote positive experiences and events they deem personally significant using eWOM (Davis, Rountree, & Davis, 2016). Conversely, users may also post unfavorable comments grounded in individual biases or grievances (Sykora, 2011). The evolution from predominantly company-dependent information disseminated in print, television, or radio has mushroomed into vast amounts of UGC posted in the global sphere of social media, dramatically changing the discipline of advertising (Chu & Kim, 2011; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Marketers are being challenged to take advantage of the cost-effectiveness and expediency of this medium to promote goods and services, while at the same time protecting brand reputation (Sparks & Bradley, 2017). However, combatting negative eWOM is a concern some organizations are reluctant to address, possibly at their peril (Breazeale, 2009; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

eWOM source credibility. Although social media hosts an abundance of eWOM, source credibility has become an ongoing issue, most recently apparent in the allegations of Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). UGC touted as *fake news* originating in Facebook posts has been associated with the intensifying polarization of U.S. political ideology (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). Internet users with limited motivation to venture beyond their social media bubble may be particularly vulnerable in this environment (Brandtzaeg & Følstad, 2017). Internet users are still humans who will defend their beliefs, even if facts support the contrary view. Protectionism becomes amplified when opinions about controversial political and social issues are under attack. As such, Internet users tend to intermingle with other users who hold similar opinions and attitudes (Brandtzaeg & Følstad, 2017). This lack of exposure to diverse perspectives, combined with growing distrust in media around the globe, creates a perfect storm for circulating propaganda on SNS like Facebook and Twitter (Brandtzaeg & Følstad, 2017; Edelman, 2017).

In an attempt to maintain the legitimacy of SNS information and eWOM, fact-checking sites like Snopes and FactCheck have been launched to expose Internet rumors and verify truths (Brandtzaeg & Følstad, 2017). Brandtzaeg and Følstad (2017) explored the perceived usefulness and trustworthiness of Snopes and FactCheck in a content analysis of user comments posted on social media. Though the sites are regarded as useful, the researchers found that distrust in the source hindered content credibility. Negative views of the service were attributed to site transparency issues, as respondents raised questions about the financiers behind the sites and their political and social motivations. Based on their findings, Brandtzaeg and Følstad (2017) maintain that sites debunking fake news have a minimal impact on shifting personal beliefs, particularly if the discredited story aligns with the individual's opinion. Consequently, depending

on the user's societal perspective, the site which dispels the material either gains or loses user trust (Brandtzaeg & Følstad, 2017). As such, the perceived source credibility of social media platforms influences the impact of eWOM in a pattern similar to the one that Hovland and Weiss (1951) observed in their 1950s print medium experiment.

The Influence of Online Review Platforms

The OECD acknowledges that online reviews or purchasing advice regarding a product, service or interest as a distinctive category of UGC, categorized as eWOM (Vickery & Wunsch-Vincent, 2007). Internet user ability to conveniently post unsolicited opinions about company brands with just a click of a mouse on a computer, or the touch of a screen on a smartphone, has shifted the course of marketing (Davis et al., 2016; L. Moroko & Uncles, 2011). Consumers are no longer passive receivers of information, as social media permits users to post their sentiments on a global platform for others to read in real time or at their leisure (Davis et al., 2016; Rauschnabel et al., 2016). Based on site rankings and traffic, Abramyk (2018) identified the top five U.S. consumer review platforms as Google, Facebook, Amazon, Yelp, and TripAdvisor (see Table 2).

Table 2

Top Five U.S. Consumer Review Platforms

Review Site	Alexa U.S. Ranking	Type of Consumer Reviews	Avg. Monthly Unique U.S. Traffic	% of U.S. Traffic
Google	1	Any Company	158.03 million	34.30%
Facebook	3	Any Company	85.57 million	29.10%
Amazon	4	Products	85.44 million	55.40%
Yelp	52	Any Company	40.47 million	89.10%
TripAdvisor	88	Hospitality	28.27 million	53.40%

Note. Adapted from Abramyk's (2018) Alexa-reported data.

To understand and monitor the patterns of online review use, BrightLocal (2017) has been conducting an annual *Local Consumer Review Survey* since 2010. The 2017 data were gathered from 1,031 U.S. consumers who were asked about their online review habits, both posting and reading eWOM, as well as their perceptions of source credibility and their encounters with fake reviews. BrightLocal (2017) found that 93% of the respondents used local reviews to determine whether a business was worthy of patronage. The most frequently read eWOM about local establishments were associated with restaurants (60%), hotels/bed and breakfasts (40%), and healthcare services (33%). Yelp and Facebook were mentioned as the most trusted sources for consumer reviews, which supports Abramyk's (2018) findings.

Regarding the influence of eWOM on consumers' decision-making processes, BrightLocal (2017) noted that 68% of the respondents were more likely to patronize a business based on a positive review, while 40% of the respondents were discouraged from use due to negative reviews. Positive reviews were also found to be associated with reader trust in the business; 85% of the respondents reported that they trusted online reviews as much as a traditional WOM recommendation. When asked if they had ever read a fake review, nearly 80% of the respondents think they may have come across one, and 84% admitted that they had a hard time recognizing fraudulent eWOM. The BrightLocal (2017) findings demonstrate that even though eWOM on review sites may be posted under false pretenses, many users still trust these review sites.

The BrightLocal (2017) study also illustrates that those who read online reviews bestow an element of trust upon the reviewer. The perceived intent of opinion-sharing on review sites is to assist potential customers with purchasing decisions, and that appears to be what users of the medium extract from the platform. However, other motivations for sharing opinions through

eWOM may also be present. To identify what incentivizes people to post reviews on consumer-review platforms, Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) surveyed over 2000 online reviewers from Germany. The researchers determined that four types of consumer reviewers partake in eWOM: (1) users motived by self-interest, (2) users who view themselves as consumer advocates, (3) altruistic users who wish to assist the consumer and the company, and (4) users with multiple motivating factors. Economic incentives were noted as a driving factor of self-interest reviewers, who were concerned with assisting others but may also have received remuneration or earned rewards for posting. This group was the largest in the Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) study, representing 34% of the respondents. Unlike the self-interest reviewers, the consumer advocates were not motivated by monetary rewards or benefits, but only wanted to provide eWOM to assist other consumers. This group had the smallest representation (17% of the respondents). Altruists comprised 27% of the respondents, and their primary intent was to provide eWOM for the benefit of product betterment and consumer awareness. The fourth group, representing 12% of the respondents, frequently mentioned multiple reasons for publishing eWOM, including social and psychological benefits (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004).

Participation in social media reviews has become a part of daily life in the U.S. and is expanding around the world (Chen & Law, 2016). Whether consumers are seeking recommendations for a local restaurant, advice about a medical issue, or just purchasing a new pillow, online reviews offer content to assist them with decision-making. The eWOM on review platforms, though helpful to the customer, poses challenges for companies accustomed to controlling the messaging around their brand (Dabirian et al., 2017). Positive consumer feedback may be well-received, but managing negative eWOM in cyberspace, where UGC can potentially reside for eternity, requires a deliberate strategy (Ong, 2012; Sparks & Bradley, 2017). Operators

in the tour and travel industry were among the earliest beneficiaries of the Web 2.0 evolution with the emergence of applications that transformed the experiences of planning and booking a vacation (Oh, Kim, & Shin, 2004). Thus, hotel marketers become some of the first practitioners faced with addressing online reviews (Baka, 2016). This unexpected technological advancement launched tour and travel practitioners into the uncharted territory of eWOM monitoring. The following discussion around the progression of travel review sites may provide general context and insight for the future study of employer review sites.

The arrival of travel review sites. In the time B.S.M., tour and travel marketing practitioners employed tactics described as "Travel 1.0" (Minazzi, 2014, p. 3). This era of hotel advertising consisted of phone-based reservation systems as well as branding campaigns launched in key feeder markets via TV commercials, radio spots, newspaper ads, and direct mail pieces (Oh et al., 2004). Prior to arriving at their destination, visitors could only access information about hotels through brochures from travel agents or phone conversations with booking agents (Law, 2000). According to Minazzi (2014), "Travel 2.0" (p. 3) arrived with the advent of the Internet and expanded with the emergence of Web 2.0. Online functionality, making it possible for travelers to book room reservations and airline tickets without calling a travel agent or hotel reservation desk. Soon, tour and travel marketers reallocated their advertising mix, substituting website banner ads for TV commercials, SNS content for newspaper ads, and email for printed, direct mail (Ong, 2012). Travel 2.0 also gave rise to Online Talent Agents (OTAs) such as Expedia and Travelocity, which offer user-friendly vacation planning and booking along with global distribution of the product (Law, 2000; Law & Chen, 2000).

Customer convenience and marketing efficiencies were hallmarks of the early OTAs until the launch of TripAdvisor in 2000, when the travel review option was unveiled (TripAdvisor, 2018). TripAdvisor was one of the first travel review sites that permitted vacationers to share and review vacation destinations without having booked or purchased a hotel through the site; this led to claims of fraudulent posts (Bjørkelund, Burnett, & Nørvåg, 2012; O'Connor, 2010). Nearly 20 years since its launch, the TripAdvisor business model remains a success; the site is ranked among the top 100 websites in the world, and it has become the most researched eWOM platform in the hospitality industry (Abramyk, 2018; Bjørkelund et al., 2012; Chen & Law, 2016). As a resource for potential vacationers, travel review sites support three phases of travel planning: (1) the pre-trip anticipatory phase of researching, evaluating and purchasing, (2) the experiential phase of consumption which occurs during the trip, and (3) the post-trip reflective stage (Minazzi, 2014). In each step of the process, eWOM is reviewed or exchanged, making these sites a significant source of influence on multiple stages of vacation-planning behavior (Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008; Litvin et al., 2018).

Managing travel review sites. Operators in the tourism industry may have a love-hate relationship with travel review sites (Baka, 2016). On the one hand, the platforms offer global distribution of travel products and services; on the other hand, eWOM can damage brand reputation. The launch of travel review sites expanded hotel management practices of service recovery beyond the confines of the resort and into cyberspace (Baka, 2016). A reexamination of the process for handling guest complaints mandates customer care offline, as well as online, and tourism operators may lack proficiency in eWOM resolution (Sparks & Bradley, 2017). Social media listening, the practice of actively surveying eWOM for issues and opinions for use to

create solutions, may provide hotel management with a proactive tool for addressing these challenges (Aureli & Supino, 2017; D. Jackson, 2016).

When service or product failures are shared via eWOM, the manner in which the issue is addressed may impact the organizational brand (Kusumasondjaja et al., 2012). As such, the collaboration between property operations and marketing is essential for managing eWOM (Sparks & Bradley, 2017). Missing an opportunity to resolve eWOM complaints may put a hotel's reputation at risk. And if operators in the tourism industry leave their online reputation to chance, then it becomes possible that online users armed with eWOM will create a reputation for them (Litvin et al., 2018). Creating and sustaining a positive brand presence is a function of hotel management and marketing. However, the resort employees might also be enlisted in the process, as they are the people who deliver the vacation experience.

The arrival of employer review sites. It may seem somewhat unsurprising that the founders of one of the most frequently viewed employer review sites were also a part of Expedia's development team (Adams, 2016). Robert Hohman, Tim Besse, and Richard Barton are the creators of Glassdoor, which launched in 2008. The Glassdoor founders envisioned a platform where job-seekers could reach out to former or current employees for advice and knowledge about potential employers (Adams, 2016). The Glassdoor concept originated from an office mishap at Expedia, where payroll information was accidentally left on a public printer (A. Jackson, 2017). Wondering what would happen to the recruitment process if salary information were made public, the Glassdoor trio set out to test the idea. The concept proved to be a success, as the company was acquired by the Tokyo-based firm Recruit for a $1.2 billion cash deal in May 2018 (Barinka & Nakamura, 2018).

Following in the spirit of irony, Recruit is also the parent company of Indeed, which is the top-ranked recruitment website in the world (Alexa, 2018). Indeed was designed as an online version of employment classified ads, offering prospective employers the ability to advertise using a cost-per-click business model (Indeed, 2018b). The site, which launched in 2004, also provides salary information and employer reviews shared from previous or current staff. While Glassdoor and Indeed are the most visited employer review sites, other platforms such as Vault, Greatplacetowork, and Thejobcrowd also provide the same functionality for sharing eWOM (Alexa, 2018; Misa, 2016). Public acceptance of employer reviews is on the rise, with 45% of job-seekers factoring this source into their job decisions (Indeed, 2018a).

Critics of employer review sites challenge the source credibility of anonymous employer reviews (Ingrassia, 2017). To reduce reviewer bias, Glassdoor instituted a "Give to Get" (GTG; Marinescu et al., 2018, p. 3) policy to encourage impartiality. Site visitors are prompted to share a facet of their employment experience before they can access the full Glassdoor site. Marinescu et al. (2018) validated the practicality of the GTG policy using a Mechanical Turk experiment which revealed that employer reviews voluntarily submitted were more negative than those comments posted in the GTG scenario. As an additional safeguard, Glassdoor also employs human reviewers to assess eWOM before the content is posted on the website. Indeed, on the other hand, is strictly a volunteer submission process with no sign-in or account set-up required. Still, the popularity of both Glassdoor and Indeed lends credibility to these sites' content, and they continue to gain acceptance at a rapid pace (Ingrassia, 2017).

Managing employee WOM. WOM is more than an advertising strategy or an opinion about a product or service. A WOM exchange in an organizational context can evolve into the underlying assumptions that guide a company's culture (Buttle, 1998; Schein, 2017). Keeling et

al. (2013) coined the term "Staff Word-of-Mouth (SWOM)" (p. 89) to describe the process in which current and former employees share information about a company through interpersonal exchanges or social media platforms. Melián-González and Bulchand-Gidumal (2016) used the phrase "worker electronic word of mouth or weWOM" (p. 710) to define this same process. Potential applicants may benefit from seeking current or former employee WOM, as a company insider may provide a more realistic view of employment practices (Buttle, 1998).

Research examining the effects of WOM on job-seeker decision-making has found that external sources, like friends, family, or acquaintances, influence applicants' perceptions of source credibility (e.g, Collins & Stevens, 2002; Fisher et al., 1979), organizational attractiveness (e.g., Van Hoye & Lievens, 2005; Van Hoye & Lievens, 2007b; Van Hoye et al., 2016), company reputation (e.g., Cable & Turban, 2003; Martin, G. & Hetrick, 2009), and employer knowledge (e.g., Cable & Turban, 2001). The limited research specifically focused on employee WOM has shown that comments from current and former staff members also influence job-seekers' perceptions of employer image and reputation (Harris & Ogbonna, 2013; Keeling et al., 2013; Melián-González & Bulchand-Gidumal, 2016).

Employee WOM is not only a primary resource for recruitment endorsement; worker sentiment may also be a predictor of a company's financial outcomes (Green et al., 2017). To investigate if online employer ratings correlate with stock market performance, Green et al. (2017) conducted a data analysis using one million Glassdoor reviews from nearly 4,000 companies. The researchers compared quarterly shifts in employer ratings to fluctuations in the company stock price. The results revealed that changes in overall employer ratings predicted the rise or fall of company market value one quarter ahead of earnings announcements. Current employee eWOM was the most significant predictor of market shifts, particularly if the

individuals who posted the reviews worked in the same location as the corporate office. Reviews mentioning growth opportunities within the company (or lack thereof) along with sentiment toward senior management were the critical employment attributes associated with the noted change (Green et al., 2017). These findings support Glassdoor's contention that businesses which attain a position on their "Best Places to Work" list outperform S & P 500 companies, while the lowest-rated companies on the site generally underperform (Chamberlain, 2015).

Company leaders may prefer to limit their company's public exposure to employee WOM, but technological innovations like employer review platforms have advanced the voice of the workforce beyond the walls of the workplace (Harris & Ogbonna, 2013; Melián-González & Bulchand-Gidumal, 2016). In addition, employees who work on the front line of service-industry companies like hotels have ample opportunities to spread WOM offline (Keeling et al., 2013). These employees can impart information about working conditions directly to guests or job-seekers who interact with them. As such, managing employee WOM both offline and online entails cross-functional collaboration between disciplines, as demonstrated in the monitoring of online travel reviews (Keeling et al., 2013). Marketing and HR coordination of employment policies and practices, along with internal communication, may alleviate the need for reactionary measures to address negative employer comments (Harris & Ogbonna, 2013).

Like the hotel marketers' encounter with online reviews, HR practitioners are now faced with protecting the employer brand, as represented in eWOM on employer review sites. While sites like Glassdoor and Indeed provide services for posting job openings and company information, the sites have also given employees a voice for sharing opinions on employment practices. By relying on Glassdoor and Indeed for recruitment purposes only, HR practitioners overlook the value of the vast amount of data from current and former employees, which could

improve company performance and working conditions (Tanwar & Prasad, 2017). Engaging in social media listening on employer review sites, HR practitioners sustain the employer-brand promise while preserving employer brand in the global marketplace (Stauss, 1997).

The Strategy of Employer Branding

Much of the employer-branding literature has focused on the organizational need to attract talent (Backhaus, 2016). Companies enact employer-branding strategies to create a positive image in the minds of prospective employees (Anitha & Madhavkumar, 2012; Ewing et al., 2002). These HRM tactics are similar to consumer marketing campaigns deployed to build brand awareness while differentiating a product from its competitors (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). The reach of employer branding campaigns can go beyond enticing external job candidates if these programs are also utilized to sustain the internal employer-brand image (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) cite a three-step HR model for launching successful employer-branding programs. First, an employer value proposition (EVP) is established to represent the organization's commitment to its employees and the relevant expected behaviors of staff and management (Robertson & Khatibi, 2012). The EVP then becomes the "recruitment value proposition" (Gowan, 2004, p. 688) for enticing future employees away from competitors. The final step is communicating the EVP through internal marketing as a central tenet of the company culture. The goal in this phase is to gain employee buy-in on the organization's goals and values (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

Employer branding has a direct effect on employer brand, particularly if the espoused EVP aligns with the actual employment experience (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Robertson and Khatibi (2012) state that employers who deliver on the EVP tend to advocate for a strong employer-branding campaign to sustain the internal and external employment image. However,

failure to deliver on the EVP is seen as a break in the psychological contract between an organization and its current employees (Mark & Toelken, 2009). Consistency in employment practices is essential for maintaining the employer brand (D. A. Aaker, 1991; Backhaus, 2016). Even if a company positions itself in advertising as an "employer of choice," that statement may not reflect the actual sentiment of the workforce. Instead, the claim may simply be a positioning statement that reflects an attempt to distinguish the organization from its competitors (D. A. Aaker, 1991).

To alleviate the potential disconnection between the cultural assumptions of management and those of employees, Martin and Hetrick (2009) suggest that the process of crafting an EVP should include collaborative input from all levels of the organization. This concept of a collective EVP may be promising in theory, but it presents practical challenges in large, hierarchical companies (Tumasjan, Strobel, & Welpe, 2011). While it is customary for most organizations to cascade leadership-developed values from the top down, a more inclusive method incorporating bottom-up feedback delivers an authentic EVP rather than a marketing image (Aggerholm, Anderson, & Thomsen, 2011; Elving, Westhoff, Meeusen, & Schoonderbeek, 2013; Martin & Hetrick, 2009). Another benefit of this bottom-up approach is that an agreed-upon and realistic EVP leaves no chance for misinterpretation of the employment experience among job-seekers or current staff members, thereby reducing turnover (Van Hoye et al., 2016; Wilden et al., 2010).

Employer branding has been linked to increased organizational attractiveness in the recruitment process as well as fostering trust, loyalty, and engagement among current employees (Backhaus, 2016; Martin, Graeme, Gollan, & Grigg, 2011; Saini, Rai, & Chaudhary, 2014). Yet organizations are not typically required to establish or fulfill an EVP, or to execute an employer-

brand strategy (Robertson & Khatibi, 2012). Organizations which refrain from employer branding rely heavily on images of the company product or service as the differentiating factor in recruitment (Robertson & Khatibi, 2012). Thus, job-seekers will use consumer associations with the business function to fill in the gap for missing employment information. As such, some organizations choose company branding instead of employer branding to support recruitment and retention messaging (Robertson & Khatibi, 2012). However, this strategy may pose increased risks in the digital age, since sources like eWOM and SNS are also available to stand in for unavailable company-sponsored content (Wallace, Lings, Cameron, & Sheldon, 2014). UGC then becomes the unfiltered, external representation of the employer brand (Backhaus, 2016).

The global view of employer branding. The international marketplace has advanced the need for multi-national organizations to attract global talent (Froese, Vo, & Garrett, 2010; Lemmink, Schuijf, & Streukens, 2003; Martin et al., 2011). As such, research investigating the effectiveness of employer branding has expanded beyond domestically focused examinations of U.S. corporations (Backhaus, 2016; Martin, G. & Hetrick, 2009). Studies exploring facets of employer branding have been conducted in countries around the world, including Brazil (e.g., Reis & Braga, 2016), Canada (e.g., Fréchette, Bourhis, & Stachura, 2013), China (e.g., Jiang & Iles, 2011), India (e.g., Jain & Bhatt, 2015), the Netherlands (e.g., Lemmink et al., 2003), Saudi Arabia (e.g., Alshathry, O' Donohue, Wickham, & Fishwick, 2014), and even the small island nation of Mauritius (Maheshwari, Gunesh, Lodorfos, & Konstantopoulou, 2017). Although each of these studies offers a glimpse into employer attraction and image from a variety of cultural standpoints, the research was limited to a domestic perspective; that is, recruits and employees were citizens of the nation where the organization under study was located.

To understand how cultural differences impact the employer brand of multinational organizations with subsidiaries outside their country of origin, Froese et al. (2010) examined Vietnamese perceptions of U.S. and Japanese employer benefits. Three hundred students attending an esteemed university in Vietnam were asked to rate their level of employment interest based on information regarding the two foreign companies and one domestic business located in Vietnam. The findings revealed that an organization's country of origin influenced job-seeker attraction. More specifically, the students were more attracted to potential jobs at the U.S. and Japanese companies than the Vietnamese organizations, in part because of their perceptions of career advancement and technology development (Froese et al., 2010).

Baum and Kabst (2013) conducted a multinational investigation of employer brand using a sample of over 1000 college engineering students gathered from universities located in China, Germany, Hungary, and India. The results showed that student country of origin is a moderator of personal value placed on employer-brand benefits. Students from India ranked work/life balance as a high priority in employer selection, while students from Hungary and China did not rate this benefit as highly. The tasks included in the job were more important to the German and Indian students than to the Chinese and Hungarian students. The rate of pay, which was the lowest-ranked employer benefit from all four groups, was more important to the students from Hungary than to the others. Work environment and career advancement were equally important among all four nationalities (Baum & Kabst, 2013).

Employee Branding Theoretical Perspectives

The first published research centered on employer branding appeared in business and management journals in the early 1990s (Theurer et al., 2016). After an extensive review of employer-branding literature, Theurer et al., (2016) found just three peer-reviewed articles

available for reference between 1990 and 1995, with each article focused on the influence of corporate image and recruitment (e.g., Gatewood, Gowan, & Lautenschlager, 1993; Turban, Eyring, & Campion, 1993; Turban & Keon, 1993). By the turn of the century, only six additional articles had been published; then the number began to rise rapidly in the early 2000s. By July 2015, 187 employer-branding articles had been published in English in peer-reviewed journals and were included in the Theurer et al. (2016) analysis.

Employer branding was founded on marketing principles; thus, the field is inherently interdisciplinary. Research on employer branding has been published in top-level journals related to applied psychology, business, economics, hospitality, labor relations, management, nursing, sports, and travel and leisure (Theurer et al., 2016). According to Theurer et al.'s (2016) research, the subjects of employer-branding research have been predominantly job-seekers, with 60% of the studies linked to recruitment strategies. Only 7% of the studies focus solely on current employee perceptions of employer branding, while 33% examine a combination of current and potential employees (Theurer et al., 2016). Additionally, employer-branding studies have been predominantly quantitative (65%), followed by conceptual (22%) and qualitative (13%) methods. Furthermore, Theurer et al. (2016) identified nearly 30 different theories or frameworks chosen to explore employer branding. While the underpinning framework of this study is brand equity theory (e.g., D. A. Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993), three additional theories are relevant to the research: (1) social identity theory (e.g., Tajfel, 1974), (2) signaling theory (e.g., Rynes et al., 1991; Spence, 1973), and (3) the instrumental-symbolic framework (e.g., Lievens & Highhouse, 2003).

