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Social Media and Employment – Students' vs. Employers' Perspective

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Abstract

Recently, social media has become an integral part of different business activities. One of these activities is the recruitment and selection of employees. The paper presents the results of empirical research conducted among the students of the University of Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BH) and BH employers related to the use of social media in the process of recruitment and selection of new employees. The aim of the research is to find if there are similarities or/and differences in standpoints of students and employers concerning the use of social media in job finding and recruitment. The results show that most students and employers recognized social media as a valuable tool in the process of job finding, i.e., recruiting. However, both students and employers expressed reserve about data accuracy on social media. Students were resolute that their activities on social media should not affect their employment, while employers saw social media only as an additional tool in human resource management.

Keywords: social media, job-finding, recruitment, students, employers

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Introduction

Quality employees are key to the success of any organization. If employers want to find such employees, they need to create interest and desire for work in their organization for potential candidates to motivate them to apply for a job. After that, they have to acquire a sufficient amount of relevant information about the potential candidates for offered positions that will be the basis for deciding to hire the best-qualified candidates for offered jobs. The selection of candidates, as a function of human resource management, is especially important because all future activities and the overall success of the organization depend on the people that have been selected to fulfill certain positions. The importance of these selection decisions can be seen in the fact that they significantly impact future gains and losses of the organization.

Furthermore, a poor choice of employees is not seen only in their poor performance. Still, it also affects other employees as their behavior can often be disruptive, frustrating, demotivating, and similar. These are all reasons why successful companies invest more money, time, and professional knowledge in the organization of a quality recruitment and selection process. Apart from determining job requirements and the necessary characteristics and qualifications of a candidate, in the organization of a recruitment and selection process, it is needed to define the appropriate methods and techniques, that is, sources of information about the candidates, to see if the candidates possess, and to what degree, necessary qualifications for the job.

Since social networks have become an almost integral part of the everyday life of both individuals and organizations, it is understandable that they have an increasingly important role in the process of recruiting and selecting employees. Their usage contributes to time-saving related to search, exchange, and use of information, and they help in saving resources necessary for connecting, developing, and maintaining desirable contacts.

More than 2.8 billion people worldwide use social networks. More than 73% of people aged 18 to 34 have found their job through social networks (Hudson, 2019). From the fact that more employers use social networks before the interview to "familiarize" themselves with the candidate, it is clear that social networks have become necessary media in the recruitment process.

Social networks, as one of Web 2.0 technologies, allow individuals to implement a wide number of different online activities ranging from creating and personalizing their web page, through connecting, communicating, and collaborating with users that share similar interests, to sharing a variety of content with other users (Orehovački, 2013).

Social networks are usually classified into three primary groups. The first group consists of general social networks, where most famous are Facebook and Google+. The principal motifs in using these networks are related to the expression of personal identity, to the dissemination of content, and various forms of interaction with the user's contacts (Pempek et al., 2009). The second group consists of social networks such as LinkedIn and ResearchGate that are intended to connect scientists and experts, to exchange knowledge and experiences, to make personal portfolios, and to disseminate project results (Orehovački, 2013). The last group consists of social networks such as Ning and SocialGo that are used to develop isolated and specialized interest communities.

The usage of social networks in the recruitment process has many advantages, but it is not without its flaws. Cober et al. (2000) state that the usage of social networks in the process of recruiting new employees can cut down the recruitment

costs up to 95%, and they state that the length of the recruitment process can be shortened by 25%. According to the research conducted by CareerBuilder.com, almost half of American managers say that they use social networks to search for new job candidates (Kluemper et al., 2016). Social networks are commonly used during the hiring process of new employees in the IT industry and professional and business services, while most widely searched profiles were on Facebook, LinkedIn and MySpace. According to the Jobvite research, done in 2018, LinkedIn was the first choice among social networks for acquiring new employees (77%), while Facebook was the second one (63%). Compared to the year before, LinkedIn recorded a decline of as much as 15%, while Instagram has become more popular (25%) as a source for finding employees, especially among younger employers.

As stated by Fallaw and Kantrowitz (Jovandić, 2014) employers, on social networks, most often search for data about a previous job (55%), education (50%), recommendations (41%), and other data about the candidate– such as hobbies and interests (33%), photographs (28%), memberships (24%), comments and other content that the candidate posts (18%).

