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SOCIAL MEDIA USE FOR ONLINE INTERACTION: LESSONS LEARNED FROM FORTUNE 100 COMPANIES ON JOB APPLICANT ATTRACTION¹

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ABSTRACT

This research identifies which recruitment characteristics attract potential user interest on social media network LinkedIn, measured by the number of likes the posting received on LinkedIn. This research provides an insight on the recruitment message's content, form, and function. We contribute to the existing research on social media with practical recommendations. This fills a gap in the recruitment literature, which has been criticized for being too theoretical and lacking practical relevance by focusing not only on the theory but also on the social media behavior of successful employers in practice. To answer our research question, we conducted content analysis using 2020 corporate LinkedIn postings of the Fortune Magazine 100 "Best companies to work for". We developed a list of 15 measures to identify the job- and organizational attractiveness, organized around three main categories: content, form, and function. We found the specific elements of form, function and success on LinkedIn that contributes to user interaction. In terms of content, challenging and interesting work, prestige of the job, company reputation and location contributed to user interaction, whereas the mention of supportive, competent and warm coworkers, did not contribute to user interaction and the description of the job position as prestigious contributed negatively. We found that the form elements of picture, color and audio/video, functional elements of questions contribute to more user interaction. Furthermore, while salary and opportunities for improvement are improvement job selection criteria highlighted in the literature, the practice of Fortune 100 companies show that for the user interaction in social hiring, they are not included. Lastly, the use of links negatively influenced user interaction on social media. Our study confirms the importance of content, form, and function in relation to job and organizational attractiveness on social media. We provide a practical insight into which elements of content, form and function to use for successful online recruitment efforts on LinkedIn.

KEYWORDS: organizational behavior, human resources, information systems, social networking sites, social media, LinkedIn, recruitment, applicant attraction, job and organizational attractiveness, content analysis

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1. Introduction

Back in 1998, the term "war for talent" was first introduced in a report by McKinsey & Company, called "Better talent is worth fighting for" (Chambers, Foulton, Handfield-Jones, Hankin and Michaels III, 2003). In this report, the "war for talent" was described as "a war for senior

executive talent that will remain a defining characteristic of their competitive landscape for decades to come" (Chambers, Foulton, Handfield-Jones, Hankin and Michaels III, 2003: 46). Companies were already having difficulty finding high-skilled employees and these difficulties were expected to remain so for the next decades. And the authors were correct, as we see now that "the war for talent" still rages

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on. It may sound contradictory that in these times with high unemployment rates internationally and job shortage (International Labour Organization, 2014), organizations are still having problems filling in vacancies (McKinsey Global Institute, 2012). Yet, the McKinsey Global Institute (2012: 2) suggests that “despite elevated unemployment rates, jobs today go unfilled in mature economies because employers cannot find the skilled talent they need”. Indeed, ManPowerGroup (2018) found that 45% of over 40,000 employers that they surveyed worldwide described having trouble filling positions due to lack of available talent. This is especially valid in the United States, which is facing a growing skills gap that threatens the nations long-term economic prosperity (SHRM, 2019: 2). The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM, 2019: 2) reports that 7 million jobs were open in December 2018 in the US, but only 6.3 million unemployed people were looking for work. This shortage of employment will have a stifling impact on the economy and global innovation (SHRM, 2019: 2). ManPowerGroup(2018) identified two main reasons for not being able to fill vacancies: lack of technical competencies and lack of available applicant pool. McKinsey Global Institute (2012: 2) suggested that they expected the world to have gap in college-educated workers of 40 million people by 2020. In 2020s, McKinsey expects the developing economies to face a shortage of 45 million workers with secondary-school level or vocational training.

While corporate employment websites were one of the most effective mechanisms for recruiting on the Internet a few years ago (Cober, Brown, Keeping, and Levy, 2004), today social networking sites constitute a powerful weapon in the war for talent. In the last decade, the number of people using social media such as Facebook and LinkedIn has risen at an impressive rate (Facebook Inc., 2014; LinkedIn Corporation, 2014b). Many companies are using social media for recruiting purposes, as a recent survey showed that 94% of all companies have used or were planning to use social media to support their recruitment efforts (Jobvite, 2013). Job seekers have always been using their social networks to find out about potentially interesting jobs. Social network is not only useful from job seekers’ point of view, but also from the organizations’ point of view; Finding out about vacancies through one’s social network effects applicant attraction more positively compared to other sources (Saks, 2005; Van Hoyer and Lievens, 2005). Social media has made it so much easier for job seekers to connect to people in their network (DeKay, 2009; Kane, Alavi, Labianca and Borgatti, 2014). It allows potential employees to reach the recruiters easily and in a personalized manner. Similarly, recruiters can learn much more about

the potential candidates. One of the most important social networking sites for recruiters is LinkedIn. LinkedIn (Loretto, 2019) is the largest professional networking site available today, that is strictly used for exchanging knowledge, ideas and most importantly for exchanging employment opportunities. Given that the number of members on social networking sites such as LinkedIn is rapidly rising (LinkedIn Corporation, 2014a), companies cannot afford to ignore social media in their recruitment efforts.

Despite the popularity of social media in the world of recruitment, there is a paucity of research on recruitment through social media (Breugh, 2013; Alalwan, 2014). Most research on social media use by companies focus on other organizational activities than interacting with potential candidates and attracting new employees. Research focuses on areas such as the promotion of products and services, relationship optimization with customers or cost minimization in marketing campaigns (Alfaro, Bhattacharyya and Watson-Manheim, 2013). Moreover, extant social media recruitment research focuses often on activities such as pre-screening candidates (Kluemper and Rosen, 2009), rather than on the most important challenge of HR departments; Getting qualified candidates to apply for a job (Rynes and Barber, 1991, Chapman, Uggerlev, Carroll, Piasentin and Jones, 2005). Overall, research into social media is still considered as being “in its infancy” (Ahmed, Scheepers and Stockdale, 2014), which many authors recognized as a serious limitation in current social media literature (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Kluemper and Rosen, 2009). Furthermore, the practices that are used in regular recruitment content and format may not apply equally to social media. Our investigation fills in the gap in the research on recruitment through social media by investigating the best practices as applied by the fortune 100 companies on social media. We specifically would like to understand how the three defining features for recruitment web pages, namely form, content, and function (Cober, Brown, Keeping, and Levy, 2004) apply to social media. Our research question therefore is: “Which elements of recruitment message content, form, and function affect potential candidates’ interaction with companies through social media?”