Brand equity theory. This study applies the employer-brand concept which Ambler and Barrow (1996) introduced over 20 years ago as an HRM strategy grounded in the consumer-

brand equity theories of Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993). A consumer brand is a differentiator between a product and its competitors (D. A. Aaker, 1991). A brand includes signals such as a name, logo, or design which conveys the originality of the good or service in relation to other versions of the same product. Brand image lives in the mind of the consumer as a memory of associations with the product features, benefits, and overall appraisal (Keller, 1993). According to Keller (1993), brand benefits are attributes which meet the functional, emotional, and social needs of the consumer. Ambler and Barrow (1996) posit that these attributes parallel the benefits in the employer-brand concept, thus establishing the idea of interdisciplinary collaboration between marketing and HRM.

Ambler and Barrow (1996) suggest that just as consumers purchase a product based on brand expectations, employees join an organization for the employer-brand benefits (Moroko & Uncles, 2008). The researchers define employer-brand benefits "as the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment and identified with the employing company" (Ambler & Barrow, 1996, p. 187). Functional benefits encompass workplace opportunities for development as well as other activities deemed useful for personal growth. Economic benefits encompass financial rewards or other forms of material compensation. A sense of purpose or belonging within the company furnishes psychological benefits. The fulfillment of each benefit, at the level desired by the employee, contributes to the employer brand (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). Thus, the employer-brand image is the employee's perspective of the workplace environment (Moroko & Uncles, 2008; Theurer et al., 2016).

Along with employer brand comes equity, an intangible asset developed from employees' familiarity with policies, procedures, and the overall job experience (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). Employer equity is the outcome of HR programs, and it is measured in employee opinion and

feedback. Like consumer-brand equity, this value can increase or decline depending on the actions of the organization and employer knowledge (Keller, 1993). Cable and Turban (2001) describe employer knowledge as a job-seeker's familiarity with a company's image and reputation. Based on employer knowledge, a potential employee forms a sense of organizational attractiveness and develops an interest in joining the company. As such, sustaining and maintaining employer equity is an on-going process of reassessment to avoid damage (D. A. Aaker, 1991). Challenges can occur in organizations with a culture of efficiency, as the pressure to meet financial goals may outweigh the need to nurture the human capital, impacting the employer-brand equity (D. A. Aaker, 1991). Problems also may arise in companies that primarily focus on consumer or corporate branding initiatives, with limited emphasis on the employer brand (Tüzüner & Yüksel, 2009).

Some critics of the employer-brand concept have voiced concern that the model overlaps with existing organizational theories related to culture, reputation, or internal marketing (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). Theurer et al. (2016) also acknowledge that conflicting definitions exist for terms like employer brand and employer image, and this ambiguous terminology can lead to inconsistent research comparisons (Cable & Turban, 2001; Linn & Kenning, 2014; Martin & Hetrick, 2009). However, Ambler and Barrow (1996) suggest that the concepts remain distinct in their intention, even if they do overlap in some ways. Organizational culture consists of values and beliefs that guide company actions and decisions (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Schein, 2017). Company reputation refers to the perception of individuals who are external to the organization, such as customers or potential employees (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990). Inherent to the organizational cycle, culture and reputation are byproducts of company existence and will mature regardless of management attention (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). Internal marketing is the

process of sharing the espoused company values and beliefs with the employees to encourage conformity to expected behaviors (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Schein, 2017). Thus, employer brand is the employee's perspective on the culture and employer-brand benefits which affect employee satisfaction.

Employee satisfaction. Employee satisfaction has been a topic of academic study for over 100 years, from Eberle's (1919) essay on labor turnover to Hamelink and Opdenakker's (2019) forthcoming research proposing a business framework for an energy storage plant that includes improving employee performance. However, the most well-known study in employee satisfaction was conducted in the late 1920s to early 1930s, when Roethlisberger and Dickson (1924) set out to understand how lighting impacted worker productivity in a Hawthorne electrical plant. These researchers incidentally uncovered the field of human relations and the power of attitudes and management behavior to affect job satisfaction. Thirty years after the Hawthorne Experiments, Herzberg et al. (1959) sought to investigate employees' motives, developing what the researchers termed the motivation-hygiene theory or the two-factor theory.

The motivation-hygiene theory posits that employees find satisfaction in the areas of employment intrinsic to the position, such as job responsibilities, growth and development opportunities, and personal recognition or achievement (Herzberg et al., 1959). Herzberg et al. (1959) identified these employment attributes as motivating factors associated with job satisfaction and engagement. Aspects of employment related to hygiene factors include pay, work environment, policies and procedures, co-workers, and management (Herzberg et al., 1959). Herzberg et al. (1959) suggested that hygiene factors prevent dissatisfaction but do not motivate increased satisfaction. More simply put, if employees perceive that workplace hygiene factors are inadequate or absent, then they will become be less motivated, and long-term

satisfaction may become unattainable. As such, the researchers categorized motivating factors as satisfiers and hygiene factors as dis-satisfiers.

Locke (1969), one of the many critics of Herzberg et al.'s (1959) research, argues that the two-factor theory fails to consider the complexity of human nature and differences in personal values. For example, one individual may be significantly motivated by a steady paycheck but have no interest in personal development, recognition, or promotional opportunities, contrary to Herzberg et al.'s (1959) theory. Similarly, another individual may make an excellent salary but feel underutilized or unappreciated, and, consequently, unmotivated. This scenario would also challenge Herzberg et al.'s (1959) concept. Despite these critiques, the motivation-hygiene theory remains a frequently cited model in customer (e.g., X. Xu & Li, 2016) and employee (e.g., Dabirian et al., 2017) satisfaction research (Matzler & Renzl, 2007). However, brand equity theory and the concept of employer-brand benefits may provide an alternative perspective for job satisfiers and dissatisfiers (Ambler & Barrow, 1996).

Employer-brand benefits. Comparable to Herzberg et al.'s (1959) motivation and hygiene factors, Ambler and Barrow (1996) propose that a combination of functional, economic, and psychological benefits contributes to employee satisfaction. These three benefits represent the complete employment experience as constructed through the opinions of current and former employees (Gardner, Erhardt, & Martin-Rios, 2011). The internal workplace stakeholders use firsthand employer knowledge to create the employer image, which they can subsequently share with potential applicants (Priyadarshi, 2011). With the potential for employees to become the de facto employer ambassadors, employers now face a need to audit their employer brand (Charbonnier-Voirin, Poujol, & Vignolles, 2017). Yet research on the influence of employer-brand benefits on employee satisfaction is minimal (Theurer et al., 2016). Nor do clear

classifications of employer-brand benefits exist, i.e., what constitutes a functional benefit versus an economic benefit versus a psychological benefit (Kucherov & Zavyalova, 2012). Moreover, previous research attempting to clarify employer-brand benefits has mostly relied on samples of student job-seekers (Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005).

To distinguish the employer-brand benefits from the viewpoint of existing employees, Tanwar and Prasad (2017) pursued the development and validation of an employer-brand scale. The researchers applied a three-step process to create the assessment. Step 1 entailed a combination of inductive and deductive investigating, which included interviews with 60 employees from three IT firms in India. A content analysis of the interview transcripts was conducted, and 14 themes were coded to one of the three employer-brand benefits identified by Ambler and Barrow (1996): functional (7), psychological (5), and economic (2). Tanwar and Prasad (2017) then relied on previous employer-branding research to generate additional employer-brand factors. Step 2 entailed a survey review conducted with a group of 14 experts comprising both academics and practitioners, who narrowed the assessment to 33 questions. In the final phase, the final 33-item survey was deployed, and the data from 654 IT employees were analyzed (Tanwar & Prasad, 2017).

Tanwar and Prasad's (2017) findings reveal that IT employees from India value the following five employer benefits in order of influence; (1) positive work environment, (2) career development, (3) work/life balance, (4) corporate social responsibility (CSR) and ethical behavior, and (5) pay and benefits. The results of Tanwar and Prasad's (2017) study align with Ambler and Barrow's (1996) theory in that career development, CSR, and ethical behavior are categorized as functional benefits; positive work environment and work/life balance constitute psychological benefits; and pay and benefits constitute economic benefits. As such, Tanwar and

Prasad (2017) argue that their employer-brand scale provides a more realistic view of what motivates employees than Berthon et al.'s (2005) employer attraction scale, which was designed using a college student sample.

Employer-brand benefits: the service industry. Attracting top talent with the customer service skills to cultivate brand loyalty is essential in the service industry (Knox & Freeman, 2006). The interpersonal interactions between consumer and employee can be a differentiating factor contributing to brand loyalty (Mosley, 2007). As such, managing a *guest service* brand is likely to be more complicated than managing an *item* brand. Mosley (2007) maintains that customer service companies are somewhat reluctant to participate in employer branding due to the complexities of simply monitoring the company brand. For example, in a hotel environment, the guest service experience has many touchpoints. i.e., the booking agent (if not using a website), valet parking, check-in, room service, housekeeping, food and beverage outlets, pools and spa services, and retail shops. Each one of these resort functions entails some form of human interaction. The challenge of ensuring that every guest encounter is a positive one becomes exacerbated by the number of hotel visitors and the number of services offered. In a hotel on the Las Vegas Strip—where a property like The Signature has over 1,000 rooms and MGM Grand nearly 5,000 rooms, and visitation is in the millions annually—the odds of guest-service failure increase significantly (LVCVA, 2018).

Mosley (2007) suggests that service organizations should capitalize on the research which indicates that satisfied employees lead to satisfied guests (Heskett et al., 1997; Prentice, Wong, & Lam, 2017). The researcher also cautions that if company-espoused service standards are practices reserved for customers only, and management treatment of employees is in opposition to those standards, then guest interactions will lose authenticity and become just a

show for the guests. As such, employer branding in the service industry requires a realistic EVP that aligns with service expectations in order to nurture reciprocal satisfaction among guests and employees (King & Grace, 2009). Conducting frequent employer image audits to determine whether employee expectations are being met or exceeded, along with adjusting employer-brand benefits based on employee feedback, are two ways for a service industry company to cultivate a distinctive culture that sets it apart from rivals (Priyadarshi, 2011).

Social identity theory. At a young age, humans begin to seek group membership, and the advent of social media made finding a tribe much easier (Valkenburg, Peter, & Schouten, 2006). An individual's instinct for group affiliation stems from a personal desire to establish and maintain a positive self-image (Tajfel, 1974). Tajfel (1974) posits that an individual's sense of self-worth is constructed from interpersonal relationships, which form social identity: a compilation of group memberships contributing to self-perception. The emotional connection derived from group affiliation can be a positive experience leading to further attachment to other people or groups with similar alliances (Tajfel, 1974). However, if the individual becomes disenchanted with the group and it no longer represents a preferred image, then that individual may leave the group.

Tajfel (1974) points out that separating from a group is not always easy if an individual's social and emotional needs can only be met through continued participation. For example, if a member is cognizant of undesirable aspects of the group and has the free will to leave it without harm but voluntarily chooses to stay, then the member may deliberately reframe the objectionable behavior in order to justify remaining (Tajfel, 1974). A dissatisfied member may also opt to stay in a group in hopes of inspiring change while maintaining their social identity (Tajfel, 1974). According to Tajfel (1974), once an individual begins challenging group

behavior, then chances are the person's self-image is no longer being adequately fulfilled. Thus, the individual will seek new affiliations that match his or her social identity, thereby increasing personal satisfaction (Tajfel, 1974).

Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) suggest that social identity theory can be applied to consumer behavior. Ownership of a product, like a specific make of automobile, a brand of shoe, or type of smartphone, becomes a status symbol invoking feelings of group membership. Similarly, institutional affiliations may also increase self-image. A student who applies to an Ivy League college may do so in order to form a prestigious social identity. For persons seeking social identity online, almost any Internet user can join or create a chat room, blog, virtual community, platform page, website, or app to host conversations and share information about specific interests or concerns (Breazeale, 2009). Likewise, job-seekers may be attracted to organizations based on the social identity of an employer's brand and the prestige associated with the being part of the company (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Highhouse, Thornbury, & Little, 2007; Love & Singh, 2011). Accordingly, Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), Highhouse et al. (2007), and Love and Singh (2011) have proposed social identity theory as a framework for exploring employer branding and organizational attractiveness in the recruitment process.

Applying social identity theory to employee retention, Maxwell and Knox (2009) presented a comparative case study of five U.K. organizations. The companies represented a variety of industries and provided a total of 69 employee responses to questions regarding employer brand. The findings revealed that employer-brand attributes were not consistent among the varied organizations. However, the researchers posit that employees may seek to align their views of the company with those held by external stakeholders who share similar demographics or beliefs. In their analysis of employer branding, Biswas and Suar (2016) noted that employees

who take pride in their organization are more likely to remain with the group, while those who no longer perceive the company as prestigious may leave. This observation may lead to Tajfel's (1974) group-desertion premise, in which some employees may disengage mentally from a company even though they physically remain on the job. They can choose to remain "in the group" upon considering the financial consequences of employment versus unemployment.

   Signaling theory. In a thesis outlining the concept of signaling theory, Spence (1973) compares organizational hiring practices to playing the lottery: the employer puts its money on a new employee, hoping that the bet will pay off. Spence (1973) explains that the willingness to invest in a candidate is based on the signals the employer receives from the applicant. Individual attributes like previous employment, education level, and personal appearance are signs that employers may take into consideration, either consciously or unconsciously, during the hiring process. The applicant transmits these messages, knowingly or unknowingly, to obtain a job. However, sometimes the signals can be misread, the employee was not what the employer expected (or vice versa), and the two part ways.

   Rynes et al. (1991) explored signaling theory from the viewpoint of the job-seeker, analyzing the signs transmitted from prospective employers during the recruitment process. In a longitudinal study on job selection, the researchers interviewed 41 graduating college students to understand which employer characteristics applicants regard as signals that a company is a good fit for them. The findings revealed that recruitment activities like on-campus interviews or tours of the potential workplace can send a strong message depending on who is representing the organization. For example, if a recruiter showed up unprepared or appeared unprofessional, then the students interpreted those characteristics as amateurish and saw them as signals that the employer was not a good fit. On the other hand, if the recruiter was a non-HR representative with

expertise similar to that of the students (e.g., an IT employee comes to speak to IT students), then the employer was seen as sending a high signal of a good fit (Rynes et al., 1991). Thus, the intentional and unintentional messages that employers convey can impact the employer brand during recruitment (Martin et al., 2011; Wallace et al., 2014; Wilden et al., 2010).

A signal's credibility increases with repeated exposure. Thus, the more times a signal reoccurs, the more likely the message is accurate (Dineen & Allen, 2016; Spence, 1973). Dineen and Allen (2016) refer to repetitive exposure as the "crystallization effect" (p. 95), in which the information communicated is validated with each new encounter. In the context of employer review sites, signaling theory would suggest that eWOM from current and former employees is a sign representing the employment experience. Potential employees who reference these platforms before applying for a job will draw conclusions about the company before they make a decision (Indeed, 2018a). Job-seekers will assume that employee eWOM is credible, and any reoccurring themes referencing employer-brand benefits, whether positive or negative, will be interpreted as symbolic of the organization (Kluemper et al., 2016). Employee eWOM may also be a signal from employees to the organization concerning the condition of the company culture.

Instrumental-symbolic framework. The instrumental-symbolic framework has roots in the psychology of self-image and consumer marketing interpretations of brand attraction (Katz, 1960; Keller, 1993). This model supposes that consumer behavior is motivated by whether or not a product or service meets the instrumental or symbolic needs of the buyer (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). Instrumental attributes are associated with the tangible aspects of the item that provide the consumer with functional rewards (Katz, 1960; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). Symbolic attributes are intangible qualities of a product that bring emotional satisfaction, contributing to one's social identity (Keller, 1993; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). For example,

smartphones have become a household item in the U.S. since the Apple iPhone launched in 2007 (Apple, 2007). Consumer enthusiasm for this product may have been driven by the instrumental aspects of the product (i.e., the sleek design with voicemail, email, and text messaging applications, bundled with a built-in camera). Others may have appreciated the iPhone's breakthrough technology, but the symbolic image, or social status, associated with Apple ownership might have been equally as enticing for them.

J. Aaker (1997) stated that symbolic attributes also represent "the set of human characteristics associated with a brand" (p. 347). In an exploratory study to identify brand personalities, J. Aaker (1997) surveyed 613 consumers and found that products symbolized five features: (1) Sincerity – e.g., Kleenex Tissue, (2) Excitement – e.g., Go Pro Camera, (3) Competence – e.g., Allstate Insurance, (4) Sophistication – e.g., BMW, and (5) Ruggedness – e.g., Ford Trucks. Aaker (1997) argues that three of the five brand personalities closely align to three of the five factors of human personality; (1) Neuroticism, (2) Extroversion, (3) Openness, (4) Agreeableness, and (5) Conscientiousness (Costa & McCrae, 1992). J. Aaker's (1997) findings suggest that Sincerity is associated with honesty and wholesomeness, which is similar to Costa and McCrae's (1992) assessment of Agreeableness being modest and tender. The brand image Excitement aligns with an individual's Extroversion, as brand Competence aligns with a person's Conscientiousness (J. Aaker, 1997; Costa & McCrae, 1992). As such, brands perceived as sincere, exciting, and competent connect with innate human characteristics, whereas images of Ruggedness and Sophistication represent the aspirational desires of the consumer (Aaker, J., 1997).

While Ambler and Barrow (1996) theorize that employer-brand benefits consist of functional, economical, and psychological factors, Lievens and Highhouse (2003) offer a similar

instrumental-symbolic framework for analysis. Lievens and Highhouse (2003) postulate that like products, organizations have an image comprising tangible and intangible assets which appeal to job-seekers. Instrumental attributes are associated with concrete job features such as wages, benefits, job responsibilities, promotional opportunities, and job security. Symbolic attributes are aligned with applicant perceptions of the organizational traits, e.g., prestigious, innovative, competent, sincere, or robust (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). Thus, an organization's level of appeal may be based on its inherent job features as well as its personified traits.

In the study of employer branding, the instrumental-symbolic framework has shown to be a practical model for interpreting employer knowledge (Theurer et al., 2016). The concept has been used to examine organizational attractiveness among student recruits, potential applicants and their close acquaintances, and employees (e.g., Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Lievens, Van Hoye, & Schreurs, 2005; Van Hoye & Saks, 2011), organizational identity and employer image amid job applicants and employees (e.g., Lievens, Van Hoye, & Anseel, 2007; Van Hoye, 2008), and employer-brand perceptions of potential and actual job applicants, along with employees (Lievens, 2007).

In summarizing the employer-branding research that utilizes the instrumental-symbolic framework, Van Hoye and Saks (2011) state that perceptions of employer image do influence organizational attraction among job-seekers and employees, yet this attraction varies by individual and group; what attracts one person may not attract another. Additionally, while job features such as pay and benefits are important to both applicants and employees, the symbolic attributes associated the organizational image may be an especially salient motivation during the early recruitment process (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Van Hoye & Saks, 2011). The employment

features which factor into self-image and social identity may be the same factors that differentiate one employer from another (Backhaus, 2016).

The instrumental-symbolic model closely aligns with the employer-brand concept. Specifically, the instrumental benefits are comparable to Ambler and Barrow's (1996) functional (promotions), economic (wages) and psychological (job security) benefits. The symbolic or humanistic traits associated with a company or brand are traditionally captured using a trait inference scale with a prompt such as, "If I were to consider the Belgian Defense as a person, I would describe it as…" (Van Hoye & Saks, 2011, p. 321). Research on the influence of symbolic attributes and employee retention and satisfaction is scant and will be explored in this study.

Summary

The evolution from WOM exchanged in face-to-face interactions to eWOM shared on SNS with millions has created a sense of urgency for organizational leaders who are responsible for managing company brands (Bradley, Sparks, & Weber, 2016). Marketing practitioners must address potential online threats to the corporate brand, while HR practitioners are challenged to maintain the employer brand. As with consumer complaints, employee grievances can be aired on global forums with possible adverse effects on the company recruitment strategies (Keeling et al., 2013). An understanding of the employer-brand benefits which contribute to employee satisfaction may assist HRM and marketing with maintaining a positive reputation on employer review websites.

The employer-branding literature reveals that researchers have primarily focused on employer brand from a recruitment perspective, with a limited amount of studies focusing on current employees' viewpoints (Theurer et al., 2016) The literature also highlights the need to develop a more thorough understanding of the attributes which define an employer-brand benefit

(Ewing et al., 2002). The studies reviewed demonstrate the need for future research regarding how employer-brand benefits are linked to employee satisfaction.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter details the methodology to address the purpose and research questions guiding this study. HRM practitioners, along with marketing professionals, are generally responsible for developing and implementing internal and external employer-brand strategies (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). While external employer-branding campaigns are designed to attract potential applicants, internal employer branding serves to establish the employer value proposition (Gowan, 2004; Martin et al., 2011; Mokina, 2014). Common aspects of both forms of employer branding are the dissemination of messages through a company-controlled source (Theurer et al., 2016; Van Hoye & Lievens, 2009). Conversely, the launch of social media platforms hosting employer reviews has opened a communication channel independent of company regulation. Employees can freely express opinions online about workplace practices. Thus, managing employer brands online presents a challenge for HRM and marketing professionals (Knox & Freeman, 2006).

Research indicates that the practice of social media listening can afford HRM practitioners an opportunity to audit the employer brand from a source outside of the company (Biswas & Suar, 2013; Lievens & Highhouse, 2006). Content-rich social media platforms like Glassdoor and Indeed may provide valuable employee feedback which no company-sponsored survey can acquire (Ingrassia, 2017). With the intention to embrace social media listening as a progressive tool for assessing employer-brand, the researcher of this study utilized the content on employer-review sites as a potential source for illuminating workplace challenges and successes (Dabirian et al., 2017). The researcher pursued the advancement of the employer-brand equity

theory and the significance of employer-brand benefits through a content analysis of eWOM

posted on the employer-review pages of four Las Vegas hotel/casino resort corporations.

Restatement of Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to understand how employees perceive their workplace

experience and which employer-brand benefits contribute to their satisfaction and dissatisfaction

with employment, as expressed through employer ratings. Two research questions guide this

study:

1. Which employer-brand benefits, if any, cited in the employer reviews of hotel/casino
   resorts are most frequently associated with positive and negative employee
   sentiment?

2. What is the relationship between employer benefits (e.g., functional, psychological,
   and economical) and the overall employee rating given by the reviewer?

Description of the Research Methodology

Creswell (2013) noted that "a phenomenological study describes the common meaning

for several individuals of the lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon" (p. 76). In this

study, the researcher applied a psychological phenomenological approach to understand the

shared experiences of current and former Las Vegas hotel/casino resort employees who had

collectively expressed thousands of positive and negative sentiments on two social networks

(Moustakas, 1994). According to Moustakas (1994), the procedure for conducting a

psychological phenomenology necessitates a defined "phenomenon of interest" (Creswell, 2013,

p. 81). The researcher defined the phenomenon under consideration as employee perceptions of

their workplace experience. Moustakas' (1994) guidelines also suggest that the researcher

complete the "epoche process" (p. 22) which employs a greater emphasis on the subjects'

experiences, as opposed to the researcher's preconceptions. Following the epoche process, the researcher prepared to suspend personal judgment and interpret the outcomes solely based on the data—that is, based on eWOM comments about employment experiences. The researcher was intent on setting aside her personal biases, with the understanding that complete impartiality is seldom achieved (Creswell, 2013).

Although the researcher desired to remain impartial, she inherently brought philosophical assumptions to the research which had been imparted to her through a lifetime of learning and experience (Creswell, 2013). Through a process of self-discovery, the researcher sought to ascertain the paradigms which guide her research decisions. The researcher tends to approach qualitative research following logical steps, careful analysis, and the amalgamation of diverse perspectives (Creswell, 2013). She is also inclined to favor quantitative methods as a process of inquiry, relying on deductive, empirical evaluation (Creswell, 2013). As such, the researcher concluded that her philosophical paradigm for this study would be guided by the post-positivist interpretive framework, which Creswell (2013) describes as framing qualitative analysis through systematic and analytical procedures much like quantitative research.

