

EMPLOYERS' PERCEPTIONS OF USING SOCIAL MEDIA FOR RECRUITMENT

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ABSTRACT

Social media has become a global phenomenon in the past several years. This study investigates the use of social media as a recruitment method among employers. A descriptive research design using a quantitative method was used to collect data from organizations in the Auckland metropolitan area, New Zealand. The results revealed that most of the organizations researched use social media as a method for recruitment. Facebook and LinkedIn are the top two preferred social media for most employers, which saved them time and money. In addition, social media is also used by many employers to enhance their brand image.

Keywords: Social media, recruitment, employers, New Zealand

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of internet-based social media has made it possible for an individual to communicate with a great number of people (Narvey 2009). Social media, such as the popular Facebook, is the medium for communicating with friends, uploading photos and is treated as an informal way of interacting socially. In addition, social networking sites such as LinkedIn have started playing an immense role in businesses for recruiting new talent, and there is a growing debate on the usage of social media for hiring people.

With the advancement of Web 2.0 technology and especially with the popularity of social media, employers are changing their ways of hiring people. For instance, employers are not only looking for the credentials and resume of potential employees (Oleniczak, Pike, Mishra & Mishra 2010), but more for a 'kind of a person'. Social media as a new platform is seen as

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a means to reduce recruitment costs and build two-way communication between potential employees and employers (Drum 2010). In addition to providing opportunities for professionals and organizations to promote their business, companies have started utilizing these social networking sites (such as Facebook and LinkedIn) for attracting the prospective employees for recruitment via their company pages (Parez 2013).

Social media has become a global phenomenon for many commercial groups over the past decades (Rodriguez, Peterson, & Krishnan 2012). It is gaining in popularity among job seekers and human resources divisions in organizations to facilitate the process of recruitment (Bicky & Kwok 2011). Recruiting via social media is certainly on the rise. Employers are using social platforms as promotional channels for sourcing and hiring candidates (Lal & Aggarwal 2013). Moreover, the extraordinary popularity of Facebook, for example, has revolutionized social networking, and is currently expanding to supplement business functions such as brand building and recruitment (Singh, Lehnert & Bostick 2012). Blogs can be another useful recruitment tool, assisting in building relationships with potential new candidates and clients. They can also provide a source of valuable information that is both industry and company specific, promote working through a recruitment company, and highlight key vacancies (Tuten & Marks 2012).

The widespread nature of the Internet has played a large role in shaping the current state of the recruitment industry, and for this reason it is easier for recruiters to source job candidates using internet job boards and social media (Mihelich 2014). There is a strong relationship between the qualities of social networking sites and effective recruitment. The higher the quality of information, the higher the number of online users there will be (Lee & Kozar 2006), and hence more diverse applicants for recruitment. In addition, the navigation features of social networking sites help recruiters find what they need without difficulty, and allow them to manoeuvre easily and quickly back and forth through the pages (Tong, Duffy, Cross, Tsung, & Yen 2005). Another quality of social networking sites is their popularity. High popularity usually means the more people make use of social networking sites, the higher the chance of finding the best candidates (Chu, Shen, & Hsia 2004).

This research focuses on how social media is used by employers in the Auckland metropolitan area, New Zealand. It also focuses on the extent to which social media is able to satisfy the needs of employers compared to other recruitment methods, such as job fairs, job boards, advertisements (newspaper or online) or recruitment agencies. Additionally, this report covers a literature review relevant to the employers' perceptions of using social media for recruiting along with the description of methods adopted in this research. The conclusions are drawn based on the theoretical and practical analyses conducted during the study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To have a clear picture of this research it is important to understand key terminologies used for various recruitment methods. This is followed by investigating the importance of social media currently used in the New Zealand context. The key terminologies are listed below.

- *Social Media recruitment:* Social media allows free participation and engagement with wider communities (Narvey 2009). The process is proactive as both job seekers and recruiters are engaged in sharing and referring to each other using social media (Nel, Werner, Du Plessis, Fazey, Erwee, Pillay, Mackinnon, Millett & Wordsworth 2012).

