

Research on Information Adoption Behavior of University Students in Job Search Postprint

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Date: 2023-04-01T00:00:00+00:00

Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] This study explores the information adoption behavior of university students in job search to provide theoretical reference for job search optimization. [Method/Process] Based on the “cognition-attitude-behavior” model, a research framework for information adoption behavior in job search was constructed and empirical investigation was conducted. Data on university students’ information adoption behavior during job search were collected through questionnaire surveys, and analyzed using mathematical statistics, correspondence analysis, and other methods to explore the internal mechanism of adoption behavior. [Results/Conclusions] University students demonstrate moderate levels of self-cognition and channel cognition regarding information adoption; attitude formation is related to search purposes with diversified evaluation criteria; specific adoption behaviors are concentrated, while adoption types vary across search contexts.

Full Text

Preamble

A Study on College Students’ Information Adoption Behavior in Job Search

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Abstract: [Purpose/Significance] This study explores college students’ information adoption behavior during job searching to provide theoretical insights for optimizing job search processes. [Method/Process] Based on the “Cognitive-Attitude-Behavior” model, a research framework for information adoption behav-

ior in job searching was constructed and empirically investigated. Data on college students' information adoption behaviors during job searching were collected through questionnaires and analyzed using mathematical statistics and correspondence analysis to explore the underlying mechanisms of adoption behavior. [Results/Conclusion] College students exhibit moderate levels of self-awareness and channel awareness regarding information adoption. Attitude formation is related to search purposes, with diverse inspection and evaluation criteria. Specific adoption behaviors are concentrated, while adoption types vary according to search contexts.

Keywords: college student; job information search; adoption behavior; cognitive-attitude-behavior model

Classification Number: G251

DOI: 10.13266/j.issn.0252-3116.2020.18.012

1. Introduction

In recent years, college student employment has attracted widespread societal attention. The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security has mandated: "Utilize 'Internet+' technology to promote cross-regional sharing of employment information, and make effective use of precise recruitment platforms for college graduates" [1]. Evidently, obtaining suitable job information is the primary prerequisite for college students to secure employment successfully. However, job searching is a dynamic, cyclical self-regulation process [2], and job information behavior can essentially be viewed as an information-seeking process [3]. Consequently, information-seeking activities permeate the entire job search journey, with obtaining job information that matches personal needs and reducing information asymmetry serving as the main objectives of college students' job information-seeking activities [4].

Given that job information is relatively dispersed and highly time-sensitive, job seekers must employ multiple channels to obtain it. Social media search has gradually become the most important and widely used method for job information searching [7]. College students typically use multiple search channels comprehensively to achieve complementarity [8], and besides traditional searches, they obtain personalized information through following and customizing, as well as through social relationship-based social searching—these have become the primary job information-seeking methods for domestic college students [9]. In search, browse, and interaction contexts, the active and passive information acquisition modes have gradually evolved into the main job search methods for college students, suggesting that their adoption behaviors may differ from the adoption mechanisms underlying traditional information search activities. During job searching, job seekers need to establish connections between obtained information and their own job-seeking needs, judge whether to adopt the information, and apply adopted effective and useful information to guide job-seeking

activities, thereby continuously revising and adjusting job search strategies.

Existing literature on job information searching primarily focuses on search costs and outcome-influencing factors [10]. Some researchers have examined how job seekers, information sources, and obtained information affect search behavior, emphasizing the application of relevant information behavior theories. Studies often select broad job-seeking populations or easily accessible college student samples for investigation, with few specifically examining college students' employment information-seeking behavior. Research on college student job searching has predominantly adopted sociological, economic, and educational perspectives based on job search theory [11-12], which examines job search and matching issues from the perspective of understanding labor market mechanisms. A limited number of domestic scholars have explored college students' job information-seeking from a behavioral perspective [13-14], focusing on analyzing active information-seeking behavior patterns, with empirical studies mostly using cross-sectional data. In the field of information behavior research, studies on college students' job information-seeking behavior remain scarce, some viewpoints lack empirical support [8], and insufficient attention has been paid to the characteristics of the job-seeking domain [15]. In contexts of information dispersion, especially when customization, push notifications, and following functions are widely applied, job seekers' combined use of online and offline social relationships to conduct effective and reasonable adoption can alleviate information asymmetry problems and facilitate correct, reasonable decision-making. However, researchers have not yet paid attention to the adoption of these fragmented information from multiple channels.