From an ontological perspective, post-positivism originates in the critical realism philosophy that reality exists but will never be fully understood (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2018). Using this framework, the researcher examined employee perceptions of employer-brand benefits through an exploration of over 1,000 online comments posted on the Glassdoor and Indeed employer review sites. The vast array of opinions collected for this study confirms that the experience of working at a Las Vegas hotel/casino resort is not the same for everyone; different employees may disagree about what drives job satisfaction in this environment. Despite this diversity of opinions, employer reviews may still be relevant to HRM and marketing

practitioners pursuing employer-brand management. Although employee perspectives differ, this study was based on the premise that their collective feedback may reveal patterns, trends and widely shared views that contribute to employee satisfaction. Therefore, the positionality of the researcher was that of an objective onlooker aiming to identify which employer-brand benefits, if any, influence overall employer ratings. This positionality is consistent with the epistemological view that knowledge should not be disregarded but further scrutinized for accuracy (Lincoln et al., 2018).

Process for Selection of Data Sources

This qualitative study was a distinct variation of traditional phenomenology in that the data sources were comments posted on social media platforms, rather than in-depth interviews. The breadth of information accessible on employer-review sites provides substantial context for evaluation (Stringam & Gerdes, 2010). The process for selecting the employer-review platforms for analysis began with a search for the top employer-review platforms as identified in recruitment blogs or articles. Using media observations, the researcher narrowed the preliminary selection to the following five employer-review sites: (1) Glassdoor, (2) Greatplacetowork, (3) Indeed, (4) Vault, and (5) Thejobcrowd (Misa, 2016).

The researcher then gathered site analytics using Alexa (2018) Certified Site Metrics. The Alexa (2018) Traffic Rank, a computation derived from average daily visitor and pageview statistics, identified the popularity of the selected employer-review platforms compared to all other websites from September 2016 to May 2018 (see Figure 2). Alexa's (2018) Traffic Metrics extracted the website global and country (U.S.) rankings for July 8, 2018, which are based on popularity calculations, the percentage of global reach, and global page views. The global reach

and page view percentages are an estimate of the number of Internet users who visit the site

(reach) and view pages (page view) over a three-month period (Alexa, 2018).

The Alexa (2018) analytics revealed that Indeed had the highest U.S. ranking (50th) and

global ranking (160th) of the five employer-review platforms, with a global reach of .4% and

global page views of .02%. Glassdoor followed Indeed with the second-highest U.S ranking

(90th) and global (398th) of the group, a global reach of .16%, and global page views of .02%.

The remaining three websites under consideration were globally ranked significantly lower than

the top two sites, with percentages of global reach and page views below .001% (see Table 3).

Based on the Alexa (2018) analytics review, the researcher used employer reviews posted on the

Las Vegas hotel/casino corporate pages hosted on Indeed and Glassdoor as the principal data

sources.

Figure 2. Traffic rankings of the five employer-review platforms. Report generated July 8, 2018
(Alexa, 2018).

Table 3

Employer-Review Sites: Global Ranking

	Indeed	Glassdoor	Vault	Greatplacetowork	Thejobcrowd
Global Rank	160	398	30,902	124,220	1,248,502
Global Reach	0.40%	0.16%	-	-	-
Global Pageviews	0.04%	0.02%	-	-	-
Rank in [US]	50	90	6,296	26,718	<100,000

Note. Website rankings generated on July 8, 2018. Alexa (2018).

Data source demographics. Employer reviews posted on Indeed and Glassdoor are anonymous. Nevertheless, Alexa (2018) Certified Site Metrics offers general insights into who is visiting the sites and where are they located. As such, an overview of site visitor demographics is offered for reference. According to Alexa (2018) analytics reported on July 8, 2018, Indeed was globally ranked 160th compared to all other websites around the world. It attracts 57.2% of its visitors from the U.S. and the remaining 42.8% from other countries. Glassdoor is globally ranked 398th and attracts most of its visitors (78.9%) from the U.S. (See Figure 3).

Country	Indeed.com	Percent of Visitors
🇺🇸 United States		57.2%
🔴 Japan		7.8%
🇨🇦 Canada		5.8%
🇮🇳 India		4.0%
🇩🇪 Germany		2.8%
🇬🇧 United Kingdom		2.3%
🇮🇹 Italy		1.9%
South Korea		1.7%
🇦🇺 Australia		1.7%
🇫🇷 France		1.0%
🇮🇪 Ireland		0.9%
Taiwan		0.7%
🇷🇺 Russia		0.6%
Poland		0.6%
🇧🇪 Belgium		0.5%
🇨🇳 China		0.5%

Country	Glassdoor.com	Percent of Visitors
🇺🇸 United States		78.9%
🔴 Japan		3.1%
🇨🇳 China		1.3%
🇮🇳 India		0.7%
🇳🇬 Nigeria		0.7%
Singapore		0.7%
South Korea		0.7%
🇮🇹 Italy		0.6%
🇵🇰 Pakistan		0.6%

Figure 3. Indeed and Glassdoor visitation by country. Report generated July 8, 2018 (Alexa, 2018).

Alexa (2018) provides user demographics based on site popularity among a particular audience relative to the Internet user population (IUP; See Figure 4). The bar graphs represent the variance between site visitor attribute and the IUP; they do not signify percentages. For example, both Glassdoor and Indeed attract an overrepresentation of females and an underrepresentation of males compared to the IUP (Alexa, 2018). The average age of the Indeed user is comparable to the user population in all age groups between 18 and 64. Glassdoor attracts a similar number of 18- to 24-year-olds as would be expected in the IUP. However, users age 25-

34 are overrepresented on Glassdoor, and users age 35-64 are underrepresented (Alex, 2018). The 65 and above age groups are underrepresented on both websites, which may be attributed the site content (career advancement) and retirement age. Additionally, Internet users with children are underrepresented as visitors to both sites (Alexa, 2018).

Relative to the average IUP, people who claim an income of $60,000 or higher are overrepresented on both Glassdoor and Indeed, whereas users who claim earning $30,000 or less are underrepresented at Indeed and greatly underrepresented at Glassdoor (Alexa, 2018). The percentage of people reporting earnings of $30,000 to $60,000 is similar to the average IUP at both sites. College-educated users are overrepresented at both Glassdoor and Indeed compared to the average IUP, while those who have no college education and those who attended graduate school are under-represented. Site visitors who have attended college but have not graduated are underrepresented at Glassdoor, yet similar to the general IUP at Indeed (Alexa, 2018). Users browsing Glassdoor from school and work are overrepresented, while users browsing from home are underrepresented. The audience browsing Indeed from work and home is similar to the average IUP, whereas individuals visiting Indeed from school are underrepresented (Alexa, 2018). While the Alexa (2018) statistics provide generalities of who visits Glassdoor and Indeed, the data may not accurately reflect the unnamed sources who posted the reviews in this study.

Figure 4. Glassdoor and Indeed generalized site demographics. Report generated November 10, 2018 (Alexa, 2018). The bar graphs represent site popularity relative to the general internet population.

Selection of Las Vegas Gaming hotel/casino corporations. This study analyzed

employer reviews posted on the Indeed and Glassdoor pages of Las Vegas hotel/casino

corporations. The sample consists of four Fortune 500 global gaming companies with corporate offices in Las Vegas. The hospitality industry was selected for this study since employees working in hotel/casino resorts have an essential role in creating the product-brand experience; thus, understanding employee perceptions of employer brand may increase employee engagement, along with customer loyalty (Backhaus, 2016; Davies, Mete, Whelan, & Mete, 2018; Knox & Freeman, 2006). The researcher did not identify the names of the four organizations in the study. Instead, pseudonyms were used, with the companies referred to as Corporation A, B, C, and D.

IRB Approval

The data set for this study was publicly available content posted anonymously online and met the criteria for non-human subjects. As such, a Graduate and Professional School (GPS) IRB Non-Human Subjects Notification Form was approved and filed with Pepperdine's Institutional Review Board (see Appendix A).

Definition of Analysis Unit

To explore employer-brand benefits referenced in social media, the researcher analyzed eWOM posted on Indeed and Glassdoor. When submitting an online employer review, users are encouraged to describe the "pros" and "cons" of a particular employer. The "pros" and "cons" fields are akin to open-ended questions prompted with text commands to share the advantages and disadvantages of employment. On Indeed, a few examples of "pros" (free meal) and "cons" (breaks or benefits) are offered to elicit responses. The researcher conducted a content analysis of the comments posted in the "pros" and "cons" fields of the employer review.

Since the website prompts urge reviewers to post positive attributes in the "pros" field and negative attributes in the "cons" field, the researcher interpreted the responses as if they were

answers to two survey questions regarding sentiment toward employer-brand benefits. It should be noted that the reviewers, not the researcher, determined which benefits were perceived as an asset or downside of employment. Also, any negative comments posted in the "pros," or vice versa, were not coded in this study, as the content would have been attributed to the incorrect sentiment. To investigate the relationship between the employer-brand benefits and the overall employer rating given by the reviewer, the researcher used the star ratings submitted with each review. Reviewers can rate their employer from one to five stars, with one being the lowest and five being the highest. For consistency, only the overall rating from Indeed was captured for comparison with the Glassdoor overall rating.

Data Gathering Process

A custom web crawler was utilized to gather employer reviews from Glassdoor (2019) and Indeed (2019) for analysis. The crawler was programmed to pull comments associated with the four Las Vegas hotel/casino corporations and include any variations of the company name (e.g., "Lucky Corporation" may also appear on Indeed as "Lucky Casino Corporation," "Lucky Hotel and Casino Corporation," "Lucky Hotel & Casinos," "Lucky Casino and Hotels," "Lucky Casino & Hotel," etc.). This method of data collection was intended to capture most reviews on Glassdoor (2019) and Indeed (2019) associated with a given corporation.

The date range of reviews began with the earliest comment posted on the designated website through September 2017. Reviews posted after October 1, 2017, which marked a mass shooting that occurred in the Las Vegas Resort corridor, were purposefully not included due to the nature of the tragedy and its possible ripple effect on hotel employees' perceptions of workplace safety. Table 4 reflects the initial number of reviews gathered (Glassdoor, 2019; Indeed, 2019). The raw data was further evaluated for time frame consistency, and a date range

of March 2012 (earliest review for Corporation D) through September 2017 was established for

the study. Additional criteria before analysis included location of employment identified as Las

Vegas, an overall employer rating, and both the "pros" and "cons" field completed. After

removing the sources that did not meet these criteria, a total of 1,063 reviews remained for

analysis (see Table 4).

Table 4

Initial Data Set

	Glassdoor		Indeed		
	Earliest Review	# of Reviews	Earliest Review	# of Reviews	Total Raw Files
Corporation A	11/29/2009	1,281	11/20/2011	877	2,158
Corporation B	6/12/2008	481	12/8/2011	881	1,362
Corporation C	4/27/2009	224	12/13/2011	234	458
Corporation D	2/2/2011	57	3/12/2012	28	85
					4,063

Note. Number of employer reviews posted on the Glassdoor (2019) and Indeed (2019) pages of Las Vegas
hotel/casino resorts through September 2017.

Table 5

Final Data Set

	Glassdoor # of Reviews	Indeed # of Reviews	Total Reviews
Corporation A	228	197	425
Corporation B	189	248	437
Corporation C	98	70	168
Corporation D	21	12	33
			1,063

Note. Final data set of reviews selected from the Glassdoor (2019) and Indeed (2019) pages of Las Vegas
hotel/casino from March 2012 through September 2017. Reviews in this data set included location of employment
identified as Las Vegas, an overall employer rating, and both the "pros" and "cons" field completed.

Validity of Data

Creswell (2014) argues that "qualitative validity means that the researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures" (p. 201). The researcher of this study tends to view inquiry through a post-positivist interpretive paradigm. Thus, a logical approach was needed to strengthen the validity of the analysis; the following procedures were applied for this purpose (Creswell, 2013). First, data for the analysis was gathered from two online sources (Indeed and Glassdoor) for capturing employer reviews. Gathering the content for analysis using multiple sources allowed for cross-validation and the justification of recurring themes (Creswell, 2014; Moustakas, 1994). Second, the researcher acknowledged her bias and shared her knowledge of the subject, if applicable, in the spirit of personal reflection and transparency (Creswell, 2014). Any pre-conceived notions held by the researcher about the outcome were limited during the data analysis process and considered in the Chapter 5 discussion sections.

Because the researcher was exploring the various sentiments associated with employer-brand benefits, the analysis of "discrepant information" (Creswell, 2014, p. 202) about the identified themes facilitated a robust examination. Discussing both the "pro's" and "con's" of a workplace environment generated a realistic, internal view of the employer brand, as opposed to the more one-sided image that would be generated for a marketing campaign. Lastly, although "prolonged time in the field" (Creswell, 2014, p. 202) is not physically possible in the context of this study, the researcher did examine employer reviews over a time span of multiple years, as some of the content was posted as early as 2012. The capacity to access nearly five years of employee eWOM for analysis offers a comprehensive view of the phenomenon and supports the credibility and validity of the study (Creswell, 2014). In summary, the researcher established the

validity of the data by using multiple data sources, acknowledging researcher bias, presenting

discrepant information, and analyzing discourse across multiple years.

Reliability of Data

The reliability of data within a qualitative study should not be confused with verification

of data in quantitative research (Boyatzis, 1998). Reliability in the context of qualitative studies

is carefully established through the researcher's "consistency of observations, labeling or

interpretation" (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 144). Boyatzis (1998) posits that qualitative validation

includes a process of coding data, assigning themes, and counting frequency in a framework

comparable to quantitative validity. Also, the process requires "consistency of judgment"

(Boyatzis, 1998, p. 146) through the assessment of interrater reliability between coders or judges.

Interrater reliability entails two or more researchers coding the same content and comparing their

coding agreement level using Cohen's Kappa Coefficient, ranging from <.0 (no chance of

agreement) to .81-.99 (almost perfect agreement; Boyatzis, 1998; Creswell, 2013; Saldaña, 2013;

Viera & Garrett, 2005). To ensure the reliability of the data in this study, the researcher curated a

codebook defining all codes and themes and employed a second coder for interrater reliability

purposes (see Appendix B).

Method of Data Analysis

The researcher employed thematic analysis using NVivo qualitative software to process

the employer reviews gathered from Glassdoor (2019) and Indeed (2019). Thematic analysis is

an accepted form of examination for most qualitative methodologies, including phenomenology,

through the process of encoding content for themes and patterns (Boyatzis, 1998). Practitioners

and scholars alike have utilized thematic analysis to manage data relative to their fields

(Boyatzis, 1998). For instance, an HRM practitioner may use thematic analysis when evaluating

organizational culture trends or strategies, while a university professor may use the same approach to analyze course evaluations. One method of developing thematic codes for analysis is the "prior-research-driven approach" (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 35), which was undertaken for this study.

According to Boyatzis (1998), the prior-research-driven approach of thematic analysis involves three distinct phases. In Phase I, the researcher verifies that the sample or data source aligns with the theory under study through a literature review during the research process. Upon exploring employer-branding research, the researcher of this study investigated the employer-brand benefits referenced in online employer reviews. The conceptual framework of this inquiry is grounded in Ambler and Barrow's (1996) employer-brand theory, which suggests that employer brand delivers a package of three benefits to employees: (1) functional benefits – opportunities for growth and development, (2) economic benefits – monetary and material rewards, and (3) psychological benefits – a sense of belonging or purpose. Employer review comments are aligned with employer-brand theory in the sense that employees are submitting opinions regarding the benefits they experienced in the workplace. Although a broad range of academic studies regarding online reviews and hotel reputation have been reported, scant research exists on the effects of employer reviews on hotel employee satisfaction and retention (Baka, 2016). As such, the researcher applied a deductive, prior-research-driven approach drawing from a sample of hotel employer reviews. The study further examines which employer-brand benefits are associated with job satisfaction, as implied in the overall employer rating.

Phase II of the prior-research-driven approach requires three steps, the first of which is generating codes or themes drawn from previous research (Boyatzis, 1998). In this study, the researcher used the three employer-brand benefits outlined by Ambler and Barrow (1996) to

guide the process of coding the raw data. In the second step of Phase II, the researcher generated, reviewed, and revised sub-themes in NVivo for integration into the three over-arching themes (Boyatzis, 1998). A codebook was created in this stage of the process (see Appendix B). Lastly, in the final step of Phase II, a test for reliability and consistency was conducted with a second coder after the data from Corporation B, one of the four organizations, was evaluated. The second coder had 25 years of experience in the Las Vegas gaming industry as a marketing professional familiar with hotel/casino human resources. The results rendered a substantial agreement with a Cohen's Kappa Coefficient of .69. (Boyatzis, 1998; Viera & Garrett, 2005). Phase III of the prior-research-driven approach was the last stage of analysis and included applying the codes and themes to the remaining three corporations in the sample. Data validity was determined in this phase as the researcher examined the employer reviews from Glassdoor (2019) and Indeed (2019) to identify developing patterns.

Summary

In this chapter, the researcher presented the methodology utilized for this qualitative study. The workplace experiences of Las Vegas hotel/casino resorts employees were identified as the phenomenon under examination, and a non-traditional form of employee feedback was selected as the data source, i.e., eWOM posted on employer review sites. This chapter also demonstrated the suitability of Boyatzis's (1998) prior-driven-research approach as a method of thematic analysis for identifying employer-brand benefits referenced in the online reviews. Understanding employee perceptions of employer-brand benefits may assist HRM and marketing practitioners in the development of employer-branding strategies that target current and potential employees (Gowan, 2004; Martin et al., 2011; Mokina, 2014). Auditing employer reviews posted on social media platforms such as Indeed and Glassdoor may provide practitioners responsible

for maintaining employer brand, and for sustaining a positive work experience, with an additional tool for assessing job satisfaction. In addition, by exploring eWOM posted on employer-review sites, this study advances scholarly work in human resources (specifically on the topic of job satisfaction), as well as the study of marketing brand management through social media. In Chapter 4, the researcher discusses the results of the thematic analysis and summarizes key findings. Chapter 5 presents a discussion of results, incorporating the relevant employer-branding theoretical perspectives which guided this study. This chapter also presents the researcher's reflections on her experience in the gaming hospitality industry and how her practitioner paradigm may, or may not, have shifted after the analysis of results.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore the lived workplace experiences of hotel/casino resort employees through an analysis of online employer reviews. The data for examination included comments posted on Glassdoor (2019) and Indeed (2019) over multiple years by anonymous reviewers who self-identified as former or current employees of four gaming corporations located in Las Vegas, Nevada. The study applied Ambler and Barrow's (1996) employer-brand concept to better understand which benefits of employment were most frequently mentioned as an asset or drawback of the job. The study also considered whether a connection exists between the perceived employer-brand benefits and the overall employer ratings. Two research questions guided this study:

1. Which employer-brand benefits, if any, cited in the employer reviews of hotel/casino resorts are most frequently associated with positive and negative employee sentiment?

2. What is the relationship between employer benefits (e.g., functional, psychological, and economical) and the overall employee rating given by the reviewer.

This chapter presents the outcomes of the thematic analysis conducted to identify the employer-brand benefits commonly mentioned in the employer review pages of Las Vegas hotel/casino resorts. The results also explore the recurrent benefits associated with the overall employer ratings. The following section provides a recap of the data collection process and a description of the sample beyond the Alexa (2018) data source generalities provided in Chapter 3. The procedures for developing theme classifications and code hierarchy are also discussed.

The chapter then reveals the results and key findings associated with both research questions. A summary of the results to be discussed in Chapter 5 concludes this section.

Data Collection

The innovative nature of this study required a custom web crawler to capture the employer reviews from Glassdoor (2019) and Indeed (2019). The web crawler was designed to read the employer review pages of four Las Vegas gaming corporations and obtain six fields of data from the employer-review template: (1) overall employer rating, (2) review date, (3) employment status, (4) location of job, (5) the content posted in the "pros" field, and (6) the content posted in the "cons" field. The web-crawler extraction process provided 4,063 employer reviews (see Table 4) which were assessed for completed fields. The evaluation revealed that the date range for each set of company reviews varied, so the time frame from March 2012 through September 2017 was selected for consistency. Reviews with missing required fields, or those comments posted outside of the designated time frame, were removed from the data set, leaving 1,063 employer reviews for investigation. Each employer-review template displays two open-ended questions which prompt reviewers to post their perceptions of positive and negative employer benefits, i.e., the "pros" and "cons". Thus, the final sample in this study comprised 1,063 reviewer-designated "pros" and 1,063 reviewer-designated "cons."

The coding process followed Boyatzis's (1998) prior-research-driven approach, allowing the researcher to identify the employer-brand benefits as described in Ambler and Barrow's (1996) theoretical framework. Additionally, concepts relative to job satisfaction theory, e.g., motivation-hygiene theory (Herzberg et al., 1959), and employer-branding theory, e.g., social identity theory (Tajfel, 1974), signaling theory (Spence, 1973), and the instrumental-symbolic framework (Katz, 1960; Keller, 1993; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003) shaped the classification of

emerging themes. A further examination of the associations between the results of this study and the referenced theoretical frameworks is presented in Chapter 5.

