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# The Use of Social Media to Attract Generation Y in Organisations

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## **Abstract**

*Generation Y are increasingly entering the workforce, and will account for around 50% of the global workforce by 2020. They come to the workplace with distinct characteristics and expectations causing organisations to rethink their traditional working practices. This short paper will present the main themes from the literature on the contemporary working practices that involve the use of Social Media to attract generation Y employees to organisations.*

*Based on the literature, a conceptual framework is presented which offers direction for future practitioners and researchers. The three main issues identified in the literature are the characteristics of generation Y employees, the use of Social Media in recruitment practices and practical implications for the use of Social Media in recruitment. The emerging research themes for future studies are: interactive engagement with employees; employee training, organisational transparency; gamification in recruitment and the increasing importance of organisational SM policies.*

**Keywords:** Generation Y, Human Resource Management, Recruitment and Selection, Social Media

## **1.0 Introduction**

Generation Y (GenY), individuals, born approximately from the early 1980s to the early 2000s, are the youngest members of the workforce globally (Martin and Tulgan 2006; Howe and Strauss 1991). The importance of GenY is highlighted by the changing age of the workforce as a result of aging populations. Over the next decade, we will see more members of the older generation retiring and more of GenY entering the workplace. By 2020, GenY will make up approximately 50% of the world's workforce (Saxena and Jian 2012).

The increasing presence of GenY in the workforce presents new challenges for employers and is causing many businesses to re-think their working practices (Kapoor and Solomon 2011; Twenge 2010). Moreover, failure to effectively attract and engage

these new workers will significantly hamper organizations' competitiveness in the long run (Tulgan & Martin 2001).

Another factor that differentiates GenY is that they have grown up in the age of information technology and this environment has shaped the way they view the world, including their expectations of the workplace (Hershatter and Epstein 2010; Cowell and Kupritz 2007; Kapoor and Solomon 2011).

Social Media (SM) is at the heart of modern communication technologies. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define SM as

*“a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content”*(pg.58).

In the UK, almost half of the population is using SM and around 80% are aged between 20 and 35 (Econsultancy 2013). With this level of reach and popularity, businesses are increasingly utilising SM as a tool to gain competitive advantage by integrating it into their marketing (Sage Pay 2013) and public and customer relationship strategies (Ashley, Tuten, and Morrison, 2012).

This short paper is motivated by the importance of GenY in the workplace and the increased use of SM in organisations. To investigate the use of SM to attract GenY employees in organisations, a review of GenY characteristics and preferences in the workplace will be conducted. This will lead to the integration of SM into recruitment practices and the development of a conceptual framework for understanding the area of concern. This will be followed by a discussion of potential research avenues in which SM can be effectively used to attract GenY employees considering their workplace characteristics and attitudes.

## **2.0 Generation Y in the Workplace**

The process of identifying the different generational groups and characterising their general values and attitudes originated in United States when Mannheim (1953) defined generations as individuals born in the same time period and raised in a similar social and historical environment. Since this early definition, generations have been grouped into cohorts based on chronological age who are assumed to share similar historical events and experiences. There are several complexities associated with identifying generations' characteristics and differences. These include the heterogeneity within a generational cohort - that is differences among individuals

within a generation and the differences in national cultures (Parry and Urwin 2011). Moreover, there is also the tendency to interpret differences due to aging (age effects) such as maturity levels and differences developed by environmental influences (period effects) such as economic depressions as generational differences (cohort effects) (Twenge 2010; Kowske, Rasch, and Wiley 2010).

Bearing in mind these complexities and in reviewing research pertaining to GenY, the following are the main GenY characteristics:

- Digital immersion: GenY subjects are technologically advanced especially in content creation and engaged interaction (Hershatter and Epstein 2010; Cowell and Kupritz 2007; Kapoor and Solomon 2011).
- Work/life balance: GenY value and seek work/life balance (Hershatter and Epstein 2010; Kapoor and Solomon 2011; Broadbridge, Maxwell, and Ogden 2009).
- Formalised procedures: GenY prefer formalised procedures, systems and structures (Hershatter and Epstein 2010; Cowell and Kupritz 2007).
- Feedback: GenY seek approval and affirmation. They need prompt and continuous feedback (Hershatter and Epstein 2010; Cowell and Kupritz 2007; Kapoor and Solomon 2011).
- Affiliation or social values: GenY seek less formal interaction with managers and supervisors and prefer building close/social relationships with co-workers and supervisors (Hershatter and Epstein 2010; Ng, Schweitzer, and Lyons 2010).
- Developmental opportunities: GenY seek opportunities for development and prefer varied work (Ng, Schweitzer, and Lyons 2010; Kowske, Rasch, and Wiley 2010).
- Equality and Diversity: GenY value and seek equality, fairness and tolerance in the workplace (Broadbridge, Maxwell, and Ogden 2009; Ng, Schweitzer, and Lyons 2010).

