Communication-Oriented Person–Organization Fit as a Key Factor of Job-Seeking Behaviors: Millennials’ Social Media Use and Attitudes Toward Organizational Social Media Policies

Jaehee Cho, PhD,1 Dong Jin Park, PhD,2 and Zoa Ordonez3

Abstract

The main goal of this study was to assess how the millennial generation perceives companies that have different social media policies and how such perception influences key variables for job-seeking behaviors, including perceived person–organization fit (POF), organizational attraction, and job pursuit intention. Results from a univariate general linear model and path analysis supported all of the established hypotheses. In particular, the results revealed that millennials perceived higher POF for a company with organizational policies supporting employees’ social media use. Further, organizational attractiveness significantly mediated the relationship between communication-oriented POF and job pursuit intention.

Introduction

It can hardly be denied that social media has largely penetrated many aspects of everyday life and that it’s easily observed in organizational settings. For instance, social media is considered the most innovative and influential marketing tool for today’s customers,1–3 as they allow company–customer conversation. From a management perspective, social media is important as employees post and share their organizational experiences,4 which stress the significance of quality leader–member relationships in contemporary organizations. Another common use of social media is for recruitment, where job openings are advertised, employment brand is managed, and even background information of job candidates is obtained.5–6 For example, information on job applicants’ social media pages is often considered as crucial information for evaluating their personalities and making hiring decisions.10,11

Previous studies have often focused on these technical applications of social media. Although they are useful, such functionalistic and technological views focus only on the external use of social media and ignore the fact that these channels are also used internally. Particularly, the millennials (people born after 1980) are more likely to engage in such behaviors at work because of their dependence on social media. In other words, because social media has become a critical part of their everyday lives,6 millennials are more likely to highly value new technologies.

Considering that they are the main new forces in today’s organizations, it is important to turn our attention to the value components of social media use. Therefore, this study examined how different policies regarding social media affect the millennials’ assessment of their fit with the organization and consequently their job-seeking behaviors. Specifically, this study examined how millennials perceive different organizational social media policies, how such perception guides their person–organization fit (POF), and, finally, how such communication-oriented POF impacts two job-seeking components—organizational attraction and job pursuit intention. The following sections will briefly review today’s organizational media policies and propose multiple hypotheses based on the signaling theory and POF.

Literature Review

Organizational policies regarding social media

Social media is often used within a company in different ways. Some companies encourage employees to actively and informally communicate with other employees, managers, and leaders as an attempt to improve or reinforce relationships among them. In fact, several studies have found that such informal communication channels often play a critical

1School of Communication and Journalism, Chung-Ang University, Seoul, Korea.
2School of Communication, Hallym University, Chuncheon, Korea.
3Interdisciplinary Program of Organizational Science, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Charlotte, North Carolina.
role of improving leader–member relationships and creating more collaborative working environments.4,15

However, social media is not only a management tool; it is also an employee-driven practice. Nowadays, employees tell company stories and everyday organizational experiences with the purpose of sharing a story in virtual spaces, but in other instances, employees intentionally expose organizational issues as a way of resisting organizational control. Whether social media is used for personal storytelling or for resistance, a considerable point must be that both such publicized stories significantly impact the public image of such companies. To control such effects, companies are increasingly developing clear policies regarding employees’ uses of social media.13,15 For example, the BBC limits employees’ social media use, stating that, “It may not be appropriate to share BBC-related photographs, comments and videos. Offensive comment about BBC colleagues may be deemed a disciplinary offence…. Blogs, microblogs and other personal Web sites which do not identify the author as a BBC employee, do not discuss the BBC and are purely personal would fall outside this guidance.”15

On the other hand, IBM encourages employees to have open dialog and exchange ideas through social media, stating, “IBM regards blogs and other forms of online discourse as primarily a form of communication and relationship among individuals….IBM believes in dialog among IBMers and with our partners, clients, members of the many communities in which we participate and the general public. Such dialog is inherent in our business model of innovation, and in our commitment to the development of open standards.”16

Considering such disparate policies of employees’ social media use, we must contemplate the new generation’s heavy dependence on social media use in their daily lives. As numerous studies have pointed out, the new generation, known as the millennials, is primarily characterized by their heavy reliance on new technologies, such as smartphone and tablet PCs.17 Moreover, millennials are often constantly interconnected with one another on social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, MySpace) and mini-blogs (e.g., Twitter). Taking into account these dominant characteristics of the millennials, it is meaningful to examine how this generation uniquely perceives companies that have organizational policies either limiting or supporting employees’ uses of social media. For that reason, this study aimed to understand how such perception of organizational media policies would impact the millennials’ job-seeking patterns. The section below presents the theoretical backgrounds of the study and proposes multiple hypotheses.