Demographics Beyond Generalizations

Sample demographics such as age, gender, or years of employment were not available due to the anonymity of the reviews, but Alexa (2018) data source generalizations were provided and discussed in Chapter 3 for website familiarity. However, a limited amount of self-reported identification did exist among the sample. For instance, of the 1,063 reviews drawn for this study, all reviewers designated Las Vegas as the location of their job, and each provided an employment status of either current or former employee. Figure 5 represents the designated employment status of the 536 reviews from the Glassdoor (2019) sample, which were nearly an even split between current ($n = 278$) and former employees ($n = 258$). The Indeed (2019) sample consisted of 527 reviews with most of the reviewers selecting former employee status ($n = 338$; see Figure 6). The increased number of Indeed (2019) reviewers who self-identified as previous employees contributed to a sample mix of 44% ($n = 467$) current and 56% former ($n = 596$) employees (see Figure 7). Also, the combined sample mainly reflects reviews of Corporation A ($n = 425$) and Corporation B ($n = 437$). The disparity in sample size between Corporations A and B, and Corporation C and D may be due to the size of the employee population, as Corporations A and B are the two of the largest employers in Las Vegas. Additionally, company policies prohibiting participation on employer review sites may be in play with Corporations C and D.
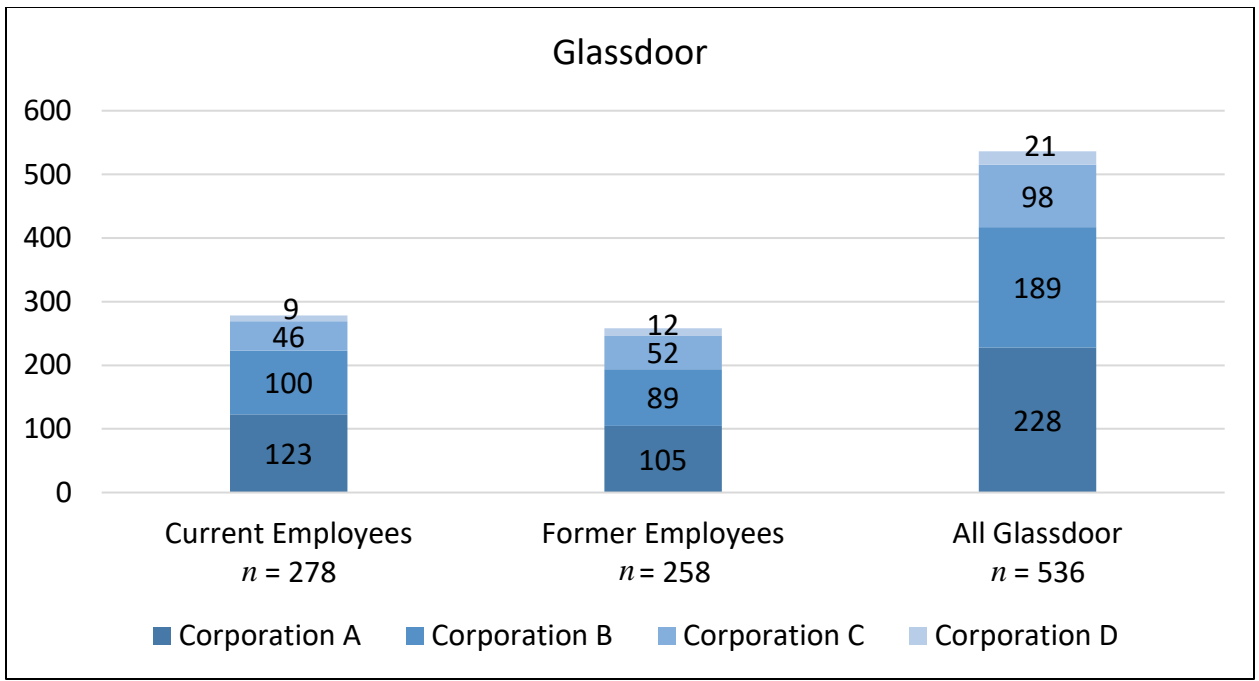
Figure 5. Self-reported employment status of Glassdoor (2019) reviewers.
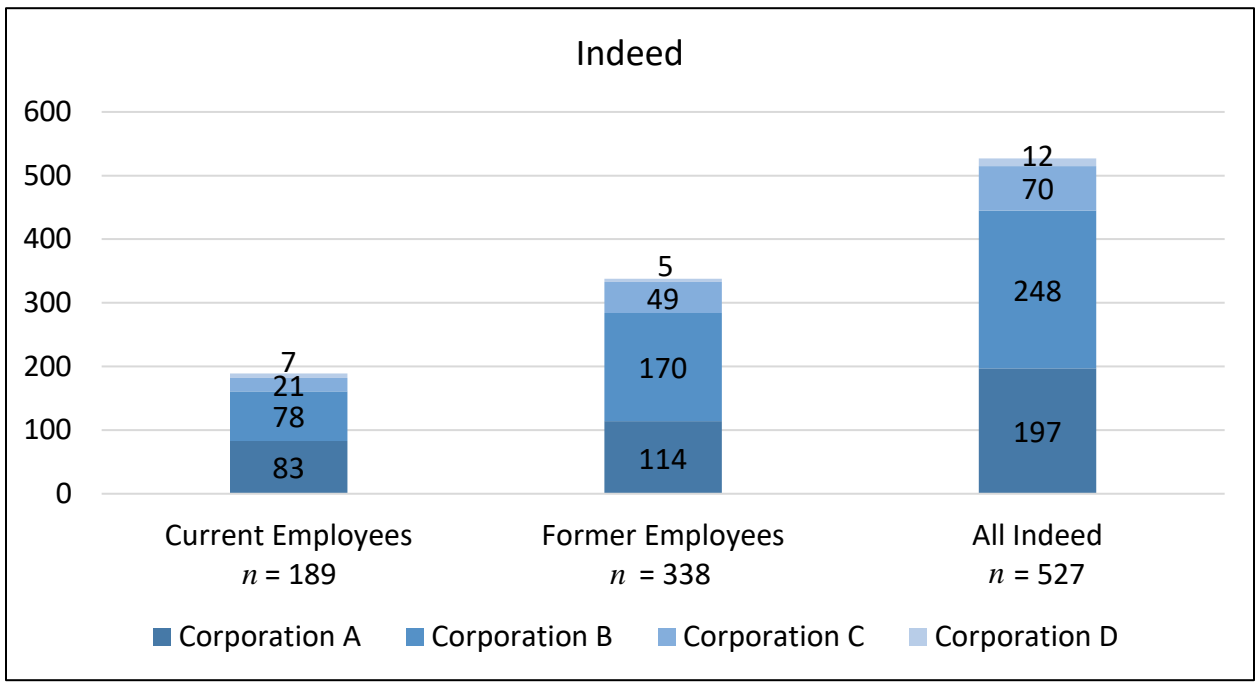
Figure 6. Self-reported employment status of Indeed (2019) reviewers.
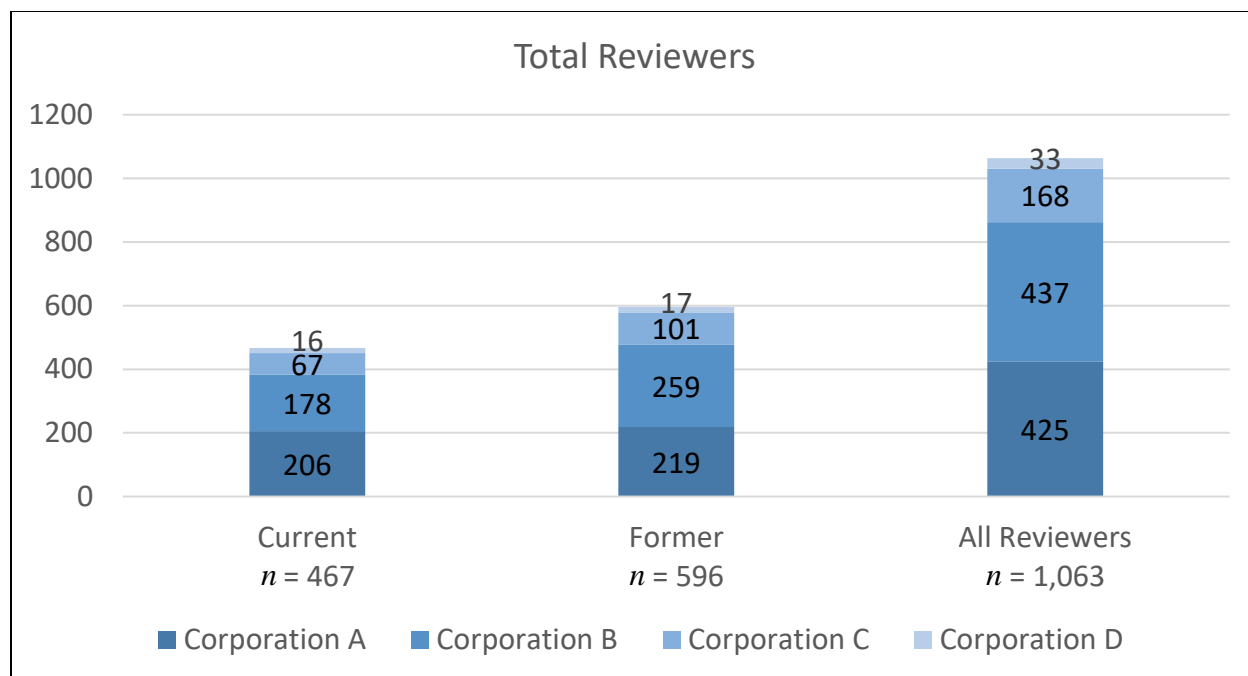
Figure 7. Self-reported employment status of the total sample.

Developing Benefit Classifications and Theme Hierarchy

The employer-brand benefit classifications and theme hierarchy were developed using

Boyatzis's (1998) three-stage process of prior-research-driven thematic analysis. Phase I of the

process requires the investigator to select a sample and research design suited for theory under

examination (Boyatzis, 1998). Employer reviews were deemed appropriate for the study of

employer-brand benefits since the online remarks posted in the "pros" and "cons" fields are

assumed first-hand employment experiences from current and former staff. Each set of the

reviewer-designated "pros" and "cons" were coded for the employer-brand benefits found

consistent with Ambler and Barrow's (1996) employer-brand equity theory. A qualitative,

phenomenological design was selected to explore the lived experiences of hotel/casino resort

employees in Las Vegas. The originality of this study enabled the researcher to examine

employer satisfaction beyond company-sponsored surveys while expanding employer-branding

research to employee retention.

Phase II of the prior-research-driven method includes theme and code development, along with determining coding reliability (Boyatzis, 1998). Each employer review from the sample of 1,063 supplied a data set of reviewer-designated "pros" and "cons," totaling of 2,126 open-ended responses. Due to the vast quantity of data, the researcher required qualitative data analysis (QDA) software for organizing and coding. After an assessment of QDA software options, the researcher selected the NVivo 12 product for its ease of use, reporting functionality, and offline support. An initial examination of the raw data was conducted in NVivo, generating 45 sub-themes which were included in a codebook for testing interrater reliability (see Appendix B). An experienced marketing professional from the Las Vegas hotel/casino industry served as a second coder in the sample drawn from Corporation B. The results demonstrated a Cohen's Kappa Coefficient of .69, considered substantial agreement between coders (Boyatzis, 1998; Viera & Garrett, 2005).

Boyatzis (1998) explains that Phase III of the prior-research-driven method is the stage when the inter-rated themes are used for coding and validating the results. Hence, the reviews associated with Corporation A, C, and D were subsequently coded to the agreed-upon themes between the researcher and second coder. Employer reviews with single comments referencing multiple themes were coded to reflect the spectrum of feedback. For example, the following review was coded to four subthemes:

Review:	"Great hours	co-workers	customers &	insurance."
Sub-themes:	Work Schedule	Co-worker Interactions	Customer Interactions	Benefits

The researcher reviewed the initial 45 sub-themes a second time in order to merge like constructs, and the re-examination confirmed 39 sub-themes assigned to seven sub-categories

linked to the three employer-brand benefits (see Table 6). For example, functional benefits included two sub-categories: (1) promotion opportunities and (2) growth opportunities. Economic benefits incorporated two sub-categories: (1) benefits and (2) compensation. Psychological benefits represented three sub-categories: (1) social identity, (2) sense of purpose, and (3) symbolic indicators. The prior employer-branding theories offered validity to the themes and categories applied to the employer review sample (Boyatzis, 1998). The reference counts tabulated in NVivo will be discussed in the research question findings within this chapter.

Table 6

Employer-brand Benefits: Sub-categories

		Reference Count
Benefit:	Functional	388
Sub-categories:	1. Promotion Opportunities	217
	2. Growth Opportunities	171
Benefit:	Economic	1478
Sub-categories:	1. Benefits	966
	2. Compensation	512
Benefit:	Psychological	2093
Sub-categories:	1. Social Identity	1146
	2. Sense of Purpose	718
	3. Symbolic Indicators	229

Data Interpretation: Research Question One

Research Question One sought to identify which of Ambler and Barrow's (1996) three employer-brand benefits, if any, cited in the employer reviews of hotel/casino resorts in Las Vegas were most frequently associated with positive or negative employee sentiment. In this study, the researcher interpreted the content posted in the reviewer-designated "pros" and "cons" as the data representative of employee opinions. As such, the reviewers, not the researcher, self-selected positive or negative sentiments regarding their employment.

The 1,063 reviews extracted from Glassdoor (2019) and Indeed (2019) were uploaded into NVivo, and the reviewer-designated "pros" and "cons" were coded for themes grounded in Ambler and Barrow's (1996) employer-brand equity theory. Employer-brand theory hypothesizes that employers provide an employment experience comprising a trio of benefits to attract and retain employees; functional benefits (growth and development opportunities), economic benefits (monetary or material rewards), and psychological benefits (a sense of belonging or purpose). Upon examination of the reviews, the researcher coded a total of 3,959 references attributed to one of the three employer-brand benefits identified by Ambler and Barrow (1996; see Table 7).

Table 7

Employer-brand Benefits: Positive and Negative References

	Pros	Cons	
	Reference Count	Reference Count	Total References
Functional	216	172	388
Economic	1,107	371	1,478
Psychological	961	1,132	2,093
	2,284	1,675	3,959

Note. "Pros" and "cons" are data sources from the online reviews and contain reviewer-designated positive and negative employment benefits. The reference count represents the frequency with which the researcher identified the theme in the "pros" or "cons" data.

Within the "pros" field, the researcher coded 2,284 positive reference to an employer-brand benefit (see Table 7). Economic benefits ($n = 1,107$), followed by psychological benefits ($n = 961$), were most commonly mentioned as favorable aspects of employment. Conversely, psychological benefits were overwhelmingly cited in the "cons" field ($n = 1,132$), far surpassing any critical views concerning functional or economic benefits. Noticeably drawing the least amount of discussion as a positive or negative aspect of employment were the functional benefits ($n = 388$) related to promotion and growth opportunities. Figure 8 offers a sentiment summary of

the trio of employer-brand benefits. An in-depth examination of the supporting sub-categories

and sub-themes of each employer-brand benefit is presented in the following sections.
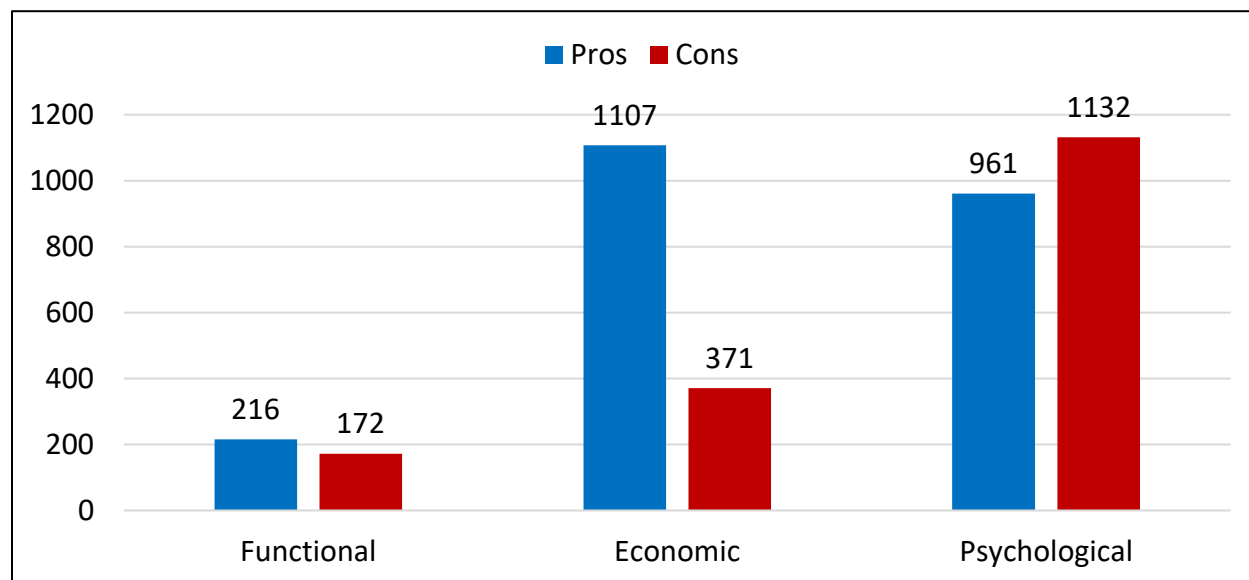
Figure 8. Sentiment summary: Employer-brand benefits. This figure illustrates the number of theme references within the reviewer-designated "pros" and "cons."

Positive and negative references to functional benefits. Functional benefits, which

Ambler and Barrow (1996) linked to employee growth and development, were the least

mentioned employment feature with 388 total references (see Table 8). The researcher of this

study identified two sub-categories of functional benefits: promotion and growth opportunities.

Reviews coded to promotion opportunities specifically mentioned the words, or forms of the

words, "promotions," "advancement," or "career opportunities." Statements coded to growth

opportunities used the words, or forms of the words, "growth," "learning experience," or

"networking." Training opportunities were coded to growth opportunities as well.

Table 8

Functional Benefits: Positive and Negative References

	Pros	Cons	
	Reference Count	Reference Count	Total References
Promotion Opportunities	87	130	217
Growth Opportunities	129	42	171
	216	172	388

Note. "Pros" and "cons" are data sources from the online reviews and contain reviewer-designated positive and negative employment benefits. The reference count represents the frequency with which the researcher identified the theme in the "pros" or "cons" data.

Promotion opportunities. Promotions, or lack thereof, were the most common concerns among the reviewers who cited a functional benefit in the "cons" field ($n = 130$). Unfavorable reviews noted workplace barriers such as:

- "Not a lot of room for advancement."

- "Lack of job promotion."

- "No clear paths for promotion or career path."

Despite the upward-mobility disappointment that some of the reviewers expressed, others noted success with career advancement as reflected in following positive comments from the "pros" field ($n = 87$):

- "Great promotional opportunities from within. Excellent opportunities for advancement."

- "You can advance if you are ambitious."

Growth opportunities. Unlike promotion opportunities, opportunities for growth were more often referenced in the reviewer "pros" than in the "cons" (129 vs. 42). Examples of favorable growth-opportunity comments included:

- "You can grow, learn and develop your career through so many options."

- "You get to build a good network of people that can help you even down the road"

- "Very detailed training before they leave you alone at the desk."

Negative references to growth opportunities also suggested upward-mobility challenges as noted in the following remarks:

- "No growth for middle management."

- "There is little to no movement or growth opportunity."

- "No real growth within company."

Thus, the functional benefit findings revealed that while the learning experience gained from a position in a hotel/casino resort was more often voiced as a positive, limited opportunities for promotion or growth were deemed a downside of the job. The sentiment summary in Figure 9 illustrates this pattern of reviewers' dissatisfaction with the promotion prospects and satisfaction with the chances for personal growth.

Figure 9. Sentiment summary: Functional benefits. This figure illustrates the number of theme references within the reviewer-designated "pros" and "cons."

Positive and negative references to economic benefits. Economic benefits, which

Ambler and Barrow (1996) linked to monetary and material rewards, were the second most

frequently mentioned theme among the employer reviews, with 1,478 references as shown in

Table 9. Economic benefits also reflected the second highest number of positive remarks overall

($n = 1,107$) with many of the references attributed to the sub-category labeled as benefits.

Compensation was the additional sub-category assigned to economic benefits. Figure 10 offers a

sentiment summary of the two economic benefit sub-categories.

Table 9

Economic Benefits: Positive and Negative References

	Pros	Cons	
	Reference Count	Reference Count	Total References
Benefits	840	126	966
Compensation	267	245	512
	1,107	371	1,478

Note. "Pros" and "cons" are data sources from the online reviews and contain reviewer-designated positive and negative employment benefits. The reference count represents the frequency with which the researcher identified the theme in the "pros" or "cons" data.
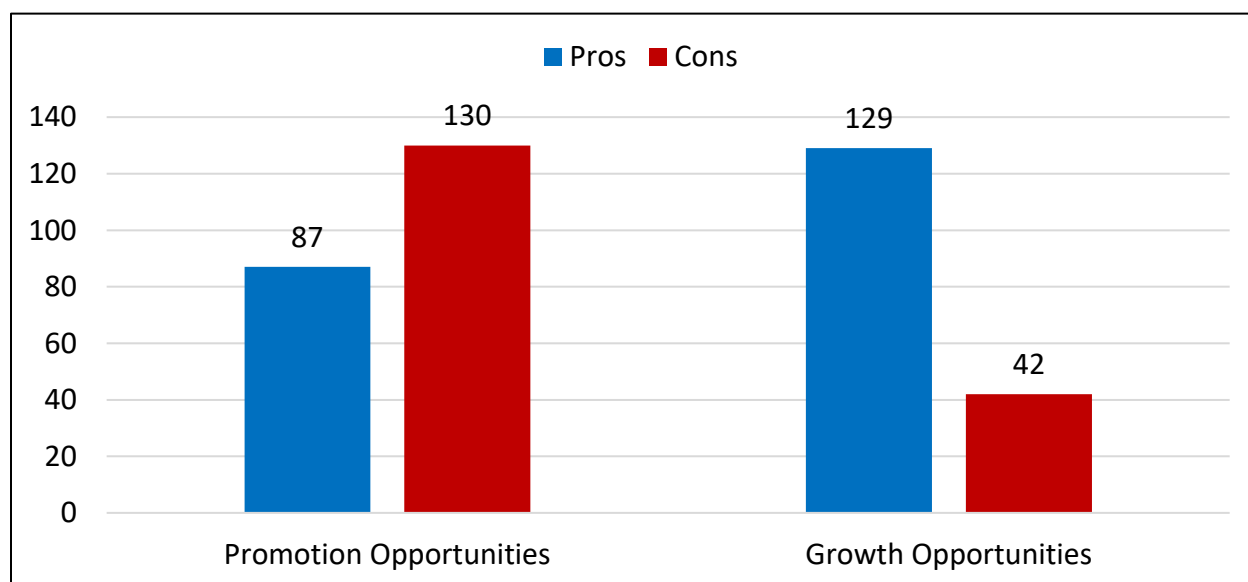
Figure 10. Sentiment summary: Economic benefits. This figure illustrates the number of theme references within the reviewer-designated "pros" and "cons.

Benefits. The benefits sub-category coded under economic benefits was comprised of ten

sub-themes and was most commonly found in the remarks posted in the "pros" field (see Table

10). Of the 840 favorable comments about benefits, the free meal provided in the employee

dining room (EDR) was the most frequently cited theme ($n = 327$), followed by general

references to employment benefits ($n = 236$) and employment perks ($n = 105$). Positive

comments referencing unspecified benefits simply stated:

- "Benefits are awesome."

- "Company offers lots of benefits"

- "Great benefits"

A description of the employment-perks theme was summed up in one review: "There are

many perks to working for a big Las Vegas hotel including free shows discounted meals etc."

Although the free meal in the EDR and unspecified benefits were also alluded to as a

negative, these references appeared in the "cons" field with significantly less frequency (Free

meal in EDR = 34, Unspecified benefits = 30). Other benefits (such as employee parking, union

membership, company-provided 401K/retirement plans, supplied uniforms, wellness, and tuition

reimbursement programs) were touched upon in the employer reviews with much less frequency

than the highest-referenced themes presented above. Figure 11 offers a sentiment summary of the

most prevalent themes within the benefits sub-category. The six least frequently referenced

topics were combined in Figure 11 to create the "other benefits" category.

Table 10

Sub-category Benefits: Positive and Negative References

	Pros	Cons	
	Reference Count	Reference Count	Total References
Free Meal in EDR	327	34	361
Unspecified Benefits	236	30	266
Employment Perks	105	8	113
Health Insurance	66	16	82
Employee Parking	21	17	38
Union Membership	27	6	33
401k or Retirement Plan	17	11	28
Uniform	20	3	23
Onsite Wellness Program	12	1	13
Tuition Reimbursement	9	0	9
	840	126	966

Note. "Pros" and "cons" are data sources from the online reviews and contain reviewer-designated positive and negative employment benefits. The reference count represents the frequency with which the researcher identified the theme in the "pros" or "cons" data.
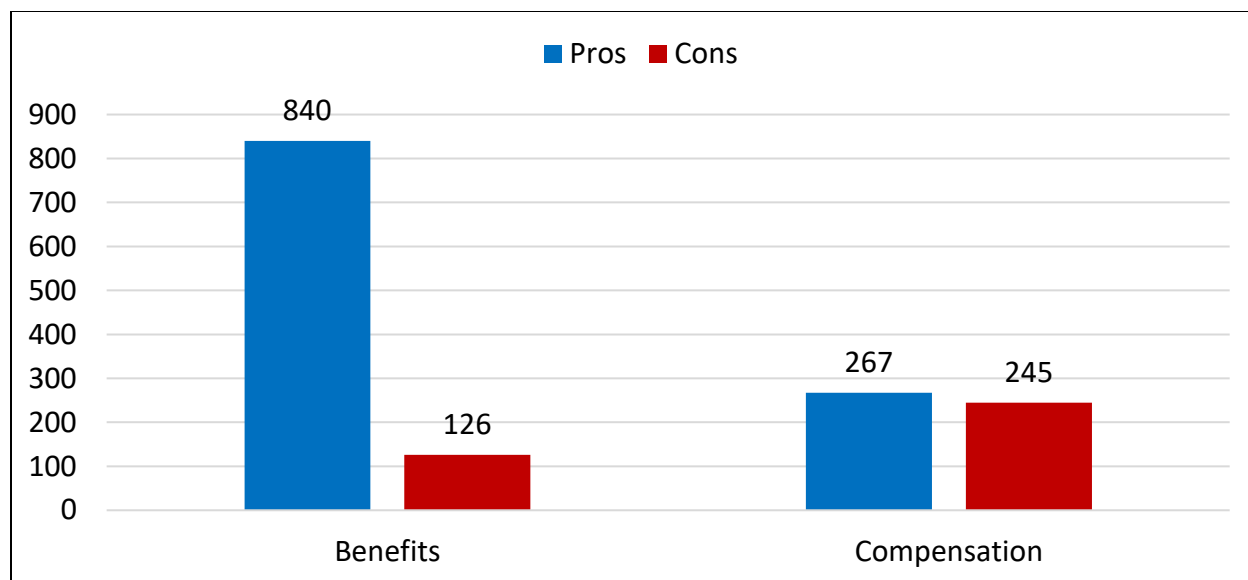
Figure 11. Sentiment summary: Benefits sub-category. This figure illustrates the number of theme references within the reviewer-designated "pros" and "cons."

