

SOCIAL MEDIA AND EMPLOYEE RECRUITMENT: TOO MUCH PAIN FOR NOT  
MUCH GAIN?

A Thesis  
by  
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Submitted to the Graduate School  
at Appalachian State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
MASTER OF ARTS

May 2013  
Department of Psychology

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## **Abstract**

### **SOCIAL MEDIA AND EMPLOYEE RECRUITMENT: TOO MUCH PAIN FOR NOT MUCH GAIN?**

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Organizations are using their corporate websites and increasingly their corporate social media pages for recruitment purposes. Despite this increased utilization of social media for employee recruitment by organizations, the extent to which potential applicants perceive social media as a useful source of employment information and their reactions to these practices have not yet been studied. This study examined the extent to which potential applicants utilize corporate websites and social media when collecting information for employment decisions. The sample consisted of 2340 high school graduates between the ages of 16 and 24 who reported intentions to work in the next few years. The results indicate that the majority of potential applicants would prefer to use both corporate websites and corporate social media pages when looking for information about full-time or part-time employment options. However, among potential applicants who would prefer to use only one source, a strong preference toward corporate websites was observed. For full-time jobs, this preference for corporate websites was stronger for higher-quality potential applicants than for lower quality potential applicants. As two of the potential antecedents of recruitment source preference, trustworthiness and perceived factualness of the content were

also examined and higher trustworthiness and perceived factualness of the information in corporate websites than corporate social media pages was observed. These findings indicate that organizations should keep their corporate websites with up-to-date information regarding job openings and complement their recruiting efforts on social media.

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank my thesis chair, Dr. Shawn M. Bergman, for his patience and advice throughout this thesis process. Additional thanks are warranted to my dedicated thesis committee, Dr. Timothy J. Huelsman and Dr. Jacqueline Z. Bergman. Finally, I wish to dedicate this thesis to my wife, Pinar Temir Acikgoz. Her timeless support has made my graduate school experience possible.

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## FOREWORD

This thesis is written in accordance with the style of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (6<sup>th</sup> Edition) as required by the Department of Psychology at Appalachian State University

Social Media and Employee Recruitment: Too Much Pain for Not Much Gain?

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### **Social Media and Employee Recruitment: Too Much Pain for Not Much Gain?**

Over the past few years, a new on-line environment has emerged which consists of various tools and websites that allow individuals to create content collaboratively. Now known as social media, this new environment has given every individual and organization the opportunity to have an online presence and it has gained popularity in a short time (e.g., Facebook now reports having more than one billion users; Ortutay, 2012). Whether it is a multinational company, a government organization, or a local restaurant, most organizations today have a presence on at least one social media outlet. In fact, most of the Fortune 500 companies are active on social media with 73% having corporate Twitter accounts and 66% having corporate Facebook pages (Barnes, Lescault, & Andonian, 2012).

There are a variety of different functions for which businesses can utilize social media to accomplish organizational goals (e.g., Hunt, 2010; McGrath, 2012), but one particular area for which organizations have increasingly turned to social media is employee recruitment (HR Focus, 2010). Ninety-two percent of organizations were using or planning to use social media for recruitment in 2012 compared to 82% in 2010 (Jobvite, 2012). Partly as a result of this rapid growth, the research literature has fallen behind practice in terms of the utility of using social media for employee recruitment. While the initial evidence is positive -- more than 55% of social network users are connected to organizations and 50% posted content about an organization (InSites Consulting, 2012) -- these figures do not explicitly pertain to organizational recruitment. This study aims to help fill this gap by

looking at the extent to which potential applicants see social media as a source of information when exploring their employment options.

### **Online Organizational Recruiting**

More than a decade ago, Michaels and colleagues envisioned a “war for talent” in which recruiting qualified applicants would become increasingly difficult due to demographic and economic factors (Michaels, Handfield-Jones, & Axelrod, 2001). Organizations now operate in this environment with the importance of human capital increasingly being recognized due to changing demographic and economic factors. Consequently, learning how to attract top talent has become critical for most organizations to thrive, prosper, and even survive (Beechler & Woodward, 2009; Chapman, Uggerslev, Carroll, Piasentin, & Jones, 2005; Tarique & Schuler, 2010; Trank, Rynes, & Bretz, 2002).

One way to attract top talent is recruitment, defined as activities that influence the number and types of applicants who apply for and accept a job offer (Breaugh, 1992). While organizations frequently fill job openings from inside the organization (i.e., internal recruitment), the majority of job openings, 59%, are filled through attracting applicants outside of the organization (CareerXroads, 2012). Given the importance of external recruiting, it is important to understand where job seekers look for information regarding employment options and how they view these sources of information.

Before the wide adoption of the internet by businesses, most popular external recruitment sources were job fairs, newspaper advertisements, employment agencies, college recruitment, and walk-ins (Zottoli & Wanous, 2000). Online recruitment is now an established practice for organizational recruiters and organizations typically engage in external recruitment through their corporate websites (e.g., microsoft.com) and online job

boards (e.g., monster.com; Breugh, 2008). More recently social media, defined as internet communications where more than one user can publish/post information within a community of users (Carroll, Romano Bergstrom, & Bergman, in preparation), has been added as another option in organizational recruiters' toolboxes.

Organizations generally find that online recruiting tools generate a large number of applicants at a relatively low cost (Breugh, 2008). While several empirical studies have examined the effectiveness of corporate websites as recruitment sources (e.g., Allen, Mahto, & Otondo, 2007; Birgelen, Wetzels, & Dolen, 2008) the effectiveness of social media as a recruitment source has not yet been empirically examined. Additionally, the characteristics of social media that might impact its effectiveness as a recruiting source have not been examined. While the recruiting literature offers several factors that might influence why some recruitment sources are superior to others (e.g., Chapman et al., 2005; Uggerslev, Fassina, & Kraichy, 2012; Zottoli & Wanous, 2000), there is not a clear consensus regarding which factors are the most important.