2. Theoretical Background

In this study, we investigate the best applicant attraction practices with social media. To ground our investigation in the extant body of literature, we first present the present the theoretical foundations of recruitment within the organizational literature that forms the basis of our

investigation. Then we discuss the current state of the literature on online recruitment, and specifically recruitment through social media.

2.1. Recruitment Literature

According to Rynes (1991), recruitment is defined as “encompassing all organizational practices and decisions that affect either the number, or types, of individuals that are willing to apply for, or to accept, a given vacancy”. Breugh gives a similar definition; “an employer’s actions that are intended to (1) bring a job opening to the attention of potential job candidates who do not currently work for the organization, (2) influence whether these individuals apply for the opening, (3) affect whether they maintain interest in the position until a job offer is extended, and (4) influence whether a job offer is accepted” (Breugh, 2008: 104–104; Breugh, 2013: 391). We specifically focus our efforts on the first part of external recruitment and investigate the interaction of the potential candidates with the job opportunity that is posted by companies, which shows that the position caught their attention and their interest.

According to Barber (1998), the recruitment process consists of three stages: generating applicants (also referred to as applicant attraction), maintaining applicant status and influencing job choices. Many researchers have stated that companies should focus their recruitment efforts on the first stage of the recruitment process (Van Hove and Lievens, 2009; Breugh, 2008; Uggerslev, Fassina and Kraichy, 2012). Applicant attraction, defined as getting potential candidates to view the organization as a positive place to work (Rynes, 1991), is becoming increasingly important for the success of an organization (Rynes and Barber, 1991; Chapman, Uggerslev, Carroll, Piasentin and Jones, 2005). Attracting high-talented applicants has become critical for many organizations, and is expected to stay critical in the nearby future (McKinsey Global Institute, 2012). This is especially the case because the foundation of the competitive advantage are the intellectual and human capitals in today’s economy (Berthon, Ewing and Hah, 2005). Companies are acknowledging that attracting a high quality of human resources could provide them with a sustained competitive advantage over other companies (Turban and Greening, 1997). Therefore, we focus our research on the first stage of the recruitment process, namely on applicant attraction. Key activity in this stage of the recruitment process is communicating information about jobs, working conditions, organizational values and work climate to persuade applicants to consider working for the organization (Popovich and Wanous, 1982). Harold and

Ployhart (2008) conducted research on the changes in applicant’s appreciation of job and organizational attributes over time and suggested that “companies would be wise to tailor the information they present according to recruitment stage”. For example, information such as location and reputation influenced job and organizational attractiveness early in the recruitment process, while information regarding salary is mostly evaluated in a later stage of the recruitment process (Harold and Ployhart, 2008). Since the factors that are important change across different recruitment stages, and because the applicant attraction is the most important stage of recruitment, we focus on the factors that draw the attention of the potential applicants at the attraction stage and get them to show interest in the position by interacting with the position announcement on social media.

2.2. Three Theories on Job and Organizational Attractiveness

Applicant attraction consists of two components: “prospective applicants’ perceptions of an organization as a desirable employer and the extent to which prospective applicants are willing to exert effort to pursue a job with an organization” (Williamson, King, Lepak and Sarma, 2010). To be successful at attracting applicants and motivating them to exert effort to pursue a job, companies need to enhance their job and organizational attractiveness, according to recruitment literature (Chapman, Uggerslev, Carroll, Piasentin and Jones, 2005; Turban and Cable, 2003). Whether job seekers apply for a vacancy is strongly related to the perceived attractiveness of both the job and the organization (Ehrhart and Ziegert 2005). Turban and Cable (2003) emphasize the importance of job and organizational attractiveness, by stating that attractive firms can usually choose from larger and higher-quality applicant pools. Job seekers will exit the recruitment process in an early stage when an organization is not seen as attractive (Barber and Roehling, 1993). To determine the attractiveness of a job and/or organization, it is important to know how job seekers evaluate job and organizational attractiveness (Behling, Labovitz and Gainer, 1968). Behling, Labovitz and Gainer (1968) proposed three theories on job and organizational attractiveness: the objective factor theory, the subjective factor theory and the critical contact theory. While this seminal work is being cited to this day, most researchers adopt either the objective factor theory, subjective factor theory or the critical contact theory, disregarding the others. In this study we are combining the valuable findings of all three theories by taking factors to represent each of the three type. These theories are described next:

According to the **objective factor theory** (Behling, Labovitz and Gainer, 1968) applicants make job choices based on objectively measurable job and organizational attributes, such as the salary and the location of the position. This theory suggests that if firms make good use of these attributes, they can significantly increase the effectiveness of their recruitment messages (Behling, Labovitz and Gainer, 1968). The **subjective factor theory** (Behling, Labovitz and Gainer, 1968) indicates that applicants choose their jobs based on subjective attributes which fit their personal emotional and psychological needs, for example the ethical standards of the company, company reputation or the organizational culture. According to this theory, companies should focus on customizing their recruitment messages to fit the personal needs of the prospective applicants, for example by targeting certain specific groups of job seekers (Behling, Labovitz and Gainer, 1968). Finally, the **critical contact theory** (Behling, Labovitz and Gainer, 1968) suggests that applicants base their judgment of the organizational attractiveness solely on the forms of contact with the company during the recruitment process, for example a company visit or contact with a recruiter or the elements of the website used for recruitment, such as the existence of pictures, colors, audio and video. In this theory, the assumption is made that especially young applicants (for example graduated students) cannot compare job offers based on objective or subjective factors due to a lack of experience. The only way for companies to be attractive for these types of job seekers, is by focusing on optimizing their recruitment process (Rynes, Bretz and Gerhart, 1991) and through friendly and personal contact towards the prospective applicant (Turban, Forret and Hendrickson, 1998).

