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The impact of social media and collaboration on Gen Y employees' engagement

Introduction

In present networked economy, organisations gain future sustainability and success, not only through knowledge assets but from interconnections, networks, and collaboration. As such organisations promoting collaboration have a clear advantage in innovation and sustainability. However, the multigenerational nature of current workforce, comprising of Baby boomers (1946-1960), Gen X (1961-1980) and Gen Y (1981-2000); makes the case of engagement more compelling as each generation has unique engagement drivers. While Baby boomers and Gen X employees seek job security, Gen Y seeks challenging tasks, learning and growth, and empowerment as engagement drivers (Gilbert, 2011). Although Baby boomers and Gen X will retire in few years, but future workforce across the globe will comprise of Gen Y. Gen Y is found to be the least engaged workforce segment globally. Also, due to competitive labor market there are ample of opportunities and attractive compensation available that appeal them at large. Therefore, engaging Gen Y employees is a mission-critical for organisations.

Engagement is heightened psychological state of cognitive, affective, and physical satisfaction of an employee to exhibit discretionary behaviors. Prior literature cites following drivers of engagement namely supportive environment, trust, communication processes, leadership, and career progression. However, psychological needs of Gen Y employees are different from its predecessors. They have dominant growth needs and seek continuous access to technology and developmental opportunities to stay engaged. Being raised in a technologically advanced era, they desire to use technology and enjoy working in collaborative environment whereby individual knowledge can serve as a resource for fellow employees' learning. Therefore, they seek technological support for networking in the workplace; hence social media offer a conducive platform to build social relationships with superiors and peers (Hershatte and Epstein, 2010).

Social media encompasses a class of online applications, which offer tremendous capabilities of interactivity, openness, visibility, and community-reinforcing potential in real-time mode. This enables social media to enhance knowledge sharing, networking, internal communication,

building relationships, and in turn collaborating (Holtzbtat et al., 2013). Collaboration through social media fills the void of Gen Y's needs for belongingness and growth, in turn, contributing to feeling engaged. On this backdrop, this paper investigates the impact of social media to promote workplace collaboration and foster engagement of Gen Y employees by developing a conceptual framework.

Theoretical framework and hypotheses development

Social media and Workplace collaboration

Social media comprises of online communication channels such as social networking sites (Facebook, LinkedIn, Myspace, Twitter), Blogs, Content sharing sites (Youtube, Flickr), Internal networking tools (Yammer), and Communities of practice (CoP). In academic literature, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) have carried out seminal work towards conceptualising social media. They defined it as “a group of internet based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of web 2.0 and enable the creation and exchange of user generated content” (p .61).

Collaboration is defined as a cooperative process whereby people with shared goal, interests, and commitment and collectively explore new ideas to reach a solution. (Rank, 2008). Marshall (1995, p. 15) defined it as “a principle based process or working together that produces trust, integrity and breakthrough results by building true consensus, ownership and alignment in all aspects of the organisation” It culminates when participants are free to exchange ideas, endowing transparency and flexibility. In contemporary organisations, collaboration is based on communication, relationship building, and knowledge sharing. However, with the advent of social media tools within organisations, collaboration has earned a new meaning, This is because as employees from diverse functions, units, areas of expertise and locations exchange resources, build network, and create informal learning opportunities to create business value.

Social media provides an array of features such as visibility, flexibility, accessibility, ease of use, persistence, immediacy, and community potential. Unsurprisingly, the information dissemination potential of social networking tools has been shown to be vital for enhancing collaboration

within organisations. Networks and connections enable effective information and knowledge flow. The increased visibility and community building enable development of networks resulting in increase in the number of weak ties- that create opportunities for collaboration by sharing novel information (Holtzbtat et al., 2013). Also, social media improves internal communication, information and resource sharing. It has invigorated internal communication by making it dynamic, synchronised, multidirectional, and real-time dialogue (Reitz, 2012). The multi-directional nature of communication enables the search and discovery of new information easier, thereby fuelling a collaborative approach. To this end, networking sites create opportunities for formal and informal interactions thereby enhancing communication and information-sharing. While tools like wikis, blogs, and internal networks act as networked information systems to facilitate organising and sharing of tacit knowledge and other information (Paroutis and Al Saleh, 2009). Also, sharing of knowledge, work experiences, and insights, through candid discussion, dialogue, and enquiry generates avenues for development. This is consistent with prior literature, which highlights impact of knowledge sharing and social media on learning and development (Naim and Lenka, 2015). In particular, Community of Practice (COP) fosters knowledge creation, sharing and learning. In contemporary organisations, COPs reinforce social learning whereby people learn from others in social context and informal information exchanges become the source of learning. In other words, social media contributes to community development, knowledge sharing, communication, and informal learning, fostering higher levels of collaboration. Therefore, we hypothesise-

Hypothesis 1- Workplace use of social media has a positive effect on collaboration.

