

Social Recruiting: The Role of Social Networking Websites
in the Hiring Practices of Major Advertising and Public Relations Firms

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine the role that professional networking websites, such as LinkedIn, play in the hiring decisions of talent recruiters at major advertising and public relations firms. A study of literature relating to social media, traditional recruitment techniques and legal implications regarding the use of networking websites in the hiring process provided a foundation for the study. Primary research, in the form of online surveys distributed to hiring managers at some of the largest international advertising and public relations firms, was conducted to set a foundation for understanding the use of networking websites in the hiring process within the advertising and public relations industry.

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In the American economy and job market, which has been unstable at best for the past decade, hiring managers in any industry must be more efficient than ever in their efforts to recruit new talent to their teams of employees. The recent influx of social media platforms offers new opportunities for those seeking employment to access those who make hiring decisions. A wealth of non-scientific articles suggests ways for jobseekers to enhance their chances of employment by making the most of their presence on online networking websites, such as LinkedIn. However, little evidence exists to determine the extent to which social networking websites actually influence the decisions of hiring managers. As such, jobseekers are left to wonder whether their efforts to build up their professional reputation online are merely futile attempts to advance their careers or might actually help them to catch the attention of corporate recruiters.

Furthermore, preexisting research is silent on the application of this topic to the advertising and public relations industry. Such an observation is surprising, given that this industry in particular relies heavily on social and online media for a significant portion of its everyday functions. Because no comprehensive research on this topic has been documented, the ubiquitous articles that offer jobseekers advice on using social networking websites to land their dream jobs are nothing more than well-formed hunches. The forthcoming research sets a firm foundation for an understanding of how social networking websites are used in the hiring decisions of managers at major advertising and public relations firms.

Employee Recruitment Techniques

As social and online technologies advance, they continue to change the recruitment landscape for jobseekers and professional hiring managers alike. Cober, Brown, Blumenthal, Doverspike, and Levy (2000) predicted that online recruitment efforts will continue to replace traditional methods such as job fairs, newspaper ads, word of mouth, and campus recruiting. The practice of online recruitment is on the rise, and an employer questionnaire distributed in the United Kingdom (Verhoeven & Williams, 2008) identified both advantages and disadvantages of this trend, as follows. Online recruitment allows for quick turn-around time, an increased number of qualified applicants, and an easier hiring process overall. On the other hand, the number of unqualified applicants also increases. Additionally, the online pool's wider geographical range results in practical and financial difficulties, as the pursuit of candidates who live farther away involves travel expenses and potential complications related to relocation. The same study found that, while online recruitment tactics have not consistently cut costs or retrieved quality employees, they are more effective for certain job types and levels.

Two main tools used for online hiring are corporate recruitment websites and social networking websites. Corporate recruitment websites typically connect directly to the company's main website and provide details about open positions and the application process. In contrast, social networking websites generally function as either personal networks (such as Facebook and Twitter) or professional networks aiming to connect applicants with potential employers (such as LinkedIn or Jobvite). A survey of 73 leading

employers (Cober & Brown, 2006) revealed that the most prominent source of new hires in that year was organizational websites (21%), while social networking websites was the least prominent (5%). However, employers received more value in the recruiting process from their budgetary investments in social networking websites than in corporate employment websites.

Organizational recruitment websites, according to Cober et al. (2000), are inexpensive, time-efficient, and customizable. Applications and resumes can be easily analyzed, allowing for quicker and more meaningful information exchange. Social networking websites possess these same benefits for online recruiters, with the possible exception of corporate customizability. In a survey issued by the ManpowerGroup (Employer perspectives, 2010), employers in 35 countries and territories were asked the following question: “In what two areas do you believe external social networks can provide the biggest boost to your organization in the future?” (p. 6). Fifteen percent of employers selected “recruiting new talent” (p. 6) in response to this question. Twenty-one percent of employers in North and South America selected this answer, which was a higher rate than in the other regions.

Types of Applicants Reached by Social Recruiting

In 2009, a nationwide survey (Rainie, 2010) found that 74% of American adults used the Internet. While the study did not detail the types of websites accessed by these adults, demographics showed that 93% of the users were between the ages of 18 and 29, and that use was positively correlated to both household income and educational achievement. These findings hold implications for the types of potential employees that

online recruiters can access as they seek to fill open positions within their organizations. According to another study (Young & Foot, 2006), a jobseeker's opinion of corporate recruitment websites in general influences his response to online recruitment methods. The design and content of these recruiting websites were found to be significant in jobseekers' decisions to apply for certain positions, and it is reasonable to conclude that the design and content of social networking websites, as well as the pages or profiles hosted by them, have similar effects.

A common assumption is that business-oriented social networking websites, such as LinkedIn, are frequented mostly by the desirable demographic of passive jobseekers. Dekay (2009), who claimed this assumption is not valid, defined the passive jobseeker as one who is currently employed and not looking for a career change, but who would be a valuable gain to an organization able to lure him away from his current position. LinkedIn was instead found to consist primarily active jobseekers, which are defined as those who are currently employed but seeking new career ventures.

Applicant attraction and person-organization (P-O) fit also help to determine the type of applicants who can be effectively reached through social recruitment methods. Through these new technologies, applicants can now provide information about their values and preferences, and potential employers can provide feedback regarding P-O fit before formal hiring techniques (e.g. interviewing) commence. A study (Dineen, Noe, and Ash, 2002) found that feedback about applicants' potential fit with the organization enhanced their attraction. As could be expected, however, this study also found that

individuals weigh such feedback against their own impressions rather than accepting it blindly.