2.2.1. Factors Relevant to the Objective and Subjective Factor Theories

Message Content. The core requirement of recruitment efforts is finding the right recruitment message. Companies need to know which information to include in job advertisements and company descriptions, to attract applicants (Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman, and Lance, 2010). It is practical for employers to focus their recruitment efforts on message content, due to the importance of the recruitment message (Barber, 1998; Breaugh, 2008; Chapman, Uggerslev, Carroll, Piasentin and Jones, 2005, Cober, Brown, Levy, Cober and Keeping, 2003). What are some elements of content that are important to include in recruitment efforts through social media? Extant research provides several aspects of content to take into consideration; First, it seems eminent for companies to include key

information about the vacant job and the organization itself. Second, Uggerslev, Fassina, and Kraichy (2012) advise recruiters to spend their first recruitment dollar on fostering perceptions of fit between the company and the employee by developing the right message content. Third, many researchers pointed to the importance of job and organizational attributes such as salary, promotional opportunities, reputation and location in applicant attraction (Powell, 1984; Harris and Fink, 1987; Turban, Forret and Hendrickson 1998; Carless and Imber, 2007; Cober, Brown, Keeping and Levy, 2004). Yet, applicants often lack this information about important job and organizational attributes when deciding whether to apply for a certain job (Breaugh, 2013). Thus, companies should be focusing on improving the content of their recruitment communication, aimed at potential employees.

Rynes (1991) stated that “job and organizational attributes are the most powerful predictors in applicant attraction”. Similarly, many articles emphasized the positive effect of applicant’s perception of job and organizational characteristics on applicant attraction (Powell, 1984; Harris and Fink, 1987; Turban, Forret and Hendrickson, 1998; Carless and Imber, 2007). These instrumental job and organizational characteristics include factors such as salary, promotional opportunities, career development and organizational structure.

Early studies on job and organizational characteristics investigated the attributes of influence on potential applicants’ job choices. One of the most prominent studies was the research of Posner (1981). Posner introduced an 18-item job and organizational characteristics scale on which many future studies were based (Powell, 1984, 1991; Harris and Fink, 1987; Turban, Forret and Hendrickson, 1998). Building on Posner’s research, others focused more on categorized groups of attributes than on the single job and organizational attributes. Researchers like Powell (1991), Harris and Fink (1987) and Turban, Forret and Hendrickson (1998) focused on 3 to 5 categories, rather than using 18 to 25 different job and organizational attributes. Carless and Imber (2007) introduced a five-factor model of job and organizational characteristics, based on earlier studies (Posner, 1981; Powell, 1991; Harris and Fink, 1987; Turban, Forret and Hendrickson, 1998). This model consisted of five factors. Among these factors, three of them are attributes that would fit the objective factor theories; namely, (1) pay and promotion opportunities, (2) organizational reputation and (3) location, and the last two factors are attributes that would fit the subjective factor theories, namely; (4) challenging work, and (5) coworkers. In this study,

we use these five elements in investigating content of the LinkedIn advertisements. These elements constitute the factors that are described in the objective and subjective perception theories we described earlier.

2.2.2. Factors Relevant to the Critical Contact Theory

Although recruitment research has been primarily focused on content (Barber, 1998; Breugh, 2008; Chapman, Uggerslev, Carroll, Piasentin and Jones, 2005; Cober, Brown, Levy, Cober and Keeping 2003), research has also shown that both aesthetic attributes and ease of navigation could attract job seekers' attention and generate interest in the organization (Cober, Brown, Levy, Cober and Keeping 2003). Study by Cober, Brown and Levy (2004) combines content, stylistic features and functionality and it demonstrate that in addition to content, form, and function of organizational recruitment websites also influence applicant attraction (Girard and Fallery, 2009). This research is seen as one of the few studies that offer useful practical recommendations for companies' recruitment efforts on the Internet (Ployhart, 2006; Allen, Mahto and Otondo, 2007; Chien-Cheng, Mei-Mei and Chang-Ming, 2012). Therefore, in our research, in addition to the content elements we mentioned before, we will also include form and function in our analysis of social networking site's ability to attract and interact with potential job seekers. Before we describe the factors relevant to the critical contact theory, namely the form and function of the job advertisements, we provide a brief overview of the online recruitment literature.

2.2.2.1. Online Recruitment

Applicant Attraction on the Internet. Dineen and Noe (2009) suggest that the use of the Internet at the earliest stages of the recruitment process is a "win-win for both organizations, by achieving leaner applicant pools, and job seekers, by being able to focus on better long-run opportunities and apply to organizations with which they fit on valued dimensions". Also, the use of Internet for communicating information about the organization itself and vacant positions has the potential to reach more potential applicants than the use of traditional media (Williamson, King, Lepak and Sarma, 2010). The use of Internet for recruitment purposes is not only a powerful tool to gain easier access to potential applicants, it potentially reduces the recruitment costs (Cober, Brown, Keeping and Levy, 2004). Moreover, online recruitment activities have a positive effect on the quality of the job applicant pool as attracted job seekers seem to be more qualified for the advertised job

(Cober, Brown, Keeping and Levy, 2004; Williamson, King, Lepak and Sarma, 2010). Corporate employment websites are considered one of the most effective mechanisms for recruiting on the Internet (Cober, Brown, Keeping and Levy, 2004), and with the rising use of social media for recruiting purposes (Jobvite, 2013; Kluemper, Rosen and Mossholder, 2012), the Internet is becoming even more important for companies in the attraction of applicants. Several researchers developed methods for evaluating corporate recruitment websites (Cober, Brown, Keeping and Levy, 2004; Terzis and Economides, 2005; Lee, 2005) to evaluate applicant reactions to the information presented on recruitment websites. Research has shown that vividness, content and functionality are important to job seekers (Cober, Brown, Keeping and Levy, 2004; Allen, Mahto and Otondo, 2007).

Social Media Networks. While the term social media is mainstream (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010), literature emphasizes that this term applies to more than just platforms like Facebook and LinkedIn (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Ellison and Boyd, 2013; Kane, Alavi, Labianca and Borgatti, 2014) and that it is sometimes difficult to clearly distinct social media from other technologies (Kane, Alavi, Labianca and Borgatti, 2014). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content". In their research, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) classified six different types of technologies that qualify as social media: blogs, collaborative projects (like Wikipedia), content communities (like YouTube), virtual social worlds (like Second Life), virtual game worlds (like World of Warcraft) and finally social network sites like Facebook and LinkedIn, which is the focus of this research. The most used definition of social network sites is given by Boyd and Ellison (2007), in which they refer to "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system".