Workplace collaboration and Gen Y's perceived learning

Bedwell et al. (2012, p. 135) conceptualised collaboration as "an evolving process whereby two or more social entities actively and reciprocally engage in joint activities aimed at achieving at least one shared goal". In contemporary organisations, collaboration is based on social interactions, communication, and knowledge sharing. Infact, the present business environment requires geographically-dispersed employees to be collaborative i.e. to seek out people with

necessary expertise to solve complex problems at a faster rate. Therefore, workplace collaboration is at the heart of managing the contemporary global organisations. But these potential benefits are still not well understood, due to lack of robust research on workplace collaboration. In this vein, collaboration fosters social interaction that facilitates knowledge, idea, and expertise sharing leading to collaborative learning, whereby individual employees are responsible for other employees' personal and professional development. In this view, an organisation promoting collaboration fosters learning opportunities for its employees. They engage in dialogue and enquiry to learn from seniors about their accomplishments, failures, and emotional distress that groom them personally and professionally. This is based on social constructivist approach of learning, which states that learning occurs in social environment promoted by spontaneous interactions, interpersonal discourse, negotiation, and questioning (Vygotsky, 1978). Collaborative environment provides avenues for employees to actively interact and share knowledge and skills, in turn, fostering critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making. In particular, initiatives promoting sharing of information and knowledge create opportunities for individual learning through competency development. (Naim and Lenka, 2016). This results in building their personal and professional competencies such as problem-solving, networking, decision making, self-confidence, opportunity identification, and analytical aptitude. This leads to satisfaction of cognitive needs of learning and growth needs of employees of Gen Y employees, which in turn translates to cognitive and emotional engagement. This is consistent with the extant literature that suggests that collaborative knowledge sharing culture fosters cognitive dimension of employee engagement by facilitating organisational learning (Kumaraswamy and Chitale, 2011; Naicker, 2013). Therefore, collaboration goes a long way in strengthening the perception of learning of Gen Y employees. This is supported by past research

indicating a connection between collaboration and perceived learning (Gao, 2013). Also, Gen Y employees are relatively new to organisations and have limited work experience; they are motivated to collaborate, to build relationships and learn from others. Therefore we hypothesise-

Hypothesis 2- Perception of collaboration in the organisation has a positive effect on Gen Y employees' perceived learning.

Gen Y employees' perceived learning and engagement

Engagement is “the harnessing of organisation members’ selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances.” (Kahn, 1990, p. 694). To be emotionally engaged is to form meaningful connections to others (peers, co-workers) and to experience empathy for others’ feelings. In contrast, being cognitively engaged is being acutely aware of the mission and role in the work environment. Engagement is also defined as a positive, affective-cognitive state composed of vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002). In recent years, employee engagement has been the focal point of HR managers. Different HR policies are framed to earn employee engagement including supportive environment, communication processes, leadership, and developmental opportunities. However, prior research reports that different generations of employees tend to have unique engagement drivers (Gilbert, 2011). Likewise, Gen Y employees feel engaged, only if they perceive an organisation committed to satisfy their higher order sociocognitive needs.

The extant literature suggests a positive association between perception of learning and employee positive attitudes (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990). Therefore, employees with access to

learning opportunities are highly motivated and committed. The past research has shown that the organisational initiatives to offer learning and development opportunities, particularly skill and capacity development are strong predictors of employee satisfaction and engagement (Cole, 1999; UdayBhaskar and Mishra, 2014). In particular, initiatives promoting sharing of information and knowledge create opportunities for individual learning through competency development. (Naim and Lenka, 2016). This results in building their personal and professional competencies such as problem-solving, networking, decision making, self-confidence, opportunity identification, and analytical aptitude.

In agreement with their psychological profile, Gen Y employees exhibit a dominant growth need and a learning goal orientation; hence are attracted to the developmental initiatives offered by organisation (Aryee, Lo and Kang, 1999). Therefore, continuous learning opportunities offered by an organisation by promoting dialogue and enquiry, socialisation, and collaboration serves their quest for personal learning, which in turn fosters feeling of engagement (UdayBhaskar and Mishra, 2014; Watkins and Marsick, 2003).

