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Social Networking Sites and Hiring: How Social Media Profiles Influence Hiring Decisions

Sara Sameen (Assistant Professor Human Resource, FAST-NUCES) and Samia Cornelius (Lecturer Marketing, FAST-NUCES)

Abstract
This study investigates the use of Social Networking Sites (SNSs) to screen candidates in the hiring process, highlighting factors that employers consider while selecting or rejecting candidates. These factors are usually visible on the candidate's SNS profile. A sample of 228 hiring professionals working in small and medium enterprises (SMEs) was used as a data set for the study. The results indicate that LinkedIn is a widely used SNS for screening candidates, and that hiring professionals consider professional qualifications, organizational fit and communication skills to be the major determinants of selection or rejection of candidates.

Keywords: Social network recruiting, social networking sites, social media in recruitment, LinkedIn hiring, Facebook hiring.

Introduction

Internet, since its popularity in the 1990s, has led employers to use social networking sites (SNSs) like LinkedIn and Facebook to screen candidates in the hiring process (Zamaria C, 2007). SNSs have helped employers to connect with applicants primarily for recruitment and reference checking (Berkshire, 2005). This study explores the use of SNSs for screening, while in the process of hiring potential candidates. Hiring professionals, from both the manufacturing and services small and medium enterprise (SME) sector, were surveyed to find (a) frequency of use of SNSs for screening, and (b) factors in a SNS candidate profile that most affected hiring decisions.

Literature Review

Screening candidates for recruitment with the help of Web 2.0 applications has allowed employers and hiring managers to connect and have real-time communication with thousands of high achieving applicants (Arellano, 2011). Social media networks, being a primary Web 2.0 application, can aggressively be used for three primary reasons in the recruitment process: posting available jobs, searching candidates, and reviewing them (Grensing-Pophal, 2009).

SNSs allow hiring managers to tap into a pool of high quality passive job applicants (who are currently employed and are not searching for new positions but can switch job if conditions are suitable (Joos, 2008)). Active job applicants represent only 10% or less of the workforce at any given time and are usually unemployed (ibid). Hence, SNSs provide a platform to employers to convert passive candidates into candidates seeking jobs (ibid).

In a survey by Jobvite (2012), it was found that 89% of human resources and recruiting professionals used LinkedIn to hire job applicants (Shepherd, 2013). Surveys carried out by Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) reveal that 77% of companies under investigation used SNSs to recruit applicants which was up from 56% in 2011 and 34% in 2008 (Segal, 2014)(Alexandria, 2013). In the same survey it was also found that more than three-quarters of US employers now use social media for recruiting job candidates, which is more than double the figure six years ago (Passman, 2014). Another research by Career Builder revealed 43% of employers use SNSs to research job applicants which was up from 39% in 2013 and 36% in 2012 (CareerBuilder, 2014). 53% of employers are using SNSs for the purpose of researching passive candidates (Rossheim, 2015). Tech Savvy companies are particularly looking at social media trends to assist their recruiting and hiring efforts (Melanie Berkowitz, 2015). Industries most likely to screen job applicants via SNSs include those that specialize in technology and sensitive information i.e., Information Technology (63%) and Professional and Business Services (53%) (CareerBuilder, 2009).

According to a survey it was found that Facebook is the top social network for US teens and LinkedIn is more popular than Twitter among US adults (Guimarães, 2014). These people are vehemently sharing information about themselves on SNSs. This information is easily accessible by, and visible to employers and hiring managers (Chu & Snider, 2013). However, it also holds the risk of introducing various biases to the screening process (ibid). For instance, possible bias via Facebook occurs when hiring managers reject suitable applicants just by looking at their profile picture, which they think is a representation of their personality (ibid). This results in an overall lower probability of the applicant to be invited for interview (Caers & Castelyns, 2011). On the other hand, hiring managers on LinkedIn have been observed to select applicants that are a suitable fit for the organization by reviewing their professional network (ibid). Empirical research indicates that hiring managers are often influenced by factors such as age (Lahey, 2008)(Weiss & Maurer, 2004), gender (Riach & Rich, 2002)(Swim & Hunter, 1995), sexual orientation (Drydakis, 2009)(Weichselbaumer, 2003), race (Cesare, 1996)(Pager, 2003), obesity (Roehling, 1999)(Swami, Chan, Wong, Furnham, & Tove´e, 2008), and facial attractiveness (Tews, Stafford, & Zhu, 2009) when screening candidates for various jobs. SNs provide an easy means of getting access to all this information, and that too by the candidates themselves. Apart from these, it should be noted that SNSs can allow demographic biases because of internet availability and literacy limitations (Hargittai, 2007). All these factors allow hiring managers to indulge in various ethical and professional violations when making hiring decisions based on the information available on SNSs (Darragh, 2012).

