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Digital Trails to Employment: A TAM–UTAUT Analysis of Online Job Portal Adoption among Fresh Graduates

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ABSTRACT
Digital recruitment platforms have become fundamental to modern day job search processes, particularly among university students transitioning into the job. Notwithstanding their extensive use, limited research has inspected the factors of online job portal adoption by early career job seekers in emerging economies. Drawing on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), this study examines how perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, information quality, trust, social influence, and facilitating conditions influence students' behavioral intention to use online job portals. Survey data collected from 178 students studying in final year in India(Gujarat) were analysed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The results represents that perceived usefulness, information quality, trust, and social influence suggestively drive behavioral intention, while trust partly mediates the relationship between information quality and intention. The study contributes to information systems literature by extending TAM–UTAUT into the digital recruitment context and offers data driven conclusions for platform designers, educational institutions, and policymakers who are looking to make improvement in digital employment systems.
Keywords: Online job portals, Technology Acceptance Model(TAM), Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), Digital recruitment, Linked In.

1. INTRODUCTION:

The digitalization of recruitment process have predominantly transformed how job markets functions, modernizing interactions between employers and candidate through technology driven platforms (Bejtkovský et al., 2018; Paramita, 2020). Online job portals have developed as critical information systems that collects, organise, present and scatter employment related information that allows job seekers to search and apply for opportunities with remarkable speed and scale (Dhamija, 2012; Hada & Gairola, 2015; Okolie & Irabor, 2017)

For organizations, these platforms acts as a cost saving recruitment tools that expand candidate reach and improve matching effectiveness. Thus online job portals have become dominant components of contemporary digital employment ecosystems (Kelley et al., 2022; Mansourvar & Yasin, 2014; Pinjari et al., 2019)

The final year of students from university represents one of the most active user clusters of online job portals. This cadre is at an essential transition point between education and employment, they depend heavily on digital recruitment platforms to navigate career decisions (Avralev et al., 2017; Signore et al., 2023). Understanding how these users perceive and adopt online job portals is therefore significant for not only online platform efficiency but also for graduate employability outcomes.

Though wide availability of online job portals, the uniformity in adoption and usage patterns among students were scarce (Wadhawan & Sinha, 2018). Deviations continues in how users access platform usefulness, credibility, and overall value. From an information management viewpoint, online job portals operate as socio technical systems wherein technological features, information quality, and social context mutually influence user behaviour (Srivastava et al., 2023). Erroneous job information, fraudulent job postings, low employer responsiveness, and data privacy concerns can corrode user trust, leading to undermine platform adoption and continued use (Rahman & Patra, 2020).

Prior research on technology adoption has mainly drawn on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) to describe user intentions across various domains like e-commerce, e-learning, mobile banking, and social media. These models highlight that the behavioral intention are determined through the study of perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, social influence, and facilitating conditions in determining (Benbasat & Barki, 2007; Davis, 1989; Dwivedi et al., 2019; Im et al., 2011; Silva, 2015; Williams et al., 2015). Although these frameworks have demonstrated robust descriptive power, their application to online job portals remains relatively narrow, particularly in emerging economies and among early-career job seekers.

These gaps are addressed in present study that investigates final year students' adoption of online job portals. A combination of Technology Acceptance Model and Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology framework is deliberated. Keeping trust as a mediating

construct and utilising Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), the study provides a ample investigation of both technological and relational determinants of adoption.

