The Impact of Online Applications and Social Media on Recruitment for Organizations and Young Jobseekers in Ireland.

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine and investigate the impact of online applications and social media on the recruitment process for both organizations and young job seekers in Ireland. In a world where technology is constantly evolving, it's important to investigate just how much reliance organizations and individuals have on these technologies and whether they are aware of the limitations. This study looks at how companies use social media and online platforms to find and assess applicants, as well as how young people use these tools to look for and apply to jobs. This study discusses the advantages and disadvantages of e-recruitment, while noting what could be argued as a new threat or benefit to the industry: the use of AI. The use of AI in general, let alone in the recruitment world, is an extremely new preface and currently lacks a sufficient range of accessible research, which is why it is a critical case for discussion.

To facilitate this research, a range of previous research by established authors and statistics have been conveyed to provide an in-dept discussion on the topics and arguments currently surrounding this area of study. Topics such as how organizations and jobseekers connect with each other, why these online methods are preferred and the ramifications that may arise due to these practices are investigated.

A qualitative methodical approach was adopted for this study in the form of semi-structured interviews with 9 young Irish jobseekers / graduates between the ages of 20-25 to investigate their firsthand experiences with online recruitment methods. The findings from these interviews were thematically outlined, with the themes recognized from the data being Accessibility & Convenience, Engagement & Personalization, Privacy and Authenticity. The data was further compared to other authors' research previously discussed, whilst also acknowledging new findings and areas worth further research.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Overview of the study

There has undoubtedly been a phenomenal surge in the use of online applications (such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom etc.) alongside social media sites (Linkedin, Instagram etc.) in relation to the recruitment and selection process in the corporate world in Ireland in the last few years as these changes are 'opening up new opportunities for organizations and for would-be employees to communicate with each other and work at a distance.' (Arman, 2023) This number expectedly only further increased when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, and many corporations were forced to move all forms of work online. Even with the pandemic over, many organizations allowed employees to continue remote working or adapt to hybrid working. With this, the corporate world is continuing

to modernize every day to adapt to and keep up with these changes to ensure efficiency continues, however the constant adaptation to these technologies can cause many new implications to arise.

Recruitment and selection are arguably one of the most important areas of business, specifically within the field of HRM. This is an area of business that too, had to significantly adapt its current practices to adapt to the current trends of remote working, with nearly all organizations now using the internet as their primary method of recruitment and selection. According to 'a study conducted by the Society of Human Resource Management, reported 84% of organizations were using social media as a recruitment tool.' (Pickern & Ledger, 2021) However organizations are not the only ones who now rely on these online services, as now, individuals can apply to jobs online, anywhere at any time. Based on data from the United States, "in bed" is the most common mobile job search location. (Statista, 2024)

The introduction and implementation of online practices in recruitment has undoubtedly changed the way in which organizations seek out and communicate with potential new employees. (Kulkarni & Pingle, 2019) This research will focus on just how much the recruitment world has changed, specifically from the perspectives of young jobseekers, addressing why exactly these alterations were made to increase the efficiency of the recruitment process, along with other potential contrasting views on the subject, especially regarding the surge of AI. These technological advances undeniably have their benefits, evident by their renowned use across the world, but there is an unmistakenly gray area when it comes to the line in when business research of a candidate turns into simply invading a person's privacy regarding using social media as a tool for research of an applicant. (Hosain, 2021) By reviewing current literature on the topic and the results attained from the methodological research, this will help outline the extent to which an organization deems these applications ethical and rewardable and showcase the views of fresh graduates and current jobseekers on their thoughts on employers using online applications and social media in their recruitment process.

1.1 Aims of research

- Evaluate how exactly the use of online methods has altered today's recruitment process in Ireland.
- Illustrate why companies and individuals use online services as their primary method of recruitment / job searching.
- Identify and critically discuss the potential ramifications of using online applications in the recruitment process.

Chapter 2: Literature review.

2.0 Introduction

There have been significant discussions, specifically in recent years, surrounding the topic of how exactly the use of social media and online applications has changed the recruitment world, for better or worse. Breaugh & Starke (2000) define recruitment as 'practices and activities carried out by the organization with the primary purpose of identifying and attracting potential employees.' The internet first began to be used as a recruitment tool back in the 1990s, leading to what many referred to as the 'recruitment revolution'. (Parry & Tyson, 2008) However, as further technological developments are continuously made, specifically regarding the rise of social media platforms, there are many arguments surrounding the extent to its effectiveness in the recruitment and selection function. The aim of this literature review is to explore a series of these current arguments to enable us to develop our own understanding of how the use of social media has greatly affected how and why organizations go about seeking out, connecting with and recruiting future employees.

2.1 How recruiters connect with candidates.

2.1.1 Exposure to larger talent markets.

Kulkarni & Pingle (2019) discuss how one of the main contributing factors causing an uprise for new and improved recruitment and selection techniques is the current highly competitive talent market. The main goal of recruitment is essentially to supply the organization with sufficient human capital by attracting and retaining a talented and qualified pool of staff, in order to provide the organization with a competitive advantage. Kulkarni & Pingles research proposes how e-

recruitment undeniably opens the organization up to a wider talent pool as 'the organization can open the vacancy to people across the world without worrying about the quantity of applications as a rightly designed online recruitment system will automatically help them in reducing the volume of applications to the appropriately required ones.' Being able to reach a greater quality of applicants, however, changes the way we communicate and view these applicants. While there are undoubtedly many positives and benefits to the use of e-recruitment, there are also many arguments that counteract these advantages. One of the main arguments that may arise from Kulkarni and Pingles research however, is how exactly an organization has the capacity to go about creating a 'rightly designed' recruitment system as defined in the article, as their study specifically yields to disclose what exactly would be entailed in an efficient e-recruitment system i.e. what characteristics would be implied in a technological system that would shortlist a potential candidate? Jenkins (2020) supports this argument by stating how the use of computer software / AI machine learning can be biased and flawed and are the 'source of many missed opportunities and connections.' Jenkins states how in today's recruitment industry, around 70% of applicant CVs are going to be first processed by a robot before they get through to an actual person. CVs will be analyzed and condensed down by key words/skills within the CV. Jenkins explores the multitude of issues with this, as either qualified candidates who may be missing these specific words are ignored for selection or those who have merely copy and pasted the job description into their CV are inappropriately selected. However, in a report by Hunkenschroer & Kriebtiz (2022) , these statements are contradicted as the authors state that from their research, AI tools are in fact extremely efficient when 'evaluating objectively measurable characteristics of applicants, including specific skills measured by gamified assessment tools' however other criteria such as social skills should be assessed by humans, but overall AI should in fact be used as a reputable recruitment tool. (Hunkenschroer & Kriebtiz, 2022)

These larger markets themselves are constantly developing and modernizing so organizations need to keep up with these developments. E-recruitment not only exposes organizations to these greater markets but attracts the new and budding talent within the market. Zheng (2021) demonstrates how many of the talent in the current job market are particularly young graduates in search of new and exciting job opportunities. Zheng states how nowadays 90% of job seekers and fresh graduates actively apply for jobs through the internet, displaying the internet as their main method of job seeking. As companies adapt to these job search preferences, websites and other online recruitment channels in turn have quickly been made an organization's primary mode of recruitment.

In a report by Sherkar (2015), research was conducted on the online recruitment tools and resources available to and used by number of sampled hotels within the hospitality industry over 5 years. Shekar emphasized how from his research on this study, deciding on a suitable and efficient e-recruitment methods and resources for an organization, the primary goal should be to attract talent

and ensuring to do so by making the process as simple as possible. This has inevitably forced organizations to keep up with these trends to maintain a competitive advantage in a highly competitive market. Both Zheng and Sherkar, note the importance of using these methods as an organizations primary source of recruitment, however, Mehrotra & Mariam's (2020) research outlined the limitations to these methods pointing out that an exclusive dependance on these sites may exclude those who simply don't use social media as often as others, therefore they may miss opportunities, or their accounts may not portray their skills and personalities to employers to their full extent. Essentially arguments here regard how newer recruitment practices involving social media may be more favorable to the younger generation where a greater percentage are much more proficient in current technologies compared to older generations. Mehrotra and Mariam further develop on this point by stating how not everyone is who they like to portray themselves as on social media in real life and how an individual's true personality and skill cannot be fully reflected online.

2.1.2 Bridging the gap between employer and employee.

A study by Hosain et al (2020) focuses on how specifically the rise of social media platforms such as 'Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and Snapchat where users can post, share, comment and like the contents within their own network of friends,' have provided organizations and employers with accessible new platforms to scope out potential candidates. Users who share a substantial amount of information to these sites, referred to as social networking information (SNI), whether intended for professional or personal use, can often nowadays gain traction from employers when looking for specific candidates. Hosain (2020) further explains how organizations themselves have, aside from the company's official website, developed their own social media pages in order to further reach and connect with audiences and 'helping in making a bridge between candidates and e-recruiters.'

