The Use of Social Network Sites as an E-Recruitment Tool

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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

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The purpose of this article is to present an initial exploratory investigation on e-recruiting and the role of social network sites (hereafter SNSs) during the process. Particularly, the aim is to identify if companies use social media during their recruitment processes to attract and screen applicants. Three critical elements guided the research: the use of social media to attract and screen applicants; the legal implication of e-recruitment and social network screening; and the possibility of using e-recruitment as the main hiring strategy. Beyond the information generated through the literature review, primary data were collected from Cypriot organizations. The findings of this research endeavor indicate that the online recruitment method has a lot of benefits but also pitfalls of which recruiters should be aware. Furthermore, it seems that the contemporary practice of employee screening through social media can highly affect the hiring decision and legal implications are likely to arise with the wrong use of information. On the contrary, a well-designed system and strategic utilization of available information about potential candidates may significantly assist the recruitment of employees with the most suitable skills and competencies.

E-RECRUITMENT IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Moving toward the second decade of the 21st century, the use of the Internet has become an integrated and vital tool in today's business world. After SNSs were first created in 1997, many changes have occurred. From being only web-based services that allowed users to simply create a profile, share connections with others, and view their profiles and connections, they emerged to multipurpose individual and business tools (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). Every day more and more companies enter the digital world by creating their own Facebook page, LinkedIn profile, and/or a Twitter account. They all have a common goal: to reach as many individuals as possible and make their company more recognizable among the many available. Recognition is the key element to a successful business strategy, given that all companies need to be known in order to operate and generate profits. It is also the driving force behind an effective recruitment strategy, as people tend to apply first to companies that they recognize (Greengard, 2012; Williams and Klau, 1997 cited in Galanaki, 2002).

Realistically, to keep up with the developments and intense competition, organizations all over the world try to utilize the immense opportunities the Internet has to offer in almost all of their operations. This is indeed true when it comes to the function of human resource management, and especially when exploring contemporary practices in relation to recruitment and selection. Today, SNSs provide utilities designed to help companies locate and attract applicants while they also enable employers to run instant background checks. However, strangely enough, many corporations avoid the use of social media and fail to take advantage of the opportunities offered.

RESEARCH RATIONALE

Trying to overcome the barriers imposed by the current financial crisis and constant increasing unemployment rates (Eurostat, 2013) many people move away from using traditional recruitment channels (i.e., local bureaus, newspapers, radio, television, etc.) and turn to alternative mediums to search for employment opportunities. Today, about one in every six individuals maintain a social network profile on Facebook, while one in every 28 own LinkedIn accounts (Facebook Key Facts, 2013; United States Census Bureau, 2014).

Employers seem to comprehend these statistics and show particular preference in utilizing technology and social media as a means to search

and recruit new candidates. There are many reasons for this recent trend, commonly referred to as e-recruitment (Allden & Harris, 2013). First, organizations have an easy access to a wide pool of labor force with diverse skills and competencies (Doherty, 2010; Galanaki, 2002; Workforce, 2000). Moreover, with proper preparation and the right procedures in place, SNSs enable companies to run their recruitment strategies at a lower cost (Doherty, 2010) and to devote much less time in information processing (Doherty, 2010; JobVite, 2012a; Workforce, 2000), hence making the process more efficient. The quality of applications collected is also improved, as the candidates are computer literate and educated individuals accustomed to the use of technology (Galanaki, 2002). Consequently, social media are currently established as an important tool for attracting and screening applicants.

Despite all the positive outcomes generated through e-recruitment however, some companies are still hesitant to be involved and adapt to this relatively new practice. Lack of expertise, costs involved, unfamiliarity, and unwillingness to depart from traditional approaches are among the reasons for reluctance. Beyond the aforementioned, however, one important aspect seems to hold back many organizations from pursuing the "e-route." Social profile screening recently generated great controversy regarding its legality as only a hairline segregates information between public and private and crossing it could result in lawsuits. Related to this argument, if network screening is partially illegal and since no restrictions exist to prevent it, then is there any ethical dilemma? Also, inevitably, information screening affects employers' decision to accept or reject an applicant. Yet, great possibility exists that the decision taken is based on false, inaccurate, or outdated information. What is more, issues of confidentiality and safe storage of the data gathered through screening are also of great concern for employers, as failing to act responsibly may result in legal proceedings with unfavorable outcomes (Slovensky & Ross, 2012).