Signaling theory, POF, organizational attraction, and job pursuit intention

One of the major theories regarding job-seeking behaviors is the signaling theory, which states that people make a decision mainly through inferences drawn from limited information.18 In other words, people review, evaluate, and develop a certain position about a target based on limited information. Then, according to this theory, job seekers gather job-related information through various channels and develop their position about future employers; further, they determine how attractive they are based on pieces of information.18

Moreover, signaling theory provides a mechanism for connecting POF to organizational attraction. POF refers to the extent to which individuals’ values match organizational values.19 According to Ehrhart and Ziegert,18 “the compatibility between people and organizations that occurs when (a) there is a similarity or match of some attribute and/or (b) one entity provides what the other wants or needs.”15 During their search, job seekers gather information about future employers, such as organizational philosophy, norms, rules, and policies. Then, they compare these values with their own values and determine their POF based on the limited information.

This study specifically focused on the millennials’ values toward social media and the organizational policies regulating its use. Their heavy dependence on social media is one of the most unique characteristics differentiating them from other generations. Essentially, millennials will place more value on social media in any circumstance. Thus, based on the signaling theory and the POF framework, it is highly plausible that when millennials obtain information about an organizational policy that supports employees’ social media use, they will perceive a good fit between their own values regarding social media and those of the organization. Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

H1: Millennials will perceive higher POF toward a company having an organizational policy that supports employees’ social media use compared with a company limiting employees’ social media use.

Previous studies of job-seeking behaviors have often relied on Schneider’s attraction–selection–attrition (ASA) model20 in order to explain how job seekers make job decisions. In this model, perceived organizational attraction plays a key role in making job decisions; moreover, POF is one of the most influential factors for organizational attraction.18,19 That is to say, as a job seeker feels normatively matched to a company, s/he perceives higher attraction toward the company. Thus, this study tested the following hypothesis:

H2: Millennials’ POF in regard to social media use will positively predict their organizational attraction toward future employers.

Furthermore, when a person perceives an organization as attractive, s/he will likely pursue a job at that company. Considering such a positive effect of perceived organizational attraction on job pursuit intentions,21 we hypothesize the following:

H3: Millennials’ organizational attraction will positively predict their job pursuit intention.

Hence, this study established two hypotheses about the direct effects of perceived POF and organizational attraction. Considering these two linear effects, this study assessed organizational attraction’s effect of mediating the relationship between perceived POF and job pursuit intention. As a result, the hypothesis below was established and tested. For this analysis, a path model composed of these three variables was created and tested.

H4: Millennials’ organizational attraction will positively mediate the relationship between perceived POF and job pursuit intentions.
Methods

Participants

To test the four hypotheses, we invited undergraduate students from three large universities located in central and southern United States to participate in an online experiment. One extra credit point was given as compensation for one’s research participation. A total of 316 undergraduate students participated in the experiment. Surveys completed by five participants were incomplete and therefore not used; in addition, surveys completed by the participants born before 1980 were also excluded from the analysis because this study solely focuses on the millennials. Therefore, a total of 286 usable surveys were available.

The majority of the participants were female (60.4 percent), and the average age was 22.1 years (SD = 2.4). Most participants (82.2 percent) were mainly from communication-related majors including journalism and communication studies. The remaining students were marketing majors (17.8 percent). Moreover, to attain more representative samples, the following eligibility criterion was emphasized in the informed consent as well as in the invitation letter for survey participation: individuals must currently be searching for a job or will actively search for a job. The majority of the participants were juniors (25.9 percent) and seniors (39.7 percent). This student classification indicates that they are in their second to last and last year of undergraduate studies, respectively; therefore, our sample is appropriate because the participants are nearing completion of their degrees.

Experimental procedure

An online experiment was designed to test the proposed hypotheses. We created two different newspaper articles in order to manipulate the organizational policies of employees’ social media use. The form of online newspaper was chosen mainly based on the contention of the signaling theory. That is, people often obtain information about various organizations from online newspapers and develop their own images about those organizations. To manipulate the experimental conditions, participants read a newspaper article about a hypothetical company, MCI, and its policies regarding social media use. In one condition, MCI was reported to have rigid policies that limit employees’ social media use. This article read: “Blogs, wikis, social networks and other tools should not be used for communication among fellow employees.” The other condition was one where the article portrayed MCI as a company that has social media policies that encourage employees to use social media and to self-regulate. In addition to the main component regarding social media policies, this newspaper article reported employee–customer communication, an attempt to decrease the demanding effects from the experimental design. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two articles and were asked to carefully read them. Then, they completed surveys asking questions about the main variables.

