



The impact of social media on recruitment: Are you LinkedIn?



Authors:

Tanja Koch¹ 
Charlene Gerber¹
Jeremias J. de Klerk¹ 

Affiliations:

¹Department of Business Management, University of Stellenbosch Business School, South Africa

Corresponding author:

Jeremias de Klerk,
mias.deklerk@usb.ac.za

Dates:

Received: 03 Sept. 2016
Accepted: 16 Nov. 2017
Published: 07 May 2018

How to cite this article:

Koch, T., Gerber, C., & De Klerk, J.J. (2018). The impact of social media on recruitment: Are you LinkedIn? *SA Journal of Human Resource Management/SA Tydskrif vir Menslikehulpbronbestuur*, 16(0), a861. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v16i0.861>

Copyright:

© 2018. The Authors.
Licensee: AOSIS. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

Read online:



Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

Orientation: With many organisations vying for the same talent, it is important to ensure that the correct methods are utilised in identifying and attracting the best talent to an organisation.

Research purpose: This research investigates the impact of social media on the recruitment process in South Africa.

Motivation for the study: As the competition for qualified talent increases, organisations need to understand where to focus their resources to attract the best talent possible. The use of social media is growing daily and its use in the recruitment process seems to have grown exponentially.

Research design, approach and method: The sample comprised 12 recruiters, spanning a wide range of industries in South Africa. Semi-structured interviews were conducted and a thematic analysis was utilised to identify themes and subthemes.

Main findings: Despite still utilising some traditional methods of recruiting, South African recruiters follow their international counterparts, with LinkedIn being central to their respective recruitment processes. The use of Twitter and Facebook for recruitment was found to be substantially lower in South Africa than elsewhere. Without following a focused approach, the volume of work that emanates from using social media may overwhelm a recruiter.

Practical and managerial implications: Recruiters cannot execute effective recruitment without applying social media tools such as LinkedIn. However, training in the optimal use of social media is essential.

Contribution: This study indicates that LinkedIn has a major impact on recruitment in South Africa, but that social media is not a panacea for recruitment issues.

Introduction

Attracting and retaining talent has become one of the key strategic issues in the talent management of many organisations (Schlechter, Hung & Bussin, 2014; Singh & Finn, 2003). Research furthermore shows that traditional, so-called 'spray and pray' recruitment methods are no longer sufficient in attracting talented employees to an organisation (Joos, 2008). The main reasons are that these methods only focus on the small and limited active pool of potential candidates, but do not give organisations access to the highly sought-after talent that may be present in the semi-passive and passive candidate pools (Dutta, 2014; Khullar, Pandey & Read, 2017; Singh & Sharma, 2017). In the quest to find these candidates faster and cheaper, new sourcing tools have been created through electronic and social media (Hunt, 2014; Phillips & Gully, 2012; Tyagi, 2012). With the exponential growth in social media users, specifically the social networking sites LinkedIn and Facebook and the microblogging site Twitter, strategic tools were developed which can be leveraged to identify, attract and recruit both active and passive potential candidates (Caers & Castelyns, 2011; Doherty, 2010; Hunt, 2010; Nikolaou, 2014; Zide, Elman & Shahani-Dennig, 2014). The objective of this article is to explore how social media impacts recruitment in South Africa.

Research purpose

The use of external recruiters as consultants is a common approach that many organisations apply to identify and source potential external candidates on behalf of their organisation (Armstrong, 2006). It is here that the specialised use of appropriate processes and technologies becomes an important aspect of the recruitment plan and strategies of various recruitment consultants. For this reason, it is important to research how recruiters use emerging technologies like social media in order to gain a better understanding of its use and value. The very nature of social media

enables recruiters to specifically identify and target talented but passive or semi-passive job candidates and to lure them to potentially attractive employment positions.

It appears that South African researchers have given little or no attention to how social media has changed the recruitment processes employed by recruiters, and the ability of social media to attract talent. The question thus remains whether the use of social media in South Africa is a significant development to take note of or if it is just a hype without much practical value. The objective of the research discussed in this article is to explore the possible impact of social media on recruitment in South Africa.

Literature review

Recruitment

Recruitment is an essential part of talent management and can be defined as 'the process of searching the right talent and stimulating them to apply for jobs in the organization' (Sinha & Thaly, 2013, p. 142). Recruiting the wrong individual is costly. Even for low-level positions, a failed hire may cost a company double the person's annual salary, rising to around six times the annual salary at higher levels (Armstrong, 2006; Houran, 2017). Employers are thus making an effort to address issues related to the attraction, recruitment and selection of talent (Holland, Sheehan & Pym, 2007). Recruitment is not an isolated organisational function. Rather, identifying, attracting and recruiting the right talent is a key success factor of any talent management strategy (Gallardo-Gallardo & Thunnissen, 2016; Tyagi, 2012). Talent can be defined as the entirety of an employee's ability, including attributes such as skills, knowledge, experience, intelligence and character (Armstrong, 2006; Stahl et al., 2012).

Having the right employees and talent is arguably the most important asset of any organisation (Sinha & Thaly, 2013). Several studies have shown that organisations with better talent consistently show better performance (Armstrong, 2006; Kehinde, 2012; Michaels, Hanfield-Jones & Axelrod, 2001; Nagpal, 2013). An organisation's ability to attract and retain the best talent is therefore one of the most important determinants of organisational effectiveness (Armstrong, 2006; Kehinde, 2012; Singh & Finn, 2003). Those organisations that differentiate themselves in their attraction, development and retention strategies are the ones that ultimately succeed (Al Ariss, Cascio & Paauwe, 2014; Schlechter et al., 2014; Tarique & Schuler, 2010).

The concept of a 'war for talent' is not new, and was already noted in 1998 (Chambers, Foulon, Handfield-Jones, Hanking & Michaels, 1998). In the current business environment, organisations are facing significant challenges in finding the correct employees (Schlechter et al., 2014). The term 'competency deficit' is used to describe what can be seen as one of the reasons why organisations are facing these challenges in the attraction of talented employees (Herman, Olivio & Gioia, 2003). A competency deficit refers to a situation where insufficient employees have the skills

needed for performing a required task, mainly because of inadequate education and training. Michaels et al. (2001) reason that the factors driving the increased competition for talent include the move from the industrial age to the information age. This has resulted in the need for an entirely different skill set and an ever-increasing demand for high-level managerial talent, as well as a growing tendency among employees to change jobs more frequently than was the case in the past. Jobs (2003) argues that there is a distinct change in employees' attitudes towards work, with a significant increase in the number of employees willing to change jobs more regularly now than in the past. It can be further argued that, while jobs and the organisational environment become more complex, birth rates are declining in some developed countries and the competition for talent is increasing globally, resulting in a chasm between skilled jobs and qualified high performers that is growing constantly (Hunt, 2014). The bottom line is that there are a number of causes contributing to the difficulties that organisations have in attracting and retaining talented employees. In combination, these causes are creating a fierce competition for talent among organisations. The exponential growth of the need for scarce skills and the resulting fierce competition to attract the best and most competent people has led to the notion of the 'war for talent' (Chambers et al., 1998), which has been the subject of much research and practical scrutiny since then (Gallardo-Gallardo & Thunnissen, 2016; Thunnissen, 2016). Organisations that want to win the war for talent need to elevate talent management to a corporate priority, including the attraction and retention of smart, energetic and ambitious individuals (Chambers et al., 1998).

As managers are increasingly realising that running a successful organisation depends on having the right employees in the right positions to successfully execute their strategy (Stahl et al., 2012), a shift is therefore taking place regarding the view of the role and importance of recruitment. It is shifting from viewing recruitment as an often-outsourced back-office function to a key differentiator in the competition for talent (Hunt, 2014). It becomes apparent that the recruitment of talent is increasingly being regarded as more of a strategic function than what was once the case (Phillips & Gully, 2012; Ready, Hill & Conger, 2008). What was previously regarded as an administrative task has now become a key strategic function that supports an organisation's strategy and enhances its effectiveness. Companies are thus increasingly realising the strategic importance of the identification, attraction and recruitment of talented employees into their organisations (Houran, 2017).

The aim of recruitment is to draw important resources into an organisation – namely, human capital (Ready et al., 2008; Thunnissen, 2016). Thus, its purpose is to identify, attract and secure the most qualified and competent employees for an organisation's current and future talent needs (Armstrong, 2006; Thunnissen, 2016). Recruitment is the process of finding the right person who is interested in working for an organisation, influencing these particular individuals to

apply for the job and convincing them to accept the position (Phillips & Gully, 2012). This can be divided into internal and external recruitment. Internal recruitment refers to the recruitment of employees who are currently employed in different positions within an organisation, whereas external recruitment refers to targeting employees currently outside an organisation (Breaugh, 2008; Hughes & Rog, 2008; Stahl et al., 2010). One could assume that internal recruitment is one of the best ways to fill vacancies as employees are already immersed in the company culture, and management knows how a certain employee performs. However, this is not always possible or desirable and there are several reasons for organisations to find talented employees outside of the organisation, in order to fulfil its present and future talent needs (Armstrong, 2006). For example, organisations might recruit from outside when specialised skills are not available within the organisation and/or there is a need for an increase in the diversity of the workforce (Pynes, 2013).