In 2013, Boyd and Ellison reconsidered their definition, given the way social network sites had evolved in the past few years and because they felt their original definition no longer accurately described the landscape of social network sites: "A social network site is a networked communication platform in which participants 1) have uniquely identifiable profiles that consist of user-supplied content, content

provided by other users, and/or system-provided data; 2) can publicly articulate connections that can be viewed and traversed by others; and 3) can consume, produce, and/or interact with streams of user-generated content provided by their connections on the site". Boyd and Ellison (2007, 2013) prefer "social network sites" over the more commonly used term "social networking sites" because networking implies that people are using these sites to initiate new relationships, often with strangers. On social network sites it is certainly possible to meet new people, but more often people are using these social media to interact with their current family, friends and acquaintances, according to some researchers (Ellison and Boyd, 2013; Subrahmanyam, Reich, Waechter and Espinoza, 2008).

However, some researchers suggest it is different with professional social network sites such as LinkedIn (Dekay, 2009; Caers and Castelyns, 2010) which people use to support a broad range of social relationships, and not just based on their current 'offline' social relationships, within their circle of family, friends and acquaintances (Dekay, 2009; Kane, Alavi, Labianca and Borgatti, 2014). Another limitation of the definition given by Ellison and Boyd (2013), is that it excludes technologies such as wikis, blogs and therefore also a microblogging platform like Twitter, although Twitter is generally seen as one of the largest social media platforms out there (Kane, Alavi, Labianca and Borgatti, 2014). Hence, Kane, Alavi, Labianca, and Borgatti (2014) constructed an updated definition in which they no longer refer to social network "sites", but more generally to "social media networks". According to the authors, the updated definition is "more reflective of the current state of the technology". Their updated definition of social media networks consists of four essential features, "such that users (1) have a unique user profile that is constructed by the user, by members of their network, and by the platform; (2) access digital content through, and protect it from, various search mechanisms provided by the platform; (3) can articulate a list of other users with whom they share a relational connection; and (4) view and traverse their connections and those made by others on the platform". Key distinctions from earlier definitions are that this definition no longer excludes social media like Twitter and focuses not only on current social relationships, but also emphasizes the possibilities to broaden current relationships and finding new opportunities (Kane, Alavi, Labianca and Borgatti, 2014). The latter aspect is important in this research, because of our focus on a professional social media network such as LinkedIn, which is all about finding new business opportunities (Steininger, Wunderlich and Pohl, 2013; LinkedIn Corporation, 2014a). For

this reason, we will use the definition of social media networks as given by Kane, Alavi, Labianca, and Borgatti (2014) in this research.

LinkedIn as the Main Social Media Tool for Online Applicant Attraction. As the definitions of social media networks (Kane, Alavi, Labianca and Borgatti, 2014) and social network sites (Ellison and Boyd, 2013), as well as the business strategy of LinkedIn (LinkedIn Corporation, 2014a) show, interactivity is a key and unique characteristic of social media networks. According to Liu and Shrum (2002), interactivity can be defined as "the degree to which two or more communication parties can act on each other, on the communication medium, and on the messages and the degree to which such influences are synchronized". Flew (2005) also emphasizes the importance of interactivity by stating "it is what the new social media sets apart from the traditional mass media". Most media are focused on merely broadcasting information, but with social media it is possible to interact with the audience (Flew, 2005; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

The private social media network Facebook (Dekay, 2009; Caers and Castelyns, 2010) still has the biggest member-base with over 1.3 billion monthly active users (Facebook Inc., 2014). Yet, for business purposes, the most popular social media network is LinkedIn (Dekay, 2009; Caers and Castelyns, 2010). Furthermore, LinkedIn continues to grow and has over 300 million members worldwide (LinkedIn Corporation, 2014b). LinkedIn started in 2003 and is aimed at "connecting the world's professionals to make them more productive and successful" (LinkedIn Corporation, 2014a). On the professional social media network LinkedIn, companies can set up a corporate page to interact with their audiences. More than 3 million companies have a Company Page on LinkedIn (LinkedIn Corporation, 2014c) which can be used to communicate information, advertise jobs or highlight certain brands, products or services (LinkedIn Corporation, 2014a). Members on LinkedIn have the option of following the company, after which they automatically receive recent updates posted on the corporate page (LinkedIn Corporation, 2014a). Followers can interact with the updates on corporate LinkedIn pages by clicking on the "like" button called (also referred to as "liking the message"), which is a very popular form of feedback on social media networks (Peyton, 2012; Cheikh-Ammar and Barki, 2014). When someone responds to the message by liking the message, this message shows up on the personal newsfeed of all the people within their entire social network, which makes the use of company updates a very valuable

tool for organizations by significantly increasing the reach of the message (Cheikh-Ammar and Barki, 2014).

According to LinkedIn, their social media network “enables members to become more successful in their careers through three value propositions: managing and sharing who they are through their digital professional identity; engaging and expanding who they know through their professional network; and discovering professional knowledge and insights making them better at what they do” (LinkedIn Corporation, 2014a). Despite the popularity of social media networks, organizations have relatively recently started using it for business purposes such as marketing, knowledge management and recruitment (Kane, Alavi, Labianca and Borgatti, 2014). Companies are still experimenting and they lack clear knowledge on how to make use of the popularity of social media networks (He, 2014).

2.2.2.2. Form and Function of Recruitment Messages with LinkedIn

Earlier, we had mentioned that content of recruitment messages is very important. We highlighted the three attributes of the recruitment message content that fit with the objective factor theory and two attributes of the recruitment message content, which fit with the subjective factor theory. In this section, we discuss the two attributes that fit with the critical contact theory, which suggests that applicants base their judgment of the organizational attractiveness solely on the forms of contact with the company during the recruitment process. These two attributes are form and function.