- *Job Fairs*: A traditional recruitment method used by large companies to attract international job applicants. It is particularly used in areas of skill shortages such as the mining industry (Dickie & Dwyer 2011). This method is expensive and not very popular (Nel et al., 2012).
- *Job advertisement and job boards*: Traditionally newspapers and professional journals have been the first place that recruiters placed job advertisements. However, during the last decade there has been a dramatic shift towards the internet and online recruitment advertising. These specific recruitment websites are called job boards (Parry & Tyson 2008). For example www.seek.co.nz and www.trademe.co.nz are good examples of job boards in New Zealand.
- *Referrals*: This method occurs when current employees recommend acquaintances for a particular position. In this situation referred employees show more loyalty and job satisfaction than other categories of new-hires (Zottoli & Wanous 2000).
- *Employment and recruitment Agencies*: Both employment and recruitment agencies perform recruitment functions on behalf of a client company by charging fees. These agencies also attract talented candidates who are currently employed (Nel et al., 2012). Moreover, due to high costs, confidentiality issues, managements sometimes do not depend on these sources.

Recently, the use of social media for recruitment is gaining popularity when compared to other methods of recruitment (Drum 2010; Tuten & Marks 2012; Parez 2013), and this is the focus of the present research. When seeking new talent, if employers or recruitment agencies ignore social networking sites which have an intense degree of audience commitment and interaction, they may be missing out on some potential candidates who are very active in using these sites to find potential jobs (Brown & Swain 2012). Moreover, recruitment agencies and consultants are using social media to search for prospective applicants for executive positions. For instance, by using LinkedIn, recruiters can ask those in their LinkedIn network if they recognize anyone in their linkage who might be appropriate for a job prospect (Brown & Swain 2012). This allows recruiters to gain benefits from their comprehensive network. Moreover, this also gives recruiters the opportunity to get to know the candidates' inscription style, behaviour, and general attitude (Brown & Swain 2012). Sullivan (2009) suggested some potential benefits that could result from using social networking sites. They are: quality of candidates, improvement in two way communication, and approaching global candidates.

Social media also provides a low-cost technique for recruiting, sourcing and interviewing prospective employees (Dennise 2013). Furthermore, Clark and Roberts (2010) explained the favorable benefits of using social media for recruitment. They emphasized the importance of an online presence that provides a positive message to potential candidates. In this respect, from the recruiter's perspective it is easy to get a preliminary character sketch from the applicant profile. This could also lead to a 'time reduction' in the search for finding the right candidates. Jäger and Porr (2008, cited in Abel 2011) suggested that job seekers and businesses are using social networking sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn as a source of information and they have also become a source for finding suitable candidates in the company recruitment process.

Dennise (2013) argued that using social networking sites (such as Facebook and Twitter) to screen potential candidates could also open an organization to potential legal risks if they used posted information relating to a candidate's religion, sexual preference, social activities etc. This could be used against candidates in the screening process. However, this drawback

can be eliminated by ensuring that a hiring decision is made on non-discriminatory grounds and based on job relevance using assessments, tests or skills (Dennise 2013). Companies have to take critical factors such as privacy of data and ethical issues into serious consideration. Since no legal guidance and legislation exists (as in the case of traditional forms of recruitment) for recruiting via social media, employers must be cautious about any discrimination that may occur (Parez 2013).

Social media recruitment in New Zealand

Statistics show that New Zealand organizations are amongst the highest users of recruitment firms in the world (Price 2003). The same study also revealed that a higher percentage of recruitment in New Zealand is conducted via recruitment firms than in Australia, the USA and the UK. The reason is that in New Zealand there is a high proportion of employment in small and medium-sized businesses, and these businesses have less sufficient expertise and resources in terms of the recruitment process. Therefore, recruitment agencies are often used to contract out. Also, in New Zealand there are only a small number of large corporations which can provide a large number of internal vacancies. Moreover, the difficulty of employers and skilled employees finding each other is demonstrated by the large responses to advertised vacancies. Even with typically 50 – 200 CVs per position, employers often comment that it is difficult to find appropriate people (Price 2003). Therefore, utilising the assistance of suitable recruitment agencies to find appropriate candidates is increasing.

