Transformations in Campus Placement Drives in Hospitality Institutions Across Madhya Pradesh : Post-COVID

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Abstract

Background: *Hospitality education plays a vital role in shaping students' knowledge, skills and attitudes, transforming them into industry-ready professionals and enhancing their employability upon graduation. Campus placement drives are highly anticipated process for final-year hospitality students, as they provide opportunities to secure jobs immediately after completing their studies. However, the Covid-19 pandemic had a severe impact on the hospitality job market, leading to significant disruptions in placement opportunities. In the post-pandemic period, several studies have explored hospitality job prospects and the expectations of graduating students.* **Objectives:** *This study addresses an unexplored gap by focusing on three key objectives. First to examine the impact of the pandemic on placement opportunities for graduating batches from 2020 to 2023. Second to identify the essential attributes that prepare hospitality students for successful campus placements. Third to assess student satisfaction with placement drives and gathering recommendations for future improvements.* **Methodology:** *A descriptive research design was employed, utilizing a structured questionnaire completed by hospitality graduates from colleges across Madhya Pradesh between 2020 and 2023. A total of two hundred fifteen filled up questionnaires were received back of which two hundred and nine were usable. The data was analyzed using frequency and percentage represented in a tabular manner.* **Results:** *The findings reveal that most respondents perceived the pandemic as having a negative effect on job opportunities. As (73.68%) of the respondents felt that placement opportunities decreased. Additionally, the study highlights key attributes essential for successful placements, such as theoretical knowledge, strong communication and interpersonal skills. The dissatisfaction regarding the campus placement is on the decline from (54.84%) among 2020 graduates to (17.65%) among 2023 graduating batch.* **Conclusion:** *To enhance future campus placements, the study recommends initiatives such as career fairs, placement lectures, seminars and workshops at the institute level. Moreover, it emphasizes the need to expand the role of placement coordinators beyond organizing interviews to actively supporting students' career development.*

Keywords: Post-COVID, campus placement, hospitality education, graduates

Introduction

Hospitality graduates have been experiencing the consequences of the pandemic that hit the industry in 2020. Even though the negative effects of health-related crises have been experienced in the past but certainly not to these levels post Covid-19 (Kaushal & Srivastava, 2021). Hospitality education is directed towards skill development and getting employed after its completion is a trait that attracts many students (Chand et al., 2019). The campus placement drives are conducted all across hospitality institutes that have been impacted by COVID-19. The final-year graduating students look forward to the placement drive conducted in the final year of the course. These placement drives not only influence the final-year student satisfaction levels but impact the

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overall success of the institution by attracting new admissions (Gamlath, 2022).

Hospitality education is known for modifying the knowledge, skills and attitudes of students so that they become employable right after they finish their graduation (Jackson & Wilton, 2017). The employers are looking for attributes and competencies that will be needed for the actual working environment which is why they approach the educational institutions in the final year of graduation (Cos et al., 2018). One study has highlighted that post COVID-19 the industry is looking for a balance of both theoretical and practical knowledge along with professional conduct in manners and behaviour (Hewitt & Sao Joao, 2022). Due to the gap in the expectations and reality, the students are unable to crack the interviews during the campus placement.

Post covid various studies have emerged around the hospitality job opportunities and expectations of the graduating students. One such study by Shah et al. (2021) has based their finding on the perception of the graduating students on future career prospects. The researchers have examined the impact of COVID-19 on decisions taken regarding joining the employment offers during the campus placement. Another research has studied the connection between engaging activities and a positive campus environment to be connected with the job opportunities being offered during campus placement.

The literature review is divided in to three sections. The first section explores the post-Covid impact on the hospitality industry. Followed by a discussion on the campus placement drives that are conducted in the hospitality institutes. The third section includes the perception of hospitality graduates on employment opportunities.

Post-Covid Impact on the Hospitality Industry: COVID-19 had a devastating effect on the health of human beings which followed the economic loss that spread to all other industries (Hao et al., 2020). The global impact of the pandemic has affected various sectors worldwide (Clausen & Phi, 2020). The travel and tourism industry suffered substantial losses in terms of money and loss of good manpower who left the industry due to pay cuts (Shah et al., 2021). Earlier to the pandemic, the hospitality industry has been affected by natural disasters like earthquakes, floods, other health crises like the SARS and Ebola (Mair et al.,

2016, Sao Joao, 2021; Zenker & Kock, 2020). The impact however was nothing that could match what was brought by COVID-19. The pandemic has significantly changed the way hospitality students interact with their academics and their potential employers (Zhong et al., 2021). The online learning was first-hand experienced by students and the academic staff. Although adopted by the students they still faced many limitations (Pandey & Juneja, 2021).