It is interesting to note that one-third of employers (Kluemper et al., 2016) states that they have declined candidates after looking into their profiles on social networks. As reasons for such rejection, the employers have listed the following: provocative or inappropriate photos or information, content revolving around the consumption of alcohol and drugs, bad experiences with previous employers, poor communication skills, false qualifications, and sharing sensitive information about the former employer. However, one-fifth of the employers have stated that they have hired specific candidates because of the information provided on their profiles on social networks. The reasons for this were: a well-organized profile, the information on the profile that confirms the candidate's qualifications, good communication skills, and positive recommendations (Kluemper et al., 2016).

As far as reliability is concerned, almost half of the managers (Davison et al., 2012) believe that the data available on social networks is not reliable. Still, it can discover unique information about the specific candidate. This caution is both logical and understandable, but it is also clear that particular abilities, personality traits, and competencies can be read from the content that the candidate posts, shares, comments, and likes on social networks.

Besides, it is also important to mention that the profile on social networks does not necessarily reveal the true image of the individual and that some people, who are more concerned about their privacy, will not post enough information about themselves on the Internet, especially on social networks. Therefore, it is not surprising that only 11% of human resource managers (Fallaw & Kantrowitz, 2013) have stated that the information on social networks is crucial to the hiring of a candidate, and 12% have confirmed full trust in the quality of the information that they find there.

In order to make social networks a more useful tool in business, it is essential to take necessary precautions to protect sensitive data and information about the employees and the business in order to lower the risk of their misuse. Besides that, it is needed to take into account that the usage of social networks in the workplace should be focused on the achievement of concrete and useful tasks that will contribute to the increase of work efficiency and will not lead to activities that will distract the employees in their work.

In any case, in the context of recruitment, the appearance of social networks has allowed employers quicker and easier access to certain information about potential candidates. In contrast, potential candidates get access to broader possibilities in terms of contacting their employers and finding an appropriate job.

This paper aims to explore the similarities and differences in the attitudes of students and employers in Bosnia and Herzegovina regarding the possibilities and needs of using social networks in the recruitment process.

Through this research, authors try to find answers on questions to what extent are social networks perceived as a tool that can make recruitment and selection process easier, faster and cheaper; as well as to what extent are social network seen as a reliable source of information process of decision making concerning the employment of new employees.

Methodology

Instrument

The authors, based on similar research available in the literature, have prepared the questionnaire used in this research. Two questionnaires were created, one for the students and the other for the employers. Both questionnaires consist of three parts.

Student questionnaire

The first part of this questionnaire contained questions about gender, age, study cycle, and year of study. The second part of the questionnaire was focused on students' habits in using social networks - whether or not the students use social networks actively, how often they use social networks, and what were the main reasons for using them. The third part of the questionnaire contained a set of 20 statements focused on the student's attitudes about social networks concerning the recruitment and selection process, more specifically about the use of social networks in finding and selecting new employees.

Employer questionnaire

The first part of this questionnaire contained questions about the characteristics of the company from which the respondents came from, such as a period of foundation, number of employees, a form of ownership, ownership structure, business activity, and information whether there is a human resources department in the company. The second part of the questionnaire contained questions about the respondent company's current practice regarding the use of social networks in the process of recruitment of new employees. The third part of the questionnaire comprised a set of 12 statements regarding employers' attitudes towards the usage of social networks in the process of recruitment of new employees.

Likert scale with grades from 1 (never/totally disagree) to 5 (always/strongly agree) is used in the assessment of all statements. It took 5-7 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

Conducting the research

The research was conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) during 2018 and 2019. Companies from all over BiH and students from the University of Mostar participated. An online survey was conducted. The questionnaire was made by using Google forms, and the link to the questionnaire was mailed to the students and companies/employers. The answers were stored in Microsoft Excel 2007 format.

Sample

Student sample

The mail with a link to the questionnaire was sent to 1000 students, of which 571 responded. After the technical control of the completed questionnaires, 565 of them

were accepted for further analysis. The return rate was 57.1%, and the utilization rate of the completed questionnaires was 98.94%. The sample consisted of 215 (38.1%) male students and 350 (61.9%) female students. The median age of the students was 21 years, with an interquartile range of 3 years [20 - 23]. The youngest student was 18, while the oldest was 31 years old. Most of the students were from the first cycle (undergraduate and professional study), 81.9%, while the rest were students of the second cycle (graduate study). A fifth of the sample (more accurately, 109 respondents, or in other words, 19.3%) consisted of final year students, regardless of whether it was the last year of the first or second cycle.

Employer sample

The mail with a link to the questionnaire was sent to 300 companies (to an official e-mail published on their websites), of which 62 have answered, with the return rate of 20.66%. The message about an incorrect e-mail address was received immediately after sending it for 39 of 300 companies. In comparison, five companies/respondents sent a return mail expressing that they do not wish to participate in the research (they do not have the time for it; they are not interested in the theme of the research, etc.). The real return rate, after the companies with wrong e-mail addresses, were excluded, was 23.75%.