The aim of this research is to identify if companies use social media during their recruitment processes to attract and screen applicants. Specifically, the objectives set out for this study include identifying whether companies use social media to attract and screen applicants, defining the legal implication of e-recruitment and social network screening, and exploring the possibility of companies using e-recruitment as the main hiring strategy.

The following sections provide the background of the study by elaborating on the theory behind recruitment and the transition to e-recruitment.

FROM "TRADITIONAL" APPROACH TO "E-RECRUITMENT"

Recruitment refers to the process of attracting, screening, selecting, and hiring the best employee based on skill, experience, and organization fit. It takes extensive time and cost effectiveness is essential for its success. Finding

the right employee at the lowest cost possible contributes toward an effective and efficient workforce and a strong competitive advantage. Independent from size, all companies worldwide use recruitment strategies, either formal or informal, in order to find and attract applicants and strengthen their human capital (Marchington & Wilkinson, 2012; Orlitzky, 2008;).

In general, large organizations are structured entities with hierarchical levels of command and formal strategic and managerial plans. Small companies follow a more informal structure with no clear hierarchy and strategy. Consequently, small firms usually adopt informal and ad-hoc approaches since they do not have particular expertise or a department dedicated solely to human resource management. On the contrary, the majority of large organizations follow a formal procedure headed by specialists in recruitment (Millward et al., 1992, cited in Jameson, 2000).

A formal recruitment and selection procedure, however, articulated as follows, is a multidimensional, long, and time-consuming procedure involving many important decisions, which unavoidably equally affect the future of the employee and employer (Armstrong, 2009; Taylor, 2010). Although no consensus exists regarding the exact recruitment process, usually the first step is the job analysis, which includes a detailed job description and a job specification. The former elucidates all the responsibilities that the new employee will undertake while the former is an account of what skills and characteristics the candidate should possess in order to perform the tasks successfully. A well-defined job analysis indeed plays a fundamental role because it will discourage unsuitable applicants (Banfield & Kay, 2013). The second important decision relates to the way the job is announced. This highly significant process determines the medium of communication, the type and amount of individuals who will be reached. The traditional options used by companies to attract applicants include newspapers, recruitment agencies, referrals from employees, suppliers, or customers, and university invitations. Today we also have the introduction of online sources like job boards, online recruitment sites, and SNSs that act as an alternative option (Gilmore & Williams, 2013). The third step toward a successful recruitment process is the development of the application procedure and the acceptance of applicants. During this process, the recruiter must identify what information is necessary and how it will be collected. Broadly speaking, this method includes the completion of an application form along with a résumé and a questionnaire or a preliminary telephone interview.

According to experts of recruitment methods (Barber, 1998; Iles, 2007; Newell, 2005), once the deadline for applications is over, the recruitment team evaluates each candidate and creates a list with those that hold the necessary credentials in order to conduct the initial telephone interview or send a questionnaire for further information. A second assessment of the applicants is carried out along with referencing and short listing. At this stage, all the information provided is verified through a background check and/or

by contacting previous employers. A short list of the applicants with the best attributes is developed and they are called for a second face-to-face interview. Usually, throughout the second-round interviews, standard pre-developed questions are asked for every candidate for comparison purposes. During this stage, the candidate has the chance to be informed more thoroughly of expected output and demands. A real case scenario simulation could be used to test the applicants in order to identify their skills and character. Furthermore, brief presentations from current employees or managers may be used to better demonstrate the job-at-hand and its requirements (Palazzo & Kleiner, 2002).

