

PATHWAYS TO EQUALITY: E-RECRUITMENT, SOCIAL-MEDIA, AND GENDER BALANCE

Iftikhar Hussain¹ and Muhammad Shahnawaz Adil²

Abstract

This study explores the vital intersection of e-recruitment and gender equality, a key pillar of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) established in 2015. With an emphasis on SDG 5—Gender Equality—this research examines the impact of online recruitment practices in fostering gender parity within the workforce, with a particular emphasis on the moderating role of social media. Drawing from previous studies, this paper examines major oil and gas marketing companies in Pakistan, uncovering a significant correlation between e-recruitment and gender equality. However, findings divulge that while social media plays a role, its impact on this relationship is partial, signifying that other factors of exploration may also contribute to enhancing gender diversity in the employment processes. These insights provide valuable inferences for organizations aiming to achieve gender balance through digital recruitment strategies, particularly in the context of emerging markets.

Keywords: E-recruitment, Gender Equality, Social Media, Sustainable Development Goals

INTRODUCTION

Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right but also a basis for a prosperous, innovative, and sustainable society. Documented globally and preserved as one of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 5), it emphasizes that individuals, regardless of gender, deserve equivalent opportunities, treatment, and rights in all spheres of life, predominantly in the workplace (Sultana et al., 2021). Accomplishing gender equality is critical not just for social justice but for enhancing organizational performance. Equal access to resources, pay, professional development, and leadership opportunities enhances organizational innovation and efficiency, as diverse perspectives and talents come together to drive better decision-making and inclusive growth (Shan & Wang, 2024). In an increasingly competitive global business environment, advancing gender equality is not only a moral responsibility but also a strategic obligation for generating diverse, inclusive, and high-performing workplaces.

Despite the recognized importance of gender equality, unfair practices still persist in many organizations. However, fostering gender equality in the workplace has been shown to meaningfully enhance organizational performance. Research by Rossi et al. (2017) demonstrates that companies endorsing gender equality outperform those that do not. Similarly, Khan et al. (2017) found that a broader gender range within organizations not only augments the talent pool but also drives better company performance. This evidence highlights the tangible business benefits of dropping gender bias and highlights the need for equitable recruitment practices that eliminate discrimination and promote inclusivity.

To address such prejudices and promote greater inclusivity, recruitment processes have evolved significantly in recent years. Recruitment encompasses recognizing, searching for, and attracting potential candidates to fill vacancies within an organization. The more candidates an organization can reach, the better its chances of identifying the most suitable talent, thereby strengthening its overall workforce (Antonova et al., 2020). The revolution of e-recruitment has completely changed the way companies hire

¹PhD Scholar, Department of Business Administration, Iqra University, Karachi, Pakistan. Email: knowledgeclaimant@gmail.com

²Associate Professor, Department of Business Administration, Iqra University, Karachi, Pakistan. Email: shahnawazadil@iqra.edu.pk

people. Armstrong (2009) explains that online recruitment includes promoting job opportunities and making communication easier between the employers and candidates through social media. This process improves the division of job ads and makes the application process better, giving companies access to a wider and multiple group of candidates, helping to encourage equality in the workplace.

As e-recruitment has developed, nowadays social media has become a very important part of how businesses use different hiring strategies. Earlier it was used for social interaction, but now social media has become a powerful communication tool, and all credit goes to advancements in technology (Chen et al., 2017; Veldeman et al., 2017). Moreover, companies are using social media to find and connect with eligible candidates. As stated by Buettner (2017), social media is now an important part of the hiring process because it offers a quick and efficient way to find the right individuals. When integrated with traditional job boards, it enhances an organization's ability to efficiently recruit talent across diverse geographies (Madia, 2011). As technological advancements continue to shape global recruitment processes, companies are no longer limited by location, enabling them to access a wider and more diverse pool of candidates (Stone et al., 2015). This shift positions social media as a crucial tool in advancing both recruitment efficiency and gender equality.

