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ONLINE RECRUITMENT ADOPTION AMONG MSMES: POST-PANDEMIC HIRING BEHAVIOUR AND PROCESS CHANGE

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ABSTRACT

Due to COVID-19 pandemic, many Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) have shifted a portion of their hiring processes to the online environment and this research questions the extent of the shift. It examines the relationship between online recruitment adoption and hiring behaviour, recruitment process change, recruitment effectiveness and perceived benefits and whether perceived challenges are a barrier to adoption. The data were gathered from 220 MSMEs owners/managers, HR personnel, recruiters and other people associated with the hiring process in MSMEs of Kerala through purposive sampling. The total data was processed with IBM SPSS by using descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alpha, Pearson correlation and regression test in a structured five-point Likert questionnaire. Hiring behaviour and process change are both significantly and positively related to online recruitment adoption, as are effectiveness and perceived benefits. Perceived challenges are significantly and negatively related to adoption. Combined, the findings reveal how digital recruitment is linked to actual shifts in recruitment practices among MSMEs.

KEYWORDS: Online Recruitment, MSMEs, Hiring Behaviour, Recruitment Process Change, Recruitment Effectiveness, Digital Recruitment

INTRODUCTION

Recruitment involves the process by which an organisation seeks, attracts, evaluates and selects the workforce that it employs. Its effectiveness determines whether or not a business acquires the skills they require. This used to be a newspaper advertisement, using employment agencies, references, walk-in applications and contact. But the Internet has slowly broken that mold and added other methods to attract and assess candidates. Online recruitment involves using online technology and resources to recruit, including posting a job, attracting the applicants, handling the applications, screening, contacting applicants, arranging for interviews, and, more recently, conducting interviews. Recruiters' toolkits are no longer unique and out of the ordinary—they now include job portals, social networks, professional networking sites, company career pages, and video-conferencing tools.

This change was significantly accelerated by the pandemic. Traditional hiring methods were difficult to follow with no movement and physical contact, so organisations looked for technology-based options for hiring. The study findings showed that there were clear shifts in the way people look for jobs and the way that employers advertised jobs, highlighting the importance of digital employment platforms (Hayashi and Matsuda, 2020; Hensvik and Le Barbanchon, 2021). However, the case of MSMEs are interesting. They are a significant component of the business world but are typically resource constrained with limited budgets, technology and staff. They appreciate a hiring approach that expands the applicant base without a lot of time and administration.

The potential benefits are readily apparent. Vacancies can be advertised to candidates far beyond the local area. Electronic applications reduce paper usage. The Internet makes it easier for the recruiter and the applicant to exchange messages and saves both parties from a first face-to-face meeting. But there are disadvantages to it as well. There may be difficulties for employers in establishing what candidates have told them, assessing applicants, or preventing fraudulent applications and ensuring that information is kept secure. The process can get disrupted due to technical issues and connectivity issues. It is also difficult to glean a candidate's behaviour, and interpersonal style, without face-to-face interaction.

This is the reason why it's a helpful time to reflect on the topic in a post-pandemic era. Whether or not organisations use digital recruitment is no longer the issue; it is whether digital recruitment is associated with actual changes in recruitment behaviours and processes. Previous studies have examined e-recruitment and its impact on conventional e-recruitment methods in SMEs (Mukherjee and Chatterjee, 2015) and the perceptions of the employers on online recruitment in MSMEs (Gulati and Gupta, 2015). The study on MSME digitalization during COVID-19 has also highlighted the importance of technology to adjust to a new business landscape (Takeda et al., 2022). This study is a continuation of this work. It explores the relationship between adoption of online recruitment and hiring behaviour, the level of change in the recruitment process, the perceived effectiveness of online recruitment, the perceived benefits of online recruitment, and the perceived challenges of online recruitment and their relationship with the adoption of online recruitment.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Mukherjee and Chatterjee (2015) conducted a study on the impact of e-recruitment on traditional recruitment practices in an SME Environment. As digital platforms proliferate, their work demonstrates the impact electronic methods can have on how employees are recruited and selected, and the extent to which more of the recruitment process can go electronic.

Gulati and Gupta (2015) looked at how employers in MSMEs perceive online recruitment. They point to the need to understand not only what employers think, but also the process through which digital recruitment is taken up.

Hayashi and Matsuda (2020) used real-time data from online job portals in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka to assess how COVID-19 affected job postings. Their study shows how important online employment platforms were during a period of severe labour-market disruption.