The characteristics of the companies in which the respondents work are the following:

- a) Foundation period: 14 (22.6%) before 1990, 27 (43.5%) 1990-2000, 21 (33.9%) after 2000,
- b) Number of employees: 12 (19.4%) less than 10 employees, 12 (19.4%) between 10 and 50 employees, 22 (35.5%) between 50 and 250 employees, 16 (25.8%) more than 250 employees,
- c) Form of ownership: 6 (9.7%) state, 53 (85.5%) private, 3 (4.8%) mixed,
- d) Ownership structure: 44 (71.0%) domestic owners, 11 (17.7%) foreign owners, 7 (11.3%) mixed ownership,
- e) Sector: 15 (24.2%) secondary, 40 (64.5%) tertiary, 7 (11.3%) quaternary,
- f) There is a human resources department in the company: 26 (41.9%) yes, 36 (58.1%) no.

Statistical analysis

The collected data were coded and stored in the SPSS database. Data was analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics, version 25 (Armonk, NY: IBM Corp.).

Categorical variables are expressed as absolute and relative frequencies (%). Numerical variables are expressed as arithmetic mean and standard deviation (M (SD)) or median and quartiles (C [Q1 - Q3]) depending on the normality of the distribution of individual variables. The Mann-Whitney U test was used to test the significance of the differences. The limit of statistical significance was set at $p = 0.05$. P values that could not be expressed up to three decimal places are expressed as $p < 0.001$.

Results

Social networks are used by 557 (98.6%) students and 51 (82.3%) of all employers. Table 1 shows the number of students and employers using specific social networks.

Table 1

Number of users (students and employers) of specific social networks

Social Network	Number (%) of students	Number (%) of employers
Twitter	29 (5.1)	10 (16.1)
Facebook	535 (94.7)	48 (77.4)
Instagram	435 (77.0)	34 (54.8)
LinkedIn	13 (2.3)	17 (27.4)
Pinterest	37 (6.5)	0
Other	26 (4.6)	1 (1.6)

Source: author's preparation

The distribution according to the numbers of used networks showed that 111 (19.6%) students and 14 (22.6%) employers used only one network, 322 (57.0%) students, and 21 (33.9%) employers used two networks. In comparison, 101 (17.8%) students and 10 (16.1%) employers used three networks.

More than 80% (440; 82.9%) of students claimed that they visit Facebook daily, while Instagram was even more used, with 397 (93.2%) students visiting it daily. Most students (477; 84.4%), on all networks, actively spends up to 5 hours, with the majority spend one to three hours on it (208; 36.8%), followed by those that spend between 3 to 5 hours on it (155; 27.4%).

On social networks, students are the most active in liking posts from fellow users (359; 65.8% do it daily). They posted their pictures a few times a month (236; 43.2%) or rarer (223; 40.8%), while their personal information (426; 80.4% does it rarely), as well as information about their education (471; 89.5% does it rarely), was posted infrequently. Sharing other posts was also done infrequently (423; 81.2%).

Acquiring data and information (362; 65.0%) and keeping contact (349; 62.7%) were the two most often given answers by students when asked about their primary usage of social networks. Less than a quarter of participated students use social networks for educational purposes (123; 22.1%), and the least represented reason for the usage of social networks was self-promotion or posting personal information and photos to promote themselves (108; 19.4%).

Half of the employers stated that they use social networks to promote open work positions, and 48.4% used social networks to acquire data and information about potential candidates. Overall satisfaction with the usage of social networks for job vacancies, employers rated with a mean grade of 3.9 (SD=0.94), and the overall satisfaction with the usage of social media for collecting data and information about potential candidates, the employers rated at 3.6 (SD=0.93).

The employers stated the following reasons why they do not use social networks in the recruitment process (Lesko Bošnjak & Mabić, 2019a):

- We use the services provided by employment agencies,
- We hire only on coworkers' recommendation,
- We are a small, family-oriented company,
- We find social media as inadequate media for advertising job vacancies,
- We receive CVs / applications of potential candidates daily,
- We work in a very specific industry,
- The company's regulations define how and where job vacancies are advertised; social networks are not provided for this,
- We used them, but we gave up because it turned out that significantly more unsatisfactory and frivolous candidates applied.

As reasons why they do not consult social networks during the selection of candidates, i.e., do not review the profiles of potential candidates, employers stated the following (Lesko Bošnjak & Mabić, 2019b):

- Social networks give a misleading image of the potential employee,
- We did not need such a method of data collection,
- Internal company rule,
- We don't consider social networks as a relevant source of information,
- We never considered such an option,
- We only hire based on recommendations.