Two of the most common explanations for why some recruitment sources are more effective than others are the realism hypothesis and the individual differences hypothesis (Breugh, 2012). These explanations are used in the current study to help examine the relative effectiveness of corporate websites and social media as a recruitment source from potential applicants' perspectives. Specifically, the realism hypothesis, which suggests that providing more accurate information about the job and the organization can lead to more effective recruiting outcomes (e.g., Breugh & Mann, 1984; Breugh & Starke, 2000; Moser, 2005; Quaglieri, 1982), will be used to help explain how perceptions of perceived trustworthiness and factualness of the information posted on these sources could lead

potential applicants to utilize these recruitment outlets. Similarly, the individual differences hypothesis, which suggests that recruitment sources reach potential applicants from different groups with different characteristics (Breaugh, 1981; Kirnan, Farley, & Geisinger, 1989; McManus & Ferguson, 2003; Williams, Labig, & Stone, 1993), will be used to help explain why potential applicants of different quality might use corporate websites versus social media when looking for a job.

This study is aimed to answer three broad questions. First, the extent to which potential applicants prefer to get information from corporate social media or a corporate website when making employment decisions (i.e., recruitment source preference) will be examined. Second, to gain additional insight regarding the antecedents of recruitment source preference, the extent to which potential applicants perceive the content posted on an organization's social media and its corporate website as trustworthy and factual will be examined. Finally, since one goal of recruitment is to attract top talent, the relationship between applicant quality and recruitment source preference will be examined.

### **Recruitment Source Preference**

The effectiveness of any recruitment source is influenced by the extent to which potential applicants choose to utilize that source. For example, the circulation rate of a newspaper may be used as a metric for determining its potential efficacy as a recruitment source. However, if potential applicants do not look for employment information in that newspaper, it is unlikely to be an effective recruitment source regardless of the circulation rate. Similarly, the overwhelming popularity of Facebook may not guarantee that it is used to look for employment information by potential applicants. In order for organizations to use social media as a viable means for attracting potential applicants, organizations first need to

know if job seekers are likely to look for and use the information on social media to make employment decisions.

*Research Question 1: To what extent are corporate websites and social media channels preferred by potential applicants to get information when making employment decisions?*

### **Factors Affecting the Recruitment Source Preference**

In order to be able to make policy decisions regarding which recruitment source to use, it is not enough to only know which among the currently available recruitment sources are used by potential applicants when looking for employment information. Equally important are the factors influencing the extent to which one recruitment source is used by potential applicants to get employment information. This is especially true in today's fast-paced business environment where innovation is the norm. Knowing the factors that lead one potential applicant to use a specific recruitment source, organizations can ensure that recruitment sources which are not currently available but developed in the future are appealing to potential applicants. Therefore, as two potential antecedents of recruitment source preference, trustworthiness and factualness of the information in each recruitment source were examined.

**Factualness of the information in a recruitment source.** One factor that may influence the extent to which social media channels are utilized for recruitment information is perceptions of potential applicants regarding the accuracy of the information. According to the realism hypothesis (Reid, 1972; Zottoli & Wanous, 2000), those recruitment sources which provide more accurate information are more effective because they allow the potential applicant to have a better understanding of what the job involves. When the information on a



recruitment source is factual, those who apply are more likely to have their expectations met after joining the organization. This is potentially very important because unmet expectations in an employment situation may lead to lower levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Moser, 2005). This notion is similar to the idea of a realistic job preview in which if job applicants' expectations are not fulfilled, they become dissatisfied and more likely to quit than applicants with more accurate expectations (Breaugh & Starke, 2000).

While providing factual information about a job is likely to be beneficial for organizations, it is reasonable to assume that those benefits also extend to potential applicants. From potential applicants' perspective, getting factual information about a job opportunity is likely to be to the potential applicants' best advantage because applying for a job with limited or inaccurate information may lead to unmet expectations, which have been found to be related with lower levels of job satisfaction (Moser, 2005). Accordingly, the extent to which a recruitment source is perceived to be providing factual information may influence whether or not it is used by potential applicants to look for employment information. Initial evidence for this notion comes from Ryan and colleagues who found that the informativeness of a recruitment source is positively related with intentions to apply (Ryan, Horvath, & Kriska, 2005).

Factualness concerns may appear to be especially salient for corporate social media channels because the content of a social media page is at least partly generated by users who may provide their opinions rather than factual information. On the other hand, organizations may provide inaccurate information on both their corporate websites and social media pages to look more attractive to potential applicants. Given the empirical evidence regarding the benefits of providing factual information in a recruitment source (Ryan et al., 2005),

empirically examining this issue is important. However, examining the actual factualness of the information in corporate websites and corporate social media is not always viable since factualness of the information is often hard to ascertain. Therefore, the current study examined perceptions of potential applicants regarding factualness of the information in corporate websites and corporate social media. To date, there has been no empirical research in this area.

*Research question 2: To what extent are corporate websites and corporate social media perceived by potential applicants as providing factual information?*

**Trustworthiness of the recruitment source.** Another factor that could influence whether potential applicants utilize information from an online source of information for employment decisions is trustworthiness. Trustworthiness of a source of information refers to the degree to which the target audience believes that the source is unlikely to deceive (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953; Mayer, Davis, & Schorman, 1995).

Trustworthiness is important in building and maintaining relationships in the online environment (Cheung & Lee, 2006). In fact, potential applicants' perceptions of trustworthiness have been found to vary by recruitment source and were related with intentions to utilize a recruitment source when looking for employment information (Mumford, 2012). Moreover, trustworthiness is a key component of credibility (Pornpitakpan, 2004), and there is evidence suggesting that the extent to which a source of information is perceived as credible may influence whether or not it is utilized when looking for information (e.g., Johnson & Kaye, 2000; Kioussis, 2001; Ridings, Gefen, & Arinze, 2002; Stavrositu & Sundar, 2008). Therefore, it is important that potential applicants perceive an online recruitment source as trustworthy because this may influence whether or

not a recruitment message reaches potential applicants. To date, the trustworthiness of corporate websites and social media has not been empirically examined.