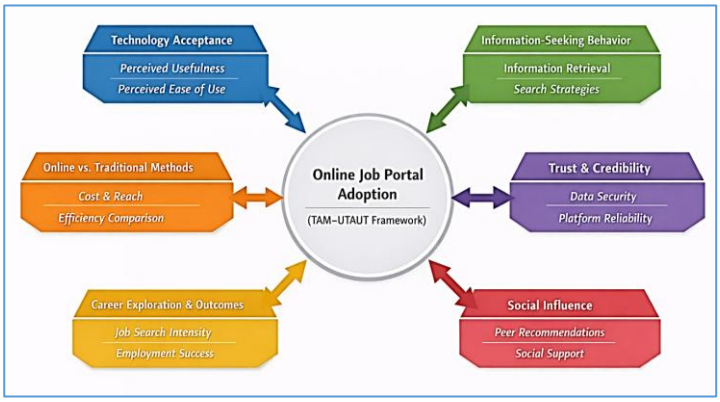
Through a survey data collected from final year university students in India, this research makes three major contributions. First, it extends TAM and UTAUT into the digital recruitment purview. Second, it diagnostically institutes trust as a mediating variable that links information quality to behavioral intention. Third, it delivers India specific empirical evidence using SEM, thus elevating information systems literature with comprehensions from an emerging economy.

Theoretical Background and Hypothesis Development

Theme	Authors and Year	Key Findings
Technology Acceptance and User Adoption of Information Systems	Davis (1989); Silva (2015); Dillon, (2001); Tarhini et al., (2015)	Perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use are the robust forecasters of user acceptance of information systems. Users adopt technology when it augments performance with minimum efforts.
Information Seeking Behavior and Technology Use	Curtis et al. (1997); Wilson (1999); Bennett et al., (2004); Al-Suqri (2015)	Individual needs influences information seeking behaviour which is influenced by, intellectual processes, and contextual factors. Technology improves convenience, significance, and efficiency of information retrieval.
Online Job Search Methods vs. Traditional Methods or Offline methods	Kuhn & Skuterud (2000); Autor (2001); Van Rooy et al., 2003; Faberman & Kudlyak (2016)	Online job portals are cost effective, enhances market reach, and improve matching efficiency as compared to traditional methods. However offline network remains as important.
Career Exploration, Job Search Intensity, and Employment Outcomes	Werbel (2000); Tziner et al., 2004; Saks (2005); Da Motta Veiga & Turban, (2018)	Higher job search intensity and organized career exploration are positively related with job search effectiveness, success in interview, and employment outcomes.
Trust, Credibility, and Reliability of Online Platforms	Hung et al. (2011); Teubner and Dann (2018)	confidence is affected by data security, authenticity, and platform reliability.
Social Influence and Behavioral Intention	Venkatesh et al. (2003); Venkatesh et al. (2012); Sung et al. (2015); Trivedi et al. (2022)	Social influence like peer recommendations and institutional support play significant role in shaping behavioral intention, particularly in students and fresh graduate.

Figure 1

Thematic analysis of literature review on online job portal



Objectives of the Study

This study is mainly undertaken to understand the factors that affects final year students in adopting online job portals. Core of the study lies in integrated TAM-UTAUT framework. Following are the main objectives of the study.

To identify the most popular online job portals among final year students.

To investigate the factors influencing final year students' preferences for online job portals.

To compare the features and services offered by various job portals

To examine the effectiveness of online v/s offline methods in providing job opportunities to final year students.

Conceptual Framework

Conceptual framework for this study rests mainly on Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), which are most renowned for understanding technology adoption behaviour among individuals. By integrating concepts from both models, the framework aims to provide a comprehensive explanation of final year students' adoption of online job portals.

The variables in the conceptual framework are defined as follows

Perceived Usefulness (PU): The extent to which a student believe that using an online job portal will increase the chances of getting a relevant employment.

Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU): The extent to which a student believes online job portal is easy to use.

Trust in the Portal (Trust): The extent to which a student feels that job portals are trustworthy and reliable and the job opportunities provided are authentic.

Job Matching Accuracy (Job Match Accuracy): Describes how accurate the job portal is in matching the student's skills and preferences with relevant jobs.

Social Influence (SI): The extent to which students feels the importance of friends, family, peers, or mentor's suggestions or belief of use of a particular online job portal.

