

Extending the Boundaries of Corporate Branding: An Exploratory Study of the Influence of Brand Familiarity in Recruitment Practices Through Social Media by B2B Firms

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Abstract The rapid growth of social media has prompted B2B firms to incorporate social media platforms into their marketing communication. Notably, for B2B firms, social media has become a useful tool for corporate branding. However, how B2B firms can leverage benefits from social media marketing is less obvious, especially in new markets. In this study, we investigate the challenges and opportunities faced by B2B firms in exploiting the social media for their recruitment practices in an international context. In this regard, we focus on the effects of brand familiarity and users' persuasiveness on their adoption of social media channels for job search. We employ a cross-country dataset from a multinational B2B firm to investigate how it can successfully integrate social media into its recruitment practices. Our empirical results suggest that users' brand familiarity encourages them to adopt social media platforms for job search; however, the effect of the persuasiveness of recruitment messages on users' adoption of social media platforms for their job search behavior is negative. Nevertheless, a higher level of brand familiarity mitigates the problem of the low persuasiveness of the recruitment messages as we find a positive effect of the interaction between brand familiarity and user persuasiveness on their adoption of social media channel for job search. Thus, without proper user engagement on social media platforms to build brand familiarity, the effectiveness of recruitment messages may not encourage users to

adopt the social media channel for job search. Therefore, our study recommends B2B firms to build better brand familiarity on social media platforms to engage with the users first before they attempt to use these platforms directly for their recruitment strategy. In addition, we find a synergistic effect between social and nonsocial media channels thereby recommending B2B firms to employ both channels in their recruitment practices.

Keywords Social media · Corporate branding · Recruitment strategy · Brand familiarity

Introduction

When expanding operations to new and relatively unexplored markets, a firm can suffer from problems emanating from newness and foreignness (Chorev and Anderson 2006; Zahra 2005). Firms can pursue building a strong corporate brand or reputation to overcome such challenges. A strong corporate branding, in turn, helps in fostering employee–brand relationship (Harris and de Chernatony 2001). In this regard, current and potential future employees of a firm act as one vital resource for building and scaling its brand reputation. However, the challenges arise as firms employ multiple channels and innovative strategies (e.g., attracting top-notch personnel (Balmer 1995)) to nurture the employee–brand relationship through corporate branding. To this end, first, firms need to coordinate their communication activities to portray the positive corporate image (Kennedy 1977), and second, they need to find the relative strengths and weakness of respective channels (Simoes et al. 2015).

The use of traditional media in branding activities is very costly. Therefore, firms are increasingly adopting

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digital media as they offer a cost-effective solution. Furthermore, for B2B firms who are planning international operations in new markets, digital media is a bona fide choice. However, due to the fast-paced technological development, B2B firms are struggling to see the opportunities provided by the digital technologies (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010). Also, very little is known about the dynamics of corporate branding using current marketing communications (Keller and Lehmann 2006). Especially, the use of social media by B2B firms to achieve objectives of corporate branding remains limited (Michaelidou et al. 2011). Therefore, considering these limitations, in this study, we explore the antecedents and consequences of the use of social media by B2B firms in their recruitment practices to manage their corporate brand image.

Brands are a mixture of attributes which when appropriately managed creates value and influence (Swystun 2007). In the context of corporate branding, the concept of branding is applied to create a favorable corporate brand image of the organization that affects multiple stakeholders (such as employees, investors, suppliers, and customers). One aspect of corporate branding involves creating a corporate image that reflects value and influence in terms of employment experience and is called employer branding. Therefore, firms employ multiple channels to manage corporate image to develop familiarity with the organization (Lemmink et al. 2003). However, the effectiveness of specific media channels in persuading the users to adopt that channel depends on their prior brand familiarity (Campbell and Keller 2003). Thus, firms exploring in the new market and trying to attract recruits to join the organization may face twofold challenges: first what communication media channels to choose to build corporate image, and second, whether to focus on creating brand familiarity or persuasive tactics to have success in recruitment strategies.

A remarkable growth in social media has driven all organizations, including B2B, to establish and maintain a strong online presence on social media platforms (such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn) to engage with users (Brennan and Croft 2012; Jussila et al. 2012; Kotler 2011; Michaelidou et al. 2011). Furthermore, users are spending a significant amount of time on social media, where they engage in activities such as searching for information and making purchases (Adler 2014; *GlobalWebIndex* 2014). Social media facilitate interactions between firms and users, thereby making dialogue richer, more meaningful, and more impactful (Kumar and Bezawada 2014). In fact, B2B firms can use social media to expand their brands, build their corporate image, enhance their brand equity, convey their vision, promote their offerings, and offer customer support including recruiting prospective employees (Brennan et al. 2014; Michaelidou et al. 2011).

Thus, firms may face the risk of becoming less competitive and even irrelevant if they fail to integrate social media into their communication tools. Thus, on the one hand, social media platforms have become very relevant to B2B firms, but on the contrary, their apparent benefits, at first sight, may not be visible to them (Jussila et al. 2014; McCann 2010). Furthermore, in new markets, firms may face a strategic dilemma of whether to use social media as platforms for persuading the recruits, or to use it as a useful communication tool to create the brand familiarity.

