

THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN RECRUITMENT-APPLICANTS' PERCEPTION

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ABSTRACT

The impact of social media on the society in general, and on HR recruitment in particular is very dynamic. Social networking sites are changing the way HR recruitment is done; moreover, we believe that this trend will continue in the future and this is the reason HR recruiters must adapt continuously their recruitment strategies.

The purpose of the current study is to examine applicants' attitudes and perceptions toward social networking websites as a source of finding a job and to identify the perceived usefulness and job pursuit intention. It is important for all organizations to understand how applicants perceive social media websites as a recruitment method.

This study used an online survey based on an online questionnaire. The respondents were recent business graduates who were searching for a job using social media websites, but not exclusively.

The results showed positive attitudes of applicants on finding a job through social media websites; the main advantage seen by respondents is the opportunity to advertise themselves. On the other hand, the main variable that influence applicants' intention to apply for a job using social networking site is perceived usefulness.

Keywords: social media, social recruitment, social network websites.

JEL classification: M50.

1. Introduction

Social media is no longer separate from any business function and contribute to success across a variety of business objectives and impact the bottom line (Berkowitch, 2010). Therefore, it is absolutely necessary that companies have to focus on social media. Social media users are commonly referred to as Generation C, where C stands for content, creation, consumption and connectivity (Dye, 2007).

Social media is changing human interaction and is influencing the way human resource professionals recruit (Gibbs et al., 2015:170). According to the Society for Human Resource Management survey*** (2016), responding HR professionals indicated use of LinkedIn (94%), Facebook (66%) and Twitter (52%) for recruitment purposes, primarily targeting non-management salaried employees (87 per cent) and other management positions, excluding upper

management (82%). Moreover, a study by Jobvite (2016), conducted with a sample of 1404 recruiting and human resources professional, reported that the majority of companies are using SM to recruit (92 %).

From the perspective of job applicants, social media has given them a tremendous opportunity for job seeking (Janta and Ladkin, 2013). A greater use of social media is associated with practical computer knowledge, innovation, openness to experience, creativity, high levels of social connectedness, and better working memory (Ouardi et al., 2015 after Appel, 2102, Correa et al., 2010, Alloway and Alloway, 2012).

Although skepticism of SM's place in the business world exists, benefits related to recruitment, branding and costs are becoming strong factors (Gibbs et al., 2015:172).

Although this phenomenon has become increasingly popular, there is a lack of studies examining how applicants perceive and react to the use of social networking websites as part of the recruitment process (Madera, 2012: 1276).

The paper is structured as it follows. The article starts with a literature review on social recruitment and emphasizes the factors that influence applicants' perception on online recruitment, particularly job boards, and identifies their intention to apply. This is followed by the hypotheses statement. We then discuss the research methodology, followed by the results of the empirical study. The discussions are presented, followed by the conclusions of our study.

2. Conceptual background

2.1. Social recruitment defined

Recruitment represents the process of finding and attracting applicants for the employer's opening positions (Dessler, 2013: 146). This definition is considered a traditional one, because web technology used by many companies radical influence the way HR recruitment is managed. Some authors (Ladkin and Buhalis, 2016:330) suggest that, in the context of using web technology, definition must also include the perspective of those who are seeking work and not only of those who are screening for employees. The reason mentioned by authors Ladkin and Buhalis (2016:230) is that web technology facilitates discussion and interaction between employers and potential employees. Therefore, web technology makes recruitment a very complex and dynamic process and companies can no longer afford to

stay outside of "online world". In this context, social media plays an increasingly significant role for recruiters.

Although SNS (Social Networking site) are almost completely embedded in current social activities and lives, they only exist since 1997 with the start of Classmates and did not reach a considerable size until 2002 (Hari et al., 2016:9763). Social media is defined as collaborative online applications and technologies that enable participation, connectivity, user-generated content, sharing of information and collaboration amongst a community of users (Henderson and Bowley, 2010:239). In concrete terms, social media websites for recruitment can be in the form of an organization creating its own social network that encourages user-generated content and discussion, or by being associated with other websites like LinkedIn (Ladkin and Buhalis, 2016:331), for example.

The use of social media in HR recruitment is often referred to as "social recruiting" and implies using platforms such as LinkedIn, Facebook or Twitter to post job advertisements, attract and recruit job applicants (El Ouiridi et al., 2016:240). The main difference of social recruitment compared with online recruitment is the bidirectional communication. More precisely, social media allows all users to contribute to discussions, to give feedback, to participate in conversations (Beer and Burrows, 2007) and to share information (Ashling, 2007). Using social media websites, organizations can discuss career opportunities with potential candidates and encourage applications. Also, potential employees can ask for information in order to better prepare themselves for the interview, for example.

A key feature of social recruitment is that it is highly visible. Therefore, organizations need to make sure that their online identity sustains their recruitment strategy. Equally, potential and existing employees have to manage their employment relationships and online reputation (Ladkin and Buhalis, 2016:335).