Pickern & Legler (2021) however, questions how ethical the use of social media is – specifically the organization's level of engagement with candidate's personal accounts, clarifying the need for more ethical standards to avoid potential risks and breaches. However, these standards are hard to obtain, as it is not simply not illegal to view a person's public profile. The use of what is now being referred to as 'cyber vetting' (viewing a person's social media and online presences in order to screen and shortlist applicants) is being utilized more and more by HR professionals. The question of ethicality comes into view here as viewing a candidate's personal Instagram for example may create a bias or negative view for the recruiter. Pickern and Legler discuss how HR professionals / recruiters frequently face ethical quandaries when they come across dubious or objectionable content on social media and must make decisions about how to handle that discovery. This content that could potentially cause bias, may include evidence of illegal activity being displayed such as

drug use or extreme political affiliations along with answers to questions that are illegal to ask on job applications such as religion, marital status etc. While it may be argued that the candidate is solely responsible for what they post online, the issue lies in the fact that many of these candidates are actually completely unaware of the fact that cyber-vetting exists. (Pickern & Legler, 2021)

Arguably for this reasoning, Broughton (2013) identifies LinkedIn as one of the most efficient and effective platforms for employers to connect with jobseekers and potential candidates as it is a platform specifically designed for this professional purpose. Initially launched in 2003, job seekers can establish a professional CV like profile, enabling them to be headhunted by organizations on the app, apply to job vacancies through the app or to simply establish a better network. While a popular and prominent recruitment channel now, Broughton, however, goes on to explain how this may just be a current tool. Five years from now, technologies may change, and the successful sites used to attract candidates now, may not be as successful in the future, emphasizing the importance for an organization to keep track and adopt to future trends to maintain those connections with candidates.

2.2 Changes within the organization

2.2.1 Time / Cost efficiency

One of the main reasons as to why these changes have taken place and why most organizations have switched to digitalized recruitment from past methods is how cost-effective it is. Smith & Rupps (2004) research shows that recruitment agencies used to spend significantly large sums of money on advertisements specifically, compared to nowadays, where a social media post is free to post on one's page and can be seen by a greater variety of people. On Indeed for example, it is free to post certain job listings, under the right criteria. (Indeed, 2024) According to a study, since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic to now (2019-2014) there has been a 57% increase in over the phone/video call interviews as it is immensely quicker and further saves costs on interview preparations. (Fennel, 2024) Smith & Rupps study further conveys that even with the pandemic over, this rate does not seem as if it will drop anytime soon, and many employers see video-interviews as a significantly more convenient practice.

Furthermore, Rathee's (2017) research shows how the use of e-recruitment further reduces HR and administrative costs and burdens. The author defines these 'administrative burdens' as the expenses to the organizations from performing administrative tasks that they would not perform in the absence of typical organizational norms. The author also goes on to explain how modern employees are more attracted to utilizing these resources, as their 24/7 accessibility comes at little to no cost. Specifically, jobs within the HR function are made easier with job portals. Rathee states how the use of these job portals such as corporate websites and online job boards save significant

time and money HR professionals would typically use on lengthy advertisements processes for job vacancies.

In a study on the comparison of using social media for recruitment compared to traditional methods, Sledzieski et Al's (2023) research showcased a huge emphasis on how cost effective the use of these online methods can be. The authors discovered that using social media to draw in eligible participants from the public was the most effective strategy and in a timely and cost-effective manner. They found that advertising on Facebook only cost around $15 for the first two weeks and ultimately attracted the most respondents with the ad reaching 483 people. Out of these 483 viewers, 16 clicked further onto the survey page resulting in 4 eligible and approved interviews. With the success of the first 2 weeks, the team decided to extend the ad on Facebook for the rest of the month, accumulating the total price to $42. Over the last 2 weeks, 50 more people clicked onto the survey, enabling 4 more confirmed interviews. The authors discuss the obvious reasonable price, stating that it is inexplicably 'a mere fraction' of the cost of having to hire researchers to do the job for them, which would have also likely taken nearly double the time to do so. However, this research only showcases one form of social media, and while evidently cheap, it doesn't advocate for all forms of social media, as advertising costs on other platforms may differ.

2.2.2 Employer brand.

A recent CIPD report on the current themes in 'resourcing and talent planning' found that 80% say that their use of technology when used for recruitment purposes significantly increased due to the pandemic. Organizations reported various benefits to this increase, however noted that the most efficient was just how much more accessible resources were made available to potential candidates. It was reported that the accessibility of these resources, along with their simplicity, has improved applicants' experience regarding the recruitment process, while making it much quicker and easier. The report also stated how more efforts to increase diversity in organizations has further attracted more talent with around 32% of companies actively working on ways to attract a more diverse board. (CIPD, 2022)

Wowor et al, (2022) research found that that the use of social media in hiring plays a significant role in enhancing employer brand. Wowor et al explain how the organization's social media and online presence is a brilliant way to showcase the organization's culture, values and benefits to potential applicants, while also granting the company access to a wider talent pool and making it easier to communicate and build relationships with candidates. The research shows that when an increased decree of information about the organization is made available online for the public to view, it is then less likely that these new recruits will leave the organization, as they enter the organization more knowledgeable of what to expect. Wowor et al also state that greater employer

brand and competitivity also depends on what company has the best online presence and resources, with LinkedIn currently being the top social networking platform for businesses.

One of the factors that attracts jobseekers to these organizations social media as stated by Wowor et al, is the display of an organization's culture and values. (Wiyaya et al, 2023) The coronavirus pandemic brought about many changes in relation to peoples working values. Wijaya et al discusses the new demands and expectations that job seekers have when they apply for jobs. Today's job seekers are now looking for companies who tend to have a more 'human-value' approach. The authors discuss how this has steered organizations towards putting greater emphasis on their consideration for their employees' well-being. Analytics display that organizations who promote these values and propositions have increased the level of satisfaction by 15% amongst job seekers compared to before. (Gartner, 2021) Wijaya et al explain how this sudden increase in the need for sufficient welfare amongst employees stems from the high levels of anxiety and uncertainty many workers experienced during the pandemic. Organizations who openly display these values through their online presence is a major attraction to those in the job market, while also encouraging applicants to align themselves to these values of harmony when applying to the organization.

2.2.3 Legal considerations

While our last two points, 2.2.1 & 2.2.2, highlighted areas of the organization indeed benefitted from the use of online methods in recruitment, it's important to note that with these positive aspects, comes a series of further regulations and guidelines to be followed by the organization. The use of one's personal social media for recruitment purposes may pose various implications like the breach of data or misuse of information, a widely disputed area regarding the use of social media within recruitment. Hosain (2021) discusses how while the use of social media is beneficial in various human resource practices, it can often come with many challenges, specifically legal issues. Hosain explains how while social media sites can be useful to reach talent, candidates' profiles often contain private or personal details. Hosain states that Facebook and LinkedIn are currently the two most accepted platforms amongst recruiters, with Facebook displaying one's more behavioral information while LinkedIn provides more job specific information. However, details on one's behaviors and personality displayed on their social media profiles can often cause employers to develop a biased perspective when viewing an applicant. This may create issues in the decision-making process when selecting a candidate, even if the employer is unaware of his bias (known as unconscious bias). According to 2018 statistics, 57% of recruiters have admitted to not hiring a candidate based on their content on social media. (Statista, 2024) Hosain further discusses how early security measures must be taken as well as ensuring both employers and employees have a general guideline of how to respect one's privacy and follow lawful regulations.

The author explains how the use of social media in recruitment can be successful if efficient guidelines are regulations are established. However, this is currently not a well-developed area.

2.3 Applicant perceptions of e-recruitment.

While there is much discussion on how the use of e-recruitment has implemented itself in organizations, Rana's (2019) research explores job seekers attitudes and behavior towards these online methods, specifically job seeker websites. The four independent variables that were researched amongst the sample group were how applicants perceived the usefulness of e-recruitment, how easy it is to use, how much they enjoy it and its social influence. The author's findings showcased that from these variables, the scores were all above the mid-point, with social influence having the highest score, meaning there was an extremely positive outlook on these online recruitment methods. Job sites such as LinkedIn and Jobseeker.com were just some of the websites researched in this study, with their high level of user-friendliness and ease contributing to these positive applicant perceptions. Rana discusses how the more user-friendly a website is, the more likely jobseekers are to return to the page for future references. With websites such as Jobseeker.com typically having such a large variety of vacant jobs, students these days main criteria for these databases are that they are easy and quick to use with the ability to apply to a variety of potential jobs as efficiently as possible. One of the main features that enables this is sites being able to store one's CV as a file on their account, meaning they no longer need to manually upload it to an application each time. University graduates are compelled to sites with greater emphasis on tech-savvy efficiency. (Rana, 2019)

Waghmare's (2018) research shows that amongst other benefits of the efficiency of e-recruitment, job seekers find the use of company websites and job advertisements essential when deciding whether or not they are a cultural fit to the organization. Organizations with a more interactive media and online presence tend to attract more applicants, creating what the author refers to as a 'company brand experience'. Applicants today use these social medias and websites to their advantage as they provide a vast amount of information about the organization and brand so applicants can decide for themselves if that's the kind of brand they want to associate with and could fit well in. Waghmare states that from the group of 52 candidates in the study, the vast majority of them would strongly agree that the use of these sites has enabled them to find and apply to jobs that align with their skills and values more accurately, saying that LinkedIn is one of the best sites due to its credibility.