Therefore, this study explores college students' information adoption behavior during job searching. The findings can, on one hand, help college students obtain effectively matched job information, inspire search behaviors, and enhance information literacy during job searching. On the other hand, they provide theoretical references for information publishers to reasonably select job posting methods and channels.

2. Research Framework for Information Adoption Behavior in Job Searching

Environmental psychology's research on how physical environments influence individual behavior has proposed the famous "SOR" model, where S (stimulus) represents external environmental stimuli, O (organism) represents the subject's emotional perception, and R (response) represents the reactions (such as adoption or avoidance behaviors) that the subject makes after receiving stimuli and undergoing certain internal mental activities [16]. For information adoption behavior in job searching, the appearance of information constitutes stimulus S. The widely applied "Cognitive-Attitude-Behavior" model, which explains human behavioral mechanisms, posits that "people's level of cognition determines their attitude toward action, and attitude determines behavioral intention" [17]. Therefore, the research framework for adoption behavior should consist of three

components: cognition, attitude, and action. Specifically, users receiving information stimuli can only take further action after developing cognition about the information's topic and format. Thus, when the stimulus of discovering relevant information occurs, the subject's cognition of and attitude toward the information constitute the emotional perception ("O"), while "R" represents specific adoption behaviors toward the information. Evidently, the "Cognitive-Attitude-Behavior" model is suitable for explaining the adoption behavior process following information stimulus occurrence during job searching. Correspondingly, college students' information adoption behaviors comprise three levels: after information appears, college students cognitively process it through active observation and thinking about content and format; they then develop attention toward and inspect and evaluate the information, forming corresponding attitudes; finally, cognition and attitude influence their behaviors of "exploring," "saving," "utilizing," and "sharing" the information.

2.1 Cognition of Adopted Information in Job Searching

Users discover information when curiosity, interest, usability, and needs drive attention-triggering mechanisms [18]. Based on prior knowledge, experience, and issues of concern, users develop corresponding cognition of appearing information. Cognition refers to the internal mental activities and processing that occur after the stimulus of discovering relevant information. For users receiving information stimuli, user, environment, information, and need factors are four essential elements for cognition formation. Accordingly, for cognition exploration before job information adoption behavior, this study focuses on two dimensions of college students' job information cognition: self-cognition and job search channel cognition. It attempts to explore: How do college students subjectively cognize themselves and job information? Are they aware of and clear about job information needs and search channels?

Combined with the mechanisms of information-seeking occurrence and the characteristics of college students' cognitive psychological development, this paper focuses on investigating two dimensions of college students' job information cognition: self-cognition and job search channel cognition. It attempts to explore: How do college students' subjective cognition of themselves and job information affect adoption? Are they aware of and clear about job information needs and search channels? Self-cognition involves whether individuals have understanding and positioning of their personality, interests, traits, and the types of information they care about. Environmental cognition refers to understanding and using job search channels. Need cognition refers to the internal activity of individuals weighing the value of information against their current need status and goals—whether they can specifically articulate problems and needs related to their job search is an important factor influencing cognition formation.