Table 2 shows which data about candidates (potential employees), according to the opinion of employers and students, employers should look/check on social networks.

Table 2

Information about employees that employers should look on social networks

	Students		Employers		p*
	Number (%)	Rank	Number (%)	Rank	
previous job data	316 (55.9)	2	35 (56.5)	2	0.937
education data	388 (68.7)	1	36 (58.1)	1	0.090
recommendations	218 (38.6)	3	23 (37.1)	5.5	0.819
data on hobbies, interests	207 (36.6)	5	25 (40.3)	3.5	0.568
pictures / photos	157 (27.8)	6	21 (33.9)	7	0.313
declarations of interests and activities	213 (37.7)	4	25 (40.3)	3.5	0.686
affiliation or membership to some groups	122 (21.6)	7	18 (29.0)	8	0.182
comments and other content published by the candidate	99 (17.5)	8	23 (37.1)	5.5	<0.001
comments and other content posted by the candidate's friends	22 (3.9)	9	6 (9.7)	9	0.036

Abbreviations: *Chi-Square test

Source: author's preparation

The students' questionnaire contained 20 statements, and the employers' questionnaire contained 12 statements for research of attitudes about the usage of social networks in the process of employment (recruitment and selection) of new employees. In this paper, the statements contained in both questionnaires were analyzed. These statements are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Statements about the usage of social networks in the recruitment process

Code	Claim
i1	Employers should use social media during the process of recruitment and selection of employees.
i2	Social networks allow employers to quickly gather the necessary data and information about potential job candidates
i3	Social network profiles do not give a real image of a potential candidate.
i4	The information accessible on social networks should not be crucial during the process of selection of employees

i5	Social networks allow employers to easily gather the necessary data and information about potential job candidates.
i6	Social networks allow employers to cheaply gather the necessary data and information about potential job candidates
i7	Social networks can be a starting point to get an impression about the future employee.
i8	Employers need to promote their job ads on social media
i9	Social networks can facilitate the merging of supply and demand in the labor market (employers and jobseekers).
i10	Information on social networks can help select new employees.
i11	Activity on social networks (published pictures, posts, shares, likes) should affect the hiring of a new employee.
i12	Activity on social networks (published pictures, posts, shares, likes) should affect the career of employees.

Source: author's preparation

Table 4 contains descriptive statistics for the researched statements (Table 3) according to the responses of students and employers, and the results of testing the significance of differences in their attitudes.

Table 4

Descriptive statistics for researched statements

Claim code	Students		Employers		p*
	M (SD)	C [Q1 - Q3]	M (SD)	C [Q1 - Q3]	
i1	2.71 (1.26)	3 [2 - 3]	3.68 (1.16)	4 [3 - 5]	<0.001
i2	3.03 (1.27)	3 [2 - 4]	3.48 (1.05)	3 [3 - 4]	0.010
i3	3.67 (1.25)	4 [3 - 5]	3.63 (0.98)	3 [3 - 5]	0.465
i4	3.80 (1.35)	4 [3 - 5]	3.97 (1.13)	4 [3 - 5]	0.596
i5	2.97 (1.15)	3 [2 - 4]	3.34 (0.99)	3 [3 - 4]	0.018
i6	3.08 (1.21)	3 [2 - 4]	3.65 (0.99)	4 [3 - 4]	0.001
i7	2.95 (1.20)	3 [2 - 4]	3.63 (1.06)	4 [3 - 4]	<0.001
i8	3.46 (1.21)	4 [3 - 4]	3.71 (1.17)	4 [3 - 5]	0.121
i9	3.44 (1.17)	3 [3 - 4]	3.87 (0.98)	4 [3 - 5]	0.006
i10	2.95 (1.17)	3 [2 - 4]	3.60 (1.08)	4 [3 - 4]	<0.001
i11	2.26 (1.18)	2 [1 - 3]	2.55 (1.20)	2 [2 - 3]	0.058
i12	2.13 (1.15)	2 [1 - 3]	2.21 (1.07)	2 [1 - 3]	0.464

Abbreviations: M (SD) – mean (standard deviation); C [Q1 - Q3] – median (first quartile – third quartile); *Mann-Whitney U test

Source: author's preparation

Discussion

The results of the research show that most of the participants, both students, and employers, use social media regularly. Those results are expected, as well as the fact that Facebook and Instagram are the most often used social networks. Also, most of the participants use two social networks at the same time. In both samples, some participants do not use social media. Still, it can be concluded that the use of social networks in private and professional life is significant.