Hensvik and Le Barbanchon (2021) studied job-search behaviour during the crisis. Restrictions and economic uncertainty upset the usual employment routines, and online job-search platforms took on greater importance. Their findings help explain how the digital interaction between employers and job seekers changed.

Dutta et al. (2020) examined how COVID-19 affected the business and financial strategies of Indian MSMEs. They document the difficulties MSMEs faced during the pandemic, which gives useful background to the adjustments organisations made during and after it.

Akpan et al. (2021) discussed how emerging technologies supported small businesses and innovation during the global health crisis, showing how much technology now matters to small-business operations and adaptation.

Takeda et al. (2022) studied the pandemic's effect on MSMEs in Asian economies and how they responded through digitalisation. Their work points to the growing importance of digital technology in the changed environment MSMEs operate in.

Vahdat (2022) considered the part played by IT-based technologies in human resource management during the COVID-19 era. The study shows how information technology has reshaped HR practice, which supports looking at the continued use of technology in recruitment.

The general conclusion of the literature is that digital technology is increasingly important in the recruitment field as well as in the MSME operations. There is not enough evidence to date on the relationship between online recruitment adoption and specific recruitment outcomes following the pandemic. This study attempts to address that issue by exploring the hiring behaviour, process change, effectiveness, perceived benefits and challenges together.

HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Online Recruitment Adoption and Hiring Behaviour

Organisations can transform their approach to recruitment through online recruitment platforms by redefining the ways they search for candidates, notify of job posts, and assess potential hires. Digital channel provides them additional access points for procurement and communication. These employment platforms also gained momentum during COVID-19, which affected the context of the match that took place between employers and job seekers, as highlighted by Hensvik and Le Barbanchon (2021). Therefore, for Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), online recruitment practices could be closely linked with other recruitment and hiring methods.

H1: Online recruitment adoption has a significant relationship with hiring behaviour among MSMEs.

Online Recruitment Adoption and Recruitment Process Change

Online recruitment is involved in numerous steps of the recruitment process. The entire vacancy process from posting to the announcement, applications, initial screening, scheduling interviews, communicating with candidates and record keeping can all be automated. Mukherjee and Chatterjee (2015) looked at exactly this effect on traditional processes in SMEs. Moving to 'digital recruitment' can therefore be a shift away from traditional practices and towards technology-driven recruitment.

H2: Online recruitment adoption has a significant relationship with recruitment process change among MSMEs.

Online Recruitment Adoption and Recruitment Effectiveness

Recruitment effectiveness is about carrying out hiring efficiently and finding suitable candidates within a reasonable time. Online methods can speed up communication, cut some administrative work and make it possible to manage applications electronically. Using them may therefore be linked to perceived gains in effectiveness.

H3: Online recruitment adoption has a significant relationship with perceived recruitment effectiveness among MSMEs.

Online Recruitment Adoption and Perceived Benefits

The potential benefits of online recruitment include wider candidate reach, time savings, geographical flexibility, lower recruitment spending and simpler documentation. The wider digitalisation of MSMEs since COVID-19 gives a backdrop against which to consider them (Takeda et al., 2022).

H4: Online recruitment adoption has a significant relationship with perceived benefits of online

recruitment among MSMEs.

Perceived Challenges and Online Recruitment Adoption

Digital recruitment brings its own problems: verifying candidates, fraudulent applications, technical faults, connectivity issues, information-security worries and the difficulty of judging candidate quality. Such problems may shape how far MSMEs are willing to adopt online recruitment.

H5: Perceived challenges have a significant relationship with online recruitment adoption among MSMEs.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