Applicant Screening and Legal Implications

A questionnaire written and disseminated by Verhoeven and Williams (2008) found that employers believe that social recruitment makes discrimination a more probable issue in the hiring process. Research commissioned by Microsoft (Online reputation, 2010) found that many companies consider online screening a formal part of their hiring process, that 70% of U.S. recruiters surveyed have rejected applicants due to online content they found, that recruiters worldwide believe the use of online screening will grow, and that consumers have mixed opinions regarding the appropriateness of recruiters' online screening tactics and the significance their online reputations play in hiring decisions.

According to McCreary (2010), the availability of online information puts employers in a difficult situation. For instance, what does a recruiter do with information about a candidate that cannot legally be used to make a hiring decision? Perhaps the most well-known and relevant law stems from Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Under Title VII, employers are prohibited from discrimination based on religion, sex, nationality or race (Solis, 2010). Every function of human resources is held accountable to Title VII, and the hiring process is no exception. Much of this protected information that cannot be asked on a job application or at an interview (e.g. race, sex, or nationality) can be easily discerned from content an applicant posts on a social media website, including that individual's profile picture.

To avoid legal problems, employers must keep adequate records and be mindful of particular electronic communication laws, many of which vary depending on one's industry or geographic location. Ideally, companies should have solid selection processes with imbedded screening in place to minimize the need for social media use within those procedures. However, the role of strictly professional networking websites, like LinkedIn, is uncertain in this context. While no law explicitly states that a hiring manager may not view an applicant's online profile, the gray area emerges when the information gleaned from such a profile is factored into a particular hiring decision. Applicants, too, should keep in mind that their profiles can communicate information at a glance that cannot be a legal part of an employer's hiring decision, yet cannot be forgotten. When a hiring manager sees a profile photo, for instance, it may be very difficult to disassociate that image from the applicant's name. Regulations for employment decisions exist, but the use of social media in recruiting and applicant screening functions makes such regulations challenging to define and even more difficult to enforce.

Method

Participants

Twenty-five major advertising and public relations firms were selected as a sample of the entire population of such companies. The criteria for selection included a minimum annual revenue and international status, which envelops both the existence of corporate offices in countries other than the United States and the implementation of business transactions and services in foreign areas. Top managers at these firms served as

the research participants. In particular, managers involved directly in hiring decisions were the ones contacted and selected for participation.

Of the twenty-five firms contacted for participation, representatives from ten participated in the research study. As such, the survey garnered a 40% response rate. The firms contacted but not secured for participation were 5W Public Relations, Campbell Ewald, Cohn & Wolfe, DDB, Fleishman-Hillard, GolinHarris, Grey Group, H+K Strategies, Ketchum, Ogilvy and Mather, Publicis Worldwide, Schwartz Communications, Wieden & Kennedy, and Young and Rubicam. Those who did participate are identified in Table 1.

Table 1 <i>Participant names, job titles, and firms of employment</i>		
Firm Name	Respondent's Name	Respondent's Job Title
APCO Worldwide	Jessica Lee	VP, Talent Acquisition
BBDO Worldwide	Debbie Lindner	EVP, Chief People Officer
Burson-Marsteller	Jenifer Sarver	Director
DraftFCB	Stephanie Warne	Recruiting Manager
Edelman	Alyssa Boule	VP, Recruitment
	Elizabeth Nguyen	Human Resources Assistant
Peppercom	Sara Whitman	Senior Director
Porter Novelli	Pam Maddalena	SVP, Human Resources
Ruder Finn	Mindy Gikas	SVP, HR and Recruiting
Waggener Edstrom	Jodi Moore	Talent Acquisition Manager
Weber Shandwick	Robert Baskin	President, Weber Shandwick Atlanta

Instruments

A questionnaire containing 21 questions was developed to ascertain the role of social media use in the employee-seeking strategies of each firm's top management. Seventeen questions were formatted with response choices in a Likert scale (*strongly*

disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, and strongly agree), three required numeric write-in responses, and one provided an open-ended field for a write-in response. The content of these questions will be further discussed in the following sections.

The questionnaire was divided into three major sections to explore the three aforementioned areas of research in this study. Section One, entitled “Social networking websites as employee recruitment tools,” included questions to gauge respondents’ perceptions of the usefulness of social media in talent recruitment, their personal frequency and likelihood of social recruiting, and their preferences and perceptions among Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn for social recruiting purposes. Questions in Section Two, “Types of prospects attracted through social networking recruitment,” aimed to tap into respondents’ perceptions of whether social recruiting is more effective for reaching applicants of a certain age or job experience level. Section Three, “Screening applicants,” included questions intended to determine respondents’ history of screening applicants through social media and the social networking platforms most frequently used to screen applicants. The final question was an open-ended call for a single recommendation to help a jobseeker catch the attention of a potential employer through the use of social networking websites.

Procedure

The questionnaire was formatted as a Google Docs form and implemented as a web survey. Initial phone calls and emails were made in an attempt to contact and secure hiring managers at the most internationally successful advertising and public relations firms. Beginning in December 2011, the link to the survey was disseminated to

participants via email. Participants could access the survey at any time and received at least one week to record their responses. All responses were collected, compiled, and analyzed by February 2012.

Respondents revealed their names, employers, and job titles. Each participant also signed a form of consent that responses would not be anonymous or confidential and that all information revealed would belong to the author of the survey. The benefits of participation, such as the prominent placement of participants' names and employers in the published study and the sharing of final results with those who participated, were made clear.

Results

The following discussion breaks down the sum of survey responses to questions in each of the three major areas analyzed in this study. In order to enhance the understanding of these results, key terms must be defined as they were in the original survey. For the purpose of this study, the term "social networking websites" refers collectively to LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook. A "prospect" refers to an individual that an employer would like to recruit as a team member/employee, but who has not necessarily applied for employment with that particular agency. An "applicant" refers to any individual that has applied for a position, specifically or generally, at said agency.