2.2 Attitude Formation Toward Adopted Information

Cognitive psychology proposes that attitude formation is a complete process of attention and judgment gradually developed based on individual cognition [17]. First, users develop internal mental activities and process obtained information. Then, users “pay attention” to and “inspect” information related to current problems, concerns, and needs. Chen Weidong proposed that in academic new media environments, users in browsing, searching, commenting, or interacting states, when encountering information stimuli, develop active attention behaviors, perceive excitement or pleasure, and subsequently adopt stopping behaviors [18]. Research indicates that feature identifiers related to problems and interests can attract user attention [19]. From attention to stopping, users’ immersion in problems gradually increases, 执着于 conducting effective inspections of information quality, practicality, and authenticity, subsequently deciding whether to use the information. If inspected information matches users’ existing cognitive structure content, they assimilate the information; if contradictory, users connect it with internal cognition, update and improve original cognition, and form new cognitive structures [20]. Therefore, this section investigates user information attitudes by focusing on information characteristics and content, attempting to explore: How do college students evaluate information usefulness? What factors influence attitude formation toward information adoption?

2.3 Specific Behavioral Manifestations of Information Adoption

From the “Cognitive-Attitude-Behavior” model perspective, information adoption is the result of value judgment in attitude formation, emphasizing the behavioral process of information being accepted and subsequently used, saved, shared, or deeply explored [17]. Awamura Michihisa proposed three forms of information encountering utilization: personal use, sharing, and storage. Personal use emphasizes users utilizing information to satisfy their own information needs; “sharing” refers to users sharing information with other users to satisfy others’ information needs; “storage” refers to users saving information for future absorption and utilization [21]. Since college students currently obtain job information through multiple channels via active and passive methods, these three utilization forms apply to exploring specific behavioral manifestations of job information adoption. Accordingly, this study examines college students’ information adoption through three aspects: different adoption behaviors, utilization types, and main uses of information, attempting to explore: What are the main adoption behaviors of college students toward information currently? What types of information do college students preferentially adopt? What are the main uses of adopted information?

3. Research Process and Results Discussion

To obtain data on college students’ job search information adoption behavior, this study employed a questionnaire survey covering four parts: basic personal

information, college students' cognition of themselves and job searching, attitudes toward information during job searching, and utilization behaviors of adopted information. The questionnaire was distributed and collected through Wenjuanxing website. Distributed on May 3, 2019, for a duration of one week, 308 responses were collected. After eliminating 40 invalid questionnaires, 268 valid questionnaires remained, yielding an effective recovery rate of 87.01%.

The overall sample characteristics were as follows: balanced gender ratio (46.27% male, 53.73% female), coverage of all college grades (11.6% freshmen, 13.8% sophomores, 26.1% juniors, 39.9% seniors, 1.1% fifth-year undergraduates, 7.5% graduate students), and majors covering arts, sciences, engineering, arts, and physical education (42.1% liberal arts, 53.4% science and engineering, 4.5% arts and physical education). Overall, the sample was representative. The questionnaire scale's reliability and validity test results showed a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.902, and KMO and Bartlett's test result of 0.901, with overall reliability and validity values within ideal ranges.

3.1 Information Adoption Cognition

3.1.1 College Students' Self-Cognition

- (1) College students' self-cognition is an important factor influencing information cognition during job searching. Self-cognition specifically manifests as personal information literacy, including awareness, knowledge, and skills—understanding and articulating what information is needed when, possessing the ability to retrieve, evaluate, and effectively use required information, and having the capacity to actively search for needed information. A Likert scale (5-point) was used to measure college students' information literacy. Self-cognition survey results (see Table 1 and Table 2) showed a self-cognition mean of 21.65, representing 72.2% of the maximum value of 30. Among these, literacy in technical aspects ("able to use relevant search tools to obtain information") was highest, followed by awareness aspects ("able to actively search for information"), while literacy in assessing and expressing personal information needs was relatively low.
- (2) Factors influencing college students' self-cognition. To explore how individual characteristics affect self-cognition, one-way ANOVA was used to analyze differences in self-cognition among different genders, grades, and majors. Results (see Table 3) showed significant differences in self-cognition among students of different grades ($P < 0.05$). Further analysis of means and standard deviations for self-cognition across grades (see Table 2) revealed that seniors and fifth-year students had higher job-seeking self-cognition, with an overall trend of cognition increasing with grade level.