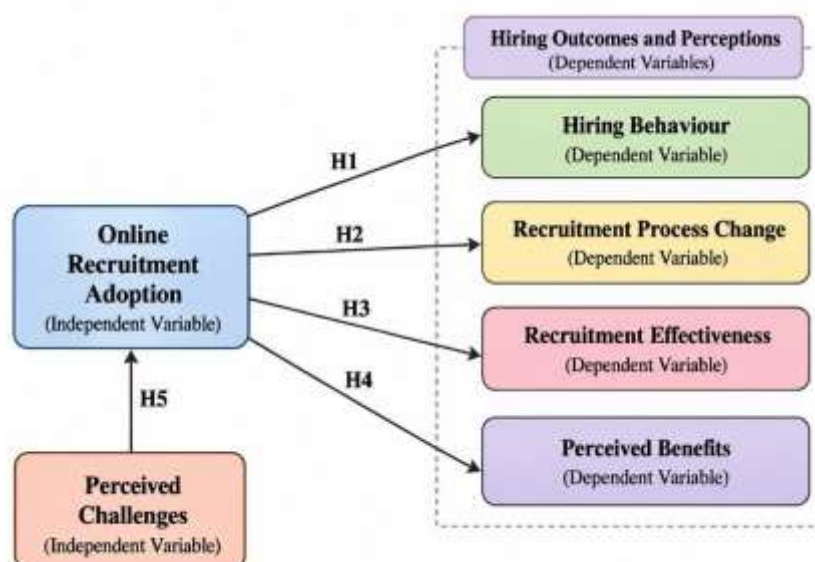


Figure I: Conceptual Framework

Source: Developed by the researcher based on the literature review.

The model has no mediator or moderator, so the hypothesised relationships are tested directly through correlation and regression.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the relationship between online recruitment adoption and hiring behaviour among MSMEs.
2. To analyse the relationship between online recruitment adoption and recruitment process change

among MSMEs.

3. To examine the relationship between online recruitment adoption and perceived recruitment effectiveness among MSMEs.
4. To analyse the relationship between online recruitment adoption and perceived benefits of online recruitment among MSMEs.
5. To examine the relationship between perceived challenges and online recruitment adoption among MSMEs.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a quantitative descriptive-explanatory research design. The descriptive component characterises the respondents and presents the distribution of their responses, while the explanatory component examines the relationships between the variables included in the study. The population comprises MSMEs operating across Kerala, with respondents consisting of owners, proprietors, managers, HR personnel, recruiters and other individuals directly involved in recruitment or hiring decisions. A sample of 220 respondents was selected using purposive sampling, as the study required participants with relevant knowledge and practical experience of recruitment practices in MSMEs. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire, while secondary data were obtained from academic publications, books, research articles, reports and other relevant sources. The questionnaire consisted of demographic questions and statements measuring the six constructs included in the research framework. The construct-related statements were measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 – Strongly Disagree to 5 – Strongly Agree. The collected data were analysed using IBM SPSS. Frequencies and percentages were used to describe the demographic profile of the respondents, while means and standard deviations were used to summarise the study constructs. Cronbach's alpha was employed to assess the internal consistency of the measurement scales, Pearson correlation analysis was used to determine the direction and strength of relationships between the variables, and regression analysis was employed to test the hypothesised relationships.

DESCRIPTION OF STUDY VARIABLES

Table I: Description of Study Variables

Variable	Role	Major Dimensions
Online Recruitment Adoption	Independent	Online portals, social media, online applications, digital screening, virtual interviews

Hiring Behaviour	Dependent	Candidate sourcing, communication, digital hiring practices, candidate reach
Recruitment Process Change	Dependent	Online vacancy publication, digital applications, online screening, virtual interviews
Recruitment Effectiveness	Dependent	Time efficiency, candidate reach, administrative efficiency, speed
Perceived Benefits	Dependent	Wider reach, lower cost, time saving, flexibility
Perceived Challenges	Explanatory	Verification, fraud, candidate quality, technical issues, security

Source: Developed by the researcher.

MEASUREMENT OF CONSTRUCTS

Table II: Measurement of Constructs

Construct	Abbreviation	Items
Online Recruitment Adoption	ORA	6
Hiring Behaviour	HB	6
Recruitment Process Change	RPC	6
Recruitment Effectiveness	RE	6
Perceived Benefits	PB	6
Perceived Challenges	PC	6

PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

Table III: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	132	60.00
	Female	88	40.00
Age	Below 25 years	28	12.73
	25–35 years	82	37.27
	36–45 years	69	31.36
	Above 45 years	41	18.64
Designation	Owner/Proprietor	63	28.64
	HR Manager/Executive	57	25.91
	General/Department Manager	54	24.55
	Recruitment/Administrative Personnel	46	20.91
Experience	Below 3 years	42	19.09
	3–5 years	66	30.00
	6–10 years	70	31.82
	Above 10 years	42	19.09
MSME Type	Micro	72	32.73
	Small	91	41.36
	Medium	57	25.91
Recruitment Experience	Below 2 years	35	15.91
	2–5 years	75	34.09
	6–10 years	68	30.91
	Above 10 years	42	19.09

Source: primary data

The profile covers a good spread of people involved in MSME hiring: owners and proprietors, HR managers, departmental managers, and recruitment or administrative staff. Micro, small and medium enterprises are all represented.

