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A Grounded Analysis of the Influencing Factors of Employment Information-Seeking Behavior cross Social Media Platforms

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Abstract: Job seekers often utilize multiple social media platforms simultaneously to actively search for job opportunities. A theoretical model of influencing factors for cross-platform employment information-seeking behavior was constructed and interpreted in depth by using the grounded theory. Results show that job applicants' user attributes, platform affordances, information characteristics, and contextual dynamics all exert significant impacts on cross-social media platforms job information seeking behavior. Among these, platform reputation affects cross-platform experience, thereby indirectly influencing cross-platform employment information seeking behavior. Additionally, individuals' job-hunting involvement positively moderates the effects of both cross-platform search costs and cross-platform experience on cross-platform employment information seeking behavior. Our findings provide certain references for a better understanding of cross-platform information behavior, improving the quality of employment information service and optimizing the path of employment information search.

1. Introduction

Research on information-seeking behavior has long been of interest in information science[1]. In recent years, scholars have noted that existing theories and research on generalized search behavior have gradually revealed their limitations in explanatory power when applied to complex contexts and subjects. As a result, there has been an increasing emphasis on investigating information-seeking behavior within specific contexts or domains. As a critical application domain of information seeking, job search information behavior is integral to the entire job-seeking process, spanning from initial vacancy discovery to final employment decision-making[2], and its effectiveness plays a pivotal role in facilitating successful employment outcomes. In the Digital Intelligence Era , characterized by

mobile interconnectivity, multi-social media, and intelligent interactions, the prevalence of multihoming behaviour[3] has compelled information publishers to adopt cross-platform content distribution strategies, while job seekers also need to engage in cross-platform social media information seeking to access diversified employment opportunities and relevant information. Therefore, deconstructing the complexity of users' cross-social media platform job information-seeking behavior(JIB) has become a critical issue that urgently needs to be addressed in information behavior research. In light of this, this paper adopts the research paradigm of grounded theory to clarify the formation mechanisms of users' cross-platform JIBs and address the following research questions:

(1) What factors influence users' cross-social media platforms JIB?

(2) Which factors promote or inhibit this behavior?

(3) What are the internal interactions among these factors?

(4) How do these factors collectively shape users' cross-platform JIB?

Through in-depth interviews with 25 cross-social media platform job seekers and a coding analysis of textual materials, this study constructs a model of the influence mechanism underlying JIB on cross-social media platforms. This research underscores the importance of examining subpopulations of job seekers, thereby enhancing our understanding of job search processes and providing valuable theoretical and practical contributions to the field of career development research.

2. Research Design

2.1 Methods

Based on the research questions and objectives, this study adopts the Grounded Theory method proposed by J. Corbin et al.[4], utilizing a three-stage coding process for conceptual exploration and categorical analysis. The methodology follows a three-stage coding process (open, axial, and selective coding) for conceptual exploration and categorical analysis. Data collection began with semi-structured interviews to gather raw materials, followed by open coding through line-by-line analysis of transcripts to extract initial concepts. During this phase, raw data were fragmented and redefined into conceptual labels, prioritizing participants' original expressions to mitigate researcher bias. Continuous comparative analysis then grouped these concepts into higher-level categories, with detailed decomposition of their attributes and dimensions. Axial coding integrated these concepts by establishing causal relationships, sequential patterns, and contextual frameworks, forming a logical analytical structure. Finally, selective coding identified systematic linkages among concepts, culminating in a core category that anchors the theoretical model. This model, validated through iterative comparisons with empirical data, explicates the mechanisms of cross-platform job seeking information behavior.

