

# Is Social Media the New Employment Referral? Perceptions of Early Career Talent

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Referrals are individuals' whose employment suitability for desired roles has been validated by referrers. Traditionally, referrers were individuals whom referrals know in real life (IRL). Referrers are also known to hiring authorities and can vouch for the referrals' employment credentials. Hence, referrals' employment applications are viewed more favorably than applicants who are not referrals. However, the internet/social media also serves as a referrer for applicants' employment qualifications. That is, people's employment attributes can be validated by their internet/social media activity and engagement with followers. They may not know their followers IRL and hiring authorities may not know the applicants' followers IRL, either.

Nevertheless, applicants' internet/social media engagement can serve as a referral for their qualifications. This study investigates how early career individuals perceive internet/social media activity as evidence of applicants' employment attributes and, thus, a referral method for employment opportunities. The study broadens research on referrals by including applicants' internet/social media activity and provides practical strategies to enhance early career individuals' employment strategies.

*Keywords: referrals, internet/social media, employment, early career, resumes, job hunt*

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**H**istorically, employers have utilized various screening methods to determine employment decisions for early career applicants. These include perusing applicants' resumes, evaluating candidates' performance on job interviews, reading applicants' recommendation letters, and determining if the applicant is a referral (Brown et al., 2012; Parks-Yancy & Cooley, 2018; Parks-Yancy, 2010; Roulin et al., 2014). Referrals are applicants who have been referred by individuals known to the employer (Brown et al., 2014; Hadlock & Pierce, 2021; Parks-Yancy & Cooley, 2018). They tend to be viewed more favorably by employers than applicants who are not referrals (Hadlock & Pierce, 2021). This is because referrers vouch for the

referrals' employment qualifications by nature of referring them to the employer (Roulin et al., 2021).

However, the internet/social media has changed the employment landscape. Gone are the days of job seekers' exclusively submitting resumes to desired employers. They also no longer rely solely on drawing on relationships with people whom they know IRL (in real life) to be referred to employers (traditional referrals) for employment opportunities. Instead, early career job seekers' internet/social media activity, increasingly, serves as evidence of their employment attributes (Lee & Cavanaugh, 2016; McCool; 2019; Riklan, 2014). That is, applicants' social media activity and engagement from followers of their internet/social media accounts "vouches" for their employment candidacy (Segal, 2021). In this regard, applicants' internet/social media activity serves as a public referral of their attributes, similar to traditional referrals (Bizzi, 2018). Indeed, some employers may hire applicants whose online presence provides evidence of their qualifications (Parks-Yancy & Cooley, 2022), without the individuals necessarily being referred by people known to the employers IRL (Dombek & Winska, 2018).

While social media necessarily involves the internet, not all internet sites are social media. Two examples of internet sites that are not social media are personal websites and company websites. Some examples of social media sites are LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, YouTube, WhatsApp, TikTok, and Snapchat (Perrin & Anderson, 2019). Individuals may post on content on both their own personal website and on their social media accounts to promote their employment-related competencies. Given the vast amount of internet/social media sites, there are many opportunities for job seekers to be referred for employment opportunities via their internet/social media activity.

Employers may perceive an applicant as credible, based upon their internet/social media activity. This is because individuals can become well-recognized for their professional capabilities and accomplishments via the internet/social media. They can regularly post content and amass hundreds or thousands of followers. This can create employment reputational credibility. An example is college students studying Animation and Visual Effects at Azusa Pacific University. The students are encouraged to post, snap, and tweet about course projects to promote their animation/visual effects knowledge. This also helps students build their employment credibility for jobs that necessitate those

competencies (Segal, 2021). According to the Program Director, Tony Bancroft, numerous students have been hired by employers based upon their internet/social media activity and responses from followers (Segal, 2021). Thus, the internet/social media serves as a referral for the students' employment attributes (Bizzi, 2018; Cooley & Parks-Yancy, 2016).

