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

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ABSTRACT

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

1. Introduction

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

Online communities have paved new paths for job seeking in the computer-mediated communication (CMC) environment (Ikenberry, Hibel, & Freedman, 2010), but few studies have examined how cues in the context of an online community affect job seekers' behaviours, such as impression formation and self-presentation strategies (van der Heide, D'Angelo, & Schumaker, 2012). Although self-presentation in online communities has been previously examined (e.g., Birnbaum, 2013; DeAndrea & Walther, 2011; Labrecque, Markos, & Milne, 2011; Schwämmlein & Wodzicki, 2012), job seeking within online communities is qualitatively different from many other online settings because of the anticipation of face-to-face job interviews (Jansen, König, Stadelmann, & Kleinmann, 2012) and the social script (Gioia & Poole, 1984) for the hiring process in this context.

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

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

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

2. Literature review and context

2.1. Job seekers and self-presentation

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

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

Online communities such as LinkedIn have initiated a new era of workforce recruitment (Guillory & Hancock, 2012) in which recruiters are increasingly using these SNSs to source and screen job candidates (Davison et al., 2011), and job seekers are encouraged to create professional identities in combination with their personal profile and résumé content to enhance the likelihood that they will convey a positive impression in the new script (Caers & Castelyns, 2011). This new script may also influence whether job seekers meet recruiters' expectations in online communities (Bohnert & Ross, 2010; Damnianović et al., 2012).

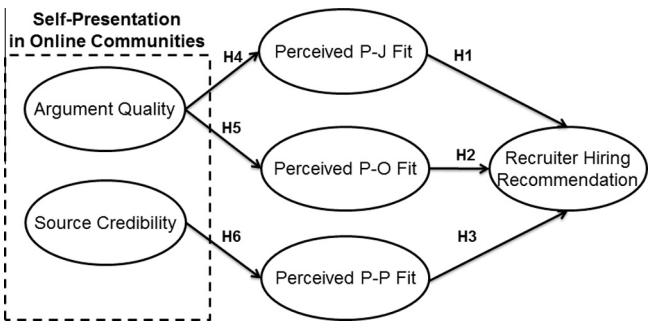

Fig. 1. A conceptual model of job seekers' self-presentation and recruiters' hiring recommendations in online communities.

2.2. Self-presentation and online communities

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

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

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

2.3. Self-presentation in online communities for job seekers

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

2.4. Job seekers' self-presentation and hiring recommendations

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

can predict recruiters' hiring recommendations (Dineen, Noe, & Ash, 2002).

Tsai, Chi, Huang, and Hsu (2011) found that a job seeker can influence recruiter evaluations through impression management. Although the effect of applicant impression management has been studied primarily in the context of employment interviews (e.g., Jansen et al., 2012), researchers have noted that job seekers may employ online impression management tactics to create a desirable image (Guillory & Hancock, 2012). Job seekers can affect recruiters' person–environment fit perceptions by promoting themselves (Sekiguchi, 2007), which can in turn increase their opportunities to be offered subsequent job interviews or the job itself (Higgins & Judge, 2004). Person–environment fit generally refers to the compatibility between individual and work environment characteristics (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Person–environment fit encompasses a variety of manifestations, and fit between an employee and the work environment has been shown to increase the likelihood of maximum work efficiency (Caplan & Harrison, 1993). The person–environment fit literature highlights the attraction aspect of both Schneider's (1987) attraction–selection–attrition model and Byrne's (1971) similarity–attraction paradigm and suggests that people are attracted to organisations that have characteristics congruent with their own.

Two of the most commonly examined aspects of person–environment fit are person–job (P–J) fit and person–organisation (P–O) fit (Gregory, Meade, & Thompson, 2013). P–J fit is concerned with the fit between applicants' knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) and the job requirements for future performance (Higgins & Judge, 2004). Because P–J fit has been shown to predict a job seeker's future task performance (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005), recruiters are motivated to match job seekers' KSAs with job requirements during the candidate screening processes through SNSs (Roulin & Bangerter, 2013). Therefore, recruiters' evaluations of P–J fit based on job seekers' self-presentations tend to have positive effects on hiring recommendations (Kristof-Brown, 2000). Thus, we propose the following:

Hypothesis 1 (*H1*). Recruiters' perceptions of P–J fit based on job seekers' self-presentation will positively affect hiring recommendations.

