



Self-presentation and hiring recommendations in online communities: Lessons from LinkedIn



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ABSTRACT

This study investigated how a job seeker self-presentation affects recruiter's hiring recommendations in an online communities and what categories of self-presentation contribute to fit perceptions for obtaining hiring recommendations. The study participants viewed potential candidates' LinkedIn profiles and responded to questions regarding the argument quality and source credibility of their self-presentations, fit perceptions, and hiring recommendations. The results show that recruiters make inferences about job seekers' person–job fit and person–organisation fit on the basis of argument quality in specific self-presentation categories, which in turn predict recruiters' intentions to recommend job seekers for hiring. Although certain specific categories of self-presentation offering source credibility have positive associations with person–person (P–P) fit perception, there is a non-significant relationship between perceived P–P fit and hiring recommendations.

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1. Introduction

An online community consists of members sharing common interests and purposes administered through guidelines and policies within a computer system (Preece, 2000). Online community life has increasingly become a significant part of our social lives (Burkell, Fortier, Wong, & Simpson, 2014) and has become a new channel through which organisations can connect with stakeholders, including job candidates (Madera, 2012). As increasing numbers of employers utilise these platforms to screen job candidates (Bohnert & Ross, 2010), job candidates are increasingly presenting themselves in online communities to impress employers (Dekay, 2009).

Online communities have paved new paths for job seeking in the computer-mediated communication (CMC) environment (Ikenberry, Hibel, & Freedman, 2010), but few studies have examined how cues in the context of an online community affect job seekers' behaviours, such as impression formation and self-presentation strategies (van der Heide, D'Angelo, & Schumaker, 2012). Although self-presentation in online communities has been previously examined (e.g., Birnbaum, 2013; DeAndrea & Walther, 2011; Labrecque, Markos, & Milne, 2011; Schwämmlein & Wodzicki, 2012), job seeking within online communities is qualitatively different from many other online settings because of the anticipation

of face-to-face job interviews (Jansen, König, Stadelmann, & Kleinmann, 2012) and the social script (Gioia & Poole, 1984) for the hiring process in this context.

Membership in the LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com) online community has grown exponentially (Gerard, 2011). The University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth released a study finding that 81% of Inc. 500 companies use LinkedIn for talent acquisition (Barnes & Lescault, 2012). LinkedIn is perhaps the most successful and widely used social networking site (SNS) for recruiters and job seekers and is the world's largest professional network on the Internet (Adams, 2013).

Some articles suggest ways that job seekers can enhance their chances of employment by optimising their self-presentation on LinkedIn (e.g., Damnjanović, Matović, Kostić, & Okanović, 2012). However, little evidence exists to determine whether job seekers' efforts to build their professional identity online are merely futile attempts to advance their careers or whether they might actually help job seekers secure opportunities for job interviews (Guillory & Hancock, 2012). As the realm of job seeking in online communities has not been studied extensively (Bohnert & Ross, 2010; Davison, Maraist, & Bing, 2011), there is a gap in the current research on job seekers' self-presentation in online communities. We address this research gap by investigating the following question: *How does a job seeker's self-presentation influence recruiters' hiring recommendations in an online community?* Accordingly, this study also explores the categories of self-presentation that contribute to fit perceptions for obtaining hiring recommendations.

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To answer our research question, we begin by reviewing a well-known approach in social psychology – self-presentation (Goffman, 1959) – to understand how job seekers present themselves and manage their self-presentations in an online community. Second, we explain how job seekers' self-presentations lead to recruiters' hiring recommendations through recruiter multiple-fit perceptions of applicants based on the theory of person–environment fit (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005). Finally, we employ an elaboration likelihood model (ELM; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) to provide a useful framework for making predictions regarding which self-presentation factors influence recruiters' evaluations of job seekers (Forret & Turban, 1996) and therefore influence recruiter hiring recommendations. We develop the conceptual framework that is shown in Fig. 1 to explain how a job seeker's self-presentation affects recruiter hiring recommendations and to identify the factors of effective self-presentation in online communities that lead to a hiring recommendation. The hypothesised relationships are based on person–environment fit theory and the ELM.

2. Literature review and context

2.1. Job seekers and self-presentation

One explanation for the behaviour of people in various social situations is provided by the script concept (Gioia & Poole, 1984), which considers context-specific norms that specify the impressions that people should convey of themselves (Leary, 1995), such as self-presentation in seeking a job (Marcus, 2009). The goal of self-presentation is to make others accept the images that individuals claim for themselves (Goffman, 1959). In the workforce recruiting context, job seekers must present themselves in accordance with a script and ensure that recruiters positively evaluate their image (Jansen et al., 2012; Lievens & Peeters, 2008).

