

Social Capital and Job Search Behavior in the Services Industry: Online Social Networks Perspective

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Abstract

Although job seeker social capital is considered a fundamental determinant of job-finding ability, it has yet to be discovered which activities contribute to its formation in the online social networking environment. Therefore, this study aims to reveal how job-seekers use online social networks, which job-searching activities increase their social capital and consequently contribute to finding a job in the services sector. The analyzed data were collected through an online questionnaire completed by 431 respondents. The resulting regression model identified two significant factors, namely the use of an online social network to directly contact a potential employer (p -value = 0.0017) and membership in Facebook professional groups in the area in which the respondent was looking for a job (p -value < 0.0001). The results confirmed that job-seekers who conduct both identified activities would have a 1.94 times bigger chance of finding a job. On the other hand, if they would not perform either of the activities, the probability of not finding a job would be 6.69 times higher. This study has several implications for human resource management theory and practice. First, it identifies job-seekers activities to find a job on online social networks and specifies the activities which lead to getting a job. Second, it enriches the Uses and Gratification theory by revealing that job-seekers prioritize the saturation of social needs over cognitive needs when searching for jobs on online social networking sites.

Key Words: online social networks; job-seeking behavior; social capital; social needs

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1. Introduction

Connections between people and organizations are exponentially increasing thanks to online social networks, which have enabled unimaginable interactive dynamics of relationships (de Mesa et al., 2020). Although individuals recognize the importance of building their connections as a source of social capital, they often do not engage in such behaviors (Horvath & Zhang, 2022). However, studies within this perspective suggest that the greater a job-seekers' social capital is, the better information they would

have, and more likely, it would lead to finding a job (Mowbray & Hall, 2021; Porter & Woo, 2015; Weiler et al., 2022). Regardless, we still need to know which job-seekers online social network activities promote their social capital accumulation and lead to job acquisition (Mowbray & Hall, 2021; Sender & Korzynski, 2020).

Activities typically used by job-seekers to find work include getting advice and referrals and seeking training opportunities (Wanberg et al., 2020), primarily through family and friends or by attending job fairs (Dillahunt et al., 2021; Godany & Mura, 2021). However, these activities are moving to online social networks today (Hedenus et al., 2021). Online social networks as the job-seekers platform (Hedenus et al., 2021) include technological features as follows (DeNardis & Hackl, 2015; Deng et al., 2022). They mediate user-generated content, enable interactivity between users and their contact with the created content, and connect individuals with other users. The study is based on the Use and Gratification theory (Katz et al., 1973), which helps to explain the motivation for using a particular medium. Specifically, this paradigm focuses on why users access and use different types of media in order to satisfy their needs. If these needs are satisfied, the user will likely repeat this behavior (Yen et al., 2019).

This study aims to reveal how job-seekers use online social networks, in which job-searching activities increase their social capital and consequently contribute to finding a job in the services sector. The study thus builds on the challenges associated with digitalization in the service sector, which requires new management practices and procedures (Rha & Lee, 2022; Cepel, 2021), including recruitment.

The first part of the study discusses the links between social capital and job seekers' ability to find a job and ways of building social capital in online social networking environments. Then, in the methodological section, the study describes the chosen sample, the questionnaire design, and conducted analysis procedures in more detail. Subsequently, it continues with the discussion of the results. This part also explains the results' relevance for science and practice. Finally, the study concludes with further research recommendations and limitations.

2. Literature review

Social capital refers to the resources or assets embedded in an individual's or group's network of social relationships (Ali-Hassan et al., 2015; Belas et al., 2020). Thus, from an evolutionary perspective, it can be defined as any feature of a social relationship that confers reproductive benefits (Machalek & Martin, 2015) or "goodwill" possessed by individuals or groups. Its source lies in the structure and content of the actor's social relationships. Its effects arise from the information, influence, and solidarity made available to the actor (Adler & Kwon, 2002). Social capital also determines how and what kind of job (Lancee, 2012) with what probability of success (Horvath & Zhang, 2022) would job-seekers find. Thus, building social capital is considered one of the most effective job search strategies (Karaoglu et al., 2021).