Instruments

All variables were measured through a seven-point Likert-type scale. The reliability tests indicated acceptable Cronbach’s alphas (>0.70) for all of the study variables.

Perceived POF regarding social media. A scale composed of three items was used to measure POF. The original scale created by Cable and Judge19 was modified to assess the fit in terms of social media. The following items were used for this study: (a) My values for social media match or fit the values of this company; (b) I am able to maintain my values for social media at this company; and (c) my values for social media prevent me from fitting in at this company because they are different from the company’s values (reverse coded). The reliability for this measurement (M = 4.66, SD = 1.30, N = 285) was acceptable (z = 0.74).

Organizational attractiveness. In order to measure organizational attractiveness, five items from Highhouse et al.’s22 scale were used. Those items were as follows: (a) This company is attractive to me as a place for employment; (b) for me, this company would be a good place to work; (c) I am interested in learning more about this company; (d) a job at this company is very appealing to me; (e) I would not be interested in this company except as a last resort (reverse). The reliability for this measurement (M = 4.15, SD = 1.51, N = 285) was acceptable (z = 0.92).

Job pursuit intention. This factor was also measured by Highhouse et al.’s22 scale. The items were as follows: (a) I would accept a job offer from this company; (b) if this company invited me for a job interview, I would go; (c) I would make this company one of my first choices as an employer; (d) I would exert a great deal of effort to work for this company; (e) I would recommend this company to a friend looking for a job. The reliability for this measurement (M = 4.32, SD = 1.39, N = 285) was acceptable (z = 0.92).

Moreover, as Turban and Keon23 addressed, organizational attractiveness was often very highly correlated with job pursuit intention. A very high correlation between those two factors was detected (Table 1) in this study. Thus, to check whether they would need to be collapsed into one factor, the one-factor model with 10 items was compared with the two-factor model. Two separate confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) were conducted. The results strongly supported the two-factor model, showing much higher $\chi^2$ and lower model fit index [CFI] = 0.89, normed fit index [NFI] = 0.88, standardized root mean of the residual [SRMR] = 0.052) than the two-factor model ($\chi^2$[df = 34] = 177.3, CFI = 0.95, NFI = 0.94, SRMR = 0.036). On the basis of these CFA results, although a high correlation between those two factors was detected, they were regarded and used as two separate factors for this study. Moreover, CFA for a model composed of three separate constructs—perceived POF, organizational attractiveness, and job pursuit intentions—was also conducted. The result

| Table 1. Partial Correlations for Key Study Variables |
|-----------------|--------|--------|
|                 | 1      | 2      | 3      |
| Person–organization fit | 1.00   |        |        |
| Organizational attractiveness | 0.66** |        |        |
| Job pursuit intention | 0.59** | 0.82** |        |

N = 285, **p < 0.001.
indicated acceptable model fits ($\chi^2 [df = 62] = 256.09$, CFI = 0.94, NFI = 0.92, SRMR = 0.043), validating those three separate factors.

**Results**

*Misleading check*

This study manipulated two different conditions either supporting or limiting employees’ social media use. For a manipulation check, we created and used a five-point semantic differential scale composed of two bipolar pairs of adjectives: positive–negative and acceptable–unacceptable. Positively weighted adjectives—positive and acceptable—were listed on the right side of each pair, closer to 5. Negatively weighted adjectives were located on the left side, closer to 1. After reading the following statement, research participants were asked to describe MCI’s communication environment (climate) regarding social media use by indicating the extent to which they agreed with each pair of adjectives: “MCI’s communication environment (climate) can be described as ________ toward employees’ social media use.”

Because of the high internal consistency between those two variables (Cronbach’s $z = 0.90$), an average score of those two variables was used for the manipulation check. The results from an independent samples t-test indicated that research participants reported higher scores for the composite measure of those two adjectives—acceptable and positive ($t = 7.16, p < 0.001$). This signifies a good manipulation of the experimental conditions.

**Hypotheses tests**

This study hypothesized that millennials would perceive a higher POF toward a company supporting employees’ social media use, compared with a company limiting social media use (H1). To test H1, a univariate general linear modeling was used. The result fully supported H1 ($df = 284$, $F = 9.27$, $p = 0.003$, partial eta squared = 0.03, observed power = 0.859).

H2 and H3 were focused on the direct effects of perceived POF (H2) and organizational attraction (H3). H4 hypothesized the mediating effect of organizational attraction on the relationship between perceived POF and job pursuit intentions. To test these multiple hypotheses, a path model was developed and tested through the structural equation modeling (SEM). Following the guidelines from Hu and Bentler, we examined the absolute (SRMR) and the comparative (CFI, NFI) goodness of fit for the path model. The results showed acceptable goodness of fit ($$\chi^2 [df = 1] = 3.18, CFI = 0.99, NFI = 0.99, SRMR = 0.018$$) (Fig. 1).