Form. To attract potential applicants, the recruitment message must be drawing candidates’ attention. The most effective way of doing this is by optimizing the form or vividness of the recruitment message (Cober, Brown, Levy, Cober and Keeping, 2004). The form of a website is known to influence the attitude of potential consumers towards a website, and therefore also the company itself as well as the product or service the company is selling (Coyle and Thorson, 2001). Zusman and Landis (2002) also found that the quality of an online recruitment advertising influenced the attractiveness of a potential employer. In both marketing and recruitment literature, it is suggested that the use of pictures, colors, animation, audio and video in product and job advertisements is positively related to organizational attractiveness (Coulter and Punj, 1999; Cober, Brown, Keeping and Levy, 2004). According to Cober, Brown, Keeping, and Levy (2004), form may also be of influence in the attracting of potential applicants using social

media. Therefore, we will use the elements of picture, color, animation, audio and video in analyzing the recruitment messages’ form on LinkedIn.

Function. Cober, Brown, Keeping, and Levy (2004) focused their research on employment websites, and with function, the authors referred to “the ability to interact and navigate a Web site and use it to achieve a goal (e.g. application)”. According to the authors, “navigational menus guide job seekers to specific areas of information” (Cober, Brown, Keeping and Levy, 2004). Key aspect is interactivity, defined as “the degree to which two or more communication parties can act on each other, on the communication medium, and on the messages and the degree to which such influences are synchronized” (Liu and Shrum, 2002). Within the social media, the use of questions that the end users can interact with and respond to, the existence of links that provide the potential candidates to gain more information are some of the elements of function. Therefore, we will use the elements of questions and links in analyzing the recruitment messages’ function on LinkedIn.

3. Research Method

To answer our research question “Which elements of recruitment message content, form, and function affect potential candidates’ interaction with companies through social media?” we conducted a mixed-method study. We first content analyzed a sample of 2200 LinkedIn messages by Fortune 100 companies, which we then tested using multiple linear regression. In this section below, we describe the data source, research sample, coding schema development, coding schema reliability establishment, sampling frame, and the quantitative analysis of coded data.

We collected data from LinkedIn to identify the elements of content, form, and function that companies with top recruitment performance include in their recruitment message using social media. We chose LinkedIn for two reasons; First, LinkedIn is regarded as the largest professional social media network (DeKay, 2009; Caers and Castelyns, 2010). Second, LinkedIn is by far the most popular social media network for recruiting purposes (Jobvite, 2013), which is the focus of this investigation. 94% of all companies have used or were planning to use LinkedIn to support their recruitment efforts, LinkedIn is by far the most popular social network used for recruiting in comparison to other social media like Facebook (65%) and Twitter (55%) (Jobvite, 2013). We chose to focus only on LinkedIn for this research, since each social media may

differ in the form and function options that they make available for the company posting due to the differences in the affordances that each social media may provide. Therefore, focusing one social media site enables us to correctly generalize our findings across that social media site.

As most of the companies would like to learn from the best company practices, we focused our research on the corporate LinkedIn pages of the 100 “Best companies to work for” (Fortune Magazine, 2014). The Fortune 100 list is compiled from data gathered by the Great Places to Work Institute and is used to identify the companies with the most satisfied employees. The ranking of the companies is determined by the results of an employee survey on workplace culture and quality (⅓rd of the score), and a “Culture Audit” from the Great Places to Work Institute (⅓rd of the score). Inclusion in this list indicates a corporate focus on progressive Human Resource practices to external audiences (Cober, Brown, Keeping and Levy, 2004; Levering and Moskovitz, 2000). Therefore, Fortune 100 companies constitute a reliable role model for progressive HR practices such as employee attraction through social media.

3.1. Coding Schema Development and Reliability Establishment

To evaluate the recruitment advertisements, we adapted the evaluation method of Cober, Brown, Keeping, and Levy (2004). Cober and colleagues (2004) developed a method for evaluating corporate employment websites, on content and stylistic features (e.g. aesthetics and navigational usability). In their study, the authors find that the interaction between content, form and function to be critical for the effectiveness of corporate employment pages because they determine the job attractiveness and organizational attractiveness (Cober, Brown, Keeping, and Levy, 2004). Based on these three constructs (namely, content, form, and function), we constructed a list of 15 measures for our research. We used these measures to content analyze corporate pages on LinkedIn to measure the level of interaction the recruitment messages create by the number of “likes”, which is often used as a form of feedback (Peyton, 2012; Cheikh-Ammar and Barki, 2014). Like is indicative of interaction by the potential candidates that shows that the potential candidates are attracted to the specific job posting.

We developed the following content analysis schema based on the literature on Content, Form and Function, using the Objective Factor Theory, Subjective Factor Theory and Critical Contact Theory (Appendix A). To

establish the reliability of the coding schema, we conducted three pretests with two independent coders, using a total of 250 LinkedIn messages. For the pretests, we sampled 10 messages from 25 randomly chosen corporate LinkedIn recruitment messages, representing 10% of the whole population, which meets the pretest requirement posed by Mayring (2000). Before the pretests, the code categories, measures and the descriptions of measures as well as the coding procedure were discussed with both coders. The main goal of this discussion was to reach consensus on the understanding and wording of the categories and measures. Afterwards, two coders independently coded the LinkedIn recruitment messages using the content analysis schema. The independent coders then discussed the codes where they had disagreement, and based on discussion, they updated the coding schema minor textual changes to clarify the codes. The finalized coding schema is shown in Appendix A, and the intercoder reliability of the coding schema is provided in Appendix B. The intercoder reliability of the coding schema was calculated using percent agreement since the variables were only coded for either the presence or absence of certain message characteristics or content. According to Neuendorf (2002), percent agreement is “particularly appropriate to measures that are categorical (i.e., nominal), wherein each pair of coded measures is either a hit or a miss”. The average intercoder reliability of all measures was **96.76%** (values per measure ranging from 87.5% to 100%). After we established the reliability of the coding schema, one of the coders used the coding schema to code the full dataset (N=2020 messages) used for this investigation.

3.2. Sampling Frame

Pretesting process not only enabled us to establish the reliability of our coding schema, but also helped us refine our sampling procedure. Our initial research plan constituted sampling all the messages provided during the standard timespan of 3 months for each Fortune 100 company. However, the pretests of the coding form showed great differences in the frequency companies posted updates on LinkedIn, varying from multiple messages per day to only a few messages per month. Since this would have caused a large variation in the number of codable messages per company, it would have made it difficult for us to draw relevant conclusions from the analysis. Therefore, we changed our research plan from sampling all messages in a fixed time-period (3 months) to sampling a fixed number of 25 messages on each of the 100 corporate LinkedIn pages, to sample a total of 2500 messages. We specifically selected 25 messages per company, since we found during

the pretesting process that after 25 messages, saturation in coding happens, where adding more messages do not provide additional new information on the way a company uses LinkedIn for recruitment purposes. Further, our first sampled message for each company was posted one month before the time of sampling, and the rest of the messages were those preceding this first sampled message.