The last stages of a traditional recruitment process include the final assessment and the hiring decision, where the best applicant is carefully chosen based on hisor her abilities, skills, character, and performance during the interviews. A contract is prepared with the aid of a lawyer and then a job offer is made to the successful candidate for acceptance or rejection. Once the applicant accepts the offer, unsuccessful candidates are notified. The last part of this long hiring process is the induction and initial training, a stage that facilitates the new recruit to become familiar with the organizational settings and culture. During this period, the newcomer learns the demands and expectations from the employer and acquires the knowledge and additional skills necessary to perform according to expectations and acclimate (Lin & Kleiner, 1999; Palazzo & Kleiner, 2002; Roselius & Kleiner, 2000). Therefore, as Schmitt and Kim (2008) argue, selecting a new employee is conceived as a time-consuming, expensive (in terms of hours spent and/or outsourcing experts) and a risky task.

Before the introduction of the Internet, all the steps were followed and executed within the company premises through personal meetings and interviews. Today, however, as highlighted by Parry and Tyson (2008), with the power provided by social media, SNSs, online communication, and recruitment software, the traditional recruitment process is now executed mostly online, resulting in what is commonly referred to as the "e-recruitment" approach.

By definition, e-recruitment is a description of the process companies follow in order to discover and recruit talented individuals from the Internet (Allden & Harris, 2013). Indeed, as Minton-Eversole (2007) explains, e-recruitment is a fast-growing method of hiring employees as more and more individuals post their résumés online in search for a better future. The success of e-recruitment mainly derives from the fact that now companies have the ability to reach a larger potential applicant pool, since the geographical constrains are non-existent (Cappelli, 2001, cited in Tong & Sivanand, 2005), and individuals are more willing to travel overseas for employment. Today, there are two types of online recruiters: the corporate recruiters, who are ordinary companies seeking employees online, and the third-party recruiters, who are companies offering expert services. The third-party recruiters act as a medium between the pool of potential applicants and the companies. They collect all the résumés posted online in a

database and then provide to client companies those that are most relevant to the position available.

Given that e-recruitment is mostly dependent on and utilizes social media, more details should be given to this particular element. Social media are defined as web-based services that allow users three main functions: (1) to create a profile on the system; (2) to create and share connections with other users (friends); and (3) to view the profiles and connections of others in the network. The connections between the users vary from network to network as they may be bi-directional (Friends), professional (Links/ Contacts), or one-directional (Followers). Social media focus on creating communities of people who want to interact and communicate with each other and share content (Boyd & Ellison, 2008).

The first website defined as a social network site—SixDegrees.com— included all three of the previously stated characteristics. The site was launched in 1997 and allowed users to create profiles, manage a list of friends, and explore these lists for various purposes (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). Today, one could argue that a contemporary version and the evolution of SixDegrees.com is Facebook, which has more than one billion active users worldwide (Facebook Key Facts, 2013), or LinkedIn, which has about 255 million (LinkedIn Ads, 2013). Facebook and LinkedIn have member pools ranging from 18 to more than 54 years old with the majority of users being 25 to 35 years old. As companies try to follow the new trends and technological advancements, more people are entering the digital world by creating their own Facebook page, LinkedIn profile, and/or a Twitter account, hence creating the term Corporate Social Media.

Corporate Social Media proved to be an effective advertising medium with many advantages over traditional media. With unemployment rates higher than ever (Eurostat, 2013) mainly due to financial crises, people turn toward social media to seek new opportunities of international recruitment. This is why the majority of job seekers today have at least one social network profile. As Tong and Sivanand (2005, p. 103) wisely stated, "where potential employees flock, there, companies follow." Indeed, employers today turn to social media for recruitment as they realize that they can reach a larger number of skilled job seekers. Yet, it is fundamental that all involved parties in this electronic world and in particular those who intensively use and utilize social media are fully aware of the risks and benefits of such exposure. Actually, a more thorough investigation of the benefits and pitfalls of e-recruitment and the role of SNSs during the hiring process will shed some light on the reasons behind why companies opt to embrace, or not to embrace, this contemporary method of employee recruitment.

> ...there is no denying that social networks are here to stay, therefore it is important thatorganizations fully understand the potential benefits and pitfalls. (Doherty, 2010, p. 12)

E-RECRUITMENT: BENEFITS AND RISKS

In an effort to improve the quality of their practices and to minimize their costs and time spent, many organizations turn to online recruitment. As already mentioned, a plethora of risks and benefits exist that need to be carefully examined before deciding to take the e-recruitment route.

