LINKEDIN for Recruitment: An Examination of Recruiters Use of "Apply" and "Easy Apply" Features

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Abstract

LinkedIn is used by over 500 million people and has been found to be the most popular recruitment site used by Human Resource professionals for recruiting employees. LinkedIn has continued to evolve, improving users' experiences and the platform's interface. Recently, it was noticed that this networking site has more than one application method on job posts: 'Easy Apply' and 'Apply'. This research examines why and for what purpose recruiters use either feature for recruitment. The findings showed that most recruiters prefer 'Easy Apply' for all recruitment on LinkedIn because of its ease of use. This study provides a preliminary foundation for understanding the use of LinkedIn by recruiters and job seekers.

Keywords: LinkedIn, Recruitment, Apply, Easy apply.

Introduction

LinkedIn, launched in 2003 as a network for professionals, has gained popularity among professionals and companies as a networking and job search site. Final year college students are advised to create profiles on LinkedIn, follow influencers and organisations they are interested in. Early career and mid-career professionals ensure they maintain good networks and follow organisations they aspire to build a career in. Organisations on the other hand try to use these sites to showcase themselves and post job openings. LinkedIn has continued to evolve to improve user experience on their platform. One of the recently added feature on job posts is the 'Easy Apply' button. Originally, with every job post comes an 'Apply' button which when clicked begins the process of the job application. With the addition of the 'Easy Apply' button simply a click to 'Submit application' button is required. On the contrary, the 'Apply' button when clicked directs the applicant to the recruiting company's website where login details would be needed to proceed the application.

While a number of research studies have been done on the use of social network sites (SNSs) for recruitment, a few of them focused on LinkedIn. There are various studies that examined the uses, behaviours and attitude for usage of LinkedIn and other popular SNSs (Utz, 2016; Archambault & Grudin, 2012; Skeels & Grudin, 2009). However, some studies examined LinkedIn profiles to identify elements that professionals mostly focus on (Zide, Elman & Shahani-Denning, 2014; Damaschke, 2012). Another study by Caers and Castelyns (2011), investigated the use of Facebook and LinkedIn by Belgian recruiters. Nonetheless, it is

rare to find a research that has studied specific features of LinkedIn, like LinkedIn endorsement (Rapanta & Cantoni, 2017). No study, to our knowledge has been conducted on the use of 'Easy Apply' and 'Apply' features for recruitment.

The aim of this study is to examine recruiters' use of the 'Easy apply' and 'Apply' features; when, for what job specifications, and why they chose either features. It is also aimed to understand which information about the applicant the recruiters receive when the 'Easy Apply' feature is used, as well as the benefits and drawbacks of the uses of these features for recruitment.

The research questions of this study are:
- When do recruiters use 'Easy Apply' feature on a job post?
- When do recruiters use 'Apply' feature on a job post?
- What types of jobs do recruiters use either features for?
- What information is received when applicants submit their application using 'Easy Apply'?
- What are the benefits of the use of each feature?
- What are the drawbacks of the use of each feature?

Literature Review

Social networking sites have become a huge part of today's world. Over the past few years, a number of new sites have emerged with increasing number of users while the older ones have continued to see their user numbers soar. Among the most popular SNSs as of 2017 are Facebook (2.13 billion active users), Instagram (800 million active users), Twitter (330 million active users), Snapchat (187 million active users) and LinkedIn (500 million users) (Statistics Portal, 2018; Elder & Gallagher, 2017).

These large community of users have made SNSs very important to businesses and corporations. In addition to advertising products and services, organisations now use these mediums for employee recruitment. LinkedIn has found to be the most commonly used SNS for job postings and recruitment purposes (Ollington, Gibb & Harcourt, 2013; Kluemper & Rosen, 2009; Karl & Peluchette, 2013).

LinkedIn is a very popular professional networking site and a platform for job search and application. It is the world's largest professional network with more than 546 million users in more than 200 countries and territories worldwide (LinkedIn Press Center, n.d.). According to Karl and Peluchette, (2013), a survey of the Society Human Resource (HR) Management showed that 95 percent of the 514 HR professionals used LinkedIn to recruit candidates passively. In a study conducted by Caers and Castelyns (2011), more than 70% of the respondents who were professionals agreed that they would use LinkedIn to find information about applicants they wanted to interview or evaluate.

LinkedIn, like most networking sites has a user's profile page and a timeline. Users' LinkedIn pages have specific tabs for network, job, message or notifications. The job page allows the user to search job openings by location. It also provides suggestions based on user's profile and career interests as shown in Figure 1. Other information like saved jobs or jobs that users have applied to can also be accessed with this page.