2.2 Sample Selection and Data Collection

The study focused on individuals who utilized multiple platforms for information-seeking during their job search process. Considering practical scenarios, recent graduates, unemployed individuals, and employees actively seeking career transitions were identified as eligible participants. The

inclusion criteria required: ① possession of multiple platform accounts with comprehensive experience in utilizing platform functionalities; ②having resolved work-related issues through cross-platform information-seeking behavior. Recruitment notices were posted on platforms including Red Note, WeChat, and Weibo, resulting in the preliminary selection of 25 eligible interviewees (coded as N1–N25). To ensure sample diversity, participants were selected to represent variations in age, professional backgrounds, and career objectives, with their basic demographic information summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 The Characteristics of Interviewees at Baseline(N=25).

Item	Category	n	Item	Category	n
Gender	Male	16	Employment	Student	11
	Female	9		Unemployed	9
Age	18–25	12		Employed	5
	25–35	6	Job-seeking Goal	Full-time	18
	>35	7		Part-time	3
Highest educational level	High school/some college	14		Internship	4
	University or post-graduate degree	11			

To ensure systematic coverage of core research questions, researchers developed an interview schedule comprising three phases. First, participants provided basic demographic information. Next, the concept of cross-platform JIB was explained to establish a shared understanding. Finally, open discussions were conducted to explore behavioral patterns. The complete framework is summarized in Table 2, demonstrating how structured schedules enhance data comparability.

Table 2 The Outline of the Semi-structured Interviews.

Interview Topic	Interview Content
Basic Information	Educational background, age, major, current employment status, primary job-seeking goals, etc.
Terminology Definition	Definitions of cross-platform job searching and employment information.
Core Topics	Which platforms or channels do you typically use to obtain employment information?
	How do you assess the quality and reliability of information acquired from different platforms?
	How do you integrate and utilize information from multiple platforms to support your job-seeking decisions?
	What challenges and obstacles have you encountered in cross-platform job searching, and how have you addressed them?
	What improvements do you believe could enhance the convenience and efficiency of job information searches? What are the most pressing barriers that need to be addressed in this regard?

Semi-structured interviews (ranging 30-50 minutes) were conducted through online conferencing,

WeChat voice calls, or face-to-face sessions. With participant consent, audio recordings were transcribed verbatim for thematic analysis. Twenty-three randomly selected transcripts underwent NVivo-assisted systematic coding, while two retained transcripts served to verify theoretical saturation through negative case analysis.

3. Interview Data Coding and Analysis

3.1 Open Coding

Open coding, the foundational phase in grounded theory methodology, entails systematic identification of initial concepts and subsequent subcategory formation. The process commenced with a line-by-line analysis of raw interview transcripts to minimize interpretive bias. To enhance methodological rigor, two researchers proficient in three-stage grounded theory coding collaboratively labeled concepts, ensuring iterative discussion and consensus for all textual segments. This procedure yielded 129 distinct initial concepts (labeled a1–a129), with partial conceptualizations summarized in Table 3. Through iterative refinement and thematic clustering, these concepts were consolidated into 11 subcategories, including Job-hunting Involvement, Cross-Platform Search Capability, and User Cross-Platform Experience (labelled A1–A11).

Table 3 The Process of Open Coding (Partial).

Initial Concepts	Representative Excerpts from Raw Data
a1 Sense of Urgency in Employment	N3: Recently, I have genuinely felt an increasing sense of urgency about employment, which has led me to conduct intensive searches across multiple platforms.
a5 Integrated Use	N11: In practice, job seekers engage with multiple platforms and adopt a multi-channel approach to job searching. We attend on-campus recruitment events and offline presentations, leverage social media for additional insights, and submit résumés through various apps.
a12 Supplementary Information	N7: At times, I don't thoroughly read job postings on official recruitment accounts, but then I come across relevant posts on Red Note. I use those as a reference before revisiting the official accounts for further details.
a13 Redundant Information	N7: Often, the same job information has already been published elsewhere and is simply reposted with key details modified.
a29 Multiple Verification	N8: If I find a job listing on the app BOSS, I typically verify its credibility by cross-checking it on another platform or conducting additional searches within the same app.
a74 More Information is Better	N10: Overall, I believe having more information is always preferable. When it comes to job searching, the more information you gather, the better.