Despite the widespread adoption of e-recruitment and social media in modern hiring practices, there remains a gap in understanding how these technologies impact gender equality in the workforce. While e-recruitment offers organizations access to a larger, more diverse pool of candidates, and social media enables targeted, efficient hiring, it is unclear whether these tools genuinely mitigate gender bias or merely reinforce existing discriminatory practices. The rapid integration of social media into recruitment strategies has also raised concerns regarding the potential for unconscious bias in candidate selection, particularly when personal information is accessible on public platforms. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate the extent to which e-recruitment, moderated by social media, influences gender equality in organizational hiring processes, and whether these technologies can truly foster an inclusive and equitable workforce.

Research Questions

To address the above stated issues, these investigation enquiries to find answers to the following research questions:

RQ1: Does the online recruitment affect the Gender Equality?

RQ2: Does the social media moderate the association between the online-recruitment and the gender equality?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender Equality

Gender equality has seen notable development over recent years, with increased female representation in leadership roles across political and corporate sectors (Keohane, 2020). Women are increasingly breaking barriers, occupying decision-making positions, and contributing to organizational success. However, significant disparities remain, as evidenced by UN data. Globally, women own only 13% of agricultural land and hold just 23.7% of political positions, highlighting persistent gender imbalances (United Nations, 2015). In developing countries, harmful practices such as genital mutilation and child marriage continue to marginalize women and girls, demonstrating that the path to gender equality remains complex and multifaceted.

The United Nations has outlined nine specific targets to address these inequities and foster gender

equality, ranging from eliminating violence and discrimination to ensuring equal opportunities in political and economic spheres. Some factors hinder women's ability to achieve senior leadership positions, particularly in boardrooms (Rossi et al., 2017). Without equal treatment and opportunities, women struggle to access Board of Director (BOD) roles, despite their potential to contribute significantly to organizational success.

Research consistently underscores the positive impact of gender diversity on company performance. Rossi et al. (2017) demonstrate that gender diversity can elevate organizational outcomes, while Khan et al. (2017) found that female representation on boards improves overall performance. Women in leadership roles often enhance board functions and influence positive policy changes (Rao & Tilt, 2016). Female leaders, recognized for their emotional intelligence and human-oriented approach, are effective in understanding and managing workplace dynamics, fostering better performance among female subordinates (Haque et al., 2017). Additionally, Flabbi et al. (2019) observed that female leaders tend to promote inclusivity and teamwork, further enhancing organizational cohesion.

E-Recruitment

The adoption of e-Human Resource Management (E-HRM) has revolutionized HR tasks, enabling organizations to leverage information technology for more efficient and effective workforce management (Strohmeier, 2020). E-HRM integrates web-based technologies to implement HR strategies, influencing organizational outcomes and employee behavior significantly (Halder et al., 2024). A key component of E-HRM, e-recruitment, offers a range of benefits, including 24/7 application accessibility, job previews, organizational promotion, and automated candidate screening. The success of e-recruitment largely depends on the organization's implementation approach, which can reduce advertisement costs and enhance employer branding (Parry & Tyson, 2011). E-recruitment has transformed traditional recruitment processes by enabling organizations to identify and attract a broader, more diverse talent pool. E-recruitment thus provides an opportunity to access candidates from diverse backgrounds, potentially supporting greater gender equality in the workforce. The cost-effectiveness of online job advertisements compared to traditional methods, coupled with the speed of automated screening, allows organizations to optimize their recruitment processes while saving time and resources (Parry & Tyson, 2011). Furthermore, e-recruitment helps companies to build their brand by showcasing their culture, values, and bonuses through websites, social media, and employee success stories. The capability of e-recruitment to support gender equality depends on how companies use these social media platforms. However, it opens up the doors for more opportunities to reach a wider range of candidates, it's important to ensure that algorithms and screening tools are fair, as they could unintentionally cause bias (Strohmeier, 2020). Therefore, when the process of e-recruitment is managed fairly, it improves not only the organizational performance but also promotes gender equality.