While both Rana's and Waghmare's research focuses on candidate's positive outlooks of online recruitment methods, these more positive perspectives may be influenced by a lack of knowledge in the field. As mentioned in 2.1.2, Pickern & Legler stated how many people were completely unaware of cyber-vetting, Hokke et al's (2020) research further develops on the gray area surrounding the extent on how ethical it is to use these methods as they explore how many recruiters themselves are unaware of these arguments. Hokke et al's research provides an analysis of surveys, conducted of researchers who have prior experience in engaging participants using social media, no group within the study was extremely confident in their knowledge of the ethical guidelines and policies surrounding the use of social media as a recruitment tool. This research further highlights the publicly undisclosed knowledge surrounding the use of social media in recruitment, as it seems neither the applying candidates nor the recruiters themselves are fully aware of the extent of the privacy and transparency issues revolving these methods, which arguably may alter job-seekers perspectives if they were made aware of the uncertainty of their rights of privacy. Hokke et al conclude their research paper by identifying the need for more training, support and education to be issued on the topic.

A study conducted by Kissi (2023) explored a variety of issues arising from the use of e-recruitment systems, that highlighted an existing negative perspective of some jobseekers surrounding the fear of scam jobs or e-recruitment fraud. Multiple interviews were conducted to reveal an issue jobseekers worried about today was e-recruitment fraud. Kissi explains how Human resource professionals working in e-recruitment are now advising job seekers to take extra care when using job sites as there have been few instances of fraudsters offering people fake jobs in order to obtain money and their personal / private data. Kissi found that these fraudulent emails, websites, text messages and advertisements were becoming increasingly more common and are beginning to deter any victims of these crimes from using any type of job site again and has taken a toll on the rate of jobseekers e-recruitment satisfaction. Kissi further discusses how preventative measures to combat these crimes can be taken such as implementing fraud policies, not only protecting against fraudulent crimes in e-recruitment but bringing both job seekers and HR professionals awareness to the threat.

2.4 The Threat of AI

The use of AI for general organizational use has undoubtedly surged in recent years, however the recruitment sector has specifically witnessed an increase in the technology as of late from its success in improving current hiring strategies. (Albassam, 2023)

Yet one of the main issues revolving AI within the recruitment industry, is people's fears and distrust in it. Research interviews conducted by Ore & Sposato (2021) displayed many of the

positives of using AI in recruitment, however it also showcased people's reservations about its use. One of the recurring themes that was mentioned was the issue of data privacy, along with its true reliability. The question rises as to what extent will people be willing to share their personal details and data with artificial intelligence technology, especially with it being a relatively new process there has not been a significant amount of time to test the reliability of these technologies. People interviewed in Ore & Sposato's study also questioned AI program's ability to initiate non-bias decisions, with Gross' (2023) research establishing the need for these questions, as the author found that ChatGPT, an interactive form of AI, seems to be extremely gender biased, placing minorities at a disadvantage. Gross' research highlights that only when official policies and ethical regulations are put in place for the use of these technologies, are they able to be effectively used.

Hunkenschroer & Luetge's (2022) systemic research findings discuss that while AI software may alleviate issues of human bias in recruitment, technical flaws in algorithms exist. Technical flaws like biased training sets or algorithmic design might cause the algorithm itself to be biased. This issue worsens when these machine learning technologies begin to develop by themselves, as it makes it nearly impossible for human developers to even evaluate how exactly these machines came to these conclusions. These findings in this research only highlight the limitations of the use of the AI systems, further conveying the limited knowledge on the risks and assessments within this area as they are so complex.

 Wright & Atkinson (2018) further mention similar criticisms of these AI systems, discussing the fact that for these systems to even be accurate and effective, they would need to be issued with years' worth of accurate data, highlighting Yano (2017) who stated, 'AI is nothing more than an empty box unless data is applied.' Wright & Atkinsons research however goes on to discuss that with these advancements of AI, evidence shows that the use of CVs within the job application process, will eventually be replaced for most roles over the years with newer application methods to better assess a person's qualification criteria, allowing for what the authors claim to be a more 'faster and fairer' method of recruitment. This claim, however, is yet to be proven, as of today, CVs are still a critical necessity in the job application process.

A recent article in The Irish Times, however, sheds a light on how the use of Ai from jobseekers themselves could be a potential threat to organizations. Gleeson (2024) states how from a recent study conducted by Hays Ireland, a recruitment firm, displayed that 'almost a third of 18- to 24-year-olds have used artificial intelligence (AI) to complete a job application'. Not only can this affect the authenticity of applications, but it may also bring about more issues within organizations already using potentially bias Ai recruitment systems as previously mentioned by Hunkenschroer & Luetge (2022).

2.5 Conclusion of literature review

To summarize this review of literature, many insights were explored into how the use of current day online applications and social media sites has affected recruitment practices. While there is a strong debate regarding the benefits of these practices for both organizations and jobseekers, there is also much debate on the limitations and the criticisms regarding these developments. This research highlights what areas of e-recruitment retain substantial knowledge and examination, while also acknowledging what areas need more investigation.

2.6 Research Objectives and Questions

The purpose of research questions and objectives is to refine and focus one's ideas to further provide a clear direction and purpose for one's research project. This further amplifies the primary focus area that is to be developed on. (Saunders et al, 2023) From our in-depth review of the existing literature surrounding how the use of social media and online recruitment methods has ultimately altered the world of recruitment, both highlights and gaps in the research have been established. This research aims to further explore how these modern-day processes have affected the recruitment process for how young people and fresh graduates connect with organizations. The focus on young people and fresh graduates for this research as they are the generation that have arguably been the most impacted by these new ever-changing technologies.

Henceforth, the main specified research questions of this study are as follows:

1. *How has the use of social media and online methods changed the way young people and fresh graduates search for jobs and connect with recruiters and organizations?*

This question strives to explore how exactly young people and graduates search for jobs, how organizations advertise to them and how they recognize if an organization is right for them through the organization's online presence and recruitment methods. This aims to explore also how communications methods have changed.

2. *How exactly are these methods efficient for both organizations and jobseekers?*

This question is posed to further evaluate just how efficient these methods are for both organizations and jobseekers as it ventures to discover how successful the use of social media and

online recruitment methods have been on attracting and retaining young candidates. The objective here is to analyze these efficiencies from young people's experiences, which will further reflect the success of these practices for organizations.

3. *What are the limitations and ethical considerations of these methods?*

After highlighting the findings of question 1 and 2, this question aims to further research the limitations of these recruitment practices and showcase the potential ramifications surrounding the use of these methods. As previously mentioned in the literature, the limitations and ethical implications of these methods are not as nearly well versed as the positive aspects. (Pickern & Legler, 2021) This question strives to explore these untaught considerations.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.0 Introduction

From our research objectives and questions previously outlined in section 2.6 of the previous chapter, this chapter outlines the justifications of why a qualitative approach for this research design is most suited and appropriate for this study's aims and objectives. This chapter will discuss the philosophical positioning for this research, how data will be collected and analyzed, the reasons for why these methods were chosen, along with the limitations and ethical considerations.

3.1 Research Philosophy

A research philosophy is defined as 'a system of beliefs and assumptions about the development of knowledge.' (Saunders et al, 2023) This ultimately outlines the framework in which the research is conducted, including how it is conducted, factors that influence the research and how it is interpreted.

The use of certain research methods is influenced by assumptions regarding our realities and theoretical perspectives. Ontological assumptions focus on the assumptions related to one's nature and being in the world, whereas epistemological assumptions stem from knowledge, its validity and known distinctions. (Quinlan et al, 2019) Axiology on the other hand focuses on the values and ethics in research. (Saunders et al, 2023) Under these assumptions fall research paradigms, which are beliefs on what, in terms of philosophy, matters in the advancement of knowledge. (Halcomb, 2018) An epistemological approach will be taken for this study, as it encompasses the methods that will be needed to be carried out. An epistemological position is arguably more relevant as there are a variety of different types of knowledge that can be obtained through projects, research, films, personal accounts and narratives. (Saunders at al, 2023) There are three paradigms / positions that fall under an epistemological assumption – positivism, social constructionism and interpretism. Positivism refers to perspectives based on reality, social construction focuses on social contexts and while similar to social construction, interpretivism relates to how social contexts are subjective and are 'based on interpretation and interaction.' (Quinlan et al, 2019)

As the aim of this study is to further explore and analyze a series of subjective perspectives surrounding e-recruitment, interpretivism is more suitable for a qualitative study as the associated views of a positivist approach, inform an objectivist research methodology based on the scientific method that emerged from the physical sciences, positivists tend to prefer more quantitative data. (Anderson et al, 2019) Interpretivists, however, have the ability to gain knowledge from a variety of diverse perspectives, with the ability to base theories and assumptions of data which cannot be counted, like in a quantitative study. These interpretivist paradigms can adopt a variety of methods to their strategy from narrative and case studies to provide in-dept perspectives and experiences.

(Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022) With this type of qualitative work, the study aims to portray why people have thoughts and feelings that influence how they behave. (Sutton & Austin, 2015) An interpretivist approach recognizes the complexity of human perspectives, as while some may experience the same reality, we may perceive things differently. As the objectives of this study are to explore young people and fresh graduate's perspectives and experiences with social media and online applications, while analyzing how it reflects organization's use of these practices, an interpretivist approach aligns with the methods of research.

3.2 Research Approach

There are two contrasting approaches to theory development in research; the inductive approach and the deductive approach. A deductive approach involves a research process in which the researcher aims to redefine and test existing theories in different contexts/situations, whereas an inductive approach aims to further develop and build on existing theories by gathering data in order to build a broader view of the subject. (Anderson, 2019) Essentially a deductive approach aims to narrow down a specific theory while an inductive approach aims to broaden the theory.

Typically, a deductive approach is more frequently related to positivism philosophy, as to achieve more specific results on a subject, larger samples are required. Henceforth, for this research, an inductive approach will be used as it links with interpretivism and through this study, the aim is to collect further data on our matter in order to better understand the phenomenon and produce and expand upon the existing hypothesis. (Saunders et al, 2023.) This research is guided through existing arguments, as discussed and explored upon in our literature review, so the findings of this study aim to further expand these arguments, rather than test their validity. Saunders et al describes induction as 'theory generation and building', which is what this study strives to achieve which cannot be achieved through a deduction approach. (Saunders et al, 2023)

3.3 Research Strategy

One of the main determinants of research design is whether the study will take a qualitative, quantitative or mixed approach. Each approach will ultimately determine how data is gathered and assessed. For this research a qualitative approach was chosen as commonly, researchers that want to know why people behave the way they do, how events affect individuals, how and why cultures and practices evolved the way they have and how attitudes and opinions arise, typically use qualitative approaches to address their questions. (Agius, 2018)

 Qualitative research is 'research that produces non-numeric data and focuses on words rather than numbers in the collection of data' whereas quantitative research is 'research that focuses on the gathering of numeric data or data in numerical form'. (Quinlan et al, 2019) Qualitative research

typically consists of collecting data through words, audio recordings etc., while quantitative research attains data through graphs, statistics, etc. (Saunders et al, 2023) Understandably the research philosophy and research approach are associated with our research design, hence the reason to use a qualitative strategy, as it accurately aligns with our interpretivist and inductive approach. Qualitative research is used in studies to explore people's opinions, experiences and perspectives on a matter, which is why it aligns with the objectives for this study as we aim to explore how the use of social media and online applications have impacted the younger generation of Ireland. 'Qualitative research focuses on the events that transpire and on outcomes of those events from the perspectives of those involved.' (Teherani et al, 2015) As our aim for this study is to gain answers through people's perspectives through discussion, this could not be achieved to the full extent that is necessary to answer the questions for this research through a quantitative approach. Qualitative research will help us with an inductive approach as with words, they can have more than one meaning compared to numbers, allowing us to explore many meanings to develop on our existing theories. (Saunders et al, 2023)

Consideration was however given to a mixed method approach for this study, as Wasti et al (2022) argue the benefits of using a mixed method, as it can help us to gain a more deeper and clear understanding view of a matter by incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data. Adding one form of data to the other can help capture other unanticipated aspects of the issue that may be significant to the study problem and aid in the analysis of the findings. (Wasti et al, 2022) However while this may prove beneficial to some studies, as this study seeks to capture the experiences and perspectives of young job seekers, the use of quantitative research would be insufficient to truly capture the thoughts and perceptions of those involved.

3.4 Research Sample

Sampling is defined as 'the deliberate choice of a number of a number of people to represent a greater population.' (Anderson et al, 2019). For this study non-probability sampling will be used as typically this form of sampling is used to disclose understandings and perspectives by supplying quality information instead of statistical explanations, (Saunders et al, 2023) whereas probability sampling is typically used in quantitative research. Probability sampling is typically used in quantitative research with a deductive approach as the sample taken from the population is deemed to be an appropriate representation of the population, implying that it is applicable to the complete. Non-probability sampling, however, is a sample chosen to represent the population, but it cannot be considered statistically representative of the population. (Quinlan et al, 2019) Non-probability sampling was chosen to be suitable as candidates were simply chosen to further develop on the

existing research and expand on the knowledge in the area, not to generalize and represent the whole current population.

Convenience sampling was designated as the best and most suitable non-probability method of sampling for this study. Quinlan et al (2019) define convenience sampling as when a researcher forms the sample group of people that are most accessible to them / easiest to recruit. As there was in fact quite a large group of convenience available, purposive sampling was also used in order to ensure there was still a range of diversity included in the sample group. Purposive sampling, also often referred to as judgmental sampling, is when a researcher needs to use their own judgement to select candidates for the sample, to ensure they fit the criteria and meet the objectives. (Saunders et al, 2023) Participants were suitably selected from close friends, college acquaintances and work colleagues, who were approached in person or over the phone. The selection criteria of these participants aimed to gather young people and students between the ages of 20 to 25 with a varied background in work.

Snowball sampling, a method whereby one of the recruits within the study helped recruit another participant, was also used in one instance. This was used as an existing participant had a close connection to someone in a different working field to the rest of the people in the study. This was a necessary step in order to further branch out the research and gain another perspective in a different job market.

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3.5 Research Instrument

It is essential that the research instrument used for this study aligns with the research, to properly gather information that can accurately answer the research question and reflect the literature. Henceforth the research design for this study is a mono method qualitative study, as we used semi-structured interviews as our sole method of data collection. (Saunders et al, 2023)

Over time anthropologists have recognized the importance of hearing other people's stories and experiences regarding past events and noting these reports in order to further interpret what happened and their meanings. (Roberts, 2020) Interviews are typically a qualitative method of gathering primary data, as semi-structured interviews focus on gathering data through participants perspectives and opinions, rather than through numerical means / statistics. 'This method typically consists of a dialogue between researcher and participant guided by a flexible interview protocol and supplemented by follow-up questions probes and comments.' (DeJonckheere & Vaugn, 2019)

Interviews for this study were conducted on a one-to-one basis, consisting of in-dept questions in order to further gain thorough information on the existing phenomenon we are researching. (Quinlan et al, 2019) By using semi-structure interviews, it can allow us to explore and further develop our understandings of the topic at hand by listening to experiences in a variety of different contexts. Semi-structured interviews specifically are used to enable participants to direct the discussion into potential further areas of inquiry. This type of research method is useful for our inductive approach as it helps our understanding of the relationships between the variables. (Saunders et al, 2023) DeJonckheere & Vaugn (2019) argue that with semi-structured interviews, a highly significant study can be conducted with as a little as 8-12 interviews as each person's perspective and answers can supply us with greatly meaningful information. One on one interviews are not only helpful in providing in-depth answers from participants, but it also allows the researcher to observe the interviewee's mannerisms and reactions to questions which can be noted and used as further data. (Quinlan et al, 2019)

3.6 Interview Process

All 9 of the interviews took place over Zoom, instead of in person, as it was most convenient for the participants given the time frame. The participants were all young people either in college, recently graduated and/or currently working, that were reached out to through personal connections. All participants were given a consent form to sign and return prior to the interview. The interviews lasted roughly from 30 to 40 minutes each and were broken up over a week. Since the individuals' full identities – aside from their vague working backgrounds and current area of employment – are to remain anonymous, interviews were conducted without recording; instead, complete responses and notes were taken and then formally typed up later.

As outlined by Anderson et al (2019) questions surrounding the key areas of this study were drawn up long prior to the interviews. The wording of some of the questions was slightly altered after a pilot study was conducted to make perfect sense and make the conversation flow more. Participants were made aware at the beginning of the interview if there was any question they did not feel comfortable asking they could simply say 'skip' however, no question was left unanswered by any of the participants. The questions were designed to be simple and easy to understand but still thought-provoking, and able to provide significant and meaningful information on the research topic. These types of questions are referred to as 'open questions' as they 'usually require thought and reflection on the part of respondents and tend to generate relatively long responses.' (Quinlan et al, 2019)

The interview process was initially structured into 3 main parts:

1. The first part of the interview process was plainly the introduction. This consisted of welcoming the participants and giving them a brief summary of the research topic and its aim. As mentioned, every participant was informed that they may choose to skip a question if they wanted and that their identity would remain anonymous, so they were free to answer any question as honestly as they wish. Participants were also enabled to ask any questions or concerns prior.
2. The second part of the interview process consisted of the priorly designed 14 questions. Questions 1-8 focused on asking the participant about their past and current uses of online job-seeking methods, such as what platforms they used and their experiences. Questions 9-14 focused on exploring what the participants knew about the areas such as cyber-vetting and how they felt about these practices and other potential issues in e-recruitment.
3. The interviews were concluded by thanking the person for participating and providing a brief evaluation of their answers to ensure everything was correct or if they would like to further add anything on.

3.7 Pilot Study

Anderson et al (2019) suggest that pilot studies are beneficial as they help identify any changes in the questions that may need to be made, in the data gathering process itself, along with clarifying how long the process will be. Saunders et al (2023) also supports this suggestion by stating how the authenticity of collecting data relies on the questionnaires design and the thoroughness of your pilot testing. Henceforth, a pilot study was conducted with one volunteer participant outside of the 9 participants involved in the actual study. From this pilot study, very few minor changes were made to questions, the only real change was to how the data was saved.