In this study, we examine the role of social media platforms in B2B firm's recruitment strategy. Several aspects make the adoption of social media platforms relevant for B2B firms (Doherty 2010; Fisher et al. 2014; Madia 2011). For example, the *Bureau of Labor Statistics* (2011) reports that the people recruited through traditional channels often fail to meet the job requirements making them ineffective. Moreover, an increasing number of professionals now use social media platforms to build an online career presence, to present their qualifications and expertise, and to search for companies and employment opportunities (*Nigel Wright Recruitment* 2011). Also, when firms expand their operations in new markets, social media platforms offer an inexpensive way to connect with these users. Therefore, firms have integrated social media into their traditional channels. However, firms' corporate image may have a major influence on the likelihood of users' response to their recruitment messages disseminated across various media platforms (Belt and Paolillo 1982). Therefore, strengthening corporate image helps firms to attract qualified applicants at a lower cost (Parry and Olivas-Lujan 2011; Parry and Wilson 2009), and simultaneously lower their liability of newness in a new market.

Despite its recruitment potential, adoption of social media platforms by B2B firms poses several challenges, some of which are information related. For example, online recruitment is influenced by the friendliness and the usability of the interface as well as the information provision by the platform and the recruiting company (Teoh et al. 2013). Additional challenges are associated with the nature of the social media platforms as open and collective forums for interaction. For example, privacy issues and attitudinal orientation toward traditional channel presumably make it more difficult to influence users on social media platforms via the corporate information, such as job adverts (Tucker 2014). Also, due to the prevalence and less-intrusive nature of traditional channels, users might be reluctant to apply for jobs through social media (van Doorn and Hoekstra 2013). Despite the increasing relevance of social media platforms in B2B recruitment practice, there are very few empirical studies on this topic. In this research, we investigate a major international B2B firm's efforts to incorporate social media into its global corporate



branding strategy to achieve its recruitment goal of attracting suitable candidates from both developed and emerging economies. Using a novel cross-country dataset, we empirically examine the importance of social media platforms vis-à-vis the other nonsocial media channels along the two critical constructs namely user persuasiveness and brand familiarity.

Our dataset comes from both primary and secondary sources from a well-known B2B firm. The primary survey data come from emerging (China and India), and developed economy (Finland). We supplement our analysis with other data sources collected from the firm's recent hires and the internal records from the firm's human resource unit. We also use other two sources of secondary data: the first one comes from the Google analytics relating to the firm's web traffic on recruitment advertisements and applications, and the second one is from the firm's previous internal studies conducted for staff development. The combined use of primary and secondary data helps us to support our empirical findings and recommend several social media strategies that B2B firms can use for their corporate branding targeted toward their recruitment practices.

Our empirical results suggest that without proper user engagement, the effect of the persuasiveness of recruitment messages on users' adoption of social media platforms for their job search behavior is negative. However, the users' familiarity with the brand encourages them to adopt social media platform for job search. Furthermore, a higher level of brand familiarity mitigates the problem of the low persuasiveness of the recruitment messages on user's adoption of social media platforms for job search. Therefore, our study recommends B2B firms to build better brand familiarity on social media platforms to engage with the users first before they attempt to use these platforms directly for their recruitment strategy. Also, we find a synergistic effect between social and nonsocial media channels, thereby recommending B2B firms to employ both channels in their recruitment practices.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. First, we review the relevant literature about recruitment strategy, corporate branding, and social media. Next, we propose our research questions which are followed by a description of our methodology that consists of data used to address the research questions and the adopted empirical model. Subsequently, we describe our results, present managerial insights, and conclude with limitations and future research directions.

Literature Review

The Internet has changed the way people communicate and interact with organizations about their careers (Parry and Wilson 2009). The relevance of new media has put pressure on firms to include new communication tools (such as social media, emails, online portals) into their recruitment practices to search for better-qualified job candidates and to make the hiring process shorter and more affordable (Smith and Rupp 2004). Therefore, firms are integrating technologically advanced media into their recruitment strategies (Anderson et al. 2010; Branine 2008; Madia 2011). However, despite the growth in online recruitment tools, they are yet to become dominant in organizations' recruitment practices (Parry and Wilson 2009).

Moreover, these new media also help firms to build their corporate image. A strong corporate brand allows firms in retaining existing employees and attracting potential ones (Balmer and Gray 2003). Due to the significance of employees in corporate brand management, firms are involved in employer branding (Foster et al. 2010) too as a part of their corporate branding strategy. For example, employer branding conveys functional, economic, and psychological benefits by the firms to their prospective employees (Ambler and Barrow 1996). Therefore, employer branding has become essential to corporate branding to ensure a closer relationship between HR and marketing functions within an organization (Mosley 2007). Thus, organizations are using several types of communications to strengthen their corporate image. Recently, the use of social media in recruitment process has increased, which helps firms to enhance their employer brand and build a better reputation (Fombrun and Shanley 1990; Madia 2011; Parry and Wilson 2009). Given such benefits of social media in employer brand building, organizations are using them in recruitment and selection process to keep up with modern technologies (Ployhart 2006). In new markets, these activities also alleviate the liabilities of newness and foreignness.