P–O fit is concerned with the compatibility between applicants and organisational characteristics for value congruence (Piasentin & Chapman, 2007). Research has consistently found that selecting applicants with high levels of P–O fit can predict not only lower levels of turnover intention and absenteeism (Arthur, Bell, Villado, & Doverspike, 2006) but also higher levels of job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and organisational citizenship behaviour (Wei, 2012). Because perceived P–O fit is a measure of an individual's perceived congruence with an organisation (Kristof-Brown, 2000), job seekers' self-presentation as provided on a SNS may allow recruiters to determine whether the job seekers' personal characteristics fit well with an organisation's characteristics (Roulin & Bangerter, 2013). Therefore, we propose the following:

Hypothesis 2 (*H2*). Recruiters' perceptions of P–O fit based on job seekers' self-presentation will positively affect hiring recommendations.

Research has found that hiring decisions are made based on both objective qualifications (e.g., P–J fit and P–O fit) and subjective impressions (e.g., Wade & Kinicki, 1997). Sometimes, subjective impressions affect hiring recommendations significantly more than objective qualifications because of an affective effect (Roebken, 2010) or unavoidable prejudices (Lodato, Highhouse, & Brooks, 2011) that may be unrelated to job or organisational performance (Highhouse, 2008). Research evidence indicates that recruiters give subjectively desirable applicants more favourable evaluations than subjectively undesirable applicants and that subjective impressions increase recruiters' perceived person–person (P–P) fit, thereby influencing hiring recommendations (e.g., Davison et al., 2011). For example, job seekers' opinions or background information may enhance recruiters' "similar-to-me" or affective effects towards these applicants, which might increase recruiters' intentions to hire the applicants (Rynes, Barber, & Varma, 2000). As a result, job seekers presenting attributes that are more desirable to recruiters will likely be considered ideal employees by such recruiters (Garcia, Posthuma, & Colella, 2008). Based on these arguments, we propose the following:

Hypothesis 3 (*H3*). Recruiters' perceptions of P–P fit based on job seekers' self-presentation will positively affect hiring recommendations.

Self-presentation is a key process of argument and persuasion aimed at making a desired impression on a particular audience in an online community (Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011). The ELM is a theory of the processes responsible for yielding to persuasive communication (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) and can be used to explain how job seekers' self-presentations influence recruiters' hiring recommendations (Forret & Turban, 1996). The ELM posits that information that is more relevant to the message topic is more likely to be processed via a 'central' route in which the merits of the information are deliberately evaluated; that is, presented information is critically evaluated and judged on the merit of its content. By contrast, less relevant information is more likely to be processed via a 'peripheral' route in which more superficial cues play a larger role in attitude formation (Gregory et al., 2013). The central and peripheral routes to persuasion are not exhaustive and are not mutually exclusive categories of persuasion (O'Keefe, 2002), and people may engage in both central and peripheral processing simultaneously (Choi & Salmon, 2003).

Forret and Turban (1996) argued that the use of central routes for information, such as P–J fit and P–O fit, enables recruiters to process job seekers' qualifications more thoroughly, resulting in greater discrimination between more and less qualified applicants. However, when necessary job information is lacking, recruiters' ability to discriminate between applicants on the basis of qualifications is reduced, and recruiters will tend to rely more on peripheral route information that is irrelevant to organisational performance, such as P–P fit.

ELM acknowledges that argument quality and source credibility are key determinants of persuasion outcomes (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Argument quality should be defined and assessed in terms of the presence of and relationships among rational assertions (Boller, Swasy, & Munch, 1990); source credibility refers to the extent to which the source of a persuasive message is perceived to be capable of making correct assertions (Pornpitakpan, 2004). Mak, Schmitt, and Lyytinen (1997) proposed that source credibility has been regarded as one of the major peripheral cues, whereas the strength of argument quality has been found to be a critical factor for central route messages. In other words, an individual with central route information processing is always influenced by argument quality, whereas an individual with peripheral route information processing is always persuaded by source credibility (Li, 2013).