3.1.2 Cognition of Job Search Channels

- (1) Overall situation of job search channel cognition. To investigate college students' cognition of job search channels, the questionnaire asked about familiarity and usage of channel types, usage frequency, and utilization of channel functions. Statistical analysis found that college students had the highest cognition of offline channels such as campus job fairs, campus bulletin board posters, and information exchange among teachers and friends, accounting for 42% of total observations. Traditional website searching and browsing and social networking sites accounted for 32% and 15% respectively, with a relatively small proportion using social networking sites to obtain job information. Through defining multiple response variable sets, statistical analysis of channels familiar to and frequently used by college students (see Table 4) found that among offline channels, the highest proportion of students frequently used campus job fairs to obtain information, while familiarity and usage of social recruitment websites like Dajie.com were relatively low. Survey statistics on job channel function usage are shown in Table 5 , revealing that students generally sometimes used functions provided by job search apps, with only 30% frequently or always using them. Among these, usage of internal search functions was relatively higher than other browsing and customization functions.
- (2) Influencing factors on job search channel cognition. To explore whether individual factors affect channel cognition, one-way ANOVA was used to analyze differences in channel usage and function usage among students of different genders, grades, and majors. Results showed no significant differences in cognition of search channels and functions between different genders and majors (ANOVA P-values of 0.247 and 0.196 respectively). However, significant differences existed across grades in channel usage frequency (see Table 6 and Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper]), with seniors, fifth-year students, and graduate students having the highest usage frequency, followed by graduate students and above, showing a gradual upward trend from freshmen to seniors.

3.2 Attitude Formation Toward Adopted Information

Attitude formation is a process from attention to inspection. Attention triggering is related to information type, with scholars proposing that users generally pay attention to problem-related and interest-related issues [20,22]. The inspection stage of obtained information is also an important factor in attitude formation among college students. Small-scale interviews were conducted with 12 college students (9 undergraduates and 3 graduate students) on attitude formation issues such as "What types of information easily attract attention during searching?" and "What criteria are used to inspect whether information is helpful for job searching?" The interviews were recorded and content-analyzed. Based on this foundation, questionnaires were designed summarizing the information types that attract college students' attention and the criteria for inspecting information. The survey included an item "What types of information would you

pay attention to?” to examine attention to interest-related and problem-related information during job searching. Information factor inspection criteria were measured using a five-point scale to examine attitudes toward the importance of four aspects: information content quality, relevance, source reliability, and information service/interface. Reliability analysis showed Cronbach’ s Alpha coefficient of 0.859 (>0.7), and KMO and Bartlett’ s test result of 0.816, with overall validity within the ideal range.

3.2.1 Analysis of College Students’ Attention to Information Analysis results showed that over half (51.1%) of college students somewhat or strongly agreed that they frequently encounter useful or interesting information during job searching, while those uncertain accounted for 32.1% of the total. Cross-analysis results of encountered information attention types and job search scenarios (see Table 7) revealed that in job-seeking scenarios, college students paid the highest attention to problem-related information about intended cities or positions, recruitment information, and benefits (62.2%), as well as job interview and work experience sharing information that might be useful (57.2%). Interest-related information about work environment and corporate culture of companies of interest accounted for a large proportion across all search scenarios. Students in part-time search contexts paid more attention to part-time recruitment information and companies’ training and development plans, while those in entrepreneurship contexts focused more on entrepreneurship experience sharing information.

3.2.2 Factors Influencing College Students’ Job Information Attitude Formation To explore factors influencing job information attitude formation, information factors and scenarios when college students encountered job search information were statistically analyzed. Correlation analysis (see Table 8) found that the four inspection criteria for information factors were positively correlated with attitudes toward job information. The higher the information quality, content relevance, source reliability, and information service standards, the higher college students’ recognition of obtaining useful or interesting information. Survey statistics on information factor inspection criteria are shown in Table 9 . College students generally considered all four inspection criteria highly important, with information source reliability being the highest, followed by quality of information services and interface operability. Regarding occurrence scenarios, survey statistics on information acquisition scenarios (see Table 10) found that interviews and job fairs were the most common scenarios for obtaining useful and interesting information, followed by job category information retrieval (54.8%), with offline chats with family and friends being the least common (26.8%).