However, the use of social media for recruitment practices is less straightforward. Especially, there is a gap between academic findings and practices followed by the HR staffs (Rynes et al. 2002). For example, academic studies recommend that the firms should engage candidates first with their social media presence to build their brand value; not doing so may cost them suitable candidates (Madia 2011). However, B2B firms fail to realize this, and they use social media platforms for recruitment process without focusing on user engagement. This could be a potential cause of disharmony between the reputation of a firm and the persuasiveness of firm's social media messages leading to ineffective and potentially even



counterproductive social media strategy for B2B companies. As noted by Davison et al. (2011), “...these sites can be valuable ‘friends’ for HR, but also have the potential to be dangerous ‘foes’ if used improperly.”

Since social media platforms give B2B firms an opportunity to engage with users, many have started using them for recruitment (Lauby 2010). However, integrating social media platforms into traditional channels brings both dilemmas and benefits. Therefore, B2B firms need a sound integration strategy for optimal benefits. Furthermore, given the literature on this topic is scant, there is a need to include concepts from diverse fields to add theoretical foundation to building corporate branding using social media platforms (Edwards 2010). Thus, in this study, we contribute to the existing literature by empirically exploring the effects of users’ persuasiveness and brand familiarity on their adoption of social media sites for their job search in a B2B setting.

Research Questions

Recruitment strategies constitute practices and processes of attracting potential employees (Gold 2007). For this, firms use employer branding under the bigger umbrella of corporate branding (Aurand et al. 2005). Their primary goal of employer branding is to obtain qualified candidates at a minimum cost to meet the needs of the firms at the right time (Armstrong 2006). Therefore, firms use multiple communication media (such as direct mail, job-board, adverts, and referrals) to meet their recruitment goals. However, in this age of the Internet, many firms now increasingly use online career job boards (e.g., Monsters, Yahoo! HotJobs, and Career Builder) that are enjoying record-high traffic (*comScore* 2010). High user traffic on such online platforms also creates a problem in screening and selection. For instance, according to *Bureau of Labor Statistics* (2011), the average ratio of job applicants to job opening was 4.7:1. It is a concern for firms as these channels primarily used for attracting qualified job seekers are instead bringing in more unqualified candidates than ever, making recruitment expensive and ineffective (Light 2011). Therefore, firms are adding new channels such as social media sites to attract suitable applicants at a much lower cost. Also, many of today’s job seekers maintain their online profiles on social media platforms (*Jobvite* 2010). Thus, social media has become an integral channel of recruitment strategy. However, there are certain barriers to successful integration of social media sites into recruitment strategy that relates to conveying corporate brand identity (Stuart and Kerr 1999).

First, information provision is very critical in employer branding targeted toward online hiring process (Teoh et al.

2013). Moreover, because of privacy concerns and intrusiveness associated with the online media, job seekers may be less persuaded by the firms’ recruitment advertisements on social media platforms. Furthermore, if firms fail to engage with their users despite their social media presence due to the lack of strong brand identity on these social media, it may result in failure (Yan 2011). Thus, adoption of social media platforms for job search is influenced by the job seekers’ trust in the firm’s messages and their familiarity with the firm.

Second, the extent of activities relating to user-generated content (UGC) and firm-generated content (FGC) for B2B firms on social media differs widely compared to that of B2C firms. B2B firms with recent social media presence mostly use these social media platforms to advertise vacancies (El-Kot and Leat 2008) as a part of their recruitment strategy. However, users’ responses to these contents may be affected by the information content and the perceived persuasiveness of the social media messages (Goh et al. 2013). Furthermore, the relationship between the job seekers and the firm on social media platforms may be affected by the formers trust and commitment to the platform and their intention to use it for job search (De Ruyter et al. 2001).

In this regard, we draw upon our arguments based on the elaboration likelihood model (Petty and Cacioppo 1986). The elaboration likelihood model (ELM) helps understand how the persuasive effect of messages differs depending on how users process the information. The key assumption of ELM is that people are overloaded with persuasive messages, and it is impossible for them to evaluate each one of them. Therefore, people process information in two main ways namely, a central and a peripheral route that can change their attitude toward messages. The central route involves an elaborated effort for major decisions by scrutinizing the information content before forming an attitude. The peripheral route does not require elaboration and is used for minor decisions based on peripheral cues taken from the information such as nonargument cues, heuristics-based cues, social cues, and other simple inferences (Petty and Cacioppo 1986). Thus, central route involves diligent processing of information, whereas the peripheral route involves less cognitive effort. While persuasion can be effective via both the routes, the strength and the durability of the attitudes formed via the two routes are likely to be different (Haugtvedt and Kasmer 2008). ELM argues that the message type and involvement will affect whether users take either central route or peripheral route to form an attitude (Lee and Lee 2014). Thus, we propose following three research questions.



Research Question 1: What is the Effect of the Users' Brand Familiarity on their Channel-Adoption for Job Search?