The building of a job-seekers social capital occurs through establishing and cultivating relationships that the job-seekers can subsequently use to gain employment (Villar et al., 2000). Usually, the job-seekers social network provides information about opportunities, application procedures, and industry or employer knowledge. Furthermore, it can signal to a potential employer that the job-seekers are looking for jobs (Olliff et al., 2022; Webb, 2015). Researchers also suggest that job-seekers may benefit from establishing both strong (i.e., friends and family members) and weak (i.e., acquaintances and referrals) ties (Wanberg et al., 2020). Furthermore, in particular, the diversity of ties is vital in this context (Olliff et al., 2022).

Over a decade, online social networks have changed how we communicate and connect (de Mesa et al., 2020). Although online social networks have gained popularity primarily outside of the work context, they are also often used for work purposes (Zoonen et al., 2016; Mura et al. 2021) and hence for job searching (Alexander et al., 2019; To et al., 2022). The rapid expansion of online networks has increased job seekers' networking opportunities and thus improved their access to sources of social

capital (Ahmad et al., 2016; Ellison et al., 2007; Utz, 2015; Weiler et al., 2022). Meanwhile, the technological architecture of the platform is not important, as users can compensate for its shortcomings by using the available features in a somewhat atypical way (e.g., by posting about work on Facebook) and carefully selecting relevant contacts (Utz, 2015). Thus, the ability of job-seekers to communicate about jobs on online social networking sites creates a competitive advantage for the job seeker, especially in the service sector (Pekkala & van Zoonen, 2022).

The benefits of online social networks in building the social capital of job-seekers are based on four essential characteristics, namely that: users have a unique user profile created by the user, network members, and the platform; they can access digital content through a variety of search mechanisms; they can create a list of other users with whom share a relational connection; and they can view and browse their connections and connections made by other users on the platform (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Kane et al., 2014).

Regarding the needs that lead job-seekers to use online social networks for a job search, in terms of Uses and Gratification theory, three main dimensions of use can be identified: social (to build new social relationships), hedonic (for fun, to pass the time, to relax, to escape, and to have fun), and cognitive use (to create content and to access content created by others) (Ali-Hassan et al., 2015). Thus, the building of the social capital of job-seekers in the online networking environment occurs through the saturation of social and cognitive needs. Social needs are satisfied by establishing relationships (with employers, individuals, or groups of individuals), for example, by simply sending a contact request (Weiler et al., 2022), by communicating with each other via private messages (Mowbray & Hall, 2021), or by membership in open or closed community groups. As groups consist of members, volunteer moderators, and the platform's interaction management mechanisms (Malinen, 2021), job-seekers can expand their circle of people beyond their friends' list and diverse connections (Kim et al., 2021) through the membership (Karaoglu et al., 2021). Cognitive needs are met through the active creation of one's content, passive consumption of others' content, and reactions to that content (Likes, Shares, and Comments), with the ability to view personal profiles of network members falling into this category (Weiler et al., 2022).

Consequently, research on the use of online social networks during the job search process suggests that job-seekers may benefit from establishing both strong (i.e., friends and family members) and weak (i.e., acquaintances and referrals) ties (Wanberg et al., 2020). According to Utz (2015), the effects of strategic networking are stronger for Facebook and Twitter platforms. Both strong and weak ties show a positive relationship with informational benefits on the online network LinkedIn, while only strong ties are significant on Facebook (Utz, 2015). Similarly, Garg & Telang (2017) also argue that weak ties on online social networks have little impact on job offers, while strong ties lead to more job offers, interviews, and offers for job-seekers (Garg & Telang, 2017). Sender and Korzynski (2020) also confirmed that receiving updates about a colleague's career progress on professional online social networks increases an individual's propensity to engage in job searches (Sender & Korzynski, 2020).