To summarise, P–O and P–J fit is relevant information in the context of job recruiting and will be processed by a central route that is always influenced by argument quality, whereas P–P fit is irrelevant information and will be processed by a peripheral route that is always influenced by source credibility. Because argument quality and source credibility have positive effects on perceived online information quality (Yi, Yoon, & Davis, 2013), we predicted

that job seekers in an online community would be perceived as having P–J and P–O fit when their self-presentations have high argument quality and that their self-presentations would be perceived as having P–P fit when they have high source credibility. We therefore proposed that a recruiter's perceptions of the argument quality and source expertise of a job seeker's self-presentation in an online community would mediate the relationship between a job seeker's self-presentation and P–J/P–O fit, on the one hand, and P–P fit, on the other hand, and would therefore influence recruiter hiring recommendations.

Hypothesis 4 (*H4*). The argument quality of a job seeker's self-presentation will positively affect recruiters' perceptions of P–J fit.

Hypothesis 5 (*H5*). The argument quality of a job seeker's self-presentation will positively affect recruiters' perceptions of P–O fit.

Hypothesis 6 (*H6*). The source credibility of a job seeker's self-presentation will positively affect recruiters' perceptions of P–P fit.

3. Materials and methods

3.1. Procedure and participants

This study was constructed in a field setting of social recruiting that includes actual recruiters' and job seekers' profiles for various job vacancies on LinkedIn to frame the posited relationships between the independent and dependent constructs – as specified in our conceptual research model (see Fig. 1). This research began with a pilot test that consisted of five in-depth interviews with human resource (HR) professionals who have hiring experience with LinkedIn and two focus groups (one with the five HR professionals and one with five actual job seekers using LinkedIn). The pilot participants (the HR professionals had a mean age of 39 and three were female, whereas the job seekers had a mean age of 41 and two were male) were located in China and worked in different industrial sectors.

The pilot test suggested that all the paths in our structural model were significant and recommended that LinkedIn's self-presentation categories of 'updated activity on the personal page', 'connections', 'number of connections', 'joined groups', 'joined organisations', and 'following' be excluded for this study because this information is seldom noticed by recruiters or used for self-presentation by job seekers and because it is irrelevant to perceived P–J/P–O/P–P fit and hiring recommendations when recruiters review the profiles of potential candidates for hiring purposes.

The survey profiles of job seekers reflect the majority of LinkedIn members: currently employed individuals who are interested in obtaining information concerning new career possibilities and who are prepared to act upon these opportunities in this online community (Dekay, 2009). In conducting the research, we joined a professional LinkedIn group that job-seekers and recruiters commonly use to search for jobs and candidates in the HR field. From this group, we connected with five recruiters in charge of hiring full-function HR Managers in the consumer goods, consulting, financial services, high-tech manufacturing, and computer software industries in China. The mean age of the recruiters was 38, and three participants were female (60%). Within this group, 90% of members are HR managers or superiors and senior recruiters who focus on sourcing candidates.

After the recruiters agreed to participate in the study, we instructed them in the survey procedure through a web meeting and then sent a questionnaire to each of them. Each recruiter was asked to randomly and carefully review 20 LinkedIn profiles within both their and the researchers' connections who meet the basic requirements in terms of relevant experience, educational background, and work location, which is the information that determines recruiters' initial judgements regarding hiring recommendations (Cole et al., 2007). If the selected profile was from a job seeker who had already been interviewed, then the recruiters were asked to find another profile. The purpose of this step was to eliminate or minimise the possibility that the recruiters' interview-based impressions of a job seeker would contaminate their evaluation of the job seeker's self-presentation (Tsai et al., 2011). By the end of this process, the recruiters had reviewed a total of 100 LinkedIn profiles for the five job vacancies.

Of the 100 LinkedIn profile owners, 58% were female, and 66% had a master's degree or above. A total of 68% of the profile owners had worked for their current employer for more than three years. Furthermore, 12% of the companies were in the consumer goods industry, 10% were in the consulting industry, 15% were in the financial services industry, 21% were in high-tech manufacturing, 22% were in computer software, and 20% were in other industries. In addition, 79% of the companies had more than 1000 employees.