Social media is an effective channel for user engagement (Briones et al. 2011; Paine 2011; Sashi 2012). Therefore, firms use them for employer branding as a part of their corporate image building (Barwise and Meehan 2010). Also, these platforms enable users to build a brand community that leads to value creation (Schau et al. 2009). Therefore, many B2B firms use social media sites for branding (Michaelidou et al. 2011). Also, B2B firms have started using social media to strengthen their brand as a means of attracting firm-user interaction by collecting feedbacks, referrals, and job applications (Madia 2011; Parry and Wilson 2009). Online social presence of B2B firms in a competitive marketing environment may influence users' elaboration and memory regarding their brand familiarity. Thus, we expect users' familiarity with the brand may favorably affect their adoption of the channel for job search. We explore this relationship empirically.

Research Question 2: What is the Effect of the Users' Persuasiveness of the Recruitment Messages on their Channel-Adoption for Job Search?

Persuasion is an internal state of users. Firms can strive to persuade by having appealing messages with facts and emotions. However, in the end, the users must convince themselves about the validity of the message. In a social media environment, herding effects of social influence theory (Muchnik et al. 2013) indicates that user-generated content and electronic word of mouth act as cues for users to process information. Furthermore, herding behavior (or imitation behavior) often lead to inefficient market outcomes (Bikhchandani et al. 1992), e.g., regarding users' information processing, herding leads to inefficient decision making due to suboptimal use of the available information (Van Campenhout and Verhestraeten 2010; Asch 1952). We argue the suboptimal use of information may result from the peripheral route of information processing, which in turn, results in low elaboration likelihood that leads to less persuasion. Therefore, the contents generated solely by the firm on social media platforms may have less persuasive effects on users' subsequent behavior (Arazy et al. 2010; Brown and Reingen 1987; Gilly et al. 1998). Furthermore, we notice that the user engagement on social media platforms is low for most of the B2B firms (Brennan and Croft 2012). Following the theory of willingness to participate (WTP) (Parent et al. 2011), we argue why there is a low level of user engagement on B2B firms' social media platforms. First, the WTP concept states that 6Cs

namely, company, content, community, customers, and conversations drive user engagement. Second, the Parent et al. (2011) report that 46% of the B2B firms think social media is irrelevant for their firms, this glaring undermining of social media by B2B firms is also reported by recent CMO Survey (2017). Thus, the misguided social media strategy from B2B companies further escalates into their poor content strategy leading to a small user base for their online brand community and subsequently affecting the overall quality of the conversation and hence, the user engagement. Thus, the persuasive power of firm generated contents (e.g., recruitment ads) may be less on social media platforms than on traditional recruitment channels (Trusov et al. 2009). In addition, due to a high level of self-expression (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010) on social media platforms, job applicants may be wary of using them for job applications due to two main reasons. First, users are worried that on social media platforms the focal company, the job applicant is applying for, may come to know if he/she has also applied for their rival companies also, thereby possibly jeopardizing their chances of landing a future job. Second, if the job applicant already has an existing job, then they are wary of their parent company knowing their intention to leave the job, thereby jeopardizing their chances of retaining the current position or future promotion. In sum, if job applicants are persuaded by the recruitment ads on social media channel they might prefer to use nonsocial media channel to apply for the job. However, we acknowledge that this relationship is an open question for an empirical investigation.

Research Question 3: Is there an Interaction Effect between Users' Persuasiveness and Brand Familiarity on their Channel-Adoption for Job Search?

There is increasing use of social media platforms by B2B firms for corporate branding (Leek and Christodoulides 2011). B2B firms' social media presence helps them to build brand loyalty and reputation (McDowell Mudambi et al. 1997). By offering access to social media communities, platforms like LinkedIn give B2B firms a solid foundation to build the brand community that becomes a tool for relationship building (Andersen 2005). Research on B2B brand community shows that brand trust of the firm is positively related to the trust among community members (Bruhn et al. 2014). Therefore, users may be more receptive to the social media contents by B2B firms with higher brand reputation due to social consensus (Deighton and Grayson 1995). Thus, the perceived persuasiveness of B2B firms' social media message is moderated by the firm's brand reputation. Consequently, we suggest an interaction effect between the brand familiarity and the



persuasiveness of employer's recruitment contents in influencing user adoption of social media channel. B2B firms' brand familiarity can affect users' elaboration of FGC on SM platform thereby increasing the persuasiveness effects of the firms' job advertisements. In our empirical setting, we explicitly model this interaction effect and explore the effect empirically.

Methodology

Data

The dataset for this research comes from a well-known international B2B firm headquartered in Helsinki, Finland; due to a nondisclosure agreement, we cannot furnish further details. The firm's key customers include constructors, property developers, property facility managers, and architects. The firm operates in more than 50 countries and is in the top ten in its industry group. The firm has over 40,000 employees, and its annual net sales in 2014 exceeded €6 billion.

Despite its international presence, the firm has very low or virtually nonexistent corporate brand identity, especially in Chinese and Indian markets. However, the rapid expansion of the firm's market share in this region prompted it to include social media platforms into its recruitment tools. The firm conducted surveys in Finland, China, and India in early 2013 to find the best platforms and the best practices to reach qualified applicants. The survey was administered online, and it was first prepared in English. The survey in China was conducted in Chinese, as respondents were not proficient in English. Language experts were used to translating survey from English into Chinese. However, in the Indian and Finnish market, the survey was conducted in English.

