The Impact of Social Media on Candidate Acceptance Decisions in Multinational Corporations: A Study of Sap, Siemens, and Delivery Hero

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Abstract
Social media has become an established channel through which job candidates gather information about prospective employers before deciding whether to apply for, or accept an offer from, a given organisation. This study examines how social media, and in particular social media reviews, shape candidate acceptance decisions within multinational corporations (MNCs), focusing on SAP, Siemens AG and Delivery Hero in the German tech sector. Drawing on signalling theory and social capital theory, and employing a quantitative survey design, the study collected data from 53 job seekers and current employees of the three selected MNCs using a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire administered through LimeSurvey; 46 responses were usable for analysis. Crosstabulation analysis, cross-referenced against respondents' use of LinkedIn, Glassdoor, Indeed and Kununu, was used to test three hypotheses concerning the relationship between social media and candidate perception, between social media reviews and candidate acceptance, and between social media generally and the decision to accept a job offer. The findings show that a substantial majority of respondents considered social media, and employee-generated reviews in particular, influential in shaping their perception of, and willingness to join, an MNC, leading to rejection of all three null hypotheses. Employees' own social media posts were found to be trusted more than official corporate messaging. The study recommends that MNCs invest in authentic employer-branding content and employee advocacy on social media, and that candidates treat employee reviews as one of several due-diligence sources when evaluating a prospective employer.

Keywords: *social media, employer branding, candidate acceptance decisions, multinational corporations, social networking sites*

1.0 Introduction

Social media has become an essential tool for recruiters and job seekers alike, extending well beyond its original role of keeping family and friends connected. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content." Today, corporations use social media to attract top talent, while job seekers increasingly rely on it during the job search process. One industry survey found that 92% of recruiters use social media to screen potential candidates, and that 55% of job seekers have declined a job offer after researching the company on social media (Flynn, 2023).

Part of this observed impact can be attributed to the employer's brand image. Platforms such as LinkedIn, Glassdoor, Kununu and Indeed have made it easier for job seekers to access reviews from current and former employees, so that a negative online reputation can materially affect an employer's ability to attract and retain talent. This study is set within Germany's tech sector, one of the fastest-growing and most competitive sectors globally, where corporations constantly compete to hire the best available talent. Because tech candidates are especially likely to use social media platforms to network and showcase their skills, the study focuses on three multinational corporations with a substantial presence in the German tech labour market: SAP, Siemens AG and Delivery Hero.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Creating profiles on social media sites such as LinkedIn allows job seekers to highlight their qualifications, skills and experience, making it easier for recruiters to evaluate fit. The relationship runs both ways: job seekers and prospective employees also use social media to learn more about an organisation before deciding whether to work with it. One industry study found that 79% of job seekers research whether a company is trustworthy through social media before deciding whether to accept a job offer (cited in the thesis from which this article is drawn). A corporation's online reputation, built through reviews from current or former employees, plays a central role in this process: engaged employees are more likely to post positively about their employer, while disgruntled ones are more likely to leave negative reviews, giving job seekers comparatively unbiased insight into an organisation from the experience of those who have actually worked there.

1.2 Objectives and Research Questions

The general objective of this study is to examine the impact of social media on candidate perceptions of technology corporations in Germany and on their job acceptance decisions, with three specific objectives: (i) to explore whether and how social media influences a candidate's perception of technology corporations in Germany; (ii) to investigate the role of different social media platforms in the candidate's decision-making process; and (iii) to examine how social media reviews influence a candidate's decision to accept a job offer. These objectives are organised around the central research question: what is the impact of social media on candidate job acceptance decisions, and how does it affect their decision-making process? Three corresponding research hypotheses, stated in the null, were tested: H1, there is no significant relationship between social media and a candidate's perception of a German tech corporation; H2, there is no significant relationship between social media reviews and a candidate's acceptance of a job offer; and H3, there is no significant influence between social media and the decision to accept a job offer. The study is scoped to job seekers and current employees of SAP, Siemens AG and Delivery Hero, three corporations located in Germany with differing specialisations within the tech industry. Its findings are intended to contribute to the existing literature on social media and employer branding, to offer insight into the current role of social media in recruitment, and to help both employers and candidates make more informed decisions. Two limitations are acknowledged at the outset: the sample is drawn from three specific corporations and may not generalise across the wider tech sector or other industries, and the study is limited to the influence of social media and does not account for other factors in the job acceptance decision, such as salary and benefits.