Social Networking Websites as Employee Recruitment Tools

The first two questions of the survey sought to determine the extent to which participants believed social networking websites have the capacity to supply high-quality prospective candidates, as well as the extent to which they believed these websites

provide truly meaningful insight about said prospects. Just over 45% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that social networking websites supply high-quality prospects. An equal number indicated neutrality on the subject, and 9% strongly disagreed with the statement. Seventy-three percent either agreed or strongly agreed that social networking websites provide meaningful insight about prospects, with 18% indicating that they neither agreed nor disagreed. Nine percent disagreed with the statement. These responses are displayed in Figure 1.

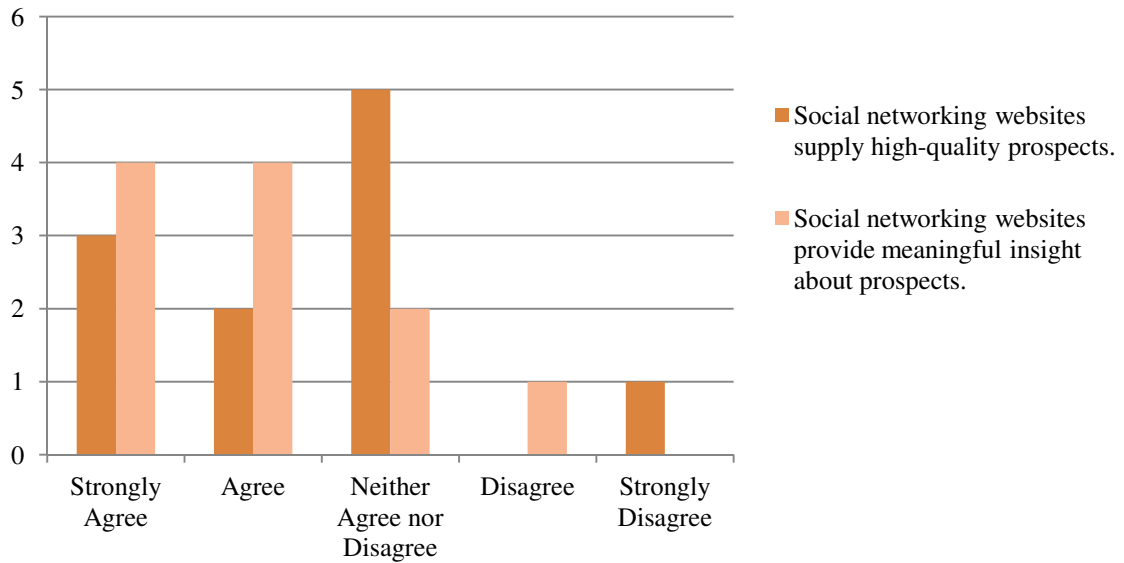


Figure 1. Usefulness of social networking websites in recruiting

The next two survey questions sought insight into participants’ past use of social networking websites in their recruitment activities and their projected likelihood of increasing their social recruiting in the months to come. The majority of respondents (72.7%) strongly agreed that they had used a social networking website within the past twelve months to recruit a prospect. Nine percent of participants each indicated that they neither agreed nor disagreed, that they disagreed, and that they disagreed strongly. Nearly

64% of respondents strongly agreed that they would be likely to increase their use of social networking websites to recruit prospects within the next twelve months. Eighteen percent agreed, and 9% each indicated that they neither agreed nor disagreed and that they strongly disagreed. These results are displayed in Figure 2.

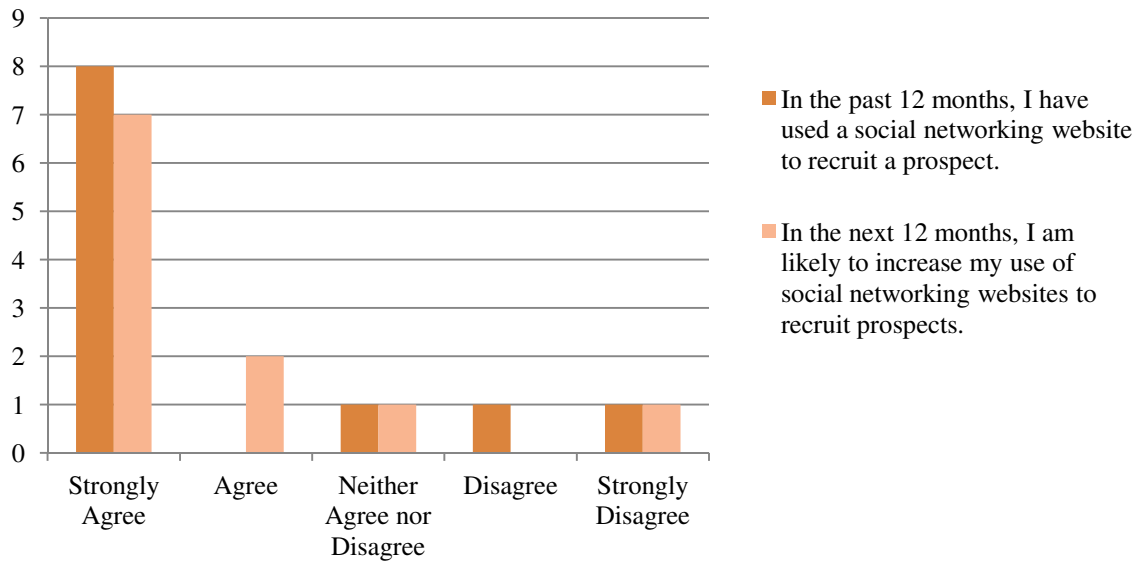


Figure 2. Past and projected future social recruiting efforts

Another key area of focus aimed to discover the roles that LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter respectively play in participants’ social recruiting efforts. Nearly 73% of respondents strongly agreed that, were they to use a social networking website in their recruiting efforts, they would choose LinkedIn. About 18% agreed, and 9% strongly disagreed. Eighteen percent of respondents agreed that Facebook would be their choice, with 9% strongly disagreeing. When it came to Twitter, 18% each agreed and strongly agreed that this would be their social recruiting tool of choice. Twenty-seven percent expressed neutrality, and 9% each disagreed and strongly disagreed. Figure 3 and Table 2 address the preference level and number of prospects recruited through each website.