Different types of candidates are motivated by different factors in making a potential career move to a new organisation. Potential candidates can be classified into different categories, namely, active, semi-passive and passive candidates (Joos, 2008; Phillips & Gully, 2012). *Active candidates* are those candidates who are active in the process of seeking employment. This group typically 'represents 10% or less of the total workforce at any given time' (Joos, 2008, p. 52). *Semi-passive candidates* are those who are interested in a new position but are not actively engaged in the process of seeking new employment. *Passive candidates* refer to those candidates who are currently employed and are not seeking a different position. At all times, but probably even more so in periods of low economic growth, organisations should endeavour to attract and entice the best talent to join, rather than only being interested in those actively looking for new employment opportunities (Phillips & Gully, 2012). In the battle for talent, one sometimes has to be proactive in order to be successful (Thunnissen, 2016). Both passive and semi-passive candidates would potentially consider making a job change if they are lured with attractive opportunities and enticing conditions (Joos, 2008).

To attract candidates into an organisation (especially semi-active and passive candidates), the potential candidate must firstly be identified so that the job can be brought to their attention (Armstrong, 2006). Of course, this requires a specific capability in identifying potentially suitable and adequately qualified candidates and then doing the selection of the most suitable potential candidates (Pynes, 2013). It is only after these steps that the position and conditions must be attractive enough to persuade the potential candidate to apply for the position and to maintain their interest in the position until such a time that an acceptable offer is extended and accepted (Barker, Barker, Bornmann & Neher, 2009; Breaugh, 2008).

Plans for identifying and attracting good candidates for which the recruiting organisation will become an 'employer

of choice' are typically made in an organisation's recruitment plan (Armstrong, 2006). Sourcing is a key initial step of the recruitment process in executing a recruitment plan. The sourcing component focuses on the actual identification of qualified candidates and the way to reach them (Phillips & Gully, 2012). The act of sourcing candidates is generally performed by a recruiter, who can be either an internal or a dedicated (external) recruiter (Sinha & Thaly, 2013). Hunt (2014) argues that organisations that excel at the sourcing stage in the recruitment process show better recruitment results and, therefore, also show better financial performance than their competitors.

With an appreciation of the importance of recruitment especially the importance of sourcing, the best method for recruitment remains debatable (Houran, 2017). Depending on what type of candidates need to be identified and attracted, there are a number of ways to source candidates, each with its own strengths and weaknesses (Hunt, 2014). However, identifying and attracting the right candidates is very difficult and can become a logistical nightmare (Sinha & Thaly, 2013). Less than a decade ago, candidate sourcing was still focused predominantly on more formal research practices, such as job advertisements, employers' websites and job boards, with little or no focus on social media (Breaugh, 2008). Until recently, recruitment advertising in national and local newspapers, in trade journals and on organisations' own career sites on corporate websites were seen as the main tools used to attract candidates. In addition, traditional sourcing activities such as asking candidates for referrals, visiting job and trade fairs and using organisations' own candidate databases were popular (Phillips & Gully, 2012). However, research has shown that placing an advertisement in popular media or on an organisation's website has a limited chance of attracting the right candidates (Nikolaou, 2014). Placing advertisements in popular media is not ideal for recruitment, as usually only active candidates tend to apply for the jobs in these advertisements, resulting in a small and limited candidate pool (Phillips & Gully, 2012). The former recruitment method, which was aimed primarily at active candidates, was predominantly the method that could be termed as the 'spray and pray' method. This means that recruiters 'sprayed' job advertisements across pages of print media and on websites, and job seekers in turn 'sprayed' their CV in the direction of recruiters, with both parties 'praying' for a positive outcome (Joos, 2008). As the competition for talented employees grows, organisations are coming to the realisation that they only access a small and limited active candidate pool through traditional recruitment practices.

The way organisations source candidates is changing rapidly and new sourcing tools are continuously being developed. Indeed, there is a clear shift towards modern and innovative sourcing channels for various factors such as quality, cost, availability and time (Sinha & Thaly, 2013). The advent of the Internet and social media have been key drivers in the development of new sourcing tools and the effective use of

appropriate technology is becoming the dominant driver for sourcing candidates (Dutta, 2014; Hunt, 2014).

Internet, social media and recruitment

In recent times, the massive growth of social media and Internet capacities and capabilities has added numerous other sourcing possibilities and activities. Some of these include Internet job boards (Internet sites that allow organisations to upload their vacancies and candidates to upload their CVs), Internet data mining (the process of using Boolean Searches) and web crawlers (programmes that continually search the web for information about employees) (Nikolaou, 2014; Parez, Silva, Harvey & Bosco, 2013; Sinha & Thaly, 2013). Other capacities and capabilities include flip searching (a process which identifies employees that link to specific Internet sites to search for passive and semi-passive candidates) and social networking (leveraging connections on social media) such as LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter.

In this world of abundant Internet and social media, with so many options available, choosing which sourcing tool to use becomes a fundamental decision in the recruitment process for any organisation or recruiter (Galanaki, 2002; Sinha & Thaly, 2013). In order to attract high-calibre passive and semi-passive potential candidates, it becomes increasingly possible and necessary to move away from the traditional 'spray and pray' approach and to embrace the new sourcing tools offered by the Internet and social media (Dutta, 2014). In the process, it is important to take cognisance of differences in the approach and philosophy between conventional and various social media recruitment tools (Dutta, 2014).

Social media

Social media can be defined as the use of web-based conversational media (applications that make possible the creation and transmission of content in the format of words, pictures, videos and audios) among communities of people who meet online to share information, knowledge and opinions (Safko & Brake, 2009). Four key motivations drive the use of social media: connect, create, consume and control (Hoffman & Fodor, 2010). A wide variety of social media platforms are available and well established, for example, Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, Twitter, et cetera. However, a large body of previous research indicates that among the various social media platforms, Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter are mainly used in the sourcing process (Caers & Castelyns, 2011; Doherty, 2010; Dutta, 2014; Singh & Sharma, 2014). LinkedIn and Facebook could be classified as social networking tools, in other words, tools that allow users to share information about themselves, often through an online profile that they have created themselves (Safko & Brake, 2009). Twitter falls under the subcategory of microblogging tools, which allow users to communicate a message in less than 140 characters.

Social networking and microblogging sites have shown tremendous growth over the past few years, with Facebook

witnessing an average of 1.32 billion daily active users in June 2017 (Facebook, 2017), an increase of 23% from the figure in 2016 (Zephoria, 2017), of which more than 14 million users were from South Africa (2OceansVibe, 2016; Business Tech, 2016). LinkedIn had 467 million members in 2017 (Chaudhary, 2017), of which 5.5 million users were from South Africa (2OceansVibe, 2016). More than 1 million professionals have published a post on LinkedIn and the average user spends 17 min monthly on LinkedIn (Chaudhary, 2017). Twitter had 317 million users in 2017, of which more than 7.7 million users were from South Africa (2OceansVibe, 2016).

Social media and recruitment

Research has indicated that placing an advertisement in popular media or on an organisation's website has a limited chance of attracting the right candidates (Phillips & Gully, 2012). This is because mainly active candidates seem to apply to these advertisements, resulting in a small and limited candidate pool. As the number of users on social media increases, the use of social media channels in recruiting is gaining momentum (Dutta, 2014; Singh & Sharma, 2014). This trend results from organisations' ability of recognising the potential of these channels to attract not only active prospective job candidates but also passive and semi-passive candidates. Social networking sites such as LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter allow recruiters to post job advertisements to lure a wide spectrum of potential candidates to easily access and apply for such potential positions, thereby enabling recruiters to search for and screen potential job applicants – even those who do not necessarily apply (Sinha & Thaly, 2013). There is evidence that recruiters and organisations are realising that more and better candidates can be discovered and approached quicker and at a lower cost by utilising social networks, compared to traditional recruitment methods (Armstrong, 2006; Singh & Sharma, 2014). Specifically, a strong association has been found between the use of LinkedIn and the ability of identifying and attracting passive candidates (Nikolaou, 2014).