The students' answers confirmed expected: they use social networks daily; most frequently, they are liking/disliking posts from fellow users while acquiring data and information, and keeping contact are the main reasons why they use social networks.

The employers' answers showed that employers in Bosnia and Herzegovina had recognized social networks as a tool that can help them in the process of recruiting the employees. However, they still do not use it in full potential. Only part of the employers uses social networks for publishing available job positions and for finding information about potential employees. The employers' average grades related to their previous experience in using social networks are below four, and they vary. These grades show that there is room for improvement, both in the intensity of the use of social networks and in the users' experience.

Both groups of participants (employers and students) have a relatively similar opinion concerning data that employers should acquire at the profiles of the potential job candidates - data about education and previous employment (more than half of the participants in both samples agree with that). Among other information about employees that employers should look on social networks (Table 2), there are similarities in the opinions of students and employers, as well as the differences. Almost the same part of the participants in both samples assume that employers on social networks should look at pictures, statements, recommendations, memberships, etc. However, one should be careful in the interpretation of these results because the percentage of students and employers that agree with the offered statements is less than 40% for most of them. It shows that participants (employers and students) only partially accept the use of social networks in the recruiting process.

There is a significant difference in attitudes between students and employers concerning the statement that employers should look for comments published by potential candidates and his friends (Table 2). Namely, part of employers stated that they should look comments and other content posted by the candidate and his/her friends, while only the small number of students agree with that. One can assume that students are afraid of hasty conclusions that potential employers could draw about them, based on their, or the comments of their friends. Namely, it is questionable to what extent is true what someone posts about themselves on social media if some comments/jokes should be taken seriously if a list of someone's friends says anything about his/her character, etc.

A glimpse at the descriptive statistics of statements suggests that students and employers have similar, not overly good, opinions about social networks in the process of recruiting. However, a detailed analysis shows some similarities, as well as differences. The results show that both students and employers have the highest and the lowest grade for the same statements. Both agree that profiles on social networks do not give the real picture of potential candidates. At the same time, there is disagreement about the statements that activities of potential candidates on social networks (posted photos, posts, sharing, likes/dislikes) should influence his/her employment. The highest disagreement concerns the need for the use of social networks in the process of recruitment. In contrast, the highest agreement is related to the importance of information about candidates available on social networks in the recruitment process.

There are significant differences in attitudes between students and employers are found for 7 out of 12 statements. The analysis of these 7 statements shows that employers are more disposed towards the use of social networks in recruiting than students (for all statements, the employers gave better grades than students). The employers more agree with the statements related to the following characteristics of social networks in the recruitment process (Table 3): a source of data about potential employees, allow employers to cheaply gather the necessary data about potential candidates, and enable employers to gather the essential data about

potential candidates easily. There is a more significant agreement of employers than students, with the statement that social networks can be a starting point in getting an impression about potential employees. However, it should be stressed that all average grades in both samples are lower than 4. It means that social networks are still a secondary source of information about potential employees. Determining the real reasons for such attitudes requires much more complex and comprehensive analysis. Nevertheless, insufficient experience in the use of social networks in the recruitment process and some level of distrust in social networks can be some of the reasons for such attitudes.

Conclusion

The findings of research imply that the employers are more inclined than students to the use of the social network in recruitment and selection of employees. However, both employers and students agree that social networks should not be crucial for decision making about employment. Still, they can facilitate the finding of a potential candidate for employers and finding the appropriate job for students.

Students, in particular, expressed a high degree of reservation towards the use of all data published on social networks (comments and other content posted by them or their friends). The reason for this attitude is probably the fear that employers might misjudge them solely based on social media activities.

Both employers and students show reservations and caution when it comes to the reliability of the information that students/potential job candidates post on social networks. They are aware that these sources should not be crucial in the decision on employee selection. Still, it is also clear that some abilities, personality traits, and competencies can be read from the content that candidates publish, follow, share, comment, or like on social media.

However, it is hard to make generalized conclusions because, as stated in the methodology of paper, the sample of students was comprised of the only student from the University of Mostar. The sample of employers included only 62 employers from all over BiH. Possibly, the results could be different if other universities from BiH, as well as more employers, are involved in the research.

One of the guidelines for further research can be the inclusion of the other universities from BiH and increasing the sample of employers. In that case, the results of the research could be analyzed from a different perspective like a specific business sector of companies, specific study program that students attend, etc.

Further research could include analysis of digital and information literacy for both students and employers.

After the implementation of suggested analysis, the general conclusion related to the use and the importance of social media in the process of employment in BiH could be possible.

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