1.3 Conceptual Review

Social media refers to web-based platforms and applications that allow users to create, share and exchange user-generated content and participate in online communities (Boyd and Ellison, 2007; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Davis (2016) similarly defines it as "the set of interactive Internet applications that facilitate (collaborative or individual) creation, curation, and sharing of user-generated content." As a form of mass personal communication, social media has transformed how job seekers and organisations interact throughout the recruitment and selection process, including candidate evaluation, employer branding and the management of organisational reputation. Employer branding refers to an organisation's reputation as an employer and how that reputation is evaluated by others (Martin et al., 2005). It is distinct from recruiting in the narrow sense: where recruiting activities affect the quantity and type of candidates who apply for a given post, employer branding is concerned with building an identifiable and distinctive image of the firm as a desirable place to work, aimed at attracting the best-fit candidates over the longer term. Employer-branding content is increasingly distributed through social media, which gives organisations a channel to showcase their culture, values and offerings directly to the candidates they wish to attract (Sivertzen, Nilsen and Olafsen, 2013; Kissel and Büttgen, 2015). Employers and recruiters also use social media platforms such as LinkedIn, Indeed and Glassdoor to evaluate candidates, assessing communication skills, professionalism and cultural fit from a candidate's online activity and profile (Boyd and Ellison, 2007; Tifferet and Vilnai-Yavetz, 2018). The relationship is reciprocal: candidates use the same category of platform, together with employer review sites such as Glassdoor and Kununu, to evaluate prospective employers. Reviews, comments and feedback on these sites can significantly influence a candidate's choice of employer, and prospects are generally more inclined to trust peer-to-peer information from current or former employees than official employer messaging, because the former is seen as depicting the workplace more accurately than carefully constructed corporate communication (Sivertzen, Nilsen and Olafsen, 2013).

1.4 Theoretical Review

This study draws on two established theoretical frameworks: signalling theory and social capital theory. Signalling theory, developed by Spence (1973) in the context of job-market signalling, addresses information asymmetry between parties by explaining how one party conveys credible information to another. Bergh et al. (2014) describe the theory as comprising four elements: the signaler, the signal, the receiver and feedback. In the recruitment context, the signaler is typically an organisation's employee, the signal is the information or review that employee posts on a job site or social media platform, the receiver is the job seeker, and feedback takes the form of the candidate's decision to accept or reject an offer. The strength of a signal depends on its observability, frequency, credibility and consistency (Connelly et al., 2010); current and former employees, by virtue of their first-hand experience, are generally regarded as credible signalers of what it is actually like to work for an organisation (Turban, 2001; Uggerslev, Fassina and Kraichy, 2012). Social capital theory holds that the networks of relationships and connections that an individual or organisation possesses are a valuable resource in their own right. Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) define social capital as "the sum of the actual and potential resources embedded within, accessible through, and derived from the network of relationships owned by an individual or social unit," distinguishing structural, relational and cognitive dimensions. Applied to recruitment, social capital theory helps explain why information passed through an employee's own network, or encountered via a platform that surfaces peer connections, tends to carry more weight with a job seeker than information obtained directly from the organisation.

1.5 Empirical Literature Review

A number of empirical studies support the view that social media exposure shapes candidates' perceptions of, and willingness to join, an organisation. Sivertzen, Nilsen and Olafsen (2013) found that people's perceptions of a corporation's reputation were more favourable when they had read information about it on social media, and that such exposure improved perceived organisational attractiveness, employer image and corporate reputation. Kissel and Büttgen (2015) found that the perceived accessibility of information about an organisation on social media was positively correlated with perceptions of corporate image, which in turn correlated positively with employer attraction. Frasca and Edwards (2017) similarly found that information about a firm posted on social media affects how prospective employees view it.
Carpentier, Van Hoye and Weijters (2019) found that candidates look to an organisation's social media pages to learn about its employer-branding personality traits, while Boyd and Ellison (2007) and Tifferet and Vilnai-Yavetz (2018) note that these platforms give job seekers a space for self-presentation and professional identity-building, a necessary step in positioning themselves favourably to prospective employers. The notion of candidate fit has also been a long-standing research focus: employees who "fit" their organisation, at the level of person-organisation, person-team or person-job fit, tend to perform better than those who do not (Bowen, Ledford and Barry, 1991; Chatman, 1989; Kristof, 1996). Person-organisation fit, defined by Kristof (1996) as the compatibility between people and organisations that occurs when at least one party provides what the other needs or the two share similar fundamental characteristics, underlies Schneider's (1987, 2001) Attraction-Selection-Attrition (ASA) model, under which applicants are drawn to organisations whose values align with their own; social media can expedite a candidate's assessment of this fit by giving earlier and more direct access to an organisation's culture and values (Rynes and Cable, 2003; Schneider, 2001).