By using social networks for recruiting, access is enabled to a wide range of candidates who are easily accessible at any given time. For example, LinkedIn now has 3 million active job listings (Chaudhary, 2017). Moreover, utilising social networks makes this access possible at an increasingly lower cost (Broughton, Foley, Ledermaier & Cox, 2013; Brown & Vaughn, 2011; Khullar et al., 2017). It is especially the widely sought-after pool of very competent but passive candidates that social networks give recruiters access to (Doherty, 2010; Joos, 2008). It is thus not surprising that recruiters and organisations regard social media and networks as attractive recruitment tools, which give recruiters a competitive edge in reaching their recruitment objectives when it is done effectively (Singh & Sharma, 2014).

It is clear that the use of social media platforms has become the norm for sourcing in recruitment and recruiters believe that social media enables them to find better quality candidates. Indeed, 93% of recruiters use social media to

support their recruiting efforts (Jobvite, 2014). Social media is used in recruitment for a number of reasons. When inquiring into how recruiters use social media for advertising, Jindal and Shaikh (2014) found that 50% use social media in paid-for job advertising via social media platforms and 37% advertise vacancies via tweets or alerts, or make use of free job advertising via targeted social media platforms (e.g. Facebook). Furthermore, 30% of recruiters develop a database of followers and/or supporters by posting regular updates, and 18% use the social media platform's job search engines to advertise vacancies or to accept CVs and application forms on an organisation's behalf. Surprisingly, only 7% of recruiters use it to screen the suitability of potential recruits on their social networking pages.

This leads to the following question: Which of the social media platforms are the most effective to use? Although Facebook is globally the largest social media platform, it is not the most popular or effective platform for recruitment (Bullhorn, 2014). Jobs posted on LinkedIn receive more views from potential candidates than those on Facebook and Twitter combined, and these posted jobs garner twice as many applications per job advertisement in general. LinkedIn is by far the most preferred social network when it comes to recruitment (Jobvite, 2014). Over 95% of recruiters who use social media in their recruitment process indicated that they use LinkedIn (Bullhorn, 2014), compared to 66% utilising Facebook and 52% engaging with candidates on Twitter (Jobvite, 2014). This trend is confirmed by Zide et al. (2014), who found that all the respondents in their research utilise LinkedIn in their recruitment process. Furthermore, recruiters who use LinkedIn more frequently in their sourcing have seen more success in the use of LinkedIn and therefore use it more often (Caers & Castelyns, 2011; Ollington, Gibb, Harcourt & Doherty, 2013). Indeed, the staffing and recruitment industry is the one that is connected most on LinkedIn (Darrow, 2017). Houran (2017) found that LinkedIn is overwhelmingly used in the recruitment of candidates for key management positions at senior (87%) and middle management levels (80%), whereas it is very rarely used for entry positions (8%). These studies confirm the importance of LinkedIn in the recruitment process.

It appears that one of the main reasons for the higher level of use of LinkedIn among the social networking sites relates to its being seen by the public as almost exclusively for building professional relationships, which is not the case with Facebook and Twitter, which are more general social media (Zide et al., 2014). Although all three of these social media platforms are being used in the sourcing process, they tend to be used differently. LinkedIn is generally used for posting advertisements, searching for candidates, and contacting and vetting candidates (Jobvite, 2014). On the other hand, Facebook and Twitter are used more to showcase the employer brand and to generate referrals as well as to post advertisements (Jobvite, 2014).

There is a marked preference among recruiters and human resource professionals for LinkedIn rather than Facebook

for recruitment as they consider the former to be more effective than the latter (Nikolaou, 2014). Recruiters are of the opinion that LinkedIn gives the most insight into candidates' employment history, education, years of experience as well as how they present themselves (Zide et al., 2014). The Jobvite annual Social Recruiting Survey is arguably one of the most comprehensive surveys of its kind. This (2014) survey was conducted online and was completed by 1855 recruiting and human resources professionals, spanning across several industries. The difference in the application of the social media platforms also yielded different results for recruiters. Overall, 79% of recruiters indicated that they placed a candidate through LinkedIn, 26% indicated that they did this through Facebook and only 14% indicated that they placed a candidate through Twitter (Jobvite, 2014). Although LinkedIn has one of the highest success rates of any website, it seems that it is still used less than more conventional recruitment platforms like job boards, career portals and corporate websites, or at least in combination with it (Allden & Harris, 2013; Tyagi, 2012). One of the reasons why many recruiters still prefer the more conventional sourcing tools could possibly be ascribed to recruiters' limited knowledge of how to recruit effectively on social networking sites (Allden & Harris, 2013). However, although web-based job portals generate many applications, they still do not necessarily reach all the candidates, especially passive or semi-passive candidates (Sinha & Thaly, 2013).

Notwithstanding the substantial increase in the use of social media for recruitment, one should be careful to think that it is the panacea that resolves all recruitment problems; it also has pitfalls (Doherty, 2010). For example, with candidates uploading their own profiles it is likely to lead to profile inflation – which can be described as attempts to artificially enhance one's profile through little white lies or using deceptively positive terms to describe oneself, past accomplishments or current status (Houran, 2017). With the practice of candidate identification and screening through social media, legal implications are likely to arise due to the wrong use of information (Melanthiou, Pavlou & Constantinou, 2015). Also, although social media is extensively used for screening candidates, it is still unclear whether this screening influences a recruiter's decision to such an extent that they would reject an applicant (Melanthiou et al., 2015). Dutta (2014) argues that while social media can offer various sourcing opportunities to recruiters, resulting in a profound impact on the way that recruitment functions within organisations, it should not be mistaken for a full recruitment strategy. Rather, it forms merely a part of an organisation's recruitment strategy. It could be argued that the recruitment process has been transformed from a mainly sequential process to a parallel process. In the latter process, social media tools are not used to directly replace traditional sourcing tools, but rather to supplement them to give recruiters access to the highly sought-after passive candidate pool (Joos, 2008) in order to turn them into active candidates (Doherty, 2010).

Social media and recruitment in South Africa

Although the use of social media for recruitment has been researched extensively internationally, no studies have explored the use of social media as recruitment tools in South Africa as far as this could be established. An extensive literature search, focusing on the use of social media in general and the use of Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter in particular for recruitment or employment purposes in South Africa rendered no results. Not even exploratory studies could be found on how social media is used in the field of recruitment. Although there are South African studies that investigated the use of social media by organisations (Cilliers, Chinyamurindi & Viljoen, 2017), no evidence could be found that focused on how it is specifically used in recruitment. Studies on the use of social media tend to focus on its informal use for personal networking, social and political commentary, et cetera. The few available studies on the use of social media in the world of business mostly focus on how it is used or could be used for aspects such as marketing, image building and teaching and training (Bolton et al., 2013). This observation provides confirmation to the suggestion from Roth, Bobko, Van Iddekinge and Thatcher (2016) that organisational practice has outpaced the scientific study of social media in the field of work.

Research methodology

Research approach

Based on the paucity of research in the field of recruitment in South Africa, an exploratory research was conducted for the purposes of gaining insights into the possible impact of social media on recruitment in South Africa. Data on the use of social media for recruitment were gathered through semi-structured interviews with recruiters. The aim of the interviews was to explore recruiters' sourcing techniques and obtain insights into their sourcing techniques and processes, especially relating to the use of social media. Semi-structured interviews were selected as the method of data collection because of their potential to elicit rich descriptions on the subject (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). They offer the interviewer the opportunity of gathering in-depth information as they provide a situated activity that locates the observer in the world of the participant, involving an interpretive approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In this situation, in-depth information can be classified as understandings that are held by real-life members in some activity or event. Semi-structured interviews allow the interviewer to gain in-depth information by allowing probing and follow-up questions to mine for underlying aspects to specific answers, ask more questions and observe participants (Wegner, 2014).

Sample

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 recruiters from four different recruitment agencies. The four agencies were purposefully selected to represent a range of industries and focus areas. The participants were selected by means of judgement sampling. In this case, two groups of recruiters were identified.

The first group consisted of six recruiters with more than 8 years of recruiting experience. This was done to include recruiters with substantial recruitment experience and who became involved in recruiting at a time before social media was used. The second group of six recruiters was selected to have less than four years of recruiting experience. In other words, these recruiters have only been recruiting in an age where social media was already commonly available and in use. The age of the participants ranged from 25 to 38 years. Participants represented recruiters from different geographical locations, from three recruitment agencies. Four of these agencies are based in Gauteng and one recruitment agency is based in the Western Cape. The participants were also selected to represent different recruitment focus areas and industries to allow for some variation in the sample (i.e. information technology, engineering, financial services, executive and senior management, human resources, management consulting and finance).

Participants were contacted and invited telephonically to participate in the research, and to set up an interview date, time and location at their convenience. The interviews were personally conducted by the main researcher in face-to-face settings, and recorded and transcribed verbatim for thematic analysis. Among other benefits, face-to-face interviews allowed the interviewer to establish a better rapport with interviewees and to note non-verbal responses such as body language and facial expressions when conducting the interviews (Wegner, 2014).