This paper investigates three ways in which early career job seekers demonstrate their professional capabilities to employers: submitting resumes; being referred by people whom they know IRL (traditional referrals); and being referred via internet/social media activity. Though the first two methods have a wealth of prior research (e.g. Derfler-Rozin et al., 2018; Risavy et al., 2022), referrals via the internet/social media remains an opportunity for further exploration. This study addresses the following research questions: 1. How can applicants' internet/social media activity serve as an employment referral? 2. How do early career job seekers' perceive the impact of internet/social media referrals on employment likelihood versus resumes and traditional referrals?

The study is explorative and is structured as follows: The authors review the literature regarding internet/social media referrals, traditional referrals, and resumes, in the context of early career individuals' employment prospects. Then, the authors address the data, methods and the research findings. The study concludes with practical implications, as well as future research opportunities.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Over 70% of Americans use the internet/social media (Auxier & Anderson, 2021). This number increases to 84% for adults under the age of 30 (Auxier & Anderson, 2021). Given their chronological age, these adults comprise individuals in their early career stage (Blokker et al., 2019). This study focuses on that population because employment search methods have changed over the past two decades (Blokker et al., 2019). Traditional methods of career attainment have given way to incorporating new methods, namely social media (Parks-Yancy & Cooley, 2020). People in their early career stage are likely to regularly utilize social media (Auxier & Anderson, 2021).

The internet/social media is a significant part of the daily lives of people in their early career stage (Auxier & Anderson, 2021). This includes their employment-related actions. The ways that job seekers' display their talents to promote their prospective

candidacy is critical for their employment prospects. This process includes individuals' consistently posting, tweeting, and/or snapping content, engaging with followers, as well as followers' reposting, retweeting, or regramming (reposting an Instagram post) their content (Kedher, 2015). Developing an internet/social media presence can positively impact employment decisions and is, increasingly, becoming more important to attracting employers' interest (Kedher, 2015).

One could argue that the internet/social media activity is a more recent form of early career job seekers' investment in employment-related activities to attain desired roles. Song et al. (2020) examined the effect of college students' cognitive behaviors on their ability to obtain interviews and to receive job offers. The behaviors included setting personal goals to guide job search activities, developing a coherent plan, determining ways to improve their skill at finding a job, and how to interview effectively. In today's society, having an active internet/social media presence can serve as a form of job search activities (Authors, 2020). This is because studies have found that job seekers' internet/social media activities can impact employment decisions (e.g. Domba & Wiska, 2018; Marin & Nila, 2021).

Employers' trust in an applicant's qualifications is no longer simply based on their resume or being referred by someone whom employers' know IRL (Parks-Yancy & Cooley, 2020). Instead, applicants' internet/social media activities can augment or, even, supplant both applicants' resume content and traditional referral methods (Segal, 2021). Individuals can become well-recognized on the internet/social media for specific competencies and accumulate hundreds or thousands of followers on that basis (Parks-Yancy, 2020). Prospective employers may trust these individuals' professional talents, based upon the trust conferred by their follower numbers and engagement. This can increase likelihood of an employment offer to these individuals. For example, individuals may excel in writing, public speaking, math, science, gaming or other technology, or have hobbies or causes about which they're passionate. Creating content about these interests on the internet/social media and amassing followers provides evidence of their professional attributes, thereby mimicking a referral for their employment credentials (Chiang & Suen, 2015; Venneri, 2018).

For example, an experienced electrician, Trevor Dunnigan, hires employees to work in the movie industry. Applicants' internet/social media activity about their competencies is a critical barometer of their qualifications, not necessarily their resume nor being a traditional referral (Segal, 2021). Dunnigan gauges applicants' internet/social media activity as evidence of their employment competencies. He says, "I don't get someone's business card. I get their Instagram" (Segal, 2021). Similarly, a survey of employers found that almost 50% would not even consider an applicant who does not have an internet/social media presence, irrespective of resume content or if they were a traditional referral. The employers' concerns are indicative of the importance of being able to digitally verify job applicants' qualifications (Career Builder, 2018).