Social Media

Social media platforms which are using Web 2.0 technology, permitting their users to create and share content, including blogs, wikis, user generated content and forums (Aldahdouh et al., 2020). Many famous platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, and WhatsApp play an important role in both social and professional life. For example, Facebook is mostly used by students because it's very easy to use and has a wide reach, while LinkedIn is an important resource for job seekers, helping them to build their professional profiles and find jobs. (Chen et al., 2017; Aldahdouh et al., 2020). Research has shown that social media can be a very useful tool in education by forming communities where people can work

together, interact with each other, and also share knowledge (Lei et al., 2021). With the evolution of social media, it has shifted people from using only for personal communication tool to a powerful platform where people promote their businesses and services. Over time, as technology has advanced, social media has shifted from being just about personal connections to becoming a powerful tool for business owners to promote their businesses, products and services (Chen et al., 2017). As businesses increasingly integrate social media into their core operations, it has become essential for recruitment strategies. Social media platforms have transitioned from being simple communication tools to integral components of modern marketing and recruitment efforts (Khanal et al., 2021). While Facebook and Twitter were once dominant, the rise of social media influencers has shifted attention to platforms like Instagram and Snapchat, further broadening engagement avenues. Small to medium-sized enterprises, often with limited resources, are leveraging social media to connect with audiences, build networks, and compete with larger companies (Baird & Parasnis, 2011).

Based on above literature review, following hypothesis was developed:

H1: E-Recruitment significantly impacts the Gender Equality.

H2: Social-Media positively impacts the relationship between e-recruitment and the gender equality.

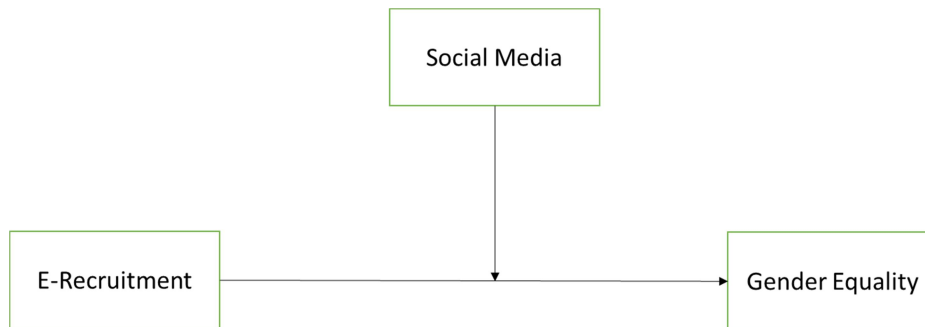


Figure 1: Research Framework

METHODOLOGY

The study followed a quantitative approach, gathering data through a survey questionnaire. In this study, a simple random sampling technique was used to ensure that each individual in the target population had an equivalent chance of being selected. As a group of researchers believe that the minimum ratio of sample to population should be 5:1 (Bentler & Chou, 1987; Worthington & Whittaker, 2006), a sample size of 348 was selected from the population of PAPCO (Pak Arab Pipeline Company) that is formed by the major oil marketing companies of Pakistan. Various descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were applied to analyze the data. Data screening, which includes identifying missing values and outliers, was conducted using SPSS 23 before proceeding with the main analysis. Descriptive statistics, also conducted using SPSS 23, helped in understanding and profiling the responses. It further assisted in summarizing and categorizing respondents based on demographics. Hypothesis testing was performed through inferential analysis to make predictions based on the collected data. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed for this purpose due to its ability to consider relationships between variables simultaneously and produce more robust results compared to other statistical techniques. Its use is also aligned with recent trends, as many highly indexed journals prefer SEM, a technique supported by Hair et al. (2010) for its high precision. Using SmartPLS 3, the outer model was measured first, followed by the inner model, leading to hypothesis testing.