Recently, the trend has rapidly been changing in favour of recruiting via social media in New Zealand. For instance, the findings of a survey conducted by AbsoluteIT Recruitment Specialists (nd) stated that 77% of job seekers in New Zealand use social media to evaluate potential employers. The same study reveals that 56% of the 500 NZ employers surveyed are using social media or websites to promote their brand image. However, this information cannot be generalized as Absolute IT offers recruitment services exclusively to IT companies, and data collection was based on the responses received from IT firms and job seekers only. Nevertheless, an international survey conducted by The Kelly Global Workforce Index (2013) from thirty-one countries revealed similar results. According to this study, New Zealanders are consistently leading Australians in utilising social media as a recruitment tool. The survey also revealed that an increasing number of people are finding jobs through social networking sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn than by traditional job boards and recruitment agencies.

A study conducted by Jobvite (2012), a leading recruitment platform for social websites, indicates that the social recruiting trend is on the rise as recruiters continue to obtain higher quality candidates through social networks. The study confirms that nearly 93% of recruiters used LinkedIn to discover talent. Additionally, the same study revealed that around 89% of recruiters have hired through LinkedIn. This trend of using LinkieIn for hiring employees is increasing, and is closing the gap with Facebook which has more users than LinkedIn. Jobvite (2013) statistics revealed that LinkedIn is the most dominant social recruiting platform in terms of searching for candidates, whereas Facebook and Twitter show strength to showcase employer brand and pre and post interviews. Similar results were revealed in other studies (Parez, 2013, Lal & Aggarwal, 2013). For instance, in a survey respondents were asked to give reasons for using LinkedIn (Parez, 2013). The results indicate that the main reason was the popularity and usage of LinkedIn to search for job openings and for seeking information on careers. Social networking sites can give businesses a competitive edge in locating and engaging the best candidates available (Oracle 2012). Overall, social media has the potential

to offer incomparable services to organizations in terms of recruitment and promoting corporate brand.

THE PURPOSE AND MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION

The purpose of this study is to understand how employers in the Auckland metropolitan area use social media such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter for recruiting employees for their organization. Since social media is gaining popularity in New Zealand organizations, the present research also considers the extent to which employers use social media as a recruitment method compared with other traditional methods. The targeted traditional recruitment methods are job advertisements, job boards, recruitment agencies, job fairs and referrals. Therefore, the focus of this research is to explore the perception of employers towards the social recruitment method. The main research question is: *Do employers prefer social media (such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter) as a recruitment method to look for talent?*

METHODOLOGY

In this study a descriptive research design has been used to explore the perceptions of employers in understanding the recruitment method. The descriptive research design provides an appropriate and structured solution for a targeted study (Ghauri & Gronhaug 2010). In this respect this study aimed in understanding the current practice of recruitment, and very specifically the importance of using social media recruitment.

A quantitative method was used based on survey questionnaires. The first section of the survey questionnaire included the respondents' industry group and size, which are necessary to understand the profile of an individual employer. In the second section respondents were asked to provide the:

- preferred methods of recruitment (including both traditional methods and social media)
- use of social media for brand recognition
- popular social media for recruitment, and
- benefits of using social media

The questionnaire was entered using an online web-based survey questionnaire tool called Survey Monkey. This online way of sending questionnaires was adopted as it can be easily administered to geographically dispersed respondents and is very cost effective. The link to the questionnaire was sent via email to selected employers in July 2013. A total of 80 survey questionnaires were sent and 63 usable replies were selected for analysis. The results were analysed using IBM SPSS statistics v.20. The next section provides the findings and discussion of this analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings and discussion of this research is based on the survey questionnaires. The first point is analysed based on the industry sectors followed by the findings on recruitment methods.

Industry sector and usage of social media

Table 1 shows the industry sector of respondents and their usage of social media. It also gives the distribution of four different industry sectors. Overall, 40 (63.5%) respondents were from private enterprises, followed by 11 (17.5%) from public listed companies. Out of 63 employers, 48 (76%) use social media and 15 (24%) do not use social media to recruiting employees. Moreover, out of the 48 who reported using social media for recruiting, 29 (60%) employers belonged to the private sector.