During the pilot study, first the use of Zoom's transcription process was used; however, when going back over the transcript after the interview, there were many errors that slightly altered the transcript. These errors consisted of wrongful punctuation or the slight change of certain words which made it difficult to later piece together what exactly the person had said and what they had actually meant. Due to this, it seemed more favorable to simply write down the participants' answers as they spoke throughout the interview as the transcription service had the potential of not recording answers accurately. This later proved beneficial as throughout the interviews some participants spoke with a slight accent or too fast at times that the transcription may have had

trouble picking up and could have later made the write up of the interview more difficult and time consuming.

3.8 Data Analysis Method

The use of thematic analysis was used to decipher and analyze the data from the interviews. Thematic analysis is a general approach to qualitative based methods, as patterns or themes are identified through data collection, in this case, through interviews. (Saunders et al, 2023) Anderson et al (2023) explains how a thematic analysis is used to 'identify and label topics, concepts or ideas within the data, which may help to explain relationships between some of the different categories you have identified.' As an inductive approach was used in our research, the themes were derived from our data. (Saunders et al, 2023)

There are various ways of approaching thematic analysis, however, Braun & Clarke (2006) have created an extremely influential approach to thematic analysis, dividing the process up into a 6-step framework. The framework is as follows as applied for this study:

1. <u>Becoming familiar with the data:</u> After the interviews, the notes and transcriptions are reviewed and reflected upon after, to become familiar with differences and similarities, noting common patterns and themes.
2. <u>The generation of initial codes:</u> After reviewing the transcripts, codes are generated and applied to ideas and key points that were identified and noted throughout the data.
3. <u>Searching for the themes:</u> Once the data has been successfully reviewed and coded, these codes can then potentially be sorted and grouped into themes.
4. <u>Reviewing the themes:</u> These are then reviewed again to ensure they align with the data account. Some of the themes found may be disregarded as they may not have as much supporting data as others.
5. <u>Defining the themes:</u> The found themes are defined and analyzed based on the corresponding data that aligned with the nature of these themes. The discussion of these themes is further conveyed to reflect the research topic's questions.
6. <u>Writing the report:</u> The write up process is an informative and reflective piece of the data gathered and found throughout the data analysis process.

(Braun & Clarke, 2006)

3.9 Ethical Considerations

The moral precepts that guide a person's, a group's, or an organization's behavior are known as ethics. (Anderson et al, 2019) Ethical considerations are used in research to ensure the study is done and carried out to the highest ethical standards, and that no harm is caused is caused by the undergoing of the research.

To ensure this, before the interviews, all participants were emailed a consent form, outlining the participants rights to withdraw at any time, right to not answer questions and right to access their own data. The consent form also clarifies that the interview will not be recorded and that their identity will remain anonymous but will be given a stage name in the official report. An information sheet was also supplied, outlining a brief summary of the area of research, what kind of questions would be asked, how long the interview would be and why the research was being conducted. As these forms were sent by email, at the beginning of each interview, participants were verbally asked to consent to participating during the introduction, ensuring that they had read both forms and knew exactly what they were consenting to.

3.10 Limitations

While interviews were decidedly the best option in order to obtain the essential data for this study, there are of course limitations. Anderson et al (2019) argue that the usefulness of interviews 'will depend on the choice of participants and the extent and depth of peoples response to the questions they are asked.' Convenience sampling was used for this research as it suitable for the timeframe given and the type of participants sought out for this study were readily available, however, limitations to this aspect include the location of where these participants reside. It is important to acknowledge that while these participants fit the specified age group and working / college background, as they are all located in a surrounding area in Ireland, their experiences with online job-seeking may differ from those in other areas due to available job opportunities.

Quinlan et al (2019) also note that one of the main disadvantages of one-on-one interviews is that they can be time-consuming and that there is the potential of the interviewer misguidedly steering the responses in one direction which could result in a compromise of the data.

As all interviews were conducted online over Zoom, another limitation was the risk of technological issues. Lobe et al (2022) argued that the issue with online methods for interviews is that some people may be more tech savvy than others and may not be as comfortable or confident using such technologies which can add additional problems for the researcher. Lobe also argued that simple issues such as a bad Wi-Fi connection can slow and delay the process altogether.

3.11 Conclusion

To conclude, while there may be certain limitations in the process of this data, the use of interviews as a method of collecting qualitative data was deemed to be the most effective and beneficial approach to assessing our research questions. This methodology specifically outlines the qualitative research process along with the reasoning supporting its proficiency and why it was chosen for this study.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.0 Introduction

Using a thematic analysis technique, this chapter aims to present and outline the results from the data obtained by nine participants through semi-structured interviews. These interviews were conducted in order to answer the research questions posed within the main area of this study – how the use of online applications and social media has affected the recruitment process for both organizations and young jobseekers in Ireland.

Through conducting these interviews, a variety of themes were discovered from the data, which were later narrowed down and condensed into 4 themes: (1) Accessibility & Convenience, (2) Engagement & Personalization, (3) Privacy Uncertainty and (4) Authenticity.

4.1 Theme 1: Accessibility and Convenience.

This theme was seemingly obvious prior to the semi-structured interviews taking place from prominent discussion in the literature review regarding how easily accessible and convenient these online job applications/job sites are, however, through these interviews, it was further highlighted what exactly about these modern-day applications stood out to participants. The data showed that 8 out of the 9 participants either regularly or favorably used Indeed the most due to its simplicity and accessibility.

'I'd say I definitely use indeed more, as every job I have secured has been through Indeed. I always have it downloaded on my phone, so I sometimes just browse it even if I'm not actively job-hunting just to see if anything catches my eye.' (Tom)

'I use indeed most often – it's the first place I would look for a job. I have the app on my phone so it's just quick and easy to browse like any other social media app.' (Sarah)

'I have applied for all my past jobs through Indeed, I've never had any problems before, so I've never felt the need to look elsewhere.' (Natalie)

Ultimately these citations prove the simple app design of Indeed is what attracts younger jobseekers to use it. As a generation that are constantly on their phone, these types of apps provide them with a 24/7 accessible service. LinkedIn was the second most popular among the participants. IrishJobs however was surprisingly only used by one participant. When participants were asked if they had ever applied for a job through any non-conventional job sites, only one participant said yes.

'Yes, an Irish brand owner and influencer I followed on Instagram was having a Christmas pop-up shop near me and I applied through a link in her Instagram story, and I was successful!' (Amy)

Evidently Indeed seemed to be the most trusted and favorite app amongst most participants, however it was two of the business graduates who found LinkedIn to be more catered toward their preferred job field.

'...as a college graduate, I have used both Indeed and LinkedIn frequently to search for jobs. I found my current retail job through Indeed. However, while I think the app is great for part-time

jobs, I don't think Indeed is sufficient to look for graduate jobs as I personally never found any. I think LinkedIn is better suited to finding corporate and graduate jobs.' (Amy)

'As a graduate in the business field, I personally find LinkedIn is best to look for my preferred jobs and it's really easy to branch out and network with employers,' (Maria)

4.1.1 Sub theme: Remote Interviews.

It became clear through research and the data gathered from the interviews that all job applications today were done primarily online. Henceforth, participants were asked about whether the further steps in their job application process were too, online. All nine of the participants in the study stated that they have had at least one in-person interview since the pandemic, however all nine also noted that they have had more Zoom interviews in comparison.

'I had one in-person interview – all others were through Zoom. I think it provides people with the opportunity to interview to more places, in a sense that I personally wouldn't be able to take so much time out of my week to travel to a variety of places to interview especially when I'm not guaranteed the job.' (Natalie)

'I had one second-phase interview in-person, all the rest were done online thankfully. I find it way easier, and it definitely takes a certain level of stress off of it all.' (Tom)

While most participants also made similar statements, two participants mentioned that while remote interviews were convenient and evidently becoming more and more popular, they disagreed that they were of best practice.

'I didn't find my remote interview as effective as an in-person interview because I couldn't get a feel for the workplace for myself to decide if I even wanted to work there. I personally find in-person interviews to be more engaging.' (Maria)

'*...I do think it's kind of losing out on the human aspect of it all, especially with online interviews, they're obviously convenient but I think it makes it harder for candidates to get a good sense of what an organization is really like.*' (Daniel)

4.2 Theme 2: Engagement and Personalization

The previous theme regarding the accessibility and convenience of these applications initiated the theme of engagement and personalization as the preferred use of these online methods have undeniably changed the way jobseekers engage with organizations. Correlations were noted

amongst the participants answering regarding how the use of these online apps such as Indeed and LinkedIn, were creating a more casual way of communicating between job seeker and employer.

3 out of 9 of participants in the study revealed that they had someone within an organization reach out to them through LinkedIn, as judging from their profile, they were believed to be a good fit for the company.