Campus Placement Drives at Hospitality Institutes: Hospitality education is focused on a structured way of providing a change in the knowledge, skills and attitude of the student (Lee et al., 2021). The purpose is to get the student employed directly through the campus placement drives that are conducted in the final year of the course. Campus placement is part of the recruitment process by different companies that would like to hire young graduates from educational institutions. In this, the organization sends a mixed team of two to three employees who represent the human resources department, training and head of major departments (Jackson & Wilton, 2017). For the hospitality institutes, the hotel companies have a set of three to four rounds or more depending on the company's policy. Generally, the rounds start with a group discussion followed by a personal interview. The shortlisted students are called for the third or fourth round at the hotel itself for the corporate level to make a decision (Shah et al., 2021). Whereas, the retail companies also proceed with similar rounds but might finalize the students after the personal interview itself at the institute. Post Covid-19 many companies have opted for online video interviews to screen the candidates and call the shortlisted candidates for face-to-face personal interviews at the hotel itself (Lee at al., 2021).

Perception of Hospitality Graduates on Employment Opportunities: Since 2020 after the pandemic hit worldwide, many research studies have emerged from various sectors focused on the availability of students' perception of employment opportunities (Shah et al., 2021; Gamlath, 2022). A study by Shah et al. (2021) concentrated on the perception of the hospitality graduate students on the career opportunities available post covid. They have concluded that the students are opting for pursuing higher studies like an MBA as they feel the pandemic reduced their chances of good job opportunities in the hotels. While Hewitt and Sao Joao (2022) have highlighted the gap in the expectations of hospitality graduates and hotel managers. They are of the

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view that due to the pandemic; training in the industry during the course wasn't provided well as it used to be pre-covid time. Due to this, there is a gap in students' expectations and reality which is a major hurdle firstly in cracking the job interviews and secondly staying on the job. Students hope to get placement opportunities when they are involved in engagement activities driven by the side of the teaching faculty members and a positive overall campus environment that is job-oriented (Zhong et al., 2021). As hospitality education prepares the students to be employed directly after the completion of the course it is important to have a positive outlook towards the placement drives. Earlier studies have focused on the perception of students, gaps between industry expectations and graduating students (Hewitt & Sao Joao, 2022) and the role of a positive campus environment post-COVID for a better job orientation by the students (Zhong et al., 2021). However, there is a gap in the literature with regards to the satisfaction level of hospitality graduates post-2020 related to campus placement drives.

The study has explored three different aspects that were gaps found in the literature review. The study is significant as it addresses critical concerns related to hospitality campus placements, employability and the evolving expectations of the hotel industry. Given that hospitality education is designed to equip students with the necessary skills and competencies for immediate employment, the disruption caused by the pandemic has created a gap between student preparedness and employer demands. The study is focused on providing valuable insights for hospitality institutions to adapt their curriculum to current needs of the industry, enhance placement strategies and bridge the gap between academic teaching and industry requirements. Furthermore, this study holds significance for policymakers, educators and employers, offering recommendations to strengthen employability outcomes for hospitality graduates in the post-pandemic era.

Objectives
- To examine the impact of the pandemic on placement opportunities for graduating batches from 2020 to 2023.
- To identify the essential attributes that prepare hospitality students for successful campus placements.
- To assess student satisfaction with placement drives and gathering recommendations for future improvements.

Methodology

Research Design: The study used a descriptive research design. A structured questionnaire is the research instrument for collecting the data from the respondents.

Locale: The target population were all the graduating students from hospitality colleges of Madhya Pradesh from 2020 to 2023.

Sampling Design: The research used convenient sampling to collect data from the respondents. The sample for the study were all those who had graduated from the National Council of Hotel Management and Catering Technology (NCHMCT) affiliated colleges in Madhya Pradesh having a 3-year degree program. The data was collected from 2 Central IHMs, 2 State IHMS and 1 Private IHM. Sample size was 209.

Tools and Technique: The questionnaire was developed after an extensive literature review. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. The first section was used to capture the demographic profile of respondents and the second part focused on the campus placement drive (Pandey & Juneja, 2021). The questions were asked using multiple choice questions. The last question was open-ended and dealt with suggestions for improvement of the campus placement drive. The questionnaire was prepared on Google Forms and circulated using WhatsApp alumni groups of the colleges. The data collection period was in the last two weeks of December 2023. A total of two hundred fifteen filled up questionnaires were received back of which two hundred and nine were usable.