First, fully supporting H2, POF strongly and positively predicted organizational attractiveness ($\beta = 0.776$, $p < 0.001$). The addition of POF into the regression model explained 43.7 percent of the variance in organizational attractiveness (squared multiple correlations [SMC] = 0.437). To better validate this result, a potential sex difference in the mediating effect was tested. For this analysis, we calculated and reviewed a Z-score based on the regression coefficients and standard errors of POF for the two groups of sex. However, no significant sex difference was detected ($Z$-score $= 0.66, p > 0.10$). Finally, this result fully supported H2.

Second, the result also indicated that organizational attractiveness also strongly and positively predicted job pursuit intention ($\beta = 0.755$, $p < 0.001$). The addition of organizational attractiveness into the regression model explained 67.7 percent of the variance in organizational attractiveness (SMC$= 0.677$). Moreover, no significant sex difference was detected ($Z$-score $= 0.87, p > 0.10$). Finally, this result also fully supported H3.

To test H4 about the mediating effect of organizational attractiveness, we checked the indirect effect of POF. The result also showed a significant indirect effect of perceived POF on job pursuit intention (standardized indirect effect $= 0.586$). To validate this indirect effect, Sobel’s test was used. The result showed a strong mediating effect of organizational attractiveness on the relationship between POF and job pursuit intention (Sobel’s statistics $= 12.72, p < 0.001$). Thus, H4 was also fully supported.

**Discussion**

The main goal of this study was to assess how millennials would perceive companies having different social media policies and how such perceptions would influence their perceived POF, organizational attraction, and job pursuit intention. To date, although there has been a large amount of research on job-seeking behaviors and perceived POF, the impressions that job seekers hold toward the communication systems of future employers have been overlooked. In regard to social media, most studies have given preponderant attention to social media as tools for either managing a company’s public image or screening job candidates’ online behaviors.

However, in addition to such behavioral aspects of using social media, it must be considered that each individual has different values of social media. In particular, millennials’ heavy reliance on social media is considerable, because it signifies the high value of using social media in both personal and organizational contexts. It also means that their values of social media can significantly influence their perceptual and behavioral patterns in various ways. Job-seeking behaviors are not an exception. This is mainly because, as the signaling theory and the ASA model propose, job-seeking behaviors are also value driven. Thus, by paying attention to millennials’ high values of social media, this study hypothesized and found that the millennials perceived higher POF toward a company that supports employees’ social media use. This finding confirms the necessity to look into the value-oriented aspects of social media use. By looking into both the behavioral and value-oriented aspects of social media, we can obtain a more...
thorough understanding of the roles and functions of social media in contemporary life and work environments.

Furthermore, the SEM results showed that there were significant indirect and direct effects of communication-oriented POF on organizational attraction and job pursuit intention. This finding highlights the importance of communication infrastructure and communication policies for understanding POF. Indeed, a match between employees’ communication styles and that of the organization is important for organizational life. Although there has been little research on communication-based POF, previous research often addresses the importance of such communication-oriented match as the main antecedent of communication conflicts. In particular, a company’s lack of consideration for millennials’ higher values toward social media may result in a communication conflict. Thus, although this study focused more attention on communication-oriented POF in job-seeking contexts, this study’s finding of the significant role of POF regarding social media use contributes to the extension of POF into communication topics in actual organizational contexts.

Hence, this study found significant relationships among the millennials’ values of social media, their attitudes toward different social media policies, and their job-seeking patterns. In spite of such meaningful findings, it is recommended for future research to conduct a longitudinal study, examining how millennial job seekers’ communication-oriented POF regarding social media will impact their organizational lives from pre-entry through entry level. Moreover, considering the cultural differences in social media use among younger populations, another direction for future research must include cross-cultural comparisons of the millennials’ attitudes toward different organizational social media policies. Next, although this study focused on millennials’ attitudes toward organizational social media policies, future research needs to scrutinize the generational differences in order to thoroughly address the uniqueness of such young generation. In regard to this issue, two directions will be beneficial for future research. First, by considering bigger generational gaps, it will be theoretically meaningful to compare millennials with baby boomers. Next, within-group comparisons among the millennials who have different individual characteristics will also provide scholars with interesting findings.

Acknowledgment
The authors are grateful to the students who agreed to participate in this study.

Author Disclosure Statement
No competing financial interests exist.

References