



An Exploratory Study Of Marriott Global Source (MGS) And Its Role In Maintaining Employee Engagement

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Abstract: This study explores employee engagement within the training and learning ecosystem at The Westin Mumbai Powai Lake, with a focus on Marriott's digital platforms Marriott Global Source (MGS) and the Digital Learning Zone (DLZ). Using Kahn's Psychological Conditions of Engagement as the primary analytical lens and supplemented by the Job Demands Resources (JDR) Model and Social Exchange Theory (SET), the research examines how digital learning infrastructures contribute to or challenge engagement in a hospitality context. Primary data was gathered through observations and informal conversations with associates across departments, while secondary data involved a theoretical comparison with established engagement models. The findings highlight that while the training platforms offer autonomy, accessibility, and recognition, which are key enablers of engagement, challenges such as time constraints, operational workload, and uneven managerial support can limit their impact. The study concludes that employee engagement in digital learning is not only a function of available resources but also how embedded, equitable, and supported those resources are within everyday work life.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the fast-changing global hospitality industry, organizations face the challenge of keeping employees engaged, motivated, and aligned with the brand's values. With rising guest expectations, intense competition, and evolving workforce dynamics, employee engagement is crucial for delivering service excellence and ensuring operational efficiency. Digital transformation has opened new avenues to address these challenges, particularly through internal platforms that improve communication, learning, and collaboration.

Marriott International, one of the world's most renowned hospitality brands, has responded to this need through the Marriott Global Source platform. MGS functions as an internal portal that provides employees with centralized access to training programs, corporate updates, standard procedures, recognition tools, and HR resources. By digitizing these elements, Marriott aims to build a stronger culture, promote continuous learning, and support employee development.

Despite the increasing reliance on digital tools, limited academic attention has been given to the role of such platforms in promoting employee engagement. This study addresses that gap by exploring how MGS contributes to workforce motivation and alignment without using direct employee surveys or interviews. Instead, it relies on real time observation, relevant literature, and secondary data.

The study is particularly timely in the post pandemic era, where digital dependence and hybrid models have redefined employee experiences. Understanding how Marriott uses MGS to sustain engagement provides useful insight not only into its internal strategy but also into broader trends in digital human resource practices.

Marriott International is a leading hospitality company headquartered in Bethesda, Maryland. With more than eight thousand eight hundred properties across over one hundred thirty countries, Marriott operates thirty

brands including Westin, Ritz Carlton, JW Marriott, Sheraton, and W Hotels. Known for its strong people first culture, the organization consistently ranks among the best global employers and invests heavily in associate development.

The Marriott Global Source platform reflects this commitment by acting as a digital bridge between the brand and its employees. It ensures that associates remain informed, recognized, and empowered in their roles. This study draws from a two-month internship in the Learning and Development department at The Westin Mumbai Powai Lake and presents an observational analysis of how MGS is used in a live hotel environment.

2. OBJECTIVES

1. To understand how Marriott Global Source (MGS) and the Digital Learning Zone (DLZ) are used by employees at The Westin Mumbai Powai Lake as part of their learning and development experience.
2. To explore the role of MGS and DLZ in shaping employee engagement, including how they support communication, learning, recognition, and alignment with brand values.
3. To observe employee interactions with the training platforms and identify key factors that enable or hinder engagement within the operational context of the hospitality industry.
4. To interpret the effectiveness of Marriott's digital learning platforms using established employee engagement models such as Kahn's Psychological Conditions of Engagement, the Job Demands Resources model, and Social Exchange Theory.
5. To offer insights into how digital learning tools can be better integrated into the work routine to foster a sustainable and engaging learning culture.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Employee engagement has emerged as a crucial determinant of organizational success, especially in service-oriented sectors like hospitality where employees are central to the guest experience. The concept of engagement was originally conceptualized by Kahn (1990), who defined it as the harnessing of the self to work roles, where people express themselves cognitively, emotionally, and physically. This multi-dimensional understanding of engagement is particularly relevant in hospitality where emotional labor, service attitude, and cultural alignment are critical.

Building on Kahn's work, Saks (2006) highlighted that engagement is influenced by both job and organizational factors, such as perceived support, meaningfulness, and learning opportunities. In the context of global hospitality chains like Marriott, digital platforms such as Marriott Global Source (MGS) and the Digital Learning Zone (DLZ) have been introduced to support these engagement drivers. These platforms provide access to learning modules, corporate updates, standard operating procedures, and recognition tools, reinforcing alignment between employees and the organization.