3. Methods

The study aims to reveal how job-seekers use online social networks in their job search, which activities increase their social capital, and which activities contribute to finding a job in the services sector.

Data source. The population consisted of Facebook users in the Czech and Slovak Republic who have been looking for a job in the service sector over the last year, as Facebook is increasingly seen as an informal tool for promoting the job-seekers image and for getting information about available jobs. According to To et al. (2022), more than half of the respondents for whom Facebook was the most popular platform for general use reported using it for active and passive job searches. By contacting an organization where they would like to get a job, being a member of relevant groups, or passively

consuming content that may be useful in their job search (To et al., 2022). Facebook is also the most widely used social network in the Czech Republic and Slovakia (Kajanova et al., 2017).

A random sampling technique was used to select the respondents. Facebook's advertising algorithm determined the opportunity to participate in the research. A paid post asking people to fill out a questionnaire was targeted to people aged 18-65 in the Czech and Slovak Republics and was posted between May 3, 2022, and May 19, 2022. The paid post was shown to 30,680 people 49,591 times. The final sample consists of 431 respondents. The sample size for 95% confidence was determined to be 385 respondents. More extensive data on the sample, year of birth, highest educational attainment, type of job, and location of the job sought are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Sample characteristics

In which period were you born?	N	% of Total
1946 - 1964	34	7.89%
1965 - 1980	184	42.69%
1981 - 1996	154	35.73%
1997 or later	59	13.69%
What is your highest level of education?	N	% of Total
Elementary school	18	4.18%
High school without a diploma	51	11.83%
High school with a diploma	198	45.94%
University (bachelor's or master's degree)	143	33.18%
University (doctoral degree)	21	4.87%
Job location	N	% of Total
Managerial	74	17.17%
Non-managerial	147	34.11%
Without preference	16	3.71%
I do not know	194	45.01%
Location of the job	N	% of Total
At home	280	64.97%
Abroad	20	4.64%
Without preference	14	3.25%
I do not know	117	27.15%
All	431	100.00%

Source: own processing

The structured questionnaire in Czech and Slovak languages consisted of two parts. The first part contained questions about the ways of using Facebook when looking for a job. The second part contained questions about the demographic data of the respondents. The total number of questions in the questionnaire was 13. The responses to the independent and dependent variables I(1-10) and D1 were designed as dichotomous (Yes/No). Responses to the demographic section were made by selecting from the designated responses.

Independent variables - work-related communication and networking activities on online social networks. The variables assessed job seekers' use of online social networking sites for job search-related

communication. The following questions and statements operationalized the independent variables in the questionnaire: (I1) Have you used social networking sites in the past to directly contact a potential employer? (I2) I am a member of groups (closed, open) of professional communities (in the field in which I am looking for a job, e.g., marketers, managers...). (I3) I am a member of groups (closed, open) that post job offers. (I4) I comment on the postings of a potential employer. (I5) I respond to comments made by others in groups that post job openings. (I6) I respond to comments on a potential employer's profile. (I7) I post content in groups with job opening offers. (I8) I post information that I am looking for a new job. (I9) I post content that I expect to be of interest to a potential employer. (I10) I have established a friendship with the HR manager of a potential employer. The questions and statements used were derived from previously published papers (Gomez-Torres et al., 2019; Utz, 2015; Zoonen et al., 2016). Regarding the Uses and Gratification theory, social needs are met by items I1, I2, I3, and I10. Cognitive needs are fulfilled by items I4, I5, I6, I7, I8, and I9.

Dependent variable - finding a job. The dependent variable was operationalized by asking (D1) whether the respondent had previously found a job in the service industry thanks to online social networks. Analogously, Karaoglu et al., for example, asked whether respondents had ever applied for a job online or responded to a job offer on online social networks (Karaoglu et al., 2021), or found a job through an online social network (Kajanova et al., 2017).