The online survey was designed to investigate prospective employees' online job search behavior, and their brand awareness about the employer. The survey also included questionnaires about respondents' demographic information and their usage of social media platforms. We use 139 samples from the survey. The sample consists of 55 and 50 users exclusively adopting social media and traditional channels respectively, whereas 34 adopt both the channels for job search.

Furthermore, we collected data from 36 of the firm's recent hires from Finland and interviewed three HR representatives from Finland, India, and China. The data from the recent hires helps us to match their job search behaviors with that of the future employees; the data from the HR representatives provides us with the detailed information on local market conditions, and the firm's current regional recruitment efforts. Finally, the firm provided data from

secondary sources such as the Google Analytics and previous internal studies conducted for human resource development that helps us to verify our findings from the survey.

Model

The objective of our study is to find how social media platforms fare against other forms of nonsocial media platforms in terms of employers' brand familiarity and the persuasiveness of recruitment advertisements when it comes to users' job search behavior. One of the questions in the survey asked the respondents about their primary sources for job search. These sources were divided into two categories: social media platforms (mainly LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter), and nonsocial media platforms (mostly online job portals, search engines, company websites, career fairs). For each of the channels, the respondents were asked how persuasive they find these channels for their job search. The persuasiveness of social and nonsocial media platforms was then aggregated. Finally, the survey also contained a question on respondent's familiarity toward the focal company that serves as a proxy for the employer brand familiarity. The details of these constructs are given in the Appendix.

We model only two channels, social media and nonsocial media platforms, as channel-choice for job search. Therefore, we adopt bivariate response models to describe the response probabilities of users' channel-choice for job search. Based on this dichotomy, an indicator variable $Social_i$ takes value 1 if the user, i , selects social media platforms for their job search otherwise it is 0. Likewise, $NonSocial_i$ takes value 1 if the user i selects nonsocial media platforms for their job search. Since, users can choose either one of the channels or both for their job search we adopt bivariate probit to capture their job search behavior. Let U_{ism} and U_{insm} be the latent utilities of selecting social media, sm , and nonsocial media, nsm , platforms by the user i respectively. Then we model these utilities as follows:

$$U_{ism} = \alpha_1 + \alpha_2 BrandFamiliarity_i + \alpha_3 UserPersuasiveness_{ism} + \alpha_4 (BrandFamiliarity_i \times Persuasiveness_{ism}) + \alpha_5 X + \varepsilon_{ism} \quad (1)$$

$$U_{insm} = \beta_1 + \beta_2 BrandFamiliarity_i + \beta_3 UserPersuasiveness_{insm} + \beta_4 (BrandFamiliarity_i \times Persuasiveness_{insm}) + \beta_5 X + \xi_{insm} \quad (2)$$

where $BrandFamiliarity$ and $UserPersuasiveness$ are the user's ratings of his/her familiarity with the firm and the



persuasiveness of the job-channel respectively. X contains macroeconomic variables such as internet penetration rate¹ and a dummy for emerging economy. The error terms are distributed bivariate normal, i.e., $\Sigma \sim MVN(0, \Omega)$. For identification, we estimate the correlation matrix instead of covariance. We use Bayesian method for the model estimation.

We support the empirical results from the Eqs. 1 and 2 using other data sources also. For this, we use descriptive research methods to analyze the data. This analysis helps us to understand, explain, and expand upon the results from the proposed empirical model. In sum, empirical and descriptive analyses help us to propose some policy implications for B2B firms about how to incorporate social media into their portfolio of recruitment and corporate brand management tools.

Results

Channel-Adoption for Job Search

We present the results of the model in Table 1 and discuss them along the three research questions.

Research Questions 1: Effect of Users' Brand Familiarity. The results indicate that the effect of brand familiarity positively affects the adoption of both social media (0.38, $p \leq 0.01$) and nonsocial media (0.01, $p \leq 0.01$) channels, albeit, the effect is higher for social media channels. The positive impact of brand familiarity highlights the importance of building a strong corporate image on both social and traditional channels that have a positive influence on user engagement such as adoption of the channel for job application.

Research Question 2: Effects of Users' Persuasiveness. We find the users' persuasiveness of the recruitment channel has a negative impact on the adoption of social media channels (-0.14 , $p \leq 0.05$), whereas it has a positive impact on the adoption of nonsocial media channels (0.04, $p \leq 0.05$). The results indicate that the more persuasive the users find the recruitment messages on the social media platforms, the lower their likelihood of adopting social media for job applications. The negative effect of user persuasiveness on the adoption of social media channels could be due to either low level of online social media presence of B2B firms or, at the same time, due to low level of users' engagement with B2B firms on online social media platforms.

Research Question 3: Interaction Effect of Users' Persuasiveness and Brand Familiarity. We find the interaction

effects of user persuasiveness and brand familiarity is positive and significant for the adoption of both channels: social media (0.15, $p \leq 0.01$) and nonsocial media (0.05, $p \leq 0.05$). These results imply that the negative effects of persuasiveness on the social media platforms could be mitigated by building a strong brand familiarity. Thus, B2B firms intending to use social media platforms for recruitment should use these platforms first to connect with their potential employees to build a stronger brand familiarity. As the job seekers perceive the higher brand familiarity of their potential employers on these social media platforms, they would then be persuaded more by the job announcements on these platforms.