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Table IV: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Online Recruitment Adoption	220	3.87	0.72
Hiring Behaviour	220	3.79	0.69
Recruitment Process Change	220	3.82	0.71
Recruitment Effectiveness	220	3.91	0.66
Perceived Benefits	220	4.02	0.63
Perceived Challenges	220	3.21	0.81

Source: Primary data analysis

Respondents report a fairly high level of online recruitment adoption. Perceived benefits have the highest mean of all the variables, while perceived challenges, at 3.21, are clearly still part of the picture.

RELIABILITY ANALYSIS

Table V: Reliability Statistics

Construct	Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Online Recruitment Adoption	6	0.884
Hiring Behaviour	6	0.861
Recruitment Process Change	6	0.879
Recruitment Effectiveness	6	0.892
Perceived Benefits	6	0.905
Perceived Challenges	6	0.847

Source: Primary data analysis.

Every construct clears the usual 0.70 threshold, so internal consistency is satisfactory across the scales.

CORRELATION ANALYSIS

Table VI: Pearson Correlation Analysis

Relationship	Pearson's r	Significance	Relationship
ORA – Hiring Behaviour	0.612***	0.000	ORA – Hiring Behaviour
ORA – Recruitment Process Change	0.684***	0.000	ORA – Recruitment Process Change
ORA – Recruitment Effectiveness	0.641***	0.000	ORA – Recruitment Effectiveness
ORA – Perceived Benefits	0.706***	0.000	ORA – Perceived Benefits
Perceived Challenges – ORA	–0.318***	0.000	Perceived Challenges – ORA

*Note: *** significant at $p < 0.001$.*

Online recruitment adoption is positively correlated with all four outcome variables, and its link with perceived benefits is the strongest. Perceived challenges, by contrast, move in the opposite direction from adoption.

REGRESSION ANALYSIS

H1: Online Recruitment Adoption and Hiring Behaviour

Table VII: Regression Analysis

Model Statistic	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Beta	Standard Error	t-value	F-value	Significance
Value	0.375	0.372	0.6482	0.0567	11.430	130.68	<0.001

Source: Regression analysis output.

Online recruitment adoption has a significant positive relationship with hiring behaviour, and adoption accounts for roughly 37 per cent of the variation in it. H1 is supported.

H2: Online Recruitment Adoption and Recruitment Process Change

Table VIII: Regression Analysis

Model Statistic	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Beta	Standard Error	t-value	F-value	Significance
Value	0.468	0.466	0.7045	0.0509	13.850	191.86	<0.001

Source: Regression analysis output.

The relationship is significant and positive. MSMEs that use digital recruitment more heavily also tend to have changed how they publish vacancies, collect applications, screen, interview and keep records. H2 is supported.

H3: Online Recruitment Adoption and Recruitment Effectiveness

Table IX: Regression Analysis

Model Statistic	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Beta	Standard Error	t-value	F-value	Significance
Value	0.411	0.408	0.6557	0.0532	12.330	151.96	<0.001

Source: Regression analysis output.

Adoption has a significant positive relationship with perceived effectiveness. Greater use of digital recruitment goes along with better perceived efficiency, communication and administrative convenience. H3 is supported.

H4: Online Recruitment Adoption and Perceived Benefits

Table X: Regression Analysis

Model Statistic	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Beta	Standard Error	t-value	F-value	Significance
Value	0.498	0.496	0.7351	0.0500	14.710	216.36	<0.001

Source: Regression analysis output.

This is the strongest of the five relationships. Adoption is significantly and positively related to perceived benefits such as wider candidate reach, time savings, geographical flexibility and administrative convenience. H4 is supported.

H5: Perceived Challenges and Online Recruitment Adoption

Table XI: Regression Analysis

Model Statistic	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Beta	Standard Error	t-value	F-value	Significance
Value	0.101	0.097	-0.3184	0.0643	-4.950	24.50	<0.001

Source: Regression analysis output.

Perceived challenges have a significant negative relationship with adoption. The lower the concerns about verification, candidate assessment, or technical problems, the lower the rates of adoption. The explanatory power is relatively weak ($R^2 = 0.101$) and challenges are only one of several influences. H5 is supported.