According to Career Builder (2014), employers usually reject candidates in the screening process if: applicants have inappropriate photographs on their SNS profiles; they have posted drugs or alcohol related information; they have bad-mouthed their previous employer/colleague/friend or relative; they have poor communication skills; they have posted discriminatory comments regarding religion/gender/race; they have written incorrect qualifications; they have shared any

confidential information of previous employer; and if they have linkages to criminal behavior or have an unprofessional screen name. Whereas, the same survey explains that employers' reasons to accept applicants in the screening process via SNSs include: a good fit with the company's culture; right fit of applicants background information with their professional qualifications; a professional image as represented on the SNS profile; relevant interests; excellent communication skills; praise and awards; good references; interaction with employers' SNS accounts; and number of followers or subscribers.

Research Methodology

A sample of 350 hiring professionals (manager level) was selected from Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Pakistan. The sampling technique was convenience and purposive. The list of companies selected was based on personal references. The criterion of selecting the companies was that the company should be categorized as an SME and should have an HR/Administration department. Contact information of the professionals was drawn from the internet and/or telecommunication. The questionnaires were then shared with the sample via email. One week was given to the respondents to fill the questionnaire.

The questionnaire used in this research was self-constructed based on current observation and surveys done by industry sources. Consistency in the results across various sources suggests the data reported in the literature is reliable and valid. The questionnaire consisted of two sections. First section consisted of questions related to descriptive statistics. This included questions related to Sector, Age, Gender, Qualification, Current Experience, Overall Experience and Formal HR/Admin training. The second section consisted of a series of questions confirming the use of SNSs for hiring purposes.

A total of 228 questionnaires (197 from services and 31 from manufacturing sector) were received. 80 emails bounced back, 22 sent automatic out of office replies, and remaining 20 were not responded to.

Descriptive analysis using frequency tables and pie charts is used to explain and summarize data. Chi square test was used to see the significance between Sectors and Usage of SNS's. Multiple response tables were used to conclude the results of multiple response questions. SPSS 20.0 is used as statistical tool for analysis.

Analysis

75.8% of the respondents were from services sector with and remaining 24.2% from manufacturing sector of SMEs. Wide majority of the respondents were falling in 25-34 years of age (71.1%) having a Master (64.1%) and Bachelor (30.5%) degree. There were 33.6% respondents who had 2-3 years of experience while 27.3% of the respondents had less than 2 years of experience and 24.6% had more than 6 years of experience in their current organization. 68.3% of the respondents had an overall experience of less than 5 years.
67.2% of the respondents used SNSs to screen and attract passive candidates.