Summary Information – Research Methodology

The research followed a quantitative approach and had a descriptive purpose. It was designed as a correlational study conducted in a non-contrived setting, meaning the research was carried out in a natural environment. Primary data were collected, with the unit of analysis being the individual. The data collection was done through a survey questionnaire based on a Likert scale. The study had a cross-sectional time horizon, meaning the data were collected at a single point in time. A convenience sample, which used non probability method was taken from officer level employees of four different oil marketing companies in PAPCO, 348 participants were included in this sample. Data was analyzed by using the Partial Least Squares method (PLS). And this analysis was done by using SPSS-23 and SmartPLS 3 software.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS**Measurement Scale**

For every construct, this research used a scale. This way would help, as recommended by Churchill (1979) and Peter (1979), the constructs and the overall model evaluation. Based on the guidance provided by Krosnic and Fabrigar (1997), a 7-point Likert scale, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agreed), was used to operationalize the constructs. However, this did not include the demography construct. Several key constructs, adapted for this research, were taken from the previous researches; E-Recruitment from the research work of Aboul-Ela (2014), Gender Equality from Sudkamper et al. (2020) and the Social Media construct from Bilgin (2018).

Data Analysis

Before starting the main analysis, SPSS 23 we used to check any missing data or outliers. We tested the hypothesis by using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with Smart PLS 3 as well. Table 1 provides a summary of all the participants' demographics.

Table 1
Respondents' Profile

Demographic Variables	Indicators	Frequency	Percent
Age in Years	25 to 34	121	34.8
	35 to 44	89	25.6
	45 to 54	122	35.1
	55 and above	16	4.6
	Total	348	100.0
Gender	Female	78	22.4
	Male	270	77.6
	Total	348	100.0

Education	Graduate	121	34.8
	Post Graduate	154	44.3
	Under Graduate	73	21.0
	Total	348	100.0

Outer and Inner Model Analysis

By using PLS 3, construct validity was tested. Table 2 shows how reliable and valid the model is, also focusing on convergent validity.

According to Hair et al. (2012), for each construct the composite reliability should be at least 0.7. In this study, all constructs met the desired standard, hence proving they were reliable. In addition, Hair et al. (2012) suggest that the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) should be more than 0.5, and in this analysis, all AVE values were found to be more than 0.5.

Table 2
Construct Reliability and Validity

Constructs	Items	Outer Loadings	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted
E-Recruitment	E-3	0.913	0.859	0.868	0.706
	E-4	0.745			
	E-5	0.874			
	E-6	0.819			
Gender Equality	GE-3	0.841	0.710	0.766	0.627
	GE-4	0.858			
	GE-6	0.660			
Social Media	SM-1	0.679	0.723	0.819	0.632
	SM-3	0.892			
	SM-5	0.799			

In order to ensure that there are no overlapping data aspects, the discriminant validity is checked using three different methods: the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT), cross loading and Fornell and Larcker criterion. Fornell and Larcker criterion method was used to compare the square root of Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for its correlation with other constructs. The correlation of the items within a construct must be higher than with the other construct items (Hair et al., 2012). The criteria were successfully met, as shown in table 3.

Table 3
Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Constructs	E-Recruitment	Gender Equality	Social Media
E-Recruitment	0.840		
Gender Equality	0.756	0.792	
Social Media	0.136	0.238	0.795

Moreover, Table 4 shows that none of the values are greater than 0.85, proving that the HTMT requirements have been achieved (Henseler et al., 2015).

Table 4
Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

Constructs	E Recruitment	Gender Equality	Social Media
E Recruitment	0.898		
Gender Equality	0.246	0.375	
Social Media	0.269	0.564	0.124

Once it's confirmed that the measurement model meets all the required standards, then the next step is to test the hypothesis by using a method called bootstrapping method. This method gives a detailed understanding of how the variables are related. Table 5 shows us a clear breakdown of the results from the inner model, and tells whether these hypotheses are accepted or rejected. These hypotheses were carefully developed earlier, grounded in the understandings drawn from the comprehensive literature review conducted during the initial phases of the research.