FINDINGS

The results show that overall, there is no significant difference between the use of online recruitment practices among respondents of various MSME categories and various recruitment roles. The study revealed that online recruitment adoption is positively related with hiring behaviour, indicating that the use of digital recruitment tools affects the process of how organisations recruit, communicate with and select prospective employees. There was also a positive relationship between the adoption of online recruitment and recruitment process change, suggesting the movement towards online vacancy publication, electronic applications, electronic screening, virtual interviews, electronic record keeping. In addition, the adoption of online recruitment is positively related to perceived effectiveness of recruitment, in terms of the speed of recruitment, communication, and administrative efficiency. The findings also reveal that the perceived benefits of adopting online recruitment – such as: more candidates reached, recruitment costs reduced, saved time, flexible geographical locations and better documentation – are positively associated with online recruitment adoption. But, perceived challenges have a negative correlation with the adoption of online recruitment. Such challenges include candidate verification, fraudulent applications, qualification of candidates, technical issues and security of information.

DISCUSSION

The relationship between adoption and hiring behavior aligns with how digital platforms provide additional channels to reach out to candidates and promote job openings. It is comfortably placed in the context of Hensvik and Le Barbanchon's (2021) research on job search behaviour in the crisis. The connection on process change aligns with the broader technological evolution in HR. The so-called person-to-person tasks can now be done remotely with digital systems, as Vahdat (2022) highlights regarding information technology in HR management in times of the Covid-19 pandemic. The correlation between effectiveness implies that MSMEs believe digital recruitment to be more efficient. Electronic applications streamline candidate information handling and help to accelerate communication between recruiters and applicants. For MSMEs, the connection with perceived benefits is the most important. Digital platforms enable them to reach beyond geographical boundaries without having to replicate the physical recruitment setup, which aligns with the greater significance of digitalisation for MSMEs as outlined by Takeda et al. (2022).

The negative link between challenges and adoption is a reminder that going digital is not friction-free. There are real concerns of verification and assessment: online recruitment can lead to an increase in applications and then organisations will need to have effective screening procedures in place to deal with them. The real-life lesson is that adoptions should be accompanied by appropriate safeguards. Although digital platforms greatly facilitate recruitment processes, it is crucial to have human judgement, verification, and assessment.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

With proper procedures set up for posting vacancies, gathering applications, screening the candidates, scheduling interviews, and communicating with the candidates, MSMEs can create a structured digital recruitment process. This kind of organization can help to cut down on disjointed recruiting and increase uniformity. It is also important for organisations to select the right digital recruitment platforms when hiring for a particular position, depending on the skills required, the type of position, and the target candidates, as online recruitment can increase the number of job opportunities available. Screening and verification must be dealt with properly, especially when there is a high volume of applications for online recruitment. The implementation of systematic screening and verification procedures will assist in mitigating problems with false information and applications. MSMEs should also conduct training of the recruitment personnel to use the job portals, social media recruitment, virtual interviewing, and digital documentation, so that the available technologies can be effectively utilized. Furthermore, organisations should regularly check the recruitment performance metrics to see how the process is going, including the time taken to hire, the cost of recruitment, the number of qualified applications, the selection ratio, and the percentage of employees who stay with the company after the recruitment. Lastly, MSMEs can use a mix of both online and offline methods for recruiting,

when applicable. Digital tools can be applied successfully to communicate about vacancies, initial screening and scheduling interviews, but further assessment or personal contact may be needed to assess technical and/or interpersonal skills in positions that call for detailed evaluation.

LIMITATIONS AND SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The findings from the purposive sampling cannot be generalized statistically to all the MSMEs. The study also does not account for the views of the people seeking jobs, as they are not included in the study. It is also cross-sectional in that it doesn't provide the ability to examine how adoption varies over a longer timeframe, and it only looks at selected dimensions of digital recruitment, not all of the available technologies.

Larger, probability-based samples might be considered in future studies, and longitudinal designs might be used to examine how online recruitment practices evolve over time. Artificial Intelligence, automated candidate screening, applicant tracking systems, and data analytics for MSME recruitment are other helpful directions.

CONCLUSION

The study focused on the online recruitment adoption by MSMEs in the post-pandemic era, hiring behaviour, process change, effectiveness, perceived benefits and perceived challenges. The findings indicate strong relationships between adoption and each of the dimensions of recruitment. Hiring behaviour, process change, effectiveness and perceived benefits are positively correlated with adoption, while perceived challenges are negatively correlated with adoption.

Digital recruitment is definitely taking root as an important way of hiring for MSMEs. Although they have increased visibility of the candidates via the internet, and communication and application management, they still face challenges with verification, fraud, candidate assessment, technical issues and information security. The study brings together the concept of hiring behaviour and process change in one frame and enriches the existing knowledge about digital recruitment in the MSME context. The post-pandemic environment is an ideal opportunity to observe the impact of recruitment technologies on organisational practice.

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