Measuring instrument

An interview schedule was used, with 13 specified interview questions pertaining to (1) the method of recruitment, (2) the procedure of recruitment and (3) the use of social media in recruitment. The 13 mandatory questions were developed by abstracting aspects of importance to the research purpose and trends relating to recruitment practices with social media elsewhere in the world, as identified through the literature study. The questionnaire included questions on both the traditional and present use of recruitment tools and their effectiveness. Specific questions and follow-up questions pertaining to the use of social media in recruitment referred only to LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter. This was done because previous research indicated these as the most important social media sources in recruitment (Bullhorn, 2014; Caers & Castelyns, 2011: p. 442; Ollington et al., 2013; Zide et al., 2014). Questions were formulated according to the language and jargon commonly used by recruiters. Examples of interview questions include:

- Can you think back – before the advent of social media – and can you tell me when you got a new job to work, what were the sourcing tools you used to find candidates?
- Could you draw a diagram in terms of how you used to source your candidates, showing the weighting of each tool?
- When you get a new job to work, what are the sourcing tools you use to find candidates?
- Which of the social media platforms do you use most frequently? Please elaborate – out of 10 jobs you would on average use x% of time, y% of time, et cetera.

- Which of the social media platforms do you use and why do you use them?
- How successful are you when you use social media as a sourcing tool and why do you say this?

Some of the questions were repeated during the interview so as to explore both the traditional and present use of social media in recruitment.

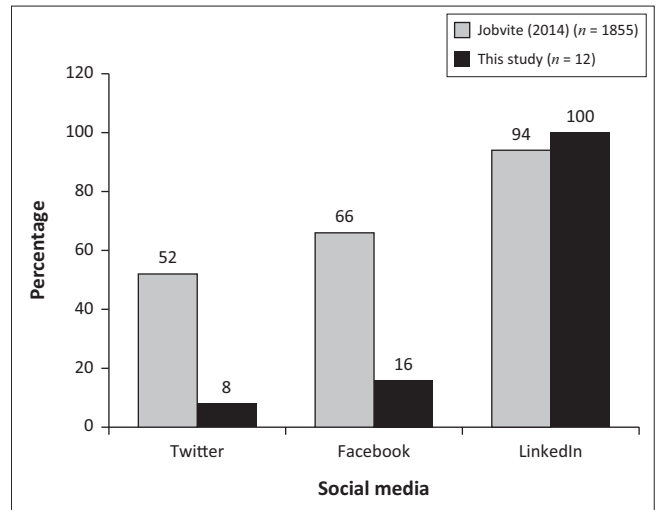
Strategies to ensure data integrity

Qualitative data analysis is a continuous process that commences while the data are being collected (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The challenge for the researcher is to enter the social world of the research participants and to try and understand the world from their points of view as objectively as possible (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2011). Care was taken not to form conclusions and themes in the mind while doing the interviews, but to ground the findings of the interview data through a structured process of thematic analysis in order to ensure its trustworthiness. The process of data analysis began with the transcription of the interviews by the researcher, which allowed for building familiarity with the data (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2011). Subsequently, a structured process of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was manually conducted by coding and categorising data, from which the key subthemes and themes emerged. Creswell's (2007) and Leedy and Omrod's (2010) research suggested steps for analysing qualitative data, which were applied to analyse the transcriptions through a structured approach to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings. These steps are to (1) sift through the relevant information to identify statements that relate to the topic (open coding), (2) to group statements into 'meaning' categories that reflect coherent dimensions (axial coding), (3) to seek divergent perspectives and ways in which different participants experience the recruitment differently and (4) to construct key themes (code families).

The interviews did not explore the use of social media by agencies but rather its use by actual recruiters. Although the participants are employed by different agencies, they participated in their personal capacity rather than as a representative of the agency. The reason for this approach was that even though an agency may claim to use social media in its recruitment endeavours, and probably have a Twitter and Facebook account or page, active recruitment through social media does not happen practically unless the individual recruiters actually use such social media practices. This approach was deemed to provide more trustworthy findings for the objectives of this study than focusing on the official practices of an agency.

Findings

With regard to the use of social media in recruitment processes, it was found to be high among participants overall. Similar to research conducted outside of South Africa (Zide et al., 2014), this research found that the use of LinkedIn is much higher among the participants than the use of either Twitter or Facebook (see Figure 1).



Source: Jobvite. (2014). Social recruiting survey results. *Jobvite*, 1–17. Retrieved April 20, 2017, from https://www.jobvite.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Jobvite_SocialRecruiting_Survey_2014.pdf and authors' own work

FIGURE 1: Percentage of recruiters using social media in their sourcing process.

TABLE 1: Themes and subthemes identified from the interviews.

Theme	Description	Subtheme description
Theme 1	Twitter has little impact on recruitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The general small size of recruiters' Twitter network restricts its use • Limited knowledge of Twitter restricts its use • Recruiters have limited time to use Twitter extensively
Theme 2	Facebook has little impact on recruitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook is not actively used for recruitment • Facebook is seen as a platform that is not to be 'used for work'
Theme 3	LinkedIn has an important impact on recruitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LinkedIn is primarily used for candidate search • LinkedIn is widely used for advertising • LinkedIn is used by all recruiters (in this study)
Theme 4	Social media is an important part of recruitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional job advertising is moving to electronic advertising • Competition for candidates remains with the use of social media • Social media tends to create a high volume of work • Seniority of a position makes a difference in how social media is used in recruitment

Only one of the 12 participants (8%) in the sample indicated that they use Twitter for recruitment, which is much lower than the 52% recorded by Jobvite (2014). Furthermore, the use of Facebook by the respondents was also shown to be much lower, with only 16% (2 of 12) mentioning the use of Facebook in comparison to the 66% found in the Jobvite study. Participants, however, follow the international trend of using LinkedIn, with all of them mentioning the use of LinkedIn in the process in comparison to the 94% found by Jobvite. Although the differences can be ascribed to the comparatively small sample size of this study, they arguably still provide important and noteworthy information regarding the difference in using social media in South Africa, in relation to elsewhere.

Thematic analysis of the interview data rendered key themes on the impact of each of the main social media sites utilised in the sourcing process (Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn). There is also a key theme on the overall changes in the sourcing process since the advent of social media. Table 1 presents the main themes and subthemes identified from the interviews.

The four themes are described in more detail in the sections that follow. Some verbatim comments from participants are included in the discussion to demonstrate the trustworthiness of the themes and subthemes derived from the analyses. Participants are identified as follows: participant number (e.g. P1), age, years of recruitment experience, location, industry specialisation for recruitment, for example, information technology (IT).

Theme 1: Twitter has little impact on recruitment

Although Twitter is not the most popular social media platform in recruitment worldwide, a large body of research has shown that Twitter is used extensively internationally by recruiters in the sourcing process (Caers & Castelyns, 2011; Dutta, 2014; Singh & Sharma, 2014). However, participants in this study indicated that, of the three social media tools, they used Twitter least. Only one of the respondents mentioned the use of Twitter in their recruitment practice. One of the main reasons mentioned by the participants for not using Twitter in sourcing is that they feel they do not have sufficient knowledge of Twitter or an understanding of how to use it effectively in recruitment. Of the participants, 58% (7 of 12) mentioned the lack of knowledge of the use of Twitter as their reason for not using it. As participants noted about Twitter:

'Twitter? I don't even know how to work it.' (P1, 33, 9 years' experience, Johannesburg, Engineering)

'Twitter – never ever. I'm so old school. I tried to use Twitter just for news and then I got over it.' (P6, 29, 7 years' experience, Cape Town, Financial Markets)

This finding is in agreement with the findings of Allden and Harris (2013). The lack of knowledge of Twitter possibly hints towards suggesting that recruiters should be trained on how to effectively use Twitter in the sourcing process. This could increase the use of Twitter by recruiters. However, even those participants who have the knowledge and have been trained to use Twitter in the sourcing process still do not use it in their recruitment process:

'I have learnt how to use Twitter but I have never done it. I haven't had the time to try something new so I'm sticking with what I know works.' (P2, 43, 14 years' experience, Johannesburg, Engineering and IT)

Participants commented that they work under significant time constraints and that a lack of available time prohibits them from adding Twitter as a tool in their sourcing process:

'We're so busy that there's really no time to try something new [Twitter] – so it's a bit of a catch 22.' (P4, 35, 11 years' experience, Johannesburg, IT)

The reason why Twitter is perceived to be overly time-consuming was not clear. One possible reason could be that it takes much time to actively manage a large Twitter account, or being flooded by too many incoming tweets. One could also speculate that if time constraint is an issue

for recruiters, it may apply similarly to job candidates. This is a new and unique finding that has not been reported elsewhere as far as we know. Although the time constraint issue regarding the use of Twitter for sourcing does not appear in international research, it is mentioned that it is important to ensure that recruiters do not merely tweet about jobs, but that the tweets reach the target job-seeking audience (Jindal & Shaikh, 2014).