Effects of Control Variables and Correlation. We find that the rate of internet penetration (0.0003, $p \leq 0.01$) of the region has a positive impact on the adoption of social media platform for job search. In emerging economies, users prefer nonsocial media platforms (0.18, $p \leq 0.01$) for the same purpose. Finally, the correlation between error terms (0.48, $p \leq 0.01$) is positive indicating that the social and nonsocial media channels act as complements for users' job search behavior.

Online Search Behavior and Usage of Channels by Job Seekers

Table 2 provides the top five online channels used by the job seekers for their job search. We report the summary statistics of the effectiveness of these channels as indicated by the respondents on a scale of 1–5. It is evident that potential employees when searching for jobs online still prefer traditional channels. The information gathered from the company's website is perceived as the most efficient method. Also, career referrals and online job portals are considered valid sources of job search. Social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter fare at the bottom in users' job search process when it comes to the effectiveness of these channels. These results support our empirical findings that nonsocial media platforms are still better at persuading potential job seekers about employment opportunities from potential employers.

The Importance of Corporate Branding in Recruitment

In B2B context, building brand familiarity is different from that of B2C context. Notably, users' knowledge of firm value may take different dimensions when they are seeking employment opportunities. In Table 3, we provide a summary of the importance of top five characteristics (on a scale of 1–5) that job seekers are looking for when seeking information about the employer.

¹ Internet penetration rate is obtained from World Bank: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.P2>.



Table 1 Parameter estimates

Variables	Social media channels		Non-social media channels	
	Parameter	SD	Parameter	SD
Constant	1.1239*	0.5872	0.5202	0.6155
Brand familiarity	0.3770***	0.1294	0.0050***	0.0024
User persuasiveness	− 0.1402**	0.0570	0.0428**	0.0176
Brand familiarity × user persuasiveness	0.1450***	0.0254	0.0489**	0.0219
Internet penetration rate	0.0003***	0.0001	0.0001	0.0004
Emerging economy	0.6529	0.7206	0.1824**	0.0848
Correlation	0.4768***			

* $p \leq 0.10$
** $p \leq 0.05$
*** $p \leq 0.01$

Table 2 Top and bottom five channels for job search and their effectiveness

Variable	Effectiveness score	
	Mean	SD
Top five		
Company website	4.15	0.91
Career referrals	3.95	1.06
Online job portals	3.85	1.00
Career web pages	3.64	1.12
Career fairs	3.59	0.87
Bottom five		
Twitter	1.72	1.00
Facebook	1.97	1.04
Mobile advertising	2.10	0.96
Smartphone apps for job search	2.21	0.94
Search engines	2.64	1.07

Table 3 Top five characteristics for job search

Variable	Mean	SD
Career advancement prospects	4.46	0.88
Firm's brand familiarity	4.13	0.91
Location of the firm	4.06	0.90
Salary package	3.68	0.99
Work culture of the firm	3.68	0.94

Note that along with personal goals such as career path and salary, the firm-specific characteristics such as reputation, location, and work culture are also crucial considerations for candidates' job search. Social media platforms, in this regard, are well suited to communicate these essential cues about the firms' reputation since the

reputational claims can be discussed openly by the firm's fan base or online professional communities. Thus, candidates tend to give greater credence to the firm's reputation or brand familiarity when such information is gathered through social media platforms. These observations are consistent with our empirical results where we find that employer brand familiarity is better projected on social media platforms. Therefore, B2B firms are advised to use social media platforms to project their reputations and brand familiarity to attract their potential future employees.

Cross-Country Differences in Job Search Behavior

The company in our analysis is one of the most recognized in the industry comfortably placed in the top four in terms of global market share. However, when we look at the brand recognition of the company in three different geographies, Finland, China, and India, we find stark differences. It has strong brand recognition in Finland for being a local company, whereas in India and China its brand recognition is weak despite being a top player in the respective industry. Low brand familiarity in a foreign market can be attributed to the B2B nature of the company who does not sell its product directly to end-consumers. Therefore, such companies when reaching out to local people in foreign markets with an objective other than selling, such as for employment purposes, must be careful about regional differences in users' job search behavior.

In Table 4, we present the top three essential job attributes and portals used for the job search by potential employees across three geographies, China, India, and Finland. In Finland, the most attractive factors relate to job characteristics, job contents, and possibilities. In China, remuneration and advancement opportunities in a career are most appealing elements. Whereas in India, company culture—considered as the combination of social environment and workplace characteristics—is the most crucial



Table 4 Important job attributes and portals used for job search: a cross-country difference

China	India	Finland
Top three job characteristics		
Prospects for high salary	Good reputation	Variety of assignments
Possibilities of advancement	Work-life balance	Work-life balance
Training and development	Challenging work	Competitive salary
Good reputation	Leadership opportunities	Secure employment
Secure employment	Rapid promotion	Dynamic work environment
Top three channel used for job search		
Google and search engines	Job portals (e.g., naukari.com)	Social media (e.g., Facebook)
Newspaper	Social media (e.g., LinkedIn)	Company web sites
College web portals	Mobile apps	Search engines (e.g., Google)

part of the job. Overall, it seems the company culture is the most key factor in job search behavior across regions. Thus, we find that factors such as local culture, values, and habits play a significant role in users’ job search behavior. For example, company culture in India and China must be related to the concept of merit, and merit-based professional recognition is considered as a success factor in career development. Therefore, firms must be cognizant of these local differences and appropriately frame message for their recruitment advertising when attracting global talents for hire.