A study of 156 human resources' professionals and communication/marketing specialists surveyed their LinkedIn activity (Marin & Nila, 2021). Over 71% used LinkedIn frequently and 40% used it daily. The primary reasons were to build their online professional presence, interact with other professionals, learn about employment opportunities, and to attract employer attention. Importantly, respondents considered LinkedIn to be more effective for promoting their professional competencies to employers than traditional resumes. Seventy-three percent believed that LinkedIn's functionality provided engagement opportunities to both promote their professional qualifications and to increase their followers, thus attracting employers' attention. Indeed, 16% of the study's participants attributed their employment to their LinkedIn page content and engagement activity, not because of their resume nor being a traditional referral (Marin & Nila, 2021).

In another study, 37% of employers indicated that their assessment of applicants' internet/social media activities positively impacted their view of applicants' fit for employment (Driver, 2018). In Sameen and Cornelius' (2015) study, applicants' LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter activity were also significant factors in hiring decisions. Thirty-one percent (31%) of the hiring managers stated that applicants' internet/social media activity favorably affected their receipt of a job offer. The hiring managers likely believed that applicants' internet/social media activity validated their employment competencies.

### **Traditional Ways to Display Employment Attributes**

**Resumes.** Traditionally, job seekers have displayed their employment attributes on their resume and by way of being a referral; that is someone they know IRL vouches for

their candidacy to employers (Derfler-Rozin et al., 2018; Parks-Yancy & Cooley, 2022). Resume content is traditionally confined to applicants' employment history, academic credentials, and technical skills (Riklan, 2014; Risavy et al., 2022; Waung et al., 2017). Employers gain insight into applicants' employment objectives, their education, their specific technical and language skills, and their work history (Cole et al., 2003). Resume content impacts employers' perceptions of applicants' personality, intelligence, and objective employment qualifications (Alexander et al., 2015; Kreisman et al., 2021). Obviously, employers usually do not want to hire people that they perceive as not having the level of intelligence, type of personality, or qualifications needed for the job (Harris, 2011). Resumes are often the starting point to applying for any job, so early career job seekers' probably deem them to be important for gaining employment (Parks-Yancy & Cooley, 2018).

However, employers are inundated with resumes for available positions, so it can be difficult for job seekers to stand out to employers (Najjar et al., 2021). The amount of resume volume lessens the likelihood that applicants will receive an interview or a job offer. On average, of 250 resumes submitted per corporate job, up to six candidates will be interviewed and only one person will be hired (Economy, 2015). Hence, there are limitations to job seekers' solely submitting their resume as a means to obtain employment (McCabe, 2017; Parks-Yancy & Cooley, 2022), because those methods have a limited impact on actual hire.

Furthermore, resumes convey static information about a candidates' qualifications. This is because resumes are comprised of applicants' information up to when resumes are submitted to employers (McCool, 2019). Conversely, internet/social media activity enables individuals to display their employment competencies in real time. If an applicant acquires a new certification, wins an award, or has mastered a new skill, they can post it on, for example, Instagram or LinkedIn or record a video on TikTok. These posts serve two purposes: 1. They provide employers with immediate updated information about an applicant's new award or skill (Joyce & Smith-Proulx, 2016; Paliszkievicz & Madra-Sawicka, 2016); 2. They provide validation of the new award or skill by way of followers' engagement with the posts. In contrast, resumes are static documents that are usually

only updated periodically and, generally, do not provide public engagement opportunities (Parks-Yancy & Cooley, 2018).

**Traditional Referrals.** Referrals embody access to social capital resources by nature of the relationship between the referrer and the referral (Parks-Yancy, 2012). Social capital is the relationships among people in a social group in which resources are shared among individuals within the group (Granovetter, 1973; Portes, 1998). It has been examined in numerous employment contexts to determine the impact of social group relationships on employment outcomes (Granovetter, 1973). Social capital resources include individuals' sharing information about employers that are hiring, the willingness of social contacts to influence employment decisions on one's behalf, and relationships with individuals who have the direct authority to make hiring decisions (Parks-Yancy, 2012). Social capital resources help people obtain employment (Granovetter, 1973), obtain training (Parks-Yancy, 2010), and receive better-paying and/or more prestigious jobs than they already have (McDonald, 2015).