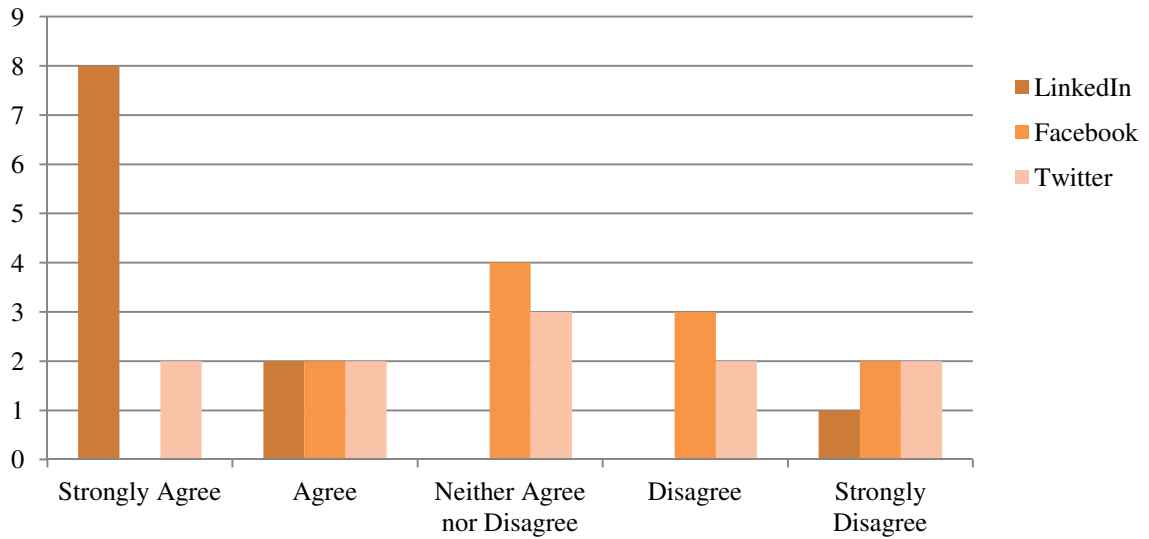


Figure 3. Preference of use in social recruiting

Question: "If I were to use a social media platform to recruit a prospect, I would use _____."

Website	Minimum Number	Maximum Number	Median	Mean
LinkedIn	2	500	30	82.77
Facebook	0	200	1	21.23
Twitter	0	200	2	21.68

Types of Prospects Attracted Through Social Networking Recruitment

The first survey question in this section sought to determine whether participants believed that social recruiting strategies are generally more effective for recruiting certain types of applicants than others. Eighteen percent each indicated that they agreed and strongly agreed that social networking websites are effective for recruiting some types of applicants, but not other types. The majority of respondents (36%) indicated that they

neither agreed nor disagreed; 9% indicated that they disagreed; and 18% indicated that they strongly disagreed. These results are displayed in Figure 4.

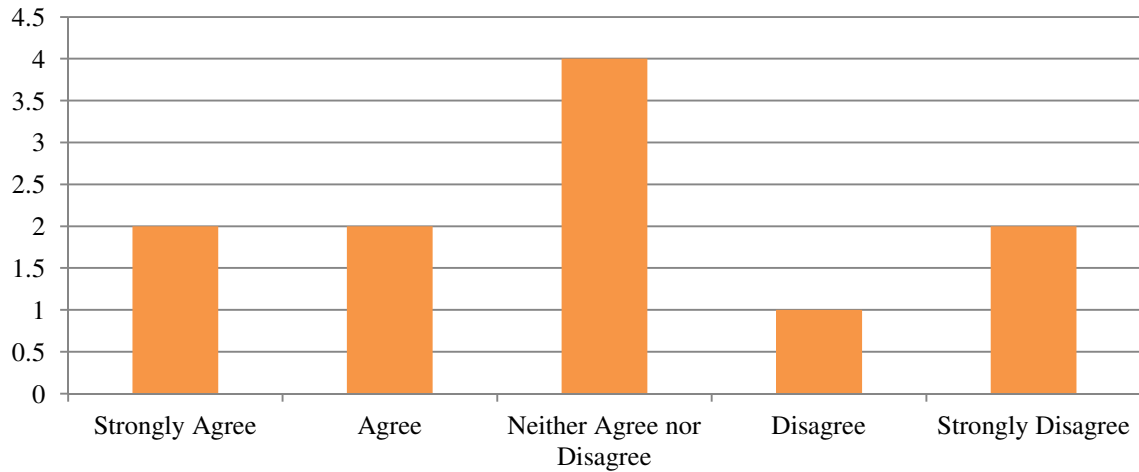


Figure 4. General perceptions of social recruiting methods' applicant-dependent usefulness

Question: "Social networking websites are effective for certain types of applicants, but not other types."

Within this area of investigation, the first determination the survey attempted to make was whether participants considered social recruiting to be more effectively used for recruiting either higher- or lower-level prospects. Twenty-seven percent each indicated that they strongly agreed, agreed, and neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement that social networking websites are effective for recruiting senior-level prospects. Eighteen percent indicated that they disagreed. Just over 36% of respondents strongly agreed that these websites are effective for recruiting junior- or entry-level prospects, while 54.5% agreed and 18% disagreed. These results are displayed in Figure 5.