Another reason for the low use of Twitter relates to recruiters' general and regular activity on Twitter, which consequently impacts the size of their Twitter network and number of followers:

'I don't do anything on Twitter – I browse but I don't have a big network there.' (P5, 28, 5 years' experience, Cape Town, Financial Markets)

Participants indicated that the size of their Twitter network negatively impacts their use of Twitter in their sourcing approaches. A small following on Twitter gives them the feeling that they will not achieve the results they are looking for. Three of the participants indicated that they feel their Twitter network is not large enough to justify its use for recruitment. They also feel that they personally do not have sufficient followers and therefore do not have enough reach to warrant the use of Twitter to attract potentially relevant candidates:

'I'm not connected enough on Twitter, not enough people follow me. I don't focus enough attention on what my brand is on Twitter.' (P8, 43, 15 years' experience, Cape Town, Financial Services)

This observation is related to the view that recruiters using Twitter in recruitment must actively tweet to earn traction, because occasional random tweets do not have an impact (Hunt, 2010). Although this finding may appear to be somewhat obvious, this aspect apparently does not attract much attention in research, apart from Silliker's (2011) observation that organisations with high numbers of followers receive a large number of applications. Not using Twitter actively in recruitment arguably makes recruiters focus their attention on those sourcing tools that they believe will give them a larger reach and a greater result.

Based on the findings of this research, the reasons noted for recruiters not using Twitter more for sourcing are varied, ranging from the feeling of a too small a network with not enough reach and limited training to a lack of knowledge for using it effectively and the time it would take to learn how to use it. It would be fair to surmise that, to all intents and appearances, Twitter is not regarded or used as a popular recruiting tool by recruitment agents in South Africa.

Theme 2: Facebook has little impact on recruitment

Similar to the use of Twitter, research by Jobvite (2014) indicates that Facebook is globally used to showcase the employer's

brand and generate referrals as well as to post advertisements. However, in this study, only 2 of the 12 respondents (17%) mentioned that they utilise Facebook as a tool for sourcing candidates. When asked why they do not use Facebook more actively, one of the participants noted:

'For me there's a big difference between work and private life. Facebook represent[s] the personal side of my life. I don't like mixing the two, I don't want candidates in my personal life if I'm posting pictures of me and my son or whatever.' (P9, 42, 15 years' experience, Cape Town, Oil and Gas/Commercial)

Evidently, Facebook is seen as a representation of the participant's private life and there is essentially a separation between who they are or what they do at work and who they are or what they do at home:

'Facebook? I don't use it. My perception is that Facebook is social and I don't want to be advertising or talking about work on Facebook. My Facebook is my personal brand.' (P8, 43, 15 years' experience, Cape Town, Financial Services)

It would seem that participants make a clear distinction between the use of Facebook for their private lives, and LinkedIn for the professional side of their lives, not wanting these two areas to overlap:

'I don't see Facebook as a business tool, I always see it as more social.' (P1, 33, 9 years' experience, Johannesburg, Engineering).

'Facebook? I don't use it because it's my private entity.' (P3, 40, 20 years' experience, Johannesburg, Commercial/Financial)

As most of the participants do not utilise Facebook for sourcing job candidates, it cannot be seen as an effective recruiting tool for individual recruiters in South Africa. This is an important new finding, as this private and/or work life distinction has not attracted the attention of international research as far as could be established and does not appear to be an issue elsewhere. Rather, this finding appears to be unique to South Africa and relates to other research which found that it is quite common that employees and organisations do not consider Facebook to be a legitimate work tool (Cilliers et al., 2017).

Theme 3: LinkedIn has an important impact on recruitment

All of the study participants indicated that they always, or often, make use of LinkedIn for recruitment purposes, confirming the preference for LinkedIn as a sourcing tool over and above other social media platforms in South Africa:

'LinkedIn Search – 100% of the time.' (P6, 29, 7 years' experience, Cape Town, Financial Markets)

'LinkedIn? 80% of the time.' (P11, 45, 20 years' experience, Johannesburg, Management Consultants)

'LinkedIn Recruiter is the best tool that I ever come across.' (P5, 28, 5 years' experience, Cape Town, Financial Markets)

This finding is in line with international research, which has shown LinkedIn to be the most preferred social network in recruitment (Houran, 2017; Nikolaou, 2014; Zide et al., 2014).

However, the preference for LinkedIn is (marginally) even stronger for this sample than what has been reported elsewhere.

Similar to trends reported in international research (Houran, 2017), participants in this study used LinkedIn for different sourcing activities. Of the participants, 67% (8 of 12) mentioned that they do not place advertisements on LinkedIn, but rather use it to search for potential candidates to approach for positions. Searching LinkedIn for potential candidates is preferred over placing advertisements on LinkedIn:

'I don't put ads on LinkedIn. I only use it to find candidates.' (P1, 33, 9 years' experience, Johannesburg, Engineering)

'100% of the time I will go on to LinkedIn to search for candidates.' (P4, 35, 11 years' experience, Johannesburg, IT)

This finding is in line with international trends that recruiters prefer LinkedIn over Facebook, Twitter or other social media to find or identify suitable potential candidates (Nikolaou, 2014).

However, one of the limitations mentioned about LinkedIn is that it does not provide direct access to candidates' contact numbers or email addresses. This necessitates recruiters to do more detective work and search for these contact details in a variety of different places, such as Facebook and Google, once they have found a potentially good candidate on LinkedIn:

'For headhunting purposes I would go onto LinkedIn and identify candidates to call and then Google the company or look on our database or on one of the career portals for their phone number.' (P2, 43, 14 years' experience, Johannesburg, Engineering and IT)

LinkedIn is therefore not used as a stand-alone tool in the sourcing process, but more for the identification of potential candidates. After a prospective candidate has been identified on LinkedIn, various other Internet sites are utilised to find the contact details and to verify information. Using LinkedIn to identify potential candidates when screening for headhunting purposes is bound to be subject to the risk of profile inflation by candidates (Houran, 2017). However, the risk of profile inflation in the identification of potential candidates was not highlighted by any of the participants as a concern and is apparently not viewed negatively by recruiters in this sample.

International research has found that recruiters believe LinkedIn to have one of the highest success rates of any social media platform (Houran, 2017). The perceived success of LinkedIn was also confirmed in this study:

'I have made 2 placements out of LinkedIn Recruiter in the past 2 months that I would not have made if I didn't have LinkedIn Recruiter.' (P8, 43, 15 years' experience, Cape Town, Financial Services)

'The good thing is that when you find one good guy you just go into his network and look at all of his friends. LinkedIn is great.' (P1, 33, 9 years' experience, Johannesburg, Engineering)

The latter quotation also gives an indication of how LinkedIn is used to gather information about prospective candidates.

This observation is in agreement with observations made elsewhere in that social media is increasingly used to gather information about potential employees (Roth et al., 2016).

However, it appears that LinkedIn is still used less than other, more conventional platforms like job boards on career portals and corporate websites, or at least in combination with them (Allden & Harris, 2013). This international trend was supported by the findings of this study for South Africa. Although all the participants mentioned using LinkedIn somewhere in their recruitment processes, various participants indicated that they use it between 60% and 80% of the time for advertising positions. Only two participants (17%) mentioned that they use LinkedIn for each position they source:

'I still write ads for the career portals and for the company website 100% of the time and I do searches on the career portals about 50% of the time. LinkedIn I use for about 80% of my positions.' (P6, 29, 7 years' experience, Cape Town, Financial Markets)

Based on the preceding comments and quote about the use of career portals and websites, it is clear that LinkedIn is seen as a key recruitment tool in the sourcing process. However, it is also evident that at least some recruiters are still utilising the more traditional way of recruiting (namely, advertising) more than using LinkedIn. This approach seems to be aligned with views that the use of social media in recruitment does not stand on its own but must form part of a well-crafted, comprehensive recruitment strategy (Madia, 2011).