While searching for job openings, there are filter options by postdate, LinkedIn features (jobs in your network, easy apply, and under 10 applicants), company, and experience level as seen in Figure 2. Figure 2 also shows a list of job titles as well as accompanying information like recruiting company, information about who you might know that works there, job location, job posting date, and method of application as 'Easy apply' or 'Apply'. If no application method is selected for a job post, then 'Apply' method will be used.

When posting a job on LinkedIn, the "POST A JOB" button redirects the user to a sub-platform as shown in Figure 3. Although it is also named "JOBS", this sub-platform is different from "Jobs" page shown earlier in Figure 2. JOBS page opens in a new window with a relatively simpler menu-bar that has "Home", "POST A JOB", and "MANAGE JOBS". As the label suggests, "HOME" button returns the user to the main page of LinkedIn (Figure 1). The second button, "POST A JOB", is actually the landing page for the sub-platform as in Figure 3.
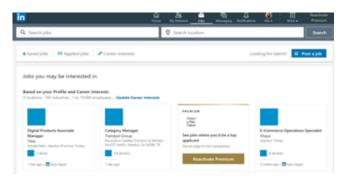

Figure 1. Screen shot of Jobs section of LinkedIn.
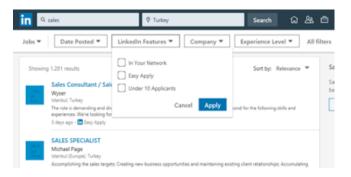

Figure 2. Screen shot of Job search filters

The page has three simple fields where the primary attributes of the job post are indicated: "Company" for company's name, "Job title" for the job offered, and "Location" to indicate where the job is. Although the fields are for simple attributes, they all support a dropdown menu. While the user starts typing in the information, the jobs engines starts suggesting matches for the attributes. If matched, the user will be able to categorise the attribute to fit into a filtering option for the candidates to find accordingly. For example, when typing "Istanbul" in the location field, the engine will suggest "Istanbul - Turkey" (Figure 4). If the user selects the suggestion, candidates will be able to view this post when filtering by location and choosing "Istanbul -Turkey". Also, the post will be displayed in the suggested jobs for users who have looked up jobs or are physically in Istanbul.
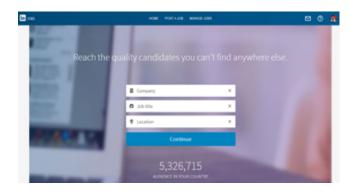

Figure 3. Screen shot of new window opened after pressing "Post a Job".

After filling the initial attributes, the user is prompted to a detailed page (Figure 5). The page contains several fields for adding more job details such as "Job Function", "Company Industry", "Employment Type", "Seniority Level", and "Job Description". All these fields, except for "Job Description", are filtering-compatible and have a drop-down menu. Next to these fields, a small note is written informing the user that this is a simplified interface intended to be filled in short time, and extra details and criteria can be added later.

After filling up the details, the user is asked to choose the application method. There are two different methods. The first one is specified on the page as "Recommended: Let applicants apply with their LinkedIn profile and notify by email". This method, which is also known as "Easy Apply", notifies the person who posted the job by email. The other method, "Apply", is specified as "Direct applicants to an external site to apply". The external site usually contains the HR recruiting page of the company or a third-party recruiter.
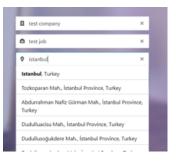
Figure 4. Screen shot of automatic suggestions for location attribute.

Few more simple details will be required after this page such as required experience, degree, and wage. The post draft will be ready at this stage and the post can be posted as soon as the payment is done.

The critical point regarding the "Easy Apply" option is that the job posting user is not informed about the effect of this option. Therefore, this exploratory study aims to understand the reasons behind recruiters' use of "Easy Apply" and "Apply" when posting jobs. Since little or no research has been done on this, the findings will go a long way in informing job seekers, researchers, recruiters who aren't currently utilizing LinkedIn, and LinkedIn Corporation on the current use of these two application methods.
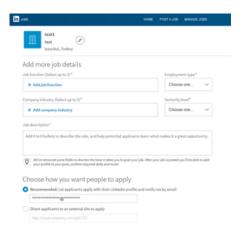

Figure 5. Screen shot of job details page.

Research Methodology

A qualitative research methodology is utilised for this exploratory study. Questionnaires were given to all five participants, however, interviews could be held with only two of them. The questions were open-ended and the interview was semi-structured. Open-ended questions were used because of their exploratory nature and because they encourage the collection of more information. Interview was preferred because it allows for access to more information by enabling further question and clarification on data provided by the participants.

Participants

The participants of this study are five recruiters who were gathered through networks of friends and the supervisor.

Instrument

A self-developed instrument was used to collect the data. The interview questionnaire was sent to participants via email in preparation for the interview. The questions focused on the frequency of job posts on LinkedIn, the preference for either of the two features under discussion, the reasons for use of either features, the suitability of both features for job types, and the preference of either features by different organizations.

