E-recruitment: A Social Media Perspective

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. Authors MSH and AHMMA together designed the study and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Author MAH managed the literature searches. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Review Article

ABSTRACT

Electronic recruitment (E-recruitment) has become a common phenomenon due to the increasing utilization of information technology by the human resource departments in many organizations around the world. However, recently, we can also observe the integration of social media as a part of e-recruitment although the practice is limited. This review paper aims at discussing the role of social media on e-recruitment process based on existing literature. Most of the previous studies indicate that social media is not being used as the main source of e-recruitment, rather as one of the secondary sources. Further, it has been revealed that such utilization of social media as complementary source is getting popular due to the inexpensive availability of information. The paper is expected to be beneficial for the scholars as a substantial literature evidence for reference as well as for human resource professionals for some practical guidelines (based on recommendations provided) regarding the utilization of social media information for e-recruitment.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The contemporary organizations have been altered into virtually interrelated and streamlined networks with the tremendous revolution in Information System (IT). Such interconnectedness has relieved those organizations from the traditional boring and time consuming manual operations that have effectively and efficiently adopted and integrated such advantages of modern Web-based technologies such as electronic recruitment (e-recruitment). According to Tong & Sivanand [1], e-recruitment is the tool and technique of effective and efficient utilization of IT to fetch efficiency, speed and perfection on the recruitment process. E-recruitment is a sub-system of overall electronization of digitalization of recruiting competent candidates using web based technologies by an organization [2]. Therefore, e-recruitment can be well defined as the adoption and integration of IT and Web to recruit competent job candidates that can largely replace the manual recruitment functions [3]. As an important function of HRM, e-recruitment can both be inductive financially and strategically for the organizations as indicated by Hosain [4] in his empirical study. In a very recent period of time, the latest accumulation to this digitalization progression is the inclusion of using social media (SM) in different areas of HRM. Such a Web 2.0 based online platform is getting particular popularity since its inception earlier in this Century. SM is the combination of a number of different social networking sites (SNSs) such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and Snapchat where the users can post, share, comment and like the contents within their own network of friends. As a result of such actions of users, they are intentionally or unintentionally creating and sharing a bulk amount of information that are termed as social networking information (SNI).

Although those SNSs were primarily intended and meant to be used and operated by the users for personal and social networking purposes, those huge amount of data have recently caught the attention of hiring professionals for searching ad recruiting competent job candidates. In fact, SNI is getting slow but steady popularity among the employers for hiring purposes. The motives are manifold for such popularity. SNSs such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, and Google+ can supply recruiters an enormous quantity of information regarding potential candidates. Many large companies with strong and active Web presence have developed their brands not only on their own corporate websites, but also on SM platform in order to reach audience whereby those companies can additionally share information about their businesses and the available job opportunities with interested job seekers. Many firms utilize such platform where they post special job adverts which make it easier for the tentative applicants to locate those jobs that interest them. Thus, SNSs are helping in making a potential bridge between candidates and e-recruiters. More recently, corporate SM pages have proved to be effective advertising media with several benefits over conventional job advertising media. As the unemployment rate is high in many countries due to various reasons, majority of job seekers today have at least one SNS highlighting their company profiles. Today employers definitely turning to SM for serving their e-recruitment purposes as they understood that they can reach a larger number of skilled jobseekers.

Although, SNSs can serve as the source of e-recruitment process by providing necessary information to the recruiters, such use might also present some hidden, potential risks such as misuse of information, legal and ethical considerations, as well as candidates' perception of privacy, fairness and ethics [5]. Still now, it is a very basic idea that all those who involved in this electronic world and particularly, those who intensively use and utilize SNI are fully aware of the risks and benefits of such exposure [6]. In fact, a more methodical exploration of the benefits and pitfalls of SM based e-recruitment and the role of such SNSs during the e-recruitment process will discard some light on the reasons behind why companies choose to or not to utilize, this contemporary method of employee recruitment. This theoretical paper has tried to shed some light concerning how SM has integrated with e-recruitment process with motives behind, benefits and pitfalls of such integration. Finally, the authors have highlighted some action recommendations to guide such utilization of SM platform into e-recruitment process more effective and free of any negative consequences.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 E-recruitment