This allowed all the targeted potential applicants enough time to respond with likes. While potential applicants may still interact with company messages that are older than a month, this happens less frequently, as the position application deadline might have already been reached by that time.

Table 1. Removed codes due to minimal observation

TYPE	CODE	RELATIVE FREQUENCY	ABSOLUTE FREQUENCY
CONTENT- Pay & Promotion Opportunities	Salary	0.3%	6
CONTENT- Pay & Promotion Opportunities	Opportunities for rapid advancement	0.3%	7
CONTENT- Location	Proximity to Family & Friends	0.2%	5
CONTENT- Challenging Work	Activity Variety	0.4%	9
CONTENT- Challenging Work	Work Enjoyment	0.5%	11
FORM	Animation	0%	0

Our final sample included 2020 recruitment messages from Fortune 100 companies to work for. Because at the time of data collection, we found that 7 companies did not use LinkedIn, and 22 of the 100 companies had fewer than 25 updates on LinkedIn. Our final sample, therefore, consists of 2020 recruitment messages from 93 of the Fortune 100 companies instead of the 2500 originally planned. Since the companies are chosen among many companies based on similarity on multiple criteria, we do not have a reason to expect for job candidates' response to job posting on these companies to differ.

3.3. Quantitative Analysis of Coded Data

All company updates were coded for the presence or absence of the 15 measures used in this research. When the message included mention or usage of the attribute, it

Table 2. Multiple linear regression of how content, form and function factors predict potential candidate interaction (likes)

		B	SE	β	p	95% CI for β
1	(Constant)	3.074	.147		.000	2.787, 3.362
	CONTENT-Job Reputation	-.419	.192	-.053	.029	-.795, -.043
	CONTENT-Company Reputation	.724	.078	.211	.000	.570, .878
	CONTENT- Location	.475	.151	.075	.002	.179, .771
	CONTENT-Challenging and Interesting Work	.411	.092	.102	.000	.230, .592
	CONTENT-Coworkers	-.010	.078	-.003	.896	-.163, .142
	FORM-Picture	.651	.104	.159	.000	.447, .856
	FORM-Color	.705	.132	.124	.000	.445, .965
	FORM-Audio/Video	.473	.204	.059	.020	.073, .874
	FUNCTION-Link	-1.198	.120	-.231	.000	-1.435, -.962
	FUNCTION-Question	.281	.089	.072	.002	.106, .456

Content. Table 2 shows the multiple linear regression of how content factors predict potential candidate likes of the recruitment messages. The recruitment messages that emphasized job reputation by mentioning prestige of the job title were likely to have fewer likes than those without ($\beta = -.05, p = .03$). The recruitment messages that emphasized company reputation by presenting objective success of the company on ethical standards, public image and reputation were likely to have more likes than those without ($\beta = .21, p = .00$). The recruitment messages that mentioned the favorable aspects of the location were likely to have more likes than those that did not ($\beta = .08, p = .00$). The recruitment messages that described the job as being interesting and challenging the were likely to have more likes than those that did not ($\beta = .10, p = .00$). The description of coworkers as competent, warm, friendly or supportive was not one of the significant predictors of likes by potential candidates ($\beta = -.00, p = .90$).

Form. Table 2 shows the multiple linear regression of how form factors predict potential candidate likes of the recruitment messages. The recruitment messages that included a picture were likely to have more likes than those without ($\beta = .16, p = .00$). The recruitment messages that included color were likely to have more likes than those without ($\beta = .12, p = .00$). The recruitment messages that included audio or video were likely to have more likes than those without ($\beta = .06, p = .02$).

Function. Table 2 shows the multiple linear regression of how functional elements predict potential candidate likes of the recruitment messages. The recruitment messages that included a link were likely to have fewer likes than those without ($\beta = -.23, p = .00$). The recruitment messages that included questions were likely to have more likes than those without ($\beta = .07, p = .00$).

was coded with '1', and otherwise with '0'. Therefore, all our independent variables were binary. For each company update, we collected the number of likes. The dependent variable data (the number of likes) were grouped into 5 bins to ensure that the results are normally distributed. The first bin represents the first 20% of the number of recorded likes and so on.

After all the company data were coded, we conducted multiple linear regression on the coded data to identify the content, form and function related elements that bring about interaction with the candidates. The following factors (listed in Table 1) were not included from the linear regression on the basis that they were minimally observed in the data.

4. Results

Our investigation to determine the message content, form, and function element that affect potential candidates' interaction with companies through social media (LinkedIn). We conducted multiple linear regression to evaluate how different aspects of job postings on LinkedIn predict the degree to which individuals found the job postings to be appealing. The predictors were the existence or lack thereof 10 measures of content, form, and function in the social media (LinkedIn) job announcements. All predictors were binary variables (the measure is observed=1, versus the measure is not observed=0). The criterion variable was the number of likes. The dependent variable data were grouped into 5 bins to ensure that the results are normally distributed. The first bin represents the first 20% of the number of recorded likes; the second bin represents the second 20% of the number of recorded likes and so forth. The adjusted R^2 was .17, which indicates 17% of likes were explained by all the content, form and function factors. The linear combination of the social media content, form and function predictors jointly significantly predict the candidates' interaction with companies' recruitment message measured in the form of 'Likes', $F(10,1634)=33.85, p=.00$.

5. Discussion

With this research, we aimed to identify how the most competitive employers are currently attracting their high-skilled, talented applicants through social media, to provide a useful, practical and timely contribution to the existing research on social media and recruitment, which has been criticized for being too theoretical and lacking practical relevance (Saks, 2005; Breaugh, 2008; Ployhart, 2006; Cheikh-Amman and Barki, 2014). We fill this gap in

the practice by specifically identifying the most relevant factors that affect the potential candidates' interaction with companies through social media when these companies post a position announcement on LinkedIn.