Figure 1: Descriptive Statistics
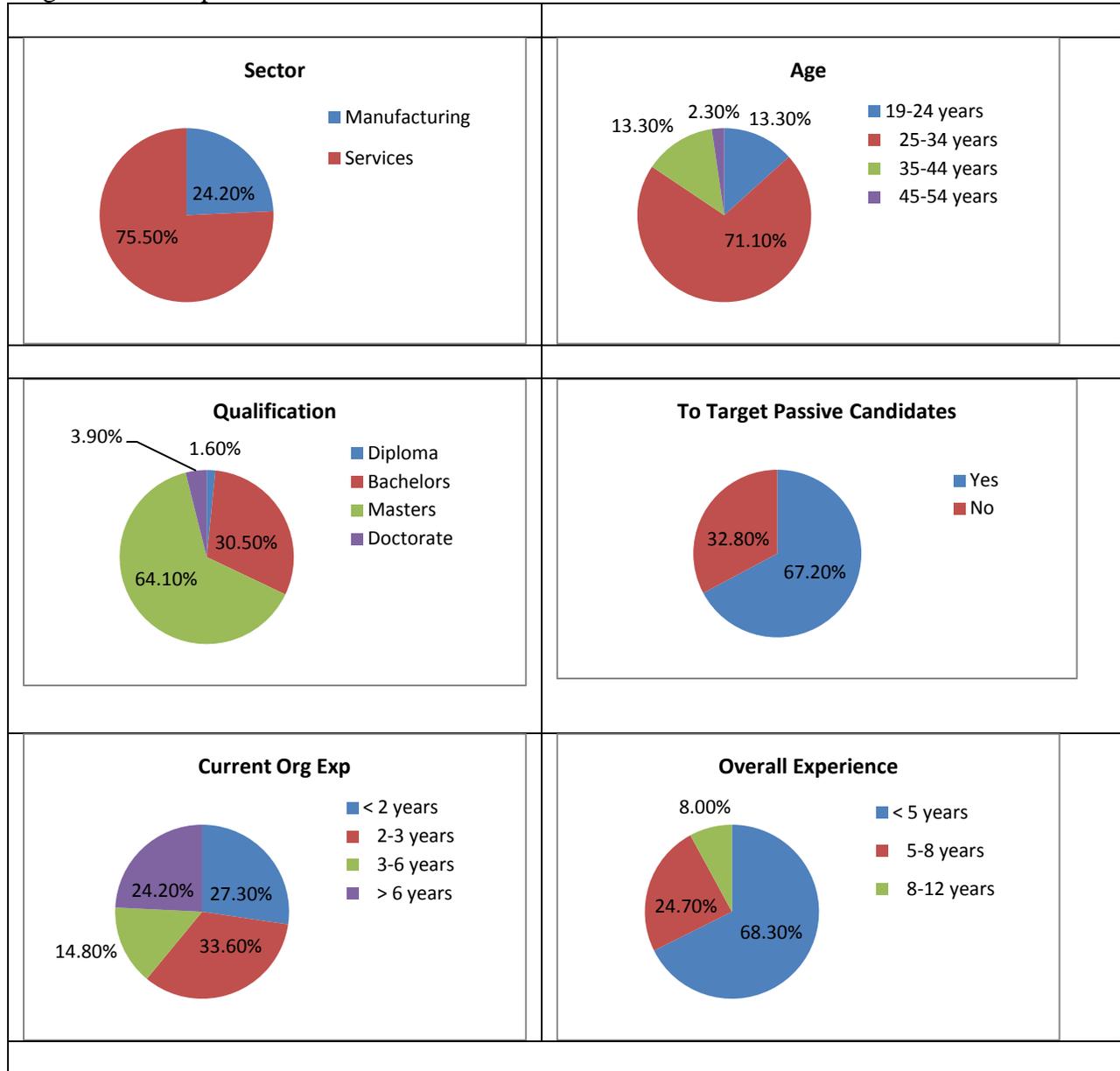
Furthermore, in order to analyze the usage of SNS sector-wise the results, as depicted in Table 2, show that usage of SNS is considerably higher in services sector in comparison to manufacturing sector of SMEs. Pearson Chi Square $\chi(1) = 3.08$, $p = .079$ shows that no statistical significant association is there between sectors and usage of SNS i.e., both services and manufacturing sector equally prefer social networking sites to screen and not to screen candidates.

Table 2: Services and Manufacturing sector usage of SNS

	Usage of SNS	
Sector	Yes (%)	No (%)
Manufacturing	11.7%	12.5%

Services	50%	25.8%
Total	61.7%	38.3%

To evaluate the usage of SNSs by hiring professionals in terms of SNS platforms, the results in Table 3 indicate that the most popular SNS to screen candidates is LinkedIn (79.8%). Facebook (35.9%) and Twitter (14.8%) were considered as the second and third choice by hiring professionals. Majority of the professionals use SNSs to target passive candidates (67.2 %). When respondents were asked that during which phase of hiring process do they look at SNS to screen prospective employees, 39.84% respondents marked "after receiving initial application", and 13.28% said they use SNS after initial conversation with prospective employee. Also 43.8% of the responses revealed that they do not make final hiring decisions based on what they see on SNS profiles. Those who did make final decisions (31.3%) based on candidate profiles, considered positive impression of the personality in match with organizational fit (33.6%), profile supporting professional qualification (32.0%), and solid communication skills (21.1%) as primary factors that influenced the hiring decision. Also it was found that most of the professionals do not reject candidates (59.4%) solely on what they see on SNSs. Professionals who did reject candidates (16.4%) based on what they saw on SNSs revealed communication skills, lies about qualifications (21.1%), sharing of confidential information of the previous employer (17.2%), and posting of negative comments about previous employer (16.4%) the factors that influenced their decision to reject candidates.