3.3 Characteristics of Information Adoption Behavior

3.3.1 Types of Information Adoption Behaviors To examine college students’ utilization behaviors toward job information, the survey included the item “What types of information would you adopt?” Results (see Table 11) showed

that the smallest proportion directly ignored discovered information. Nearly three-quarters chose to save it for later use, with the next largest group continuing to follow up and deeply search for related topics. Direct browsing/using and sharing behaviors were relatively less common. Regarding the sequence of searching for information versus using encountered information, the vast majority of college students chose to first save discovered information, then return to current job search activities, and process the saved information after completing search tasks.

3.3.2 Adoption Preferences and Uses of Job Information To explore information usage types and purposes, the survey included items “What types of information would you adopt?” and “How do you think inadvertently encountered information helps you?” to analyze college students’ job information reception preferences and uses. Results for adopted information types and uses are shown in Table 12. More people preferred information about work environment, corporate culture, and surrounding environment of companies of interest, recruitment information and benefits for intended cities or positions, and job interview and work experience sharing information that might be useful. Usage rates were lower for part-time, entrepreneurship, and entertainment news about cities and companies of interest. Regarding information uses, over 50% believed job information could help obtain recruitment information, improve understanding of target companies and positions, revise and improve existing job search directions and goals, and accumulate employment and entrepreneurship experience.

3.3.3 Influencing Factors on Information Adoption Behavior To examine whether different information types in job searching produce different usage behaviors, multiple correspondence analysis was used to determine if correspondence exists between them (see Figure 2 [Figure 2: see original paper]). Results indicated associations between save, continuous follow-up, and deep search behaviors and information types such as recruitment information, experience sharing, corporate culture and environment, and intended company position recruitment. The behavioral patterns of information adoption types were similar to attention generation patterns—college students with different search purposes preferentially adopted information related to their current problems. Interest-related encountered information fell into two categories: one could improve understanding of target companies and positions or might be useful later, such as corporate culture environment and experience sharing. This type of information could test the correctness of existing job search cognition, revise and improve job search goals, and help users increase knowledge reserves, thus showing high proportions across different search purposes. The other category was entertainment information such as news about cities and companies of interest, which had no specific use and thus showed low adoption rates across all scenarios. Comparative analysis of information types that attracted attention versus those that were adopted revealed that the proportion of observations for

all information types was generally higher in the attention stage than in the usage stage, indicating a filtering process from attention to usage that screens out some information.

3.4 Discussion of Results

3.4.1 Moderate Levels of Self-Cognition and Channel Cognition in Adoption From the overall cognitive level of college students, the ratio of each mean value for self-cognition and job channel cognition to the maximum value of 5 was between 60%-75% (this study defines ratios below 60% as low; 60%-75% as medium; 75%-90% as good; 90% as excellent). The results indicate a medium level of cognition toward job information, with grade level significantly affecting college students' cognition. Further analysis of survey results showed that seniors and fifth-year students had relatively higher urgency and information needs for job searching, as well as higher frequencies of channel and function usage and stronger awareness of actively searching for information. This reflects to some extent that the urgency of information needs promotes college students' active information-seeking activities, thereby enhancing their job search cognition. Regarding overall self-cognition, most college students have awareness to actively search for information and possess information skills such as proficient use of search engines and abilities to evaluate and utilize information, but are relatively weaker in clearly articulating their information needs. From the channel cognition perspective, college students mainly concentrate on obtaining job information through offline channels such as campus job fairs, showing relatively low familiarity and usage of interactive recruitment websites like Dajie.com, and relatively weak awareness of using search, browse, and interaction functions of job search channels for job seeking. Therefore, from an information literacy cultivation perspective, college students should improve cognitive abilities and develop awareness of using multiple job search channel functions for information seeking. Based on offline searching, they should fully utilize personalized customization and information push services on interactive networks and job websites to obtain information related to their interests and needs, thereby continuously revising and improving their job information needs and articulating them accurately to increase the probability of information encountering.

