

## **Leveraging Social Networking for Talent Management: An Exploratory Study of Indian Firms**

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## **ABSTRACT**

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Utilizing the social capital and social network theories, this research explores and highlights how social networking has been strategically utilized as an effective tool by organizations for employer branding and innovative talent acquisition strategies in India. Qualitative data from 78 semi-structured interviews with human resources (HR) professionals of information technology (IT), information technology enabled services (ITeS), and talent acquisition organizations confirm the growing utilization of social networking sites (SNSs) as part of the organizational HR strategy for employer branding and talent sourcing, acquisition and retention, and reinforcing stronger relationship with their employees. The study contributes to the fields of talent management and social networks and has several key implications for practitioners regarding the usefulness of SNSs towards organizational branding, talent management and retention.

**Keywords:** Social networking, Talent management, Social networking Sites, HRM, India

## **Introduction**

There seems to be a huge potential for human resources management (HRM) researchers in adopting conceptual, empirical, and practitioner-oriented applications of social networking sites (SNSs) to understand HR-related issues in organizations as sparse research exist in this regard, and especially, related to talent management (TM). Research conducted in HRM utilizing SNSs can be broadly summarized into three main categories: (a) employee recruitment and selection (e.g., SNSs have been explored in the areas of pre-employment checks, Warning, & Buchanan, 2010), hiring decisions (Brown, 2011), job networking (Clark

& Roberts, 2010; Kellard, Millo, Simon & Engle, 2017) and evaluation of job candidates (Bohnert & Ross, 2010); (b) employee and employer relations (see e.g., Macdonald & Thompson's 2016 study on employment relations; Sanchez Abril, Levin & Del Riego's, 2012 study on privacy of employees; Vayrynen, Hekkala & Liias's, 2013 study on knowledge protection challenges; Herbert's, 2011 study on workplace consequences of electronic exhibitionism and voyeurism; Mainierio & Jones's, 2013 study on harassment of employees at workplace; Mitsuhashi & Min's, 2016 analysis on resource matching); and (c) legal issues involved in the use of SNSs at the workplace (e.g., discipline of employees while posting on social media, Eastman, 2011); study on organization information security policies with respect to employee security and employee privacy (Siponen & Vance, 2010).

Though studies have been conducted linking HRM and SNSs, there is a scarcity of literature on linking SNSs and strategic HRM (SHRM). Scholars have defined SHRM as “the decisions, processes and choices that organizations make about managing people” (Cascio & Boudreau, 2012: 1). Two theoretical frameworks in SHRM are present, the first, ‘*systemic view perspective*’ focused on aligning HRM policies and practices with external environments, that determines the business strategy of the organization (Snell et al., 2001). While the other theoretical framework is based in the ‘*resource-based view*’ (RBV) of the firm, which emphasizes on the internal resources and capabilities within the firm as a source for competitive advantage (Barney, 1991; Nyberg, Moliterno, Hale, & Lepak, 2014). Driven by this perspective, talent has become the key differentiator for organizations across the world for leveraging competitive advantage (Stahl et al., 2012). In the current global dynamic business environment, TM is important for practitioners and of interest for academics (Latukha, 2016). This is more so for emerging markets like India, which are recording rapid economic growth and for them there is a scarcity of relevant literature (see Bhatnagar, 2009; Budhwar and Varma, 2011; Pereire & Scott, 2015).

The increasing use of social media is a trend among many Indians (like many others) and presents a perfect milieu for exploring different employment opportunities and TM strategies. Given the scarcity of reliable research evidence, we are not sure about the trends emerging in this area. Hence, it is worth examining how the influence of SNSs on TM processes specifically, and HRM functions in general, impact an organization. In addition, research scholars have accepted that the popularization of SNSs have resulted in the growth of social network theory as an academic field (Lewis et al., 2008). Researchers like Ellison (2007) recognized the potential of communication technologies like SNSs in social network research. Accordingly, the principal aim of the current research is to broaden the horizon of SNSs as a mode of social networking in the context of organizational strategy and we are exploring its usage in TM in Indian context. In particular, the research objectives are twofold: (a) to highlight the extent to which SNSs are being adopted and are proving to be a useful mechanism for both employer branding and TM; and (b) discuss the practical implications for organizations and directions for future research associated with using SNSs for TM decisions. The research outcome should be beneficial for both HR practitioners and researchers, as it highlights the usefulness of SNSs in talent acquisition and selection, employee engagement, and employer branding - some key HR strategy areas of any organization.

This paper is structured around six sections. The introduction focused on research objectives and the need of the study. The second section presents the context of the study. The third section focuses on literature review, which provides a theoretical background on both TM and SNSs. The fourth section briefs about the methodology adopted for this study. This section is followed by results and discussion, which include both theoretical and practical implications. Finally, the last section concludes the study, acknowledges the main limitations of the analysis and highlights avenues for future research.

*Context of the study:* During most of the 2000s, it was acknowledged that after China, India

was the preferred destination for foreign direct investment, even ahead of developed countries like the US (Capelli et al., 2010). This occurred despite the worldwide economic slowdown and India's well-recognized less-developed infrastructure than that in most Western nations (Arevalo & Arvind, 2011). Factors responsible for this growth have attracted the attention of many researchers. One of the key interests lies in India's social capital and rapidly evolving social networking structure. This is because a larger section of the Indian economy (including both formal and informal sectors) is extensively regulated by both informal networks and social structures based on religion, caste, political affiliation, and other social linkages (Budhwar & Varma, 2011). Hence, a study of networks and their usefulness in the context of growing Indian economy can yield interesting outcomes.

On the global map, India enjoys a lead-player's status in its provision of IT, software, outsourcing, information and communication technology related services (e.g., Lahiri, 2013). Recent statistics have revealed that approximately two million jobs are posted monthly on social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Google plus, LinkedIn and an increasing number of hiring managers are utilizing SNSs such as Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter to aid screening and selection of applicants (e.g., Brown & Vaughn, 2011). Given the expanding percentage of employers using SNSs to gather data on applicants, it is reasonable to expect this practice to affect various other human resource decisions including hiring, training, promotion, and job termination. To what extent this is happening in reality is then worth exploring.