E-recruitment, also known as online recruitment, is the practice of using technology and in particular web based resources for tasks involved with finding, attracting, assessing,

interviewing and hiring job candidates [7]. It is the process of recruiting job candidates with the aid of electronic resources, particularly Internet. At present time, organizations and recruitment agencies have turned much of their recruitment process online in order to improve the speed and efficiency where the candidates can be matched with vacancies offered. Using online databases, online job advertising boards and search engines; employers can now fill the vacant positions saving a substantial portion of time than before. Using an online e-recruitment system, the hiring professionals can potentially save their valuable time as well as they can rate the candidates.

2.2 Social Media (SM) and Social Networking Sites (SNSs)

Social media (SM) can be defined as a collection of Internet based applications created on the ideological and technical foundations of Web 2.0 that permit the creation and exchange of "User Generated Content" [8]. In other words, such applications are based on Internet and empowered by Web 2.0 ideology and technology [9]. Such applications are determined by end users as contrasting to single authors. We can define such applications as social networking sites (SNSs) such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and YouTube as the well-known examples of multi-authored Web 2.0 applications; whereas single website-based profiles do not qualify as Web 2.0 capable or as a SM platform. Thus, in defining an SNS, the sustaining technology concerned is vital as it differs from Web 1.0 static pages in the capability of end users although both create and consume content. Kaplan & Haenlein [8] classified SM into six general types: (1) Collaborative Projects such as Wikipedia; (2) Blogs; (3) Content Communities such as YouTube or Flicker; (4) Social Networking Sites (SNSs) or Social Networking Websites (SNWs) such as Facebook, Twitter, and MySpace; (5) Virtual Game Worlds such as World of Warcraft; and (6) Virtual Social Worlds such as Second Life.

2.3 Utilization of SM as an E-recruitment Platform

For a number of years, organizations have used jobsites such as Careerbuilder.com in their recruiting practice, as a leading source to the attract jobseekers from among more than 100 career sources. According to Nessler [10], Careerbuiler.com has been successfully reduced

the cost per hire by 70% due to a decline in travel costs and has also reduced by 60% time taken for employers in hiring. Electronic recruiting is the blend of the Web with the process of recruiting human capital [6]. However, recently, organizations now have their own SM pages for recruiting job applicants [6]. As an example, organizations are now creating and opening their own Facebook and LinkedIn pages and using those pages as advertisement tools for attracting and getting talented job candidates [11]. Moreover, there is a boost in SM usage by HR professionals with the intention to find "elaborate job applicant information"; and to screen and select the best-suited candidates for vacant positions [12]. According to Facebook authority, a new feature is in progress that would assist companies to direct their job postings [13]. In addition, according to Facebook's official webpage, job posts are now linked to the "Facebook Business Page" from where jobseekers can see new jobs available through the "Jobs Bookmarks" on Facebook [14]. SM, therefore, is now serving as a lead to forward followers (job seekers) to organizations' personal website where they can learn about job vacancies [15]. Having such a substantial figure of account holders, recruiting through Facebook gives employers a much wider diversity of opportunities and challenges.

As a result of appearance and rising attractiveness of SNSs such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, growing number of HR professionals and recruiters are being attracted to the social networking information (SNI) obtainable from such source [12]. More recently, more and more recruiters are taking the benefits of different SNSs to search and screen job candidates [12,16-18]. Nevertheless, we should not forget that any latest technology also brings the accountability to identify associated debates regarding the challenges and advantages both at realistic and moral viewpoints.

Recruiters generally utilize SNI to enhance their recruitment optimality [19-22]. Such utilization seems ubiquitous among the recruiters. Around 93% employers do utilize or are currently using SNSs during the e-recruitment & selection procedure and 55% employers reported that they re-evaluated candidates on the basis of the contents obtained from their SNSs [23]. After scrutinizing these profiles, recruiters attempt to accumulate a complete summary of future employees that would be unavailable otherwise particularly as such information is associated

with their behavioral attitudes [24,25]. In addition, numerous recruiters move toward to evaluating candidates with the help of SNI as a supplementary source to assess "best fit" with the company or to identify "red flags" [20]. Such "red flags" may consist of a candidate's personal contents or sensitive information such as consumption of alcohol and prohibited drugs, sacrilege and involvement in sexually implicit actions [21]). Recruiters frequently try to obtain SNI to eradicate the candidates from additional consideration [19]. Grasz [20]) reported based on the statements of the recruiters that 89% of them were reluctant to employ a job candidate who has the trace of "unprofessional behavior" in their SNSs.