Theme 4: Social media is an important part of recruitment

Previous research indicates that placing an advertisement in popular media or on an organisation's website has a limited chance of attracting the right candidates (Phillips & Gully, 2012). However, the findings of this study suggest that traditional advertising approaches are still an important recruitment practice for recruiters. For all of the participants, the first step when receiving a new job to recruit a candidate for is to write an advertisement – as one would expect. The only change in this process is where the advertisement is placed; while in the past, recruiters would post their jobs in print media, 33% of the participants (4/12) indicated that they now post advertisements on their company websites and career portals, as well as on LinkedIn:

'My first step is still the same – 100% of the time I would write an ad; in the past I would place it in various print media, now I place it on the company website as well as the relevant career portals and then on LinkedIn, depending on how senior or how technical the job is that I'm working on.' (P6, 29, 7 years' experience, Cape Town, Financial Markets)

All the participants confirmed that they no longer place any advertisements in print media. Although participants still rely heavily on advertising to find candidates, the sites where they place their advertisements have shifted towards Internet media, in particular, career portals and social media such as LinkedIn:

'Advertisements? Probably 80–90% of the time, but no more print; LinkedIn 100% of time, referrals 100%, PNet and CJ 50%.' (P6, 29, 7 years' experience, Cape Town, Financial Markets)

'Advertising? Now – purely online.' (P8, 43, 15 years' experience, Cape Town, Financial Services)

This finding is in agreement with previous research that social media is used in combination with more conventional recruitment platforms like job boards, career portals and corporate websites (Allden & Harris, 2013; Tyagi, 2012).

This raises the question as to why recruiters still rely heavily on more traditional advertising methods such as career portals and organisational websites in the age of social media. Previous research indicated that one of the reasons why recruiters often still prefer more conventional sourcing tools is their limited knowledge of how to effectively recruit on social networking sites (Allden & Harris, 2013). The findings of this study show that this holds true only for Twitter. It would seem that the reason why some participants still prefer using the more conventional sourcing tools is that they have limited time and their perception is that social media adds much more work:

'I believe we're not using technology correctly – there are email inboxes, there are company inboxes, Gmail inboxes, there are LinkedIn inboxes, there is Facebook, there is Twitter ... so recruiters aren't focused as it all seems too much.' (P11, 45, 20 years' experience, Johannesburg, Management Consultants)

'Social media adds a huge amount of volume to the sourcing process.' (P1, 33, 9 years' experience, Johannesburg, Engineering)

Participants indicated that they feel social media is providing everyone with access to the same candidates, whereas in the past recruiters had to pay for access to search for candidates on career portals or utilise their own databases. Everyone can now easily search for and connect with potential candidates through social media. However, participants feel that social media does not really give them a competitive edge, rather, it has increased competition as all recruiters now have access to the same information:

'Social media has created more competition for recruiters because everyone has access. All you need is a name and the names are on the Internet, specifically on social media sites. It's now down to who's better at headhunting and who's not, because everyone has access.' (P1, 33, 9 years' experience, Johannesburg, Engineering)

The above finding suggests that social media is increasing the competition for top candidates in sourcing and has become the proverbial 'ticket to the game' in order to compete for identifying and attracting the best talent, rather than providing a competitive edge. This finding differs somewhat from notions in the recruitment literature that the use of social media in the recruitment process provides recruiters with a competitive edge in reaching their recruitment objectives (Singh & Sharma, 2014). It appears, and was expressed by one of the participants, that the use of social media simply levels the playing field and has become an

essential part of the recruitment process just to be able to compete in the recruitment war for talent:

'LinkedIn is not DAV specific – 4.5 million people in SA are on LinkedIn – It levels the playing field.' (DAV refers to this recruiter's managing agency) (P8, 43, 15 years' experience, Cape Town, Financial Services)

Although this theme indicates that social media has become an important part of recruitment, 75% of the participants (9 of 12) agreed that they combine its use with the more traditional recruitment methods when sourcing active candidates. Specifically, participants indicated that when they recruit for more technical, senior passive candidates, they use a combination of different sourcing techniques, namely, utilising LinkedIn to identify potential candidates and then using headhunting techniques to lure them into becoming interested in the position:

'Depending on the job – if it's a rare skill I go directly to LinkedIn; if it's a not rare skill I go to PNet first and then only, if I don't find anyone, I go to LinkedIn.' (P5, 28, 5 years' experience, Cape Town, Financial Markets)

This could possibly indicate that for lower level and non-technical positions, the sourcing approach has not changed much. However, if recruiters are trying to attract more senior or technical candidates, especially those they classify as 'passive', they would search less on career portals and add LinkedIn and headhunting to their sourcing process:

'If I work on a lower level job, one that's technically not that complicated, I would advertise and go to the career portals and go to the database. If it was something more technical I would do similarly, I would always advertise and go to our database, but I would then do head hunting via LinkedIn and to a lesser degree go to job portals because the assumption is that if you are senior and technical, you're not really on the job portals; you're not active, you're more passive.' (P8, 43, 15 years' experience, Cape Town, Financial Services)

This finding is in agreement with previous research (Houran, 2017).

The growth of the Internet and social media has given rise to more and more ways to connect candidates and recruiters. However, this benefit adds a large volume of work to recruiters' desks. Rather than reducing work, one of the drawbacks of social media is the volume it adds to the sourcing process:

'I'm inundated with requests – I can't even keep up. I have about 100 requests pending. I think my [LinkedIn] network is close to 2000. A lot are referrals.' (P5, 28, 5 years' experience, Cape Town, Financial Markets)

The volume of work increases as a result of various aspects, such as the vast number of available candidates whose profiles are available to search and screen. This increase is compounded by the large number of candidates who have access to job advertisements through social media, resulting in a vast number of (often unqualified) applicants. This aspect was confirmed by 67% of the participants (7 of 12) in

the study. Participating recruiters felt that they are already stretched for time and that utilising the various channels of social media adds more strain to their already limited available time:

'Social media is quicker, but it creates more volume, less quality. There is less quality because people take more chances because there is easier access. In general, if you were forced to post your CV, you would think twice about it, vs. just sending an email.' (P1, 33, 9 years' experience, Johannesburg, Engineering)

'I get a lot of referrals on LinkedIn. I must say, the candidates haven't been great – it just adds to the volume.' (P3, 40, 20 years' experience, Johannesburg, Commercial/Financial)

This finding raises an interesting perspective regarding notions in the literature that social media reduces the 'spray and pray' approach (Dutta, 2014). Social media may give better access to the passive and semi-passive candidate pool and an improved ability to attract these candidates. However, the sheer volume of work and high number of candidates that emerge from using social media may inhibit the effective use of the acquired pool of potential candidates. This finding also relates to Houran's (2017) observation that anyone using LinkedIn, or recruiting through social media in general, has the challenge of appraising profiles. As such, one could question to what extent the use of social media provides a more focused approach rather than the 'spray and pray' approach. The question is: Is this not just another version of the 'spray and pray' approach?

Ethical considerations

This study was conducted under the guidelines for ethical research of the relevant university after the research proposal was approved by its Research Ethics Committee. Informed institutional permission for the research was obtained from the organisations from which recruiters were invited to participate in the study. Informed consent was obtained from all the participants. Participants were assured that confidentiality would be maintained by treating their responses as anonymous and that no names would be disclosed.

Discussion

The findings of this research confirm that the use of social media for recruitment in South Africa is high among recruiters and is an important part of their sourcing process. This finding is in line with research conducted elsewhere, which indicates that the use of social media in recruiting gains momentum as the number of users on social media increases (Dutta, 2014; Khullar & Pandey, 2014; Singh & Sharma, 2014). Recruiters recognise the potential that social media provides to attract not only active but also passive and semi-passive candidates. Similarly to elsewhere in the world, the use of LinkedIn in South Africa is much higher than the use of Twitter and Facebook. However, the use of Twitter and Facebook in South Africa was found to be substantially lower than for recruitment in comparison to what was recorded elsewhere (Jobvite, 2014). Although one can only speculate

on the reason for this difference, it appears to be related to the international nature of the Jobvite (2014) study and the South African focus of this study. As noted, South African recruiters appear to have a different approach towards the use of Twitter and Facebook for work purposes. One can thus not just assume that international trends apply indiscriminately to South Africa. It was further found that South African recruiters follow the practices of their international counterparts, with all participants mentioning the use of LinkedIn as central to their respective recruitment processes. The findings confirm Hunt's (2010, p. 37) conclusion that 'LinkedIn recruiting tools focus on finding candidates and networking online; while Facebook and Twitter recruiting tools focus on employer branding – an important part of engaging candidates'.

However, the size of a recruiter's personal Twitter network is an important aspect when considering its use. The view is that, to be able to use it effectively, a recruiter has to be very active on Twitter, with many 'followers'. One of the deterrents of using Twitter in the sourcing process is a small following and low activity, which gives recruiters the feeling that they will not achieve results that are worthwhile. As such, they rather focus their attention on those sourcing tools that they believe will offer them a larger reach and better results. This finding is similar to what was found in research elsewhere (Silliker, 2011). Recruiters' Twitter activity also relates to their knowledge of its use. The majority of participants mentioned that they do not use Twitter because they do not know how to use it properly. If recruiters were more exposed to training on how to effectively use Twitter in the sourcing process, they could arguably use it more frequently and effectively. However, even those participants who had been trained in the use of Twitter in the sourcing process mentioned that they feel Twitter consumes time, which they can use on more proven sourcing methods. It is clear that Twitter is not seen as an effective sourcing tool in South Africa for this sample of recruiters.