## **Literature Review**

*Social Networking Sites:* The SNSs are web-based services that allow individuals to: (a) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system; (b) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection; and (c) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system (Boyd & Ellison, 2007: 3). The concept has been driven from the perspectives of both social capital and social network theories. Social network

theory focuses on relationships among actors (i.e., individuals, work units, or organizations) and thereby distinguishes itself from more traditional organizational research perspectives that examine individual actors in isolation (Brass et al., 2004). The central premise underlying social network theory is that actors are embedded within networks of interconnected relationships that provide opportunities for and constraints on behavior (Burt, 2010). Social capital has been acknowledged as a concept having significance to the study of “network social processes” (Adler & Kwon, 2002). Burt (2000) was amongst the initial researchers who linked the network theory to the concept of social capital. According to Burt (2000), there are two network structures that help in the creation of social capital. The network closure argument is that a network of strongly interconnected elements creates social capital. The structural hole argument is that social capital is created by a network in which people can have connections between otherwise disconnected segments. The idea behind “*Structural hole theory*” is somewhat close to the strength of weak ties theory, developed by sociologist Mark Granovetter (1973), who stressed on value in ‘*weaker ties*’ in connections. The basic assumption of this theory is that weaker ties can be a source of big advantage of transmitting information and establishing relations. An example can be, getting information on jobs through associates rather than a close friend. Granovetter (1973), applied this theory at the group level, arguing that communities with many strong ties have stronger local cohesion but weak global cohesion, while communities with many weak ties have weak local cohesion but stronger global cohesion. Similarly, Burt (2000) also highlighted the importance of networks within and between groups and suggests that networks do not simply imply the number of connections people have, but they also develop into social capital.

Existing research on social capital has shown the advantages people can get from their social networks; strong ties provide them with emotional support (bonding capital), and weak ties provide them with non-redundant information and different perspectives (bridging

capital) (Granovetter, 1973; Putman, 2000). Supporting the importance of social networks, research has found social capital to be associated with innovation, performance, and survival of groups and organizations, and with individual outcomes, such as work attitudes, job performance, and employment search (e.g., Brass et al., 2004; Vlasisavjevic, Cabello-Medina, & Perez-Luno, 2016).

India is an enormously diverse country with broad language, religious, geographic, and political variations across its territory (Barker, 2010; Varma & Budhwar, 2013). Apart from its heterogeneous nature, factors like segregation in cost of living, cast system and many such reasons act as an obstacle in developing inter/intra -group relationships among the people (Barker, 2010). Technological advancements to some extent have helped to counter these challenges (Singh, Lehnert & Bostick, 2012). Currently, social media is perceived as a way to overcome these limitations in building and establishing relationships in India (Chauhan & Pillai, 2013). Its underlying networking structure allows different individuals to connect, within larger and more heterogeneous networks, and to communicate in varied and newer ways ignoring their own social structures and formal social systems.

*Talent Management (TM):* With the introduction of increased worldwide economic development, extensive global communication, quick transfer of innovative technology, growing trade, and emigration of large numbers of people, several challenges have emerged for the field of HRM. A major topic that has emerged in the recent years is the importance of maximizing the talent of individual employees as a unique source of competitive advantage (Scullion, Collings, & Caligiuri, 2010). For Schweyer (2010: 38), “Talent management is encompassing all HR processes, administration and technologies. It commonly refers to the sourcing, screening, selection, on-boarding, retention, development, deployment and renewal of the workforce with analysis and planning as the adhesive, overarching ingredient”. Some authors have defined it broadly to the management of talented employees (Lewis & Heckman,

2006). According to some scholars, TM theories have focused on the assumption that maximizing the talents of employees is a source of sustained competitive advantage (e.g., Al-Ariss et al., 2014). Hence, TM is extensively linked to HRM practices in organizations anticipating increasing business performance (Katou, & Budhwar, 2012; Farndale, Scullion, & Sparrow, 2010). Some authors have highlighted concepts of employer branding, employee engagement within the scope of TM strategies (Christensen, Hughes, & Rog, 2008) apart from recruitment, selection and retention strategies.

Though there are many perspectives on understanding of the term “talent management,” and its aim and scope (see Scholz, 2012; Al-Aris et al., 2014), there is uniformity of acceptance regarding the difficulty in managing talent in organizations (Scullion et al., 2010). Further, the sources for getting the right candidates for all organizations are common, such as newspaper advertisements, job postings on company websites, job portals, external consultants, and campus interviews. In addition to this, organizations are now dealing with employees who are more educated and more mobile (Briscoe, Schuler, & Claus, 2009), who function at “twitch speed,” expecting instant feedback and responses, while having the advantage of receiving information quickly (Bondarouk & Ruël, 2010: 150). Hence, finding the right candidate is a challenging task for the HR department, which is needed to regularly look at new and innovative talent acquisition and management strategies. According to Scholz (2012), as competition for talent gets intense, new talent acquisition strategies need to be formulated to enable organizations to find relevant talent for open positions.

An organization can adopt a strategy where apart from formal networks, exploring informal networks of employees is possible. Resources in a network facilitates the flow of information (Burt, 2000). Social ties in a networking structure can help an individual to get useful information about opportunities and choices otherwise not accessible. Besides, individuals will be able to find organizations of their choice to work, which can utilize them



and reinforce them with rewards. From an organization's point, such information would cut the transaction cost to recruit better employees. Some social ties, due to their strategic locations in networking structure may exert influence on recruiters or managers and facilitate in organization level decision-making. Further, the organization can utilize social tie resources, and their known relationships for getting individual's social credentials, some of which are possible because of the individual's accessibility to resources through social networks and relations, i.e., their social capital. These resources beyond the individual's personal capital, sometimes can be very useful to the organization especially in selection of candidates. Finally, social relations are expected to reinforce identity and recognition (Lin, 2002).