Although the hiring organizations have a liability to be fair and meticulous in recruitment process to keep away from neglectful recruitment, the likelihood of wrong utilization the SNI cannot be ignored as well [16,18]. Irrespective of the question of such mistaken use is deliberate or unintentional; the hiring professionals are taking risks while exposing themselves susceptible to possible legal ramification. Through the search of contents from SNSs like Facebook to evaluate job candidates, organizations are possibly breaching individual privacy, getting deceptive or mistaken idea regarding the candidates and getting possibly restricted data that a hirer might not seek because of the pertinent service regulations [12,16-18].

However, even after all the above facts, utilization of SNSs by the recruiters to evaluate applicants have been becoming a fast rising fashion [26] as they are interested to get and accumulate more data outside that are not included on the CV/ Resume/ application form in order to evade wrong hiring [27]). Swallow [28] conducted an extensive investigation on 300 recruitment experts and found that 69% of them discarded job candidates on the basis of their SM profile contents. Furthermore, numerous candidates were asked or requested to supply their ID/passwords/login details in order to allow potential recruiters to get complete admission to individual SM accounts [29]. Despite of the growing fame of SM platforms, it is still a matter of debate if such practice of utilizing SMI lawfully appropriate or not. Even though, organizations have the gifted option to use SNI for evaluating applications, unregulated utilization of such practices might raise several ethical and fairness issues that are required to be identified and considered [12]. A lot of recruiters approve SM

based e-recruitment since it permits them to collect enormous tentative information regarding candidates that assist to forecast the possible blend between the candidate and the job itself. On the contrary, many experts pointed that the recruiters ought to be cautious in utilizing SNI to assess applicants [30]. There are intense debates regarding the credibility and accuracy of information gathered from SNSs with the possible misuse. Thus, the experts guide the organizations to search somewhere else for the information [30].

3. UTILIZATION OF SM/SNSS AS AN E-RECRUITMENT SOURCE: THE MOTIVATIONS

There are number of motives behind the increased popularity among the hiring professionals in utilizing the SM platform as a secondary e-recruitment source. In this section, the authors have tried to identify such motives that are highlighted on the following sub-sections.

3.1 Reduced Cost and Time

A number of previous authors [31-33] indicate that SM can reduce the cost and time needed for recruitment with higher efficiency. For example, placing a job advert on SM is often cost free and the information may be edited if any mistake is noticed or a change is needed [34], while publishing a job advert on a newspaper requires financial expenses. Online SM e-recruitment also allows for a considerable reduction in paperwork, reducing application costs [31].

3.2 Readymade Information

SM as a platform provides some information already available for the employers that are not otherwise obtainable elsewhere such as behavioral pattern, hobbies, interests, friend groups etc [35]. In addition, there is an opportunity for the employers to cross check the information that has been already provided to them.

3.3 To Attract Passive Job Seekers

HR professionals frequently sustain that business oriented SNSs present an abundant source of information concerning passive jobseekers [36]. Such individuals are particularly attractive for organizations as they represent an

unexploited pool of potentials not connected with placement agencies or other recruiting professionals. Many passive candidates are considered to be especially stable employees [37]. He [37] pointed out that a majority of LinkedIn members are having a profile to be contacted by employers for new career opportunities. Most of such profiles include detailed descriptions of present and past work experiences, areas of expertise and links to references made available by former supervisors and co-workers [38].

3.4 To Avoid Negligent Hiring

A good number of employers argue it is purely their responsibility, as stewards of their organizations and as individuals to uphold their obligations to their stakeholders. Therefore, they want to use SNI to learn as much as they can about potential employees. They further argue that they have a right and a need to protect them from the accusations of negligent hiring. This could occur if a hiring professional fails to uncover an applicant's incompetence or unfitness by a diligent search of references, criminal background or even general background [39].