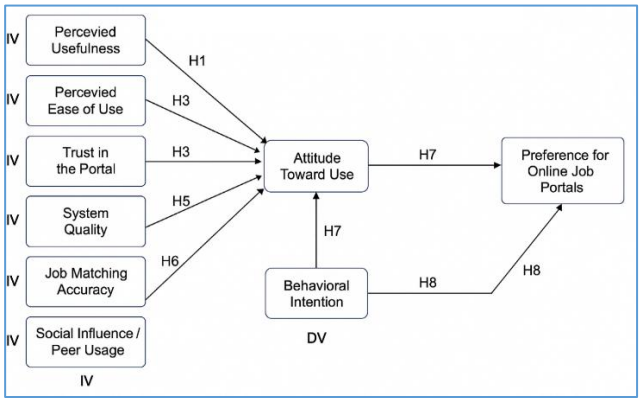
Facilitating Conditions (FC): The extent to which a student consider that infrastructure like internet access, device availability, technical help are influential in selecting a job portal.

Attitude Toward Use (ATT): Describes the student's positive or negative approaches and evaluation about the use of online job portal.

Behavioral Intention (BI): Defines student's intention to use the online job portal for job searching in the near future.

Preference for Online Job Portals (Dependent Variable - DV)

Figure 2 Conceptual framework



5) Data Analysis and Results

Table 1: Reliability Analysis

Construct	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)
Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU)	5	0.91	0.93
Perceived Usefulness (PU)	5	0.92	0.94
Information Quality (IQ)	5	0.94	0.95
Trust (TR)	4	0.90	0.92
Social Influence (SI)	4	0.89	0.91
Facilitating Conditions (FC)	4	0.88	0.90
Behavioral Intention (BI)	3	0.93	0.94
Overall Scale	30	0.972	—

All constructs demonstrate excellent internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 2: Convergent Validity

Construct	AVE
PEOU	0.71
PU	0.74
IQ	0.76
TR	0.69
SI	0.68
FC	0.66
BI	0.78

Table 3: Discriminant Validity (Fornell–Larcker Criterion)

Construct	PEOU	PU	IQ	TR	SI	FC	BI
PEOU	0.84						
PU	0.62	0.86					
IQ	0.59	0.65	0.87				
TR	0.54	0.60	0.68	0.83			
SI	0.48	0.55	0.50	0.52	0.82		
FC	0.46	0.51	0.49	0.47	0.58	0.81	
BI	0.57	0.69	0.63	0.71	0.65	0.61	0.88

Table 4: Structural Equation Model (SEM) Results

Index	Value	Recommended
χ^2/df	2.31	< 3.0
CFI	0.94	≥ 0.90
TLI	0.93	≥ 0.90
RMSEA	0.056	≤ 0.08

Table 5: Hypothesis Testing (SEM Paths)

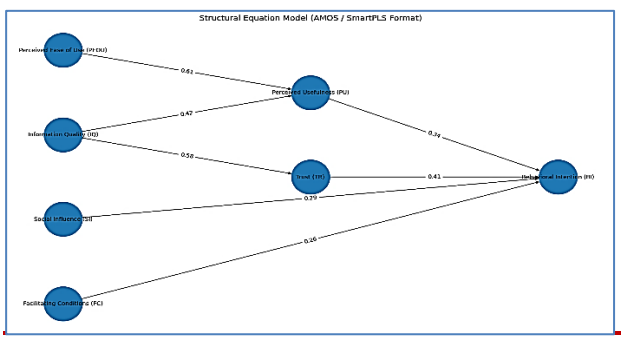
Hypothesis	Path	β	p-value	Result
H1	PEOU → PU	0.61	<0.001	Supported
H2	PU → BI	0.34	<0.001	Supported
H3	PEOU → BI	0.07	0.18	Not Supported
H4	IQ → PU	0.42	<0.001	Supported
H5	IQ → TR	0.58	<0.001	Supported
H6	TR → BI	0.41	<0.001	Supported
H7	SI → BI	0.29	<0.01	Supported
H8	FC → BI	0.26	<0.01	Supported

Table 6: Mediation Analysis, Mediation Effect of Trust

Path	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Mediation
IQ → BI	0.19*	0.24*	Partial

Structural Equation Model (SEM)