Referrers leverage their relationships with employers to support a referral's candidacy. Historically, employers have sought referrals to fill open positions. They tend to regard referrals more favorably than candidates with similar skills, but are not a referral (Brown et al., 2012; Di Stasio & Gerxhani, 2015). This is because, by definition, referrals' talents have been validated by the referrer (Dustmann et al., 2000). Referrals start their job faster, are more satisfied with their job, and stay longer at the firm than non-referrals. Presumably, they have a better understanding of the work by virtue of having an "inside track" from the referrer (Hebberd, 2015). Referrals also receive a higher initial salary offer than non-referrals (Brown et al., 2012; Derfler-Rozin et al., 2018).

However, even referrers may not be knowledgeable of all aspects of a referral's employment competencies. For example, if the referral recently received an award or just acquired a new skill, the referrer may be unaware of it, in spite of vouching for their employment qualifications (Schlachter & Pieper, 2019). In those instances, referrers' may have incomplete knowledge of all of the relevant aspects of a referral's employment-related competencies.

Finally, though referrers, by definition, confer credibility to referrals, they are likely finite in number. That is, the number of people who know both the applicant and the

desired employer is probably much smaller than the numbers of people engaging with applicants' internet/social media accounts. Conversely, applicants' internet/social media followers may be in the hundreds or thousands. Commenting on, reposting, regramming, and retweeting applicants' internet/social media activity equates to engagement from followers. This can provide validation of applicants' employment credentials to prospective employers (Segal, 2021).

Resumes and traditional referrals are probably still a prevalent way to determine applicants' qualifications (Derfler-Rozin et al., 2018; Risavy et al., 2022). However, there is growing evidence that applicants' internet/social media activity also serves as a validation (referral) of their employability and can, in some cases, be more credible to employers than applicants' resumes or traditional referrals (Segal, 2021). This study investigates the perceived impact of internet/social media referrals on employment likelihood versus resumes and traditional referrals. The study examines the perspectives of individuals in their early career stage.

## **METHODS**

The data are 115 completed surveys from junior and senior undergraduate business majors at a mid-sized university located in the Southwestern region of the U.S. The university is comprehensive, such that it offers undergraduate, Master's level and PhD degrees. About 80% of the students receive federal financial aid and only about 40% of undergraduate students complete their degree within six years. The university has dormitories, but many students do not live on campus. Instead, approximately, 50% of the undergraduate population live off campus. Students tend to arrange their school schedules around their work schedules (Mamiseishvili, 2010). Table 1 indicates that the study participants were approximately 42% males and 58% females. The average age was about 24, over 75% of the sample worked 25 or more hours per week, and about 12% had young children. This sample was appropriate for this study because they were primarily under age 30 and in their early career stage, they were likely to be active internet/social media users, and, evidenced by their employment status, were accustomed to applying for jobs.

Table 1  
Respondents' Demographics

	Male	Female
Gender	42%	58%
Work 25+ hours per week	46%	43%
Children	2%	10%

The purpose of this study was to examine how early career respondents' demonstrate their qualifications to employers, with particular focus on resumes, traditional referrals, as well as internet/social media activity, as a form of referral method. The authors utilized common employment screening data from the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM, 2016) to develop the survey. The respondents completed the survey online, utilizing Survey Monkey. They were assigned a unique identification code to ensure they could only complete the survey once. They were incented to participate by way of receiving extra credit points towards a class assignment. However, if they did not participate in the survey, they could still receive extra credit by completing other coursework.

Table 2 shows survey questions. The survey consisted of three Likert-scale questions (questions 2-4), two close-ended questions (question 1 and the first half of question 5) and three open-ended questions (the second half of question 5 and question 6). The first question asked respondents to select which employment method (resumes, referrals, internet/social media activity) employers use most for hiring candidates. Question 2 asked which method did they think helps applicants get hired. Question 3 asked respondents' opinion of what applicants believe is the screening method that employers utilize the most. Question 4 asked the participants to decide which method helps employers get better job applicants. Question 5 had two parts: Participants were asked which method employers relied upon primarily to make hiring decisions, first, and second, to explain their answer. Question 6 invited the respondents to share any additional comments.