2.0 Methodology

The study adopted a quantitative survey research design, consistent with its aim of investigating the opinions of a relevant stakeholder group, job seekers and current employees of selected MNCs, on the impact of social media on candidate acceptance decisions. Survey-based approaches of this kind prioritise objectivity, replicability and generalisability of findings (Harwell, 2011), and allow original data to be collected directly from individuals as the unit of analysis. The study population comprised job seekers and current employees who had used social media in their job search and received, and accepted, a job offer sourced through social media, drawn from SAP, Siemens AG and Delivery Hero. Of the 65 respondents targeted, 53 responded to the survey; two sampling techniques were used in combination, convenience sampling for its practicality and ease of access, and snowball sampling, adopted after an initially low response rate, under which participating respondents were asked to recommend other qualified respondents. Data were collected through a structured, anonymous online questionnaire administered via LimeSurvey, divided into a Section A covering the study's research questions on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Agree) and a Section B covering respondent demographics. The survey took five to seven minutes to complete and was administered in English. An intra-reliability check was performed by re-sharing the questionnaire with the same respondent after a short interval and comparing responses for consistency. Data collected under Section A were analysed using crosstabulation, cross-referencing responses to each research-question item against respondents' reported use of individual social media platforms (LinkedIn, Indeed, Glassdoor, Kununu and other platforms), in order to test the study's three hypotheses; this analysis was conducted in SPSS. Data collected under Section B were analysed using simple percentage distribution. For the purpose of this analysis, the original five-point response categories were collapsed into three

categories: Agree (combining Agree and Strongly Agree), Disagree (combining Disagree and Strongly Disagree) and Undecided.

3.0 Results

Of the 53 questionnaires distributed, 46 were completed and usable for analysis, a completion rate of 88%. Respondents were predominantly aged 21–30 years (57%), followed by 31–40 years (35%); 51% held a master's degree and 42% a bachelor's degree. In terms of job experience, 39% of respondents had between 4 and 10 years of experience, 30% had 1–3 years, and 21% had less than a year. By employer, 61% of respondents worked for Delivery Hero, 27% for Siemens AG and 12% for SAP. LinkedIn was by far the most-used platform for career purposes, used by 73% of respondents, followed by Glassdoor and Kununu (7% each) and Indeed (2%).

3.1 Hypothesis One — Social Media and Candidate Perception

H1 proposed that there is no significant relationship between social media and a candidate's perception of a German tech corporation. Among the 43 respondents who answered this set of items, 79% agreed that social media influences their perception of a multinational corporation, 88% agreed that reading about a corporation on social media is persuasive, 68% agreed that social media influences whether they apply to, or accept an offer from, a corporation, and 77% agreed that an employee's own comments about an employer, its services or an offer are more trustworthy or believable than official messaging. On this basis, the null hypothesis is rejected: social media was found to exert a significant influence on candidate perception.

3.2 Hypothesis Two — Social Media Reviews and Job Offer Acceptance

H2 proposed that there is no significant relationship between social media reviews and a candidate's acceptance of a job offer. Seventy percent of respondents agreed that expressing support for a corporation on social media reflects genuine appreciation for it, 70% agreed that they are attracted to a corporation's brand based on what they see on social media, 76% agreed that positive reviews on social media make them more likely to accept a job offer from that corporation, and 74% agreed that familiarity with a corporation on social media has attracted them to join it. The null hypothesis is accordingly rejected.

