Investigating the potential use of E-HRM: the Context of Egyptian Hotels and Travel Agents

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays, information technology (IT) plays a dominating role in each and every sector with its technology up-gradation. Human resources Department is increasingly depending on IT in the form of e-HRM (Electronic Human Resource Management). E-HRM is a process where all the activities of HR professionals are converted into electronic for the sake of smoother employee and employer relationship in the workplace, reduced administrative burden, as well as, simpler and easier organizational process. However, there is relatively little research on factors that influence e-HRM use, particularly, in a HRM challenging area, like Tourism & Hospitality Industry.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the current status of e-HRM application in Egyptian Hotels and Travel Agents, specifically in payroll management, employees' database, recruitment, performance management and knowledge management. In doing so, determinants of e-HRM will be explored. The determinants include Performance Expectancy (PE), Effort Expectancy (EE), Social Influence (SI) and Facilitating Conditions (FC) will be studied. The study also aims to investigate the probable challenges facing e-HRM application.

A convenience sample of twenty three establishments included travel agencies, tour operators and 4 & 5 star hotels. Respondents included HR managers or assistant/general managers. Eventually, the study is expected to contribute to the existing e-HRM literature by representing an overview of the current status of e-HRM in Egyptian Hotel and Tourism sector.

Keywords: E-HRM, e-HRM determinants, behavioral intention, acceptance theory.

1 INTRODUCTION

There have been major changes in the way human resources (HR) has been managed in recent years (Obeidat, 2015). Particularly, the way HR practices and functions are delivered with the use of information technology. (Strohmeier, 2007)

E-HRM can be defined as "a way of implementing HR strategies, policies and practices in organisations through the conscious and directed support of web technology-based channels in order to comply with the HR needs of the organization (Ruël et al., 2004, p. 281). It has been argued that the implementation of e-HRM can be extremely valuable to the organisation. In particular, it will increase productivities by dropping down HR operational costs. It can also be used flexibly on an unlimited number of occasions at little or no marginal cost. Lastly, the effective use of e-HRM can free up HR professionals to provide strategic value to the organization. (Heikkilä and Smale, 2011)

The use of e-HRM has been researched with some limitations. (Obeidat, 2015) For example, there are partial empirical findings for the relation between e-HRM and HRM effectiveness. Few studies also have pointed out the expected consequences of introducing e-HRM within an organization as well as the strategic value of e-HRM. (Bondarouk and Ruel, 2009 and 2013)

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the current status of e-HRM in Egyptian Hotels and Travel Agents, in doing so; level of application, determinants and challenges of e-HRM will be explored.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

In today's knowledge- based economy, the organizational success and its competitive advantage is depending heavily on the performance of HRM. (Masum et al., 2016; Adli et al., 2014) Within the past few years, electronic human resource management (e-HRM) has been another face of human resource (HR). This new face has been arising based on internet and intranet technologies. There are many reasons for HRM's needs for IT for its powerful capability in accelerating processing, in handling complexity of all HRM issues and in measuring the performances HRM practices need to learn and track.

Most of E-HRM definitions are general and emphasize the internet-supported way of performing HR policies and/or activities. Some researchers claimed that e-HRM has been interchangeably coined with Intranet-based HRM, virtual HRM, web-based HRM and HRIS. (Masum et al., 2015) However, Kabir et al. (2013) specified that E-HRM is defined as an integrated information system that comprises some applications of HR supply and demand forecast, HR planning, staffing information, recruitment and selection, information ontraining and development, pay increase, compensation forecast, promotion-related information, employee relations, and so on.

Nevertheless, Strohmeier (2007) presented a specific definition that works well with the objects of this study. E-HRM is the planning, implementation and application of information technology for both networking and supporting at least two individual or collective actors in their shared performing of HR activities. This definition highlights two main feature of e-HRM; namely, the idea of interaction and networking of e-HRM besides the multilevel nature of e-HRM as it requires the involvement of the whole organization that interact in order to perform HR activities.