Table 5
Hypothesis Testing using VB-SEM Analysis

Relationships	Estimate	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values	Decision
E-Recruitment -> Gender Equality	0.646	0.034	19.011	0.000	Supported
Social Media -> Gender Equality	0.174	0.036	4.845	0.000	Supported
Social Media x E-Recruitment -> Gender Equality	0.303	0.042	7.205	0.000	Supported

Table 6 depicts the R-square and R-square adjusted values for the construct of gender equality. The R-square value of 0.668 specifies that nearly 66.8% of the variance in gender equality is explained by the model. The adjusted R-square, which accounts for the number of predictors in the model, is slightly lower at 0.665. This slight reduction suggests that the model is a strong fit and that the predictors used are highly pertinent in explaining gender equality.

Table 6
Inner Model Results

	R-square	R-square adjusted
Gender equality	0.668	0.665

Based on the outcomes of the above tests, along with support from the existing literature, both hypotheses are accepted. The findings line up with previous research, further validate the proposed

relationships of this study.

Discussion

Gender equality is a cornerstone of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly reflected in Goal 5, which aims to "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls." The SDGs emphasize the need to eliminate discrimination and create equal opportunities in all spheres of life, including economic, political, and social domains. Improved gender equality in the hiring process promotes a global effort and creates more inclusive and diverse workplaces. By using modern hiring methods and technology, companies can effectively reduce gender discrimination and ensure equal opportunities for women. This study was conducted to check how online hiring affects gender equality in leading oil marketing companies of Pakistan; their main focus was on how social media plays a role in fair hiring. The researcher did careful statistical testing, and made sure the results were valid and reliable. Before finalizing the model's suitability, several methods were used to check its effectiveness. The results shown in Tables 5 and 6, give clear evidence supporting both hypotheses. The direct effect of online hiring on gender equality and the role social media plays in this process. The research found a strong connection between online hiring processes and improved gender equality in the work environment. It means that those companies which are using online recruitment strategies are best at achieving gender equality between their employees, and showcasing how technology helps to reduce these gaps. Furthermore, the study also showed that using social media in the hiring process makes a positive impact. We can't deny the importance of gender equality in the hiring process and role of social media in moderation; but the moderation is only partial. It means that although social media plays a vital role in enhancing the effects of online hiring on gender equality, there are many other factors which play an important role.

This finding supports the earlier studies including Teigen (1999), which also showed the hiring and selection process effects on gender equality. Like our research, Teigen's work also emphasizes how important are hiring methods in decreasing gender discrimination within organizations. The implications of these researches are important. The data shows that online hiring is not only a modern and effective way for searching for new talent but also play an important role in gender equality within companies. By following the online recruitment process, businesses can overcome some biased traditional hiring, leading to a more inclusive and diverse workforce. This aligns with the goals of United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially goal number 5, which emphasizes on achieving gender equality and empowering all the girls and women. Moreover, Social media's role as a partial moderator shows how important digital media are in shaping companies' operations. Social media can make hiring processes fairer by making them more transparent and broader reach. This allows companies to connect with a larger and more diverse group of candidates, which is vital for promoting gender equality.

Summarily, this study contributes to the growing body of literature that supports the positive role of online recruitment in evolving gender equality. It also highlights the importance of integrating social media as a tool to strengthen this relationship. While the moderation effect of social media is partial, its significance cannot be disregarded. The findings suggest that oil marketing companies, and potentially other industries, can take advantage from utilizing online recruitment strategies together with social media to foster a more gender-balanced and inclusive workforce. Going forward, further research could explore additional moderating variables and examine the long-term effects of online recruitment on organizational diversity results, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how digital tools can shape the future of gender equality in the workplace.