Being member of a social group sharing similar interests and resources not only provides emotional support (e.g., Stea, Pedersen & Foss, 2017) but also status recognition of being part of a group is helpful for the maintenance of mental health of the employees apart from helping them to always 'get connected' in a network. At the workplace, HRM can create an environment where these interactions between the actors are more likely to emerge (Cross & Parker, 2004) which can be beneficial for the TM process of the organization. The current study applies this logic and proposes that network structures of relationships facilitate the TM process in organizations. In addition to this, for decades, even though studies on social networks have been conducted in fields like sociology and anthropology, recent developments in web and Internet tools provide a rich and unprecedented opportunity to reexamine some assumptions and findings concerning the structure and behavior of social networks especially in organizational settings. The current study is an attempt to explore the use of SNSs in TM processes within the scope of both social capital and social networking theories. The research question this study aims to address is: "How the use of SNSs impact the TM process of organizations?"

## **Method**

Given the nature of our research objectives, the research is explicitly exploratory and therefore employed qualitative and inductive methods (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). A grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) has been used, which allows us to develop a theory that is closely correlated to the context of the phenomena being studied (Cresswell, 1998). The value of using a qualitative approach for the discovery phase of research is well documented (e.g., Locke, 2001). In the design and analysis, we followed the grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) by collecting different “slices” of data, then, creating categories by coding observations, doing comparisons between our data and the literature, and finally, concluding collection and coding, when no new codes emerged (theoretical saturation) while adhering to basic notions of the theory.

Grounded theory approach is a mixture of set of procedures that can be used to investigate a phenomenon. Though in HR research it has not frequently used as a research inquiry method, still, development of new theories on how HR is being practiced, especially in current environments can be made, with the use of grounded theory (Murphy, Klotz & Kreiner, 2017). As our research phenomenon (SNS) lacks a theoretical explanation on the specifics of the usage of SNSs by HR professionals in organizations, the grounded theory approach is expected to allow this to be examined in greater depth, providing insights on the HR strategy of present-day organizations (see Robinson & Kerr, 2015). In this study, HR professionals, namely HR managers, senior HR managers and HR consultants were purposefully, selected as the sampling frame due to their critical role in providing HR solutions and services in their organizations (applying the ‘theoretical sampling’ strategy following Grounded theory approaches, Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Moreover, these HR managers and consultants extensively use the web and the Internet at their workplace for their respective job responsibilities and characteristics. Hence, it is reasonable to assume that they

can provide useful information about the usage of SNSs in organizations (see Table 1 for sample details).

*Insert Table 1 Here*

Managers from software organizations, ITeS organizations, and staffing organizations that exclusively provide staffing support to software organizations were selected for this study. All interviewees were manager-level HR professionals within their organizations. However, the specific roles of respondents varied depending on how their organization was pursuing TM. For example, in organizations where SNS was being used more broadly, we spoke to the HR head responsible for talent acquisition, director talent acquisition, or a senior corporate HR executive. In case of staffing organizations, we interviewed the CEO/director/founding member of the organization.

Based on a thorough literature analysis and considering the research question/objectives, an interview protocol was created. Three experts were invited to give feedback on the interview schedule. These included: (a) the business head of a global open-source software development company; (b) an assistant vice president of HR of a large software organization; and (c) director HR of an ITeS company. These experts were asked to evaluate each question and suggest any alterations. After gathering their feedback, we re-evaluated the appropriateness of each question and finalized the interview schedule.

Given the exploratory nature of this research, mainly semi-structured interviews (Bachiochi & Weiner, 2002) were chosen to collect data. We took the help of open-ended questions (such as “what is the usefulness of SNSs in organizations,” “how are SNSs used by the HR professionals in their organizations,”) which offered the respondents an opportunity to explain their opinions and reasons behind the use of SNSs. Senior HR managers responsible for talent acquisition activity or talent acquisition managers (N = 78) were interviewed. In our study, we have treated each interview with an HR manager as an exclusive data source.

The interviews lasted 60 minutes on average. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. The transcripts provided the foundation for our analysis. Given the exploratory nature of the research, we needed to let categories emerge from the data, rather than impose them a priori; hence, the grounded theory approach was adopted for data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). For example, collecting different “slices” of data and then creating categories by coding observations, comparing between our data and the literature, and finally, concluding collection and coding when no new codes emerged (theoretical saturation). In this study, a two-step coding process has been used, where codes are first derived inductively from the interviews and then agreed upon by the researchers. For the task of summarizing, analyzing, and storing a concrete example that falls into a definite coding category, a number, a letter, a color, a geometric shape, or anything else can be given, which is convenient to the researcher (Gordon, 1992). Here an abstract symbol has been given to represent any case in that category. Coding is an established method of “meaning condensation” (Lee, 1999: 89).

In the study, the process of coding followed the following steps. First, each transcript was read carefully word for word and then independently coded by the authors - the one who had conducted the interview and the coauthors. Then, in joint meetings, batches of transcripts were analyzed. Sometimes four or five transcripts were analyzed and sometimes even more than that. Here, the authors who coded a given transcript compared and discussed their independent coding to determine a final coding for the transcript. The non-coding author served as a record-keeper and as a third source of analysis (or “judge”) whenever the two coding authors sought further clarification on a coded passage, or in case of disagreement on a code. The role of judge alternated at each joint coding session. This coding process made traditional inter-rater reliability measures impractical, as new codes emerge throughout the process and are not determined a priori. Yet this process ensured that multiple perspectives

were presented on each transcript, helping lessen researcher bias in the analysis. We also used the NVivo 8.0 software program to enter all codes, facilitate coding links (i.e., connections among codes in the data), and perform text searches, and count instances and intersections of codes. Coding was halted after 78 interviews when no new themes were found in remaining transcripts, and theoretical saturation occurred (Saunders & Townsend, 2016).

## **Results**

The qualitative data analysis was primarily focused on identifying content relevant to the HR managers' perspectives about the use of SNSs in the TM process of the organization. A total of 188 phrases were extracted from the interview analysis. The final list of coding category included four major themes. Each of the four categories included some subcategories, to which the authors agreed, reflecting similar factors influencing the major themes. For example, within the area of quotes referring to organizations leveraging SNSs in constructing organization employer branding, some quotes referred to the extensive reach of SNSs that help in creating employer image in a big way, whereas others referred to the use of "social media" by their organizations. The authors finally adopted four categories (for their details see Tables 2 and 3).