As the literature predicted, we found that to attract potential users on social media content of the recruitment message is important. Among the elements of content, highlighting company reputation, prime location and the challenging and interesting nature of the work made the recruitment posting more attractive to potential candidates. On the other hand, mentioning the prestige of the job title made the job title less attractive to potential job candidates. Lastly, as opposed to what the literature would predict, mentioning sociable, competent, warm, supportive, and collegial coworkers in the recruitment message did not influence the attractiveness of the job posting.

While content of the recruitment messages mattered, some of the factors that are important determinants of applicant attraction were not even used by Fortune 100 companies in their recruitment efforts. For example, while the literature shows that the variety in work activities and the enjoyable nature of the work are important criteria for candidates, they were not mentioned by many Fortune 100 companies. Similarly, both salary and opportunities for rapid advancement are important to potential job candidates, yet they were rarely mentioned in the job postings of Fortune 100 companies. This may be explained by the culture that salary and advancement opportunities are more appropriate for later stages of recruitment.

We found that to attract potential users on social media, as much as the content of the recruitment message, form and function of the message also matter. As for the form of the message, both the inclusion of a picture, the use of color to highlight certain aspects of the picture, and the inclusion of video or audio were of significant influence on the number of likes messages received.

Lastly, in terms of the function, while the existence of questions influenced the user interaction with the message positively, the existence of an external link strongly negatively influenced the user interaction. We expect that this happened because, when the interested potential applicants saw the link to the job details, they followed the link instead of interacting further with the social media page. In that case, while the link may still help in attracting potential job candidates, it reroutes them away from the social media, which may reduce the effectiveness of the social media.

In terms of the theoretical contribution, our study shows that recruitment researchers should not focus on one of the three theories of applicant attraction. Our research shows that objective factor theory, subjective factor theory and critical contact theory together give us the full picture of the elements that attract potential job candidates. Specifically, the objective factors such as company reputation (in terms of objective criteria such as fit with ethical standards, company-based awards that show company reputation) and location, and the subjective factor of challenging and interesting work were important to include in company recruitment message contents. Critical contact theory elements can be divided into form and function of the social media postings. Regarding the form of the recruitment message, the picture, color, audio and video were the elements of “critical contact theory” that positively influence applicant attraction, whereas animation was not observed. This may be because animation was used heavily during the early years of the web, and it does not get perceived as professional in the current internet world. Regarding the function of the recruitment message, questions were the elements of “critical contact theory” that increased the potential candidates’ interaction with the recruitment message, whereas the links took the potential candidates away from the social media, thereby reducing the effectiveness of social media, even if they may still positively contribute to the effectiveness of overall recruitment efforts.

These results provide an insight in which type of characteristics or information is important to include in recruitment messages to make the message appealing to potential applicants on LinkedIn. Given the need for more practical recruitment literature (Saks, 2005; Breaugh, 2008; Ployhart, 2006), this study provides a useful contribution to current recruitment research literature by not only looking at the theory but also at social media behavior of successful employers in practice.

For some characteristics, such as the use of a picture and color, we had expected these characteristics to make the message more appealing to potential applicants, as multiple researchers emphasized the importance of the form or vividness of the recruitment message (Cober, Brown, Keeping and Levy, 2004; Coyle and Thorson, 2001; Zushman and Landis, 2002; Coulter and Punj, 1999).

But for some measures, results are not completely in line with current recruitment literature. Especially the lack of observation of pay and promotion opportunities in the recruitment messages is noteworthy, considering that literature suggested salary is one of the most important

predictors in applicant attraction (Powell, 1984; Harris and Fink, 1987; Turban, Forret and Hendrickson, 1998; Carless and Imber, 2007). However, researchers like Harold and Ployhart (2008) suggested that information regarding salary is mostly evaluated in a later stage of the recruitment process, as opposed to information like location and reputation which influenced job and organizational attractiveness early in the recruitment process (Harold and Ployhart, 2008).

Also, with the inclusion of an external link in the recruitment message, it seems that the number of likes is lower than with messages without these external links. Remarkable, seeing that 90% of all company updates coded in this research contain an external link. One of possible reasons for this negative influence, might be that messages which include an external link, contain less concrete information itself and need to be clicked on before the entire content of the message can be read. Another possible reason could be that companies have too much information about their organization or vacancy to share, to fit into one message on LinkedIn, making it necessary to use a link to an external page like their own corporate or recruitment website. More research should be conducted to find a scientific explanation for this.

6. Conclusion

In this study several relations between applicant attraction and message content, form, and function have been demonstrated. The research population consists of companies that are in the Fortune Magazine list of 100 “Best companies to work for” (Fortune, 2014)). These companies seem suitable for researching corporate recruitment efforts on the Internet, because the list indicates a certain corporate focus on progressive Human Resource practices to external audiences (Cober, Brown, Keeping and Levy, 2004; Levering and Moskovitz, 2000), the list doesn’t necessarily represent all successful employers. Moreover, the list represents larger companies and other additional factors may be applicable to smaller companies.

LinkedIn was chosen as social media network of choice, and because this platform is the most popular social network used for recruiting purposes (Jobvite, 2013). A problem for researching social media in general which other authors (Ellison and Boyd, 2013) have also indicated, is that due to the rapid technological development the research landscape of social networking sites is prone to changes which could eventually lead to literature becoming outdated. In time, other social network platforms may

become more heavily used for recruiting purposes, which will require testing of the factors we identified for fit with these new platforms.

In this study, we have not distinguished the jobs among entry-level versus experienced positions. Recruitment literature is primarily based on populations including only college graduates in the United States (Chapman, Uggerslev, Carroll, Piasentin and Jones, 2005). It is very much possible that preferences of first-time job seekers differ from, for example, those of more experienced employees who are looking for a different job. Future studies could distinguish between the experience level required for the position to find out if different factors emerge as being important for attracting individuals at different career stages.

In conclusion, this study responds to the need for more practical research in the field of recruitment by focusing on the way successful employers currently are using social media in their recruitment efforts. Results from this research indicate that certain message characteristics in the categories content, form, and function of recruitment messages do influence the attractiveness of the job or organization, as seen by potential applicants. From a practical point of view, this insight gives employers clear advice on which type of information to include in their recruitment messages through social media. From the theoretical perspective, we show that the subjective factor theory, the objective factor theory and the critical contact theory should be used together in evaluating the social media use for attracting potential candidates.