Two core theoretical lenses guide the understanding of how such platforms influence engagement: the Job Demands Resources model (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007) and Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964). The Job Demands Resources model explains how job resources such as autonomy, feedback, and development opportunities help offset demands like workload and emotional stress. Marriott's platforms offer job resources like self-paced learning, flexible navigation, and recognition tools, which potentially support employee resilience and motivation.

Social Exchange Theory (SET) adds another layer by suggesting that employees engage more when they perceive fair and supportive treatment from the organization (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). This theory positions engagement as a reciprocal relationship, where organizational investments in learning, recognition, and communication are returned through higher employee effort and commitment. Marriott's visible reward systems and continuous development resources signal to employees that their growth is valued, prompting increased loyalty and engagement.

Learning and development have been identified as strong predictors of employee engagement. Gruman and Saks (2011) emphasized that when learning aligns with career growth and is delivered meaningfully, it becomes a source of intrinsic motivation. Digital learning platforms like DLZ address this by offering customized, multimedia-based training. This is supported by Deci and Ryan's (2000) Self Determination Theory, which states that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are essential to internal motivation. The platform's interactive design, self-led modules, and peer visibility fulfill all three conditions.

In addition to learning, internal communication has been cited as a central component in creating an engaging work environment. Welch (2011) found that effective internal communication fosters trust, cohesion,

and a sense of inclusion. In large hotel chains with cross-cultural teams, communication tools within MGS help ensure clarity and reduce ambiguity. Regular updates, visual dashboards, and leadership messages all help employees feel informed and connected to organizational goals.

Recognition also plays a pivotal role in reinforcing employee engagement. As Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) explain, recognition enhances emotional engagement by affirming employee value. Marriott's use of certificates, badges, and online leaderboards contributes to a culture of appreciation. Gupta and Sharma (2016) noted that timely and visible recognition enhances morale, especially in front-line service roles.

Gamification has also been introduced in learning platforms to increase participation. Hamari et al. (2014) found that elements such as points, challenges, and rewards increase motivation and performance in digital environments. Marriott's DLZ includes several of these gamified features to make training more engaging and reduce monotony. However, it is important that such elements are used meaningfully and not perceived as superficial or forced.

Despite these advantages, digital tools must be implemented with caution. Tarafdar et al. (2011) discussed the concept of technostress, where continuous connectivity, system complexity, and digital overload can lead to disengagement. Marriott's platform must therefore remain intuitive, user-friendly, and accompanied by managerial support. Employees need to be guided, not just monitored, in their usage of the system.

Moreover, the role of managerial support is repeatedly emphasized in literature as a critical factor. Saks and Gruman (2014) argue that engagement cannot be sustained through technology alone; supportive supervisors are essential in encouraging participation, addressing challenges, and aligning digital tools with day-to-day roles. In Marriott's case, active managerial involvement in learning plans and feedback cycles can bridge the gap between platform availability and actual engagement.

In summary, existing literature strongly supports the idea that digital platforms can be powerful enablers of employee engagement when designed thoughtfully and supported by human touchpoints. In organizations like Marriott, where brand consistency and service excellence are non-negotiable, platforms like MGS and DLZ serve as both informational and emotional connectors. They support the delivery of learning, communication, recognition, and career development in ways that align with modern engagement theories, offering a comprehensive approach to nurturing a motivated and connected workforce.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a **qualitative and exploratory research design** to investigate how Marriott International's internal digital platform, Marriott Global Source (MGS), enhances employee engagement. The research focuses on its implementation at The Westin Mumbai Powai Lake and explores how tools like MGS and its embedded Digital Learning Zone (DLZ) influence engagement through internal communication, learning, and recognition.

1. Nature of the Study

The study is exploratory in nature, aiming to understand how MGS supports communication, knowledge sharing, learning, and emotional connection to the brand. Rather than testing hypotheses, the research explores engagement as a complex and multi-dimensional construct within the hospitality context.

2. Data Collection Methods

a. Primary Data: As a Learning & Development intern, the researcher conducted non-intrusive observations of how employees engaged with MGS and DLZ. Notes were taken on onboarding practices, frequency of platform use, training completion patterns, and recognition events. Access to the backend dashboard further enabled tracking of employee progress categorized into "Achievers," "In Progress," and "Non-Starters."

b. Secondary Data – Literature Review: Secondary data was drawn from academic literature, Marriott corporate publications, and industry reports. Three engagement models guided analysis: Kahn's Theory of Engagement (1990), Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), Social Exchange Theory (SET) (Blau, 1964). These frameworks were applied to features like gamified learning, certificates, and digital communication tools.