Now that we have identified GenY characteristics and preferences in relation to the workplace, in the following sections we will investigate the integration of these characteristics into SM recruitment practices.

### **3.0 Social Media Integration in Recruitment Practices**

SM has already impacted the recruitment process in organisations. The literature indicates that SM is increasingly being used to create an employer brand and to hire and select job applicants.

Employer branding involves the development and communication of the culture of an organization in order to be perceived as a desirable employer (Reichenberg 2009). Employer branding has gained a lot of attention over the last few years among practitioners and academics arguing that it is a significant part of the HR function and that it aids organisations to search and identify workers that would best fit an organization's particular culture (Arama 2011; Davies 2008; Martin et al. 2011; Edwards 2009). Organisations have long depended on traditional media such as corporate websites and career brochures to promote themselves as first-class employers. However, over the past decade SM is increasingly being used as a new medium for organisations to promote their employer brand. Some of the advantages offered by SM compared to traditional employer branding media include: allowing for transparency in shared information, allowing for personalised communication, engaging with target audiences, and reaching a wider audience (Arama 2011; Laick and Dean 2011).

In addition to establishing an employer brand, organisations are using Social Networking Websites (SNW) such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter to collect information on job candidates that might not be accessible from traditional sources such as CVs and application forms (Collins 2012). There are several quoted advantages of using SM in the hiring and selection processes (Brown and Vaughn, 2011; Davison, Maraist and Bing 2011). These include cost saving, verifying information in an applicant's CV and inferring an applicant's character or personality from information on SNW.

On the other hand, the literature highlights complexities in using SNW in the hiring process. These include the validity and reliability of data collected via SNW, the accuracy of information on SNW, the variability of information across different candidates, and the associated legal implications and international differences in employment law (Brown and Vaughn 2011; Davison, Maraist and Bing 2011; Kluemper and Rosen 2009; Slovensky and Ross 2012; Collins 2012).

## 4.0 Conceptual Framework: Utilising SM in Attracting GenY in Organisations

In light of the preceding discussions on the characteristics of Gen Y and the use of SM in recruitment and selection practice, it is possible to hypothesise on how SM can be utilised to attract Gen Y in organisations. In figure 1, we present a conceptual framework that summarises and organises the three main factors that affect the utilisation of SM to attract GenY in organisations. These factors are GenY characteristics, recruitment practices in which SM has been used, and the associated practical implications of using SM in these practices.

We propose that organisations can effectively use SM to attract GenY candidates when they integrate GenY characteristics into their recruitment practices and then address the different practical implications that arise from the integration of SM in recruitment.