Compensation. The second sub-category of economic benefits was compensation. This sub-category contains four sub-themes relative to the employee pay (see Table 11). References to salary and wages were the predominant compensation theme and were equally cast as positive (*n* = 176) and negative (*n* = 173). While some reviewers raved about the "Great pay," "Competitive salary," and "Good pay for an unskilled job like this," others found their "pay was not enough for the work expected from employees." This finding demonstrates a perceived inconsistency in the employee pay structure, which may be dependent on variables beyond the scope of this study (i.e., tenure, job classification, union position, or employee qualifications). While paid time off, paid breaks, and paid lunch were mentioned in the reviews, the frequency of these topics was minimal compared to the frequency of comments about salary and wages. Figure 12 illustrates the disparity between the references to salary and wages and the other compensation sub-themes.

Table 11

Sub-category Compensation: Positive and Negative References

	Pros	Cons	
	Reference Count	Reference Count	Total References
Salary and Wages	176	173	349
Paid Time Off	33	24	57
Paid Lunch Break	43	11	54
Paid Breaks	15	37	52
	267	245	512

Note. "Pros" and "cons" are data sources from the online reviews and contain reviewer-designated positive and negative employment benefits. The reference count represents the frequency with which the researcher identified the theme in the "pros" or "cons" data.
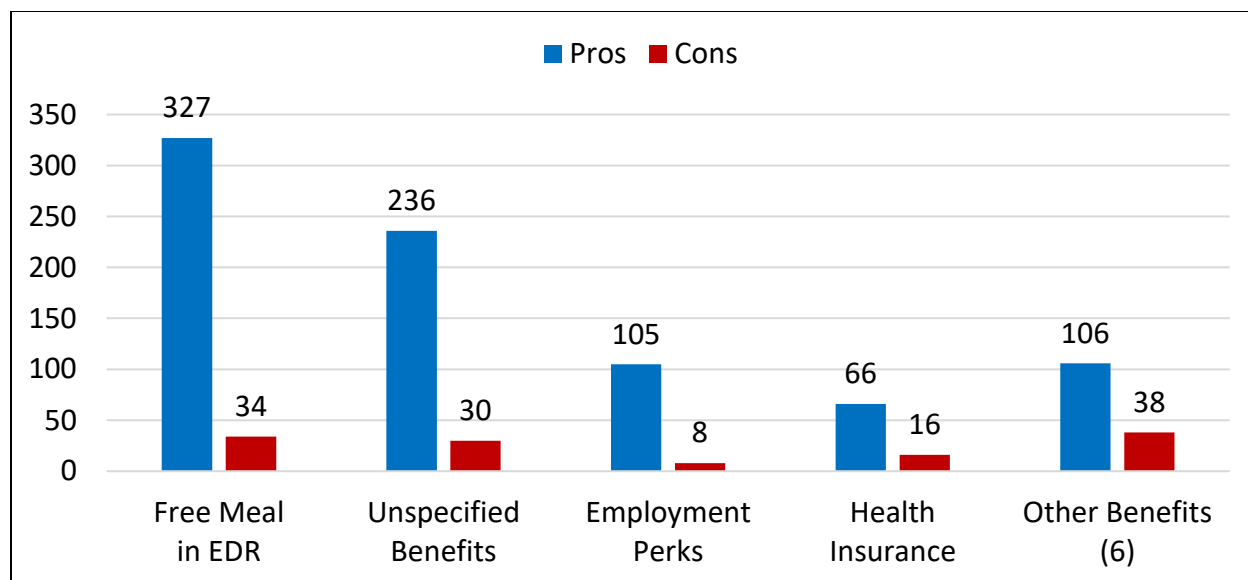

Figure 12. Sentiment summary: Compensation sub-category. This figure illustrates the number of theme references within the reviewer-designated "pros" and "cons."

In summarizing the economic benefit findings, the results suggest that employer brand in the hotel/casino resort industry is closely associated with the free meal provided in the EDR and the general benefits that accompany working in a hotel/casino resort, i.e., insurance and employee perks like room discounts and complimentary shows. However, the employer reviews also suggest a conflicting picture of the salary and wages offered in these companies.

Positive and negative references to psychological benefits. According to Ambler and

Barrow (1996), psychological benefits are the attributes of employment which convey a sense of

purpose and belonging in the workplace. The themes coded to psychological benefits were

mentioned with the most significant frequency among the three, employer-brand benefits,

yielding 2,093 references (see Table 12). To isolate the facets of psychological benefits, the

researcher established three sub-categories informed by prior employer-branding theory: (1)

social identity (Tajfel, 1974), (2) sense of purpose (Ambler & Barrow, 1996), and (3) symbolic

indicators (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Spence, 1973). A sentiment summary is offered in

Figure 13.

Table 12

Psychological Benefits: Positive and Negative References

	Pros	Cons	
	Reference Counts	Reference Counts	Total References
Social Identity	627	519	1,146
Sense of Purpose	217	501	718
Symbolic Indicators	117	112	229
	961	1,132	2,093

Note. "Pros" and "cons" are data sources from the online reviews and contain reviewer-designated positive and negative employment benefits. The reference count represents the frequency with which the researcher identified the theme in the "pros" or "cons" data.
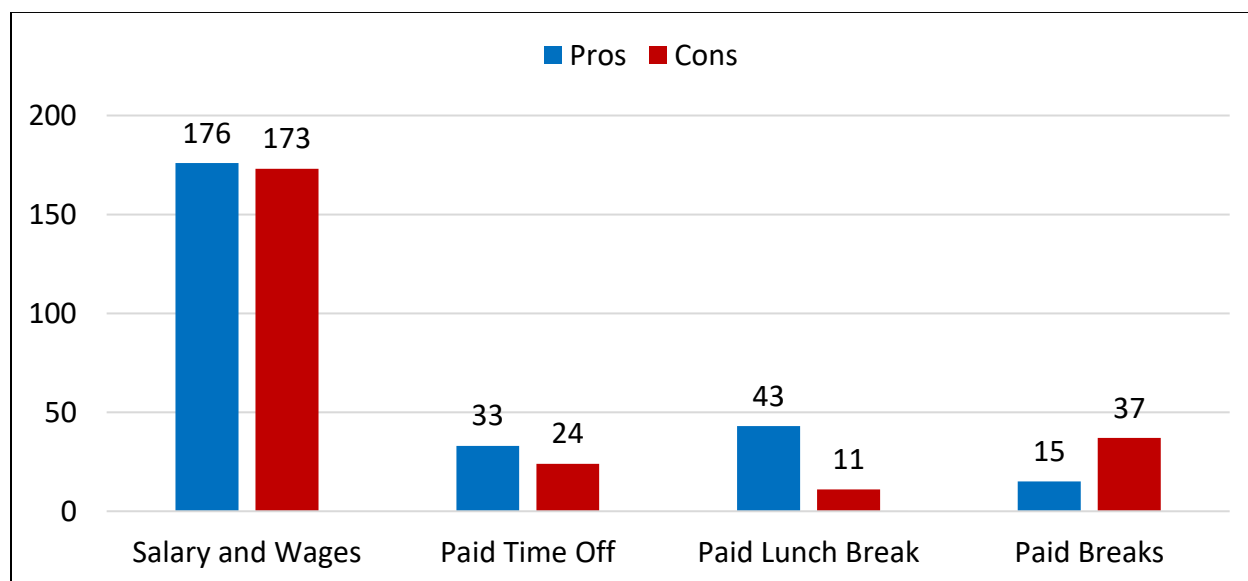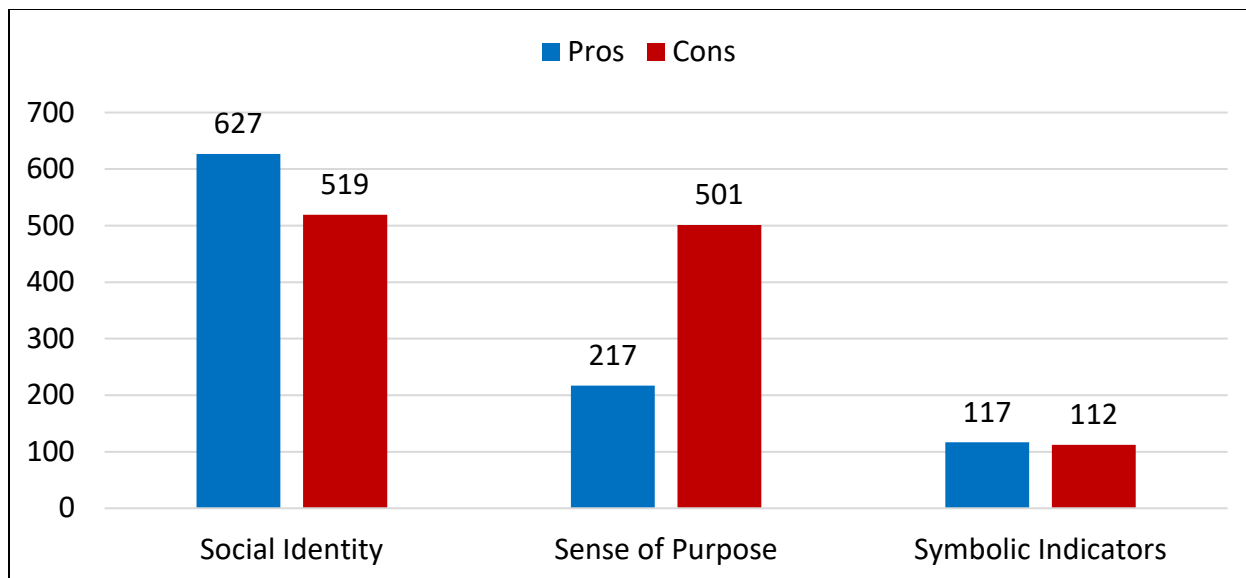
Figure 13. Sentiment summary: Psychological benefits. This figure illustrates the number of theme references within the reviewer-designated "pros" and "cons."

Social identity. As noted in Table 13, social identity includes eight sub-themes concerning interpersonal relationships and workplace surroundings that influence a sense of employee inclusion (Tajfel, 1974). This sub-category had the highest reference count of all sub-categories in this study ($n = 1,146$). Leading the tally among the social identity sub-themes were management behaviors with 454 references. The sentiment toward management was predominately negative ($n = 337$), and examples of poor behavior included:

- "…disconnect between senior level management team and employees."

- "…sometimes management fails to recognize that we are the heartbeat of the company."

- "…a lot of politics and favoritism the higher you move up."

The second most commonly cited social-identity sub-theme was company atmosphere, with 347 references. Most often noted as favorable, company atmosphere was expressed as:

- "Nice culture."

- "Friendly atmosphere."

- "I like the work environment."

Table 13

Sub-category Social Identity: Positive and Negative References

	Pros	Cons	
	Reference Count	Reference Count	Total References
Management Behaviors	117	337	454
Company Atmosphere	237	110	347
Co-Worker Interactions	152	22	174
Interactions with "People"	65	4	69
Guest Interactions	22	26	48
Department Interactions	8	13	21
Community Connection	16	0	16
Employee Events and Programs	10	7	17
	627	519	1,146

Note. "Pros" and "cons" are data sources from the online reviews and contain reviewer-designated positive and negative employment benefits. The reference count represents the frequency with which the researcher identified the theme in the "pros" or "cons" data.

However, negative remarks about the company atmosphere ($n = 110$) were also prevalent,

with reviewers citing:

- "Culture is not what they preach in meetings."

- "Boys Club-ish."

- "Too Corporate, low morale."

Co-worker interactions were a significant part of the social identity sub-category with

174 references, of which 152 were posted in the "pros" fields. The reviewers spoke highly of

their "work family," who were "great," "nice," and "friendly" people contributing to a

"supportive team and environment." Although most of the co-worker references were positive,

some reviewers did perceive their counterparts as "lazy," "angry," "flaky," and "whiners."

Despite these expressions of disapproval, most of the reviews emphasized workplace camaraderie and teamwork.

Other social identity themes that were brought up with less frequency included interactions with "people," guests, and other departments. The "people" comments, i.e., "great people," or "Get to meet people from all over the world," did not specify whether the individuals being referenced were fellow employees or customers. Thus, a "people" theme was created for these general remarks. Community connection denoted volunteerism and the "strong footprint in giving back to the communities in which they (the corporations) operate." Employee events and programs highlighted recognition and incentives for strong job performance.

Figure 14 presents the sentiment summary of the psychological benefits associated with social identity. Management behaviors topped the list and were perceived as mostly negative. Company atmosphere and co-workers, on the other hand, were described more favorably, as were social interactions with "people," which may be a general reference to customers or other employees. The four least-mentioned sub-themes assigned to social identity (i.e., guest interactions, department interactions, community connection and employee events and programs) are represented in the "other" category listed in Figure 14.

Figure 14. Sentiment summary: Social identity sub-category. This figure illustrates the number of theme references within the reviewer-designated "pros" and "cons."

Sense of purpose. Table 14 lists the eight sub-themes associated with the sense of purpose sub-category, which encompasses job responsibilities and expectations (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). Work schedule ($n = 209$), the primary concern observed in this sub-category, involved reviewer frustration with the number of work hours and shift flexibility. An employee's sense of purpose was deemed diminished in cases of "layoff" or "no full-time work." As one reviewer remarked, "after ten years on the extra board I would like to get more work than I do, and that is why I'm applying for another job." Dissatisfaction with shift flexibility was evident in work schedule complaints referencing "late nights," "long hours," "crazy hours," or working the "graveyard" shift. The following review sums up why some employees may perceive the work schedule in Las Vegas hotel/casino resorts as a negative:

- "The gaming/hospitality industry is a 24-hour industry. Depending on your role within the company you could be working on holidays and other days you would normally not want to be at work."

Table 14

Sub-category Sense of Purpose: Positive and Negative References

	Pros	Cons	
	Reference Count	Reference Count	Total References
Work Schedule	58	151	209
Job Responsibilities	88	69	157
Policies and Procedures	10	85	95
Staffing and Turnover	5	72	77
Stress Level	19	51	70
Work/Life Balance	17	34	51
Job Security	15	29	44
Tools to Perform Job	5	10	15
	217	501	718

Note. "Pros" and "cons" are data sources from the online reviews and contain reviewer-designated positive and negative employment benefits. The reference count represents the frequency with which the researcher identified the theme in the "pros" or "cons" data.

Job responsibilities were the second most common theme in the sense of purpose sub-category ($n = 157$). Job responsibilities were mentioned with similar frequency as a positive and negative aspect of employment (pros = 88, cons = 69). Favorable comments about job tasks included statements such as "good projects for the most part," "helped out with events that guests had received invitations," and "great for a people person." Comments expressing frustration with workplace duties ranged from "no challenges, repetitious days" to "long hours walking standing talking" to "not able to utilize sales skills, training from previous positions."

Policies and procedures ($n = 95$) were also frequently cited concerns impacting employees' sense of purpose. As one reviewer expressed, "They have ridiculous rules that make you feel like a child in need of supervision." Staffing and turnover was also viewed as a negative issue, with only five of the 77 references to this theme posted in the "pros" field. One of the five reviewers viewed high turnover as a bonus, stating, "High turnaround allows for the ability to move up the ladder relatively quickly." Stress level, work/life balance, job security, and

availability of tools needed to perform one's job were least mentioned themes in this sub-category. These four themes were combined to represent the "other" category listed in the sense of purpose sentiment summary in Figure 15.
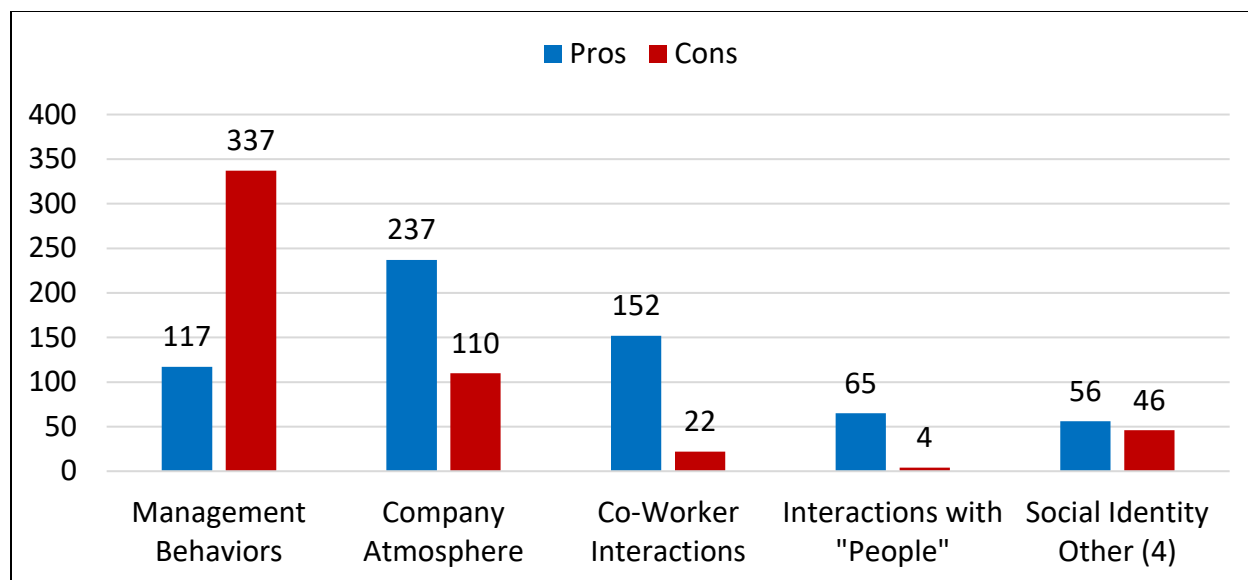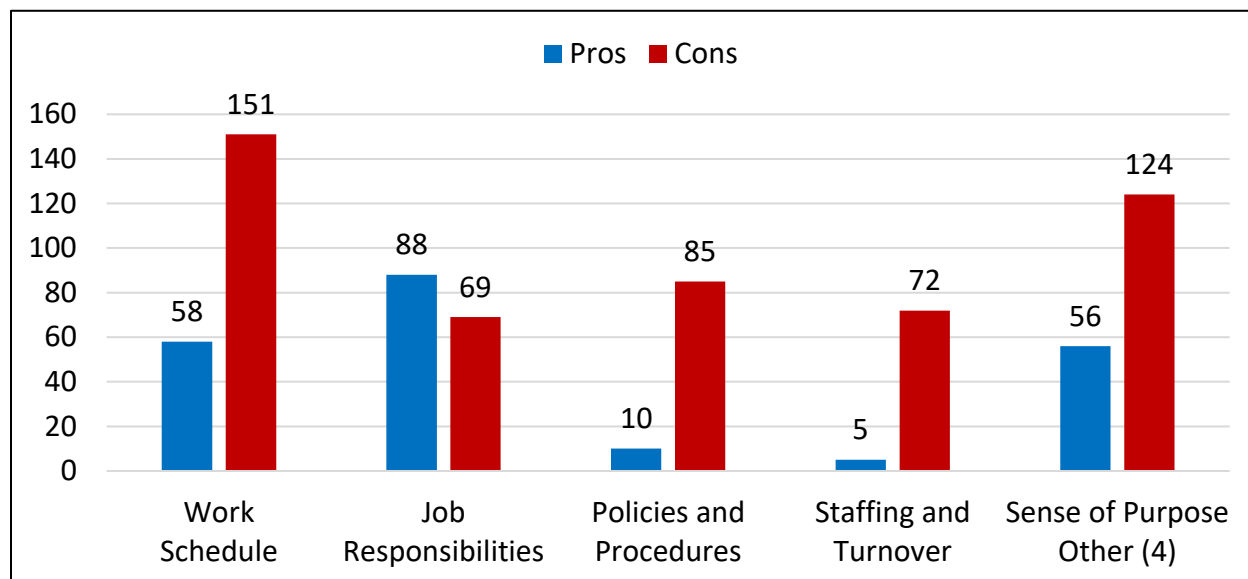

Figure 15. Sentiment summary: Sense of purpose sub-category. This figure illustrates the number of theme references within the reviewer-designated "pros" and "cons."

Symbolic indicators. The least referenced sub-category of psychological benefits was symbolic indicators (*n* = 229). Symbolic indicators are the combination of tangible and intangible organizational attributes which attract and retain employees (Keller, 1993; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Spence, 1973). As presented in Table 15, the physical products available to the guests, such as the "unique buildings," "beautiful surroundings," "lots of great restaurants," and "pretty casino interior where the guests pass through," were the top mentioned symbolic indicator, with 67 references. While product attributes were often noted in the "pros," those references coded in the "cons" frequently cited the "smoke environment" in the rooms and casino.

Table 15

Sub-category Symbolic Indicators: Positive and Negative References

	Pros	Cons	
	Reference Count	Reference Count	Total References
The Physical Product	40	27	67
Company Brand	48	2	50
Company Finances	4	41	45
The Physical Workspace	13	22	35
Las Vegas Attributes	12	20	32
	117	112	229

Note. "Pros" and "cons" are data sources from the online reviews and contain reviewer-designated positive and negative employment benefits. The reference count represents the frequency with which the researcher identified the theme in the "pros" or "cons" data.

The company brand was mostly viewed as a positive symbolic indicator, with 48 out of

50 mentions coded in the "pros" field. Examples of reviews citing the company brand included:

- "Great to have on your resume. It is a recognizable brand."

- "The company dominates the Las Vegas Strip with some of the best world-renowned

    properties."

- "Beautiful surroundings with an International brand recognition."

The topic of company finances (or the financial soundness of the organization) was most

frequently mentioned as a contrary symbolic indicator ,with 41 of 45 references coded in the

"cons" field. Over half of the company finance references were attributed to a bankruptcy filing

by one of the four gaming corporations under study. The fallout of budget cuts and layoffs was

noted in the following reviews:

- "Company constantly claims poverty and has withheld raises for years, yet upper

    management continue to receive bonuses."

- "Financial problems caused transfers & layoffs."

- "…too focused on minimizing operational costs."

However, reviews of other companies that did not file bankruptcy indicated similar frustration with company finances, i.e., "Upper management has a slash and burn approach in attempts to reach their stock option triggers" and "company that invests heavily in their property assets but not to their most important asset, the employees."

The physical workspace was coded as a symbolic indicator reflective of the employer brand. Reviews coded to this theme referenced the back-of-house areas, office set-up, and location of the hotel/casino resort, i.e., "location near to my residence" or "Accessible by many street options." Qualities inherent to Las Vegas, such as "low cost of living in Las Vegas- No state income tax in Nevada" or "the heat" may or may not appeal to potential, current, or former employees. As such, Las Vegas attributes were also coded as symbolic indicators that may impact recruitment and retention strategies. Figure 16 offers the sentiment summary of psychological benefits associated with symbolic indicators.
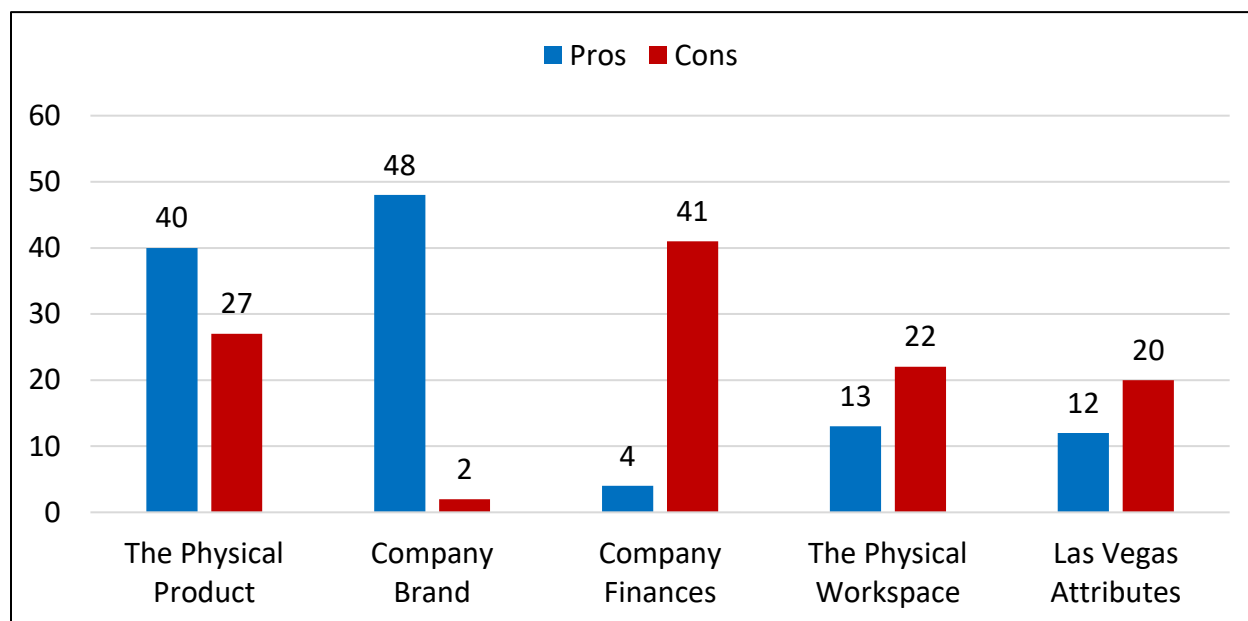

Figure 16. Sentiment summary: Symbolic indicators sub-category. This figure illustrates the number of theme references within the reviewer-designated "pros" and "cons."