An important aspect that influences the minimal use of Facebook is its perceived image in South Africa as a communication tool on a personal and private level rather than a business tool. South African recruiters make a distinction between their private lives, represented by the use of Facebook for communication; and their professional lives, which is represented by LinkedIn. They keep these two aspects separate and seldom let the two overlap – even just in perceiving such an overlap. It is clear that Facebook is not seen as an effective recruiting tool in South Africa for recruiters. This finding is a new and unique perspective that holds important consequences for its use in recruitment in South Africa.

LinkedIn is clearly the most popular social media site in the sourcing process and seems to have taken over from company databases. While recruiters would have searched for candidates on their own database in the past, they now use LinkedIn as their new tool to search for potential candidates.

However, whereas the database was often seen as a stand-alone tool, LinkedIn in comparison is not used as such. Rather, after a candidate has been found on LinkedIn, various other Internet sites are utilised to find the contact details and verify information about that candidate. Although LinkedIn gives recruiters better access to the passive and semi-passive candidate pool and arguably provides an improved ability to attract these candidates, it also leads to information overload. The sheer volume of candidates that comes from using it restricts the effective and focused use of the pool. It appears that social media in the recruitment process is simply becoming a more modern 'spray and pray' approach. Recruiters 'spray' their attention to combing through LinkedIn profiles, and job seekers in turn 'spray' their CVs through social media in the direction of recruiters, with both parties 'praying' for a positive outcome. The main difference is that the process may now be a bit easier and more elegant than before. This is because it is electronically automated, but is where the overload occurs.

Notwithstanding the exponential rise of social media in recruitment, recruiters still do not regard it as the answer to all of their problems. Advertising on career portals and corporate websites still remains a key sourcing tool for recruiters in South Africa in identifying and attracting potential candidates. However, the locations where they advertise have shifted towards the Internet, specifically career portals, companies' own websites and to some extent LinkedIn. This contradicts previous research findings, that placing an advertisement in popular media or on an organisation's website seems to have only a limited chance of attracting the right candidates (Phillips & Gully, 2012).

These findings confirm Dutta's (2014) and Hunt's (2010) argument that, while social media can be seen as opening doors and having a profound impact on the way that recruitment functions, it should not be mistaken as the full recruitment strategy. Rather, the use of social media forms an essential part of an organisation's recruitment operations. Indeed, a well-designed, comprehensive recruitment strategy and process, and the effective utilisation of available information about potential candidates, may significantly assist the recruitment of employees who have the most suitable skills and competencies (Melanthiou et al., 2015).

Limitations of the study

This research was limited to the South African context and cannot therefore be applied to other settings. Moreover, because of the relatively small sample size of individual recruiters, the findings of this study cannot be applied to recruitment agencies or all recruiters in South Africa. In addition, only recruiters from recruitment agencies were interviewed; thus, the findings cannot be applied beyond this particular population to a broader recruitment population. The nature of the data collected through this study was specifically focused on gaining an understanding of the reasons why recruiters do or do not use social media during recruitment. As such, it did not focus on the detailed

workings and impact of recruitment through the various social media tools. It also did not focus on the expectations or experiences of recruitment from the candidates' point of view.

Recommendations for future research

There is scope for further research relating to the use and impact of social media on recruiters in corporate companies (internal recruitment) rather than in recruitment companies (external recruitment). This study focused on individual recruiters from recruitment companies only; more research is required that focuses on the use of social media by recruitment agencies themselves. The impact of training for recruiters in the use of social media, specifically Twitter, in the recruitment process is a further topic that has yet to be explored in more detail. Studies in the future may seek to use quantitative methods to do research that allows a much bigger sample size in order to validate the conclusions of this study.

Conclusion

This research set out to investigate the impact that social media has had on recruitment, specifically on the sourcing process. It provides a new insight into the impact of social media on recruitment in South Africa. The findings confirm that social media has become an essential part of the recruitment process. However, recruiters should be careful not to be seduced into a hype or frenzy about the use of social media in recruitment. Although recruitment through social media is useful and important, it has limitations and does not provide all the solutions to recruitment problems. Indeed, it may simply become another 'spray and pray' approach if used unwisely.

This study makes an important scientific and practical contribution to the understanding of effective recruitment processes. By confirming the importance of social media in recruitment in South Africa, at least as a parallel process to more traditional recruitment processes, the study confirms the increasing role and importance of social media within the South African talent management context. The study demonstrates that recruitment through the use of social media in South Africa differs from what is done elsewhere in the world – at least for this sample. One should therefore be careful not to just assume that the trends reported in international literature indiscriminately apply to South Africa. The finding that the main impact of social media on the recruitment process derives from LinkedIn is an important aspect that should be taken note of by researchers, recruiters and potential job seekers. It suggests that in order to be part of an effective recruitment process in South Africa, recruiters and job seekers have to be 'LinkedIn'.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

T.K. was the main researcher and was responsible for conducting the fieldwork and writing up the research. C.G. and J.J.d.K. supervised the research and made conceptual contributions to the study.

References

- 2OceansVibe. (2016). *Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn – All the South African stats*. Retrieved April 20, 2017, from <http://www.2oceansvibe.com/2016/09/20/this-how-social-media-is-being-used-by-south-africans/>
- Al Ariss, A., Cascio, W.F., & Paauwe, J. (2014). Talent management: Current theories and future research directions. *Journal of World Business*, 49(2), 173–179. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jwb.2013.11.001>
- Allden, N., & Harris, L. (2013). Building a positive candidate experience: Towards a networked model of e-recruitment. *Journal of Business Strategy*, 34(5), 36–47. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JBS-11-2012-0072>
- Armstrong, M. (2006). *A handbook of human resource management practice* (10th ed.). London: Kogan Page.
- Barker, M., Barker, D., Bornmann, N., & Neher, K. (2013). *Social media marketing: A strategic approach*. Australia: South-Western Cengage Learning.
- Bloomberg, L.D., & Volpe, M. (2012). *Completing your qualitative dissertation: A road map from beginning to end* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Bolton, R.N., Parasuraman, A., Hoefnagels, A., Migchels, N., Kabadayi, S., Gruber, T., et al. (2013). Understanding Generation Y and their use of social media: A review and research agenda. *Journal of Service Management*, 24(3), 245–267. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09564231311326987>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp0630a>
- Breaugh, J.A. (2008). Employee recruitment: Current knowledge and important areas for future research. *Human Resource Management Review*, 18(3), 103–118. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2008.07.003>
- Broughton, A., Foley, B., Ledermaier, S., & Cox, A. (2013). *The use of social media in the recruitment process*. Retrieved April 20, 2017, from <http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/0/b/The-use-of-social-media-in-the-recruitment-process.pdf>
- Brown, V.R., & Vaughn, E.D. (2011). The writing on the (Facebook) wall: The use of social networking sites in hiring decisions. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 26(2), 219–225. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-011-9221-x>
- Bullhorn. (2014). *Global social recruiting activity report*. Retrieved April 20, 2017, from <http://www.bullhorn.com/resources/2014-social-recruiting-activity-report/>
- Business Tech. (2016). *Massive rise in Facebook users in South Africa*. Retrieved April 20, 2017, from <http://businesstech.co.za/news/general/128584/massive-rise-in-facebook-users-in-south-africa/>
- Caers, R., & Castelyns, V. (2011). LinkedIn and Facebook in Belgium: The influences and biases of social network sites in recruitment and selection procedures. *Social Science Computer Review*, 29(4), 437–448. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0894439310386567>
- Chambers, E.G., Foulon, M., Handfield-Jones, H., Hanking, S.M., & Michaels, E.G. (1998). The global 'war for talent'. *McKinsey Quarterly*, 3, 1–8. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/03071840308446873>
- Chaudhary, M. (2017). *LinkedIn by the numbers: 2017 Statistics*. Retrieved April 20, 2017, from <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/linkedin-numbers-2017-statistics-meenakshi-chaudhary>
- Cilliers, L., Chinyamurindi, W.T., & Viljoen, K. (2017). Factors influencing the intention to use social media for work-related purposes at a South African higher education institution. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management*, 15, 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v15i0.859>
- Creswell, J.W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Darrow, B. (2017). *LinkedIn claims half a billion users*. Retrieved April 20, 2017, from <http://fortune.com/2017/04/24/linkedin-users/>
- Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S. (2011). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Doherty, R. (2010). Getting social with recruitment. *Strategic HR Review*, 9(6), 11–15. <https://doi.org/10.1108/14754391011078063>
- Dutta, D. (2014). Tweet your tune – Social media, the new pied piper in talent acquisition. *The Journal of Decision Makers*, 39(3), 93–104. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0256090920140307>
- Facebook. (2017). *Facebook stats*. Retrieved April 20, 2017, from <https://www.iaa.org/about/ourmission/>
- Galanaki, E. (2002). The decision to recruit online: A descriptive study. *Career Development International*, 7(4), 243–251. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13620430210431325>
- Gallardo-Gallardo, E., & Thunnissen, M. (2016). Standing on the shoulders of giants. *Employee Relations*, 38(1), 31–56. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09564230910978511>
- Herman, R.E., Olivio, T.G., & Gioia, J.L. (2003). *Impending crisis: Too many jobs, too few people*. Winchester, VA: Oakhill Press.