As engagement is a psychological state, employees are more likely to feel emotionally and cognitively engaged, when their dominant growth needs are served. Therefore employees perceive that their organisation is concerned towards their continuous development and they harbor a sense of belongingness, involvement, and growth. This results in satisfaction of their higher order cognitive and self actualisation needs. In line with social exchange perspective, once Gen Y employees recognise that organisation is committed to their overall well-being, they feel an obligation to repay in terms of positive reciprocal response of higher engagement. Thus, the perception of learning evokes positive response manifested as higher engagement. This is consistent with the past research which indicates strong positive relationship of employee

engagement with psychological need satisfaction (Meyer and Gagne, 2008). Therefore, we hypothesise-

Hypothesis 3- Gen Y employees' perceived learning has a positive effect on employee engagement.

Research methodology

Sample description

A cross-sectional survey design is used to gather primary data. Gen Y employees from IT industry in Delhi-NCR region are selected as respondents. NCR is one of the biggest IT hubs in India. We contacted HR Managers to take their consent to participate in this research and to identify Gen Y employees based on their birth years. Those born between 1981-2000 are deemed fit to participate in the research. We administered 300 questionnaires from October 2016 to December 2016 to survey Gen Y employees. In all, 209 completely filled questionnaires were collected with a response rate of 69.67%.

Instrument

Questionnaire items were adapted from pre-existing validated scales. The five-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree) was used as the measurement method.

Collaboration It is measured by scale adapted from Liao et al. (2015, in press) and Ushiro (2009). A sample item was: "*Employees of my organisation help each other.*" Responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree").

Social media- Based on the extant social media literature a questionnaire is developed, as no suitable measure for social media existed. Based on this study, a questionnaire was developed (see Annexure A). Each item is a 5-point likert type statement anchored at extreme poles ranging from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’. An example of a item is “*I frequently use social media for work purposes*”.

Perceived learning- It is measured by scale adapted Halic et al. (2010) to test perceived learning in a collaborative environment. A sample item is. “*My point of view has been acknowledged by my peers*”.

Employee engagement - It is measured by scale taken from Rich, Lapne and Rawfor (2010). This questionnaire measures cognitive, emotional, and physical dimensions of employee engagement. An example is “*I am enthusiastic in my job*”. It is widely used scale of engagement.

Controls

To avoid potentially misleading relationships between our study's variables and to enhance the validity of the study, the probable influence of age group, gender, and education were controlled. The coding schemata for the categorical control variables are shown in Table 1.

Results

Data analysis for the present study was done using SPSS 21.0 and AMOS 7.0 software.

Hypotheses testing were carried out through correlational analysis and regression

technique.

Measurement Model assessment

Firstly, the instrument reliability and validity were examined. To this end, reliability estimates, correlations, and descriptive statistics including standard deviations for all the variables under study are depicted in Table 1. Then, the scales were examined for construct validity by estimating reliability, composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE). Table 2 presents reliability and validity estimates and other metrics for the item measures, and suggests that all reliability estimates were higher than 0.70 and the minimum value of the composite reliability of all the research constructs is 0.868 and the minimum average variance extracted (AVE) is 0.774. This indicates that each research construct possesses good internal consistency. Moreover, the factor loadings of all the items possess statistically significant levels. The factor loadings of all the items in the research model were > 0.5. In addition, the AVE values for all study variables were between 0.724 and 0.921, which were > 0.5. Thus, this measurement model possesses adequate convergent validity.

Before proceeding for hypotheses testing, firstly the measurement model was examined for dimensionality, convergent, and discriminant validity through Confirmatory factor analysis. As depicted in Table 3, the proposed four-factor model of social media, collaboration, perceived learning, and employee engagement is found to exhibit acceptable fit indices (Hair et al. 2010) with following results ($\chi^2/df= 1.37$, $p< .001$, CFI (Comparative-Fit-Index)= 0.93, TLI (Tucker–Lewis-index)= 0.92 RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation)= 0.036).

Test of hypotheses

To examine the discriminant validity of the four-factor model, it was compared with four alternate models (see Table 3). First, it was compared against the three-factor model (all the items of social media and collaboration loaded on a single factor, and perceived learning and employee engagement). Findings reveal that the three-factor model was a comparatively poor fit with following values: $\chi^2/df = 2.66$, $p < .001$, CFI = .62, TLI = .63, RMSEA = .072, $\Delta\chi^2 = 2,395.44$, $df = 50$, $p < .001$. Then the proposed model is tested against two factor model (all items related to social media, perceived learning and employee engagement loaded on a single factor), which was proved to be a poorer fit than the proposed measurement model with following values: $\chi^2/df = 2.96$, $p < .001$, $df = 1,809$, CFI = .61, TLI = .55, RMSEA = .079, $\Delta\chi^2 = 2,964.79$, $df = 64$, $p < .001$. Therefore, it is concluded that the overall fit of the model is good.