*Research question 3: To what extent are corporate websites and corporate social media perceived as trustworthy sources of information by potential applicants?*

### **Applicant Quality**

Most recruitment studies focus on post-hire outcomes (e.g., retention) rather than pre-hire outcomes (e.g., applicant quality; Breugh, 2012). However, pre-hire outcomes are important for employers since the success of a selection process is confined by the quality of applicants generated by the recruitment process. Learning how to attract top talent is critical to organizational success because employee quality is important in gaining competitive advantage for organizations (Beechler & Woodward, 2009; Breugh & Starke, 2000). Understanding which recruitment sources are more likely to be preferred by higher quality potential applicants may allow organizations to spend their resources on those recruitment sources, resulting in a more qualified applicant pool.

A large body of selection literature suggests that higher quality potential applicants are those with more ability and motivation (e.g., Barrick & Mount, 1991; Hunter, 1986). Thus, academic achievement can be used as a measure of potential applicant quality since it is related with both ability and motivation. In fact, academic achievement has been found to be strongly associated with general cognitive ability (Rohde & Thompson, 2007) and conscientiousness (O'Connor & Paunonen, 2007), and both cognitive ability and conscientiousness are consistent predictors of job performance (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Hunter, 1986).

According to the individual differences hypothesis, recruiting sources vary in effectiveness because they reach individuals from different groups and potential applicants from one group may be more or less qualified for the job than those in other groups (Breaugh, 1981; Kirnan, Farley, & Geisinger, 1989; McManus & Ferguson, 2003; Williams, Labig, & Stone, 1993). In fact, there is evidence for quality differences between applicants generated by different recruitment sources (e.g., McManus & Ferguson, 2003; Williams et al., 1993). However, being a relatively new recruitment source, no empirical work has examined the quality of applicants generated by social media as a recruitment source.

*Research question 4: Is there a difference between higher and lower quality potential applicants in the extent to which they prefer to use corporate websites or social media when looking for employment information?*

As previously discussed, two of the potential antecedents of the recruitment source preference are perceived trustworthiness and perceived factualness of the information. It is reasonable to assume that the same factors influence the extent to which corporate websites and/or social media pages are used by higher and lower quality potential applicants when looking for employment information. However, there may be differences between higher and lower quality potential applicants in terms of perceived trustworthiness and factualness of the information on a recruitment source, and these differences may allow organizations to design recruitment strategies which are even more appealing to higher quality potential applicants. To date, this issue has not been empirically examined.

*Research question 5a: To what extent do higher and lower quality potential applicants perceive corporate websites and corporate social media pages as providing factual information?*

*Research question 5b: To what extent do higher and lower quality potential applicants perceive corporate websites and corporate social media pages as trustworthy sources of information?*

## Method

### Participants

The research questions were tested on a sub-sample of the data from a larger study which collected a nationally representative sample from the United States (see IRB approval in Appendix A). The data was collected through a pencil-and-paper questionnaire which was mailed to the participants between February and April of 2012. The sub-sample consists of 2340 participants who are at least high school graduates and report intentions to work in the next few years. These participants were chosen for this study due to the fact that they are or will most likely be the targets of organizations' employee recruitment efforts in the near future. The sample in the current study (51% female, 49% male) was mostly White (67% White, 9% Black, 14% Hispanic, and 5% Asian) with a mean age of 21.02 ( $SD = 2.07$ ). Among four census bureau regions, more participants were from South (31%), followed by northeast (24%), west (23%), and mid-west (22%). All participants had at least a high-school diploma with 26% having a college degree and 41% being currently enrolled in college. The sample from which this sub-sample was created was weighted to reflect the population values for gender, race, age, region, and education variables.

### Measures

**Recruitment source preference.** Two items were used to assess potential applicants' recruitment source preference. The first item asked participants if they would prefer to get information from social media, a corporate website, or both when making decisions regarding where to get a full-time job. The second item asked participants if they

would prefer to get information from social media, a corporate website, or both when making decisions regarding where to get a part-time job (see Appendix B).

**Perceived factualness of recruitment sources.** In order to assess the extent to which content of a corporate social media page was perceived to be factual, participants were asked if they believed content found in a potential employer's Facebook page, Twitter feed, and YouTube channel was fact or opinion. Similarly, the extent to which content of a corporate website was perceived to be factual was examined by asking participants if they believed content found in a potential employer's website was fact or opinion. Each source of information was rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 "All opinion" to 5 "All fact" (see Appendix B).

**Recruitment source trustworthiness.** Two items were used to examine recruitment source trustworthiness. The first item asked the extent to which participants trusted the content posted on an employer's/potential employer's corporate website, and the second item asked the extent to which participants trusted the content posted on an employer's/potential employer's social media. Each source of information was rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 "I do not trust this information" to 5 "I fully trust this information" (see Appendix B).

**Applicant quality.** In order to assess applicant quality, participants responded to a single item: "What grades do you or did you usually get in high school." Response options ranged from "Mostly A's" to "Mostly D's and lower" (see Appendix B). Two applicant quality groups were created with participants who reported getting mostly A's and mostly A's and B's in high school being higher quality potential applicants (62% of the sample) and others being considered lower quality potential applicants.

## Results

### Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics for and correlations among all variables used to examine the study's research questions are presented in Table 1.

### Research Questions

**Recruitment source preference.** The first research question asked the extent to which corporate websites and social media channels would be preferred by potential applicants to get information when making employment decisions. The analyses revealed that, for part-time jobs, 33.58% reported that they would prefer to use corporate websites, 4.81% reported that they would prefer to use social media, and 59.74% reported that they would prefer to use both, see Figure 1. The results for full-time jobs followed a similar pattern as 39.81% reported that they would prefer to use corporate websites, 3.18% reported that they would prefer to use social media, and 55.48% reported that they would prefer to use both.