Data Analysis & Statistics Analysis: Descriptive statistics were used for the data analysis. Frequency and percentage have been represented in a tabular manner. Microsoft excel was used a tool for the analysis.

Results and Discussion

Demographic Profile: The respondent's demographic profile is shown in Table 1. This table shows that more than half respondents (67.94%) were male and the remaining respondents (32.06%) were female. The majority of the respondents (87.08%) belong to the age bracket of "below 25 years" whereas (12.9%) belong to "25 years and above". The maximum percentage of the respondents who participated in the study (39.80%) graduated in the year 2021 followed by 2022 (37.23%). The maximum percentage of respondents

(48.33%) got offers from "1-2 companies" followed by (32.06%) having offers from "3-5 companies" while 6.70% of the respondents had offers from "more than 5 companies" during their placement drive. About half of the respondents (48.4%) have secured jobs in hotels, (41.9%) have secured jobs in the retail sector and (22.97%) from Quick Service Restaurants.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Background	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Gender			
	Male	142	67.94
	Female	67	32.05
Age Bracket			
	Below 25 years	182	87.08
	25 years and above	27	12.92
Year of Graduation			
	2020	31	14.83
	2021	82	39.23
	2022	79	37.80
	2023	17	8.13
Number of Placement Offers			
	1 to 2	101	48.33
	3 to 5	67	32.06
	More than 5	14	6.70
	Opted for self-placement	27	12.92
Selection made of the placement offered			
	Hotels	102	48.80
	Retails	41	19.62
	Quick Service Restaurants	48	22.97
	Don't accept the job offered	18	8.61

Effect of the pandemic on the placement opportunities for hospitality graduates: The study has covered those graduating batches that have been affected by COVID-19, so the respondents were asked whether they felt that the pandemic affected the placement opportunities during their campus drive. The tabel 2 shows the cross tabluation based on the garduation year and the effect of the pandemic on placement opportunities for hospitality graduates. (73.68 %) of respondents agreed that the opportunities decreased whereas (18%) of respondents opted for the option that the opportunities increased. It can be noted that from 2020 to 2023 the percentage of resspsondents who opted for decrease in placment opprotunties is on the decline. The study has disclosed that (74%) of the respondents felt that COVID-19 decreased job opportunities during the campus placement drive, which is why students have opted for higher studies like pursuing an MBA or master's instead of working as soon as they graduate (Shah et al., 2021).

Table 2: Cross Tabulation -Based on Graduation Year and Effect of Pandemic to the Placement Opportunities

Year of Gradua-tion	Effect of Pandemic on placement	Opportunities Decreased	Opportunities Increased	Oppor-tunities remained unchanged	Total
2020	Frequency	27	3	1	31
	Percentage	87.10	9.68	3.23	100
2021	Frequency	64	14	4	82
	Percentage	78.05	17.07	4.88	100
2022	Frequency	54	18	7	79
	Percentage	68.35	22.78	8.86	100
2023	Frequency	9	3	5	17
	Percentage	52.94	17.65	29.41	100
Total	Frequency	154	38	17	209
	Percentage	73.68	18.18	8.13	100

Attributes required for excelling in campus placements: In table 3 it can be noted that (33.01%) of the respondents have chosen a comprehensive understanding of the hospitality industry. (25.84%) of respondents agreed that the hospitality curriculum facilitates the development of strong communication and interpersonal skills which is necessary for cracking the interviews. (11%) of respondents have chosen practical knowledge as essential for excelling in the interview. Only (8.13%) agree on opportunities for networking help with the interviews while (22.01%) have chosen all the above options that are necessary for getting selected in the campus placements drive. This falls in line with the conclusion made by Zhong et al. (2021) that engagement activities driven by

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the teaching faculty members and a positive overall campus environment that is job-oriented help in the placement of the students. Post-COVID-19 it has become even more important to offer trainings, workshops and coaching to develop the skills possessed by hospitality professionals (Birtch et al., 2021). Strong communication and interpersonal skills were the second attribute valued by the hospitality graduates. This agrees with the findings of Chand et al. (2019) who identified the need for soft skills in making young graduates employable in their first jobs and Ongartsuebsakul et al. (2024) who inferred that poor language skills pose a barrier among young recruits.