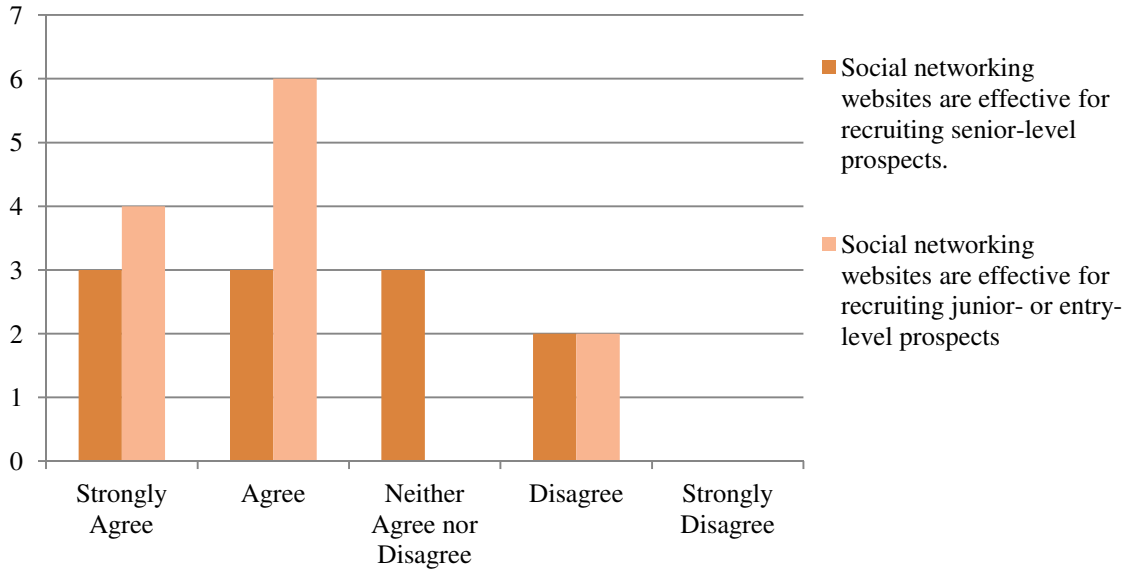


Figure 5. Job level-specific social recruiting

The other main area of study related not to prospects’ job levels, but to their ages. Thirty-six percent of respondents strongly agreed with the statement that social networking websites are effective for recruiting prospects under the age of 30, and 54.5% agreed. Nine percent disagreed. Only 18% of respondents strongly agreed that these websites are effective for recruiting prospects over the age of 30. Thirty-six percent each indicated that they agreed and neither agreed nor disagreed. Again, 9% disagreed. Figure 6 demonstrates the survey’s findings in this area.

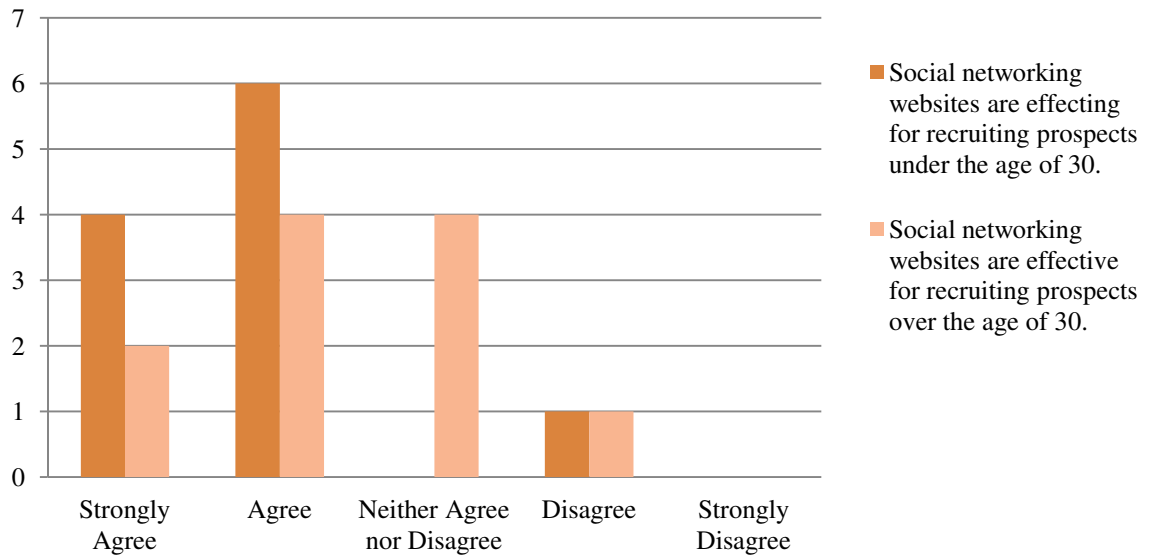


Figure 6. Age-specific social recruiting

Screening Applicants

The final section of the survey studied the extent to which participants claimed to use social networking websites to screen job applicants. Twenty-seven percent of respondents indicated that they strongly agreed that they had looked at a social networking website to recruit job applicants. Eighteen percent agreed, and 27% indicated that they neither agreed nor disagreed. Nine percent disagreed, and 18% strongly disagreed. When asked about their use of specific social networking websites in their recruitment efforts, 81.1% strongly agreed that they had used LinkedIn to do so. Eighteen percent each agreed and indicated that they neither agreed nor disagreed. For Facebook, 36% strongly agreed; 27% agreed; and 18% each indicated that they neither agreed nor disagreed, and disagreed. When it came to Twitter, 36% strongly agreed; 18% agreed; 27% neither agreed nor disagreed; and 9% each disagreed and strongly disagreed. Figures

7 and 8 display the results of participants' general and website-specific social screening behaviors.