CONCLUSION

Achieving gender equality has been recognized as a critical Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) by the United Nations, outlined in its 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Since its implementation in 2015, this goal has become a central focus for global policymakers, institutions, and organizations. This research focused on to find how impactful an online recruitment is on promoting gender equality. The results show a strong connection between the hiring through social media and gender equality in the workplace. This connection shows how social media can break traditional barriers that limit women's access to few kinds of jobs. Online hiring gives a more transparent, easily accessible and flexible way to search for new jobs, which can help to overcome biases and open more doors of opportunities for all genders. By removing geographic and social roadblocks, Social media creates a more transparent hiring process, where candidates are hired on the bases of their skills rather than their gender. Furthermore, the study also found that social media plays an important role in the effectiveness of online hiring for promoting gender equality. Social media platforms are important for those companies who are looking for a diverse group of candidates, promoting gender equality, sharing their values and showcase transparent practices. Due to wide range accessibility and interactive nature of social media, It allows businesses to engage directly with their potential candidates without any discrimination. This active connection strengthens the relation between recruitment and gender equality, making it easier to see and promote gender inclusive policies and create a transparent hiring process. The inferences of this study add to the existing knowledge about how important social media tools are for achieving sustainable goals, especially gender equality. When the power of social media combines with online recruitment, it allows companies and policymakers to form a pathway that can better align with their hiring process which promotes the goals of inclusion and equality. As we approach the 2030 target, these insights underline the need for continued innovation in digital recruitment strategies to ensure that gender equality becomes a reality in the workplace.

Recommendations

To supplement the goal of gender equality, there is a clear need for supplementary research into the fundamental factors that contribute to achieving this target. Understanding these antecedents will provide deeper perceptions into how gender equality can be promoted more effectively across different sectors and industries. Besides, while this study focused on the major oil marketing companies in Pakistan, it is suggested that similar investigations be conducted in other countries and under diverse socio-economic and cultural environments. Such comparative studies would offer a broader viewpoint on the generalizability of the findings and help identify context-specific strategies for promoting gender equality in the workplace. By expanding the scope of research, legislators and organizations can develop more tailored, evidence-based interventions to accelerate development toward achieving this critical Sustainable Development Goal.

Limitations of the Study

While this study provides valuable insights into the impact of online recruitment on gender equality, there are several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research is limited to a specific geographical region, focusing solely on major oil marketing companies in Pakistan. Due to their limited applicability, these study findings are not helpful in other industries or countries, where the process of hiring, company's culture, and gender roles are different. By adding more sectors and regions could give a clearer and more comprehensive picture of expanding research. As we use cross-sectional data in this

study, it only shows the connections between variables at one point in time. It restricts the ability to draw conclusions about the effects or see how the process of online hiring affects gender equality in the long run. A long-term study would give a better understanding into how hiring through social media impacts gender diversity over time. Moreover, while the role of social media was examined, other components like company policies, leadership's commitment to diversity, and other social values were not included. These can also affect the connection between online hiring and gender equality and that should need further study. The study depends on self-reported data, which may cause biased responses. Candidates' views on effectiveness of online hiring and gender equality might be affected by their own biases or pressure from higher authorities of a company may affect the accuracy of the results. By adding more objective measures, like actual hiring outcomes or more variety of data, could overcome this problem. The main focus of this study is gender equality but it fails to notice other factors like age, race and disability. Future research should look deep to see how online hiring affects all areas of workforce diversity. Acknowledging these restrictions will help those future studies which builds on this research and will give a clear picture of how online hiring affects workplace diversity and inclusion.

Directions for Future Research

To build on the findings of this research, it's so important to study the same connections in different companies and countries. Handling tests in different surroundings can give a clear understanding of the results, making them more useful and acceptable in both academic and working circles. In any case, if the results are different in different situations, this study could highlight the importance of upgrading the current model or reveal more particular insights based on industry or regional differences. This study used a basic model to check the links between social media, online hiring and gender equality. We can expand future studies by adding more components like company culture, leadership styles, and how much technology is involved. A detailed model could show deeper insights into the many components that affect gender equality, helping businesses create more inclusive workplaces. Moreover, long term research on how digital hiring and social media affect gender equality would be useful. These studies could see how long positive changes stay and how they evolve with the passage of time. By adding personal experiences of employees could give a better understanding of how specific hiring methods affect gender equality. Generally, the main aim of these methods is to improve both academic discussions and realistic solutions for establishing gender equality at workplaces.

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