Table 3: Attributes Required for Excelling in Campus Placements

Attributes	Frequency	Percentage
Comprehensive understanding of the hospitality industry	69	33.01
Develop strong communication and interpersonal skills	54	25.84
Practical knowledge of Hospitality Industry	23	11.00
Opportunities for networking	17	8.13
All of the above	46	22.01

To understand the satisfaction level among hospitality students from the placement drive and suggestions for improvement for the future: Table 4 shows the satisfaction level of the respondents regarding the campus placement drive based on the graduation year. The majority of the respondents (56.94%) are satisfied with the support provided by college placement while (24.40 %) are dissatisfied with the placement drive. 18.66% of the respondents had a neutral opinion being neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. It can be noted that the satisfaction level among the graduating students is on the rise since 2020. That gives scope for improvement opportunities for the institutions. Lee et al. (2019) and Ongartsuebsakul et al. (2024) concluded that collaborative partnerships in the form of career fairs help to provide authentic experiences through face-to-face interactions with students. Organizing forums with industry experts (Birtch et al., 2021) gives students possibilities to learn about employment opportunities and career paths first-hand. Providing industry mentors to final-year students and a career counsellor at the institute were also some suggestions put forward. Park and Jone (2021) propose

that virtual internships can enhance learning by applying practical knowledge in real management settings.

Table 4: Cross Tabulation: Based on Graduation Year and Satisfaction Regarding the Campus Placement Drive

Year of Graduation	Satisfaction Regarding the Campus Placement Drive	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	Total
2020	Frequency	10	17	4	31
	Percentage	32.26	54.84	12.90	100
2021	Frequency	34	22	26	82
	Percentage	41.46	26.83	31.71	100
2022	Frequency	64	9	6	79
	Percentage	81.01	11.39	7.59	100
2023	Frequency	11	3	3	17
	Percentage	64.71	17.65	17.65	100
Total	Frequency	119	51	39	209
	Percentage	56.94	24.40	18.66	100

Those who were dissatisfied were asked to give suggestions for improvement in the campus placement drive in form of an open-ended question. The results have been tabulated for further analysis. COVID-19 has given a chance for hospitality programs to revamp the programme perception and improve the course curriculum (Ka Leong et al., 2024).

Table 5: Suggestions Related to Improvement of Campus Placement Drive

Respondent	Suggestions
C39	Basics concepts of campus recruitment drive should be part of the curriculum and the importance of campus placement can be made part of the academics.
C71	The institutes can collaborate and organize career job fairs.
C145	Industry experts can be called for guest lectures focused on placement drives.
C158	In-house campus training programs can be conducted over weekends for the students.
C181	There should be a mentoring program where an Industry expert can provide one on one coaching to the students during the final year. This will act as a support and linkages with the hospitality sector.

C189	An emotional support team in case the student doesn't get placed. A career guide/ counsellor can also be made available in the college. After the completion of the course and starting with the job, the placement coordinator can keep in touch to ensure that the students are not facing any problems.
C191	More number of placement related lecturers, seminars and workshops can be conducted in the college.

Conclusion

This study reveals the post-COVID scenario of the campus placement drive in hospitality across institutions in Madhya Pradesh. The maximum percent of the respondents were males below 25 years of age and who had graduated in the year 2021. About half of the respondents had got a job offer from 1 to 2 companies during the campus placement with the majority of the respondents opting for jobs in the Hotel industry. The study has highlighted the attributes that are needed to excel in campus placement drives. The majority of respondents claim that theoretical knowledge of the hospitality industry should be the prime focus of the student while preparing for job interviews. This includes the theoretical knowledge imparted in the classrooms. The study assessed the satisfaction level of the hospitality students and more than half of the respondents were satisfied with the campus placement drive. While (22%) were dissatisfied leaving scope for improvements. The suggestions for improvement included having sessions on basic rounds of the selection procedure and soft training as part of the academic curriculum. Recommendations regard organizing industry-collaborated career fairs, placement lectures, seminars and workshops to be conducted at the institute level.

Another interesting recommendation made by our study regarding the placement coordinator keeping in touch with the students after starting the job. This will keep the students motivated and help them deal with any problems faced during the initial few months. These suggestions can be implemented at the institute level and the New Education Policy has included communication and soft skills into the new academic curriculum implemented in NCHMCT-affiliated colleges since the start of the academic session 2023. Connecting with the industry experts is an ongoing process which the institutes must keep striving for. A few limitations were faced while conducting the study. These included time constraints and reaching out to samples which may be addressed by further studies.

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