It cannot be disputed that an e-route reduces the time spent on the hire process. Actually, online recruiting has proven to be up to 30% faster than other traditional hiring methods due to the elimination of intermediaries and a shorter recruiting cycle (Workforce, 2000). Many researchers confirm that the time spent from posting a job to receiving applications, filtering them, and contacting the applicants is notably lower than before, as all the needed information is found at the click of a button. Moreover, video-conferencing helped decrease the time spent on interviews as initial evalua-tions could take place through the Internet (Doherty, 2010). This also translates into reduced cost, with the cost of hire through social media esti-mated to be nine times less than the cost of more traditional methods because job postings are free through a corporate website (or company's social media profiles) or available at a lower cost through an online recruitment site.

Related to this argument, JobVite (2012b), one of the most renowned researchers regarding online recruitment technology, suggests that social media is an ideal vehicle for employee referrals, which significantly reduces time and cost of hiring. Moreover, potential applicants can access the Internet from everywhere and find information about a company; as such, geographi-cal restrictions are also eliminated and as a result, there is a wider reach for employers and applicants (Galanaki, 2002; Workforce, 2000). Almost every electronic device (smartphone, tablet, laptop, etc.) gives access to social media, therefore enabling someone to express immediate interest to a job post.

Doherty (2010) also surfaces a more indirect benefit for organizations adopting the e-recruitment philosophy by explaining how company brand is positively affected. Promoting the company image through e-recruiting shows a more innovative and flexible strategy that may help attract young talents and passive employees with skills that could drive the company into the new century, taking full advantage of the constantly evolving technology.

Finally, a strong argument suggests that organizations applying e-recruitment techniques attract higher calibre candidates than those follow-ing the traditional approach. Applicants that apply for a job through social media are usually computer literate, educated young individuals interested in joining a company that embraces technology. Research indicated that young employees are "accepting of change and, therefore, more likely to help the business grow and change."(Thaler-Carter, 1998 cited in Galanaki, 2002, p. 244). Better quality responses can also be achieved by clearly defining

the target audience and identifying the required skills. Furthermore, online questionnaires and psychometric tests could be conducted at the application stage, rejecting individuals that fail and therefore accepting only the competent ones. Another way of collecting better quality responses is by attracting the passive job seekers. These individuals are considered as the most highly prized catch by recruiters (Shand, 2000; Hansen, 1998, Galanaki, 2002), as they are experienced, skilled, and already employed individuals who could consider a job if the right opportunity was provided.

Having presented a number of benefits associated with e-recruiting, equally important are the risks associated. Even though e-recruiting is a fast-developing practice, traditional employment methods still maintain an important role in the recruitment strategy as not all job seekers use the Internet to apply. As a result, e-recruitment cannot be the sole means for promoting a job opening, but should be incorporated in a wider strategy and supported also by other means.

Significant investments are required in order to build a competent e-recruitment system to be able to utilize and follow constant technological advancements. Budgets must be allocated not only for installing related software to monitor and process all the incoming applications, but also training costs will increase in order to have competent HR specialists to effectively handle the whole procedure. Other costs are also involved since for being successful it is essential that online job descriptions and person specifications are constantly updated and are always available as part of the organisation's whole website, e-accounts etc.

One of the biggest online recruitment websites, Byat.com, explains that using the right social media is important and greatly affects the quality and amount of applications received as well as the success or failure of the project. Selecting the wrong social media to communicate a job opening could result in receiving excess and unrelated applications. Possible overloading of the system could lead to missing actual skilled (talented) applicants. On the other hand, wrong selection could also mean receiving less than the expected applications, leading again to the same outcome.

Also, it should be mentioned that online recruitment is more effective for companies already known (Greengard, 2012; Williams and Klau, 1997, Galanaki, 2002), large, and involved in technology. It was proven that e-recruitment was more effective and yielded more results when the company was more recognized, as job seekers look first at companies that they know and advertise more, and then locate less recognized ones.