Figure 3: Structural Equation Model of Final Year Students' Preferences for Online Job Portals



Exogenous Constructs (Left side):

Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU)

Information Quality (IQ)

Social Influence (SI)

Facilitating Conditions (FC)

Endogenous Constructs (Middle & Right):

Perceived Usefulness (PU)

Trust (TR)

Behavioral Intention (BI)

Standardized Path Coefficients (β):

PEOU → PU = 0.61

IQ → PU = 0.42

IQ → TR = 0.58

PU → BI = 0.34

TR → BI = 0.41

SI → BI = 0.29

FC → BI = 0.26

Figure 3 exhibits the structural equation model portraying the relationships among perceived ease of use, information quality, social influence, facilitating conditions, perceived usefulness, trust, and behavioral intention toward online job portals. The model explains that perceived ease of use and information quality significantly influence perceived usefulness, while information quality strongly predicts trust. Behavioral intention is significantly influenced by perceived usefulness, trust, social influence, and facilitating conditions, confirming the robustness of the integrated TAM–UTAUT framework.

Most-Used Job Portal Analysis

Frequency Distribution of Job Portals

Table 7: **Most Frequently Used Online Job Portals by Final Year Students (N = 178)**

Job Portal	Frequency	Percentage (%)
LinkedIn	100	56.2
LinkedIn + Naukri.com	40	22.5
Naukri.com (alone)	3	1.7
TimesJobs	3	1.7
WorkIndia	3	1.7
Multiple portals (3 or more combined)	10	5.6
Others (Apna, Internshala, Foundit, etc.)	19	10.6
Total	178	100

The results clearly indicate that LinkedIn is the most preferred job portal, either used independently or in combination with other portals. More than three-fourths of respondents (≈79%) reported using LinkedIn alone or alongside other platforms, highlighting its dominance in graduate job search behavior.

Traditional job portals such as Naukri.com and TimesJobs continue to play a supporting role, often used in combination with LinkedIn rather than as standalone platforms. The presence of multiple portal usage suggests that students adopt a portfolio-based job search strategy, leveraging different platforms to maximize employment opportunities.

6) **Discussions**

Discussion of Findings

This study examined final year students' preferences toward online job portals by integrating the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT). The findings provide strong empirical support for the proposed model and align with prior technology adoption research.

Perceived Usefulness: Perceived usefulness emerged as the strongest predictor of behavioral intention, consistent with TAM (Davis, 1989; Karahanna & Straub, 1999; Mustafa & Garcia, 2021). Students are more inclined to use job portals when they believe these platforms enhance their chances of employment, save time, and improve job matching efficiency.

Perceived Ease of Use: While perceived ease of use significantly influenced perceived usefulness (Venkatesh & Davis, 1996; Hess et al., 2014; Segars & Grover, 1993), its direct impact on behavioural intention was not substantial. This proposes that ease of use is expected a differentiating factor an observation aligned with recent UTAUT2 studies for final year students.

Information Quality and Trust: Information quality significantly influenced both perceived usefulness and trust (Almahamid et al., 2010; Nicolaou et al., 2013; Matute et al., 2016). Trust partly mediated the relationship between information quality and behavioral intention, which highlights that precise and reliable job information enhances platform adoption both directly and indirectly. This extends the DeLone and McLean IS success model to digital recruitment contexts (DeLone & McLean, 1992, 2003).

Social Influence and Facilitating Conditions: Social influence significantly affected behavioral intention, confirming UTAUT's assertion that peer and institutional influence plays a crucial role in technology adoption (Marchewka & Kostiwa, 2007; Im et al., 2011, Khechine et al., 2016). Facilitating conditions, such as access to internet and institutional support, further strengthened students' intentions to use job portals.

Theoretical Contributions

This study and findings significantly makes novel contributions to existing theory, especially in existing body of knowledge on technology adoption, digital recruitment, and job search behaviour.