Table 2  
*Survey Questions*

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1. What methods do you think employers use for hiring applicants? Select one.  
Resumes; \*Referrals; \*\*Internet Activity/Social Media Activity
  2. Which method do you think helps applicants get the job?
  3. Which methods do APPLICANTS (people applying for a job) think employers use more often?
  4. Which of the following methods do you think helps employers get better job applicants?
  5. If you had to decide the method that employers rely on primarily to make hiring decisions, which would it be? Select one. Why did you select that one?
  6. Please share any additional comments that you may have.

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\*The study provided a note explaining that referrals are people recommended to employers by others.

\*\*The study provided a note explaining that internet/social media activity included personal websites, employers' websites, Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Snapchat, TikTok, and Pinterest.

Means comparisons were utilized to determine if there were significant differences between the participants' ranking of the various employment methods presented to them in the survey. Bivariate correlation t-tests were used to determine if there was a significant relationship between the variables (internet/social media, resumes, referrals).

The open-ended questions were analyzed by examining the respondents' answers. The authors determined the raw proportions of respondents' answers and included samples of their remarks. These responses provided a nuanced understanding of the respondents' thoughts.

## RESULTS

### Respondent Survey Perceptions

Table 3 shows the mean values of the respondents' answers to the survey. Their responses indicate the following: 1. the participants' ranking of the methods that help applicants' get hired; 2. their ranking of job applicants' perceptions of the hiring methods

employers use the most; 3. the participants' ranking of the method(s) that provide employers with better applicants.

This study paid particular attention to the internet/social media activity results because the paper's purpose was to compare them to resumes and traditional referrals. Respondents perceived internet/social media activity as a significant employment method. It was the most important way for candidates to get hired ( $m=2.65$ ). However, resumes were deemed as the method employers used most often to assess candidates, relative to the internet/social media ( $m=2.71$  vs.  $m=2.67$ ). Still, the respondents believed that internet/social media activity helped employers get better applicants than resumes ( $m=2.67$  vs.  $m=2.23$ ). The respondents ranked referrals as the least utilized applicant evaluation method by employers ( $m=2.57$ ), the least important method for getting hired ( $m=1.92$ ) and the least useful way for employers to gain better applicants ( $m=1.91$ ).

Table 3

Respondents' Mean Scores

*Perceptions of Employment Methods that Help Applicants Get Hired*

Internet/Social Media Activity:	2.34
Resume:	4.24
Referrals:	3.61

*Perceptions of Employment Methods that Employers Use More Often*

Internet/Social Media Activity:	2.29
Resume:	4.63
Referrals:	3.64

*Employment Methods that Help Employers Get Better Applicants*

Internet/Social Media Activity:	2.43
Resume:	4.18
Referrals:	3.78

Note: \*all means significant at the  $p < .05$  level.

Table 4 indicates the relationships among the employment methods, utilizing bivariate correlation t-tests. The results primarily support the findings from the means' comparisons. The relationships that were significant at the  $p < .05$  level were negative.

This indicates that the more a participant thought a method was utilized, the more likely they thought the comparative method was not, and vice versa. There were significant negative relationships between resumes and internet/social media activity. As one increased, the other decreased. The more often that the respondents perceived internet/social media activity as the primary ways that employers evaluate applicants, the less likely they believed that the resumes and referrals were utilized. Resumes also had a negative relationship with referrals. The more that respondents thought that resumes were a primary method, the less they believed that referrals would be utilized by employers. However, the relationship between internet/social media activity and referrals was not significant.

Overall, the study participants thought that internet/social media activity and resumes were the most useful ways for employers to evaluate applicants. Internet/social media activity was perceived as helping applicants the most with getting hired and as the most effective methods for employers to find the best applicants. Respondents believed that resumes were the most utilized method by employers, as well as the method that they thought that applicants believed employers utilized the most.