*Insert Table 2 & 3 Here*

Our results indicate that the most frequently occurring comments related to the use of SNSs in the talent acquisition and selection process of the organization (79% of quotes). Next in importance is the use of SNSs in employer branding strategies of the organization (61% of quotes falling into this theme). The next most frequently occurring comment related to the use of SNSs as an employee engagement system (54%). Finally, HR managers' comments about change in the role of an HR manager accounted for the least number of comments (46%).

### **Categories in SNSs, Talent Acquisition and Selection Process**

The categories of talent acquisition and selection process were derived from the

interview data during our two-step coding process. In coding the interview data, we focused on both the relevance and importance of the data, in answering our research inquiry as well as on the frequency of which they were reported. Table 2 displays the categories of talent acquisition and selection process, namely attracting talent (e.g., creating talent pool), selection of talent (e.g., employee verification), and cost-effective talent acquisition process (e.g., advertises job offers easily and cheaply).

Comments of interviewees were divided into three subcategories: attracting talent, selecting talent, and fast talent acquisition process. Regarding the uses of SNSs, nearly 88% of the HR managers' comments in this category were focused on attracting talent or new candidates (see 2a in Table 2). Out of the total, 75% of the respondents agreed with the use of SNSs in selection of candidates and 80% HR managers reported that SNSs facilitate in faster talent acquisition process.

All the sample respondents agreed that organizations are using social websites to improve talent acquisition of potential employees. Recruiters also look at SNSs for mutual connections that can provide information on the applicant. These sites are often used for entry-and mid-level job applicants but also for professionals and CEOs. In our study, one of the frequently cited message is summarize in the quote: *“We get resumes free of cost and a candidate pool creation is easy because of SNSs, thus extensively helpful in initial part of talent acquisition activities like sourcing of candidates.”* In addition to this, HR professionals are impressed with the use of SNSs - *“Creating and managing connections,” “antecedent checks,” “global talent acquisition without any cost,” and “successful talent acquisition of middle level and senior level managers”* were viewed as positive, as supported by the following quotes:

*SNSs make it possible for us to approach applicants differently, nowadays we recruit differently. If you're in a system that facilitates more and more connections, then creating a*

*candidate pool is always easy. SNS is a great medium for creating and exploring connections (General Manager (HR) of an IT company).*

*Talent acquisition cannot work in isolation. With the social networking sites, users can now easily connect with their friends and business acquaintances. We use this for developing our resource pool. We get future on time (CEO of an international staffing organization).*

Some of the common ideas emerging from the analysis echoed:

*Social networking sites are quite useful for a global talent acquisition process. From India, one can successfully get candidates from the worldwide net without any cost. Our talent acquisition efficiency has increased. SNSs are more successful in talent acquisition for middle level and senior level managers. SNS is quite successful in tapping passive candidates. Luring them with good remuneration and good job profile is convenient through this medium (HR manager of an ITeS company).*

A second subtheme that emerged was the importance of SNSs in selection of candidates. At least 59 managers commented on this. As reflected in the following quotes, most of the respondents were impressed with the use of SNS in the selection of candidates.

*Social networking sites are very useful in the talent acquisition process. A small pep talk on the site, or a scrap message gives immense confidence to the employee before joining an organization. Building trust and establishing rapport is easier via these mediums (Director (HR) of an IT company).*

*Recruiters for businesses are using social and professional networks to perform background checks on potential employees (Director (HR) of a big ITeS organization).*

The participant's responses clearly suggest that organizations are using SNSs to conduct background checks on potential job applicants. The statement "employers use social/business network sites to check applicants' backgrounds/history" received strong agreement from the respondents. Of the total respondents, 81% agreed on the importance of SNSs in facilitating

speedier talent acquisition process. Company recruiters are using Facebook, MySpace, and LinkedIn when searching for new employees. In this regard, some of the commonly cited quotes by the participants can be seen in the following examples:

*SNSs make it easy for the employers to get information from people who have worked with or personally know potential job candidates. They can now probe for others in the same networks and can follow antecedent reference checks* (Head (HR) of a software organization).

However, 11% of the respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the use of SNSs in talent acquisition and selection process. Although, HR managers were not extremely concrete about the success of these channels, they nonetheless recognized their importance. Overall, the HR managers noted that in this dynamic business context, SNSs could be harnessed for business purpose.

### **Categories in SNSs and Employer Branding**

The SNSs play a vital role in creating a brand image for the organization. Thus, helping in attracting talent to the organization emerged as one of important category in this study. Comments of respondents were divided into three subcategories: employer attractiveness, employer of choice, and employee value proposition. Organizations with excellent reputation and strong brands were well positioned to attract talent. In total, 79% managers reported the use of SNSs in employer attractiveness. Employer attractiveness refers to the envisioned benefits that a potential employee sees in working for a specific organization (e.g., team commitment, team support, and team flexibility). The participants frequently cited the following general experiences as examples of “organization as an employer” (HR manager of an IT organization).

*With SNSs our brand is getting built automatically and without any cost. On social networking sites pages, employees normally paste the information and anyone who is in “friend list” of that employee can see this and can have an idea of the organization. This is*



*one of the major advantages for our organization as it helps in attracting talent from industry without any expenses from our side (Senior HR manager of an ITeS organization).*

*Firms are using SNS to attract recruits and assure that current employees are engaged in the culture and the strategy of the firm. One can highlight all the offerings included in organization's culture, management style, qualities of current employees, and current employment image in SNS without any cost (HR manager of an ITeS organization).*

Next in importance was the employer value proposition, reported by 41% managers. Finally, 27% managers reported the “employer of choice” theme. Our results confirmed such developments. As reflected in the following quotes, many respondents were impressed with the use of SNS in this respect.

*SNS can be largely harnessed for this purpose. By creating a company page, company can show all the information regarding organization culture, values etc. For the small and medium sized budgets with budget constraints this can be very effective (HR head of an IT organization).*

*Every organization desires to project its image as “People-first employer brand.” With the help of SNS, one can do this easily by sharing organization's values, missions and vision statements, employee engagement activities on web. Again, the advantage is that it will reach rapidly to both targeted and non-targeted audience (Talent acquisition manager, ITES organization).*

The employer brand puts forth an image reflecting the organization as a good place to work (Sullivan, 2004). Due to this, on the web, employer advertising (“Social Media”) is becoming increasingly common and SNS is a good and successful medium for this.