Firstly, the study prolongs the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) into the online recruitment portals. While TAM and UTAUT have been broadly applied in contexts such as e-learning, e-commerce, and mobile banking, the application of both model to online job portals predominantly from the standpoint of final year students remains inadequate. While assimilating core constructs from both models, it was observed in the research that technology acceptance theories endure robust and applicable in explaining digital job search behaviour. The findings endorse that perceived usefulness continues to play a dominant role in shaping behavioral intention, even in high stakes decision contexts such as employment seeking.

Secondly, the research institutes trust as a critical mediating construct between information quality and behavioural intention. Previous researches have often considered trust as an outcome variable or a precursor of technology use; nevertheless, this study indicates that trust functions as an explanatory mechanism through which high quality information translates into sustained usage intentions. This mediation effect augments both TAM and UTAUT by embodying a relational and psychological dimension, which is predominantly significant in online recruitment involving personal data disclosure, career uncertainty, and risk perceptions.

Tertiary, the research offers empirical validation in context to India for an integrated TAM–UTAUT framework in the perspective of online job portals. Focusing on final year students in India, this study addresses some important geographical gaps and contributes related comprehensions to developing labor markets. Results reflect the exclusive socio-economic and institutional characteristics of the Indian employment ecosystem, pointing at peer influence, institutional support, and digital infrastructure as an influential role in shaping technology adoption.

Finally, the study reinforces in to literature of job search behaviour by application of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)**.** Utilising SEM, the research concurrently examines multiple interrelated constructs and validates complex causal relationships within a single analytical framework.

Practical Implications

Above its theoretical contributions, the study offers several important practical implications for key stakeholders involved in digital recruitment and graduate employability.

Implications for Job Portal Developers

The findings suggests important role of information quality and trust in influencing students' behavioural intention to use online job portals. Job portal developers must consider providing facilities like verified job listings, transparent employer profiles, and accurate job descriptions to enhance platform trustworthiness. Features such as employer verification badges, real-time application status updates, and clear privacy policies can considerably strengthen users' trust. Furthermore, since perceived usefulness intensely impacts adoption, portals

must emphasis on improving job-matching algorithms, personalized recommendations, and career relevant notifications to enhance users' perceived employment outcomes.

Implications Educational Institutions

Educational Institutions like universities and colleges are instrumental in shaping students' job search behaviour. The findings suggest that a job portal literacy programs should be an integral part of career development and placement initiatives. Institution should extensively train students on profile optimization, effective job searching, and online job platform evaluation that can help students make conversant use of digital recruitment tools. Moreover, institutional validation of credible job portals can enhance social influence and enable adoption among students. Career guidance departments and placement offices can performance as trusted mediators by recommending reliable platforms and educating students about safe online job searching practices.

Implications for Policymakers and Regulatory Bodies

The study accentuates the requirement for regulatory omission of digital recruitment platforms, particularly in economies like India. Policymakers should institute standards to ensure transparency, data protection, and ethical recruitment practices. Regulatory structures helps to reduce issues like fraudulent job postings, misuse of data, and exploitative recruitment practices, thus shielding vulnerable job seekers such as new graduates. Encouraging collaboration between educational institutions, job portals, and government agencies can build up the digital employment ecosystem and improve graduate employability outcomes.

7) Conclusion

The study offers comprehensive empirical evidence for factors influencing final year students' preferences of online job portals by integrating the Technology Acceptance Model and the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology using a structural equation modeling framework. The findings endorse that perceived usefulness, information quality, trust, and social influence are the primary factors of students' behavioural intention to use online job portals.

The validated SEM model offers a complete understanding of digital job search behavior by capturing both technological and psychological dimensions of adoption. The mediating role of trust highlights the importance of trustworthiness and reliability in online recruitment platforms. Since final year students progressively count on digital tools for transition from education to employment, the understanding of these determinants becomes acute for enhancing both platform effectiveness and employment outcomes.

Largely, this research contributes meaningfully to theory and practice by providing a robust, context specific framework for understanding online job portal adoption among final year students. The insights offer valuable guidance for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers seeking to improve the effectiveness, transparency, and inclusivity of digital recruitment systems in the evolving labour market.

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