Thereafter, the discriminant validity of the four-factor model was estimated. Furthermore, the result reveals a 38% explained variance, which was well within the prescribed limit of 50%, the minimum threshold in accordance with Harman's single factor test (Podsakoff et al., 2012), thereby indicating that common method variance has been dealt with effectively. Table 1 shows that social media has a significant positive effect on collaboration ($\beta = .321$, $p < .01$), providing support for Hypothesis 1. Also, collaboration found to have significant positive effect on perceived learning ($\beta = .437$, $p < .01$) providing support for hypothesis 2, and finally perceived learning found to have significant positive effect on employee engagement ($\beta = .313$, $p < .01$) thereby supporting hypothesis 3.

Evaluation of Structural Model

Given the positive results for the analyses of discriminant validity, internal consistency reliability, and convergent validity, the structural model, in which the assumed relationships between latent variables are specified, can be evaluated. We estimated the R^2 , path coefficients, and effect sizes. The R^2 and path coefficients provide information on the model efficiency. The R^2 indicates the portion of explained variance in relation to overall variance. The R^2 values may be between 0 and 1. Table 2 shows the values obtained for the R^2 and path coefficients. The findings from Table 2 suggest the the model explains 44% of the variance in social media ($R^2 = 0.438$), 48% of the variance in collaboration ($R^2 = 0.483$), 33% of the variance in perceived learning ($R^2 = 0.327$), and 32% of the variance in employee engagement ($R^2 = 0.317$). The standardised path coefficients ranged from 0.321 to 0.443 were statistically significant.

(PLEASE INSERT FIGURE 1 AND TABLE 1, 2 & 3 ABOUT HERE)

Discussion

Employees in contemporary organisations are increasingly facing pressures of meeting deadlines and delivering results, and engrossed in work that they may get disconnected from each other, in turn feeling disengaged. This is evident from significant slump in global employee engagement levels as reported by Gallup (2013). Therefore, promoting workplace collaboration acts as a double-edged sword by improving employee networking as well as maximising organisational effectiveness through higher engagement. This paper aims to broaden the understanding on possible linkage of collaboration, social media and Gen Y employees' engagement. In this vein, this study emphasised on the role of collaboration and perceived learning and moderating effect of social media on the relationship between collaboration and perceived learning. Findings of the

hypotheses testing reveal that collaboration has a positive relationship with Gen Y employees' employee engagement ($\beta = .31$, $t = 2.9$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that higher the collaboration, higher the engagement. This is due to the fact that collaboration promotes development and networking, which creates a sense of emotional attachment with the organisation. This is in agreement with past research, which reveals a positive link of collaboration with employee engagement (Soker, 2015). Importantly, the present business environment requires collaboration of geographically-dispersed employees to have a shared perception, understanding of complex business problems, to arrive at a consensus, and develop a shared goal. Consequently, workplace collaboration is the heart of managing the contemporary global organisations.

Further, from Indian Gen Y employees' perspective, learning and development is crucial, as they face pressure from family, friends, and relatives to progress in their professional careers. Also, IT industry demands continuous updating of skills and knowledge to stay marketable and enhance career opportunities. Therefore, continuous learning is quintessential for Indian Gen Y employees. Consequently, organisation offering avenues for development generates a sense of emotional attachment and commitment manifested as high levels of engagement. It has theoretical underpinnings from social exchange theory, whereby an individual reciprocates for a positive treatment received from others (Emerson, 1976).

The second hypothesis is focused on assessing the mediating effect of perceived learning on collaboration and employee engagement, signifying that perceived learning is the key to invoke employee engagement. Gen Y employees' employee engagement is directly proportionate to perceived learning ($b = .3$, $t = 2.9$, $p < 0.01$) i. e. the higher the perceived learning, the higher the

employee engagement of Gen Y employees. As suggested by Cole (1999), an organisation's developmental opportunities to enhance employee competencies, have a profound influence on employee engagement of the employees.

The third hypothesis highlighted the moderating effect of social media on collaboration and perceived learning of Gen Y employees, suggesting that strategic leaders being visionary and development-oriented reinforce the competency development. Social media tools such as offer tremendous capability to promote internal communications, knowledge sharing, and relationship building, in turn facilitating collaboration. This is consistent with the study examining the relationship between social media and collaboration (Naim and Lenka, 2015).