Calculations. In the first step, descriptive statistics were used to understand better the results obtained. At the same time, the urgency index of respondents' social and cognitive needs was calculated as a percentage of the sum of positive statements to the total sum of respondents' statements.

A binary logistic regression model was used to estimate how changes in predictor values are related to changes in the likelihood of the event occurring, whether a respondent found a service job due to social networking. Before model development, the following assumptions were tested. The dependent variable is dichotomous, there are no outliers in the data, and there are no high correlations between predictors.

First, we attempted to create a model that included all predictors as effects. The model contained too much error in prediction due to a lack of model fit (p -value 0.0051). Only the intercept (p -value < 0.0001) and the coefficients (I1, p -value < 0.0001) were significant in the selected model. Have you used online social networks to directly contact a potential employer? (I2, p -value = 0.0088) I am a member of groups of professional communities (in the field in which I am looking for a job. We then reduced the model by successively deleting the non-significant predictors. The resulting model is presented in the next section after the descriptive results.

4. Results and Discussion

Descriptive results. The vast majority of questions were answered negatively. Thus, this study generally found the same pattern as the work of Kajanova, H. et al. (2017), who investigated the current importance of online social networks in students' job searches. They found that most of the respondents (59.1%) had no experience finding a job through social networking (Kajanova et al., 2017). Thus, online social networks are still not the predominant way of looking for a job in the Czech and Slovak Republic service sectors.

The only exception is membership in the groups that post job offers. In the context of looking for a job, this is the most realized activity for 62.41% of respondents. The following most commonly realized activities are direct contact with a potential employer (40.84%) and membership in "professional communities in the area in which respondents are looking for work (35.03%).

Conversely, the least performed activities on online social networking sites when looking for a job include posting posts that the respondent expects to be of interest to the potential employer (15.08%),

commenting on the potential employer's posts (13.23%), and establishing a "friendship" with the potential employer's human resources manager (7.66%).

In the context of the Mowbray & Hall (2021) study, it is possible to identify an increase in the popularity of membership in groups that post job offers. Only 36.2% of job-seekers in the mentioned study were a member of such a group, and a relatively equal range of interest in direct contact with an employer (55.8% of respondents had never contacted an employer about a job) (Mowbray & Hall, 2021).

The above results afterward correspond with the fact that only 32.25% of respondents have found a job in the past, thanks to online social networks. The complete descriptive results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive results

Categories	Yes		No	
	N	% of Total	N	% of Total
(I1) Have you used social networking sites in the past to directly contact a potential employer?	176	40.84	255	59.16
(I2) I am a member of groups (closed, open) of professional communities (in the field in which I am looking for a job (e.g., marketers, managers...)).	151	35.03	280	64.97
(I3) I am a member of groups (closed, open) that post job offers.	269	62.41	162	37.59
(I4) I comment on the postings of a potential employer.	57	13.23	374	86.77
(I5) I respond to comments made by others in groups that post job openings.	118	27.38	313	72.62
(I6) I respond to comments on a potential employer's profile.	70	16.24	361	83.76
(I7) I post content in groups with job opening offers.	82	19.03	349	80.97
(I8) I post information that I am looking for a new job.	83	19.26	348	80.74
(I9) I post content that I expect to be of interest to a potential employer.	65	15.08	366	84.92
(I10) I have established a friendship with the HR manager of a potential employer.	33	7.66	398	92.34
(D1) Have you previously found a job in the service industry thanks to online social networks?	139	32.25	292	67.75

Source: own processing

The results also confirm that job-seekers prioritize social needs saturation (social needs index = 36.48%) over cognitive needs saturation (cognitive needs index = 18.37%) when searching for a job on online social networks. This is, in principle, confirmed by the resulting regression model below.

Model. Based on the Uses and Gratification theory, this study examined the activities of job-seekers on online social networks. The resulting model identified two activities that significantly lead to finding a job. The first factor (I1) that the respondent has previously used online social networking sites to contact a potential employer directly confirms the findings of Carmack & Heiss (2018). They confirmed that previous use of online social networking sites for searching for a job predicts subsequent intention to use online social networking sites to search for a job (Carmack & Heiss, 2018). The second activity was job-seekers membership in professional communities bringing together professionals in the field in which they were looking for a job (Table 3).