3.3 Hypothesis Three — Social Media and the Decision to Accept a Job Offer

H3 proposed that there is no significant influence between social media and the decision to accept a job offer. Eighty-four percent of respondents agreed that social media reviews stimulate their interest in a corporation, 86% agreed that such reviews attract them to a corporation's brand, 75% agreed that reviews influence their decision to join a corporation, and 74% agreed that reviews had, in practice, led them to a decision to join a corporation they reviewed. A further, more general item found that 60% of respondents believed social media plays a significant role in influencing candidate decisions regarding multinational corporations generally, with 17% disagreeing and 24% undecided. The null hypothesis is rejected.

Two supplementary items situate social media's influence against other sources of information. Asked which sources, besides social media, they prefer for gathering information about a multinational corporation, respondents most often cited people they know who work at the company (33%), followed by friends (27%), newspaper coverage (19%), journalists' interviews with executives (14%) and other sources (9%). Asked to weigh an organisation's stated purpose against its social media reviews when deciding whether to join it, 48% rated the organisation's purpose as important or extremely important relative to reviews, 34% rated it as unimportant,

and 18% were neutral, indicating that social media reviews operate alongside, rather than in place of, an organisation's substantive value proposition.

4.0 Discussion

Across all three hypotheses, a consistent majority of respondents, generally between two-thirds and nine-tenths depending on the specific item, indicated that social media shapes their perception of, attraction to, and ultimate decision to join, a multinational corporation. This finding is consistent with the view, drawn from signalling theory, that an employee's social media activity functions as a credible signal of what an organisation is actually like to work for, a signal job seekers weigh more heavily than official corporate communication because of its perceived independence from the organisation's own messaging (Connelly et al., 2010; Sivertzen, Nilsen and Olafsen, 2013). The finding that employee-generated content is trusted more than official employer messaging (77% agreement) reinforces this reading: the signal's credibility, in Connelly et al.'s (2010) terms, derives in large part from the signaler being a current or former employee rather than the organisation itself.

The role of personal networks, evident in the 33% of respondents who cited people they know at the company, and the 27% who cited friends, as preferred sources of information, is consistent with social capital theory's emphasis on the value embedded in an individual's own network of relationships (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). Social media platforms do not so much replace these networks as extend their reach, allowing a candidate's existing relational and structural capital to be supplemented with peer information surfaced through LinkedIn, Glassdoor or Kununu. At the same time, the finding that 48% of respondents weighed an organisation's purpose as important or extremely important relative to its social media reviews, against only 34% who considered it unimportant, suggests that social media reviews function as one input into a broader evaluation rather than a decisive factor on their own. This is consistent with the person-organisation fit literature (Kristof, 1996; Schneider, 1987, 2001), under which candidates assess the compatibility of an organisation's substantive values and mission with their own, using social media as one of several channels through which that assessment is made rather than a substitute for it.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

This study set out to examine the impact of social media on candidate acceptance decisions within three multinational corporations in Germany's tech sector. The findings support rejection of all three null hypotheses: social media, and employee-generated reviews on it in particular, were found to significantly influence candidates' perception of, attraction to, and decision to join, an MNC, with LinkedIn the dominant platform among the respondents surveyed. Employee commentary was trusted more than official corporate messaging, while an organisation's stated purpose continued to carry weight alongside, rather than instead of, its social media reputation. For multinational corporations, the findings suggest that employer-branding efforts are best concentrated on platforms with the broadest engagement among target candidates, built around content, such as authentic accounts of workplace culture and employee experience, that candidates will find credible rather than merely promotional, and supported by active employee advocacy, since employees were found to be trusted messengers in their own right. For recruiters, the findings point to the value of an explicit social media recruitment strategy, active engagement with candidates on relevant platforms, and up-to-date job postings accessible on mobile devices. For candidates, the findings support reviewing a prospective employer's social media presence, reading employee reviews on sites such as Glassdoor and Kununu as one source of due diligence among several, and weighing such reviews against the organisation's own stated purpose and values rather than relying on either in isolation.

The study's conclusions should be read in light of its limitations: the sample was limited to three corporations and 46 usable responses, restricting generalisability across the wider tech sector and other industries; the data are self-reported and may be subject to response bias; and the study did not account for other determinants of job acceptance, such as salary and benefits. Future research would benefit from a larger and more industry-diverse sample, a longitudinal design capable of tracking candidates from exposure to decision, and attention to a wider range of social media and employer-review platforms.

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