3. Data Analysis

Qualitative content analysis was used to identify four key themes: **Access to Training:** MGS introduced during onboarding with structured follow-up. **Portal Usage:** Frequent use observed, often driven by manager reminders. **Brand Alignment:** Courses emphasized Marriott values and trending topics. **Recognition:** Tangible rewards (pins, certificates) boosted peer motivation.

4. Scope and Delimitations

The study is limited to The Westin Mumbai Powai Lake and may not reflect engagement practices across other Marriott properties. The research is qualitative and excludes surveys or interviews due to time and data access constraints. As such, findings are interpretive rather than generalizable.

5. DATA ANALYSIS

Primary Data – Observation (refer Table 1.1- Annexures)

During the internship at The Westin Mumbai Powai Lake, primary data was gathered through ongoing observation of employee interactions with Marriott Global Source (MGS) and the Digital Learning Zone (DLZ). Thematic insights were analyzed using Kahn's (1990) model of employee engagement, which categorizes engagement into cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions.

Access to Training: New employees are introduced to MGS and DLZ during onboarding, where they complete initial modules under the guidance of the Training Manager. This structured initiation fosters cognitive engagement by helping employees understand expectations and operational standards. Emotional engagement begins early through supportive interactions, promoting a sense of belonging. The setup encourages behavioral engagement by instilling accountability from the start.

Frequency of Portal Use: Platform use is common among interns and new hires, although reminders from the Training Manager often prompt engagement. Employees are tracked as “achievers,” “on track,” or “incomplete” via a dashboard. While behavioral engagement is visible, cognitive and emotional engagement can wane if learning is driven solely by compliance rather than interest or perceived value.

Alignment with Brand Standards: DLZ content aligns closely with Marriott's brand values and operational protocols, covering both foundational skills and emerging industry topics like digital transformation and cybersecurity. This alignment supports cognitive engagement by connecting learning to professional relevance, enhances emotional engagement by fostering pride in the brand, and encourages behavioral engagement as employees implement updated practices.

Learning Experience Design: DLZ features interactive modules, videos, quizzes, and gamification elements. Employees earn virtual badges and receive push notifications, which enhance emotional engagement and reinforce learning as an enjoyable and rewarding process. Scenario-based content stimulates cognitive engagement, while competitive and social features drive behavioral participation.

Recognition Mechanisms: Public acknowledgment of training success—via certificates, pins, and praise during huddles—reinforces the value Marriott places on learning. This enhances emotional engagement, boosts confidence, and motivates others to participate. It also strengthens cognitive engagement by signaling a link between training and career growth, and promotes behavioral engagement through positive peer influence.

Summary of Observations: Overall, MGS and DLZ are well-integrated into Marriott's learning culture. The platforms foster all three dimensions of engagement but rely heavily on managerial prompting. Enhancing intrinsic motivation and integrating learning more fluidly into work routines could increase sustainable engagement.

Secondary Data – Theoretical Interpretation

To deepen analysis, the Job Demands Resources (JD-R) Model and Social Exchange Theory (SET) were applied to the observational data.

Job Demands Resources Model: This model suggests that engagement results from a balance between job demands and resources. DLZ and MGS provide flexibility, multimedia content, and role-specific learning pathways, serving as strong resources. Recognition features such as badges and leaderboards support motivation. However, operational pressures in hospitality—like long shifts and customer demands—limit employees' ability to fully utilize these tools. Without dedicated time or managerial support, learning may feel like an added burden rather than a growth opportunity. To harness the model's benefits, Marriott could integrate learning into daily routines, create structured time blocks, and emphasize learning as a core responsibility.

Social Exchange Theory: SET views engagement as a reciprocal relationship. Marriott's learning investments reflect an organizational commitment to employee growth. Employees respond with effort and motivation when they perceive fairness and support. Recognition and accessible training pathways reinforce this exchange. However, inconsistency in acknowledgment or lack of supervisor involvement can disrupt perceived fairness, leading to disengagement. Trust and loyalty are best fostered when managers actively coach employees and recognize learning achievements consistently. Clear communication about the purpose and value of training enhances reciprocity and deepens emotional investment.

Synthesis

Both models highlight that while Marriott's learning platforms are effective, their impact is constrained by workplace realities. The JD-R model emphasizes the need to reduce barriers and ensure access to resources, while SET underscores the importance of relational dynamics and perceived fairness. For maximum engagement, Marriott must not only maintain robust digital tools but also create a supportive culture, integrate training into operational flow, and promote shared ownership of learning outcomes.