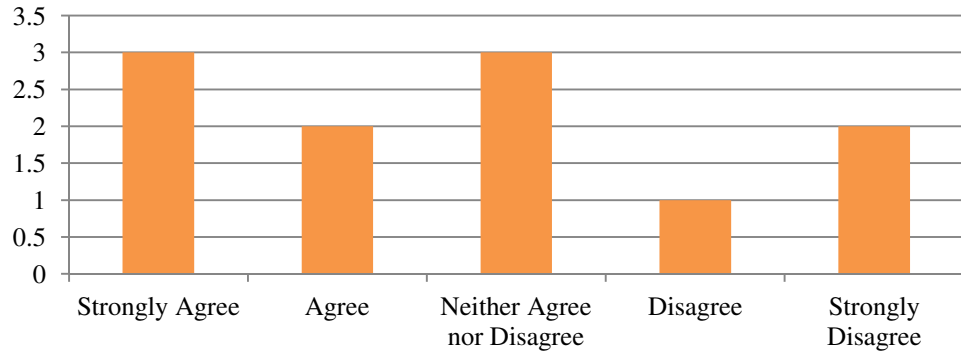


Figure 7. General use of social networking websites in applicant screening

Question: "I have looked at a social networking website to recruit job applicants."

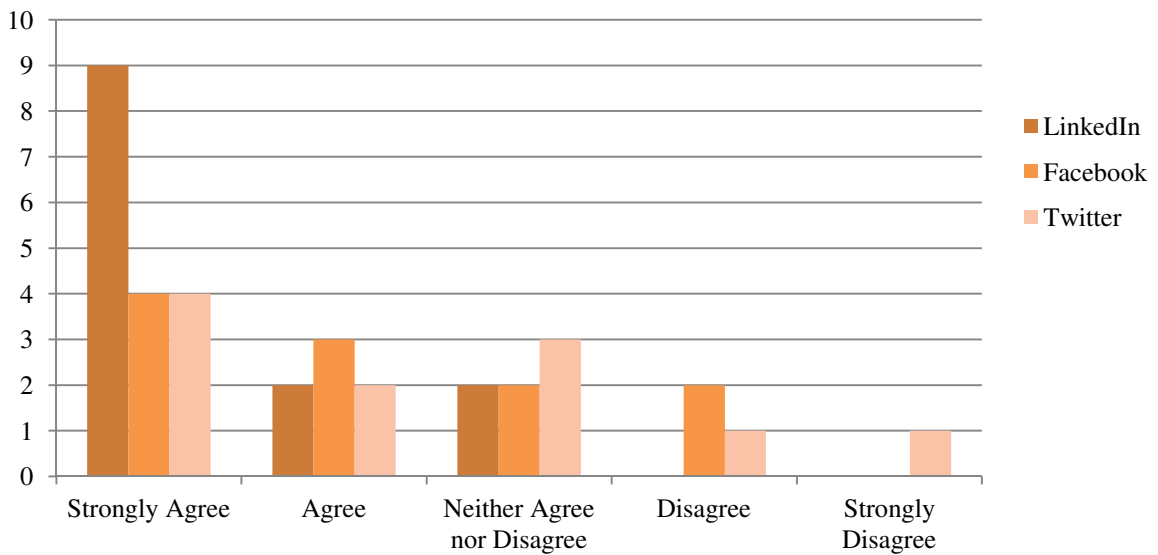
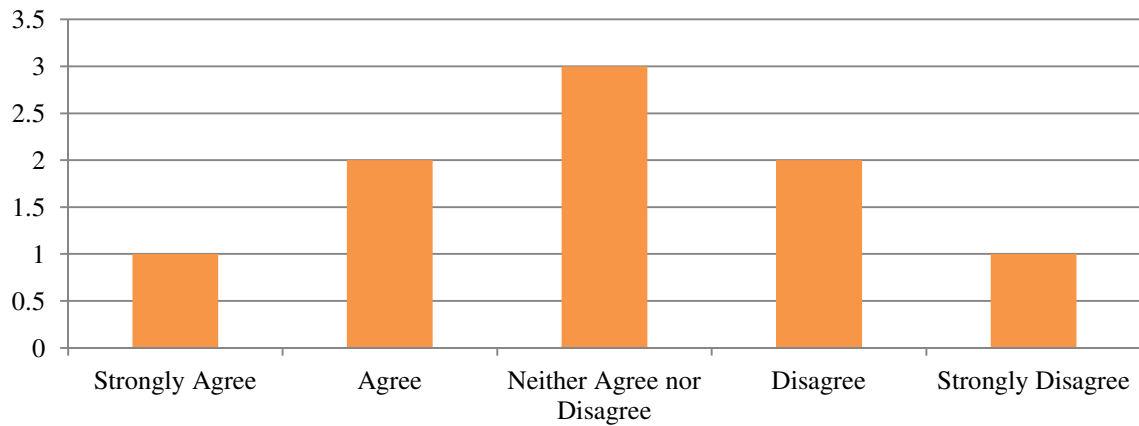


Figure 8. Specific use of social networking websites in applicant screening

Question: "I have looked at an applicant's _____ page before making a hiring decision."

In the final closed-ended question on the survey, participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with the following statement: "If an applicant is rejected based

on information found on a social networking website about that individual, said applicant should be informed of that content’s contribution to his or her rejection.” Nine percent strongly agreed; 18% agreed; 27% indicated that they neither agreed nor disagreed; 18% disagreed; and, completing the even spread, 9% strongly disagreed. These results are shown in Figure 9.



*Figure 9. Rejected applicant's right to know
 Respondents who skipped this question: 2*

The final question offered the opportunity for open-ended responses to the following question: “In your opinion, what single recommendation would help a prospect catch the attention of a potential employer through the use of social networking websites?” Table 3 highlights several insightful responses to this question.