To avoid the potential problem of social desirability (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003), the respondents were simply told that the purpose of this study was to identify factors that influenced recruiters' perceptions when reviewing job seekers' LinkedIn profiles. When reviewing a job seeker's LinkedIn profile, the recruiters themselves decided how much time to spend screening the profile. Once they felt that they had sufficient information to form an opinion regarding a job seeker, they were asked to complete the surveys evaluating the job seeker's self-presentation information quality (argument quality and source credibility), fit perceptions, and hiring recommendations. With the information openly provided by each job seeker once connected on LinkedIn, recruiters can review the self-presentation categories for each job seeker, which includes (1) portrait, (2) profile summary, (3) experience, (4) volunteer experience and causes, (5) projects, (6) languages, (7) certifications, (8) publications, (9) education, (10) discussion posts and comments, (11) recommendations, (12) endorsed skills and expertise, (13) interests, and (14) honours and awards.

3.2. Measurements

The measures were adapted primarily from previously validated questionnaires when possible. Minor modifications were made to fit the context of the present study. All the items used a six-point Likert scale with anchors ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (6). The preliminary instrument was pilot tested using a convenience sample of 30 HR professionals in a LinkedIn group who have experience recruiting in online communities. The results of the pilot test were evaluated using Cronbach's reliability and factor analysis. Cronbach's alpha indicator was used to assess the initial reliability of the scales. The standard lower bound for Cronbach's alpha is 0.6 (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 2010). Any items that did not significantly contribute to reliability were eliminated. A factor analysis was then performed to examine whether the items produced the expected number of factors and whether the individual items loaded on the appropriate factor as expected. The criterion for factor loading suggested by Hair et al. (2010) is greater than 0.5. The measurement was then refined by removing the items that did not load significantly onto the expected constructs. As a result, the Cronbach's alpha (α) values ranged from 0.77 to 0.97, which indicated a satisfactory level of reliability.

3.2.1. Argument quality

We measured argument quality for each self-presentation category using three items adopted from Bhattacherjee and Sanford (2006): 'The information presented by the job seeker on LinkedIn was informative', 'The information presented by the job seeker on LinkedIn was valuable', and 'The information presented by the job seeker on LinkedIn was persuasive'. The α score for these items ranged from .87 to .99.

3.2.2. Source credibility

We measured source credibility for each self-presentation category using three items adopted from Bhattacherjee and Sanford (2006): 'The job seeker presenting the information on LinkedIn was trustworthy', 'The job seeker presenting the information on LinkedIn was credible', and 'The job seeker presenting the information on LinkedIn appeared to be experienced and professional'. The α score for these items ranged from .94 to .99.

3.2.3. Perceived P–J fit

We measured perceived P–J fit using Kristof-Brown's (2000) three-item scale: 'The job seeker fits the demands of the job', 'Other employees will think this job seeker is qualified to do this job', and 'I am confident that this applicant is qualified for this job'. The α score for these items was .90.

3.2.4. Perceived P–O fit

We measured perceived P–O fit from Cable and DeRue's (2002) three-item scale: 'The things that the job seeker values in life are very similar to the things that the hiring organisation values', 'The job seeker's values match the hiring organisation's values and culture', and 'The hiring organisation's values and culture provide a good fit with the things that the job seeker values in life'. The α score for these items was .94.

3.2.5. Perceived P–P fit

We measured perceived P–P fit on the basis of Howard and Ferris' (1996) three-item scale for measuring 'affect toward applicant': 'The job seeker has qualities that I like', 'I would like to do something with the job seeker', and 'I would like to spend free time with the job seeker'. The α score for these items was .98.

3.2.6. Hiring recommendation

We adopted three items from Tsai, Chen, and Chiu (2005) to assess recruiters' intentions in terms of hiring recommendations: 'I consider the job seeker to be suitable for hiring into the hiring organisation', 'The job seeker would have a good future in the hiring organisation', and 'The job seeker would perform well for the hiring organisation'. The α score for these items was .91.