Job Search Behavior of Recent Hires

Report from the survey conducted among recent hires reveals that more than 83% of them used search engines as a primary tool for online job search. Interestingly, having found the job announcement through search engines, they then preferred to research about the firm through social media platforms. More than 50% of them reported they applied mostly through referrals and they never used smartphone apps for job search. These findings suggest a two-phase job search process. In the first phase, search engines are employed for their functionality for identifying potential job offerings; in the second, search results or leads are then elaborated via social media such as LinkedIn and Facebook. This finding supports the importance of creating strong employer reputation among the users of the professionally relevant social media communities.

Secondary Data from the Firm

Finally, we use secondary data from the firm to investigate its use of online recruitment practices. The firm reported a significant dropout rate in the electronic filing, i.e., several applicants did not complete their applications. According to the data gathered through Google Analytics, this dropout rate was 43% in 2012. One of the major factors of dropout rate was the time required to complete the digital

application. Open-ended question from the survey revealed that candidates must add the same information in different forms. This duplication could be prevented by interconnecting information from a candidate’s social media profile to the firm’s online application portal.

In sum, the information received from different data supports the conclusions that combining social media with nonsocial media platforms would enable firms to increase the persuasiveness of job application and improve their reputation. In the online environment where there is a wide dispersion in individuals’ search behavior, B2B firms should take advantage of all possible channels, rather than focusing on one when building their public relationship.

General Discussion and Conclusions

In this study, we examine the role of social media for B2B firms in their recruitment practices in three different international markets. This increasingly important topic has received only scant research attention, and the issue of how B2B firms can utilize social media platforms in their professional recruiting is practically open. We addressed this question through two interrelated themes. Based on a survey of the job-seeking behavior of Chinese, Finnish and Indian professionals we investigated the effects of (i) the perceived brand familiarity or reputation of the B2B firm, and (ii) the user persuasiveness of recruitment ads on social media platforms on the users’ channel-adoption for their job search. These results were then complemented with secondary data, enabling us to conclude the popularity of different channels in searching B2B companies’ job offerings, and of the search process itself in their recruitment practices.

Theoretical Contribution

The study offers several significant theoretical and managerial insights. First, the survey results indicate that the



recruitment advertisements placed on social media platforms, such as Facebook or LinkedIn, are lower in perceived persuasiveness than those in nonsocial media platforms. We suggest that this result is based on the contradiction between the view of social media platforms as open and user-driven communities and their use as advertising media. Interestingly, however, the brand familiarity of the firm can positively influence job seekers' adoption of social media platforms for their job search. Such adoption of social media may be related to the positive attitude toward the company leading to more engagement with the FGC on these platforms.

What do these divergent effects mean? Should B2B firms give up on social media platforms, as it is difficult to connect with users initially on such platforms? Our examination of the interaction between the persuasiveness of recruitment advertisements and employer-perceived brand familiarity suggests that higher employer brand familiarity mitigates the negative effects of persuasiveness. Therefore, even though it is difficult for B2B firms to connect with users, in the interest of building brand familiarity, they should invest proactively in developing their social media presence. Shedding lights on the main and interaction effects of brand familiarity and user persuasiveness on users' channel-adoption is a significant theoretical contribution. In sum, our empirical exploration into three proposed research questions should be helpful in planning future studies on the use of social media platforms in the B2B recruitment strategies.

Another interesting result provided by a secondary survey conducted among the recent hires of the focal firm suggests that the B2B job applicants use a two-phase process in their online job search. Search engines are used first for identifying job offerings; these leads are then evaluated through social media platforms. This finding supports the need to build stronger employer reputation on social media platforms as a primary condition for successful online recruitment.

In addition to these more theoretical conclusions, the study provides requisite knowledge of the online B2B job search and application. In the job search, several firm characteristics such as reputation, brand familiarity, location, and work culture were crucial to the applicants. Moreover, despite the rapid growth of such social platforms several nonsocial media platforms, such as company website, and career referrals, are still widely used by the job applicants. Taken together, these findings provide us a solid base for several specific managerial recommendations.

Managerial Contribution

The enormous growth in popularity of social media platforms compels B2B firms to integrate them into their marketing communication tools. However, integration of social media platforms into their existing communication tools is not as easy as it sounds; as our results show that the users of social media platforms have an innate distrust of the commercial messages, including job announcements, placed on these channels. Therefore, looking for immediate success on social media platforms may be a suboptimal strategy. Based on our study we propose following suggestions that support the planning of an efficient online B2B recruitment strategy.