Key findings: Research Question One. To determine which employer-brand benefits were frequently referenced as positive or negative attributes of employment in Las Vegas hotel/casino resorts, a thematic analysis was conducted. The following summary offers the key findings of Research Question One, which will be discussed further in Chapter 5. Ambler and Barrow's (1996) trio of employer-brand benefits, e.g., functional, economic and psychological, were associated with both positive and negative remarks posted in online employer reviews. Functional benefits were the least mentioned among the three employer-brand benefits, with the sub-category "growth opportunities" most frequently cited as a positive and lack of promotion opportunities most frequently cited as a negative. Economic benefits were the second most frequently referenced employer-brand benefit; the free meal in the EDR, unspecified benefits, and employment perks were all perceived as positives, while salary and wages were viewed as positive and negative with equal frequency.

Psychological benefits were the most frequently cited of the three employer-brand benefits. Of the three psychological benefit sub-categories (social identity, sense of purpose, and symbolic indicators), the themes linked to social identity were the most commonly referenced, with positive sentiment toward the company atmosphere and co-worker interactions, and negative sentiment toward management behaviors. Within the sub-category sense of purpose, job responsibilities were most frequently mentioned as positive, and work schedule was most frequently mentioned as negative. Symbolic indicators were the third sub-category of psychological benefits, and the most common positive theme was associated with the company brand, while the most common negative theme was associated with company finances.

A sentiment summary of the top five "pros" and "cons" as cited in the employer reviews is presented in Figure 17. Three of the top five themes within the "pros" were linked to economic

benefits (free meal in the EDR, unspecified benefits, and salary and wages), and the two additional themes were associated with social-identity psychological benefits (company atmosphere and co-worker interactions). Conversely, three of the top five themes noted in the "cons" were aligned with psychological benefits: two themes related to social identity (management behavior and company atmosphere) and one theme denoting sense of purpose (work schedule). The remaining two themes most often mentioned in the "cons" related to economic (salary and wages) and functional (promotion opportunities) benefits.
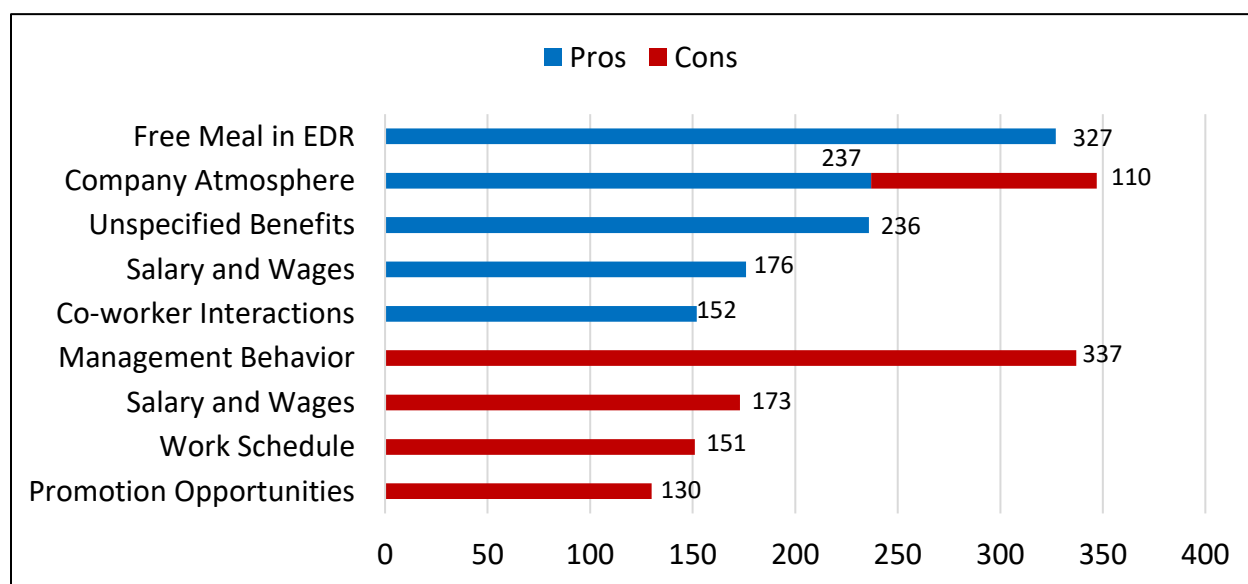
Figure 17. Sentiment summary: Top-five pros and cons. This figure illustrates the number of theme references within the reviewer-designated "pros" and "cons."

Employment status impact on positive and negative references. A secondary analysis was conducted to determine whether employment status affected the frequency of references to the top themes. More specifically, the researcher wanted to determine whether former employees were more likely to reference the top "cons" than current employees and whether current employees more likely to reference the top "pros" than former employees. Surprisingly, the results indicated the opposite. As illustrated in Figure 18, former employees were more likely to

reference the top five themes in the "pros" than the current employees. However, the increase in frequency was modest, excluding mentions of the free meal in the EDR (current = 121, former = 206).

   In examining the "cons," the findings reflected in Figure 19 indicate that current employees were more likely than former employees to mention the top five negative aspects of employment. Yet when discussing management behavior, the former employees spoke more negatively about leadership conduct than the current staff (current = 144, former = 193). Thus, the overall impact of employment status on the frequency of themes mentioned in the "pros" and "cons" was minimal, except regarding the free meal in the EDR and management behavior. Former employees frequently mentioned the free meal as a plus and management interactions as a drawback.
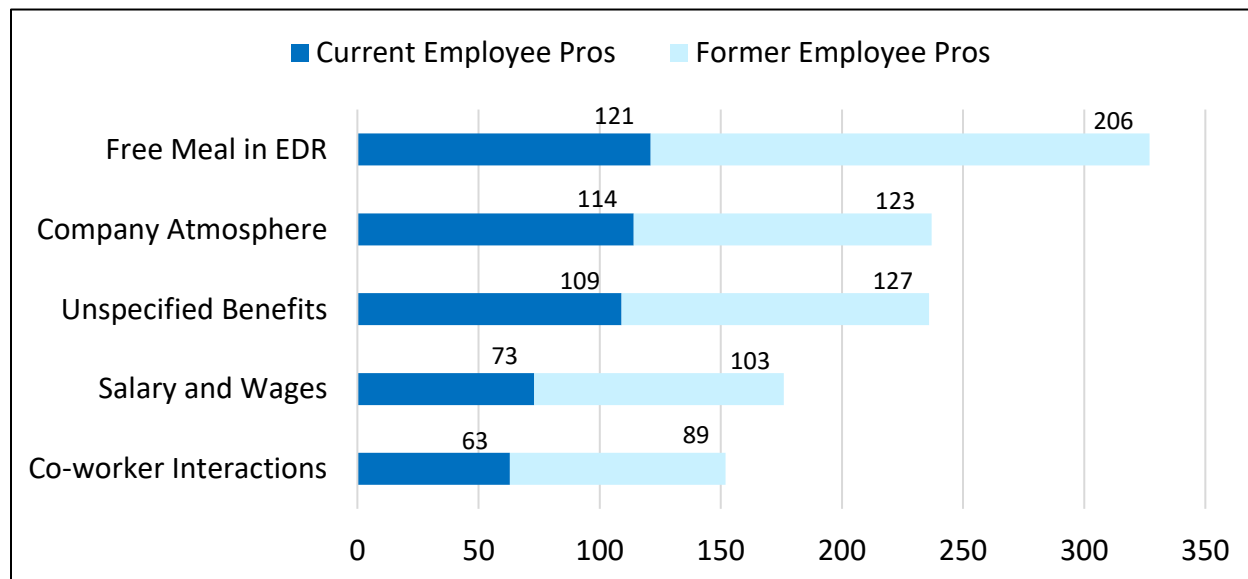
Figure 18. Referenced positive benefits by employment status. This figure illustrates the number of theme references within the reviewer-designated "pros."
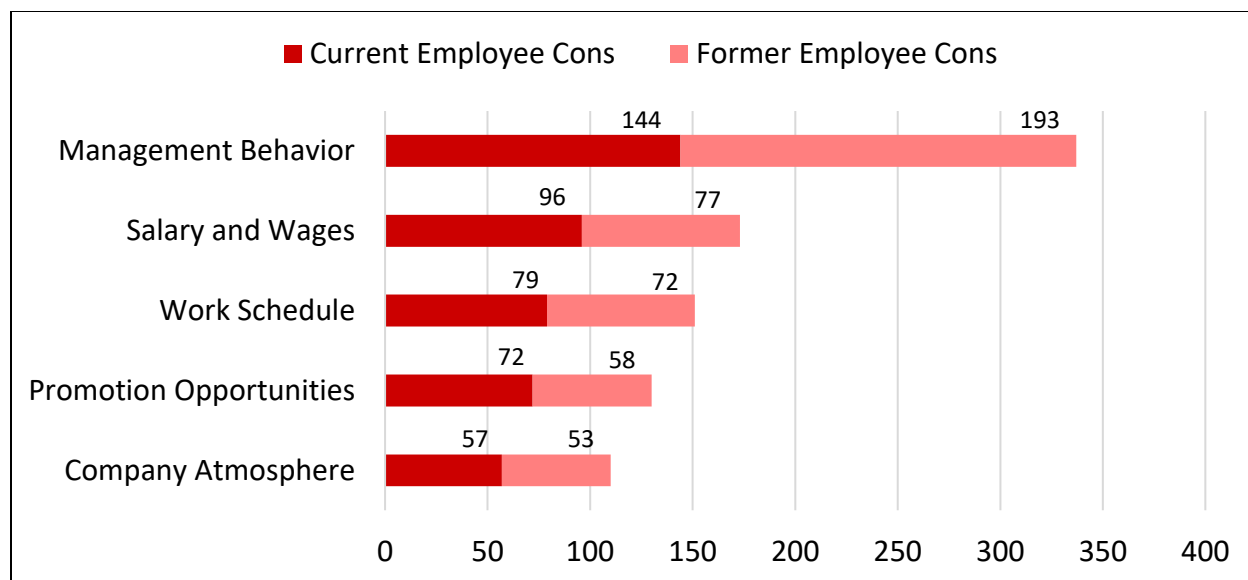
Figure 19. Referenced negative benefits by employment status. This figure illustrates the number of theme references within the reviewer-designated "cons."

Data Interpretation: Research Question Two

Research question two explored the relationship between Ambler and Barrow's (1996) trio of employer-brand benefits (e.g., functional, psychological, and economical) and the overall employee rating awarded by the reviewer. For this research question, the overall rating represented a level of employee satisfaction with the employer. As such, understanding which employer-brand benefits are repeatedly mentioned in reviews with high or low ratings may offer insight into employee motivation (Herzberg et al., 1959). Employees rate their employers on Glassdoor (2019) and Indeed (2019) using a scale of one to five stars, with one star being the lowest score and five stars being the highest. To minimize possible polarity in comments linked to one-star reviews versus five-star reviews, the researcher combined the one- and two-star reviews to reflect "low" ratings and combined the four- and five-star reviews to denote "high" ratings (Marinescu et al., 2018). Three-star ratings were considered moderate and will not be discussed in the results. Of the 1,063 reviews analyzed, 204 represent low ratings, 618 represent

high ratings, and the remaining 241 represent moderate ratings (see Table 16). Thus, 58% of the

reviewers in this sample gave their employer a high overall rating, while 19% of the reviewers

imparted a low rating.

Table 16

Breakdown of Overall Employer Ratings

Overall Employer Rating	No. of Reviewers	%
Low	204	19%
Moderate	241	23%
High	618	58%
Total Reviews	1,063	100%

Note. Low ratings are the combined one- and two-star reviews. Moderate ratings are three-star reviews. High employer ratings are the combined four- and five-star reviews.

The relationship between employment status and overall employer ratings is presented in

Figure 20. Of the 204 reviews in this sample with low overall ratings (one and two stars), 62%

were posted by self-identified former employees. Those who claimed to be former employees

were also responsible for posting 56% of 618 reviews with high overall ratings. The percentage

of employees who gave a moderate rating was split nearly evenly, with 51% former employees

and 49% current employees.
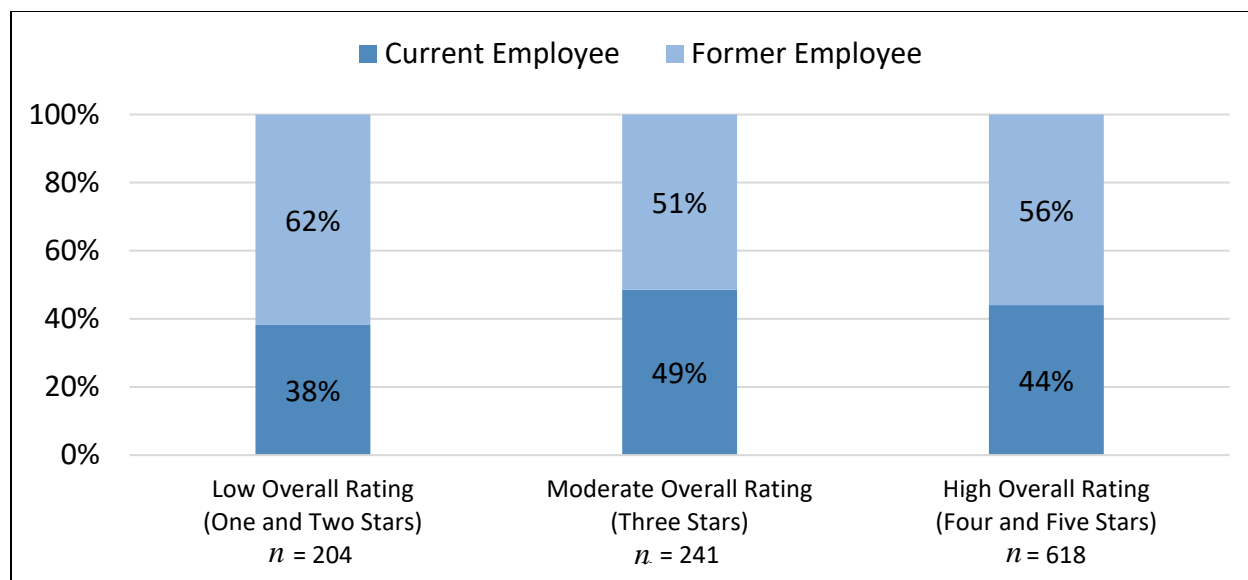
Figure 20. Employment status paired with overall employer ratings.

Positive and negative references associated with low ratings. To explore the association between the positive and negative perceptions of employer-brand benefits and the overall employer ratings, an NVivo matrix coding query was conducted. The matrix coding query reports patterns where data and codes intersect. Thus, the researcher was able to ascertain which frequently mentioned employer-brand benefits most commonly appeared in the reviews with low or high ratings. For example, Table 17 represents the number of benefit references in the 204 reviews that were posted with low employer ratings (one and two stars). Of the 371 positive references made by this group, 53% cited economic benefits ($n = 195$), and 42% cited psychological benefits ($n = 157$). Functional benefits were rarely mentioned as a positive ($n = 19$). Conversely, 69% of the negative references posted in the low-rating reviews referenced psychological benefits.

Table 17

Employer-brand Benefits Paired with Low Overall Rating

	Pros	%	Cons	%
Functional	19	5%	43	10%
Economic	195	53%	93	21%
Psychological	157	42%	308	69%
	371	100%	492	100%

Note. Low overall ratings are combined one- and two-star ratings. "Pros" and "cons" are data sources from the online reviews and contain reviewer-designated positive and negative employment benefits. The reference count represents the frequency with which the researcher identified the theme in the "pros" or "cons" data.

A secondary analysis of the low-rating reviews revealed the top five positive and negative sub-themes, which are provided in the Figure 21 sentiment summary. Management behaviors were the most frequently cited theme in the low-rating reviews ($n = 140$), indicating dissatisfaction with company leadership. Reviewers who gave low ratings also mentioned the following concerns, but with much less frequency than unfavorable management: dissatisfaction with the company atmosphere ($n = 37$), available promotion opportunities ($n = 31$), and the work schedule ($n = 27$). Those reviewers who scored their employers low did offer positive comments about the free meal in the EDR ($n = 47$), employment benefits ($n = 43$), interactions with co-workers, ($n = 35$) and perks like discounts and free shows ($n = 23$). Interestingly, the low reviews mentioned salary and wages as both a satisfier and dissatisfier with nearly the same frequency (pros = 38, cons = 51).

Figure 21. Sentiment summary: Top-five themes in low-rating reviews. This figure illustrates the reference counts of the top-five themes cited in the "pros" or "cons" of the one- and two-star reviews.

Positive and negative references associated with high ratings. Table 18 shows the frequency of benefit references within the 618 employer reviews with high overall ratings (four and five star). Within this group, the positive references to employer-brand benefits nearly doubled the number of negative references (pros = 1,421, cons = 784). Like the reviews with low ratings, the reviews with high ratings expressed satisfaction with economic benefits in 47% of the references ($n = 665$) and psychological benefits in 43% of the references ($n = 612$). The high-rating reviews also favorably mentioned functional benefits with twice as much frequency as the low-rating reviews (high rating = 10% vs. low rating = 5%). Dissatisfaction within the high-rating reviews was most often noted as a psychological benefit, with 65% of the negative references. This finding was similar to the percentage of psychological benefit references observed in the low-rating reviews (high rating = 65%, low rating = 69%).

Table 18

Employer-brand Benefits Paired with High Overall Ratings

	Pros	%	Cons	%
Functional	144	10%	73	9%
Economic	665	47%	198	25%
Psychological	612	43%	513	65%
	1,421	100%	784	100%

Note. High overall ratings are combined four- and five-star ratings. "Pros" and "cons" are data sources from the online reviews and contain reviewer-designated positive and negative employment benefits. The reference count represents the frequency with which the researcher identified the theme in the "pros" or "cons" data.

The top five positive and negative sub-themes cited in the reviews with high ratings were obtained in a secondary analysis, and a sentiment summary is provided in Figure 22. Like the reviews with low ratings, this group expressed satisfaction with the free meal in the EDR ($n = 203$), the general benefits that came with the job ($n = 153$), and interactions with co-workers ($n = 89$). Also comparable was the nearly equal satisfaction and dissatisfaction with salary and wages (pros = 99, cons = 79). Unique to the top themes in the high-rating reviews was the frequency of positive references to company atmosphere ($n = 184$), which was observed as one of the top five negative themes in the low-rating reviews.

Although high employer ratings tend to be perceived as favorable, the reviewers who submitted these scores still offered negative feedback. Key sources of dissatisfaction among these reviewers were challenges with the work schedule ($n = 94$), management behaviors ($n = 92$), and promotion opportunities ($n = 58$). These three aspects of the employment experience were also top concerns expressed in the reviews with low ratings. Issues with job responsibilities ($n = 43$) were a top theme observed in the high-rating reviews and were not as prevalent in the low-rating reviews.
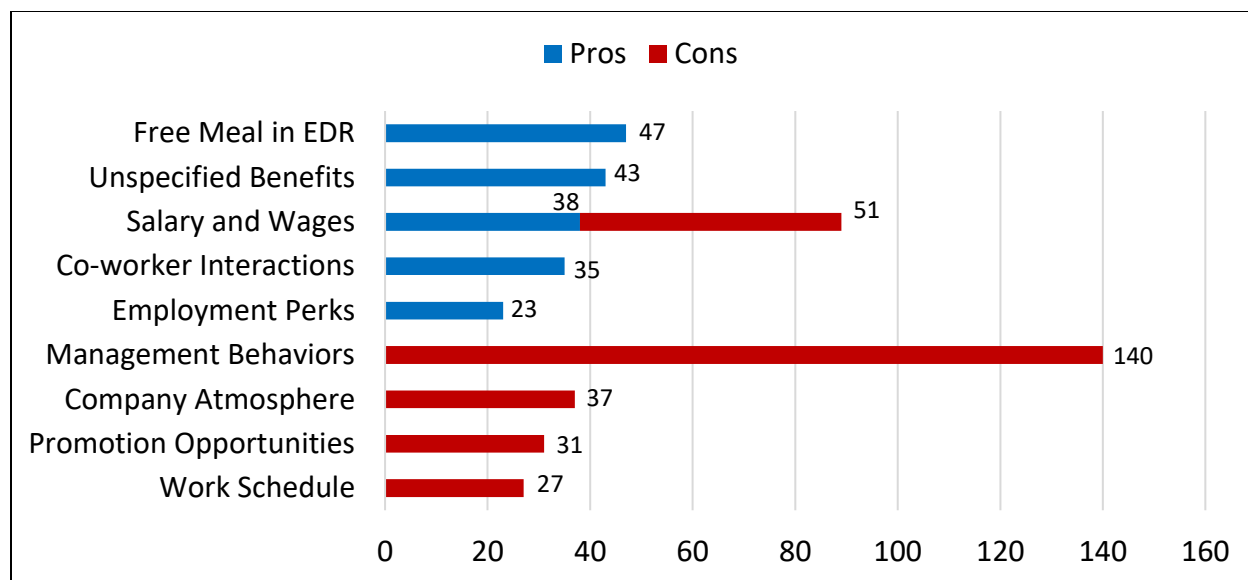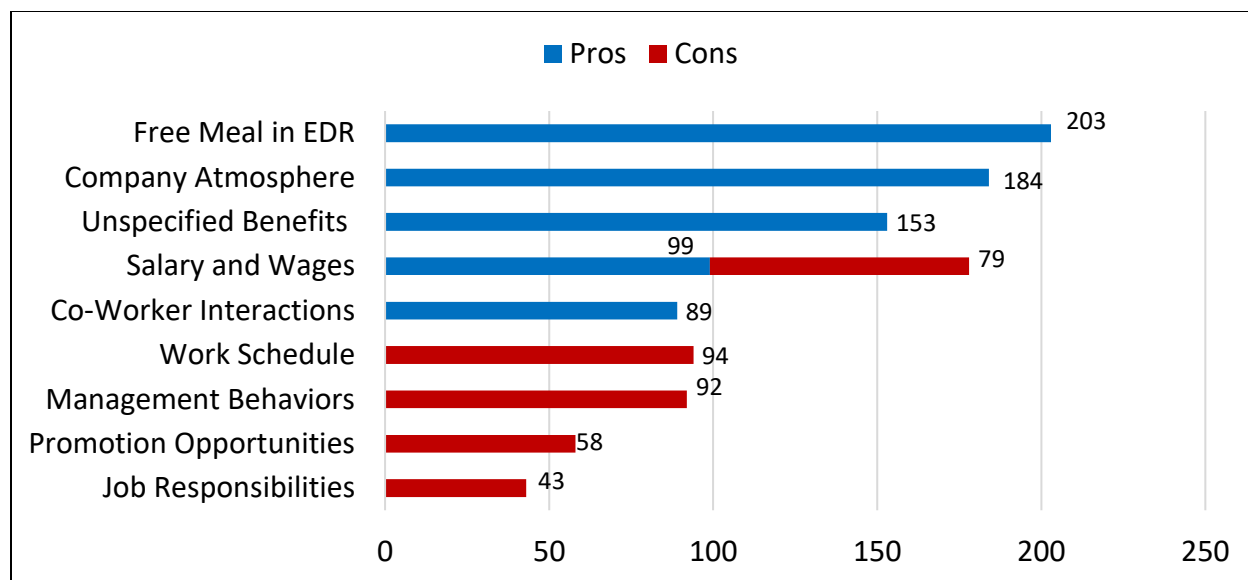
Figure 22. Sentiment summary: Top-five themes in high-rating reviews. This figure illustrates the reference counts of the top-five themes cited in the "pros" or "cons" of the four- and five-star reviews.