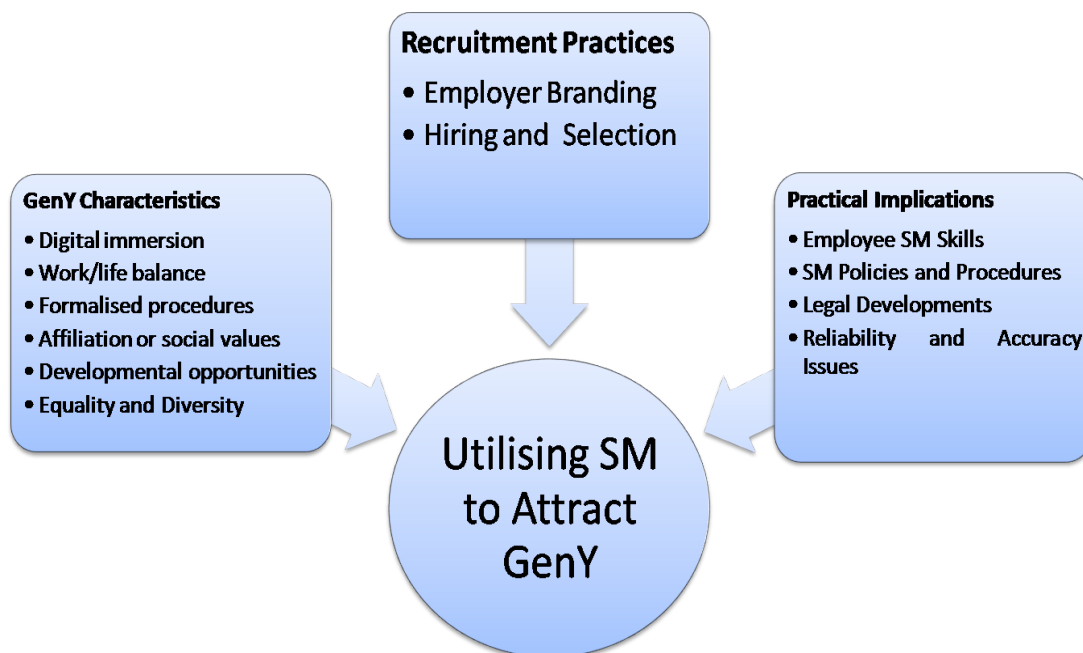


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Utilising SM to Attract GenY in Organisations

Following from the above conceptual framework, are some areas for potential future research studies in which SM can be used effectively to attract GenY.

- **Interactive engagement with employees**

To attract top talent from GenY, organisations can use SM to highlight their organisational culture in ways that supports what GenY are looking for in a future employer. For example, organisations can use blogs and SNW instant messages to keep current and future employees continuously updated as regards to their family

friendly policies and activities, developmental opportunities, and policies/success stories of maintaining diversity and equality in the workplace. An example of an organisation's SM engagement is Ernst & Young's use of SM to attract college students and recent graduates. Ernst & Young's Facebook page contains useful information, such as career tips, video discussion boards, and testimonials from interns and employees who talk about what it is like to work at the firm ([www.facebook.com/ernstandyoungcareers](http://www.facebook.com/ernstandyoungcareers)).

- **Active employees encouragement in the use of SM**

Employers can encourage current employees to share their experiences and success stories on SM applications. Employees can portray what it is like to work for an organisation and even recommend future employees. An illustration is Enterprise Rent-A-Car 'Work with Me' Facebook application where existing employees can recommend jobs to their friends. The application will automatically track when an employee uses it to recommend a job at Enterprise to one of their friends. If that person then applies for a post and is successful, then the recommender will receive an employee referral bonus in line with company policy.

- **Organisational transparency**

Organisations can stimulate open discussions through SM. This would appeal to the GenY audience that look for personalised, less formalised, transparent and prompt discussions. Moreover, engaging senior management in discussions satisfies GenY's need for less formalised relationships with the organisational hierarchy.

- **Gamification in recruitment**

Organisations can engage with GenY in innovative and creative ways through SM. For example, virtual games and worlds allow organisations to create challenges and engage with technologically-savvy GenY audiences. A good illustration of this practice is IBM's use of Virtual Worlds, which they use as an extension of their existing recruitment efforts by hosting pre-scheduled events and inviting specified groups of graduates to meet managers and senior business figures (Eckhardt, Laumer, and Weitzel et al. 2008).

- **Organisational SM policies and procedures**

To use SM effectively and consistently, organisations need to put well researched and tested SM policies and procedures in place to guide them through their SM practices and continuously communicate them to employees. Some of the important concepts that can be integrated into an organisation's SM policies and procedures are as follows:

- **Authenticity and truth**

Organisations must always advertise a true image of the company. Providing false information will lead to the loss of GenY's trust in the organisation and to negative publicity (Foster, Punjaisri, and Cheng, 2010).

- **Continuous staff development**

Organisations need to develop their employees' SM skills and increase their confidence in using SM. This is particularly important when SM is used to build an employer's reputation (Gaines-Ross 2010).

- **Legal developments**

Organisations need to be aware of the legal and ethical factors related to the use of SM and integrate them into their SM policies. Among other things, SM policy should consider privacy and employee rights, discrimination and harassment claims and reputational risk (Steffee 2012).

- **Recruitment process integration**

Organisations need to consider issues related to the reliability and accuracy of SM as a selection tool. As the literature suggests, it is important to use SM along with other more reliable selection tools (Brown and Vaughn 2011; Davison, Maraist and Bing 2011).

## **5.0 Conclusions and Recommendations**

This paper highlights the importance of GenY in the current and future workforce and the growing use of SM related organisational and academic research challenges. There is a growing area of research which deals with these problems but more empirical work is needed in order to be able to evaluate the impact of SM on the recruitment process. The conceptual framework proposed in this short paper suggests directions for both practitioners and researchers and the ways in which SM can be effectively used to attract GenY in the future. This short paper presented a literature review on the ways in which SM can be used to attract GenY to organisations.



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