3.2 Axial Coding

Axial coding, a core phase in grounded theory methodology, involves synthesizing subcategories derived from open coding into higher-order conceptual groupings termed main categories. Following established grounded theory protocols, the researches conducted a systematic analysis of their interrelationships through iterative discussions to minimize interpretive bias, yielded four primary categories (labeled B1 to B4), including User attributes, Information characteristics, Contextual dynamics, and Platform affordances, which collectively structured the analytical framework(Table 4).

Table 4 The Results of Axial Coding.

Categories	Sub-categories	Intension of the Category
B1 User attributes	A1 Job-hunting Involvement	The level of attention and emotional engagement in the job search process.
	A2 Cross-platform Search Competence	The ability to switch and integrate information between multiple platforms.
B2 Information characteristics	A4 Information Content	The accuracy and reliability of employment-related information.
	A5 Information Coverage	The extent to which employment information meets job seekers' needs.
	A6 Information Presentation	The structure and format in which employment information is displayed.
B3 Contextual dynamics	A7 Cross-platform Experience	Customer's feelings and satisfaction of functional requirements when interacting with different platforms.
	A8 Cross-platform Search Cost	The time, effort, and financial resources required for cross-platform job searching.
B4 Platform affordances	A9 Platform Reputation	The collective perception and evaluation of a platform's credibility, reliability, and overall quality
	A10 Service Iteration	Cyclic process of continuous improvement and optimization of platform
	A11 Platform Heterogeneity	Different types of platforms, such as Red Note and Liepin.

3.3 Selective Coding

Selective coding refined the core category (cross-platform JIB) and integrated it with four main categories (user attributes, information characteristics, contextual dynamics, and platform affordances) through theoretical saturation (Table 5). Iterative analysis consolidated intercategory relationships, revealing causal pathways that informed a conceptual framework of determinants influencing users' cross-platform information-seeking behavior on social media.

Table 5 Selective Coding and Relational Structure.

Relational Structure	Type of Relationship	Relational Connotation
User attributes → Cross-platform JIB	Causal Relationship	Job-hunting Involvement, cross-platform Search Capability, and cross-platform experience influence cross-platform JIB.
Information characteristics → Cross-platform JIB	Causal Relationship	The quality, coverage, and presentation of employment information affect cross-platform JIB.
Contextual dynamics → Cross-platform JIB	Causal Relationship	The credibility of information sources and the cost of cross-platform searches in specific search contexts influence cross-platform JIB.
Platform affordances → Cross-platform JIB	Causal Relationship	Platform reputation, service iteration, and platform heterogeneity impact cross-platform JIB.
Platform Reputation → Source Credibility → Cross-platform JIB	Mediating Relationship	Platform reputation indirectly influences cross-platform JIB by affecting source credibility and cross-platform search costs.
Job-hunting involvement → (Cross-platform Search Costs, Cross-platform Experience) → Cross-platform JIB	Moderating Relationship	Job-hunting involvement positively moderates the impact of cross-platform search costs and cross-platform experience on cross-platform JIB.

3.4 Theoretical Saturation Test

Theoretical saturation, an essential methodological procedure in coding analysis, serves to assess the sufficiency of conceptual development and inform the termination of theoretical sampling. To operationalize this validation, two reserved validation samples were systematically reintegrated into the grounded theory analysis. The iterative coding process revealed no emergent concepts or categories that substantially modified the established core category, nor did it yield novel structural relationships among existing categories. These findings confirm the attainment of theoretical saturation in the proposed model.

4. Construction and Interpretation of an Influencing Factors Model for Cross-Platform Job-seeking Behavior

Grounded theory research demonstrates that job applicants' cross-platform employment information search behavior is subject to complex influences from user attributes, information characteristics, contextual dynamics, and platform affordances. By selecting 10 main categories (A1-A10) as antecedent variables and cross-platform employment information search behavior as the outcome variable, a theoretical model was induced, as illustrated in Figure 1. This model delineates dimensional relationships among different main categories and provides in-depth analysis from both

perspectives of behavioral influencing factors and behavioral outcomes.