3.3. Data analysis

To test the hypotheses, the partial least squares (PLS) method was used. PLS is suited for explaining complex relationships, as it avoids two serious problems: inadmissible solutions and factor indeterminacy (Fornell & Bookstein, 1982). Moreover, PLS offers the benefit of lower sample size requirements (Chin, Marcolin, & Newsted, 2003). In the context of this study, PLS was employed to examine the proposed paths from argument quality to P–J fit and P–O fit and the path from source credibility to P–P fit for each of the 14 self-presentation categories. To evaluate convergent validity, three criteria were used. First, the standardised factor loadings were greater than 0.7. Second, the composite reliability (CR) was greater than the cutoff value of 0.7. Third, the average variance extracted (AVE) was greater than the 0.5 threshold (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Each research construct of the 14 structural models conforms to the above three criteria, indicating adequate convergent validity for this exploratory study. To assess discriminant validity, the root square of AVE and all reflective interconstruct correlations were compared (Sánchez-Franco & Roldan, 2005). Because the square root of the AVE was greater than all the interconstruct correlations, this result provides evidence of sufficient discriminant validity.

Because this study collected data from a single respondent regarding each job seeker, common method variance (CMV) might possibly have inflated the relationships among the variables. To examine this possibility, we first followed Podsakoff et al.'s (2003) approach to examine the CMV using Harman's single factor test for the 14 models. To complement Harmon's test, this study conducted an additional analysis as outlined by Klein, Rai, and Straub (2007) and Liang, Saraf, Hu, and Xue (2007). The results demonstrate that the average substantively explained variance of the indicators is between 0.70 and 0.78, whereas the average method-based variance is between 0.029 and 0.016. The ratio of substantive variance to method variance is between 26:1 and 39:1. Second, we adopted Malhotra, Kim, and Patil's approach (2006) and modelled all items as indicators of a factor representing the common method effect. The results indicated a poor fit with the 14 models. For example, the goodness-of-fit index (GFI) was 0.538 (<0.90), and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) was 0.133 (>0.08). Given the results of both tests, we believe that CMV is not a significant problem in our research.

4. Results

A summated score was saved for the construct of cognitive response to preserve the multiple aspects of the concept when estimating the 14 complete models. We tested the hypotheses with PLS, and Table 1 presents all of the hypothesised paths. For H4, the results show that the argument quality for the self-presentation categories in the online community has a significant influence on P–J fit ($\beta = 0.27–0.72$, $p < 0.05$) except for volunteer experience and causes, publications, and interests. The results indicate that the self-presentation messages with higher levels of argument quality in the online community tend to stimulate recruiters to perceive better P–J fit. The most important self-presentation categories with argument quality that positively affect perceived P–J fit are certifications, profile summary, and discussion posts and comments.

With regard to H5, the results show that the argument quality of the self-presentation categories in the online community – including experience and education – has a significant influence on P–O fit ($\beta = 0.29–0.40$, $p < 0.01$). The results indicate that when receiving a self-presentation message regarding experience and education with higher levels of argument quality in an online community, recruiters tend to perceive higher levels of P–O fit.

For H6, the source credibility of the self-presentation message in the online community has significant effects on perceived P–P fit ($\beta = 0.11–0.71$, $p < 0.05$), except with respect to profile summary, experience, projects, certifications, recommendations, and endorsed skills and expertise. The results suggest that a job seeker's source credibility in terms of their portrait, volunteer experience and causes, languages, publications, education, discussion posts and comments, interests, and honours and awards in an online community tends to stimulate recruiters' feelings regarding P–P fit. The most important self-presentation categories with source credibility that positively affect perceived P–P fit are volunteer experience and causes, portrait, and languages.

Taken together, the results show that self-presentation messages with argument quality in online communities tend to result in perceptions of P–J and P–O fit by recruiters, whereas self-presentation messages with source credibility in online communities

Table 1
Hypothesised path coefficients.