In summary, Marriott's approach to digital learning successfully supports employee engagement when supported by organizational structures, proactive leadership, and clear value alignment. Continued attention to employee experience and context will ensure that tools like MGS and DLZ deliver lasting impact.

6. KEY FINDINGS

- Effective integration of MGS and DLZ: The platforms are actively used in onboarding and ongoing learning, offering easy access to essential training and policy resources.
- Interactive and engaging training modules: Features like quizzes, gamified certifications, and content updates keep learning sessions informative and appealing.
- Structured tracking and follow-up: The Learning and Development team monitors completion rates and sends reminders, helping maintain training consistency.
- Recognition boosts motivation: Employees who perform well receive certificates and branded pins during team huddles, creating a sense of achievement and engagement.
- Challenges in balancing learning with operations: Staff in guest-facing and physically demanding roles find it hard to allocate time for digital training due to their schedules.
- Job Demands Resources model insights: While platforms offer useful resources such as autonomy and relevant content, high workloads often prevent consistent use.

7. CONCLUSION

This study explored how digital learning platforms contribute to employee engagement within the training ecosystem of The Westin Mumbai Powai Lake, a Marriott property. Through both primary observations and theoretical analysis, the findings reveal that platforms such as Marriott Global Source and the Digital Learning Zone play a significant role in shaping a culture of continuous learning and personal growth. These platforms offer accessible, relevant, and flexible training resources that align employees with brand values and performance expectations. The availability of recognition tools, such as pins and certificates, adds emotional value to the learning journey and fosters a sense of achievement.

However, the study also highlights that digital tools alone are not sufficient to sustain engagement. Operational challenges such as heavy workloads and irregular schedules often limit the time and energy employees can devote to learning. As such, even the best training systems require strong managerial support, time allocation, and integration into daily workflows. Without these, employees may perceive learning as a burden rather than an opportunity, weakening its potential impact.

The application of theoretical models such as the Job Demands Resources framework and Social Exchange Theory helped deepen the analysis. The Job Demands Resources model emphasized the need to balance work pressure with adequate learning support, while Social Exchange Theory shed light on the emotional contract between the employee and the organization. When employees feel that the organization invests in their growth and values their development efforts, they are more likely to reciprocate with higher levels of engagement, commitment, and performance.

In summary, the study confirms that digital learning platforms can be powerful tools for enhancing engagement, but their success depends on thoughtful implementation and a supportive organizational culture. Marriott's systems are well designed and resource rich, but their effectiveness is maximized only when learning is positioned as a shared responsibility between employees and leaders. By creating space for learning during work hours, recognizing achievements, and fostering open communication, organizations can transform training into a meaningful and motivating experience. The findings suggest that a people centered approach to digital learning has the potential to strengthen employee connection, improve service quality, and contribute to long term organizational success.

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9. ANNEXURES

Table 1.1- Direct Observation Log

Date	Location	Observed Behavior	Raw Notes	Initial Interpretation
10-Jun-25	Housekeeping Office	Staff skipped training to complete operational work	A housekeeping associate mentioned to a colleague that she intended to complete the module later due to a heavy room cleaning load that day.	Time constraints impacted the prioritization of training among frontline staff.
12-Jun-25	Staff Cafeteria	Employees viewed DLZ content during breaks	Two associates were observed watching DLZ videos on their phones during lunch. They commented that the video was easy to follow and interesting.	Indicates voluntary engagement when learning is flexible and content is accessible.
14-Jun-25	Training Room	Manager reminded staff to complete modules	A training manager addressed a group of associates, reminding them about pending modules visible on their MGS dashboards. The tone remained formal.	Engagement was largely driven by reminders and external accountability.
16-Jun-25	Front Desk	Recognition given for learning achievement	A supervisor awarded a learning pin to a front office associate in front of the team. The associate appeared pleasantly surprised and smiled.	Public recognition contributed to emotional reinforcement and team morale.

17-Jun-25	Pantry	Informal talk on training load	During a casual conversation, one associate asked why so many modules had been assigned that week. The other mentioned the upcoming audit.	Training was perceived as audit-driven rather than development-focused.
18-Jun-25	Housekeeping Corridor	Difficulty accessing modules	An associate expressed uncertainty about how to access a newly assigned course. Another suggested checking with HR for the link.	Indicates gaps in communication or digital literacy among certain employees.
20-Jun-25	Lobby Lounge	Manager demonstrated DLZ navigation	A manager was observed explaining the DLZ login process to new hires. The manager emphasized the connection between learning and career progression.	Early managerial involvement positively shaped attitudes toward digital learning.