Finally, one of the greatest issues is the different legal implications related to e-recruitment practices. Many companies use social media to screen individuals shortly after receiving their application. Screening could lead to lawsuits from applicants for negligence and unfair treatment. In the following section, the legal liabilities that could arise from applicant screening are discussed in more detail.

E-RECRUITMENT: THE "IS-IT-LEGAL?" QUESTION

Most literature on the legality of employee screening focuses on one main point: to distinguish between useful and private information. As Karl, Peluchette, and Schlaegel (2010) suggest employers need to be cautioned that, while use of SNSs may provide employers with useful information that they would not be able to obtain otherwise, they will also inevitably uncover information that should not be used when making hiring decisions. Nonetheless, since this form of information is available in public profiles relevant or irrelevant, a lot of employers base their decisions on them ignoring the legality of their actions and the implications. Actually, social network profiles are usually protected by privacy settings adjustable by the users. Violation or manipulation of those settings in order to screen an applicant's profile could result in a costly lawsuit.

Related to the previous argument, a contemporary practice espoused by many organizations is the analysis and review of candidates' social network profile activity, with the claim that posts, comments, likes, interests, and pictures shared by an individual help to identify personality traits that would fit the company culture and provide an indication of job performance (Kluemper & Rosen, 2009). However, to what extent is this accurate? Adopting a different perspective, Slovensky and Ross (2012) claim that social network activity does not always reflect the way an applicant will behave when found in the work environment. Many users post information in their profiles that is not reflective of their actual behavior, either during work or throughout their everyday routines. In addition, individuals over time create various accounts in a number of SNSs according to the current trend. Those accounts usually get abandoned after time, rarely get deleted, and usually reflect a different phase of life for the applicant and do not represent his or her current status (Fernando, 2008; Slovensky & Ross, 2012). Finally, identity theft (in SNS profiles) and profile imitation is a common problem that could result in error and bias.

Rationally, in the effort to learn as much as possible for potential candidates, organizations conduct various background checks. Yet, caution should be taken as social network screening is considered ethical and legal as long as no privacy rights are breached. Of course, in such cases, organizations should always notify the candidates of such searches and even obtain written consent in order to avoid any legal implications. Furthermore, as Ross et al. (2009, p. 59) state, "data breaches can disrupt lives and can embarrass organizations. Therefore, information security must be considered."

Finally, discrimination during applicant screening using online SNSs is another common pitfall. It appears that any information acquired by screening an applicant's social network profile could become subject for discrimination if it involves personal characteristics such as race, gender, sex, age, religion, or disabilities. If any of the information is used to screen

out an applicant, then a breach of privacy and legal action against the company could be taken (Kluemper & Rosen, 2009; Slovensky & Ross, 2012).

METHODOLOGY

Undoubtedly, e-recruitment is an evolving trend that companies began to adopt intensely during the past few years, mostly due to the financial crises and their efforts to minimize expenses. However, related research endeavors are scarce and only a handful of scholars (i.e., Galanaki, 2002; Slovensky & Ross, 2012, Ollington, Gibb, & Harcourt, 2013) tried to shed some light to the actual value and to the contemporary nature of e-recruitment practices. Most of the studies were conducted in large European countries such as Germany, the United Kingdom, and France, and from the United States. Research on smaller economies, such as Cyprus, is almost non-existent.

This research study aimed to shed some light into e-recruitment practices in Cyprus by carrying out exploratory research. Specifically, the objectives of this study were to:

1. Identify if companies from specific market sectors use SNSs more than other companies use them, and if company size affects this decision.
2. Investigate whether companies in Cyprus use SNSs during recruitment to attract applicants and if not, why not.
3. Identify if recruiters in Cyprus use SNSs to conduct background checks/ screening of applicants, in what way, and how much this affects their hiring decision.
4. Measure companies' awarenessof the legal implications associated with social network screening and how ethical they believe their actions to be.