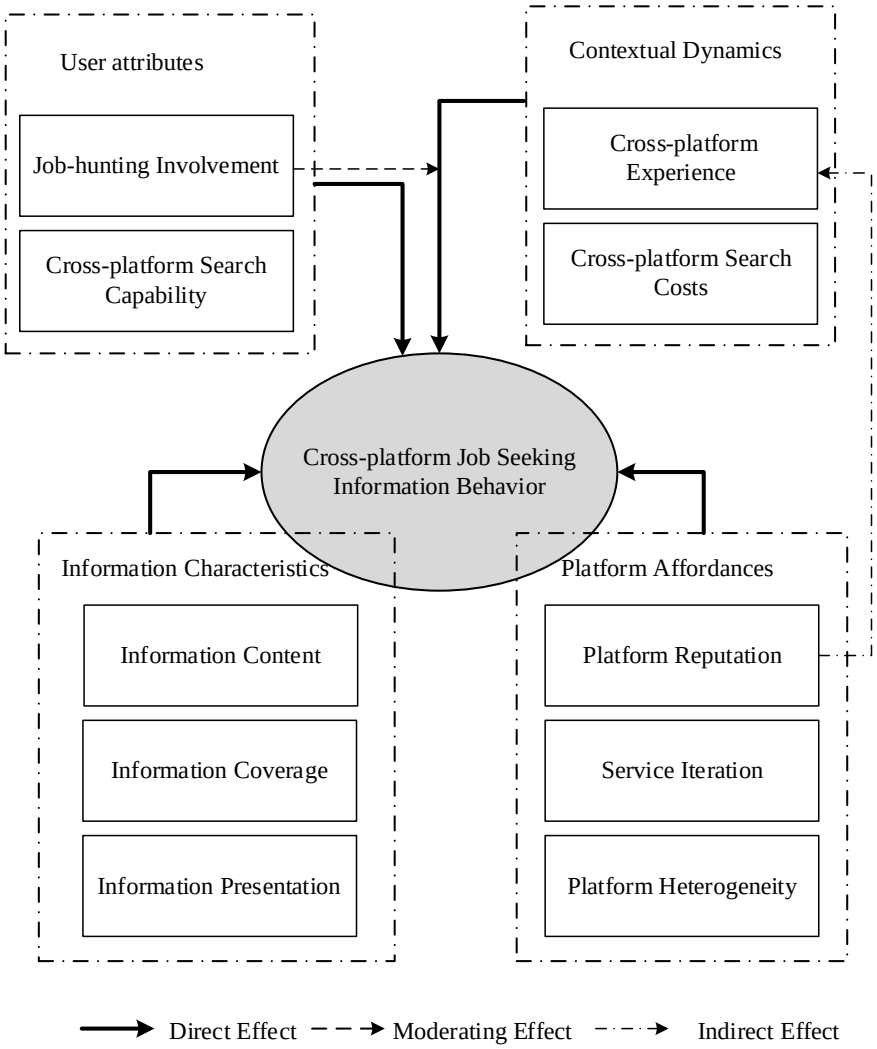

Figure 1 Theoretical model of cross-platform Job Information-seeking Behavior.