Table 4  
Respondents' Bivariate Correlations

		Resume	Internet/Social Media Activity	Referrals
Resume	Pearson Correlation	1	-.012	-.224*
	Std. Deviation		1.23	1.539
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.908	0.025
Internet/Social Media Activity	Pearson Correlation	-.012	1	-.125
	Std. Deviation	1.23		1.552
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.908		0.231
Referrals	Pearson Correlation	-.224*	-.125	1
	Std. Deviation	1.539	1.552	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.025	0.231	

\* highlighted cells show significance at the p. < .05 level

\*\*highlighted cells show significance at the p. < .01 level

## Open-ended Survey Responses

**Resumes are Important.** Survey question 5 asked participants which screening method employers primarily relied upon to make hiring decisions and to explain their decision. Thirty-eight percent (38%) believed that resumes were employers' most utilized method. Below are some of the respondents' comments:

- “Because your resume is the way to market yourself! It's the first representation an employer has of a potential candidate and based on your experience and what they're looking for it will determine if they call you for an interview or not!”
- “I think resume shows the education that [an applicant has, an employer can enhance his employee in [the] future and also can get a talented worker.”
- “Resumes give details on experience and more information on the person. Some may not be good at doing interviews, but have the experience.”
- “Resumes has [sic] a detailed list of your work history and job duties.”

**Traditional Referrals Are Not Important.** Only 17% of the respondents thought that traditional referrals were the method that employers most relied upon to make hiring decisions. Below are some of their comments:

- “Most employers utilize their employee referrals...they compare the applicant [doing the job] to the current employee. That helps [the applicant].
- “When a person refers another candidate, organizations know that that person is credible and trustworthy as he is already associated with some who knew what organization requires.”
- “Employers have relied on their employees for years because they know that the employee is a walking advertisement board and each one can bring in like-minded individuals.”

**Internet/Social Media Activity is the “Real” Referral.** Internet/social media activity was viewed as the best way to get hired. Furthermore, respondents believed that it helped employers get the best applicants. This was interesting, given that respondents also thought that resumes were the most utilized way by employers to hire candidates. In other words, the survey participants believed that the most useful way for employers to obtain the best candidates was not the method that employers utilized the most. Ninety-seven

percent (97%) of the respondents believed that internet/social media activity was effective for screening applicants. In their opinion, internet/social media activity acts as a referral for their “true” employment attributes. Employers can learn information about who the candidate “really is”, thereby validating their qualifications for the desired role.

- “[Internet/social media] allows employers to see if prospective employees actually fit with the organization and can really do the job.”
- “Social media outlets such as LinkedIn is beneficial for employers looking at applicants because they can get information about them.”
- “Indeed, social media helps employer [sic] to understand how a person is in reality. Employers can understand applicant behaviors by analyzing likes, posts, shares which an applicant doesn't show [in] interviews.”
- “Social media is always up to date. Everyone in the world has access to social media, so it's a fast way to learn quickly about an individual. It shows the [technical experience] of the applicant, which is important.”
- “Absolutely! For example, LinkedIn gives one a snapshot of the candidates’ experience, credentials, and how they present themselves.”

Four respondents did not think that internet/social media activity was useful to evaluate candidates because people can lie and lies can easily go viral: “There’s spam and lies on social media so you don’t always know what’s true.”

## DISCUSSION

This research examined advancements in employment screening methods to encompass internet/social media activity as a form of evidence of applicants’ qualifications. The authors argue that internet/social media activity acts as an employment referral. The study analyzed early career individuals’ perceptions of the employment utility of three screening methods: resumes, traditional referrals, and internet/social media activity.