Key findings: Research Question Two. To explore the relationship between employer-brand benefits and the overall rating given by the reviewers, the researcher conducted NVivo matrix coding reports, which revealed the following key findings for discussion in Chapter 5. The findings first note that most reviewers in the sample gave their employer a high overall rating of four or five stars ($n = 618$), and self-identified former employees submitted more reviews than self-identified current employees. Previous employees were also responsible for 62% of the low ratings and 56% of high ratings.

The investigation into which employer-brand benefits were repeatedly mentioned in the reviews with low and high ratings revealed that economic and psychological benefits were the most frequently cited, with functional benefits appearing less important. The free meal in the EDR, unspecified benefits, and co-worker interactions were repeatedly mentioned as positive themes irrespective of employer rating. However, employment perks were observed as an important satisfier among reviewers who posted low ratings, while company atmosphere was

perceived as a dissatisfier among these reviewers. Conversely, the reviewers who posted high ratings noted company atmosphere as a satisfier and job responsibilities as a dissatisfier. Displeasure with management behavior was evident across both high-rating and low-rating groups, but frustration with company leadership was much more frequently observed in the reviews with low ratings. Lack of promotion opportunities and issues with the work schedule were common challenges noted in the reviews with both high and low ratings. Additionally, the topic of salary and wages emerged as both a satisfier and dissatisfier among both groups.

Summary

This qualitative, phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of hotel/casino resort employees through an examination of employer reviews posted on the Glassdoor (2019) and Indeed (2019) web pages of four, Las Vegas gaming corporations. This chapter presented the results of a thematic analysis using Boyatzis's (1998) prior-research-driven approach to distinguish the presence and frequency of Ambler and Barrow's (1996) trio of employer-brand benefits posted in the online comments. The researcher also sought to investigate the relationship between the most commonly cited benefits and the overall employer rating awarded by the reviewer. More specifically, the researcher sought to understand which positive and negative themes appeared most frequently in the low-rated and high-rated employer reviews. Chapter 5 will provide a discussion of the key findings presented in this section, along with conclusions, implications for practitioners and scholars, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Implications

Introduction

In the digital age, social media is rising in popularity as a credible source of information for consumers worldwide (Brandtzaeg & Følstad, 2017; Cervellon & Lirio, 2016; Huete-Alcocer, 2017; Wang et al., 2018). Access to online product reviews appears limitless, and consumer voices now influence purchasing behavior far beyond the reach of traditional marketing campaigns (Chu & Choi, 2011). In recent years, a relatively new platform for sharing opinions has joined the ranks of Internet influencers: employer-review websites like Glassdoor and Indeed. These platforms offer a forum where current and former employees can post unfiltered comments about their employers. The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore the comments posted on the Glassdoor (2019) and Indeed (2019) pages of four Las-Vegas based global gaming organizations to better understand employee perceptions of the employer brand. A thematic analysis of the reviews was conducted to identify the trio of employer-brand benefits (e.g., functional, economic, and psychological) drawn from Ambler and Barrow's (1996) employer-brand equity theory. Although the overarching goal of this research was to identify what employees of this unique industry desired from their employer, two specific research questions guided the study:

1. Which employer-brand benefits, if any, cited in the employer reviews of hotel/casino resorts are most frequently associated with positive and negative employee sentiment?

2. What is the relationship between employer benefits (e.g., functional, psychological, and economical) and the overall employee rating given by the reviewer?

Summary of the Study

Past employer-branding research has generally been conducted from the stance of employee recruitment, with college students as the core sample for investigation (e.g. Arachchige & Robertson, 2011; Cable & Turban, 2001; Van Hoye & Lievens, 2007b; Wayne & Casper, 2012). This study is one of the few to explore employer branding from the perspective of the current and former employee, rather than potential applicants. The research is also one of the first employee-centric studies to examine online employer reviews for the presence, and frequency, of Ambler and Barrow's (1996) employer-brand benefits (Dabirian et al., 2017; Lievens & Slaughter, 2016; Tanwar & Prasad, 2017). This study aimed to advance the interdisciplinary study of employer-branding theory in the fields of marketing and HR.

To expand the field of employer-branding, the researcher analyzed over 1,000 employer reviews with a focus on their mentions of employer-brand benefits. The reviews were gathered using a custom web-crawler designed to capture designated fields from the Glassdoor (2019) and Indeed (2019) pages of four global gaming corporations operating in Las Vegas, Nevada. The comments under analysis were posted over multiple years, and the anonymous reviewers all self-identified as current or former employees who worked in Las Vegas. The employer reviews were coded following a prior-research-driven approach of thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998). The main theoretical framework for this study was Ambler and Barrow's (1996) employer-brand equity theory, which posits that employers offer three types of benefits to attract and retain employees: (1) functional, (2) economic, and (3) psychological. Other underlying employer-branding theories that guided this research were Tajfel's (1974) social identity theory, Spence's (1973) signaling theory, and the instrumental-symbolic framework (Katz, 1960; Keller, 1993;

Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). In addition, Herzberg et al.'s (1959) motivation-hygiene theory was considered primary to the job satisfaction aspects of this research.

Discussion of Key Findings

A thematic analysis was conducted to answer the two research questions posed in this study. The reviewer-designated employment "pros" and "cons" obtained from Glassdoor (2019) and Indeed (2019) were explored for repeated themes associated with Ambler and Barrow's (1996) trio of employer-brand benefits. The following is a summary of the key findings reported in Chapter 4.

Research Question One. Research Question One asked which employer-brand benefits, if any, cited in the employer reviews of hotel/casino resorts are most frequently associated with positive and negative employee sentiment? The findings revealed that all three of Ambler and Barrow's (1996) employer-brand benefits appeared in the reviewer-designated "pros" and "cons" posted in the employer reviews. The results confirmed Ambler and Barrow's (1996) hypothesis that employer-brand benefits are a distinct product that employers offer to attract and retain employees. Thus, employer brand may be as invaluable to an organization as the company brand, as both contribute to company reputation (Sparks & Bradley, 2017).

Psychological benefits. Ambler and Barrow's (1996) original framework did not specify the level of significance that employees attribute to each of the three employer-brand benefits. In this study, the results showed that psychological benefits were emphasized with more frequency than economic or functional benefits. More specifically, three aspects of psychological benefits were most often mentioned: (1) management behaviors, (2) co-worker interactions, and (3) company atmosphere. These three themes were assigned to the social identity sub-category, a classification in this study drawn from Tajfel's (1974) social identity theory. Tajfel (1974)

suggests that an individual develops a sense of social inclusion through interpersonal interactions that emotionally connect the person to the environment or group. In a workplace scenario, employees may feel included, or excluded, from the group depending on how they perceive their interactions with management and co-workers (Tajfel, 1974). These social exchanges, in turn, affect the employee's interpretation of the company atmosphere.

One additional psychological benefit commonly cited in the reviews was the work schedule, which was assigned to the sub-category labeled "sense of purpose." A sense of purpose and belonging were facets of psychological benefits as initially defined by Ambler and Barrow (1996). The work schedule theme was linked to the psychological aspects of employment in this study since reviewers often talked about the challenges of not having enough hours, working long hours, or staffing shifts around the clock. As such, a work schedule lacking hours, requiring overtime, and odd shift availability diminishes the employee's sense of purpose for performing the job.

The third sub-category of psychological benefits, symbolic indicators, captured the group of physical company attributes or signals that attract employees to the employer (Spence, 1973). The themes coded to this sub-category represented the company indicators that attract employees to the employer, e.g., the company brand, the consumer product, and the location of the job. The symbolic indicators aligned with Spence's (1973) principles of signaling theory which posits that businesses transmit signals, whether intentional or unintentional, about the underlying organizational culture. Job seekers receive these transmissions and use them to determine whether a company is a good fit for them. The attributes in this sub-category also support Lievens and Highhouse's (2003) symbolic-instrumental framework. The symbolic qualities associated with working in a Las Vegas casino/resort, such as "world class," "prestigious,"

"cool," and "good vibe," reflect traits linked to this distinct industry (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003).

Although the symbolic indicators noted in this study were reflective of two of the foremost employer-branding theories (e.g., signaling and symbolic-instrumental), the frequency with which employees mentioned these benefits was not commonly noted in this study. This finding may reveal that symbolic indicators are more relevant to a job-seeker during the recruitment process than to current or former employees sharing an employer recommendation. The results may also serve as a cautionary note to those organizations who rely heavily on their consumer brand, or external marketing, to represent their employer brand (Robertson & Khatibi, 2012). Company image may serve as the initial allure for joining an organization. However, if the company's external image is not congruent with employees' actual experiences, then employees may express dissatisfaction. For example, if potential employees seeking to work in the Las Vegas casino/resort industry are attracted to the job because of the company-advertised "prestigious" and "world class" brand, then the implied EVP may be that employees will experience the same prestige as the consumer. If employees then start the job and realize the best benefit of employment is a free meal in the EDR, then they may be disappointed because the implied EVP was not delivered.

Economic benefits. The second most referenced employer-brand benefit in this study was economic benefits. Most notably mentioned in this sample were the free meal in the EDR, the general (or unspecific) benefits of employment, and compensation in the form of salary and wages. While some reviewers found compensation to be "good," "decent," "fair," and "probably the best thing about this company," others thought the pay was "well below the industry average." One reviewer justified the lesser compensation through the observation that "pay is a

little lower than other companies, but no one can compete with their benefits." The contradiction among the reviewers could be an indication that inconsistent pay impacts turnover rates. As one reviewer remarked, "They don't compensate well, and they continuously lose talent over competitors because of it." Another reviewer also stated that "Salaries are embarrassingly low. High performing employees leave for more money from competitors regularly." The inconsistent perceptions of compensation among hotel/casino resort employees may be a function of several variables, such as company-specific pay structures for union versus non-union positions, salary versus hourly positions, and management versus frontline positions. Other factors including seniority, skill level, previous job experience, and education level may also contribute to the varying opinions regarding pay structure.

Functional benefits. Functional benefits, the elements of employment which provide growth and development opportunities, were not commonly referenced in the employer reviews. However, when this benefit was cited, reviewers were happy with the learning opportunities but disappointed in the limited or null career advancement. One reviewer suggested that the organizations "need more opportunities for everybody can have a chance to move up." However, in hierarchical organizations like hotel/casino resorts, the breadth of management positions diminishes as an employee moves up the company ladder (Tumasjan et al., 2011). As such, HR practitioners in the hotel/casino industry may want to consider implementing or reexamining learning and development programs to ensure that clear paths to promotion are readily and easily accessible.

Furthermore, some reviewers suggested that office "politics" and "favoritism" were barriers to advancement, e.g., "Really hard to get noticed and get ahead unless you're connected with the 'right people' within the company." No matter what the perceived reason for lack of

promotions, the functional-benefit findings reveal that without a viable career path, some employees working in the Las Vegas gaming industry may agree with the reviewer who stated, "This place is just a stepping stone to a better job." Without a clear map for advancement, employees who partake in regular training and never encounter a promotional opportunity may begin to perceive learning and development as a self-serving exercise on behalf of the company. Thus, employees may view the lack of advancement as a disappointment in the implied employer-brand promise.

The key findings in Research Question One provide evidence to support Ambler and Barrow's (1996) concept of employer-brand benefits. This study expanded Ambler and Barrow's (1996) original framework with the inclusion of relevant employer-branding theories in the formation of three psychological benefit sub-categories; (1) social identity, (2), sense of purpose, and (3) symbolic indicators (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Spence, 1973; Tajfel, 1974). Based on the frequency of mentions, the results also indicated the order of importance in which these employees value employer-brand benefits: (1) psychological benefits, (2) economic benefits, and (3) functional benefits.

Research Question Two. Research Question Two sought to identify which employer-brand benefits cited in the employer reviews were most frequently associated with positive and negative employee sentiment. Mainly, the researcher wanted to know which themes aligned with the low (one- and two-star) and high (four- and five-star) overall employer ratings submitted by the reviewers. Understanding what employees are defining as favorable or unfavorable aspects of employment, and how often those attributes are referenced in the low and high-rated review, may assist HR practitioners with pinpointing workplace motivators.

Figure 23 demonstrates the intersection between overall employer ratings (high or low) and reviewer sentiment (negative or positive) regarding the trio of employer-brand benefits. The sub-themes referenced in this diagram represent the top five themes observed in each quadrant. Conceptually, the illustration shows that reviewers who gave high employer ratings were quite positive about economic (i.e., salary and wages, unspecified benefits, and the free meal in the EDR) and psychological (i.e., co-worker interactions and company atmosphere) benefits. Interestingly, reviewers who gave low employer ratings frequently mentioned the same sub-themes as favorable. The reviewers who submitted low ratings did not appreciate the company atmosphere, but they enjoyed the employment perks.

In opposition, reviewers who gave their employer low ratings expressed negativity regarding the economic (i.e., salary and wages), psychological (i.e., management behaviors, work schedule, and company atmosphere), and functional (i.e., promotional opportunities) benefits. All three employer-brand benefits and associated sub-themes were also cited as unfavorable among the reviewers who gave high employer ratings. However, poor company atmosphere was linked closely to low ratings, while disapproval of job responsibilities was related to high ratings. Only one sub-theme, salary and wages, was evident in all four quadrants.
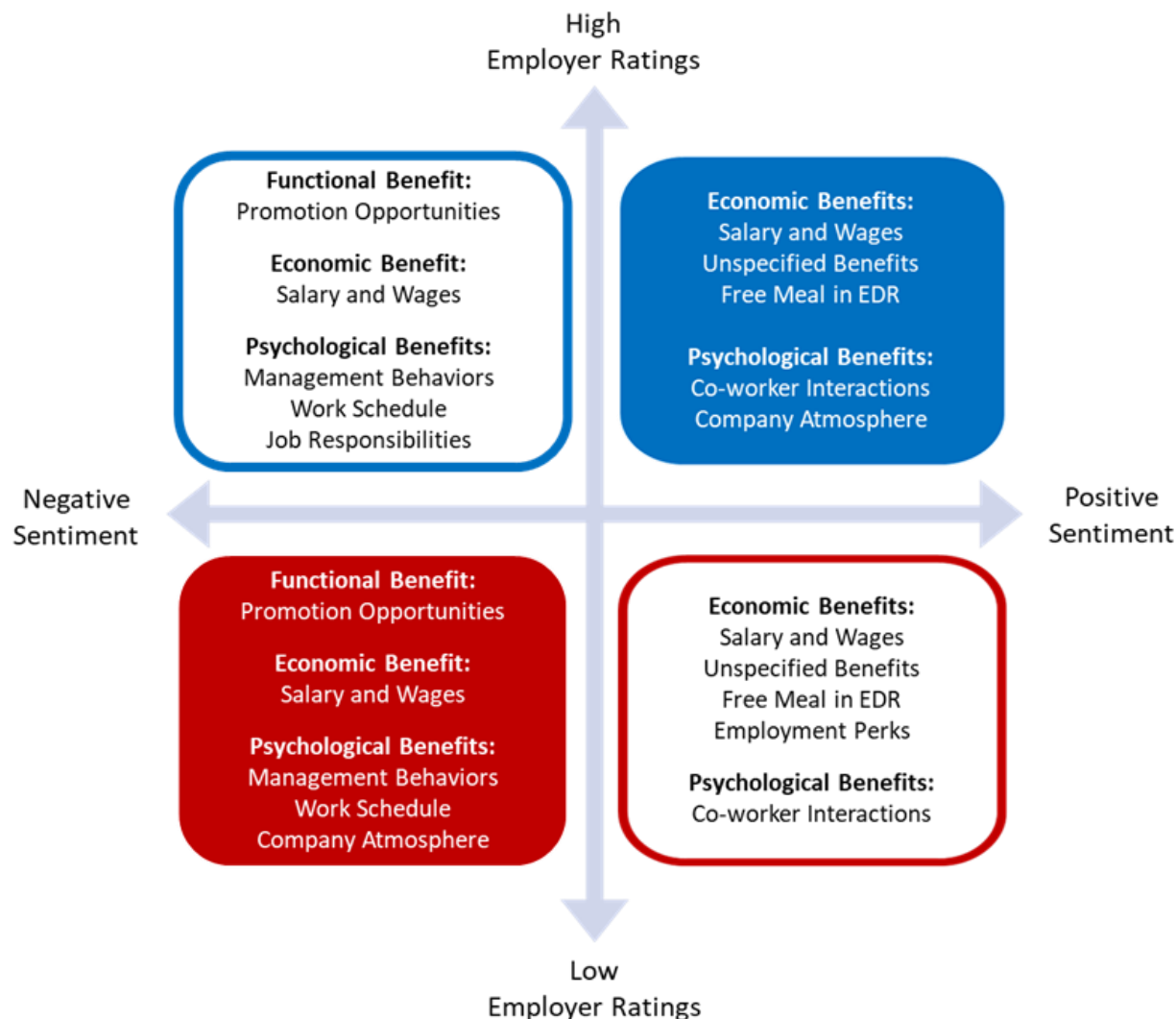
Figure 23. The intersection of reviewer sentiment and employer ratings. This figure illustrates the top-five referenced employer-brand benefits observed in each the sentiment/rating quadrants.

Employer-brand benefits associated with job satisfaction. The findings in Figure 23

reveal how the different sub-themes relative to the trio of employer-brand benefits appear as both

"pros" and "cons" of employment and in low and high-rated reviews. Thus, viewing these results

through the Herzberg et al.'s (1959) motivation-hygiene theory for gauging employee

satisfaction posed a challenge. According to Herzberg et al. (1959), motivators were thought to

be job satisfiers, and when evident in the workplace, these factors help sustain long-term

satisfaction, but do not invoke dissatisfaction. Examples of motivating factors include personal

achievement and advancement, which coincide with functional employer-brand benefits, and recognition, job responsibility and the job itself, found in psychological employer-brand benefits (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Herzberg et al., 1959). Hygiene factors, on the other hand, were not viewed as employee motivators, according to Herzberg et al. (1959). Instead, these employment features, if absent, cause dissatisfaction and do not increase satisfaction (Herzberg et al., 1959). Economic employer-brand benefits, such as monetary rewards, and psychological employer-brand benefits concerning interpersonal relationships would be examples of hygiene factors (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Herzberg et al., 1959). Table 19 compares Herzberg et al.'s (1959) motivation-hygiene factors to Ambler and Barrow's (1996) employer-brand benefits and will be referenced for the discussion of job satisfaction.

Table 19

Comparison of Motivation-hygiene Factors to Employer-brand Benefits

	Motivation Factors	Hygiene Factors
Outcomes	Job Satisfier Source of Satisfaction Sustainable Engagement	Job Dis-satisfier Absence causes Dissatisfaction Short-term Engagement
Herzberg et al. (1959)	Achievement Advancement Recognition Responsibility The Job Itself	Monetary Rewards Interpersonal Relationships Management Interactions Co-worker Interactions
Ambler and Barrow (1996)	*Functional Benefits* Promotion Opportunities Growth Opportunities *Psychological Benefits* Social Identity Sense of Purpose	*Economic Benefits* Benefits Compensation *Psychological Benefits* Social Identity

The results of this study indicated that psychological benefits linked to social identity (i.e., management behaviors), sense of purpose (i.e., work schedule), and functional benefits (i.e., promotion opportunities) were more often perceived as negative aspects of employment. Aligning these findings with the motivation-hygiene theory comparison in Table 19, the researcher noted that Herzberg et al.'s (1959) reference to recognition might be an outcome of management behavior; therefore, it may be considered a motivating factor. Additionally, an employee's work schedule can be associated with job responsibilities and the overall job itself; thus, it can be deemed a motivating factor as well. Lastly, promotion opportunities are viewed as chances for career advancement and meet Herzberg et al.'s (1959) criteria for a motivating factor. According to Herzberg et al. (1959), motivating factors lead to job satisfaction and do not arouse dissatisfaction. However, the motivating factors, in this case, were frequently mentioned in the reviews with low (one- and two-star) and high (four- and five-star) overall employer ratings as a dis-satisfier.

The results also showed that economic benefits (especially the free meal in the EDR and employment benefits) and psychological benefits (mainly the social identity theme related to co-worker interactions) were most often perceived as positive employment features, regardless of the overall employer rating. All three of these employer-brand benefits (e.g., a free meal in the EDR, employment benefits, and co-worker interactions) correspond with Herzberg et al.'s (1959) hygiene factors (see Table 19). Herzberg et al. (1959) claim that hygiene factors do not motivate employees, but if these elements are absent, then dissatisfaction occurs. Furthermore, hygiene factors do increase satisfaction (Herzberg et al., 1959). While the hygiene factors in this study were often mentioned as a job satisfier, the reviewers also cited them in both the low- and high-rated reviews.

While facets of the motivation-hygiene theory were evident in this study, conclusive outcomes as to whether these factors are directly linked to the low and high overall employer ratings would require further analysis. This study identified seven sub-categories of employer-brand benefits comprising 39 sub-themes, indicating an assortment of variables tied to job satisfaction. The multiplicity of perceived employer-brand benefits, coupled with the reviewers' content or discontent with the feature, demonstrates the diversity of acceptable employment standards among the workforce. Consequently, Locke's (1969) assessment of Herzberg et al.'s (1959) research is a valid one; Locke argued that the motivation-hygiene theory might be an oversimplified view of the complex human value system. Although it is essential to understand what employees are saying in employer reviews, and perhaps understand the commonalities which drive satisfaction, further research is suggested to confirm the potential relationship between overall employer scores and specific employer-brand benefits.

Conclusions

This study offered an innovative approach for gathering and analyzing employee feedback, outside of traditional surveys or focus groups. The eWOM posted on employer review sites such as Glassdoor (2019) and Indeed (2019) proved to be a rich data source available for researchers and practitioners alike. The sample of reviews offered a glimpse into the lived experiences of the hotel/casino resort employees, highlighting their positive and negative perceptions of employer-brand benefits. Although theme commonalities were observed within the favorable and unfavorable reviews, the researcher's investigation of anonymous feedback places some limitation for asserting conclusions. One key limitation of this study is that the unknown reviewers were self-identified current and former employees, and it was not possible to fact-check whether their employment status claims were truthful. Thus, the results of the study

rely heavily on the assumption of source credibility. Filieri et al. (2015) argue that the vast quantity of feedback posted on a review website, known as the "wisdom of the crowd" (p. 182), lends credibility to the hosted information. The user trustworthiness of platforms like Glassdoor and Indeed is also achieved through the combination of website recognition and brand reputation (Chen & Law, 2016; Lee et al., 2017; Sparks & Browning, 2010; Wang et al., 2018). As such, the conclusions of this study should be considered a first step toward understanding the validity of online employer reviews as a data source.

Conclusion one. This study supports Ambler and Barrow's (1996) theory that companies have an employer brand, as well as a company brand, which requires the attention of HR and marketing practitioners. Online strategies for promoting a corporate brand are generally the responsibility of marketing practitioners. However, given that the popularity of online career sites for posting resumes, applying for jobs, and researching potential employers is on the rise, HR practitioners must now monitor the online employer brand. The sharing of online best practices between HR and marketing teams will be an invaluable asset for companies interested in maintaining their employer brand. The interdepartmental collaboration will be essential in the digital age, as employer-brand monitoring may become just as crucial as overseeing the corporate brand.

Conclusion two. HR initiatives and company actions may influence the company brand, but employee opinions define the employer brand and the benefits of employment. According to Dabirian et al. (2017), the expressed views of employees reflect their authentic employment experiences. If company recruitment campaigns are portraying an unrealistic employer brand that turns out to be incongruent with the actual employment experience, then employees are likely to feel dissatisfaction after being hired (Robertson & Khatibi, 2012). For instance, in this study,

potential employees may have been attracted to positions in a Las Vegas hotel/casino resorts based on the symbolic indicators associated with a world-renowned vacation destination and iconic properties. The excitement of working in an infamous adult playground with 24-hour action may conjure expectations of a similarly exciting work environment. The reality is somewhat different when recounting the employer brand from employee reviews. Based on the findings of the study, the employer brand of these four Las Vegas resort/casino companies might be described as:

> A job with satisfactory salary and wages; excellent benefits, such as a free meal once day; and insurance. Employees also have occasional access to perks like discounts on show tickets and hotel rooms on the Las Vegas Strip. Learning opportunities abound, but the chances for promotion are limited. Fellow employees are friendly and helpful, and they make the job fun. Overall, the company atmosphere is good, unless the employee perceives poor treatment from management.