Combining the percent those who would only use social media and those who would use both, the results showed that 65% of participants would prefer to use social media for gathering information about a part-time job and 59% would prefer to use social media when looking for a full-time job. In contrast, 93% and 95% of participants would prefer to use corporate websites when looking for part- and full-time jobs, indicating that corporate websites are likely to be utilized by almost all potential applicants when looking for employment information.



**Perceived factualness of recruitment source.** The second research question asked the extent to which employers’/potential employers’ corporate websites and social media were perceived as providing factual information or opinions. Given that perceived factualness was measured on a 5-point scale, a score of 3.00 could be considered as the neutral point such that ratings over three represent factual information whereas ratings below three represent opinions. As shown in Table 1 and Table 2, the mean perceived factualness of corporate websites ( $M = 3.88$ ) was found to be significantly higher than the neutral point of 3.00,  $t(2253) = 38.76, p < .001, d = .64$ .

Next the extent to which corporate social media were perceived as hosting factual information was examined. Analyses revealed that perceived factualness of employers’/potential employers’ Facebook pages ( $M = 3.14$ ) was significantly higher than the neutral point of 3.00,  $t(2233) = 6.66, p < .001, d = .11$ , but the effect size was much smaller than that was found for corporate websites. Perceived factualness for YouTube channels ( $M = 2.92$ ),  $t(2230) = 3.88, p < .001, d = .06$ , and Twitter feeds ( $M = 2.91$ ),  $t(2225) = 3.93, p < .001, d = .07$ , were significantly lower than the neutral point of 3.00, Tables 1 and 2.

Finally, the perceived factualness of corporate websites and social media were compared. The results showed that corporate websites were perceived as hosting significantly more factual information than Facebook,  $t(2230) = 35.08, p < .001, d = .58$ ; Twitter,  $t(2222) = 40.67, p < .001, d = .68$ ; and YouTube,  $t(2227) = 39.47, p < .001, d = .66$ . A comparison among social media outlets revealed that Facebook was perceived to be more factual than Twitter,  $t(2216) = 15.92, p < .001, d = .26$ ; and YouTube,  $t(2221) = 12.96, p < .001, d = .22$ . No significant differences were observed between Twitter and YouTube,  $t(2219) = .11, p = .914, d < .01$ .

**Trustworthiness of the recruitment source.** The third research question asked the extent to which employers'/potential employers' corporate websites and social media were perceived as trustworthy sources of information. Since trustworthiness was measured on a 5-point scale, a score of 3.00 could be considered to indicate the neutral point in terms of perceived trustworthiness such that ratings over three represent higher perceived trustworthiness and ratings below three represent lower perceived trustworthiness. As shown in Table 1 and 2, the perceived trustworthiness for employers'/potential employers' corporate websites ( $M = 3.73$ ) was significantly higher than the neutral point of 3.00,  $t(2232) = 26.48$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = .44$ . The perceived trustworthiness for employers'/potential employers' social media ( $M = 2.88$ ) was found to be significantly lower than the neutral point of 3.00,  $t(2223) = 4.66$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = .08$ . Comparing the perceived trustworthiness of corporate websites and social media revealed that corporate websites were perceived as significantly more trustworthy,  $t(2218) = 28.59$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = .48$ , than corporate social media.

**Applicant quality.** The study's fourth research question asked if higher and lower quality potential applicants used corporate websites or social media when looking for employment opportunities. A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relationship between applicant quality and recruitment source preference. The result for part-time jobs was non-significant,  $X^2(2, N = 2274) = 6.17$ ,  $p = .229$ , indicating that higher and lower quality potential applicants were similarly likely to prefer corporate websites or social media for part-time employment decisions. However, the result was significant for full-time employment decisions,  $X^2(2, N = 2282) = 31.37$ ,  $p < .001$ , such that higher quality potential applicants were more likely to use corporate websites and less likely to use social media than lower quality potential applicants for full-time employment decisions, see Figure 1.

The study's fifth research question asked if there was a difference in the extent to which higher quality potential applicants and lower quality potential applicants perceived corporate websites, Facebook pages, Twitter feeds, and YouTube channels as hosting factual information and being trustworthy. No significant differences were observed between higher and lower quality potential applicants regarding the extent to which corporate websites,  $t(2327)=1.12, p = .263, d=.07$ , Facebook,  $t(2307)=1.18, p = .238, d=.09$ , Twitter,  $t(2299)=.54, p = .589, d=.04$ , and YouTube,  $t(2304)=1.12, p = .263, d=.06$ , were perceived as hosting factual information, see Table 3. However, results showed that corporate websites were perceived as significantly more trustworthy sources of information by higher quality potential applicants than lower quality potential applicants,  $t(2305) = 4.36, p<.001, d = .24$ , see Table 3. The difference for corporate social media was not significant as higher quality potential applicants and lower quality potential applicants trusted employers' social media similarly,  $t(2296)=1.83, p = .067, d=.11$ .

**Post-Hoc Analyses.** Two ordered logistic regression analyses were conducted to determine, when considered together, whether perceived factualness and trustworthiness of the content in social media and corporate websites and applicant quality were predictive of social media and corporate websites usage for both part-time and full-time employment.

The result of the regression analysis for part-time employment was not significant, indicating that the variables examined did not predict the extent to which social media would be preferred when looking for information about part-time jobs. However, the results of the regression analysis for full-time employment indicated that both trustworthiness of social media and applicant quality significantly predicted recruitment source preference, see Table 4. Higher quality potential applicants were less likely to prefer social media to look for

information for full-time employment. These results also indicated that participants were more likely to prefer social media to gather information for full-time employment as the trustworthiness of the information in social media increased.