3.5 Tentative Forecaster of Potential Employee's Personality and Person-Job Fitness

Some employers utilize SNI as instruments to evaluate candidates' behavior or characteristics [40] since such information provide relatively transparent and honest personal information, such as the content posted on candidates' sites by their friends, compared with the information on conventional resumes or application forms, which is expected to project a definite impression or preferred image [17]. Kluemper et al. [25] conducted two studies on Facebook established that screening a job candidate's SNS profile may also supply useful information to forecast the candidate's personality for a hiring decision. Moreover, SNI can be used to develop targeted interview questions [41] and conversations as well as to build connections during interviews [42].

4. UTILIZATION OF SM/SNSS AS AN E-RECRUITMENT SOURCE: THE RISKS

Although having a great possibility to be used as an e-recruitment platform, such utilization is not free of debate and confusion. Despite of having some obvious advantages, utilization of SNI for e-recruitment is not free of risks or limitations whatever might be the word. Such practice carries some severe risks that can make an organization liable to the court if used improperly. Due to such limitations, some authors recommend not to use or use the SNI to a limited extent possible.

4.1 Ethical Issues

Many SNS users and researchers alike argue that SNSs are not meant to be used for any official or organization related issue. Those sites are purely created and meant for personal and social communication with some exception such as LinkedIn that was purely developed for professionals and job seekers. As a result, utilization of SM or SNSs for hiring process has become a matter of debate on basis of ethical issue. A survey in US discovered that one of the most common reasons for not short-listing or rejecting a job candidate was his/her "lifestyle" rather than employment-related information [43]. Yet again, 53% of recruiters surveyed in the UK reported that they found SNS contents that influenced them not to hire a job candidate such as "provocative or inappropriate" photographs or information [44]. One of the frequently cited ethical arguments against the use of SNS profiles as part selection and screening process is that such search can allow for "unchecked" discrimination towards a candidate [45]. Clark & Roberts [39] branded the use of SNSs for hiring as a socially irresponsible practice based on individual privacy breach and violation of corporate social responsibilities of organizations. According to Lorenz & Kikkas [46], several hiring are managers also facing ethical dilemmas regarding the decision of background search of candidates based on SM. However, it should be noted that such an ethical concern is almost absent or very unnoticeable for the job related SNS like LinkedIn as the site is primarily intended for job search and sharing professional information where all the information are publicly available and nothing to hide on a personal basis. The concern is mainly regarding those SNSs that are regarded as the personal and social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter. Therefore, since the issue of searching an applicant's SNS for hiring purpose is still in infancy but a growing practice, the employers need to make a proper balance between its advantages and ethical considerations.

4.2 Legal Concern

The utilization of SNI for hiring is giving birth to growing legal and privacy concerns as well. Every year, there is growing awareness and negative consequences regarding the utilization of freehand SM surfing for personal information. Such legal concern has forced to decide some employers not to search SNS for candidates' information. As an example, a survey conducted by SHRM in 2013 reported that the percentage of screening personal SNSs such as Facebook or Instagram to explore job candidates is 22 percent, a decline from 34 percent in 2008. The same survey attempted to identify the reasons for such decline where 74 percent of employers were reported to be concerned with legal risks or discovering information regarding protected characteristics at the time of perusing candidates' profiles which can be a justifiable concern [47]. One of the legal concerns might be the correctness of information obtained from SNS. An applicant hired based on incorrect information extracted from social platforms could raise a legal problem, arguing "defamation of character" [43]. Another issue might be the legal privacy right which is most likely to be based on the "job-relevance of the information obtained" [43]. In addition to legal risks, organizations should note that their (job candidates') image and reactions to the "real or perceived invasion of privacy" [43]. Furthermore, additional legal issues might contain potential discrimination while using SNSs. Any information regarding gender, race, age, religion or disability obtained through SNSs and used as a source of not hiring or hiring is considered illegal [6]. According to Broughton et al. [43], if the employer tries to know "too much" regarding job candidates, they may use such information as a source of discrimination.