'I currently work as a personal trainer and the owner of a gym found me on LinkedIn and asked if I would be interested in applying. I ended up doing an interview, but the location just wasn't for me. He did tell me however if I ever changed my mind the position was mine, so while I didn't take the position it was nice to make a good connection in my line of work.' (Shane)

'I've been headhunted twice actually. Most recently through LinkedIn which I am now currently waiting on an interview for.' (John)

'I was contacted by a recruiter from a recruitment company through LinkedIn, who was in search of potential candidates for a client company. It was only a brief casual conversation as I decided the job role didn't suit me.' (Tom)

During the interviews, participants were asked about their online levels of engagement with organizations by questioning them about whether a company's online presence would affect their view of an organization. These questions were donned to test Waghmare's (2018) theory that an organization's online presence was essential in attracting new and young applicants, however the answers were nearly 50/50 with only 5 out of the 9 participants agreeing a good online presence would be more likely to engage them to an organization.

'Yeah, I think I would judge a company from their websites and social media. I think you get a good sense of a company's values, culture and reputation from their online presence, which these days I think a lot of young people would look out for.' (Maria)

1. *'I think a social media / online presence definitely plays a part in how I would judge a company but wouldn't play a major factor in deciding if I wanted to work there or not. I do however think it's good for a company to have a good presence online as it displays their culture and creates a more engaging relationship with customers or people who want to work there.'* (Daniel)

'... a good online presence would definitely create a good image for that company in my mind and a 'want' to work there.' (Amy)

However, while the majority agreed with Waghmare's theory, few participants displayed indifference to this assumption.

'No, I would never judge a company from their social media. I don't think a company's social media presence can really define them.' (Tom)

'To be honest, I wouldn't even bother to look at a company's social media pages.' (Sarah)

'No, I wouldn't define a company by their online presence. I wouldn't really say it's fair to judge an organization by their marketing team!' (Shane)

This question showcased a clear divide in participants' level of engagement with organizations and their personal perspectives when it comes to job hunting.

4.3 Theme 3 – Privacy

This theme was the first theme to be made immediately evident after the interviews were initially conducted due to its apparentness in the majority of the participants' answers. The theme of privacy uncertainty stems from participants' little to complete lack of knowledge regarding 'cyber-vetting'. From the data, only 3 of the participants within the study were briefly aware of the term itself, however, unsurprisingly, these 3 participants were business students, so were only aware of the term due to past study. When the rest of the participants were asked 'What do you know about cyber-vetting?' they all had similar answers:

'Absolutely nothing.' (Tom)

'I've never heard anything about it.' (Shane)

'Nothing, never heard of it.' (Tracy)

When participants were briefed on what cyber-vetting was, all 6 participants who had never heard of the term, still found difficulty in believing it was a real practice. Participants were then questioned on whether they agreed with or were okay with this practice, to which many candidates expressed similar views.

'I don't think it's right for a recruiter to look through my social media pages. I believe my personal life has nothing to do with and does not reflect my work life.' (Tracy)

'I wouldn't necessarily panic if a recruiter went through my profile, however I really don't think it is necessary or fair to judge me off, it just seems a bit invasive.' (Amy)

'I think it's fair to say I would just feel really uncomfortable knowing an employer went through my social media pages, it's an invasion of privacy.' (Natalie)

As many of the participants in the study were only made aware of this process on the spot, the potential concern for their privacy was evident. The only participants who did not display as much concern were predictably the 3 participants who previously were aware of this method.

*'I wouldn't mind if an employer were to look at my social media pages. They reflect me, so I understand why they would look. As I am aware of the process of cyber-vetting, I would always try to make sure everything I post is appropriate and doesn't contain anything that may harm my working reputation.' (*Maria)

'Ideally, I wouldn't like them to look at my personal accounts, however, I don't believe that my current uploads would seriously harm my prospects of landing a job so it's not a huge concern of mine.' (John)

'I would feel comfortable as I don't think there is anything on my social profiles that I would be concerned or conscious about an employer seeing as I know better than to post anything inappropriate, but I also don't think it wouldn't be fair for an employer to base their decision in hiring me from their judgements solely off these profiles.' (Daniel)

All 9 participants collectively agreed however, that if they had to pick one profile that they wouldn't like an employer viewing, it would be their Instagram profiles as many noted that it's the most personal, containing pictures with friends and families. Many also clarified that while they didn't believe they had anything necessarily inappropriate uploaded to their Instagram accounts, they believed it just didn't define them as a person or reflect how they would act in a professional position.

4.4 Theme 4: Authenticity

The theme of authenticity, or more so, its potential lack thereof, was highlighted in the data regarding the participants' use of artificial intelligence (AI) on job applications / CVs. All participants were fully aware of AI and sites such as ChatGPT, all disclosing they have used it before in one way or another, however 6 out of the 9 participants interviewed admitted to using AI in the past for certain parts of the job application process.

'ChatGPT, I have used before for a cover letter and to prepare interview answers.' (Shane)

'I have frequently used AI to help build a better CV, I'll admit there's probably a few sections of my CV completely wrote by ChatGPT.' (Natalie)

'I once used AI to help answer some questions I had on a tough online job application, but other than that I have only used it for things like CV templates.' (John)

The budding lack of authenticity within the early stages of recruitment became evident due to the surge in the use of these AI applications amongst young people. The use of sites such as ChatGPT has become a helping hand for those struggling with their job seeking process. Participant 4 however, while noting they had used it for a cover letter before, disclosed why they would fear using it on an actual job application.

'I have used ChatGPT for a cover letter, however I would not use it for a job application or CV. I feel like the use of it is still very up in the air regarding whether or not its okay or not to use it. I would be afraid of being caught out and potentially lose a job over it. '(Amy)

Participants were also asked if they have or would ever alter their CV to the skills and attributes outlined on a job description / company website to enhance their chances of being selected. 5 out of the 9 participants said they *had* done it before while 7 out of the 9 said they probably *would* do it in the future, many expressing that they didn't see the harm in it.

'If there are skills outlined in a job description that I believe I have, that I did not already have mentioned in my CV, I would definitely go and add them in my CV, however I wouldn't lie on my CV.' (Maria)

Chapter 5: Discussion of themes

5.0 Introduction

This chapter aims to further analyze and discuss the findings from the data obtained through the interviews of 9 participants. Through these interviews, many of the answers and statements from participants were anticipated and predicted, stemming from previous similar findings in past research outlined in the literature review, however, there too were few answers that didn't align with assumptions of certain previous studies. The participants within this study represent a small sample group of the population of the area of study, representing current young jobseekers and fresh graduates, in a variety of job markets, in the Eastern area of Ireland. The data obtained from this study provides substantial information regarding this focus group's perspectives, experiences and opinions in the world on e-recruitment, enabling the opportunity to answer the research questions outlined in this study.

5.1 Accessibility and Convenience.

The theme of accessibility and convenience was noted from the beginning, quickly emerging from the responses and statements of the participants. It illustrated not only how accessibility and convenience were prevalent concepts in the jobseeker role, but also how and why organizations are also currently utilizing these strategies.

The findings under this theme were similar to Rana's (2019) research which emphasized that today, a young person's criteria for a simple and effective job site waged simply on how quick and easy it was to use. All participants in the study displayed a strong relationship and common use with online job sites. Many specifically emphasized the convenience of those particularly available in mobile app form, as they were accessible 24 hours a day, enabling them to casually browse jobs like they would browse any other social media site on their phone, whether they were actively job hunting or not. Indeed and LinkedIn were the most popular amongst participants and while both can be used through Google, they are more notably used through their mobile apps by participants. This showcases jobseeker's potential current preferences, that the sites are more commonly used when they are readily available at one's fingertips.

Indeed, being noted as the most popular jobseeker app amongst participants, further reflected just how convenient these recruitment methods were also becoming for organizations. Various participants mentioned how Indeed was in fact the *only* place they searched for jobs through, supporting Rupps (2004) point that organizations are now spending significantly less on recruitment expenses due to the accessibility of these sites and apps, while also being able to

branch out into further various markets and talent pools at the click of a button. (Kulkarni & Pingle, 2019)

A great level of digital proficiency was highlighted throughout the interviews, as every participant was well versed in every type of technology and website/social media mentioned during the interviews, debatably due to 24/7 accessibility of these technologies. Mehrotra & Mariam (2020) argued that organizations should not exclusively depend on these online methods, reasoning that many people may either prefer not to use not social media, or not know how to work these modern sites, however this data suggests otherwise. Unless a job today was specifically catered toward someone with years and years of experience, essentially targeting an older person, this argument may not potentially be a grave concern in coming years. The current young generations are practically growing up with a phone in hand, surrounded by modern technologies every day whether chosen or not, undoubtedly forcing them to become fluent in technological literacy. This was evident from the data itself to even how simply and efficiently all participants of the study were contacted and handled the online interview process, as every person knew precisely what they were doing and showcased no issues.

However, while all participants chose to do this type of interview over Zoom, few noted while still convenient, an online job interview disabled people from being able to get a full sense and feel of an organization. While Waghmare (2018) found that jobseekers typically based their opinions of a company by their websites and advertisements, participants within this study suggest that some people simply cannot bond with or decide if an organization suits them, solely based on its online presence and require some form of in-person aspect of the recruitment process.