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Appendix A. Coding schema for messages on LinkedIn position listings

	VARIABLE	OPERATIONALIZATION
	<i>Dependent variable</i>	
	Likes	The number of likes in the message has received on LinkedIn.
	<i>Independent variables</i>	Mention of prestigious job title in the message
	Job Reputation	
CONTENT	Pay and Promotion Opportunities -Salary	Mention of good salary in the message
	Pay and Promotion Opportunities -Opportunities for rapid advancement	Mention of opportunity for rapid advancement in the message
	Company Reputation	Mention of organizational reputation in the message, including public image, and high ethical standards
	Location	Mention of an attractive geographical location in the message
	Location- Proximity to Family and Friends	Mention of a location near family and friends in the message
	Challenging and Interesting Work	Mention of challenging work (i.e. work that extends individual capabilities) in the message
	Challenging and Interesting Work- Activity Variety	Mention of variety of activities in the message
	Challenging and Interesting Work-Work Enjoyment	Mention of enjoyable type of work in the message
	Coworkers	Mention of coworkers in the message and the description of coworkers as competent, sociable, warm, friendly or supportive (i.e. supporting of other coworkers' development)
	FORM	Picture
Color		Prominent use of color to highlight aspects of the picture in the message
Animation		The graphics or pictures in the message animated (e.g., pictures changed form) in some way
Audio/Video		Use of audio or video in the message
FUNCTION	Link	Use of an external link in the message
	Question	Use of a question in the message

Appendix B. Codes and the intercoder reliability per code

	VARIABLE	% AGREEMENT	N AGREEMENTS	N DISAGREEMENTS	N CASES	N DECISIONS
CONTENT	Job Reputation	99.60%	249	1	250	500
	Pay and Promotion Opportunities -Salary	99.60%	249	1	250	500
	Pay and Promotion Opportunities -Opportunities for rapid advancement	98.80%	247	3	250	500
	Company Reputation	94.00%	235	15	250	500
	Location	99.60%	249	1	250	500
	Location- Proximity to Family and Friends	99.60%	249	1	250	500
	Challenging and interesting work	89.60%	224	26	250	500
	Challenging and Interesting Work- Activity Variety	97.60%	244	6	250	500
	Challenging and Interesting Work- Work Enjoyment	92.00%	230	20	250	500
	Coworkers	95.20%	238	12	250	500
FORM	Picture	99.20%	248	2	250	500
	Color	99.60%	249	1	250	500
	Animation	100.00%	250	0	250	500
	Audio/Video	100.00%	250	0	250	500
FUNCTION	Link	99.20%	248	2	250	500
	Question	99.20%	248	2	250	500

Appendix C.Descriptive statistics: frequencies (messages, N = 2020)

	VARIABLE	OPERATIONALI-ZATION	FREQUENCIES		LIKES GROUP STATISTICS		COMMENTS GROUP STATISTICS	
			RELATIVE FREQUENCY (%)	ABSOLUTE FREQUENCY (N)	MEAN (M)	STANDARD DEVIATION (SD)	MEAN (M)	STANDARD DEVIATION (SD)
	-	-						
CONTENT	Job Reputation	No Job Reputation	95.6%	1931	69.4	151.4	4.2	11.6
	-	Job Reputation	4.4%	89	38.9	57.4	4.8	9.2
	Pay and Promotion Oppor- tunities -Salary	No Salary	99.7%	2014	68.1	148.8	4.2	11.5
	-	Salary	0.3%	6	52	48.6	6	9.1
	Pay and Promotion Oppor- tunities -Opportunities for rapid advancement	No Opportunities for rapid advan- cement	99.7%	2013	67.9	148.8	4.2	11.5
	-	Opportunities for rapid advan- cement	0.3%	7	104.4	112.2	8.6	12.2
	Company Reputation	No Company Reputation	68.6%	1386	61.3	144.9	3.9	12.2
	-	Company Reputa- tion	31.4%	634	83.0	155.7	5	9.9
	Location	No Location	92.9%	1877	68.2	152.5	4.1	11.7
	-	Location	7.1%	143	68.3	83.9	6.0	9.2
	Location- Proximity to Family and Friends	No Proximity to Family and Friends	99.8%	2015	68.1	148.8	4.2	11.5
	-	Proximity to Family and Friends	20.0%	5	46.2	45.6	3.2	2.6
	Challenging and intere- sting work	No Challenging and interesting work	80.3%	1622	62.5	120.96	4.04	9.89
	-	Challenging and interesting work	19.7%	398	90.84	228.02	4.99	16.60
	Challenging and Intere- sting Work- Activity Variety	No Activity Variety	99.6%	2011	68.011	148.73	4.21	11.53
	-	Activity Variety	0.4%	9	80.11	139.37	7.22	12.70
	Challenging and Interesting Work-Work Enjoyment	No Work Enjoy- ment	99.5%	2009	67.38	145.73	4.18	11.42
	-	Work Enjoyment	0.5%	11	192.82	424.15	13.64	22.88
Coworkers	No Coworkers	67.5%	1363	66.75	138.33	4.25	12.14	
-	Coworkers	32.5%	657	70.80	168.15	4.17	10.15	
FORM	Picture	No Picture	18.4%	371	50.80	145.03	4.13	13.81
	-	Picture	81.6%	1649	71.95	149.23	4.25	10.96
	Color	No Color	91.7%	1852	60.83	129.60	3.83	9.83
	-	Color	8.3%	168	147.80	272.05	8.55	22.70
	Animation	No Animation	100.0%	2020	68.07	148.65	4.23	11.53
	-	Animation	0.0%	0	0	0	0	0
	Audio/Video	No Audio/Video	95.8%	1936	68.39	148.37	4.24	11.54
	-	Audio/Video	4.2%	84	60.60	155.81	3.87	11.30
FUNCTION	Link	No Link	10.0%	201	134.73	216.37	10.34	16.52
	-	Link	90.0%	1819	60.70	137.28	3.55	10.63
	Question	No Question	80.0%	1617	66.06	149.53	3.76	10.57
	-	Question	20.0%	403	76.14	144.97	6.11	14.65