First, a firm should take a long-term investment perspective in building the company's reputation and brand familiarity on the relevant social media platforms. Besides commercial messages, the online social conversation should be based on an active dialogue with the users and concern topics that relate not only to the company and its offerings, but also to industry and sustainability issues, and the corporate citizenship. This kind of holistic reputation building through an active social presence requires encouraging and incentivizing key company personnel for taking an active part in the social media community discussions. Second, the company values, goals and strategy should be communicated. The job seekers use these company related information in the course of their job search process. Furthermore, the cultural differences between geographies should be considered in planning the communication. Third, Company should ensure that it has a good visibility and a positive reputation before investing in social media as a recruiting channel. Our study shows that this is a necessary precondition for the efficient use of social media platforms for recruiting professionals and it is essential also in securing a competitive position in the search engines employed by the job seekers. Finally, the firm should orchestrate and integrate the relevant social media platforms and nonsocial media platforms. While the former helps in building reputation and brand familiarity, the latter remains prime channels for the job application.

Based on these suggestions, we recommend B2B firms to utilize their social media profiles in their recruitment advertisements. This may or may not lead to conversion into employees, but this will still help businesses to gain the user attention by expanding their fans and followers through social media channels. In the long run, this will improve company's visibility and brand recognition, and thus overcome the liabilities of newness and foreignness. However, firms should be proactive in their adoption of social media into their recruitment channels. In this regard, we recommend two major actions. First, B2B firms should have active social media presence on social networking



sites such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter, and multinational firms should extend their social media presence in local networking sites too. Second, firms' HR department should use social media analytics² to monitor the progress of their social media presence. Based on our study, we find that at the current moment B2B firms cannot replace existing recruitment tools with social media channels completely as the role of social media is to enhance the performance of existing channel. The monitoring of social media analytics will enable firms to optimize their resources in terms of selection of right recruitment channels that complement each other. These firms should also invest in mobile apps that support hiring process as more and more users nowadays are accessing the information through their mobile phones. Finally, due to the reduced attention span of online users, today firms should optimize their online job portals that take less time for filling the application forms. In this regard, integrating their existing channels with social media will accelerate this process as their existing channel can directly pull all the relevant information from users' social media profile.

Future Research Directions

Our study is based on a cross-country data from a single international B2B firm. However, strategy for social media

recruitment plan may depend on a variety of business objectives. Furthermore, the content provided on these platforms may affect the job application process. In addition, one of the rationales used for the negative effects of persuasiveness on user adoption of social media channels for their job search is based on fear. However, our data and model do not provide any means to capture the fear. These are few limitations of our study, and future research can investigate into the use of social media as recruitment tools for various business objectives accounting for the content on these platforms.

Another opportunity is to examine in more detail the influence of the reputation and brand familiarity of the firm on the effectiveness of using social media platforms in recruitment. One should develop research designs that enable the comparison of companies that differ in their relative platform user awareness. Another possibility is to acquire longitudinal data from a company entering a new market and assess the effect of its growing reputation on social media recruitment. Such studies will provide a more holistic view of social media strategy for B2B firms to attract future talent as well as to highlight their brand familiarity or reputation. We leave these avenues for future research.

² These are also called social media aggregator tools that enable the control of several social media profiles at once from the same interface.



Appendix

Q1. When searching for jobs which sources do you mainly use?						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Online job portal					
<input type="checkbox"/>	Google and other search engines					
<input type="checkbox"/>	LinkedIn Jobs-channel					
<input type="checkbox"/>	Facebook					
<input type="checkbox"/>	Twitter					
<input type="checkbox"/>	Referrals					
<input type="checkbox"/>	Company website					
<input type="checkbox"/>	Newspaper					
<input type="checkbox"/>	School career page					
<input type="checkbox"/>	Career fairs					
<input type="checkbox"/>	Smartphone job search apps					
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other					
Q2. How persuasive do you find job announcement in this channel? (1-not persuasive, 2-slightly persuasive, 3-Unable to say, 4-Fairly persuasive, 5-Extremely persuasive)						
		1	2	3	4	5
Online job portal		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Google and other search engines		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
LinkedIn Jobs-channel		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Facebook		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Twitter		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Referrals		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Company website		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Newspaper		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
School career page		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Career fairs		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Smartphone job search apps		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q3. How familiar are you with [Company Name] before applying for jobs?						
<input type="radio"/>	Not familiar at all					
<input type="radio"/>	Had heard the company before					
<input type="radio"/>	Knew the industry the company is in					
<input type="radio"/>	Very familiar, knew the product, brand.					

Operationalization of Social and NonSocial: *Social* takes value 1 if the user selects social media platforms for their job search otherwise it is 0. Likewise, *NonSocial* takes value 1 if the user selects nonsocial media platforms for their job search. Social media platform constitutes Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, whereas nonsocial media platform constitutes online job portal, online search engines, referrals, website, newspaper, career page, career fairs, and apps.

Operationalization of UserPersuasiveness: The *UserPersuasiveness* variable for the respondent is operationalized based on Q2.

Operationalization of BrandFamiliarity: The variable *BrandFamiliarity* for a user is defined based on his/her response to Q3. In Q3, the ordinal scale goes from 1 to 4, where 1 corresponds to not familiar at all, whereas 4

corresponds to very familiar with the company's product and brand.

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