4.1 User attributes

Job seekers' backgrounds significantly influence their choice of platform types[5]. Based on coding analysis, this study identifies two individual determinants—job-hunting involvement and cross-platform search capability—that jointly shape users' cross-platform JIBs. Job-hunting involvement denotes the intensity of motivation and the level of attentional/emotional investment in employment information searches. High-involvement individuals exhibit proactive engagement in job-seeking activities, greater persistence in overcoming challenges, and enhanced performance. Interview data indicate that perceptions of this dimension directly influence cross-platform behavior intensity: low-involvement individuals demonstrate higher loyalty to leading recruitment platforms (e.g., Zhaopin, LinkedIn), thereby reducing cross-platform search frequency. In contrast, high-involvement individuals devote more time and effort to information searches, which amplifies cross-platform search behaviors. Cross-platform search capability reflects an individual's competence in switching across platforms to rapidly acquire, evaluate, organize, and utilize heterogeneous

information, thereby resolving employment-related challenges. Interviews revealed significant variation in users' capability profiles: high-capability job seekers efficiently leverage multiple information sources, optimize information reception contexts, and enhance alignment with organizational technical requirements. In contrast, low-capability individuals often exhibit suboptimal information filtering, leading to the acceptance of low-quality information and prolonged job-seeking cycles.

4.2 Information characteristics

The characteristics of information sources are key factors influencing JIB. The proposed model identifies information-level determinants, including information content, coverage, and presentation formats. Information content quality, as the core determinant, defines the intrinsic value of information. Prior studies emphasize the critical role of high-quality information sources in shaping employment outcomes [6][7]. The value of information content is characterized by accuracy, timeliness, processability, and context-dependency[8]. The primary motivation for information search is to acquire desired content that addresses immediate needs. Platforms with inconsistent quality or ambiguous content may exacerbate user anxiety[9], prompting users to seek alternatives. Authentic and detailed employment information plays a pivotal role in guiding subsequent job-hunting activities. Consequently, information content and coverage are prioritized in cross-platform searches, particularly among high-involvement job seekers, who favor platforms offering comprehensive and accurate job descriptions and organizational details. When a single platform proves insufficient, these individuals engage in cross-platform verification or supplementation. Furthermore, platforms with optimized presentation formats—such as intuitive navigation and user-friendly interfaces—align better with users' cognitive patterns and reading habits, thereby enhancing search efficiency, reducing cross-platform costs, and ultimately driving cross-platform search behaviors.

4.3 Contextual dynamics

Context, as another pivotal construct in information behavior research, refers to the dynamic environmental system surrounding individuals' information-seeking and sharing activities. In this study, this system further expands to encompass job seekers' cognitive states toward social media platforms and their interaction patterns with these platforms[10]. On average, participants utilized three social media platforms for job information searches, driven by motivations such as broadening information channels (e.g., accessing diverse industries or regions) and mitigating single-platform limitations (e.g., insufficient job listings or algorithmic mismatches). Platform preferences varied by user identity: recent graduates predominantly relied on general recruitment platforms (e.g., Zhaopin), whereas experienced professionals frequently accessed niche platforms (e.g., Lagou). Participants' search strategies centred on a visit-and-evaluate approach, with limited use of query refinement or advanced search techniques, reflecting high dependency on—yet constrained mastery of—platform tools. Cross-platform experience, operationalized as search efficiency and user satisfaction, serves dual roles: it not only initiates cross-platform JIBs but also modulates the breadth and depth of acquired information, as well as the cost-benefit ratio of the search process. Aligned with the principle

of utility maximization, heightened search efficacy and positive cross-platform experiences critically sustain such behaviors over time.

Coding results reveal another contextual factor: cross-platform search costs. Grounded in information economics theory, the essence of information search lies in cost-benefit comparisons to maximize expected gains or minimize anticipated expenditures[11]. While cross-platform search enhances informational complementarity and search completeness, thereby improving information cross-verification rates, it simultaneously escalates time costs, cognitive load, and operational friction (e.g., repeated authentication across platforms). Job seekers are more likely to engage in cross-platform searches when perceived benefits outweigh costs, following the utility optimization principle.

4.4 Platform affordances

Platform-switching behavior across multiple social media platforms represents a defining characteristic of cross-platform activities among high-involvement users. Empirical evidence indicates that such behavior enables users to strategically manage social relationships and fulfill self-presentation needs[12]. This phenomenon is not only closely tied to personal preferences and sociocultural demands but is also shaped by platform functionalities and user experience design. Coding results further identify three platform-related determinants: platform reputation, service iteration (e.g., frequency of feature updates), and platform heterogeneity (i.e., functional divergence across platforms.