The literature distinguishes three types of e-HRM in terms of their potential goals: operational (salary management and maintain employees' database), relational (training and development, recruitment, performance management), and transformational e-HRM (knowledge management, strategic re-orientation). (Strohmeier and Kabst, 2014; Rajalakshmi and Gomathi, 2016)

The main goals of e-HRM are improving HR services and effectiveness, cost reduction, and improving strategic orientation. (Normalini et al., 2012; Ruel et al., 2007 and Obeidat, 2015) This is owing to its ease of speedy accessibility to information related to employees, eliminating of unnecessary HR activities and improving the strategy of decision making process. (Rodríguez and Ventura, 2003; Marler and Fisher, 2013 and Lakshmi, 2014)

On the other hand, factors like shortage of management attention, fear of high costs, lack of experience, and lack of training on e-HRM are the main challenges for implementing e-HRM. (Jahan, 2014; Kabir et al., 2013) Determinants of e-HRM adoption can be categorized as organizational, technological and environmental determinants. Organizational determinants represent some administrative characteristics which influence adoption of E-HRM such as a skilled workforce and top management support (Troshani et al., 2011; Teoet al., 2007). Technological determinants represent the manner where technology characteristics can influence adoption, as strong organization's technology infrastructure indicates the technology readiness of a firm. (Oliveira and Martins, 2010) Environmental determinants describe the area where organizations conduct their business, and include industry characteristics, and supporting infrastructure. (Oliveira and Martins, 2010 and Troshani et al., 2011) Previous researches asserted that unified theory of acceptance and use of technology (UTAUT) frames most of the determinants of the e-HRM usage as it refines the critical factors related to the intention to use a technology, like e-HRM, in an organizational context. (Venkatesh et al., 2012) Within the theory, the determinants had been classified into (performance expectancy, effort expectancy, andsocial influence).

Previous researches exposed that e-HRM practices are essentials in many business contexts (Hotels, banking sector, health care). Results revealed an appreciation of e-HRM applications in association with HRM effectiveness, talented management, differences in the relative weight of using e-HRM categories. (Bondarouk et al., 2009; Obeidat, 2015; Choochote and Chochiang, 2015 and Alkerdawy, 2016) Nevertheless, reviews evaluated e-HRM research area acknowledges the opportunities to continue to refine this important area of research. (Maler and Fisher, 2013) Baum (2015) confirmed that HRM is still a challenge for the tourism and hospitality sector due to its dynamic nature.

The current study mainly aimed at finding the emerged applications of e-HRM in Tourism and Hospitality industry in Egypt. It depicts the current status of E-HRM application and shed light on the challenges related to its application. The specific objectives of the study are to appraise to what extend e-HRM is currently applied in some core HR functions, to appraise the perceived importance of the above functions from management point of view, to examine the potential reasons behind the deviation between actual application and perceived importance, to explore determinants of e-HRM, including Performance Expectancy (PE), Effort Expectancy (EE), Social Influence (SI) and Facilitating Conditions and finally, investigating the probable challenges facing e-HRM application. Eventually, it is expected to contribute to the knowledge of electronic human resource management in Egypt's tourism and hospitality sector, as one of the developing countries.

3 METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

3.1 Sample Selection

A convenience sample of twenty three establishments participated in the current study. Convenience sampling techniques is proved to be effective during exploration stage of the research area. (Saunders, et al, 2012)It included travel agencies, tour operators and 4 & 5 star hotels, representing a number of hotel chains working in Egypt. The participants were approached personally via e-mails and phone calls to explain the idea and the significance of the study. Then links of the online questionnaire were sent to them. The study is conducted during April, 2017. Data for the study were collected using a questionnaire administered to human resources managers, or assistant/general managers.

3.2 Measures

The questionnaire was divided into four parts. Part one asked about the type of the organization and the respondent's current position. In the second part respondents were asked to indicate to what extent certain types of e-HRM are applied in their establishments and the level of importance of these types from their point of view. The types included 1/payroll e-management, 2/Employees database, 3/e-recruitment, 4/e-training, 5/e-performance management and 6/Knowledge management. These six types represented operational, relational and transformational aspects of e-HRM. (Strohmeier and Kabst, 2014; Maatman, 2006; Obeidat, 2016; Rajalakshmi and Gomathi, 2016) Scale for extent of application was "totally applied", "partially applied" and "not applied"; scale for importance level was "great importance", "moderate importance" and "no importance".

The third part investigated the determinants of e-HRM. Items measuring the e-HRM determinants (i.e. performance expectancy, effort expectancy, and social influence) were adopted from a questionnaire that had been previously used in research on the UTAUT model, developed by Venkatesh et al. (2003). The original questionnaire was adapted to accommodate the context of e-HRM. A five-point Likert scale was used, and every item could be scored as follows: 1 indicating "strongly agree" and 5 indicating "strongly disagree". Facilitating conditions were also investigated as an e-HRM determinant and its items were adopted from Maatman (2006).
The fourth part of the questionnaire asked respondents to identify the challenges that might be facing e-HRM application from their view. Six statements were adopted from Hossain and Islam (2015) and were rated on five-point Likert scale.