Consistent with the script concept, personal profile and résumé content are generally considered to be evidence of a job seeker's employability (Breugh, 2009; Nemanick & Clark, 2002), and these features have become the most commonly used tools in personnel selection (Cole, Rubin, Feild, & Giles, 2007). Job seekers may acquire this script through self-help books or websites focusing on how to succeed in self-presentation with a strong profile and résumé (Tyler & McCullough, 2009).

Online communities such as LinkedIn have initiated a new era of workforce recruitment (Guillory & Hancock, 2012) in which recruiters are increasingly using these SNSs to source and screen job candidates (Davison et al., 2011), and job seekers are encouraged to create professional identities in combination with their personal profile and résumé content to enhance the likelihood that they will convey a positive impression in the new script (Caers & Castelyns, 2011). This new script may also influence whether job

seekers meet recruiters' expectations in online communities (Bohnert & Ross, 2010; Damnjanović et al., 2012).

2.2. Self-presentation and online communities

Online communities are actually online manifestations of physical communities, despite their strong reliance on technology and physical distance between participants (Daneshgar & Ho, 2008). When people become members of a community, they must select the relevant and appropriate pieces of information for their self-presentation to be consistent with the script for the group (Hornsey, Grice, Jetten, Paulsen, & Callan, 2007).

Managing self-presentation in online communities is an integral part of private and professional life (Rui & Stefanone, 2013). However, the willingness to provide personal information in member profiles on these SNSs is generally high because members gain acceptance through extensive self-presentation that facilitates the establishment of relationships with other network members (Schwämmlein & Wodzicki, 2012).

van Dijk (2013) found that a LinkedIn profile can be used to shape an idealised portrait of one's professional identity by displaying skills to peers and anonymous evaluators. LinkedIn asked members not to provide their life story but to highlight specific skills, thus promoting their strengths for different business stakeholders. Members were also urged to complete their profiles with recommendations or statements from colleagues or clients praising their performance or competencies. A member's professional identity might also receive a boost from contributing to the Question and Answer space provided by the SNS (Raban, 2009), which is typically called a 'post and comment'. Accordingly, withholding personal information appeared to be incompatible with the key motivations for joining these online communities (Debatin, Lovejoy, Horn, & Hughes, 2009). In other words, the large amount of information disclosed on these SNS might be a response to the CMC environment, which made the goal of building self-presentation salient, particularly for job seekers (Dekay, 2009).

2.3. Self-presentation in online communities for job seekers

Consistent with Goffman (1959), members in online communities have various socio-discursive needs – expressive, communicative, or promotional – that reflect the need for different personas and that necessitate different addresses. Although gaining employment is often a goal of self-presentation, it is not the exclusive goal; people engage in self-presentation for many social reasons, including to conduct business, to establish friendships, or simply to express themselves (Shepherd, 2005). Consequently, difficulties may arise when a person wishes to create multiple impressions for different audiences online (Labrecque et al., 2011). Failures may also become clear if a job seeker's online self-presentation does not match a recruiter's expectations (Bohnert & Ross, 2010). Because personal goals affect self-presentation in online communities, it is important for job seekers to provide information related to specific topics and recruiter interests that may enhance the likelihood of obtaining hiring recommendations (Schwämmlein & Wodzicki, 2012).

2.4. Job seekers' self-presentation and hiring recommendations

Because a job seeker's self-presentation in an online community contains a wide range of information (Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011), how recruiters perceive and make decisions based on that information is critical to the hiring process (Caers & Castelyns, 2011). The theory of person–environment fit (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005) and the elaboration likelihood model (ELM; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) may help determine whether job seekers' online self-presentation

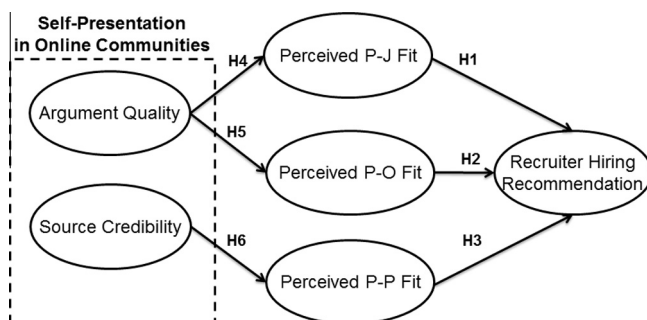


Fig. 1. A conceptual model of job seekers' self-presentation and recruiters' hiring recommendations in online communities.

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