Primary information was collected using an online survey that was available online for 40 days. All the information collected was anonymous and confidential. Participants were members/employees or owners/directors of a company (companies were selected randomly through the Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry Listing), with direct participation in the recruitment process and the power to affect the employment decision. They were inquired through e-mail invitation, and upon consent were directed through a tailor-made link to an online survey site, were they could answer and submit their completed survey. Exactly 1,060 e-mails were sent to companies all over Cyprus, of all sizes and from all market sectors. One hundred seventeen usable questionnaires were collected and descriptive analysis was carried out.

For ensuring validity and reliability, the questionnaire was divided in three interrelated sections and questions were close-ended with various formats of response categories (including scale ratings, one choice answers,

polar questions, and multiple-choice answers). To establish reliability in the survey, similar questions were asked, either reordered or stated with different wording, in order to evaluate the honesty of the respondent. Questions from past surveys were incorporated in the survey as a means to compare the responses and identify any change in preferences and link the literature review with the research findings. In terms of validity, the survey was pilot tested and through this process important outcomes surfaced regarding the questionnaire's overall content and level of comprehension, presentation, and question phrasing.

FINDINGS

From the total number of answers collected, 16 participants were from the tourism and food industry, 15 from information technology, and 15 from banking, finance and management, 9 from telecommunications, 8 from construction, 7 from the marketing and public relations, and the rest from smaller market sectors such as security, manufacturing, and engineering. The largest number of replies was collected from small companies of zero to 30 employees with a percentage of 61.6%; 70.9% were medium-sized companies with 31 to 100 employees; and 20.5% were large companies with more than 100 employees. Furthermore, the survey showed that from the 117 participating companies, 86 (73.5%) maintain social network accounts with the most popular answers being Facebook with 65%, LinkedIn with 40.2%, and Twitter with 20.1%. A number of companies (10.3%) reported their involvement in other SNSs like Instagram, Pinterest, and Google+.

Through the literature review, it was found that large companies with involvement in technology used the e-recruitment technique more effectively. The findings from the research however, indicate a different pattern of behavior in Cyprus. From the 117 respondents, 24 were large companies with more than 100 employees. The companies with involvement in technology showed 50% use of e-recruitment practice, whereas the companies with no technological background showed 55% use. This indicates that large organizations that are independent of sector tend to use online recruitment more than the smaller ones. In general, the findings indicated that from the companies with more than 100 employees, 54% are involved with online recruitment, as opposed to 48% from companies with 31 to 100 employees, and 39% for those with up to 30 employees.

On the contrary, small companies with technological backgrounds practice e-recruitment significantly more than do those from other market sectors. Of the small companies (zero to 30 employees) with technological background, 47% replied positively on the question regarding the use of e-recruitment, whereas those without the technological background were only 36%. Moreover, out of the total companies that replied positively to

the use of e-recruitment, the sectors that showed the most replies were the finance/accounting/banking sector and the food and tourism sector. The agricultural and security sectors did not have any positive replies regarding the use of online recruitment as a technique to locate and attract applicants.

The popularity of SNSs is evident as the findings showed that 72% (85 responses out of 117) of the companies maintain one or more social network accounts. Out of those respondents, 89% maintain a Facebook account, whereas a much smaller 55% keep a LinkedIn account, and 40% keep a Twitter account. Seventy-three percent of the respondents replied positively to the question as to whether they would use the Internet and/or social media to invite skilled applicants for a job opening, and also agreed that SNSs have the power to attract the same quality and quantity of applicants as the traditional recruitment methods of newspapers, job boards, and recruitment agencies. Furthermore, despite the fact that Facebook had the lead in terms of social network activity, 50% of the participants provided LinkedIn as their first choice of social media to use in order to attract applicants followed by Facebook with 37%. This coincides with the perception that LinkedIn is a more corporate social network than Facebook and that the companies follow where potential employees are located. However, despite all the positive reactions to SNSs, it appears that most of the companies do not use them during their recruitment process and are also not willing to consider them as a strategic tool to invite applicants. In both cases, more than half of the companies gave a negative answer when asked. Moreover, the findings concur with Galanaki (2002) as the collected survey results showed that time and funding play a significant role in the adoption of an e-recruitment strategy and are sources from which reluctance arises.