2.2. Advantages and disadvantages of social recruitment

For organizations, the main advantages of using social media websites for employee recruitment are:

- social media can be a helpful method for generating referrals with respect to recruiting the candidate (Smith and Kidder, 2010);
- social media offers the opportunity to develop a recruitment strategy in conjunction with marketing, public relations, customer relations and internal communications (Madia, 2011:20);
- is a fast and more cost-effective recruitment method (Madia, 2011:20; Gibbs et al., 2015:172) comparative to traditional ones: for example, when participate to job fairs companies have to pay for recruiters to travel, to pay for accommodation, to book space etc., but using social media is cost-effective; of course, recruiters have to research if the outcomes are favorable;
- social networking websites are perceived to be reliable sources by all users (Kluemper and Rosen, 2009) both recruiters and job seekers;

- social networking websites facilitate global versus local recruitment (Brotherton, 2012);
- social media facilitates easier access to Generation Y candidates (Barron, 2008) who have technology preferences and interactive ways for finding a job;
- social media offers opportunities beyond the identification of potential candidates, as a driver to attract, brand and retain employees, while leveraging each employee network for further growth (Berkowitch, 2010); we believe that this characteristic makes social media a unique method of recruitment among the others methods of recruitment, traditional or not.

To sum up, we must mention that in order to effectively use social media, recruiters have to implement recruiting strategies for the differing platforms (for example: Facebook, LinkedIn) (Hunt, 2010) and differing audience (existing employees or potential employees)

From the perspective of prospective employers, using social media to seek a job offers the following advantages:

- candidates prefer to receive information and have a preference for interactive and engaging methods (Barron, 2008) and social media websites offer these opportunities;
- candidates have the opportunity to advertise themselves (Ladkin and Buhalis, 2016:330) and to promote their CVs and profile globally and at low cost: social media websites allow users to create an online profile, to provide descriptive information about hobbies, tastes, career goals or other kind of information that can be relevant to recruiters. But, recruiters have to pay attention because some online information about candidates can be fake. For example, ADP Screening and Selection Services found that applicants do falsify their information on applications, such as their employment record, education, and credentials or licenses (Levashina, 2009).

Thus:

- Hypothesis 1. There is a positive relationship between perceived usefulness and applicants' opportunity to advertise themselves using social media networking websites for recruiting purpose.
- Hypothesis 2. There is a positive relationship between perceived usefulness and applicants' intention to apply for a job using social media networking websites.
- Hypothesis 3. There is a positive relationship between overall perception on social media websites and applicants' intention to apply for a job.

Even though there are many advantages for employers and prospective employees in using social media for recruitment/seek an opening position, some researches identify some risks:

- current employees of a company may use social media websites to warn potential employees

about some problems, which may or may not be verified. Also, ex-employees may damage online a company reputation (Ladkin and Buhalis, 2016:333);

- lack of formal policies for use (Smith and Kidder, 2010) in HR activities; in the SHRM study mentioned above, 58% of organizations indicated that they do not have a policy regarding the use of social media websites;
- social media may not target all groups of candidates and that may cause unequal opportunity for employment; for example, recruiters or job seekers might have low knowledge or skills in order to use social media websites.

Although some studies identify some risks that could be identified as reasons for non-use of social media websites, no empirical studies have reported reasons as to why HR managers are not using social media websites (Gibbs et al., 2015:171) for recruiting or other specific HR activities.

Recruiters must keep in mind that social media is not a replacement for existing (traditional or not) recruitment methods, but a complementary one: not everyone (companies or job seekers) have the opportunity to use web technology to develop an online presence on social network websites; the reasons refer to: low knowledge or abilities, cultural norms, technology costs or internet availability.

3. Research methodology

This study used an online survey applied to business bachelor and master graduates who are actively looking for a job using, not exclusively, social media websites.

The online questionnaire designed for job seekers was pre-tested with three job seekers; they were asked to judge our instrument in terms of convenience and interpretability.

The respondents couldn't continue with completing the online questionnaire if their answer to the question "When you look for a job, do you use social media websites?" was not affirmative.

The respondents were asked to complete an online questionnaire with 19 items measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree), excepting items regarding general information: age, sex, type of searched job and the name of the most used social network site for searching a job.

The survey used for this data collection was composed of several sub-sections, the first of which included questions about social media perceived usefulness assessed by five items adapted from Gibbs et al. (2017) research. The respondents' perception toward their opportunity to advertise themselves and social media websites in general was measured by four items, respectively six items. Respondents' intention to apply was assessed by four items adapted from Madera (2012) research.

4. Data analysis and findings

A sample of 137 complete responses from job seekers was retained for this study (see Table 1). The sample was composed of 67.2 percent of female job seekers and 32.8 percent of male job seekers, and the average age was 23,3 (SD=1,5). The respondents had varying levels of work experience, with the majority having at least 1 year of experience. Finally, 86.9 percent of all respondents were unemployed and looking for a job at the time of completing the survey.