### **Discussion**

Social media is increasingly being used by organizations for employee recruitment (Jobvite, 2012). However, whether or not social media channels are used by potential applicants as sources of employment information has not yet been empirically examined. This study examined the extent to which social media channels would be utilized by potential applicants when looking for information about employment options and the potential antecedents of this preference. Results indicated that the majority of potential applicants would prefer to use both corporate social media and corporate websites when looking for information about full- or part-time employment options. The preference for corporate websites was stronger for full-time jobs than for part-time jobs. Among those potential applicants who would only utilize one source, there was an overwhelming preference for corporate websites. The results also indicated higher trustworthiness and perceived factualness of the information in corporate websites than corporate social media pages.

Unlike corporate websites, in which the content is solely generated by the organization, the content in social media is generated collaboratively by the organization and by non-corporate users. Previous research has compared content generated by the organization to user-generated content in the context of online advertising, but not in the context of employee recruitment. The online advertising line of research has found evidence that user-generated content is preferred by product consumers (e.g., Cheong & Morrison, 2008). The inconsistency between this finding and the findings of this study suggests that the

information gathering practice consumers use to learn about a product is different from the process in which they engage when looking for a job.

One difference between buying and employment decisions may have to do with the antecedents of source preference. Specifically, trustworthiness is domain specific (Mayer et al., 1995) and there is some evidence suggesting that one necessary condition of trust is competence in the specific area (Butler, 1991). Individuals may form different perceptions regarding the most knowledgeable party in each area and this difference may explain the contradiction between this study's findings and previous research examining online advertising. In fact, there is some evidence showing that user-generated content is perceived to be more credible when looking for product information (Jonas, 2010). It may be that individuals trust organizations when looking for employment information, but they do not trust when looking for product information because they perceive that users of the same product are more capable than the organization to give accurate information.

This study also found a difference in recruitment source preference between higher quality potential applicants and lower quality potential applicants such that higher quality potential applicants were more likely to prefer corporate websites over social media than lower quality potential applicants for full-time employment information. One reason for this finding may be that higher quality potential applicants were also more likely to trust corporate websites than lower quality potential applicants. Indeed, the results of the present study support this conclusion as it was found that higher quality potential applicants trusted corporate websites more than lower quality potentially applicants. This increased trust in corporate websites by higher quality potential applicants may lead to an even stronger

preference towards corporate websites. Interestingly, no differences between higher and lower quality potential applicants were found in regards to trust of social media.

Another potential explanation for this finding lies in the way that information is presented in corporate websites and social media. Corporate websites tend to be a richer source of information about organizations as they generally host ample information organizations are willing to convey to various stakeholders (e.g., customers, investors, etc.). Getting a specific piece of information from among many different types of information in a corporate website generally requires a search by the information seeker. On the other hand, most organizations share only relevant targeted information on specific topics on their social media pages and invite potential applicants to contact the organization or visit their websites for additional information (Waters, Burnett, Lamm, & Lucas, 2009). Moreover, since it is inherently “social” social media is frequently utilized for interaction between organizations and their target audiences, allowing individuals to ask questions to organizational representatives. Thus, a potential applicant can also get information by simply asking a specific question to the organization on social media.

Given this difference in the amount and types of information shared on the two different recruitment sources, corporate websites arguably require more effort and a larger investment of time on the part of the information seeker than social media. As conceptualized in this study, higher quality potential applicants, those individuals with higher high school grades, tend to have more cognitive capacity and higher levels of motivation than lower quality potential applicants (O’Connor & Paunonen, 2007; Rohde & Thompson, 2007). This higher cognitive capacity and motivation may explain the difference in source preference. That is, higher quality potential applicants may be more willing and able to find

and review the information on corporate websites, while lower quality potential applicants may prefer getting the targeted information from other users or organizational agents on social media.

Overall, the findings of the study support individual differences hypothesis. Specifically, potential applicants who reported a preference towards corporate websites were more likely to be from the higher quality group. This suggests that the applicant pool generated by corporate websites is more likely to be comprised of higher quality individuals. However, this study did not find a relationship between the extent to which a recruitment source was perceived as factual and preference towards that recruitment source. This suggests that potential applicants do not only seek for factual information about a potential employment opportunity but they also seek for opinions of others.

The results of this study demonstrate the importance of strategic planning when utilizing social media. Many organizations embrace social media without first examining whether or not social media can actually fulfill their expectations. However, potential applicants' attitudes towards social media will influence the extent to which organizational initiatives with social media are successful. The findings of this study indicate that it is important to take user attitudes into account when using social media. A one-size-fits-all approach in which organizations utilize social media for a broad range of business functions in the same way is likely to lead to sub-optimal business outcomes. Currently, social media is being touted as the golden goose which will generate a plethora of amazing results (e.g., Shankland, 2011). However, the results of this study show that this may not be the case and organizations may not get the results they are expecting from social media unless they take user attitudes into account.



These findings also suggest that organizations should not approach social media as a replacement for their corporate websites for recruiting employees. Even though the majority of potential applicants report that they would use social media for employment information, around one third report that they would only use corporate websites. More importantly, more of the participants who report not preferring to use social media for full-time employment information are higher quality potential applicants. These findings suggest that organizations that use only social media for recruiting are likely to narrow their applicant pool and the remaining potential applicants are likely to be of lower quality. Instead, organizations should keep their corporate websites with up-to-date information regarding job openings and complement their recruiting efforts on social media. The finding that social media was more likely to be preferred for part-time jobs suggests that social media might be a relatively more viable option for recruiting for part-time positions but organizations should put more recruiting effort on corporate websites for attracting full-time employees. Organizations that use social media for recruiting should also take steps to increase the trustworthiness of their social media content as this study found a relationship between trustworthiness of the content in social media and recruitment source preference.