Table 3 <i>Recommendations for jobseekers utilizing social networking websites</i>		
Recommendation	Respondent	Firm
“Include professional, thoughtful content that demonstrates great writing plus shows an interest in issues or an industry.”	Jessica Lee	APCO Worldwide
“Demonstrate an understanding of how to use social media for business purposes.”	Jenifer Sarver	Burson-Marsteller
“Participate in the content of you network and site. Tweet, keep your LinkedIn profile up to date, blog, create a fan base and following, stand out amongst your peers.”	Stephanie Warne	DraftFCB
“Build up your profile on LinkedIn to attract recruiters.”	Elizabeth Nguyen	Edelman
“Ensure key words on your profile are those that a potential employer might use to find someone like you.”	Mindy Gikas	Ruder Finn
“The number one thing is to make sure you are representing what you are passionate about and your brand. If you tell me your passion is around X, but you are not even talking about X on social networking sites, how will that potential employer know your passions and interests?”	Jodi Moore	Waggener Edstrom

Discussion

According to survey results, participants believed to a reasonable degree that the content available on social networking websites provided meaningful insight about prospects. However, 27% of respondents either disagreed with this statement or indicated a neutral perception. While any number of factors may serve as potential reasons for these negative responses, several widely acknowledged possibilities include the self-manipulability of online personas and the inconsistency of content across social networking profiles. Without any sort of qualitative follow-up to the responses offered by these participants, no certain or concrete conclusions can be drawn about why these

responses were given. As a whole, though, it is clear that hiring managers agree that social networking websites have value as a recruitment tool, in that they do provide a measure of pertinent information about candidates.

In relation to their perceptions of social networking websites' capacity for providing meaningful insight about prospects, survey respondents were slightly less convinced that these websites provided high-quality prospects for a given position. As mentioned in the literature review, online recruitment in general tends to generate a much higher volume of applicants to any given position; and with this increase of applicants increases both the number of unqualified and qualified job candidates. Forty-five percent of survey respondents indicated neutrality about their perceptions of whether social networking websites provide high-quality prospects. While the other 55% fell more on the side of agreement than disagreement, the data is not clear enough to determine a definite trend in either direction. An interesting addition to this aspect of the study would be to predetermine the qualifications employers considered to indicate a high-quality prospect in a given job position, and to determine the percentage of candidates recruited through social networking websites that displayed these qualifications. Thus, an exact conclusion could be drawn regarding the capacity of social recruiting to provide high-quality prospects.

Keeping in step with current trends, the majority of respondents revealed that they had used social networking websites for recruitment purposes in the past 12 months and were likely to increase their social recruiting efforts in the next 12 months. This finding alone holds tremendous implications for those on the other side of the social recruiting

phenomenon, i.e. jobseekers who are utilizing social networking websites in their quest for employment. Seventy-two percent of the hiring managers surveyed strongly agreed with the statement that they had participated in social recruiting within the past 12 months, and 63% indicated that they would *increase* their use of social recruiting methods within the following 12 months. Not only do these results demonstrate the robustness of social recruiting practices at this point in time, but they predict an increasingly prominent role of social networking websites in future talent acquisition efforts.

Of the three social networking websites offered as options in the survey, LinkedIn was clearly the website of choice for social recruiters. Twitter followed at a distance, with Facebook close behind it. LinkedIn's leadership is not surprising, as it is a professional networking website by design, whereas Twitter and Facebook were intended first to be used socially and later adopted for use in marketing and other professional functions. Twitter's one-on-one style and direct messaging option allow for targeted social recruiting efforts. While Facebook allows for just as much interactivity, the distinction between an individual user's personal content and professional life is often ill-defined. Likewise, because social media in general is so new and emerging, rules of the game have not been firmly established. While one user may optimize his Facebook with resume-like information in an attempt to catch the attention of corporate recruiters, another user may prefer to use his Facebook strictly to share photos of his family and friends and would feel a targeted approach from a recruiter was nothing short of an

obstruction of his personal space and freedom. For these and other reasons, the effectiveness of Facebook as a social recruiting tool has yet to be decided.

Responses for the number of prospects recruited annually through each website (LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter) were across the board. For instance, one respondent claimed to recruit an average of two prospects through LinkedIn each year, while another respondent's estimate was 500. The inconsistency of responses to this survey question speaks to the growing and dynamic nature of the social recruiting practice. Again, a follow-up qualitative analysis of participants' responses would provide a wealth of relevant insight into the variation among these numbers. Another area of study would be to discern if recruiters use different strategies in their efforts to recruit prospects through LinkedIn, Facebook, or Twitter or if different reasoning goes into their choices to use one social networking website instead of another.

No real pattern was established in respondents' general perceptions of whether social recruiting was more effective for targeting certain types of prospects than others. The majority of survey participants neither agreed nor disagreed, and there was a relatively even spread between the responses of *strongly agree* and *strongly disagree*. When this issue was broken down more specifically, it was revealed that respondents considered social recruiting to be more effective for reaching entry- or junior-level prospects than senior-level prospects. However, the results did not show that social recruiting was altogether ineffective for recruiting senior-level prospects. On the contrary, 55% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that social networking

websites are effective for recruiting senior-level prospects, and 27% indicated that they were neutral on the subject.

Correspondingly, results showed that participants also considered social recruiting to be more effective for reaching prospects under the age of 30 than those over the age of 30. There was a greater separation between the “strongly agree” option for these two choices than between the aforementioned job level variables, indicating that the surveyed hiring managers as a whole feel that age is a slightly stronger variable in the effectiveness of social recruiting than is job level. While it is not entirely surprising that respondents deem social networking websites an appropriate outlet to reach younger adults, the number of older adults active on social media continues to increase, according to Madden (2010). If this trend continues, perceptions of the social recruiting practice’s relevance to prospects over the age of 30 may continue to rise in the future as well.