5.2 Engagement and Personalization

This theme further conveys the topic of how an organization's online presence potentially alters jobseeker's perceptions of the organization. While argued in the last point that some people believe they can't get a full feel of an organization through online interviews, many still agreed with Waghmare's (2018) point that an organizations online presence can still be an engaging factor in shaping people's opinions. The 55% of participants in the study who agreed with Waghmare's statement suggested that company websites and social media displayed an indicator to what a company's cultures and values were, providing those with a brief idea of what it would be like to work there. Participants who had previously followed certain organizations' online profiles were enabled to decide for themselves if they would be a good fit for the company. This particularity also reflects Gartner's (2021) research that found that organizations who promoted their values online saw an increase of 15% amongst jobseekers. Jobseekers who place a certain level of

personalization into the deciding of their place of work, are also less likely to leave an organization. (Wowor et al, 2022)

Unpredictably however, the rest of the participants answers regarding whether or not they engaged with companies online, further contradicts Waghmare's research with one participant notably stating that they simply wouldn't bother or care to check out an organization's online profiles, with another noting that it is only the skill of marketing teams behind company websites / advertisements, who purposefully try to showcase the organization in a good light, only highlighting the benefits. This reflects how many of people's engagement levels with organizations online have to do with their perceptions and trust of what they see.

Besides creating a good online presence, the data found that not only were jobseekers looking to engage with organizations online, but organizations were beginning to reach out and engage to employees themselves through social media such as LinkedIn, for means of recruitment. 3 participants discussed how they were contacted by employers/recruiters through LinkedIn, emphasizing further these organizations current use of the applications. This finding reflects Broughton (2013) statement regarding LinkedIn being one of the most efficient ways for employers to connect with jobseekers, as a person's working background and skills is outlined on their profile, purposefully for the eyes of employers. A potentially important point to note from the data, however, is that the 3 participants who were sought out by employers, were male, with one participant having been headhunted more than once, meanwhile none of the females in the study had ever had an employer reach out. What could be just a mere coincidence within the sample, could also be evidence of gender bias within recruitment displayed on a smaller scale.

5.3 Privacy

The theme of privacy became swiftly apparent from the data as most of the participants interviewed discussed how they would feel uncomfortable if an employer were to view their social media profiles. As mentioned, only 3 out of the 9 participants within this study were aware of the process of cyber-vetting, with these 3 participants only having heard of the term as they were business students.

The vast majority of participants felt very strongly about this issue, displaying similar views. Most agreed that it was a total invasion of privacy for an employer to view certain profiles such as Instagram, as they were personal accounts that did not reflect them in a professional setting, or really just didn't define them as a person at all which could lead employers to form a misrepresented view of an applicant. The fear of misrepresentation amongst participants was clear within this theme. Pickern & Legler (2021) too discussed the danger of recruiters creating a bias

view for themselves when looking at a candidate's personal social medias however noted that some may argue that findings such as illegal activities / offensive posts displayed on one's profiles as 'valid' reasons to not hire an employee. Nevertheless, with no guidelines for recruiters outlining what's right and wrong, it's difficult to say what could cause a bias view, what one recruiter may see as a joke, one may find offensive as some things may be taken out of context. Even subjects revolving religious beliefs / political opinions may subconsciously alter an employer's perspective, resulting in unconscious bias.

The legalities and policies surrounding this newer process in recruitment are sparse. Whether the process of cyber-vetting is considered ethical or not, the findings from this data would suggest it isn't. However, one of the main contributors to the negative outlook of cyber-vetting judging from this data is that people are simply unaware of its possible occurrence, resulting in a lack of consent from the jobseeker as they did not agree to be professionally evaluated and scrutinized based off their personal medias. Those interviewed who were aware of the process, did not fear it happening as with their knowledge, took precautions to maintain their personal social medias to an appropriate standard, ensuring not to post anything questionable or improper. However, those who were not fortunate enough to be made aware are left at a possible disadvantage. The suggested use of guidelines and early security measures being made known for both jobseekers and employers was discussed by Hosain (2021), to protect people and avoid any legal implications for organizations due to breaches or misuse of data. The need to make this process known to jobseekers is evident, as many participants in the study further agreed that while they believed they had nothing of offense or anything inappropriate uploaded to their medias, it was the fear of the unknown, fear that someone they did not know personally was creating assumptions off them based on their personal content, only typically meant for the eyes of family and friends.

5.4 Authenticity

The theme of authenticity developed from the data due to the participants use of AI. 2 thirds of participants in this study admitted to using some form of AI for a job application or CV, 33% higher than the result from Gleeson's (2024) recent study showcased in The Irish Times which found almost one third of people between the ages of 18 and 24, used AI on a job application. The significantly higher result from participants in this study was frankly unexpected due to the lack of research and articles surrounding the topic currently available when evidently it is a prominent matter.

Jobseekers growing use of AI, while may be seen as beneficial in their eyes, seemingly may sprout a variety of issues for organizations. According to Jenkins' (2020) research, as organizations adjust and adapt to AI systems, problems are inevitable as AI systems and technologies are now used to

complete tasks such as shortlisting CV's and job applications in the early stages of recruitment. These types of technologies are being used to analyze and condense applications down by key words and skills. However, the issue now evident with the use of these systems is now that applicants are beginning to as well use AI for job applications, people who use sites such as ChatGPT are inevitably going to have eerily similar job applications and CV's, resulting in organizations being issued with a variety of applications that are unauthentic and completely the same. 77% of participants also agreed that they would put the skills and attributes sought out in the job description, into their CV's, further implementing issues for these AI shortlisting systems. This will evidently make the shortlisting of CV's / job application lengthy and flawed, as with so many similar applications it will be harder to navigate who's really suited for the job and who isn't. Even for organizations who don't use AI systems to shortlist, by these statistics in the data, recruiters will begin to see more and more unauthentic CV's, lacking personalization and originality.

Hunkenschroer & Kriebtiz (2022) attested for the use of AI in the recruitment process, arguing that these systems were extremely efficient when evaluating characteristics and skills in CV's and applications, however these tools may be seemingly ineffective when the issue of the CV's and applications themselves being unauthentic, is taken into account. The lack of authenticity amongst applicants also creates a level of dishonesty and lack of trust within the employment relationship, which may also lead to further strain if an applicant were to be caught out lying on these applications or using AI.

The uprise in the use of these AI generated technologies amongst young people and their evident reliance on these services for job application purposes, begs the question of just how reliant are young people on these services for other aspects of their life? With many young people admittedly using AI generated sites such as ChatGPT for CV's and job applications, one can only assume that these are not the only instances they are used in. These findings may suggest that young people today are becoming more reliant on these services for things such as college/work assignments, leading to an increase in inauthenticity in college and working life. The popularity of these easy-to-use services may be reducing the need for authentic research and personal learning.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.0 Conclusion of research

The literature review, methodology and discussion chapters provided insightful and worthwhile information about the area of study. This chapter will conclude the research by answering the research questions and objectives, providing HR recommendations, highlighting an area of study worth further research while outlining the limitations to this research.

6.1 Final thoughts

The primary aim of this research was to investigate the impact of online applications and social media on recruitment for organizations and young job seekers in Ireland. Extensive investigation to answer this question was carried out through research of past literature followed by gathering primary data through interviews of young people in Ireland in order to answer the research objectives.

6.1.1 Research Question 1

'How has the use of social media and online methods changed the way young people and fresh graduates search for jobs and connect with recruiters and organizations?'

Investigating these newfound channels of communication between job seeker and recruiter was a prominent aspect to help understand how these online networks worked to connect job seekers with potential employers. Evidently from the research, online job sites and networking social medias are now young job seekers primary sources of job advertisements, and essentially the only place they now search for and apply to jobs as these methods are now seen as the most efficient and easiest amongst young people, being so accustomed to the online world.

This research found that while many people still have had experience with in-person interviews, the findings indicate that the majority of interviews are now being conducted online. While many

supported the use of online interviews, there were few mentions regarding how online interviews lacked providing the interviewee with a full feel for the organization. While recruiters may learn enough information about a candidate, the potential candidate may be losing out on creating a sufficient opinion on an organization with this method of interview. However overall, these new online methods within the recruitment process are evidently less time consuming and costly for both recruiters and candidates compared to previous methods.

An organization's social media page was found to provide many young job seekers with a significant outlook or opinion of an organization, indicating a completely new way of connecting job seekers and the general public with organizations. The display of an organization through their company website or social media is seemingly developing subconscious relationships and connections with the people who view these profiles.

6.1.2 Research Question 2

'How exactly are these methods efficient for both organizations and jobseekers?'

The findings within this research evidently displayed the benefits of online recruitment methods for both organizations and jobseekers. While only young job seekers were interviewed for the study, their answers to the questions undeniably reflected and highlighted how organizations benefitted from their standpoints.

Young jobseekers' success is securing roles through online job sites and advertisements showcases organizations success in hiring through these methods. The easier and more sufficient young job seekers found applications and interview processes, highlights how many organizations are doing their job well in adapting to these new recruitment technologies. As participants within the study have all been previously successful in securing a job through an online recruitment channel, for every participant successful, an organization had a successful hire.