This study is one of the few studies that examined pre-hire applicant quality. The results show that corporate websites are more likely to generate higher quality applicants and thus support individual differences hypothesis. These findings have important implications on current practices in employee recruitment given the increased competition for talent between the organizations (Michaels et al., 2001). In this hyper-competitive business environment, organizations should take every factor into account when planning a major business function such as recruiting. In order to best utilize social media for recruiting,

organizations should strategically use both their corporate websites and their social media pages and make sure the recruitment message is appealing to potential applicants. As this study demonstrated, one way to make the recruitment message more appealing is making sure that the content is perceived as factual and trustworthy.

### **Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

This study makes an important contribution to the literature by showing the importance of user attitudes in organizational use of social media for employee recruiting. However, as with all studies, there are certain limitations to acknowledge.

First, the sample of this study included potential applicants who reported intentions to work in the next few years. These participants were selected because it is important to know these individuals' attitudes towards organizational use of social media as they are or will most likely be the targets of organizations' employee recruitment efforts in the near future. However, it is not known whether or not they had experience looking for jobs or were actively seeking jobs at the time of the study. It may be that the realities of looking for a job influence the way individuals feel regarding organizations' recruitment practices. Future research should examine actual job seekers' attitudes towards organizational use of social media for recruiting.

Second, this study utilized data collected for another larger study and the variables examined were limited to the available data. The areas that were not addressed in this study represent opportunities for future research. For example, the participants were asked which sources they would prefer to utilize when looking for employment information. However, there are different facets of information about a job. Specifically, job information includes a broad range of topics such as pay, benefits, unpaid vacations, supervisor-subordinate

relations, and work-life balance. It may be that potential applicants prefer to utilize one source for one topic whereas another source for another topic. Future research should examine recruitment source preference at the content level.

Third, this study took an important first step in examining how trustworthiness of social media relates to the extent to which potential applicants use social media for employment information. However, trust is a complex construct and future research should examine how different dimensions of trust (e.g., expertise, benevolence) relate to recruitment source preference. Similarly, factualness is a complex variable which is contingent upon the specific social media or corporate website. This makes it impractical to measure the actual factualness of the content in corporate websites or social media. Instead, perceived factualness of the content in three most popular social media outlets was examined. The results of these analyses should be interpreted with caution as it is not possible to know whether or not they will apply to other social media outlets which were not examined.

### **Conclusion**

This study took an important first step in showing how incompatibility with user attitudes may engender obtaining the outcomes organizations desire from their social media operations. There is a current buzz around social media that calls for using social media for every business function. For example, users' Facebook newsfeeds are cluttered with advertisements of social media advising agencies explaining how to earn ten times the money when they spend one dollar on Facebook advertising. As this study shows, at least for recruiting this approach has the potential to lead to suboptimal business outcomes and wasting of valuable organizational resources. Organizations are advised to avoid the

bandwagon mentality and strategically plan how to use the resources at their disposal when planning interactions with their target audiences.

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**Appendix A**

**To:** Yalcin Acikgoz  
Psychology ,  
CAMPUS MAIL

**From:** Julie Taubman, IRB Administrator

**Date:** 12/19/2012

**RE :** Determination that Research or Research-Like Activity does not require IRB Approval

**Study #:** 13-0153

**Study Title:** Social Media Recruitment: Too Much Pain for Not Much Gain?

This submission was reviewed by the IRB. It was determined that it does not constitute human subjects research as defined under federal regulations [45 CFR 46.102 (d or f)] and does not require IRB approval because the study does not involve an interaction or intervention with a human subject or accessing private identifiable information as the archival survey data is anonymous. Please let me know if you have any questions: [irb@appstate.edu](mailto:irb@appstate.edu) or 828-262-7981. Thank you,  
Julie

**CC:**

Shawn Bergman, Psychology



## Chesapeake Research Review, Inc.

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*IRB Services • Consultation • Education*  
 7063 Columbia Gateway Drive, Suite 110  
 Columbia, MD 21046-3403  
 410.884.2900

### PROTOCOL AND PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR APPROVAL

**DATE:** 23 Jan 2012

**TO:** Sean Marsh, Ph.D.  
Fors Marsh Group LLC

**FROM:** Amy Redmond  
Project Coordinator, Chesapeake IRB

**CC:** Caitlin Krulikowski  
Fors Marsh Group LLC

**RE:** Initial Review of Joint Advertising Market Research Studies (JAMRS) Protocol, 2012 Media Survey (Pro00006854) and Dr. Sean Marsh.

---

Thank you for selecting Chesapeake IRB to provide oversight for your research project. The IRB has reviewed the following:

- Protocol (Full Protocol, Not Dated).
- Informed Consent Form.
- 2012 Media Survey (Not Dated).
- Principal Investigator and Site Information for Dr. Sean Marsh.

The IRB approved the above referenced protocol and Dr. Sean Marsh via expedited review on 22 Jan 2012. The IRB determined that this study presents no more than minimal risk to human subjects.

The IRB Approved Informed Consent Form (*Chesapeake IRB Approved Version 22 Jan 2012*) is electronically available on your CIRBI workspace under the "IRB Issued Documents" tab.

**IRB Approval for the protocol and Dr. Sean Marsh expires on 22 Jan 2013 unless re-approved by the IRB.** A Continuing Review reminder will be sent prior to your expiration date.

In accordance with 45 CFR 46.116 (d) of the federal regulations Chesapeake's IRB has waived the requirement for obtaining consent for this study. If the subjects are minors, parental consent is waived in accordance with 45 CFR 46.116.

Please review the Chesapeake IRB Investigator Handbook by accessing CIRBI™ ([www.cirbi.net](http://www.cirbi.net)). Log on to your CIRBI homepage ("My Home") and select the "Reference Materials" tab for IRB requirements and guidance. A copy of the most recent IRB roster is also available under "Reference Materials".