	H1	H2	H3	H4	H5	H6
1. Portrait						
β	0.721**	0.164**	0.167	0.335**	0.158	0.634**
R^2		**0.717**		**0.112**	**0.025**	**0.402**
2. Profile summary						
β	0.722**	0.165**	0.164	0.603**	0.096	0.215
R^2		**0.717**		**0.364**	**0.009**	**0.046**
3. Experience						
β	0.720**	0.165**	0.166	0.448**	0.404**	0.283
R^2		**0.714**		**0.200**	**0.163**	**0.008**
4. Volunteer experience and causes						
β	0.719**	0.166**	0.166	−0.119	−0.224	0.674*
R^2		**0.715**		**0.200**	**0.163**	**0.454**
5. Projects						
β	0.722**	0.165**	0.168	0.377**	−0.091	0.19
R^2		**0.715**		**0.142**	**0.008**	**0.036**
6. Languages						
β	0.716**	0.167**	0.168	0.331**	−0.132	0.613*
R^2		**0.710**		**0.109**	**0.017**	**0.375**
7. Certifications						
β	0.714**	0.168**	0.168	0.723**	0.200	0.403
R^2		**0.713**		**0.523**	**0.004**	**0.163**
8. Publications						
β	0.719**	0.166**	0.166	0.151	−0.307	0.554*
R^2		**0.712**		**0.023**	**0.094**	**0.307**
9. Education						
β	0.718**	0.166**	0.168	0.268**	0.293**	0.11*
R^2		**0.714**		**0.072**	**0.086**	**0.012**
10. Discussion posts and comments						
β	0.720**	0.166*	0.163	0.474**	0.189	0.51*
R^2		**0.714**		**0.225**	**0.036**	**0.260**
11. Recommendations						
β	0.717**	0.167*	0.169	0.285*	−0.255	0.055
R^2		**0.713**		**0.081**	**0.065**	**0.003**
12. Endorsed skills and expertise						
β	0.722**	0.166*	0.162	0.322**	0.314	−0.289
R^2		**0.713**		**0.104**	**0.171**	**0.083**
13. Interests						
β	0.720**	0.166**	0.165	0.113	0.226	0.579**
R^2		**0.715**		**0.013**	**0.051**	**0.335**
14. Honours and awards						
β	0.715**	0.168*	0.169	0.432**	0–.173	0.711**
R^2		**0.709**		**0.187**	**0.030**	**0.505**

Note: $n = 100$.
* $p < 0.05$.
** $p < 0.01$.

lead to perceptions of P–P fit by recruiters. Thus, H4, H5, and H6 are partially supported.

With respect to H1, H2, and H3, the path from argument quality for self-presentation in the online community to P–J fit and P–O fit and the path from P–J fit and P–O fit to hiring recommendations were both positive and significant ($\beta = 0.72$ and 0.16, $p < 0.05$). However, the path between P–P fit and hiring recommendation was not significant. This result indicates that under higher levels of argument quality for self-presentation in online communities, recruiters will perceive job seekers' P–J and P–O fit and will therefore be more willing to recommend such job seekers for hiring. However, P–P fit does not mediate the relationship between source credibility for self-presentation in online communities and hiring recommendations. Therefore, H1 and H2 are supported, but H3 is not.

5. Discussion

The goals of this study were to deepen our understanding of the explanations and evaluations of how a job seeker's self-presentations influence recruiters' hiring recommendations in online communities. The results of this study revealed that recruiters positively perceive P–J fit, P–O fit, and P–P fit when a job seeker offers argument quality and source credibility for specific self-presentation categories on LinkedIn, which indicates that there is indeed a commonly shared script (Jansen et al., 2012) that places clear demands on job seekers' self-presentation in online communities. Moreover, our findings suggest that recruiters make inferences about job seekers' P–J fit and P–O fit based on the argument quality in specific self-presentation categories, which in turn predict recruiters' intentions to recommend job seekers for hiring.

In particular, we found that volunteer experience and causes, publications, and interests were unrelated to recruiters' P–J fit perceptions. It is plausible that the relationship between job seekers' non-work activities and perceived P–J fit depends on undetected moderators. For example, given that involvement with non-work activities is an indicator of job seekers' vocational interests (Ehrhart, 2007), recruiters may rely more on job seekers' publica-

tions as a basis of their judgements of P–J fit when the job vacancies require occupants to have more artistic (e.g., journalist) than conventional (e.g., human resources) traits.

Our results were consistent with Roulin and Bangerter (2013), which indicates that recruiters use job seekers' self-presentation signals in online communities to infer characteristics that are predictive of P–O fit and P–J fit for hiring recommendations, while they focus more on job-related information that is available in online profiles, such as experience and education (Kristof-Brown, 2000).

In applying the ELM to recruitment in an online community context, because recruiters do not always have the ability or the motivation to process job seekers' qualifications – central route information (Forret & Turban, 1996) – they may be persuaded by identification with the source presented by the job seeker through peripheral route information processing (Bhattacherjee & Sanford, 2006). If the persuasive messages come from a credible source, affective response (e.g., perceived P–P fit) can be evoked (Li, 2013).