Implications

The present study has implications for both theory and practice. From managerial vantage point, the study reveals that to improve employee engagement of Gen Y employees from IT industry, organisations must integrate social media into their strategy. Social media offers a conducive platform to facilitate workplace collaboration, which in turn positively influence workplace learning. As a result, organisation as a whole becomes a learning entity with a strategic orientation towards learning, performance, and innovation. Therefore, it is essential for IT organisations to design a holistic social media policy as a guideline for employees to facilitate the effective usage of social media. In addition, social media is commensurate to the techno-savvy profile of Gen Y employees (Naim, 2014). Secondly, the results indicate that collaboration has a significant positive relationship with employee engagement. More importantly, in today's multigenerational workforce, collaboration has become crucial as it fosters healthy relationships

resulting in workplace harmony and effective utilisation of available skills within the organisation. Thirdly, evoking positive employee attitudes of engagement in Gen Y employees is positively related to their intention to stay (Naim and Lenka, 2015). This has valuable implications for hyper-competitive IT industry, which operate in globalised economy, highlighted by high talent mobility. In India, as per recent estimates, IT industry experiences roughly 20-25% attrition rates in a fiscal year (Deloitte, 2013).

From theoretical vantage point, this study contributes to the literature on linkage between collaboration and employee engagement. Firstly, Gen Y employees' perception of learning is the key to evoke their engagement. The findings suggest that social media is pivotal in facilitating collaborative learning, ultimately leading to higher engagement in Gen Y employees. Secondly, no empirical study has investigated the impact of collaboration on engagement of Indian Gen Y employees. To the best of our knowledge, so far no study has ever examined employee engagement of Indian Gen Y employees from IT industry using an empirical approach. Finally, the study contributes to the literature on collaboration, social media, perceived learning, and employee engagement through external validation of the the concepts developed in a western world context.

Limitations and future scope

The present research has certain limitations, which open up new avenues for future investigation. The first limitation is its relatively small sample size and cross-sectional nature of survey method. Hence, further research is needed to confirm our suggested relationships, as self-reported surveys are poor to establish cause-effect relationships. Therefore, it is recommended to replicate the research using longitudinal design to establish better causal-effect

relationships. As this study was carried out in IT industry of India, empirical findings of the study could be more applicable in Asian countries as compared to Western ones. It is better to replicate this study in public sector organisation or in manufacturing sector, may be in a different country as suggested results may not be generalised. As quantitative research design has its obvious limitations so future studies should employ qualitative methods like focus interviews to further examine the results of this study. Further, future research should examine both HR managers and Gen Y employees to validate the results.

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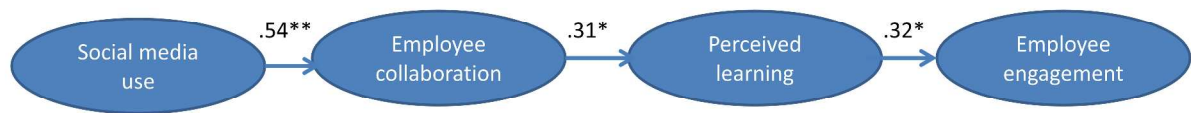


Figure 1. Path analysis of structural model * $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Age-group	2.5861	.5436	-					
2. Gender	1.5439	.4863	.012	-				
3. Education	2.2210	.67799	.044	-.14	-			
4. Social media	3.9883	.68274	(.967)					
5. Collaboration	3.8488	.58608	.535**	(.788)				
6. Perceived learning	3.3398	.84596	.180*	.320*	(.735)			
7. Employee engagement	4.0415	.76183	.583**	.480**	.202*	(.874)		

Notes: * $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; Reliability estimates (Cronbach's alphas) are in parentheses.
; N = 209 respondents

Table 1. Construct means, standard deviations and correlations (N=205)

Scale	Standardised loading	t values	R ²	Composite Reliability	AVE	α
Social media	0.79-0.96	16.287	.438	.985	.921	.967
Collaboration	0.72-0.88	12.454	.483	.894	.833	.788
Perceived learning	0.69-0.81	9.683	.327	.868	.774	.735
Employee engagement	0.69-0.85	11.256	.317	.912	.808	.874
Overall Fit indices	$\chi^2 = 2,389.88$, $df=1,745$, $p < .001$, CFI (Comparative-Fit-Index) = 0.93, TLI (Tucker–Lewis-index) = 0.92 RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation) = 0.036).					

Table 2: Overall Measurement Model Analysis

Model	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA
Model#1	2,389.88	1,745	1.369	.95	.93	0.038
Model#2	4,785.32	1,795	2.665	.63	.64	0.067
Model#3	5354.67	1,809	2.960	.60	.58	0.081

Table 3. The fit indices for alternative measurement models