### **Categories in SNSs and Employee Engagement**

In all, 49% of the respondents strongly agreed that SNSs could be used for employee engagement. Overall, 20.2% quotes fell under this category. Some of the frequently cited

quotes by participants of the use of SNSs in employee engagement are as elucidated here:

*Though Facebook and similar sites are frequently banned in the workplace and it is true that SNS at workplace provides some meaningful personal space to the employees” (HR head of an ITeS organization).*

*Employees are social beings and they have certain needs for affection, attention, challenge, respect, recognition and responsibility, irrespective of the place and situation they are in. SNS channels help the employees to express themselves at the workplace (HR Director of a software organization).*

*Now businesses must go beyond campaigns and move to real-time engagement. The real advantage of SNS is that it helps the HR manager reach all of its employees, which is not easy in case of large organizations (VP - HR of an ITeS organization).*

### **Categories in SNSs and Changing Role of Human Resource Manager**

The role of an HR manager changed with the emergence of SNSs as an important mode of the talent acquisition, employer branding, and employee engagement processes of an organizations. Of all the respondents, 35% agreed with the changes in the HR department and 17.9% respondents agreed with the organization factor. A common theme running through most of the responses was that the role of an HR manager had changed. Some of the frequently cited quotes by participants in this regard include:

*Decentralization of talent acquisition responsibilities (easy cooptation through social networks) has been made easy because of extensive use of SNSs (Director - Talent Acquisition of an IT organization).*

*SNSs help in eliminating much of the administrative activity in HR department, thus, helping the HR person to focus more toward value added activities such as strategic business support with more cost efficiency (Vice President HR of an ITeS organization).*

*Today our responses to the employee issues are immediate and to be specific, more*

*effective. This is possible because of SNS. We are understanding our employee needs in a better way by discussing with them... we also receive feedback instantly from the employees via their SNS pages. Now, we are engaging with our employees in a better way and vice versa* (HR Head - Asia Pacific of an IT organization).

Some respondents also highlighted the increase in efficiency of HR department.

*Somewhere SNS has helped in streamlining the back office or administrative side of the HR department in the organizations. SNS leads to alignment and efficiency of the HR processes Also, because of SNS the image of HR department has changed in the mind of employees* (Senior manager of an organization).

Finally, one-third of the comments in this category referred to organizational factors where the respondents discussed the usefulness of SNSs in understanding organizational leadership.

*Views of senior management can easily get communicated to the employees with SNSs. Because of this, employee concerns are also addressed effectively* (HR manager of a software organization).

### **Grounded theorizing perspective: Changes in TM practices with social networking sites:**

Findings from this study serve as a foundation for a grounded theorization of how social networking sites can be used in the context of an organization talent management process. The first SNSs usage in the talent management process reflected the impact of SNSs in recruitment and selection process in an organization. It has several distinct characteristics. SNSs uses were not initially tailored to the needs of the practices of the organizations. This was partly a result of the limitations of the recruitment process such as cost, time, and partly for the peripheral situation of employees and the advanced Internet platforms. Second, the use of SNSs coincided with new, innovative recruitment practices, such as first creating a candidate pool derived from the employee social capital, and second it helps in attracting

passive candidates not actively available in job marketplace because of their own networks. A third development initiated as changes in recruitment practices with SNSs became endogenous to the organizations. In other words, over time, the inspiration for the managers to use social media in new and innovative ways came from within the SNSs itself. Social media use was becoming increasingly pervasive in employee background verification before release of employment offer to the candidate. Moreover, during this stage, more individual participants have agreed to rely upon SNSs. Additionally, as more participants agreed to use SNSs in the context of their daily practices, many related dynamics unfolded. The first was that the organizations were adapting to the SNSs that supported them (e.g., the tone and content of communications with external stakeholders started to change). Further, these usages of SNSs were in turn changing and becoming more indispensable to the needs of the TM practices of the organization. Moreover, as SNSs were becoming increasingly integrated into the TM practices of the organization, managers in organizations began to take notice of the advantage of using SNSs as a platform for employer branding. The SNSs originally used were highly informal but over time, they became aligned with the employer branding strategy of the organization as the awareness increased about the usage advantage of SNSs. Organizations used SNSs for communicating the future employees about the organization's culture, management style, skillset of current employees, current employment image, vision, mission of the organization including all the envisioned benefits that the organization offers to future employees.

Another development was observed as SNSs usage became public in the organizations. Since, during this stage, the use of SNSs had widely diffused throughout the organization hence, more and more individual participants had started to rely upon social networking platforms in various aspects of their work. This trend led to management's growing awareness and willingness to both capitalize upon and rein in multiple informal initiatives in

organizations. Another characteristic of this process was that employees who were using SNSs at that time also capitalized on the benefits from their networks. Now employees of the organizations were more connected and more engaged with each other as well as with the organization in an effective way.

In addition, another significant development was observed as changes in TM practices with SNSs were adapted by organizations. As more work practices started to rely upon the use of social media, the competences that HR members needed for this, evolved as well. This changes in competences did not translate into an obsolescence of existing competences, but rather resulted in a combination of existing HR practices competences with the new SNS related competences (e.g., flexibility of HR manager, HR effectiveness). And, as more TM practices relied upon, and were transformed using SNSs, most social media initiatives and policies became more formalized in organizations. Senior management level respondents of our study had acknowledged of the increasingly extensive reliance on social networking sites and became more directly involved in initiatives at the organizational level.

These four processes of changes in practices of the TM were highly influenced by transformations of the SNSs and waves of popularity of their platforms (growth of Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn). Moreover, as organizations became more familiar with the advantages of usage of SNSs, they learned to transfer some of the new competences they had acquired in their use of SNSs onto different departments in organizations.