3.4.2 Attention in Adoption Attitudes Related to Search Purpose, with Pluralistic Inspection and Evaluation Criteria Overall, college students have relatively high evaluations of the usefulness of information obtained during job searching. The vast majority believe they frequently encounter useful or interesting information, indicating the importance of active information acquisition channels such as following and customizing in job searching. However, a small portion of college students are uncertain about encountering useful information during job searching. Case analysis of relevant data found that compared to those who somewhat or strongly agreed (cognition mean of 22.3), college students who were uncertain (cognition mean of 21.2) had lower

self-cognition, suggesting that cognition affects college students' perception of adopted information usefulness. Regarding attention preferences, college students with different search purposes preferentially pay attention to problems related to their current concerns. Job-seeking scenario students prefer recruitment information and benefits, while entrepreneurship/part-time scenario students prefer entrepreneurship experience and part-time information. From the inspection perspective, college students consider information quality, relevance, publisher reliability, and service quality all important evaluation criteria. Therefore, channels providing job information should implement corresponding information filtering mechanisms and review measures to ensure information source credibility, simple and easy-to-operate interfaces, and high-quality information content, providing college students with high-quality, reliable, and timely job information.

3.4.3 Concentrated Specific Adoption Behaviors, with Adoption Types Diversifying According to Search Context The main behavior of college students using job information is to save it first, followed by continuous follow-up and deep searching for related topics. Regarding the sequence between search tasks and information processing, Guan Jiawa et al. found that many users terminate initial target searches and shift to encountered information [23]. However, this study found that the vast majority of college students save discovered information first, process current search tasks, and then return to process the saved information. This may be because, unlike broad information searching, job searching involves specific goals, and college students can recognize the urgency and importance of current search tasks and will not deviate from original search tasks due to encountered information. Regarding saved information types, they preferentially adopt saving and deep search behaviors toward recruitment information, experience sharing, and corporate culture/environment information. The behavioral patterns of information adoption types are similar to attention generation patterns—college students with different search purposes preferentially adopt information related to their current problems. Interest-related encountered information is divided into two categories: one can improve understanding of target companies and positions or might be useful later, such as corporate culture environment and experience sharing. This type of information can test the correctness of existing job search cognition, revise and improve job search goals, and help users increase knowledge reserves, thus showing high proportions across different search purposes. The other category is entertainment information such as news about cities and companies of interest, which has no specific use and thus shows low adoption rates across all scenarios. Comparative analysis of information types that attracted attention versus those that were adopted revealed that the proportion of observations for all information types was generally higher in the attention stage than in the usage stage, indicating a filtering process from attention to usage that screens out some information.

In summary, college students should, on one hand, cultivate good personal

information management habits, using convenient network technologies and well-functioning job application services to instantly store and share attention-attracting information to prevent missing useful information and more fully realize the value of various job information. Information literacy can be enhanced through appropriate channels, enabling students to consciously reflect on information acquisition processes and achieve iterative optimization of search behaviors and task cognition based on understanding the characteristics of various information sources and effective acquisition methods. On the other hand, they should develop thinking and cognition about the primary-secondary relationship between current search tasks and information acquisition to avoid losing direction among numerous information sources and deviating from original job search goals. Additionally, job websites should improve personalized recommendation functions, using historical data to analyze and mine user search intentions, thereby achieving precise recommendations, providing currently needed information types for people in different job search scenarios, and creating better search experiences.

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Fan Zhe: Topic selection and conceptualization, outline development, guidance on data collection and analysis, paper writing and revision.

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Sun Xiaoning: Provided paper revision suggestions, participated in paper revision.

Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

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