4 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The study covered 11 travel agencies, 7 "5-star" hotels, 4 tour operators and one "4-star" hotel. Respondents included HR managers or GMs (Assistant GMs).
Table (1) Levels of importance and application of e-HRM types

Types of e-HRM	High Importance		Moderate Importance		Low Importance		Mean	Totally applied		Partially applied		Not Applied		Mean
	F	%	F	%	F	%		F	%	F	%	F	%	
e- payroll management	21	91.3	2	8.7	0	0	1.09	14	60.9	8	34.8	1	4.3	1.43
Employees database	22	95.7	1	4.3	0	0	1.04	12	52.2	9	39.1	2	8.7	1.57
e-recruitment	11	47.8	12	52.2	0	0	1.52	6	26.1	10	43.5	7	30.4	2.04
e-training	12	52.2	11	47.8	0	0	1.48	10	43.5	5	21.7	8	34.8	1.91
e-performance management	10	43.5	13	56.5	0	0	1.57	5	21.7	11	47.8	7	30.4	2.09
Knowledge management	17	73.9	6	26.1	0	0	1.26	8	34.8	10	43.5	5	21.7	1.87

It is apparent from results in table (1) that, basically, all types are considered important by respondents; "employee database" came on top of the list with mean = 1.04, followed by "e-payroll management" with mean = 1.09, meanwhile, the different types of e-HRM were not widely applied.The most applied e-HRM type was "e-payroll management" with mean = 1.43; the least applied was "e-performance management" with mean = 2.09, followed by "e-recruitment" with mean = 2.04. These results came in agreement with Strohmeier and Kabst (2014). Similarly, astudyconducted on hotel business in Phuket showed that 85 % of the recruitment system, as well as, 94 % of the performance assessment system had never applied the use of the e-HRM. (Choochote and Chochiang, 2015)

Table (2) Paired Sample T-test for comparing importance vs. application of e-HRM

		Paired Differences					T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	E-payroll Management	-.348	.573	.119	-.596	-.100	-2.912	22	.008
Pair 2	E-database	-.522	.665	.139	-.809	-.234	-3.761	22	.001
Pair 3	E-recruitment	-.522	.730	.152	-.838	-.206	-3.425	22	.002
Pair 4	E-training	-.435	.945	.197	-.843	-.026	-2.206	22	.038
Pair 5	E-Performance Management	-.522	.790	.165	-.863	-.180	-3.166	22	.004
Pair 6	Knowledge Management	-.609	.783	.163	-.947	-.270	-3.730	22	.001

It is assumed that traditional recruiting systems may be preferred because they provide prospects with the opportunity to obtain customized information about various factors. Stone et

al.(2006), Bissola and Imperatori (2013) and Adli et.al (2014) also argue that e-performance can only be used for low level jobs with objective performance standards and may not have the capacity to measure all of the behaviors that workers must perform. Therefore, it is suggested that tourism and hospitality sector, being heavily depending on human factor, may not find e-performance management a proper way to evaluate employees' performance.

Importance and application levels were significantly different in all types of e-HRM, as shown in table (2). The most significant differences were depicted between importance and application levels of "e-database" and "knowledge management". This raises a question about the reasons behind this discrepancy, and urges the study of e-HRM determinants in the study establishments.

Table (3) Application of e-HRM in Hotels versus tour operators and travel agents

Type of Organization		E-Salary Management	E-database	E-recruitment	E-training	E-Performance Management	Knowledge Management
Tour Operator	Mean	1.50	1.75	2.00	1.50	2.50	1.75
	Std. Deviation	.577	.500	.000	.577	.577	.957
Travel Agency	Mean	1.64	1.82	2.36	2.55	2.27	2.18
	Std. Deviation	.674	.751	.809	.820	.786	.751
5-star hotel	Mean	1.00	1.00	1.57	1.14	1.57	1.43
	Std. Deviation	.000	.000	.787	.378	.535	.535
4-star hotel	Mean	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00
	Std. Deviation	.000	.531	.009	120	.321	.000
Sig.		**.099**	**.045***	**.208**	**.003***	**.136**	**.229**

Table (3) results indicated that 5-star hotels, followed by tour operators, had the highest application levels of different e-HRM types if compared to other establishments. It is assumed that International hotel chains have the capabilities and the necessary resources for acquiring different technology applications. Furthermore, they accomplish most of their functions on a central basis, where they act as a unit among hundreds of units around the world managed by a particular chain, thus, carrying out their daily functions via internet or intranet is a must, in order to be able to share information. This view is supported by Strohmeier and Kabst (2014); in their study they proposed that the particular size of organizations determine their readiness for e-HRM adoption. The results also showed that the most significant differences among establishments were seen in "e-training" and "e-database", with significance 0.03 and 0.045, respectively.