Data collection

Data from three participants were collected via emails as responses to the pre-sent interview questions. However, data from two participants were collected via interviews; telephone and face-to-face. Data from Turkiye Finans Bank, Aktif Bank, and PwC were collected via emails, while for KPMG and ING Bank, data was collected with a 12 minutes telephone interview and a 30 minutes face-to-face interview respectively. During the interviews, audio records were made and notes were taken.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analysed manually. Audio records were listened to and transcribed into texts. All responses to each questions were read and keywords noted. Upon completion of the study, the findings were narratively reported in response to the research questions. Tables were also made available to present a visual representation of participants' responses.

Results

The data collected showed disparities in the use of LinkedIn for recruitment. Table 1 shows the demographic information about the participants and their organizations. The participants varied in years of experience and job titles but all are Human Resources Personnel responsible for recruitment. It is found that four of the five companies reported 100 and above job postings in the past 12 months.

It is found that most participating organizations preferred and used only the "Easy Apply" feature when posting jobs on LinkedIn. As shown in Table 2, all participants indicated that ease of use is the reason for their preference for the "Easy Apply" feature.

Table 1. Profiles of participants.

Organization	Number of Employees	Participant's Role / Job Title	Participant's years of experience	Total jobs posted in the last 12 months
Aktif Bank	1200	Head of HR / Managing Director	20 years	40
ING Bank	5000	Recruiter	1 year	284
KPMG Turkey	1200	HR Manager / Recruitment & Employer Branding	≥ 16 years	350
PwC Spain	4300	Head of HR/Human Capital	20 years	200
Turkiye Finans Bank	3857	Human Resources Business Partnership Manager	6.5 years	100

All participants reported using "Easy Apply" for all their LinkedIn recruitment. However, PwC indicated using LinkedIn "Easy Apply" for recruiting candidates for experienced roles. On the other hand, preferred to recruit graduate and entry roles on-campus. KPMG uses "Easy Apply" since they do not have an external human resource information system but indicated that with "Apply" feature they could be able to manage the application flow and applicant history better. Also, since they had thousands of

applications for each job post, it would be better to see them in one specific format.

Surprisingly, one participant reported not knowing that there were two options available for posting jobs on LinkedIn. They simply inserted the job description and other required information but never changed the method of posting/application which is set to "Easy Apply" by default.

Table 2. Results of interview questions.

Organizations	"Easy Apply" and/or "Apply"	Reason for the preferred option	Information received from "Easy Apply"	Specific roles recruited using each feature	Do you store candidates' "Easy Apply" information?
Aktif Bank	Easy Apply	Ease of use for applicants and user friendly	* Education * Experiences * CV (sometimes)	All roles	Yes
ING Bank	Easy Apply		LinkedIn profile and custom CV	All roles not recruited internally	Yes
KPMG Turkey	Easy Apply	Preferred by applicants	LinkedIn profile information	All roles	Yes
PwC Spain	Easy Apply	Easier for applicants	LinkedIn profile: Personal information, CV, contact	For experienced roles	Yes
Turkiye Finans Bank	Easy Apply	Easier for applicants.	Name, Surname, Experience, Education, Language, Skills & Expertise, Certificates	All roles	Yes

All of the participants indicated that information on education, and experience were received. In general, they all received LinkedIn profile information of applicants. Aktif Bank and PwC also mentioned that in some cases applicants also uploaded/sent their CVs. ING bank indicated that in addition to CVs and profile information of applicants, LinkedIn also creates a pdf version of applicants' CVs containing basic information like education and experience.

Advantages and disadvantages for each feature are specified as follows:

- "Easy Apply" advantages: Fast for the companies, easier to use for the applicants
- "Easy Apply" disadvantages: Filtering and matching applicants by keywords usually do not give the desired results
- "Apply" advantages: It possible to collect more information (e.g. GPA) and information specific to roles
- "Apply" disadvantages: Some applicants prefer not to answer detailed information questions on external sites, candidates are directed to make their application to another career website which means extra effort and time.

Conclusion and Discussion

In this study, the "Easy Apply" feature was found to be the only feature used by all of the participants for their LinkedIn job recruitment. Perceived ease of use was found to be the main influencer, which supports the technology acceptance model (Davis, 1989).

It is particularly interesting that all participants indicated preference for "Easy Apply" given that it is not unusual for recruiters to receive hundreds of thousands of applications to a single job opening, making their job more time consuming. However, this might not be the case as it was found that LinkedIn provides search and filter options that enable narrowing down applications by keywords. Therefore, recruiters' preferences for "Easy Apply" would ensure that as much candidates as are interested in the position apply, thus increasing the chances of getting applications from most qualified candidates. This feature was confirmed to be used by participants for recruiting for all roles. Two participants however added some more information. One indicated recruiting fresh graduates for entry level roles on-campus, whereas for more experienced jobs, LinkedIn 'Easy Apply' is used. This finding opposes the idea that more strategic (important) roles with more experience will require more information from applicants. The other participant stated that internal recruitment is preferred for regional office positions but for branch office positions, external recruitment is done. This is understandable given that regional roles would have higher stakes thus requiring people who are trusted and who have good knowledge of the organization.