Table 1: Industry sectors and usage of social media

Usage of social media	Government	Not for profit Organization	Private Company	Public listed Company	Total
Yes	3 (6.3%)	7 (14.5%)	29 (60.4%)	9 (18.8%)	48 (76%)
No	1 (6.7%)	1 (6.7%)	11 (73.3%)	2 (13.3%)	15 (24%)
Total	4 (6.4%)	8 (12.6%)	40 (63.5%)	11 (17.5%)	63 (100%)

Because the number of responses received from government agencies was 6.3% and is a relatively very small portion compared to other organizations, the information collected from public sector organizations was not included in the following discussion. However, the literature suggests that the reason government agencies are not catching up with new technology including social media is due to related concerns such as security, costs and human resources (Cockerill 2013). Previous research also suggested that the private sector is continuously exploring the benefits of new technology such as social media, and that those benefits are limited with regards to government agencies (McDonough 2012).

Preferred method of recruitment

Table 2 illustrates that traditional recruitment methods are still in good use despite the growing practice of using social media in recruitment. Job boards (for example, www.seek.co.nz and www.trademe.com), and recruitment agencies are heavily used by employers (24 and 18 respectively).

Interestingly, the very oldest method of advertising in printed media such as newspapers and journals is still preferred by 11 employers. The boundaries between traditional recruitment practices and online engagement are now blurred. This is because organizations consider all the above channels for recruitment and are important in terms of attracting the right candidates for their organizations (Wadee 2013).

Table 2: Preferred method of recruitment

Industry	Respondents	Social Media	Recruitment Agencies	Job Ad in Newspaper	Job boards (web site)	Other
Government	4	2	2	3	3	
Not for profit	8	5	3	7	4	1
Private enterprise	40	15	18	11	24	3
Public listed company	11	5	8	6	7	1

Social media for brand recognition

Of the 63 organizations that completed the survey, 48 (76.2%) use social media for brand promotion. This shows the majority of organizations are keen to promote their brand image. Table 3 shows the cross tabulation of the percentages of organizations belonging to different industries that use social media for brand recognition. Each industry is categorised based on the number of their employees, which is an indication of the size of the organization.

Table 3: Cross tabulation of brand recognition by industry

Number of employees	Use Social Media			
	Industry	No	Yes	Total
Less than 10	Not for Profit		2 (3.2 %)	2 (3.2 %)
	Private Company	2 (3.2 %)	12 (19 %)	14 (22.2 %)
	Total	2 (3.2 %)	14 (22.2 %)	16 (25.4 %)
10 to 30	Not for Profit	1 (1.6 %)	1 (1.6 %)	2 (3.2 %)
	Private Company	3 (4.8 %)	9 (14.3 %)	12 (19 %)
	Public Listed Company		1 (1.6 %)	1 (1.6 %)
	Total	4 (6.3 %)	11 (17.5 %)	15 (23.8 %)
31 to 50	Not for Profit		3 (4.8 %)	3 (4.8 %)
	Private Company		6 (9.5 %)	6 (9.5 %)
	Public Listed Company		1 (1.6 %)	1 (1.6 %)
	Total		10 (15.9 %)	10 (15.9 %)
More than 50	Government	1 (1.6 %)	3 (4.7 %)	4 (6.4 %)
	Not for Profit		1 (1.6 %)	1 (1.6 %)
	Private Company	6 (9.5 %)	2 (3.2 %)	8 (12.7 %)
	Public Listed Company	2 (3.2 %)	7 (11.1 %)	9 (14.3 %)
	Total	9 (14.3 %)	13 (20.6 %)	22 (35.0 %)
Total		15 (23.8 %)	48 (76.2 %)	63 (100 %)

It is interesting to report the higher percentage (76%) of employers who use social media to improve their brand recognition. Moreover, the cross tabulation above demonstrates that small organizations with less than 10 employees, and not-for-profit organizations also prefer to use social media for brand promotion. This shows that the revolution in social networking is expanding to supplement business functions such as brand building (Singh et al., 2012). Based on the information given in Table 3 it can be inferred that social media is slowly earning acceptance in different industries in the Auckland metropolitan area.

Popular social media sites for recruitment

Respondents were asked to provide their preferences in terms of using different social media sites. Figure 1 summarises the frequency of different social media sites used by different organizations. Most of these organizations reported that they used more than one social media site for recruitment purposes.