Table (4) showed that respondents agreed most on "performance expectancy" statements, mean = 1.9348, as determinants of e-HRM; a view that is supported by Yusliza and Ramayah (2012), Alkerdawy (2016) and Rajalakshmi and Gomathi (2016). On the contrary, was the case of "effort expectancy" with mean = 3.6522. It was apparent from the results that respondents expected to pay

an effort in order to be able to understand, use and operate e-HRM technology. On the other hand, respondents agreed on the advantage of e-HRM in accomplishing HR tasks quickly and efficiently. This result is in line with previous studies which found that the use of e-HRM enhances the operational HR activities' implementation (Marlerand Fisher, 2013; Adli et.al, 2014; Obeidat, 2016). The statement "if I use e-HRM technology, I will increase my chance of getting a raise" recorded the highest agreement level with a mean = 1.52, meaning that respondents believed that using e-HRM technology is a potential path for raise and promotion in their careers. Meanwhile, they disagreed on statements like "Working with e-HRM technology is clear and understandable" and "Learning to operate e-HRM technology is easy for me" with mean = 3.78 and 3.70, respectively. This indicates that there is still some users' anxiety about using new technologies in operating HR functions. Obeidat (2016) suggests that organizations with technological nature, like telecom sector, supports e-HRM adoption and use, since its employees possess high level of IT skills which facilitate e-HRM adoption and use.

Table (4) Determinants of e-HRM

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Mean
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
Performance Expectancy											
I find e-HRM technology useful in performing my P&O tasks/activities	14	60.9	0	0	1	4.3	0	0	8	34.8	2.48
Using e-HRM technology enables me to accomplish P&O tasks more quickly	18	78.3	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	21.7	1.87
Using e-HRM technology increases my productivity when performing my P&O tasks	17	73.9	0	0	2	8.7	0	0	4	17.4	1.87
If I use e-HRM technology, I will increase my chance of getting a raise	19	82.6	0	0	2	8.7	0	0	2	8.7	1.52
Overall mean of Performance Expectancy											**1.9348**
Effort Expectancy											
Working with e-HRM technology is clear and understandable.	7	30.4	0	0	0	0	0	0	16	69.6	3.78
It is easy for me to become skilful at using e-HRM technology	7	30.4	0	0	2	8.7	0	0	14	60.9	3.61
I find e-HRM technology easy to use.	8	34.8	0	0	1	4.3	0	0	14	60.9	3.52
Learning to operate e-HRM technology is easy for me	7	30.4	0	0	1	4.3	0	0	15	65.2	3.70
Overall mean of effort Expectancy											**3.6522**
Social Influence											

People who influence my behaviour think that I should use e-HRM technology.	12	52.2	0	0	5	21.7	0	0	6	26.1	2.48
People who are important to me think that I should use the e-HRM technology.	7	30.4	0	0	7	30.4	2	8.7	7	30.4	3.09
In general, the organization has supported the use of e-HRM technology	8	34.8	0	0	5	21.7	1	4.3	9	39.1	3.13
Overall mean of Social Influence											**2.8986**
Facilitating Conditions											
My organization has the financial resources necessary to use e-HRM technology.	9	39.1	0	0	3	13.0	0	0	11	47.8	3.17
My organization has the knowledge necessary to use e-HRM technology.	9	39.1	0	0	4	17.4	2	8.7	8	34.8	3.00
E-HRM technology is compatible with other systems I use.	6	26.1	0	0	5	21.7	0	0	12	52.2	3.52
A specific person (or group) is available for assistance with e-HRM technology	8	34.8	0	0	4	17.4	1	4.3	10	43.5	3.22
Overall mean of Facilitating Conditions											**3.2283**

It was clear from table (5) that respondents disagreed most with the statement " E-HRM functions is not value additive" with mean = 4.30; this comes in agreement with their opinion about "performance expectancy" as one of the e-HRM determinants, discussed above. Meanwhile, the necessity of training employees handling e-HRM emphasized the respondents' point of view about "effort expectancy" cluster previously discussed. The necessity of training for handling e-HRM operations was basically agreed on, with mean = 2.27. A result that is in agreement with Bissola and Imperatori (2014), in their study technology attitude of employees moderated their acceptance for e-HRM.