4.3 Tentative Inaccurate, Forged or Incomplete Information

The most fatal risk that employers typically take when screening SNS is the risk of receiving inaccurate, forged or incomplete information [16,17,48]. The information provided on the profiles may not be accurate for a variety of reasons. The profile may be falsified or created to make the profile owner appear better or worse than they are depending on the intended audience [49]. In other words, individuals may try to "fake good" or "fake bad" on their SNS profiles based on whom they anticipate to showcase their information [41]. Previous research has established that the social norm of most SNSs is

to highlight exaggeration and eccentric behavior while posting by applicants might reflect that norm [41]. Information on SNS profiles may also be obsolete and may represent what applicants were like in different stage of their lives and might or might not symbolize what they are like toady [41]. Therefore, the information that required today might be misleading for the employers who want to rely on such information for PBC. Depending excessively on the information obtained from SNSs might result in unfair inferences due to the possibility of intentional or unintentional inaccuracy [18]. The usability of such information will be legally and ethically questionable and might require more study to conduct [41].

5. UTILIZATION OF SM/SNSS AS AN E-RECRUITMENT SOURCE: SOME ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the literature and the authors' own viewpoints, this paper has highlighted some action recommendations for the hiring professionals listed below.

5.1 Reliability and Validity of the Information Collected

Since SNS such as Facebook and Twitter depicts decision makers to factors that equal employment law restricts, the burden of proof may be on the organization to demonstrate that group membership did not factor into the e-recruitment decision (and this may be difficult to accomplish). On the basis of such factors, it is strongly suggested that the organizations should refrain from using SM (e.g., Facebook) and other Internet information (e.g., Google searches) until methods for collecting and evaluating such information are shown to be reliable and valid [50].

5.2 Development of a Transparent Policy and Codes of Conduct

Van-Iddekinge et al. [50] recommend that organizations develop clear policies concerning the use of SM and other Internet information. In fact, the outcome of an SHRM [51] survey suggested that a good number of organizations do not have a policy regarding the use of Internet information. Fortunately, some organizations have already recognized codes of conduct or ethical guidelines for the use of SNI guided by some professional associations. Such codes should be extended to reflect on e-recruitment and e-selection. These codes should specify the

ethical and/or professional consequences of certain actions while providing recommendations to HR professionals to reduce the reliance on individual judgment and morals. In addition, a well-structured and thought-through code of conduct sends a signal to all in the organization (employers and employees) about which practices are acceptable and which are not such as cybervetting job candidates' SNSs without their consent or legal justification [52].

5.3 Linking the Code of Conduct to Training

At present, individuals may be recruited and promoted to roles with greater responsibility without being trained in how to spot, avert, and react to challenging SNI use among employees they manage [53,34]. The Society of Human Resource Management [55,56] reported the results of two surveys with HR professionals showing the following: Only 56% of respondents in 2011 and 59% in 2013 had a formal or informal policy on evaluating applicant in their organizations. This means that risks such as slander [57] are almost inevitable, given that around 40% of employers do not have such a policy. Attempts to control what is shared by employees on SM platform is less likely to be effective than a proactive discussion and effective training only if the responsibilities and confidentiality issues are understood will they be acted upon [58]. While code of conducts may exist, few of these are actually linked to induction training upon hiring or promotion.

There are reasons to believe that training and discussion are the keys to ensuring that the underlying aspects of the codes of conduct are understood and applied. Training, however, is unlikely to reduce discriminatory practices. The organization must have a policy of fair and unbiased treatment, modeled by its leaders and reinforced through additional training and appropriate legal recruitment practices [52]. If the training is not complemented by good management practices (e.g., such as having an open discussion around inclusion vs. discrimination, ethical leaders that role-model ethical behavior when discriminatory practices are discovered), codes of conduct are unlikely to be effective [59].

5.4 Selection of an Appropriate SNS

If an organization wants to use SM platform for job advertising, it should select the appropriate

SNS that suits such a purpose. Selecting the wrong NSS to communicate a job opening could result in receiving excess and unrelated applications. Possible overloading of the system could lead to missing actual skilled (talented) applicants. On the other hand, a wrong recruitment could also mean receiving less than the expected applications, leading again to the same outcome. According to some experts, an SM based e-recruitment is more effective for companies already known [60,61], large, and involved in technology. It was proven that e-recruitment was more effective and yielded more results when the company was more recognized, as job seekers look first at companies that they know and advertise more, and then locate less recognized ones.