Table 1. Demographic profile of respondents (N = 137)

Variable	Details	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	92	67.2
	Male	45	32.8
Years of work experience	1 year or less	97	70.8
	2 years	40	29.2
	3-5 years	-	-
Employment status	Employed	25	18.2
	Unemployed	112	81.8

We asked respondents to rate the effectiveness of 9 social media platforms, including Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter, in their job search on a scale ranging from 1 (very ineffective) to 5 (very effective). 52% of respondents answered that the first social media website that they visit on a daily basis is LinkedIn. However, it is important to note that the majority of respondents indicated that they never use Twitter (93.2%) for the mentioned purpose. Only 32% of respondents mentioned that they use Facebook for finding a job. Respondents find Facebook and Twitter personal social networking sites aimed at friends, while LinkedIn is seen as a professional site that focus on business connections. LinkedIn focuses on job-posting or resume-related information, such as past and current employers and education.

The adequacy of the measurement model was assessed through examining construct reliabilities. All Cronbach's α values were above 0.70 recommended by Cronbach (Tong, 2009:290 after Cronbach, 1951). All the constructs met the internal consistency reliabilities with the lowest measure of 0.72 and highest 0.83, as presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Cronbach's coefficient alpha

	No of items	α
Perceived usefulness	5	0.72
Branding opportunity	4	0.70
Overall perception on SM websites	6	0.75
Intention to apply	4	0.83

Means, standard deviations and correlations for the studied variables are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Correlations among variables and shared of measures

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1.Perceived usefulness	3.90	0.576	1.00			
2.Branding opportunity	4.80	0.235	0.912	1.00		
3. Overall perception on SM websites	4.30	0.278	0.728	0.897	1.00	
4. Intention to apply	4.20	0.542	0.658	0.945	0.685	1.00

SD-Standard deviation; p<0.05

As observed in Table 3, the variable with the highest score is branding opportunity (Mean=4.80). Social media websites offer this unique feature that enables prospective candidates to make a personal brand and to advertise themselves. We believe that this is the reason why social media recruitment has surpassed online job boards and it is a very preferred method for acquire talent as some researches (Brotherton, 2012) show.

Also, we observe positive correlation coefficients between studied variables, suggesting that the relationships are in the same direction.

The highest correlation coefficient was between branding opportunity and intention to apply for a job (0.945), while the lowest correlation coefficient was found in perceived usefulness and intention to apply for a job (0.542).

It is also important to consider which studied variables have a high influence on job seekers' application decisions:

Table 4. Hypotheses testing of H1-H3 standardized parameter estimation

Variables	Intention to apply	
	Beta	t-value
1.Perceived usefulness	0.420	1.947
2.Branding opportunity	0.580	2.218
3.Overall perception on SM websites	0.240	1.665

p<0.01

As Table 4 shows, the variables with the most significant impact on applicants' intention to apply for a job posted on social media websites are: branding opportunity ($\beta=0.580$, $p<0.01$) and perceived usefulness ($\beta=0.420$, $p<0.01$). Overall perception on SM websites has a less significant impact on job seekers' intention to apply for a job posted on social networking sites. Consequently, H1 and H2 are supported, H3 is partially supported.

5. Conclusions

The research suggests that the recruitment process is increasingly affected by the use of social media. This study has practical implications for both recruiters and job seekers. Our findings suggest that recruiters need to take into consideration social media for recruiting.

Respondents find social networking websites a good source for finding a job. We believe that young people in general and respondents in particular have a preference for interactive and engaging methods of communications, and social media websites meet these criteria.

Our results can provide to HR recruiters information about candidate attitudes regarding social media recruitment and thus they can implement better recruitment strategies.

To summarize the main results, our study found that:

1. Applicants have a favorable perception on the social media recruitment and therefore HR recruiters must take in consideration this method even though it implies some risks. We believe that many organizations use social media more as a marketing and communications platform than a recruiting platform. Also, the most used platform by respondents is LinkedIn, a professional social networking site which allows candidates to find job openings and organizations to find suitable applicants; it facilitates a bidirectional way for recruiting.
2. The most important opportunity seen by respondents when using social media for seeking a job is personal branding, self-promotion and impression management. To be more precisely, users are allowed to submit different data on social media websites to engage in self-presentation and construct their personal brand identity. This characteristic of social media makes a unique method of recruitment/ finding a job. As part of their branding and self-promotion, users can post online data like: education, work experiences, capabilities, aptitudes, skills, personal achievements, qualifications, conversations, pictures, hobbies, interests etc.

Some researchers claim that in 2020 workplace people will be hired and promoted based on their reputation capital and employers will consider online image necessary in career success (Berkelaar, 2014). In this context job seekers need to monitor and improve continuously their self-presentation on social media websites.

Our study demonstrates that respondents are aware of the power of this information and consider them important in the context of recruitment. Thus, HR recruiters should consider this source for finding suitable applicants.

For future, our research could take into consideration other variable in order to analyze applicants' perceptions on social media recruitment or could focus on some specific groups of respondents who are targeting jobs in a certain sector of activity.

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