Table (5) Challenges facing e-HRM application

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Mean
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
Challenges											
E-HRM operations is costly	7	30.4	0	0	5	21.7	2	8.7	9	39.1	3.26
E-HRM function are time Consuming	1	4.3	0	0	5	21.7	12	52.2	5	21.7	3.87
Inadequate IT set up and number of expertise	7	30.4	0	0	2	8.7	0	0	14	60.9	3.61

Necessity of training for the people handling the operations	12	52.2	0	0	2	8.7	1	4.3	8	34.1	2.27
E-HRM functions is not value additive	0	0	0	0	4	17.4	8	34.8	11	47.8	4.30
Resistance from the user employee (Manual Vs system)	4	17.4	0	0	6	26.1	5	21.7	8	34.8	3.57
Overall mean of challenges											**3.5797**

Overall, respondents did not believe that e-HRM application is facing obstacles or serious challenges; unlike the findings of Sylvester et.al (2015), who stated that developing countries find difficulties in e-HRM operation due to poor maintenance culture, lack of technical know-how, bureaucracy and paper work and work community resistance. Furthermore, Hossain and Islam (2015) argued that most of the software is built in outside the country where some customization needed, add to this resistance to change, cost factors and lack of organizational learning.

Table (6) Pearson correlation for study variables

		Importance	Application	Performance Expectancy	Effort Expectancy	Social Influence	Facilitating conditions	Challenges
Importance	Pearson Correlation	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Sig. (2-tailed)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Application	Pearson Correlation	.292	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.177	-	-	-	-	-	-
Performance Expectancy	Pearson Correlation	.360	-.135	-	-	-	-	-
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.091	.539	-	-	-	-	-
Effort Expectancy	Pearson Correlation	.348	.402	.540**	-	-	-	-
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.103	.057	.008	-	-	-	-
Social Influence	Pearson Correlation	.507*	.403	.412	.610**	-	-	-
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.013	.056	.051	.002	-	-	-
Facilitating conditions	Pearson Correlation	.077	.583**	-.009	.405	.255	-	-
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.727	.004	.969	.055	.240	-	-
Challenges	Pearson Correlation	.274	.042	-.255	-.244	-.068	-.070	-

	Sig. (2-tailed)	.206	.851	.240	.261	.759	.751	-

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Pearson correlation analysis indicated significance relation among a number of study variables. (Table 6) Importance of e-HRM types was significantly related to "Social Influence"; sig. = .013. It is assumed here that respondents' readiness and colleagues/supervisor encouragement about adopting e-HRM is associated with its perceived importance from their point of view. Not surprisingly, "facilitating conditions" is significantly related to e-HRM application level; sig. = .004. This comes in line with Masum, et.al (2015), who suggest that the firm's infrastructure and the compatibility of its current digital-data resources are determinants for e-HRM application, examples are, secure networking system, sufficient back up plan and swift internet facility.

"Effort and Performance Expectancy" were also significantly related to each other; sig. = .008. It is suggested that despite the effort and time that should be paid in order to excel in operating e-HRM functions, respondents see that the benefits in performing these functions quickly and efficiently will be harvested, eventually. Similarly, Yusoff et.al (2015) found that the perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness were significantly related. Furthermore, "Effort Expectancy" and "Social Influence" contained a significant relation; sig. = .002; this agrees with the findings of Voermans and Veldhoven (2007) and Yusliza and Ramayah (2012). Obviously, the support one can get form organization and colleagues would help overcoming the challenging efforts related to learning how, operating and mastering HRM functions in their electronic version.

4 CONCLUSION

The present study has contributed to the knowledge of human resource management area through providing significant insights on the determinants that influencing the managerial decision to adopt e-HRM in the context of Tourism and Hospitality industry in Egypt as a developing county. It ensures the importance of operational e-HRM as important and applicable in Tourism and hospitality organizations. In contrary, the transformational e-HRM lacks neither importance nor application within the organizations.

This study similarly provided empirical evidence supporting the relevance of e-HRM in increasing HRM effectiveness. Most importantly, perceived usefulness, managers' readiness, the colleagues, managerial support as well as IT infrastructure are major determinants of applying e-HRM. From a managerial perspective, findings of the study have strategic implications for managing e-HRM programs. Appropriate preparation for the organization socially as well as physically will help to apply the concept more widely. The expected consequences would exceed the predictable effort of adopting e-HRM.

Even though systematic research procedures were used, this study had some limitations that could be addressed in future studies. The study data are cross-sectional. Longitude data collection would help in determining more causality.

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