Again, no clear trend was distilled from participants’ responses regarding whether they had or had not screened an applicant (i.e. checked said applicant’s social media presence, usually for any content that would change an employer’s mind or provide a final flash of insight into the character or lifestyle of the candidate, before making a formal hiring decision) using social networking websites. Thirty percent of respondents offered a neutral response regarding their history of social screening, with a relatively even spread across the categories of agreement and disagreement (although a slightly higher number conceded that they had screened applicants using social networking websites than indicated that they had not). With the ubiquity of profiles on LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook, as well as the extent to which social screening is discussed in the

literary works of human resources professionals and corporate headhunters, it was a bit surprising that this finding lacked a clear indication that social screening is a universal practice. Whether this is due to legal restrictions on hiring practices is yet to be determined.

When respondents did use social networking websites for screening applicants, however, LinkedIn was again the most frequently used, followed this time by Facebook and then Twitter. While LinkedIn's professional nature contributes to this finding, some have speculated that Facebook or Twitter may be more reliable in their portrayals of a candidate's true character. The idea behind this claim is that an individual can essentially list their resume on LinkedIn and put their best professional foot forward, while keeping his personal life quite separate and using Facebook to share that side of him. Again, questions arise as to the appropriateness of hiring managers viewing content that would be off limits in a traditional interview setting. However, the current study's findings do not support this idea. Rather, they dispel the notion that hiring managers are more interested in the private social lives of candidates, which are represented by Facebook, than they are in the professional achievements and qualifications of those they want to recruit to their firms.

Interestingly, the data revealed scattered responses to the question of whether an applicant rejected on the basis of content revealed on his or her social networking profile should be informed of said content's role in the rejection decision. As discussed in this study's preliminary literature review, this issue speaks to an ethical gray area in which no industry standards have been widely adopted. Likewise, participants' responses to this

topic failed to form a cohesive pattern or indicate a uniform consensus, one way or the other. While this survey asked participants whether they have looked at an applicant's presence on social networking websites, it could have delved deeper into the types of information sought, the perceptions formed and the roles such information plays in the ultimate hiring decisions that are made. As such, this survey question alone could serve as the foundation for a fascinating future study.

Finally, responses to the open-ended call for recommendations to social networking savvy jobseekers, the most compelling of which are outlined in Table 3, revealed the participants' underlying belief that these websites do offer legitimate and substantial opportunities for securing employment. The hiring managers' structured suggestions stemmed from their own perspectives of having used social networking websites to secure strong prospective team members for their own firms. While the predominant closed-ended questions in the survey helped to establish some loose patterns, this final qualitative question arguably provided the greatest depth of insight into how hiring managers use social recruiting techniques and, clearly, how prospects can best take advantage of social networking websites to increase their chances of securing quality employment at these major firms.

This survey provided a solid framework for a continuing investigation of the role social networking websites play in the hiring decisions of managers at these major advertising and public relations firms. Several additional questions and a more personalized, quantitative approach could certainly uncover further principles of social recruiting practice, as will be discussed in the forthcoming directions for continuation of

this research. Yet taken as a whole, the data garnered through the dissemination of this survey reinforced the fact that recruiters at advertising and public relations firms are indeed using these emerging media as tools to identify new talent and entice legitimate candidates to join their respective firms.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The main limitation of the current study is seen in the size of its research sample. While twenty-five firms were actively pursued for participation, only representatives from ten firms were secured as participants. While this 40% rate is significant, a much larger sample would be likely to provide more accurate and generalized results. This initial study, however, lays the groundwork to be built upon by a future study with a much larger number of participants.

An additional limitation of the study is related to the survey used as a foundation for the discussion of research findings. The survey was pre-tested by five people who were not in the target market of respondents. For further accuracy, this instrument could have been copy tested more extensively among hiring managers at advertising and public relations firms to ensure that the wording of questions and response choices was perceived as intended. However, certain measures were taken to improve respondents' understanding of the survey. Before questions were presented, key terms were defined and an explanation of the Likert scale used for the majority of the survey questions was provided.

As social recruiting rapidly becomes a more popular trend and the advertising and public relations industry continues to grow and prosper despite macroeconomic

challenges, rich opportunities exist to build on this study and conduct more targeted research on the use of social networking websites in the hiring decisions of prominent firms. One suggestion is to develop a study that compares these research findings with the perceptions of job applicants. Such a study would seek to determine whether applicants' use of social networking in the job search, as well as their perceptions about how their social networking activity affects their chances of employment, match up with the data provided in this study about how managers at major firms actually use social networking websites in their hiring decisions.

A second identified opportunity is to compare these observations about social recruiting against other online recruitment methods, such as corporate recruitment websites and online job boards. While survey participants were asked about their overall impressions of social networking websites in the process of talent recruitment, they were not asked specifically about their perceptions of the usefulness of social networking websites in relation to these other online recruitment techniques. As more professional activity moves to the online sphere, it will become increasingly important to separate the virtues and pitfalls of one online recruiting method from those of another.

Other potential opportunities for future research include conducting in-depth interviews with survey respondents to probe deeper into their responses. While closed-ended questions allow for quick survey taking and analysis, a more thorough and qualitative investigation could provide a wealth of insight into the social recruiting trend. Future research could also determine whether trends are adopted on a grand scale

throughout the industry or are more likely to be dependent on an individual recruiter's preferences.

In addition, the survey used in this study could easily be adapted to address industries other than that of advertising and public relations. A main merit of this topic is that it is incredibly timely and relevant to both employers and jobseekers in nearly any line of work. If current trends continue, the professional community will see a widespread adoption of the practice of social recruiting, and any forthcoming research that contributes to this practice will be invaluable to the future of the working world.

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