 The research showcased an undeniable primary reliance on these new online methods as they provide many of the same benefits for both jobseekers and organizations; time efficiency, easy to use, reliable, non-costly etc. The success rate of these technologies is evident and undoubtedly preferred amongst the majority.

6.1.3 Research Question 3

'What are the limitations and ethical considerations of these methods?'

The findings of this study showcased an evident lack of information amongst young job seekers regarding the use of cyber-vetting. The lack of privacy job seekers felt they had because of this issue was a prominent concern in the research, as this is an area that is evidently yet to be fully explored and developed on. The uncertainty of young people regarding their rights in online recruitment is a major issue within this area of study.

Another grave area of concern found was the prominent use of AI by both organizations and job seekers. The staggering percentage of job seekers who actively used AI for some part of their application process could be a cause for concern in the future if not handled appropriately. It is clear that besides matters of inauthenticity in the recruitment process, the overreliance on these technologies may cause further issues for both organizations and jobseekers in the future.

While these limitations and issues found in the recruitment process are not ideal, it grants ideas for further areas to be explored within the world of online recruitment and provides a need for further research.

6.2 Recommendations

From the interviewing of young job seekers in Ireland regarding their experiences and perspectives with online recruitment methods, a series of recommendations can be made to recruiters and HR personnel in order to improve their usages of these online recruitment processes in order to benefit not only themselves and the organization but future applicants. These recommendations were made to help and avoid prominent issues that were discovered throughout the study along with simple suggestions for organizations to enhance their online recruitment process.

From the findings within this study, it is clear that job application sites Indeed and LinkedIn are seemingly the most popular and regularly uses by young job seekers in Ireland. Organizations in search of younger applicants or graduates for graduate's programs for example should evidently narrow down their focused platforms to these two sites, as sites such as IrishJobs and GlassDoor are seemingly not nearly as popular as Indeed and LinkedIn. As these platforms are not as popular, organizations could spend time and money on advertising elsewhere, where they are more likely to reach their target audience. With this, organizations could also work on putting more effort into their social medias and websites pages as over half of participants within the study emphasized how an organizations online presence played a substantial role in shaping one's opinions and connections with an organization. An engaging social media page may drive more people to apply to the organization as an organization online webpage can showcase the perks and values of a company, potentially enticing more people to want to work there. It would be evidently beneficial

for an organization to come up with new ways to engage their audience and potential future candidates to attract attention to the company such as questionnaires, polls and work-life content.

Fear of one's privacy regarding cyber-vetting was a prominent issue within the study, so organizations creating policies ensuring they disclose whether or not this process will take place within a job application may be ideal for applicants for peace of mind. Simply stating whether or not the process may or may not take place in a job description if one were to apply for the role showcases a level of authenticity and honesty. This can also prepare an individual to check their socials, ensuring nothing they deem inappropriate is available to see, or simply switching their social media accounts to private if they're not 100% comfortable with the process.

With the many issues surrounding the use of AI for both organizations and applicants, it is clear that these technologies should be avoided for recruitment purposes, specifically the use of AI shortlisting processes for organizations. With many young job seekers now using AI sites to help with job applications and CV's, the use of AI to shortlist these applications will only lead to many suitable candidates being left out, or unsuitable candidates being let in. This may lead to a lenghty and inefficient recruitment process. While these technologies are still new and developing, it's best to avoid using them for important purposes such as recruitment due to uncertainty and unreliability.

6.2.1 Areas for future research

The main area of research within this study that requires further research is the limitations of using online practices for recruitment. While researching this study, there is an obvious lack of information regarding the use of AI in recruitment, for both organizations and individuals, as it is still such a new topic. Further research into this area will provide greater insight into how the use of AI can be managed efficiently and effectively, and how organizations can use these technologies to their advantage. As of now there is a great level of uncertainty surrounding this topic, with much conversation regarding whether it is sufficient to use, therefore further research and assurance on this topic would be extremely beneficial to both organizations and job seekers.

6.3 Limitations

While this study provided significant information from a group of 9 Irish jobseekers from a diverse background of work, it is important to note this group is only a small representative of the whole young population of Ireland. While participants had diverse working backgrounds, evidently not all areas of work can be accounted for this sample size. Geographical limitations should be considered as participants in the study were from the east of Ireland, specifically Kildare and

Dublin which are highly urbanized areas and therefore have more working opportunities compared to more rural areas like in the west of Ireland.

Chapter 7: CIPD learning statement

The process of undertaking this dissertation has not only been extremely rewarding and fulfilling, but also a valuable learning experience. Not only have I explored and educated myself on a valuable topic through thorough research which will undoubtedly prove beneficial to me in my future career, but I have also learnt much about myself regarding my skills and ability to focus, organize and push myself in times of challenges. The time constraints throughout this process taught me skills of prioritization, determination and discipline. There were many times of confusion and misunderstanding while trying to navigate the course of this dissertation, however, being able to overcome these challenges and produce a piece of work I am confident in has been one of, if not my biggest achievement throughout my years of education.

The data collection process of this dissertation was by far the most thought-provoking aspect of this piece of work. While taking up more time and effort than primarily anticipated, I found every

part of the interviews intriguing as I was able to compare and contrast my findings, forcing me to develop a more critical mindset while exploring the underlying meanings of my data. While suffering difficulties at times with time constraints and finding certain aspects or areas confusing, I concluded each chapter feeling confident with my work. I often find it hard to stand back and really look at and feel proud of my achievements as I tend to view them more as things that are simply expected, but completing this dissertation for my Master's degree, by myself, on a topic of my choosing, done in my own time, I have a genuine sense of pride in myself with what I have accomplished and my newfound knowledge.

This area of study was particularly chosen as it was a subject of HR that I have always felt drawn to and interested in. I chose to pick this area of HR as I knew it was an area that I had the ability to gather significant research on with the resources available to me. I have always enjoyed learning about the recruitment process in organizations as well as having much experience on the opposite end of the process, being a young student and jobseeker in Ireland, growing up in a world of technology and social media. I knew that choosing an area I actually enjoyed researching would be what gave me the determination to complete this dissertation to the best of my ability, compared to choosing a subject I had no interest in just for the sake of completing this piece of work like any other assignment. After months of research and further investigation into this topic, I feel as though I now have an immense understanding and appreciation for this area of HR, being an area, I will undoubtedly continue to follow and learn from in my future career endeavors.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. Have you used job sites such as LinkedIn, Indeed etc. to look for jobs? (If so, which websites, if any, did you secure a job interview?)

2. Have you ever applied for a job through job advertisements on social media sites such as Instagram, Facebook, (non-traditional job-seeker sites) etc.?

3. Have you ever been headhunted by a recruiter through any of these platforms?

4. Since the pandemic have you had an in-person job interview?

5. Would you judge a place of employment based on their internet / social media presence?

6. Based on your own experience, which platforms do you find easiest to use? Is there any platform you would never use?

7. What do you know about cyber vetting?

8. Would you feel comfortable if an employer were to look at your public social media pages when researching you as a potential candidate for a job?

9. Is there any specific social media page you wouldn't like an employer to view? If so, why not?

10. Would you alter your CV to the skills and attributes on a job description to enhance your chances of being selected?

11. Have you ever used AI / ChatGPT on a job application / CV?

12. Are there any issues you personally see with these current online recruitment methods?

Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet

The Impact of Online Applications and Social Media on Recruitment for Organizations and Young Jobseekers in Ireland.
Participant Information.

Who am I and what is this study about?

My name is Ellen Keane, and I am a master's student in Human Resource Management in the National college of Ireland. For my degree, I must complete a dissertation on a subject of my choice. For my dissertation, I will be investigating the impact of online applications and social media on recruitment for organizations and young job seekers in Ireland. The aim of this research is to explore this topic further from a young job seekers perspective by seeking out their experiences with online recruitment methods. This will in turn contribute to prior existing research in this area, while possibly unveiling new statistics. The results of this research will be presented in my final dissertation.

What will taking part in this study involve?
Taking part in this study will require the participant to answer a series of questions regarding their opinions and experiences with online recruiting. All participants will remain completely anonymous besides their gender, stage names will be used in the dissertation.
A semi-structured interview will take place wherever is most convenient for the participant i.e. over Zoom or in-person. The interview should last around 30 minutes. Participants will not be recorded visually or audibly; their answers will be written down as the interview progresses, but only a handful of them will be quoted in the dissertation.
 At the end of each interview, the questions and answers will be promptly read back over, ensuring the participant is happy with each answer. Participants can ask questions at any time.
If a participant wishes to skip a question they may do so. If a participant wishes to withdraw from this study at any stage, they can do so. Taking part in this research is completely voluntary.

Appendix C: Participant Consent Form

Participant Consent Form.

- I .... voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time.

- I have read the participant information form.

- I have had the opportunity to ask questions.

- I understand the purpose of this research.

- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.

- I understand I will have to share my online recruitment experiences and opinions.

- I understand that participation in this research will involve a 30-minute semi-structured interview.

- I understand that my answers will be written down.

- I understand that my answers may be directly quoted in the research.

- I understand that my indentity will remain anonymous in the research and I will have a stage name assigned to me.

- I understand that a transcript of my interview will be retained for two more years after submitting the dissertation.

- I understand that I have full access to the transcript of my interview.