Conclusion three. As noted in the Las Vegas resort/casino employer-brand example, Ambler and Barrow's (1996) trio of employer-brand benefits identifies relevant attributes of the employment experience, particularly the psychological and economic aspects. The results of this study suggest that for many employees, emotional connections which support their social identity and sense of purpose in the workplace are just as important as monetary and material rewards. Most importantly, this study's results indicate that employee interactions with management significantly influence the employment experience. This finding highlights the importance of hiring and developing individuals who have the emotional intelligence to foster mutual respect and inclusion in the workplace. Organizations whose employer brand symbolizes a positive work environment, led by leaders who are respected and trusted, may be the most attractive to potential employees. These same attributes might contribute to employee loyalty and engagement, thereby lowering turnover rates.

Conclusion four. Monetary and material rewards over and above regular pay are high-ranking features of the employer brand. Among the economic benefits identified in this sample, the researcher observed that employees had conflicting views on fair wages. However, ancillary employment benefits—such as free meals, insurance, discounts and other perks—were highly valued. These "what's-in-it-for-me" features of the employment experience were overwhelmingly evident in the positive comments submitted by the reviewers. As such, companies should be mindful when eliminating or reducing long-established benefits, as these cutbacks may diminish employer-brand equity in the eyes of the employees.

Conclusion five. Workplace growth and development opportunities were not presented as top priorities in this data set of employer reviews. Reviewers mentioned these functional benefits significantly less frequently than psychological and economic benefits. Although one could argue that this observation supports a philosophy that training and development is not a critical employee motivator, one could also argue that growth opportunities are secondary to the emotional and financial aspects of the job. Thus, development opportunities do not appear to be at the forefront of employees' minds when they are providing an employer recommendation.

Conclusion six. When employees do comment on growth and development opportunities, they voice appreciation for on-the-job learning opportunities, and they express frustration about limited opportunities for career advancement. Lack of promotion opportunities was a top theme observed in the low- and high-rated employer reviews in this study. With no clear progression in the company available, highly-trained employees may be apt to leave an organization for an advanced position with a competitor. Furthermore, employees are likely to regard company training initiatives presented as career-building opportunities with some

skepticism if they see that actual promotion opportunities are out of reach. Careful planning of such programs is required to ensure that the chances for advancement are evident post-training.

Conclusion seven. All employer-brand benefits have varying levels of favorable and unfavourability. While sentiment commonalities were noted, the findings confirm Locke's (1969) assertion that every human has a unique set of values which influences the perceived significance of each benefit. In this study, the most notable differences in opinion concerned salary and wages. This particular benefit was cited as both a positive and a negative, and it was mentioned in both the low- and high-rated reviews. These varying opinions may be attributed to organizational structures and policies. However, personal values and life experiences may also influence employee perceptions of fair wages. For instance, employees who have experienced challenges finding employment may feel fulfilled by the security of a steady paycheck and find the pay scale satisfactory. Others, like salaried employees who work beyond a 40-hour week without additional compensation, may find that their salary does not outweigh the time spent away from their families and personal lives.

Conclusion eight. Not all employer reviews posted on Glassdoor and Indeed are unduly negative. Surprisingly, 58% of the employer reviews in this sample rated employers highly (with four- or five-star ratings). Moreover, self-identified former employees gave more favorable overall employer ratings than self-identified current employees. This finding is relevant to practitioners who may initially be inclined to discount employer review sites as forums where employees go to vent their frustration. Based on this study, the researcher recommends a paradigm shift toward proactive social media listening for improving the employee experience. The way HR practitioners respond to online employer reviews will impact the employer-brand

image, just as marketing responses to travel reviews influence the consumer-brand image
(Sparks & Bradley, 2017).

Implications of the Study

The findings from this interdisciplinary study have implications for both marketing and
HR practitioners and researchers. Accordingly, this section will address both of these areas.

Implications for practitioners. This study supports the need for incorporating social
media listening into HR practices, particularly following the posts on employer review sites
(Biswas & Suar, 2013; Reid & Duffy, 2018). Platforms like Glassdoor and Indeed offer
employees a forum to share feedback and freely voice their concerns outside of the constraints of
the company. HR practitioners generally expect to capture honest employee opinions through
internal surveys and focus groups. If trust between management and employees is high, then the
chances for obtaining candid feedback using these methods may also be high. However, if
employees do not feel a sense of trust in their workplace environment, then gathering truthful
opinions in these ways may be a fruitless exercise. Employer reviews can help to address this
challenge by supplying HR practitioners with information that may not be openly shared in
company-sponsored forums or questionnaires. The researcher of this study was not aware of any
back-end Glassdoor or Indeed software that would offer employers the ability to evaluate
reviews in detail, as the researcher has done. If HR practitioners do have access to website
applications for in-depth analysis of employer reviews, use of those services is highly
recommended.

Furthermore, this study strongly suggests the need for shared online practices between
marketing and HR practitioners. This notion supports research indicating that consumer
advertising strategies may be applied in the HR setting (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Backhaus &

Tikoo, 2004). Some consumer marketing teams, particularly those in the tourism and travel industry, have over two decades of experience addressing the challenges of online reviews. As such, the tourism and travel marketing teams might be a good source of assistance for the development of best practices for responding to employer reviews. However, as Sparks and Bradley (2017) noted, some hotel management teams are still learning the most effective ways to address online complaints, while others are not responding to these complaints at all. Should HR practitioners choose to ignore the feedback posted in employer reviews, then a risk exists that employee eWOM will fill in the gaps and provide information to guide job-seekers' decisions (Backhaus, 2016).

At a granular level, this study offers a detailed perspective on the employer-brand benefits that accompany employment at a Las Vegas hotel/casino resort. The findings pinpoint the specific benefits which employees most often perceive as positive or negative. The results also show which specific benefits are linked to low or high overall employer ratings. With this knowledge, leaders in the Las Vegas hotel/casino resort industry will have better insight into what employees commonly value from the employment experience. The findings may also serve as the baseline for establishing an EVP representative of the established culture and the realities of the workplace. An EVP in alignment with management actions and beliefs, rather than marketing spin, may bring about a greater degree of employee trust, higher engagement, and reduced turnover (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

Implications for researchers. Employer-branding research is a relatively new field of investigation, and studies examining the concept from the employee-centric perspective are scant (Theurer et al., 2016). The findings from this study contribute to the employer-branding literature in several ways. Foremost, this research is one of the first to provide support for Ambler and

Barrow's (1996) employer-brand concept through an examination of online employer reviews from a single industry. This study has also contributed to the expansion of employer-branding research from college-student convenience samples to eWOM posted by self-identified current and former employees.

This study also shifted the research perspective of employer branding from a recruitment strategy to retention strategy. The methodology demonstrated that online reviews offer a unique data source for exploring employee sentiment outside of company-controlled environments. The open-ended questions posed on Glassdoor (2019) and Indeed (2019) furnished information suitable for qualitative data analysis of job satisfiers and dis-satisfiers, which may impact turnover rates. The sheer volume of employee feedback available in public online forums has broad implications for a variety of research topics related to employee retention, including employer branding, job satisfaction, and leadership effectiveness.

Lastly, this study expanded the dimensions of Ambler and Barrow's (1996) trio of employer-brand benefits (e.g., functional, economic, and psychological benefits) by developing sub-categories of these benefits. The seven sub-categories and 39 sub-themes identified in the Las Vegas hotel/casino resort reviews might be applicable for future research in the field of hospitality. Additionally, employer-branding researchers may find that the interrelationship of social identity theory (Tajfel, 1974), signaling theory (Spence, 1973) and the instrumental-symbolic framework (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003) within the broad category of psychological benefits provides a more comprehensive profile of the emotional aspect of employment. Figure 24 offers a conceptual illustration of the role employer-brand benefits in the employment experiences based on these findings. As shown in Figure 24, psychological benefits represent the attributes most closely related to a positive or negative employment experience, with

relationships that support an employee's social identity being the most influential, followed by sense of purpose, then symbolic indicators. Economic benefits provide the second layer of employer-brand benefits, with free meals, insurance, discounts and perks emerging as well-received benefits, while compensation had its advantages and disadvantages. Functional benefits were the least mentioned aspect of the employment experience. Although reviewers appreciated learning opportunities, they viewed the lack of promotion opportunities as a downside.
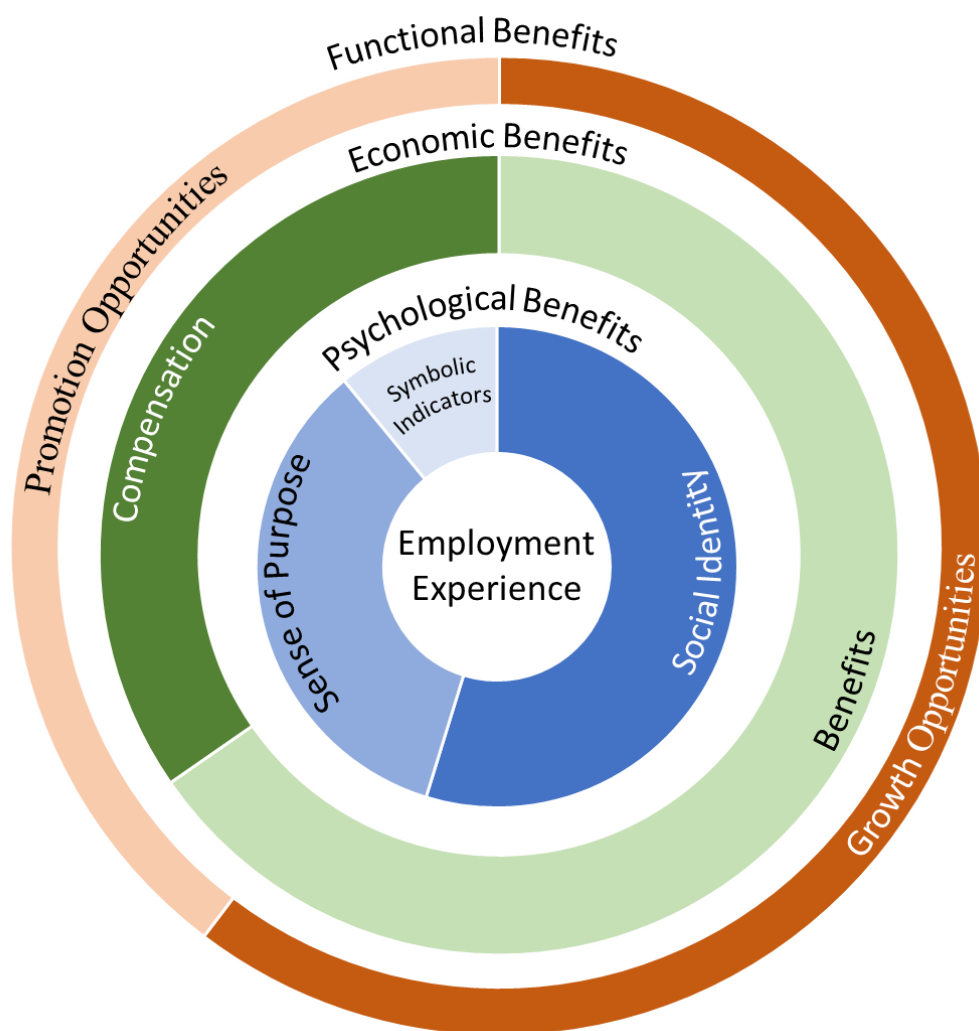

Figure 24. The role of employer-brand benefits in the employment experience. This figure offers a conceptual illustration of the findings for Research Question One.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research is one of the first to explore online employer reviews from a single industry for the presence of Ambler and Barrow's (1996) employer-brand benefits. Through this investigation, the researcher identified the lived workplace experience of hotel/casino resort employees in Las Vegas. Because the sample of reviews examined was limited to a distinctive brand within the hospitality industry, the results may not be generalizable beyond Las Vegas gaming corporations. As such, the researcher offers the following recommendations for future research:

- Determine whether online reviews are a credible source of information by using triangulated data to compare the online feedback with company-administered surveys. Do commonalities exist between the two sources?

- Validate whether the identified employer-brand benefit sub-categories and sub-themes are present in online reviews of other gaming resorts within and outside Las Vegas. Do Las Vegas casino/resorts have a different employer brand than casino/resorts located in the Midwest or East coast? Would Native American-owned gaming establishments have different employer-brand benefits than non-tribal casinos?

- Compare the employer-brand benefits of U.S. and international gaming resorts owned by the same parent company. With gaming corporations expanding to jurisdictions outside the U.S., are employer-brand benefits affected by cultural shifts in the workforce?

- Survey HR practitioners to better understand whether employer reviews are broadly accepted as a source of employee feedback or perceived as a potential hindrance to recruitment. How is the external data being used internally, if at all?

- Research best practices for responding to employer reviews. Determine whether HR, marketing, or both are responsible for monitoring employer reviews and the employer brand.

- Uncover reviewer intent. Why do employees leave comments on employer review sites? Are reviewers expressing retaliation, the need to be heard, or do they believe they are assisting job seekers in the decision-making process?

Evaluation of the Study

The researcher of this study openly stated her potential bias as a practitioner within the Las Vegas hotel/casino resort industry. As a former marketing and HR executive in the Nevada gaming industry, the researcher has extensive experience in brand and reputation strategies targeting consumers and employees. Although the researcher was not privy to company surveys for triangulating the data and validating her current findings, she can offer professional insight. While some of the findings were surprising to the researcher, others were expected. For instance, the abundant number of references to the free meal in the EDR was both unexpected and disappointing. It was unexpected because the researcher did not realize how much value the employees place on free meals in the EDR. This realization put into perspective why employees voice complaints whenever the EDR food is modified or reduced in availability. It also helped the researcher to understand why employees sometimes feel upset when the EDR furnishings (i.e., the tables, chairs, carpet, and décor) are not well-maintained or updated. For some employees, the free meal in EDR may represent more than complimentary food. For these

employees, the free meal, along with the other secondary economic benefits, may represent an offering of gratitude from the employer. Thus, when budget efficiencies reduce or remove these benefits, the company actions may signal to some employees that the organization cares more about the bottom line than about the staff. That is a disappointing possibility and one that may be associated with employee disengagement.

What the researcher did not find surprising was the number of negative references to management behaviors. The researcher's preconceived notions going into this study were that employer reviews would be filled with leadership-bashing, and this was not necessarily the case. Management conduct may have been the most unfavorable aspect of the employment experience, yet for some reviewers, leaders' poor behavior was not enough to merit a low overall employer rating. This silver lining in the researcher's observations should not deter companies from hiring managers with the soft skills needed for leading people. The researcher has discovered through trial and error that it is much easier to teach employees how to do a task than it is to teach them how to be a good leader. Hiring for hard skills, and presuming employees will inherently possess soft skills, is a cautionary tale that may not lead to a *happily ever after* in the workplace.

This study also gave the researcher a newfound appreciation for the importance of co-workers' interactions in the workplace. The significant role that fellow employees play in job satisfaction was not even on the researcher's radar before conducting this study. Much of the researcher's work during her tenure in HR was focused on improving the performance of management. Little to no time was spent evaluating team dynamics as a contributor to job satisfaction. Exploring the employer reviews has given the researcher an increased awareness of the psychological benefits associated with on-the-job social interactions. This study identified management exchanges with staff and staff exchanges with co-workers as potential catalysts for

a positive company atmosphere. By coupling these interactions with economic benefits that employees deem valuable (i.e., free meals, insurance, discounts, and other perks) a hotel/casino resort in Las Vegas may improve its overall employer ratings and consequently strengthen its employer brand. However, what happens when the gaming corporations in this study attempt to bring their business models into other U.S. or international markets? The researcher would be interested in conducting interviews with the leaders of these organizations to understand the extent to which they discuss employer-brand benefits and cultural differences (if at all) when courting markets outside of Las Vegas for gaming licensure.

Summary

Just as consumers have an online voice capable of influencing the perceptions of a company brand, employees have an online platform for influencing the perceptions of an employer brand. Employer review sites give employees the opportunity to share the good and bad of the employment experience. The comments posted on these platforms are free from company control, which might cause concern for HR practitioners and company leaders who prefer that employee feedback remain within the confines of the organization. Practitioners in the travel industry felt similar unease when travel reviews were launched in the mid-1990s (Baka, 2016). At that time, marketing practitioners and hotel operators were faced with the question of whether they should respond to consumer feedback in a public forum. HR practitioners are now confronting the same online challenges that their marketing counterparts experienced over 20 years ago. In examining this challenge, this research contributes to the interdisciplinary study of employer branding through the lens of HR management and marketing strategy. This phenomenological study explored staff eWOM posted on employer review sites to understand the lived workplace experience of hotel/casino resort employees. The reviews were analyzed for

the presence of Ambler and Barrow's (1996) employer-brand benefits, and prevalent themes appearing in low and high overall employer rating were noted. Although psychological and economic benefits were commonly referenced in the reviews, the findings also suggest that employees have varying degrees of appreciation for the package of employer-brand benefits. Employees' diverse opinions may be based on their individual value systems.

The research also demonstrated the usefulness of employer reviews as a source of qualitative analysis. Previous recruitment research suggests that source credibility plays a role in the selection of future employers (Fisher et al., 1979; Van Hoye & Lievens, 2009). Recruitment studies have also shown that the opinions of current and former employees influence the decisions of potential employees (Harris & Ogbonna, 2013; Keeling et al., 2013; Melián-González & Bulchand-Gidumal, 2016). As websites like Glassdoor and Indeed gain popularity, and in turn credibility, job seekers may believe that the most accurate picture of an employment experience can be found in employer reviews. Thus, the content posted from the mouse of self-identified current and former employees may appear more authentic than a company-crafted employer-branding campaign. As such, HR and marketing practitioners must be prepared to protect the employer brand in the same manner as the consumer brand while maintaining the overall company image.

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APPENDIX A

IRB Approval

PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY

Graduate & Professional Schools Institutional Review Board

January 28, 2019

Protocol #: **1282019**

Project Title: Examining Employer-Brand Benefits through Online Employer Reviews

Dear Patricia:

Thank you for submitting a "GPS IRB Non-Human Subjects Notification Form" related to your *Examining Employer-Brand Benefits through Online Employer Reviews* project for review to Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has reviewed your submitted form and all ancillary materials. Upon review, the IRB has determined that the above titled project meets the requirements for *non-human subject research* under the federal regulations 45 CFR 46.101 that govern the protection of human subjects.

Your research must be conducted according to the form that was submitted to the IRB. If changes to the approved project occur, you will be required to submit *either* a new "GPS IRB Non-Human Subjects Notification Form" or an IRB application via the eProtocol system (httpw://irb.pepperdine.edu) to the Institutional Review Board.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite our best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete explanation of the event and your response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the IRB and documenting the adverse event can be found in the *Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual* at https://community.pepperdine.edu/irb/policies/.

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all further communication or correspondence related to this approval.

On behalf of the IRB, we wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Sincerely,

Institutional Review Board (IRB)
Pepperdine University

cc: Mrs. Katy Carr, Assistant Provost for Research
        Dr. Judy Ho, Graduate School of Education and Psychology IRB Chair

APPENDIX B

Phase II Codebook

Node	Description
401k and Retirement Plans	Comment specifically mentions 401k plan or retirement plans.
Benefits General	Comments reference benefits but does not specify type of benefits. General comment "Benefits."
Breaks	Mentions breaks. Does not include "Paid Lunch Break" which is separate node.
Community Service	Comments reference community involvement or giving back to the community.
Company Atmosphere_ Culture Environment	Comment specifically mentions the word "culture" or the general workplace "environment" or "atmosphere." General comments such as "great place to work" included, as well as references to employee morale and engagement. Does not specifically mention "management" which would be coded to Management Behaviour.
Company Brand	Comments mention the brand, i.e., "looks good on resume." Reflects how the company reputation or name is perceived beyond just a "great company to work for." Phrases like "industry leader," "iconic," or "well-known." Different than general feelings such as "great company," or "awesome company," which cannot be assumed as related to the brand or working environment.
Company Finances	Mentions financial decisions or situations influencing the employee opinion. Can include budgets, consolidations, profits, earnings, mergers, layoffs, capital expenses or bankruptcy.

Node	Description
Compensation	Comments referencing weekly salary or hourly pay. Includes words such as "pay," "salary," "raises," or "bonuses." If referencing "overtime" as a scheduling issue, then code comment to "Scheduling" node. If "overtime" is mentioned as not being compensated, then code to "Compensation" node.
Co-workers	Comment mentions "employees," "team," "staff'," and "co-workers." Does not include "management." Can include "people" if follow with "people I work with" to denote co-workers. Does not include "People" without specifics, i.e. "the people are great." In this case, people could be co-workers, managers or customers and coded to "People General."
EDR	References to employee dining room (EDR) without specifically mentioning the food or free meal. Comments about break rooms can be coded to this node as well.
Employee Events and Programs	Comment mentions HR events and programs created especially for employees
Employment Perks	Mentions of comps, free shows, free meals (not EDR), and discounts. Also includes references to perks of employment available outside of the company.
Environmentally Conscious	Mentions of Corporate Social Responsibility or environmental issues.
Free Meal	Comment references free meal in employee dining room (EDR). Does not include references to complimentary meal in restaurants or other venues outside of the EDR. Includes comments mentioning "paid lunch."

Node	Description
Growth Opportunities	Comment specifically mentions "Growth Opportunities" or ability to learn, improve skills or network. Code references to training to "Training" node. Code references to advancement or promotions to "Promotion Opportunity" node. Growth due to ability to transfer among properties should be coded to "Transfer Opportunities."
Guests	Comment references guest interactions. Guests can be identified as customers, clientele, or patrons.
Health Insurance	Comment specifically mentions insurance, including health, dental and vision.
Job Responsibilities	Specifically mentions job tasks or responsibilities. Includes mentions of job ease or likability of position.
Job Security	Comments reference feelings of employment security or insecurity.
Las Vegas Attributes	Comment reference characteristic inherent of Las Vegas.
Management Behaviours	Comment references management, supervisors, boss, etc... Includes references to lack of recognition or office politics.
On-site Wellness	Refers to gym, wellness program, or onsite clinic.
Other Departments	Mentions other "teams" or "departments."
Paid Lunch Break	References "paid lunch" or "hour long break."
Paid Time Off	Comment references Paid Time Off (PTO), holiday pay or vacation time. Does not include "paid lunch" which should be coded with "Paid Lunch" or "Paid Breaks" which should be coded to "Breaks."

Node	Description
Parking	Comment references parking, or issues around employee parking.
People General	Mentions people without specifying if that means employees, management or guests.
Policies and Procedures	Comments reference policies or procedures effecting work performance.
Promotion Opportunities	Comment references promotion, advancement or career opportunities (or lack thereof).
Scheduling	Comment references scheduling procedures and shift availability (hours scheduled).
Staffing	Comment referencing staffing issues such as not enough employees on shift, downsizing.
Stress Level	Comment mentions general feeling of stress associated with job.
The Physical Product	Comments referencing facility attributes related to the consumer product, i.e. property, rooms, casino area, restaurants. Does not include customer services as the product.
The Physical Workspace	Includes references to office space and areas where job takes place.
The Relational Product Customer Service	Comments mentions the customer service product.
Tips	Mentions receiving tips.
Tools to Perform Job	Mentions items provided to do the job.
Training Opportunities	Mentions training opportunities, includes certifications
Transferring Opportunities	Mentions of transferring to other departments or properties.
Tuition Reimbursement	Mentions school reimbursement programs.

Node	Description
Turnover	Comment references turnover or constant changes in positions.
Uniforms	Comment references supplied uniforms and laundry services. References to dress code should be coded to "Policies and Procedures."
Union	Mentions the union in comment.
Unknown	Unable to determine what comment is referencing within the context of the review.
Work Life Balance	Comment references that work schedule or workload impacts life outside of work, i.e. time with family, vacation planning, days off.