All documentation related to this study must be submitted electronically through CIRBI™. Please **do not fax or mail** any information to the IRB. If you have any questions or concerns, please use the Contact IRB activity on your CIRBI workspace. We look forward to continuing to work with you on this project.

## **Appendix B**

### **Measurement of information source preference**

1. Would you prefer to get information from social media or an official website when making a decision about where to get a full-time job?
2. Would you prefer to get information from social media or an official website when making a decision about where to get a part-time job?

Official website/social media/both

### **Measurement on information source trustworthiness**

1. To what extent do you trust content posted on an Employer's/Potential Employer's official website?
2. To what extent do you trust content posted on an Employer's/Potential Employer's social media?

1: I do not trust this information

5: I fully trust this information

### **Measurement of factualness**

1. Do you believe content found on a potential employer's official website is fact or opinion?
2. Do you believe content found on a potential employer's Facebook page is fact or opinion?
3. Do you believe content found on a potential employer's Twitter feed is fact or opinion?
4. Do you believe content found on a potential employer's YouTube channel is fact or opinion?

- 1: All opinion
- 2: Mostly opinion
- 3: Both
- 4: Mostly fact
- 5: All fact

**Measurement of academic achievement**

What grades do you or did you usually get in high school?

- Mostly A's (Numerical average of 90-100)
- Mostly A's and B's (85-89)
- Mostly B's (80-84)
- Mostly B's and C's (75-79)
- Mostly C's (70-74)
- Mostly C's and D's (65-69)
- Mostly D's and lower (64 and below)

SOCIAL MEDIA RECRUITMENT

Table 1  
*Descriptive Statistics and Correlations*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Applicant Quality	--												
2. Trust Web	.12	--											
3. Trust SM	.06	.39	--										
4. Factual Web	.04	.41	.15	--									
5. Factual Facebook	.05	.25	.32	.54	--								
6. Factual Twitter	.02	.15	.30	.38	.77	--							
7. Factual YouTube	.03	.14	.29	.36	.68	.78	--						
8. Part-time Website	.01	-.01	-.05	.01	-.02	.01	.01	--					
9. Part-time Both	.01	.02	.06	-.01	.05	.02	.01	-.89	--				
10. Part-time SM	-.04	-.03	-.02	-.02	-.03	-.03	-.03	-.16	-.27	--			
11. Full-time Website	.04	.02	-.04	.06	.00	.00	.01	.83	-.74	-.13	--		
12. Full-time Both	-.01	.00	.04	-.05	.02	.01	.00	-.77	.81	-.10	-.94	--	
13. Full-time SM	-.08	-.06	.01	-.03	-.04	-.01	-.02	-.11	-.20	.71	-.14	-.19	--
<i>Mean</i>	1.61	3.73	2.88	3.88	3.14	2.91	2.92	.33	.58	.06	.40	.54	.04
<i>Standard error</i>	.01	.03	.03	.02	.02	.02	.02	.01	.01	.00	.01	.01	.00

*Note.* SM refers to social media. Part-time Website, Part-time Both, Part-time SM, Full-time Website, Full-time Both, and Full-time SM variables are dummy variables created from part-time and full-time recruitment source preference variables. All correlations greater than .04 are significant at the .05 level.



SOCIAL MEDIA RECRUITMENT

Table 2

*Proportions of Potential Applicants Who Endorsed Each Level of Trustworthiness and Factualness*

<b>Perceived Factualness of Corporate Websites and Corporate Social Media</b>			
	Mostly-All Opinion(1-2)	Both(3)	Mostly-All Fact(4-5)
<b>Corporate Websites</b>	6.01%	26.49%	67.50%
<b>Corporate Facebook page</b>	17.88%	53.04%	29.08%
<b>Corporate Twitter feed</b>	27.75%	51.34%	20.91%
<b>Corporate YouTube channel</b>	26.38%	54.18%	19.44%
<b>Perceived Trustworthiness of Corporate Websites and Corporate Social Media</b>			
	Low Trust(1-2)	Medium Trust(3)	High Trust(4-5)
<b>Trust Corporate Websites</b>	13.81%	23.10%	63.09%
<b>Trust Social Media</b>	31.74%	43.52%	24.73%

*Note.* Trustworthiness was measured by a 5-point scale ranging from 1-“I do not trust this information” to 5-“I fully trust this information”. Factualness was measured with a 5-point scale ranging from 1-“All opinion” to 5-“All fact”.

SOCIAL MEDIA RECRUITMENT

Table 3  
*Perceived Factualness and Trustworthiness by Applicant Quality*

<b>Perceived Factualness of Corporate Websites and Corporate Social Media</b>										
	Mostly-All Opinion(1-2)		Both(3)		Mostly-All Fact(4-5)		Mean			
	Lower Quality	Higher Quality	Lower Quality	Higher Quality	Lower Quality	Higher Quality	Lower Quality		Higher Quality	
	%	%	%	%	%	%	Mean	SE	Mean	SE
<b>Corporate Websites</b>	7.12	5.17	26.92	26.16	65.97	68.67	3.85	0.04	3.90	0.03
<b>Corporate Facebook page</b>	19.35	16.92	53.06	53.06	27.59	30.02	3.11	0.04	3.16	0.03
<b>Corporate Twitter feed</b>	29.08	26.95	50.19	52.19	20.72	20.87	2.90	0.04	2.92	0.03
<b>Corporate YouTube channel</b>	27.89	25.42	52.15	55.21	19.96	19.36	2.89	0.04	2.94	0.02

<b>Perceived Trustworthiness of Corporate Websites and Corporate Social Media</b>										
	Low Trust(1-2)		Medium Trust(3)		High Trust(4-5)		Mean			
	Lower Quality	Higher Quality	Lower Quality	Higher Quality	Lower Quality	Higher Quality	Lower Quality		Higher Quality	
	%	%	%	%	%	%	Mean	SE	Mean	SE
<b>Trust Corporate Websites</b>	19.05	10.28	25.98	21.32	54.97	68.40	3.57	0.05	3.83	0.03
<b>Trust Social Media</b>	35.81	28.93	40.12	46.02	24.07	25.05	2.82	0.05	2.92	0.03

*Note.* Trustworthiness was measured by a 5-point scale ranging from 1-“I do not trust this information” to 5-“I fully trust this information”. Factualness was measured with a 5-point scale ranging from 1-“All opinion” to 5-“All fact”.