## **Discussion**

A rich tradition of research exists within the purview of social science field that has traced the performance of individuals and collectives to networks and social relationships (Bourdieu 1983; Lin et al., 2001). In an organizational context, the opportunities and benefits arising from both weak ties and strong ties are immense. In our research, we have tried to explore these dynamics. The core research aim of this study was to explore the use of SNSs in

different TM processes of the organizations in India. Most of the participants agreed that their organizations had started strategically leveraging the networking ties in SNSs in their TM process.

Further, most respondents felt that in the current business scenario, recruitment and talent acquisition strategies of their organizations had changed drastically. Several reasons were offered for this. First, the key resource for firms competing in the new economy is no longer land, capital, or hard assets but human capital. Hence, the demand for skilled workers is on a continuous rise; on the other hand, the supply is sluggish. This is certainly applicable in the Indian context where the economic conditions over the past decade or so have been phenomenal and are predicted to stay the same even in the coming decades (Srivastava, 2016). Hence, TM is becoming a tough challenge for HR professionals working in India, as pointed by many respondents in this study.

Whilst the interview results suggested that SNSs are extensively getting leveraged in different TM processes of the organizations, most of the HR managers and HR professionals whom we interviewed reported that even today, organizations are exploiting “networking” as a means for their talent acquisition activities. Consistent with previous research (Snow, Zurcher, & Ekland-Olson, 1980), this study revealed that prior contact (an example of Grannovetter’s 1973, weak ties in networking structure) with someone is the most important factor in explaining the talent acquisition process of an Indian organization. This also points to the need for further work on the role of SNSs in contact formation and their use in different areas in organizations, apart from talent management process, such as in the marketing and sales departments.

It should be noted that the use of social networking provides a creation of new organization level social capital known as pool of quality candidates (Hoffman, 2008). A candidate pipeline is an established pool of candidates that can be easily contacted in time of

need (Burkholder & Preston, 2004). Our findings suggest that with the use of SNSs such as MySpace and LinkedIn, creating a candidate pool is becoming easier for the organizations. Staffing professionals are actively using their networks on Facebook, MySpace, and LinkedIn when searching for new employees. Organizations always want to adapt geocentric staffing strategy to develop and communicate a value proposition that will attract the most qualified employees (Gowan, 2004). With their wider network, SNSs foster the possibility for HR professionals to reach out to more candidates, thus helping organizations create candidate pools for themselves. Talent pool and database always helps in India where the attrition rate is always on the higher side. This finding is consistent with Parry and Tyson's (2008) work on online recruitment that highlights the importance of web and Internet in the creation of candidate pool. Furthermore, our work is exploring the use of SNSs for the development of new services and social networks in a cost-effective way for establishing talent pool of an organization.

Our findings also suggest that SNSs may help the HR manager in sourcing passive talent for the organization. Rutledge (2008) defines a passive candidate as one who is currently employed but not actively seeking employment; yet is willing to consider other opportunities. Findings of this study are consistent with the finding of Rutledge (2008) that social networking technologies such as MySpace, Facebook and LinkedIn, allow HR and staffing professionals the ability to connect with the available talent force in the employment market. To add to this, our study is highlighting the use of SNSs in reaching the passive and proactive talents that the organization would otherwise not aware of their presence in the employment market.

Our results also demonstrate that HR professionals use SNSs in the selection process, for credential checking of candidates and research on the talent before extending an employment offer. SNSs offer this opportunity without any additional costs for organizations.

For example, LinkedIn, a SNS, has recommendations within the profiles that speak of exemplary work behavior of a candidate. Our interview analysis revealed that HR professionals are leveraging SNSs for networking that can yield more information on the applicants before closing an employment offer. SNSs for employers, are serving as an inexpensive and quick source of background information on job applicants and current employees (Clark & Roberts, 2010) and allow HR and staffing professionals to find information that can lead or not to making an employment offer (Sampath, 2007). In India, informal networks have a vast role in an individual's life. Hence, on various occasions, getting realistic information of candidates becomes a challenge for the HR practitioners. SNSs serve as an aid for them by providing correct information on the candidates.

For an organization, the hidden cost of talent acquisition, which includes employee turnover expenses and cost associated with training new employees, has its adverse impact (Zeidner, 2009). Hence, the talent acquisition process is generally meticulously planned in professionally run organizations. Another finding from our study is that SNSs enable an organization to control and reduce the cost of sourcing and hiring. According to most of our respondents, the cost of using social networking platforms is lesser in comparison to print and media advertisement costs. Most of the research participants believe that these SNSs enable them to advertise job offers easily and cheaply, whilst appealing to a larger public and achieving a better application management.

Apart from the above, our findings imply that an extensive use of SNSs helps to increase the “agility” of the talent acquisition process in organizations. Implementing a low cost social networking system improves the recruiting efficiency, allowing organizations to search by keywords and/or qualifications (Carr & Kariyawasam, 2008). In addition, SNS advertisements can be viewed 24 hours a day, providing immediate appearance and the advantage to stay posted for as long as the organization wants. This process enables



jobs/requirements posted on an SNS the ability to receive response the same day, thus increasing talent acquisition agility.

Further, it can be noted that to attract and retain the best talent, an organization is required to have a strong and positive employer brand (Knox & Freeman, 2006). Kaplan and Haenlien (2010) suggested that most of the firms are using SNSs to promote their brand and create brand communities. It has been found that the use of social media for human resource functions helps in building employer branding for attracting right talent for the firms (Davison et al., 2011). Our findings support this. In addition, we are also exploring the advantages of networks and relations for creating employer brand of an organization. Analysis of the interviews in our study revealed that organizations are using SNSs extensively for creating and communicating their brand image. Apart from this, HR professionals are taking the advantage of SNSs for the development and communication of the employee value proposition (EVP) to attract and retain talented employees. According to our study, SNSs are emerging as one of the leading medium for the organizations to provide insights into their daily activities as well as demonstrating their human sides to the world. Today, more and more organizations are striving for the “best employer” status. Our analysis revealed that HR professionals are actively using SNSs for this purpose by posting and discussing on different HR practices on different web forums and initiating feedback from key audience. The respondents agreed that they were actively using their SNSs pages for this purpose. Most of the participants agreed that today organizations are using blogs and SNSs to establish their own employer brands.