However, the relationship between perceived P–P fit and hiring recommendations was non-significant in this study. We propose two possible explanations for this finding. First, recruiters under high levels of accountability and training load will engage in greater elaboration than recruiters under low levels of accountability and training load, and when recruiters engage in greater elaboration, they will be influenced more by central route information (Forret & Turban, 1996). Because our participants were all well-trained professional recruiters who are accountable for the recruiting outcome, they have sufficient motivation and ability to engage in a high level of elaboration for hiring recommendations using central (e.g., P–J and P–O fit perceptions) rather than peripheral (e.g., P–P fit perception) cues. Another possible explanation may be the strong correlations between P–P and P–J fit ($r = 0.41$) and between P–P and P–O fit ($r = 0.30$). Thus, the unique effects of P–P fit on hiring recommendations may become non-significant after controlling for the effects of P–J/P–O fit.

Although this study provides interesting results, certain limitations must be discussed. First, to collect data from the actual online profile screening process, we measured all variables on the basis of self-reports from the recruiters, which may cause a CMV problem. CMV is a complex topic, and one can never be certain of the extent to which correlations are inflated or attenuated as a result of the measurement method (Gregory et al., 2013). Although we cannot eliminate the possibility of CMV affecting our correlations, we do not find evidence that the hypotheses were supported solely as a result of CMV.

Second, our convenience samples of recruiters and online profiles were small for some analyses, resulting in limited external validity and generalisation. Thus, our results should be replicated in future studies. Future research may also attempt to replicate the above results in a different online community or SNS (e.g., Facebook).

Finally, this study used HR professional vacancies for sampling. Different job vacancies may have different targeted job seekers, who may have engaged in different forms of self-presentation. Thus, future research may elucidate different job vacancies to decrease the variance among different job seekers in online communities.

Our research also has implications for theory and research. The present study proposed a model that links job seeker self-presentations to recruiter hiring recommendations in an online community and is rooted in the ELM (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) and person–environment fit theory (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). The model indicates that self-presentation in online communities may be currently emerging as a new persuasive message for recruiter hiring recommendations. When the recruiter carefully scrutinises the job seeker's qualifications on job-relevant messages (e.g., P–J and P–O fit), the recruiter is engaging in high elaboration through a central route, and his/her attitude towards the job seeker will be influenced more by the argument quality of the messages. When the recruiter does not carefully process the job seeker's qualifications but is instead influenced by messages (e.g., P–P fit) that are unrelated to job-relevant information, the recruiter is engaging in low elaboration through a peripheral route (Forret & Turban, 1996). In other words, in online communities, recruiters who perceive P–J and P–O fit from job seekers' self-presentations might have activated a central route for the elaboration of information, and those who perceived P–P fit from the job seekers' self-presentations might have followed the peripheral route, which is more immediate and not as deep for hiring recommendations. Future research would benefit from examining how job seekers' self-presentations actually influence recruiter recommendations based on this study.

Our results also have practical implications for recruiters and job seekers. When recruiters want to search potential job candidates, professional SNS (e.g., LinkedIn) profiles may serve as an extended online résumé that allows applicants and recruiters to exchange detailed job-related information at low cost and without the legal or ethical issues associated with private SNSs (e.g., Facebook). Moreover, many job seekers build their profiles in this online community for professional use and expect employers to view their profiles (Roulin & Bangerter, 2013). Job seekers may have various needs for different personas, necessitating different addresses in the online community (Bohnert & Ross, 2010). However, managing multiple online personas is increasingly difficult, and separating one's social and professional worlds appears to be nearly impossible without the proper mechanisms for exercising such control (Labrecque et al., 2011). Individuals seeking a job or building a career clearly recognise the importance of constructing a consistent personal–professional image online. The key features of self-presentation for job seekers are the profile summary, work experience, and educational background.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study elucidates the mechanisms (ELM persuasion processes with fit perceptions) that link job seekers' self-presentations to recruiters' hiring recommendations in online communities. Our findings provide evidence that the argument quality of self-presentation influences recruiter perceptions of P–J and P–O fit and that perceived P–J fit and P–O fit lead to recruiters' hiring recommendations. Future research might explore additional moderators (such as different types of job vacancies) to further clarify the boundary conditions of the proposed model.

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Conflict of interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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