In cross-platform information search scenarios, users operate under information asymmetry due to factors such as social ties, privacy concerns, and incentive misalignment. Reputation emerges as a critical signaling mechanism under such conditions, enhancing perceived credibility of information sources and fostering trust, thereby providing psychological assurance. For instance, user testimonials like "Bilibili is my go-to platform for job searches" or "WeChat mini-programs fully address my job-seeking needs" align with findings on platform trust formation. Service iteration—encompassing product iteration (e.g., feature upgrades) and user experience iteration (e.g., interface optimization)—reflects platforms' user-centric strategies to enhance both the quantity/quality of published information and the frequency/depth of user interactions over time. This iterative process relies on continuous feedback loops to refine services in response to evolving user needs and market dynamics. Platform heterogeneity manifests through two interconnected dimensions: Functional Divergence, where diversity in platform architectures amplifies informational richness and complementarity, enabling multifaceted search experiences; and Interoperability, where seamless data portability across platforms mitigates technical barriers and temporal costs inherent to cross-platform operations. Platform reputation and service iteration modulate users' engagement intensity, which subsequently determines the scope (e.g., industry coverage), granularity (e.g., salary details), and reliability (e.g., verification rates) of acquired information. The indirect effects of platform factors underscore job seekers' intrinsic pursuit of informational completeness—a latent driver of cross-platform search behaviors.

5. Conclusion

Proactive job-seeking behaviors serve as a critical precursor to high-quality employment outcomes. While existing research on information-seeking behaviors is extensive, the unique complexities inherent to job seekers' information search processes necessitate dedicated investigation into their behavioral determinants. Establishing an influential factors model can provide foundational insights for optimizing employment information resource systems. Although prior studies have examined task-specific influences on information-seeking behaviors, research evaluating cross-platform employment information ecosystems remains limited, with no comprehensive framework identifying key determinants. To address this gap, this study adopts a grounded theory approach with standardized coding protocols, conducting in-depth interviews with 25 participants to iteratively analyze raw data, extract influencing factors, and construct a theoretical model of cross-platform JIBs. The proposed model comprises four interconnected dimensions: user attributes (e.g., job-hunting involvement, cross-platform search capability), contextual dynamics (e.g., cross-platform experience, cross-platform costs), information characteristics (e.g., information content, coverage, and presentation), and platform affordances (e.g., reputation, service iteration, heterogeneity). Mechanistically, user attributes directly drive cross-platform search behaviors while simultaneously moderating the pathways through which contextual and informational factors shape behavioral outcomes. Platform factors, conversely, exert indirect effects by dynamically altering contextual constraints and informational landscapes. Individual factors exert direct effects on cross-platform JIB while also moderating the pathways through which contextual factors drive behavioral outcomes. Platform affordances, conversely, indirectly influence such behavior by altering contextual conditions.

This study acknowledges two primary limitations. First, the limited generalizability stemming from the small interview sample (N=25) fails to comprehensively represent all job-seeking demographics. Future research should conduct subgroup analyses targeting specific populations—such as university graduates and employed professionals—to systematically examine how divergent employment exigencies (e.g., career transitions vs. entry-level searches), socioeconomic contexts (e.g., urban vs. rural labor markets), and information synthesis capabilities shape cross-platform search behaviors, thereby uncovering unique behavioral signatures and complex mediating mechanisms. Second, the inherent subjectivity of grounded theory as a qualitative approach introduces potential researcher bias during data interpretation. To enhance objectivity, subsequent studies could adopt mixed-methods designs—quantitatively validating emergent theories through structural equation modeling or experimental protocols. For instance, tracking cross-platform navigation paths via clickstream analytics could objectively quantify behavioral patterns hypothesized in this model.

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