Social networking channels, such as blogs, intranet sites, and micro blogging via SNSs, provide numerous opportunities for companies to forge more genuine and direct connections with their employees. Our findings suggest that HR professionals are using SNSs to enhance employee engagement in their organizations. According to Fleming and Asplund (2007), a

strong correlation exists between employee engagement and customer engagement, which when looked holistically and implemented well, leads to significantly improved financial and organizational performance. Future research can further explore opportunities in this direction.

Indian companies spend on the capabilities of their employees and try to engage employees with empowerment and similar measures (Cappelli et al., 2010). In our study, most of the managers agreed with the use of SNSs as an innovative channel for employee engagement activity in Indian organizations. However, there were few concerns about the implementation of the use of SNSs in these organizations and its acceptability among their employees. A concern shared by our interviewees was that the use of SNSs in organizations could adversely affect the productivity of the organization if employees misuse this platform. Yet, 49% of the managers accepted the use of SNSs or the possibility of using SNSs as an employee engagement tool for their organizations.

Strategic HRM literature reflects an emphasis on the strategic role of HR (Roehling et al., 2005: 212). Cascio (2005: 159) suggests that HR must act more than simply partner with top management; i.e., it must actively engage itself for driving business success. According to Gratton's '*Model for Considering Ties*' (quoted in Roehling et al., 2005: 151), HR has an essential role to play in fostering the development of appropriate social ties within and across organizational groups. However, many scholars have pointed to the challenges for the HR professionals to move to a strategic position (Parkes & Borland, 2012). The analysis of our interviews reveal that with the use of SNSs, the HR professionals are becoming successful in lowering their transactional activities, thus focusing on more strategic parts of the business. This is in consonance with the thinking of scholars in the field (e.g., Schuler, Jackson, & Tarique, 2011). On the one hand, SNSs have given the HR department a platform to reduce the backend work and on the other hand, the flexibility and quick approach of this medium

enables HR professionals to be in constant touch/relation with their employees. The role of an HR manager has turned out to be more relational than transactional. As is evident in the interview transcripts, with the use of SNSs, less administrative tasks for the HR department has resulted in more focus on the strategic goals of the organization for the department. A large number of participants agreed that the HR department is becoming “more strategic” with the implementation of SNSs.

Research demonstrates that Internet, has changed the way HR processes are managed in organizations (Parry & Tyson, 2008). Further, our findings suggest that with the use of SNSs, TM costs have been reduced, efficiency has been increased, employee participation has been better and service has been improved for the HR. In addition, HR professionals are more able to concentrate on strategic activities.

To summarize, SNSs can be leveraged for effective and efficient management of talent in organizations. In any organization SNSs can be utilized for the development of new services and social networks, accessing free CVs and profiles, accessing the “passive” or “proactive” applicants (open to market opportunities), decentralizing talent acquisition responsibilities (easy cooptation through social networks) and/or being less dependent on talent acquisition agencies, cost-effectiveness of the talent acquisition process in rich media advertisements (audio, video, animation) of/for the organization, in the selection processes of the candidates, in the development of employer’s reputation and branding with less time and cost, and fast and immediate communication with the employees (see Figure 1 for use of SNSs in TM Process).

*Insert Figure 1 here*

### **Theoretical Implications**

The study makes four important contributions to existing theories of social capital and social networking: (1) the benefits organizations seek and receive from their social media networks,

capitalizing on both strong and weak ties, primarily extending the networking theory; (2) how network strength influences the benefit what the organizations get as well as they receive. We are extending the previous work on the importance of the dimensions of tie strength in networking theory; (3) the underlying processes of social networking in an organizational setting, for example, the change in role of HR managers contributing the ‘black hole theory’ (Wright, Gardner, & Moynihan, 2003); and (4) how social capital is getting developed in an organizational context internally and externally for example, creation of candidate pool, talent pool in organizations with use of SNSs besides, capturing the benefits of using employee social capital for the advantage of the organization. Here we are extending the previous work done by Coleman (1990) that identifies social capital as something inherent in the structure of relations between actors and organizations can exploit these networks and relations for their advantage. In our study, we explored the use of SNSs in different TM processes.

### **Practical Implications:**

As our study highlights, in any organization SNSs can be utilized for the development of new services and social networks in recruitment process, in decentralizing talent acquisition responsibilities in the selection processes of the candidates, in the development of employer’s reputation and branding with less time and cost, fast and immediate communication with the employees and finally in creating a better and effective HR department which is more strategic and relational. The findings of this analysis have several practical implications. First, the significant relationships of SNSs in recruitment, selection, engagement and employer branding process support and reinforce the evidence that SNSs are not just networking tools but a platform for engagement and collaboration in an organization. Considering the usability of SNSs in reaching the probable job candidates, creating a talent pool, or for the verification process, it is emerging that organizations utilizing SNSs have found out a cost-effective way to fight the talent war. Thus, there seems to be a drastic shift taking place in the talent-hunt

process from the traditional district-level “employment exchanges” to weekly “employment news,” from “job classified” in a national daily to “job portals” and now through SNSs such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and MySpace. Despite SNSs being used by organizations in their TM process, the question remains of credibility, i.e., will these sites be a source of credible pool of information for the organizations to use? Are the testimonials written on the site a true reflection of the candidate for the organizations to base their decisions on? Potential employers would need to reflect on the truth and legality of the posted information. Also, while leveraging SNS for TM, organizations should be vigilant about the privacy and security as the implications can be harmful for both the concerned individuals and the organizations. Also, organizations can use SNSs as a platform to capture implicit and illegal behaviors of employees, which is one of the primary areas of concern for present day organizations. Hence, it is recommended that organizations should establish explicit HR policies and procedures concerning the use of SNSs as screening devices (Davison et al., 2011) in the recruitment process. As with any procedure used in the recruitment and selection process, policies and interventions should be developed by the organization’s HR department to ensure fair and uniform procedures in evaluating SNSs. These should be shared with new recruits at induction or ‘onboarding’. In addition, HR departments should encourage employees making hiring decisions to document all information gathered and used in the screening process as well as to document reasons for follow-up or rejection decisions. The details assessed with the use of SNSs by the subject matter experts should be included in each applicant’s personnel file, as well as any printed screen shots of profile aspects that may have affected the screening decision should be recorded. Another important consideration for HR professionals electing to allow policies for searching publicly available information from SNSs is whether to disclose this practice to applicants. Doing so may cause applicants to alter their profiles in a socially desirable way, thus reducing access to potentially helpful information. On the other