Table 4  
*Ordered Logistic Regression Results – Main Effects*

	Part-Time Employment Information		Full-Time Employment Information	
	<i>b</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>p-value</i>
<b>Step 1</b>		<b>.298</b>		<b>.019</b>
Trust Websites	-.07	.227	-.06	.301
Trust Social Media	.08	.161	.11	.045
Factual Websites	-.02	.791	-.11	.125
Factual Facebook	.20	.047	.06	.550
Factual Twitter	-.09	.391	.08	.455
Factual YouTube	-.09	.407	-.12	.222
Applicant Quality	-.12	.239	-.24	.018

*Note:* Positive coefficients indicate a preference towards websites and negative coefficients indicate a preference towards social media.

SOCIAL MEDIA RECRUITMENT

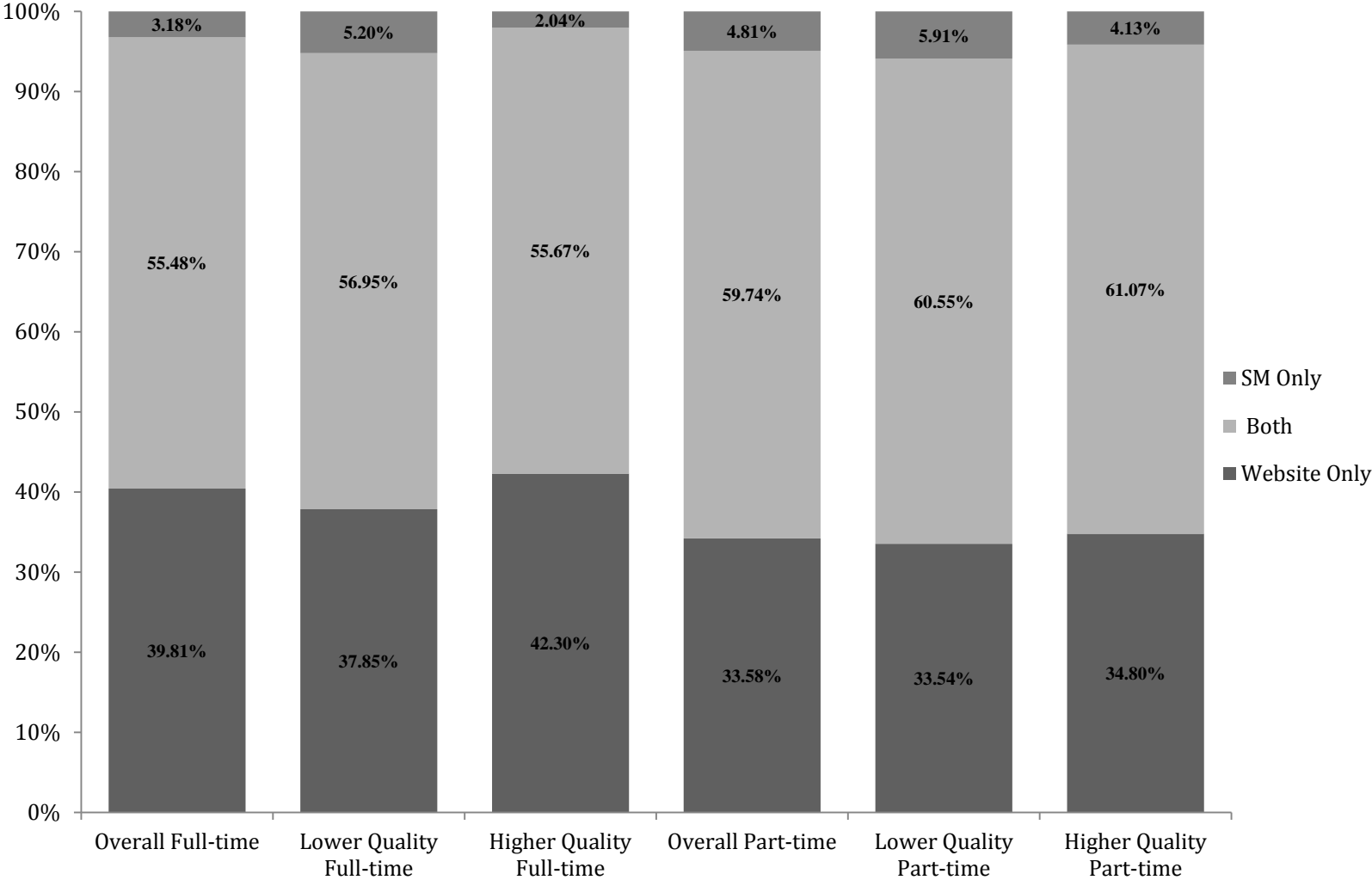


Figure 1. Recruitment source preference by applicant quality and type of job.

Note: Potential applicants who usually got mostly A's and mostly A's and B's in high school are higher quality potential applicants and others are lower quality potential applicants.

### **Vita**

Yalcin Acikgoz was born in Turkey in 1983. He graduated from Turkish Military Academy in 2004. In 2007, he got married to Pinar Temir Acikgoz. After several assignments as an officer in the Turkish Army between 2004 and 2011, he attended Appalachian State University and received his degree in Industrial-Organizational Psychology and Human Resource Management. Following his graduation, Mr. Acikgoz intends to pursue his Ph.D. degree in Industrial-Organizational Psychology.