When asked about the benefits of SNSs, a large majority of the respondents selected cost effectiveness (64.1%) and timeliness (61.2%) as major reasons to use SNSs.

Table 3: Usage of SNS to Screen candidates

Items	%
Social Networking Sites	
Linked In	79.8
Facebook	35.9
Twitter	14.8
Google+	10.9
MySpace	0.0
Youtube	0.8
Targeting Passive Candidates	
Yes	67.2
No	32.8
Which phase you look at SNS in hiring?	
After receiving an application	39.8
After initial conversation with prospective employee	13.3
After detail conversation with prospective employee	11.7
Don't use SNS	28.9
Right before making an offer	6.3
Hired candidates of what you saw about them in SNS ?	
Yes	
No	31.3
Don't use SNS	43.8
	25.0

Factors you consider to hire candidates through SNS	
Positive impression of personality & organization fit	33.6
Profile in match with professional qualifications	32.0
Communication skills	21.1
Well rounded candidate through profile	10.2
Good references posted by others	11.1
Candidates awards and accolades	4.7
Never hired a candidate based on the information on SNS	28.9
Other	3.9
Rejected candidates of what you saw about them in SNS ?	
Yes	16.4
No	59.4
Don't use SNS	24.2
Factors you consider to reject candidates through SNS	
Inappropriate photos	4.7
Inappropriate comments	7.0
Content posted on substance abuse	10.2
Negative comments about previous employer	16.4
Poor communication skills	21.1
Discriminatory comments	9.4
Lied about qualifications	21.1
Shared confidential information of previous employer	17.2
Negative impression of personality and organization fit	13.3
Other	20.3
Benefits of using SNS	
Cost effective	64.1
Time saving	61.2
Easy processing of data	38.3
Other	16.4

Discussion

Based on prior research conducted majorly in the US, it was found that companies use SNSs to help search and screen passive candidates (Joos, 2008). This supports our findings: 67.2% of the companies use SNSs to track passive candidates. LinkedIn was considerably the best option, as depicted by prior research (Jobvite, 2012) (Shepherd, 2013). Companies also considered cost effectiveness the primary reason for them to use SNSs as supported by prior findings (Chu & Snider, 2013). High usage patterns were seen in tech-savvy companies, similar to what was found in a previous survey conducted on industries (CareerBuilder, 2009). Many factors that hiring professionals considered while making their decisions also matched results of previous studies. These included personality, qualifications, communication skills, comments about and relation with previous employers, and lies (Caers & Castelyns, 2011) (CareerBuilder, 2014).

Conclusion

With the emerging trend of social media, organizations are extensively using SNSs for different purposes and have also started utilizing these sites in recruitment and screening process. This study was an effort to relate the findings of studies conducted in the developed world to an emerging digital economy of a developing nation. The results reinforce the nature of internet as developing and promoting a global and boundary-less business environment.

LinkedIn, as the research indicates has huge potential for recruitment functions and widely popular among employers. The cost-effectiveness, timeliness and easy data processing are the main motivating factors that encourage hiring professionals to prefer online screening methods over traditional methods. In addition, employers can get insights from the magnitude of data available on these networks, which cannot be included in or evaluated through a resume or CV.

This research provides insights to not only professionals as to how these networks can be used for screening purposes, but to candidates who are utilizing these platforms to look for jobs.

Limitations

Permission issues in various organizations, and professional's limited knowledge of online recruitment and hiring limited the scope of the research to fewer respondents. Little to no research on the topic relevant to Pakistan left some grey areas which can be explored further.

Future Research

Quantitative studies can be carried out on particular companies utilizing SNS for recruitment in Pakistan. Furthermore, active utilization and presence can be classified as two different aspects of as study. Research on the kinds of tools and applications used for each particular network can also be undertaken with respect to Pakistan, and various cultural implications on the use of each tool can be investigated.

This particular study can further be utilized to conduct a more comprehensive research on the usage of social networking sites and its impact on hiring decisions particular to one social network or industry. The reported results have been in a form of simple percentages on simple tabulations; an extension of this research could be the inclusion of multiple factor scale on different samples to make more direct comparisons.

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