hand, failure to inform the applicant might create an impression of an unfair hiring procedure or an invasion of privacy on the part of the organization. To tackle this, organizations can hire social media experts or consult with experts to analyze the usefulness of the usage of SNSs by the employees in the organization. Periodical social networking etiquette training programs should be held within the organization making more and more employees aware of intranet and other SNSs usages and risks involved in them. Information breaching on SNSs and risks involved in them should be clearly communicated to employees and can be incorporated in the code of conduct manual of the organization. Moreover, organizations should devise their social media policy that would encourage the use of SNSs within the organization to promote the information sharing as well. Hence, this study has useful messages for both HR and IT managers who plan to implement technology for collaborative purposes, and they should not undermine the importance of building employee social capital through SNSs. Lastly, the above recommendations can be considered to create policies with respect to the use of SNSs in the organization processes.

### **Conclusion and Future Research**

This study has some limitations. First, the data was mainly collected through interviews and relied heavily on HR professionals confined to a limited sample of IT/ITeS companies. Noting that it is entirely a new area of research, we had little choice but to rely on this approach. However, we made efforts to reduce the impact of this weakness by using interview protocols and data triangulations, which were useful to enhance the reliability of our findings. Second, our data was mainly collected from HR practitioners. Data from employees of the same organizations on the use of SNSs should be considered for future research. Third, this work looks only at SNSs, using data available from the respondents. We look forward to work on evaluating the utility of “behind-the-scenes” data and to work on contrasting these findings with other social media platforms. Finally, the focus of our study was on the resources in

network and network ties in social capital where the medium is web/Internet principally used at an individual level. A comparison of different media of networking, like Enterprise Social Media (Leonardi et al., 2013) at an organizational level may be used in future studies.

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### **Table 1: Research Sample Details**

<b>N = 78</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>No. of organizations</b>	<b>No. of organizations in percentage</b>
Subsidiary size	<100	14	18
(No. of employees)	100–500	31	40
	501–1000	18	22.8
	>1000	15	19.2
Organization Type	Software organizations	26	33.3
	ITES organizations	33	42.3
	Staffing organizations	19	24.4
Wholly Owned (100%)	Yes	72	92.6
	No	6	7.4
Location	Head quarter	38	49.2
	Local branch	40	50.8
Talent Acquisition Team	Yes	55	71
	No	23	29
Age	25-35	18	23.1
	35-45	25	32
	45-55	22	28.2
	>55	13	16.7
Gender	Male	58	74
	Female	20	26
Education level	Bachelor's	31	39.7
	Master's	28	35.9
	Above Master's	19	24.4
Marital Status	Married/Living with partner	67	85.9
	Unmarried	11	14.1
Seniority In Current Position	Above 15 years	34	43.6
	10~14 years	26	33.3
	5~9 years	14	18
	less than 5 years	4	5.1

**Table 2: Categories Emerging from Analysis of Interview**

<p>1. Those related to the use of SNSs in talent sourcing and acquisition process</p> <p>1a. Attracting talent: For example, creating a talent pool, attracting passive candidates</p> <p>1b. Selection of talents: For example, employee verification, release of employment offer</p> <p>1c. Cost-effective talent acquisition process: For example, advertise job offers easily and cheaply</p>
<p>2. Those related to the use of SNS in employer branding</p> <p>2a. Employer attractiveness—the envisioned benefits that a potential employee sees in working for a specific organization: For example, team commitment, team support, team flexibility</p> <p>2b. Employer of choice—concerned with building an image in the minds of the potential labor market that the company, above all others, is a “great place to work” (Ewing et al., 2002): For example, employee retention, employee relations, communication with external recruiting agencies, placement counselors</p> <p>2c. Employer value propositions—concerned with the central message what the organization wants to convey to its employees: For example, information about the organization’s culture, management style, qualities of current employees, current employment image</p>
<p>3. Those related to the use of SNS in employee engagement</p> <p>Use of social networking channels, such as blogs, intranet sites, and micro blogging, for employee communication, employee engagement</p>
<p>4. Those related to the impact of SNS on the role of the HR manager or the HR department.</p> <p>4a. HR—characteristics of HR or the HR manager: For example, flexibility of HR manager, HR effectiveness</p> <p>4b. Organizational factors—characteristics of the organization or top leadership: For example, organizational communication, HR policies</p>

**Table 3: Number and Percentage of Quotes that Fell into Each of the Four Categories and**

## Subcategories

Quotes falling into each category and subcategory <sup>1</sup>	Number of respondents (N = 78)	Respondent percentage <sup>2</sup>	Overall percentage <sup>3</sup> (n = 188)
<b>Use of SNS in talent acquisition and selection process</b> Attracting talent Selection of talent Cost-effective talent acquisition process	68 59 63	88% 75% 80%	39.8% of quotes fall in this category
<b>Use of SNS in employer branding</b> Employer attractiveness Employer of choice Employer value propositions	62 21 32	79% 27% 41%	Overall 28.6% of quotes fall in this category
<b>Use of SNS in employee engagement</b> Intranet, internal blogs, company pages	38	48%	Overall 20.2% of quotes fall in this category
<b>SNS and the change in the HR manager's role</b> Characteristic of the HR manager or HR department organization factor	27	35% 18%	12.4% quotes fall in this category. Total = 100%

Note. <sup>1</sup> Main theme presented in bold. Subtheme presented below each main category.

<sup>2</sup> Overall percentage: The number of quotes in the theme as a percentage of the total number of quotes (n = 188).

<sup>3</sup> Respondent percentage: Shows the responses of number of samples as a percentage of total number of samples (N = 78).

**Figure 1: Use of Social Networking Sites in Talent Management Process**