Table 3. The Binomial Regression Model

Predictors	Coefficient estimate	Standard error	Wald	Prob>ChiSq	Odds ratio
Intercept	-1.929029874	0.196232326		< 0.0001	
I1	1.858278267	0.232572167	63.84193114	< 0.0001	6.41268632
I2	0.738280012	0.23504864	9.865673483	0.0017	2.09233363
Diagnostics					
(LR) Chi-square	89.0332434			< 0.0001	
AUC	0.75956				

Source: own processing

Based on the resulting model, it can be predicted that if a job seeker implements both identified activities, the probability of finding a job is 66% (i.e., it is 1.94 times higher than not finding a job). On the other hand, if he/she does not perform either of the activities, the probability of not finding a job is 87% (i.e., it is 6.69 times higher than finding a job) (Table 4).

Table 4. The probability of finding a job

I1	I2	Probability (D1 = Yes)	Probability (D1 = No)
No	No	13%	87%
Yes	No	48%	52%
No	Yes	23%	77%
Yes	Yes	66%	34%

Source: own processing

Paradoxically, respondents prefer membership in groups with job offers (I3) instead of a direct contact with a potential employer (I1) or membership in professional communities (I2), both significant factors.

This study has several implications for the theory and practice of human resource management. First, it identifies job-seekers activities to find jobs in online social networking environments. Second, it identifies activities that lead to social capital accumulation. Third, it enriched the Uses and Gratification theory by finding that job-seekers prioritize the saturation of social needs over cognitive needs when searching for jobs on online social networking sites.

At a practical level, the disparity between job-finding activities in the online networking environment and the popularity of activities among job-seekers points to the ineffectiveness of job-seeking strategies among job-seekers. Since job-seekers are not motivated to create or respond to content, membership in professional communities is irrelevant. This is likely because they are not interested or able to present themselves as an expert in the field in which they are looking for a job. The preference for membership in general-oriented groups (with job offers) over professional communities is also related to the low value of cognitive needs.

One of the conditions that determine the success of companies operating in the changing and volatile environment of the service industry is the quality of their human resources (Stefko et al., 2017). In this context, the results also contribute to understanding how online social networks can be used for recruitment activities, namely where to post job offers and how to communicate with job-seekers.

5. Conclusion

Online social networks allow job-seekers to form purpose-driven relationships (de Mesa et al., 2020) and build social capital to find suitable jobs. This study aimed to uncover job-seekers activities and determine which led to finding a job. The service domain was deliberately chosen, as this is where the use of relationships or social capital for finding a job is so commonplace that their existence is already inevitable (Stefko et al., 2020).

The results showed that job-seekers are not motivated to create or respond to content on online social networks. Thus, they do not make much effort to build their reputation or brand in the professional community, which consequently, together with the disproportion between job-seeking activities in the online networking environment and the popularity of job-seeking activities, points to the ineffectiveness of job-seekers job-seeking strategies. At the same time, it is essential to note that once employers decide to use online social networks to recruit employees, they should also be using online social networks to respond to potential job-seekers requests.

In the future research, it is crucial to focus on the reasons for lower levels of cognitive need saturation in the context of the demographic characteristics of job-seekers. In addition, quantitatively-focused research has a limited ability to explain or further understand certain relationships, so it may be more useful in the future to use a qualitative research methodology to find an evidence of hypothesized relationships.

Regarding the potential limitations of the research, a relatively large number of respondents did not know their answers to the questions about the type of position and location of the prospective employer. We assume these are passive job-seekers who are already employed but are still looking for a better opportunity for a change (Hosain & Liu, 2020). Such job seekers usually engage in online social networking activities at earlier stages of the job search process; they take time to decide or submit any job application and therefore show little preference.

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