5.5 Using the Social Media More for Talent Search and Recruitment than Screening

Information collected from SM platform are now being utilized for a number of HRM practices such as recruitment & selection, pre-selection background checking and even training. But such utilization should be limited to or more concentrated in searching talents advertising and recruitment. Organizations should rely less on screening a candidate based on SNI to avoid lawsuit and privacy issues. With having proper guidelines and validity and reliability of SNI, organizations should refrain from using such information for selection, screening and background checking.

5.6 Using SM a Secondary Source Rather than a Sole One

Organization should use SNI as supplementary tool for initial recruitment rather than solely relying on that. SNS can serve as the tool of checking the information on CV or resume of candidates.

5.7 Focusing on Job-Related Information and Professional SNSs Only

Recruitment should be based on job related information only [62]. The information should note the nature of the behaviors being targeted or measured. Further, it is suggested that organizations consider what criterion (or criteria) they wish to predict and what type of SNI might be relevant to that criterion. This set of suggestions may help clarify results of the SM based assessment process, because decision

makers will better understand what to focus on and predict. Third, organizations focus only on employment purposed SNSs (such as LinkedIn) [25,62-64]. Again, in this respect, it is not generally recommended to use such information for operational recruitment process at this time. Rather, this is a good place to do research "in the background" to see if SM based assessments might provide valid information. This background research might examine resume to check if variables such as breaks in employment and promotions might be captured from SM platform [63]. Such data might add to variance accounted for (in various criteria) beyond personality tests or cognitive ability tests, although dealing with potentially incomplete information could still prove challenging [65].

6. THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Social media is gaining rapid attention from the academicians and researchers but there are very few evidences (both theoretical and empirical) on how to, when to and which information to utilize for different HRM functions such as recruitment. The paper is based on previous literature where the summarized findings have been highlighted briefly. The authors are optimistic that this paper will help the researchers to further investigate regarding this comparatively recent but growing area more deeply and with wider scope. Therefore, this review paper can bridge the gap of adequate research absence to some extent since this area of organizational management needs more attention and results to be implemented.

This review paper is expected to be expected to be further helpful to the organizations and policy makers to formulate and implement their organizational policies in using social networking information. Social media is an accepted platform that can be utilized for saving time and money provided that it is being used with extreme caution and with proper guidelines to avoid any complicacies. The paper might helpful also for formulating and implementing a proper social media policy (SMP) in order to make timely and efficient utilization of social media information for different HR practices particularly recruitment and selection.

7. CONCLUSION

As the inevitable parts of technological innovation and development, no one can ignore

social media as part of our daily lives. However, cautions should be made while utilizing those networks keeping consistency with law and regulations. Furthermore, both players in this game, employers and job candidates should respect each other in terms of privacy, fairness and ethics (for employers) and organizational recruitment policy and practices (for job candidates).

The social media can only function in an effective and efficient manner if both employers and employees know the basic legal and ethical foundations regarding such recent utilizations of social networking information for organizational and business purposes. It is obvious that social media is being utilized in searching and acquiring potential employees and it is expected to grow as a hiring tool in upcoming time. However, utilizing social media instead of the traditional methods can be as well problematic. Further, using social media as a searching and recruitment tool might lead to legal issues. Similarly, social media has non-work-related components (e.g. photograph, personal interests and personal information) that can influence in biased decision making regarding recruitment. On a final note, the authors emphasize that using social media as a searching and recruitment tool is a rapidly burgeoning practice, though it is severely under-researched. The authors hope that this investigative study will shed some lights for future experimental research in this particular sphere.

DISCLAIMER

The products used for this research are commonly and predominantly use products in our area of research and country. There is absolutely no conflict of interest between the authors and producers of the products because we do not intend to use these products as an avenue for any litigation but for the advancement of knowledge. Also, the research was not funded by the producing company rather it was funded by personal efforts of the authors.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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