One other recurring reason for preference for 'Easy Apply' is that unlike 'Apply', applicants' information will be collected by/on LinkedIn, whereas for the latter, organizations would require a Human Resource Information System (HRIS). LinkedIn provides some sort of external system for recruiters to collect and store information of applicants. Most organization would rather utilize what LinkedIn offers than invest in a personal HRIS. It can be deduced from this that 'Easy Apply' offers a cost efficient way of recruiting staff, which is one of the benefits of Information Technology (Melville, Kraemer, and Gurbaxani, 2004).

It was quite surprising to learn from one participant that she had no idea there were more than one option. No other participants reported not knowing there were more than one job post methods. Hence, the participant's lack of awareness of the two options could be attributed to her limited experience in the role. With only one year experience in Human Resources department, it can be said to be an oversight on her part. 'Easy Apply' is marked as the default job application method option for recruiters on LinkedIn. It is common for social media and technology users to stick to default settings. This could also explain the participant's lack of awareness. It costs similar amounts to use either 'Easy Apply' or 'Apply' on LinkedIn. If this wasn't the case, it would have been right to say that the idea of setting 'Easy Apply' as default is a strategy used by LinkedIn to generate more revenue.

Most of the benefits of 'Easy Apply' led to its vast adoption. Ease of use (mainly for applicants), speed of application making, speed of application retrieval and sorting by recruiters were all mentioned as benefits of the feature. However, the quality of sorting obtainable here was said to be low by one user, but still didn't deter them from using the feature. It's obvious that all other advantages of 'Easy Apply' make this particular drawback negligible. Another drawback that was not vastly mentioned but was insinuated by most participants was that 'Easy Apply' offers no flexibility for more information to be collected from applicants. Besides the information available on an applicant's LinkedIn page and on his/her standard CV (if uploaded), no further specific desired information can be obtained, a drawback that the 'Apply' feature solves. As with the other mentioned drawback of 'Easy Apply', it still does not discourage recruiters from using it as their only means of recruitment. Other information not provided are said to be requested for during the later stages of the recruitment process.

While none of the studied recruiters use 'Apply', some of them managed to talk about them. Where more specific information is required by a recruiter for certain roles, 'Apply' gives the flexibility to request such information. But as explained above, this benefit of 'Apply' isn't strong enough to lure recruiter into investing in

personal HRIS systems required for 'Apply'. One thing however comes to mind when considering why recruiters use solely 'Easy Apply' for all job posts on LinkedIn. Having to pull information of applicants from more than one database is challenging. It would take more time, cost more, and would be less efficient for an organization to use both 'Easy Apply' and 'Apply'.   However, it should be noted that most organizations in Turkey use both LinkedIn and a very popular local job board called Kariyer.net. Hence, the cost and time implications of collecting data from more than one database might not be enough to justify the use of a single database.

Recruiters' use of 'Easy Apply' and 'Apply' is mainly determined by ease of use. 'Easy Apply' makes the application and recruitment process less time consuming. Recruiters' preferences for 'Easy Apply' lies on its ease of use for applicants given that it reduces the number of actions and time required for an application. Also, most organizations use LinkedIn 'Easy Apply' because they lack an HRIS that collects and stores applicants' information. The zero start-up cost required to use LinkedIn for recruitment purpose makes it a more attractive option over investing in HRIS capabilities that affords recruiters more flexibility.

The findings of this research will be beneficial to job seekers, helping them understand differences in job openings on LinkedIn based on the required application method. Recruiters who are not acquainted with the use of LinkedIn for recruitment can have better understanding of the use of LinkedIn for recruitment and how to leverage its features. LinkedIn Corporation could benefit from the findings of this research to improve the job search and application process.

Limitations and further research recommendations

As with any qualitative study, this research is not devoid of limitations. One limitation is the small sample size of five participants. Hence, the findings of this research cannot be generalised to explain what is obtainable in a wider population. Further research can be carried out on the same issue but then study a larger sample from different countries. Moreover, the data were mostly collected via questionnaires. The preferred data collection method was through interviews but most participants declined the interview request. This led to the collection of fewer information as there was no opportunity to ask further questions based on their responses. One other limitation of this study is that by chance there was not a participant using the "Apply" feature. Additionally, as the instrument used was a self-developed instrument that hasn't been tested, it is not known how well it conveys to the intended use. Future studies can also examine the job seekers perspectives on the use of LinkedIn job application methods.

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