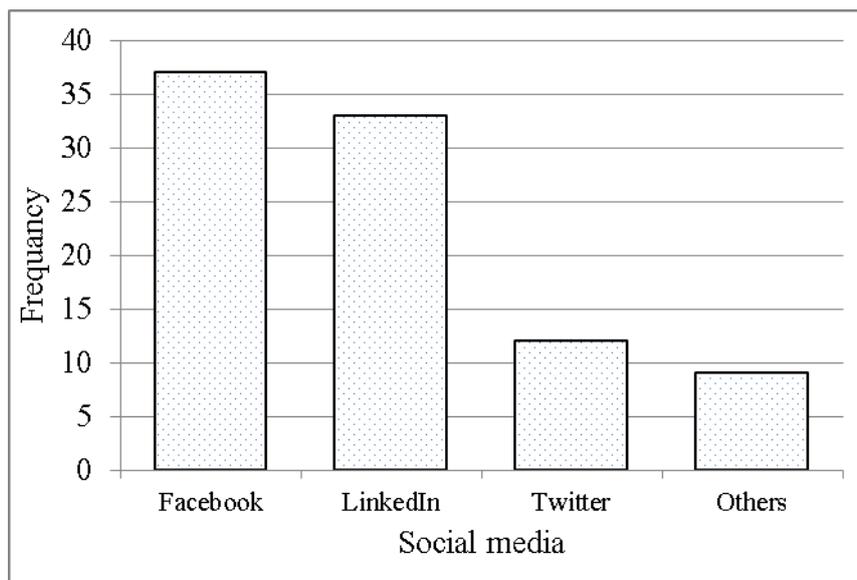
Figure 1: Popular social media sites based on their usage

Figure 1 reveals that Facebook is the most used social media for networking and is gaining popularity for recruitment, followed by LinkedIn and Twitter. Although LinkedIn is widely regarded as a professional network and Facebook for more personal use, Facebook is six times larger than LinkedIn in terms of usage (Carter 2012). However, Facebook is expanding to attract different businesses in the area of branding and recruitment (Singh et.al, 2012), the literature suggests that LinkedIn is becoming popular and dominant social recruiting platform in terms of searching for candidates (Jobvite 2013; Parez 2013; Lal & Aggarwal 2013).

Benefits of social media sites

Table 4 provides the cross-tabulations between different social media sites and the benefits of using these sites. The results show that 'cost saving' and 'time saving' were the most important benefits voted by employers. Similar results were also found in the literature (Clark & Roberts 2010; Dennise 2013; Parez 2013).

Table 4: Social media sites and the benefits

Benefits	Facebook	LinkedIn	Twitter	Others
Cost saving	26	23	9	4
Time saving	23	22	8	4
Diversified applicants	15	15	6	3
Fast processing	15	15	4	5

However, benefits such as gaining 'diversified applicants' and a 'fast application process' appear to be less recognized by employers. This shows that although social media is popular among employers, it needs more efficiency and reliability in filling the gap between employers and job seekers. This is irrespective of the fact that employers agree that social media does have some benefits when recruiting prospective employees.

CONCLUSIONS

In this research, the survey results indicate that a majority of the employers (76%) who took part in this study were from private organizations. These employers preferred social media to improve their brand image as well as filling their job vacancies. Only 24% of organizations did not use social media to promote their organization brand, including hiring employees. The government sector represented a very small percentage of this study at only 6.4% of the respondents. This study also reveals that most non-profit organizations surveyed use social media to select employees for their organizations. It is interesting to note that most of the organizations are not dependent on a single social media site to improve their brand image and for recruitment processes. A higher number of organizations preferred Facebook to other social media such as LinkedIn and Twitter. Facebook and LinkedIn are the top two preferred social networking sites of most employers. In addition, the respondents mentioned that using the above two sites for recruitment saves time and money. It can be concluded that most of the organizations that responded are using social media to enhance their brand image and for filling job vacancies.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This research was limited to the Auckland metropolitan area of New Zealand. Out of 63 employers only 48 revealed that they use social media for recruitment. A more diverse geographical location could give a better understanding of this distribution. As a consequence, it is difficult to draw a definite conclusion about social networking sites and recruitment. Hence, there may be a possibility of variance in the results.

This research is based on a descriptive study. The results of this study were collected at one point of time and hence it is important to conduct a longitudinal research in order to get a better insight from this research. Additionally, the usage of social media and recruitment is steadily evolving and applications are developing to enhance the usage of different social networking sites. In this respect, further research including this information could provide the future trends in using social media for recruitment.

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