- Hoffman, D.L., & Fodor, M. (2010). Can you measure the ROI of your social media marketing? *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 52(1), 41–49. Retrieved April 20, 2017, from <http://www.mitsmr-ezine.com/mitsmrphone11/fall2010/m2/MobileArticle.action?articleId=23732&mobileWeb=true&lm=1285614348000%5Cnhttp://www.emarketingtravel.net/resources/can-you-measure-the-ROI-of-your-social-media-marketing.pdf%5Cnhttp://sloanreview>
- Holland, P., Sheehan, C., & Pyman, A. (2007). Attracting and retaining talent: Exploring human resources development trends in Australia. *Human Resource Development International*, 10(3), 247–262. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13678860701515158>
- Houran, J. (2017). *New HR study: Candid recruitment experiences with LinkedIn*. Retrieved April 20, 2017, from http://www.aethoscg.com/aethos_insights/new-hr-study-candid-recruitment-experiences-with-linkedin/
- Hughes, J.C., & Rog, E. (2008). Talent management: A strategy for improving employee recruitment, retention and engagement within hospitality organizations. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 20(7), 743–757. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09596110810899086>
- Hunt, G. (2010). Finders keepers: Social media strategies help find top talent. *Journal of Property Management* (November/December), 36–41. Retrieved April 20, 2017, from <http://www.irem.org/jpm>
- Hunt, S.T. (2014). *Common sense talent management: Using strategic human resources to improve company performance*. San Francisco, CA: Wiley.
- Jindal, P., & Shaikh, M. (2014). Social networking sites – Emerging as effective tools for attracting talent. *Gavesana Journal of Management*, 6(2), 48–55.
- Jobs, M. (2003). It's only a time-out in the war for talent. *Leader to Leader*, 29, 62–63. Retrieved April 20, 2017, from <https://search-proquest-com.ez.sun.ac.za/docview/218306951?accountid=14049>
- Jobvite. (2014). Social recruiting survey results. *Jobvite*, 1–17. Retrieved April 20, 2017, from https://www.jobvite.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Jobvite_SocialRecruiting_Survey2014.pdf
- Joos, J.G. (2008). Social media: New frontiers in hiring and recruiting. *Employee Relations Today*, 35(1), 51–59. <https://doi.org/1002/ert.2018851>
- Kehinde, J. (2012). Talent management: Effect on organization performances. *Journal of Management Research*, 4(2), 178–187. <https://doi.org/10.5296/jmr.v4i2.937>
- Khullar, A., Pandey, P., & Read, M. (2014). Effective use of social media recruiting. *International Journal of Management*, 4(4), 216–227. Retrieved April 20, 2017, from <http://www.inderscienceonline.com/>
- Leedy, P.D. & Ormrod, J.E. (2010). *Practical research: Planning and design*. (9th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill.
- Madia, S.A. (2011). Best practices for using social media as a recruitment strategy. *Strategic HR Review*, 10(6), 19–24. <https://doi.org/10.1108/14754391111172788>
- Marshall, C. & Rossman, G. (2006). The how of the study: Building the research design. In C. Marshall & G. Rossman (eds.), *Designing qualitative research* (pp. 51–96). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Melanthiou, Y., Pavlou, F., & Constantinou, E. (2015). The use of social network sites as an e-recruitment tool. *Journal of Transnational Management*, 20(1), 31–49. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15475778.2015.998141>
- Michaels, E., Handfield-Jones, H., & Axelrod, B. (2001). *War for talent*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Publishing.
- Nagpal, G. (2013). *Talent economics*. London: Kogan Page Limited.
- Nikolaou, I. (2014). Social networking web sites in job search and employee recruitment. *International Journal of Selection and Assessment*, 22(2), 179–189. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijsa.12067>
- Ollington, N., Gibb, J., Harcourt, M., & Doherty, R. (2013). Online social networks: An emergent recruiter tool for attracting and screening. *Personnel Review*, 42(3), 248–265. <https://doi.org/10.1108/00483481311320390>
- Parez, M., Silva, K., Harvey, D., & Bosco, S. (2013). Linked into a job? The ethical considerations of recruiting through LinkedIn. In *Proceedings for the Northeast Region Decision Sciences Institute (NEDSI)*. Retrieved April 20, 2017, from http://docs.rwu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1000&context=management_theses
- Phillips, J., & Gully, S.M. (2012). *Strategic staffing* (3rd ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson Education.
- Pyne, J.E. (2013). *Human resources management for public and nonprofit organizations*. San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Ready, D.A., Hill, L.A., & Conger, J.A. (2008). Winning the race for talents in emerging markets. *Harvard Business Review*. Retrieved April 20, 2017, from <https://hbr.org/2008/11/winning-the-race-for-talent-in-emerging-markets>
- Roth, P.L., Bobko, P., Van Iddekinge, C.H., & Thatcher, J.B. (2016). Social media in employee-selection-related decisions. *Journal of Management*, 42(1), 269–298. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206313503018>
- Safko, L., & Brake, D.K. (2009). *The social media bible: Tactics, tools, and strategies for business success*. Skin & Allergy News (Vol. 43). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.
- Saunders, M.N., Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2011). *Research methods for business students*. London: Pearson Education.
- Schlechter, A., Hung, A., & Bussin, M. (2014). Understanding talent attraction: The influence of financial rewards elements on perceived job attractiveness. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management*, 12(1), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v12i1.647>
- Silliker, A. (2011). Embracing social media for recruitment about shifting culture, knowing end user well. *Canadian HR Reporter*, pp. 18–19. Retrieved April 20, 2017, from <http://www.hrreporter.com/article/11200-embracing-social-media-for-recruitment-about-shifting-culture-knowing-end-user-well/>
- Singh, K., & Sharma, S. (2014). Effective use of social media for talent acquisition and recruitment. *International Journal of Intercultural Information Management*, 4(4), 228–237. Retrieved April 20, 2017, from <http://www.inderscienceonline.com/doi/abs/10.1504/IJIIIM.2014.067932>
- Singh, P., & Finn, D. (2003). The effects of information technology on recruitment. *Journal of Labor Research*, 24(3), 395–408. Retrieved April 20, 2017, from <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs12122-003-1003-4?LI=true>
- Sinha, V., & Thaly, P. (2013). A review on changing trend of recruitment practice to enhance the quality of hiring in global organizations. *Management*, 18(2), 141–156. Retrieved April 20, 2017, from http://hrack.srce.hr/index.php?show=clanak&id_clanak_jezik=166315
- Stahl, G.K., Björkman, I., Farndale, E., Morris, S.S., Paauwe, J., Stiles, P., et al. (2012). *Global talent management: How leading multinationals build and sustain their talent pipeline* (No. 2007/34/OB). Fontainebleau: INSEAD.
- Stahl, G.K., Björkman, I., Farndale, E., Morris, S.S., Stiles, P., Trevor, J., et al. (2010). *Global talent management: How leading multinationals build and sustain their talent pipeline*. Fontainebleau. Retrieved April 20, 2017, from <http://720plan.ovh.net/~inseadpoq/knowledge2/stahl.pdf>
- Tarique, I., & Schuler, R.S. (2010). Global talent management: Literature review, integrative framework, and suggestions for further research. *Journal of World Business*, 45(2), 122–133. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jwb.2009.09.019>
- Thunnissen, M. (2016). Talent management: For what, how and how well? An empirical exploration of talent management in practice. *Employee Relations*, 38(1), 57–72. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ER-08-2015-0159>
- Tyagi, A. (2012). Effective talent acquisition through e-recruitment: A study. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 2(3), 302–312. Retrieved April 20, 2017, from <http://www.zenithresearch.org.in/>
- Wegner, T. (2014). *Applied business statistics*. Cape Town: Juta and Organisation Ltd.
- Zephoria Digital Marketing. (2017). *The top 20 valuable Facebook statistics – Updated July 2017*. Retrieved April 20, 2017, from <https://zephoria.com/top-15-valuable-facebook-statistics/>
- Zide, J., Elman, B., & Shahani-Dennig, C. (2014). LinkedIn and recruitment: How profiles differ across occupations. *Employee Relations*, 36(5), 583–604. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ER-07-2013-0086>