On another level, data revealed that 59% of the company representatives believe that information derived from SNSs are not trustworthy and are neutral about using social media for employee referrals during recruitment. This indeed coincides with Slovensky and Ross (2012) who warn recruiters to be careful concerning what information they use and how they select it because social media profiles may incorporate inaccurate or outdated information.

Negligent hiring is another legal issue that companies need to treat with extra caution or avoid. With this reasoning, employers claim that applicant screening is legal and ethical as long as no breach of privacy rights occurs. From the research findings collected, we can conclude that the same rationale applies for companies in Cyprus as well, since 86% of the participants replied that they consider applicant screening as ethical and legal. Furthermore, the respondents agree with Slovensky and Ross's (2012, p. 58) statement that "a good predictor of future behaviour is past behaviour" hence, any information collected on applicants could help identify character traits that could prove to be harmful for the company.

Information security is one of the most important conditions during online recruitment and in general any online activity. All companies operating

online need to be able to guarantee that they provide information security to their users. When asked if they believe that data breaches can disrupt lives and embarrass organizations, 55% of the respondents believed the statement to be true, whereas 39% replied that they were indifferent. Through the survey results, we can determine that there is lack of information from the recruiters' side, as the replies regarding their knowledge on the legal implications of applicant screening are very close; 51% has knowledge of the legal implications of applicant screening, whereas 49% do not.

Likewise, applicant discrimination is an additional issue pointed out by Kluemper and Rosen (2009), which falls under the information security umbrella. Screening out applicants based on information acquired through social media profiles is considered a breach of privacy rights and legal actions could be pursued. An enormous 94% denial of rejecting applicants during recruitment due to their social network profiles is an indication that Cyprus companies do not completely base their decisions on unverified and/or potentially discriminative information.

Finally, another objective of this research was to identify if recruiters in Cyprus use SNSs to conduct background checks/screening on applicants. Data collected showed that even though companies do not use social media to attract applicants, they use them to run background checks and screen potential employees. Ninety out of 117 respondents admitted that they conduct background checks on applicants, whereas more than 50% of the total respondents admitted using social media to search an applicant's profile for information.

When asked if they ever requested from an employee or used a different social media profile to gain access to an applicant's profile, 94% of the respondents denied it with only seven positive responses. Those who responded positively said that they used Facebook and LinkedIn as the means to do so. In addition, a large proportion of the company representatives replied that social media are considered a good vehicle for employee referrals.

As stated previously, a large number of companies access applicants' profiles to search for information. Depending on the gravity of the information discovered, the recruiters may create a positive or negative impression about the applicant. There is no doubt that their hiring decision will be influenced to some degree. However, the data collected from the survey did not provide sufficient information to state with certainty that the information available through SNSs would be enough to alter the recruiters' decision to the point of accepting or rejecting an applicant.

Summarizing the findings, one of the study's main objectives was to identify if companies from specific market sectors use SNSs during recruitment more than others use them, and if the company size affects their decision to use it. Briefly, this study's findings do not prove a relationship exists between market sector or company size and the decision to use social

media during recruitment. Also, the purpose was to investigate whether companies in Cyprus utilize (or do not utilize) SNSs during recruitment to attract applicants and why. Findings reveal that only a small percentage of Cypriot companies use SNSs to attract applicants. The prevailing reasons for this appeared to be the implementation time and initial cost required to develop the overall strategy.

The results were fascinating regarding the attempt to identify if recruiters in Cyprus use SNSs to conduct background checks/screening on applicants, and in what way and how much it affects their hiring decision. It was actually revealed that beyond any concerns about the validity of information available, Cypriot companies do utilize SNSs to conduct background checks and screening. The most popular sites mentioned were LinkedIn and Facebook. However, the degree to which employers were affected by the information discovered was not clear (although the dominant indication was that organizations almost never rejected a candidate because of his or her social profile). Finally, one of the key aims was to measure awareness of Cypriot companies of the legal implications associated with social network screening and how ethical they believe their actions to be. Although there seems to be little awareness regarding the particular laws and regulations governing this aspect, the majority of the participants expressed the belief that social network screening is both legal and ethical.

CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

The main goal of this research was to identify and examine the use of SNSs during the recruitment process and specifically during e-recruitment. The research focused on three dimensions of e-recruitment: (1) the use of social media to attract applicants; (2) the use of social media to screen applicants, and (3) the legal and ethical perspective of the previous two subjects. The idea behind the research was to create a spherical view of how companies in Cyprus perceive social media during recruitment. Data collected coincide but also differ from similar past investigations carried out in other counties.

On an international level, it is obvious that the popularity of SNSs as a business tool only recently started to grow. Therefore, publications on e-recruitment subjects in relation to social media and on e-recruitment software date back no more than a decade. Furthermore, most of the studies are conducted in European countries and in the United States where the economies are strong and the market sectors great enough to accommodate a range of large organizations with unlimited resources. Consequently, as in every research, comparisons should be made with caution, keeping in mind that contextual deviations play a significant role when it comes to results interpretations.

Through the overall research, it is obvious that some of the findings are in agreement with those resulting from past investigations sharing same or

similar objectives as the current study. Similarities between the current study and similar research include the confirmation that SNSs are indeed a useful tool in the hands of organizations when it comes to recruitment practices (i.e., Research demonstrates the success of Internet recruiting, 2003); that Facebook and LinkedIn dominate and are popular among the business circle; and that LinkedIn is mostly used for e-recruitment purposes (Caers & Castelyns, 2011); a large number of company representatives do not completely trust information gained through social media profiles (Matthews, 2011; Slovensky & Ross, 2012). This research seems to contradict other research with reference to the relationship between company size and the use of e-recruitment; however, a retest of the survey on a larger scale with more participants may well assist in the formation of a more adequate assessment that could possibly be used in a more generalized setting.

Even though most of the respondents admitted the use of social media to screen applicant profiles (77%), it was unclear whether this screening influenced their decision to such a degree that they would reject an applicant. Another investigation could be conducted to provide a clearer view of how much information derived from applicant profiles affects the hiring decision and in what ways. Examining what Matthews (2011) refers to as "legal and ethical alarm bells," it was revealed that those who viewed their actions as legal (86%) also viewed them as ethical. Furthermore, it was discovered that there is a lack of information, as almost half the respondents reported that they were ignorant of the legal implications that could arise from mishandling applicant information.

Overall, the research provides valuable information regarding the way that Cypriot companies use their social network profiles during recruitment process. Even though the majority of companies are small in size, it seems that they manage to take advantage of the various technological advancements. When it comes to recruitment practices, Internet and social media are powerful tools and Cypriot organizations manage to adjust them according to their needs, either in terms of inviting applicants to a job opening or by performing background checks and screening.

As already explained, one of the main limitations of this study relates to the low response rate achieved. Although extensive effort was made to achieve high participation rates this was not achieved to the desired level. As such, the extent to which the findings can be regarded as sufficient for statistical generalizations is questionable. Yet, this does not diminish the value of the study's results, as they indeed shed light to a largely unexplored area and help to gain an understanding of the way companies in smaller economies, like Cyprus, use social media during employee recruitment.

Beyond the current investigation, various related areas remain to be studied. A comparative research between companies using e-recruitment and social media when hiring as compared to companies that do not can reveal the actual opportunities or threats of this new recent trend. In

addition, given that technology is rapidly changing and along with it market trends, a retest of this research endeavor could be done in the future to identify any change in opinions or process adjustments. The retest can also be used to verify the results of the current study and establish the level of validity by comparing the responses collected and form a more extensive study applicable in other countries and market sectors. Of course, a retest at a larger scale involving more satisfactory samples would indeed lead to robust feedback and would lead to enhanced findings.

A final proposal for future investigation is to explore the e-recruitment process through the eyes of the applicants. Information is scarce regarding applicant expectations and reception, especially during a newly created strategy such as e-recruitment. Future research, therefore, has the potential to provide some valuable information for improving the value of e-recruitment and enhancing its popularity.

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