The respondents believed that resumes were the most utilized employer screening methods and that applicants shared similar sentiments. However, they also believed that internet/social media activity was the most effective way for applicants to be hired. It was also deemed as the best way for employers to obtain better applicants. The participants thought that referrals were less utilized by employers to evaluate applicants than resumes

and internet/social media activity. Referrals were also perceived as less useful for applicants to obtain employment and not particularly helpful for employers to obtain better candidates. The results provided some evidence for the paper's premise that, according to early career individuals, internet/social media activity can serve as evidence of applicants' suitability for desired roles and, therefore, is a form employment referral. However, it is important to note that these results are specific to this study's sample and are not, necessarily, generalizable to the broader population of early career individuals in the U.S.

The responses to the open-ended questions mostly followed the quantitative results. However, the comments also provided insight as to why the study participants held their beliefs. Resumes were perceived as the most utilized employment screening method. Conversely, internet/social media activity was deemed as most important for getting hired. By and large, the participants thought that internet/social media activity revealed applicants' "true" employment qualifications. That is, the respondents suggested that people's internet/social media activity was a more accurate depiction of their actual employment attributes, as opposed to resumes and referrals. Few respondents thought that referrals were central to employers' perceptions of applicants nor evidence of their employment qualifications. The few respondents who thought that referrals were important suggested that employers are more likely to view them favorably because referrals are connected to someone associated with the employer.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE**

Most early career individuals are aware that internet/social media activity can, potentially, be utilized to promote their candidacy to employers (Parks-Yancy, 2020; Parks-Yancy, 2018; Segal, 2021). This appears to have some accuracy, despite countless of instances that applicants' internet/social media activity can also negatively impact their employment goals (e.g. McDonnell, 2016; O'Connor et al., 2016). Therefore, it behooves applicants to be judicious, intentional, and consistent when tweeting, posting, snapping or regramming content about themselves and their employment attributes.

This study serves as an opportunity to propose an institutional intervention that benefits early career job seekers, as well as organizations that serve that population:

University career centers should reframe their traditional student career preparation services. Currently, university career centers generally focus solely or primarily on helping students with setting career goals, resume preparation, interviewing preparation, professional attire, and vouching for students' candidacy to employers (Parks-Yancy, 2012; Reese & Miller, 2006). These are obviously important for students' professional readiness. However, they should also invest in helping students' showcase their academic and professional qualifications by way of the internet/social media, as well. This is because internet/social media activity is evolving to be a form of employment screening, namely as a referral (or lack thereof) for individuals' candidacy.

As indicated by the study's results, students generally know that internet/social media activity and resumes are significant ways that employers screen applicants. They visit university career centers in person or online for help, as the centers are often organized such that students go to them for career assistance. University career centers' services should evolve to include helping students manage their internet/social media activity in ways that highlight their employment qualifications. It is not sufficient to just caution students about not engaging in internet/social media activity that may harm their post-collegiate professional ambitions. Instead, university career centers should embrace that idea that the internet/social media is a form of employment referral. They should help students understand the value of positive and consistent internet/social media activity.

There are several ways for university career centers to accomplish the aforementioned objectives. Career center professionals already host professional development seminars about resume preparation and other professional matters (Parks-Yancy, 2012). Career centers should also promote seminars and events about the benefits of internet/social media activities for employment referral and provide specific examples of how to do it. Career center staff should visually demonstrate sample posts, videos, images, etc. on university social media sites that highlight students' employment attributes, as well as those that have the opposite effect. They could also invite recruiters and employers to share information about their perceptions of internet/social media activity that garners their attention and improves applicants' candidacy. Finally, they could partner with alumni who obtained employment via internet/social media activity. Career center staff could organize professional development seminars for students with the alumni. These are

all ways in which university career centers can update their traditional student career assistance to include internet/social media activity, which, the authors suggest, is a modern form employment referral.

## FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research should also include ways in which universities can improve college students' readiness for employment screening via internet/social media engagement. This can include incorporating career development that encompasses internet/social media activity in their curriculums. For example, McDow and Zabrucky (2015) examined the effectiveness of a career course on college students' resume writing, interviewing skills and job search self-efficacy (JSSE) compared to a control group of students who were not enrolled in the career course. Students enrolled in the course increased their resume writing and interview skills significantly. But, this course could be expanded to include internet/social media activity, as an additional method for students to promote their employment attributes.

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