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Title:

In Search of Employment – Online Technologies and Polish Migrants

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Abstract

This paper seeks to advance our understanding of recruitment strategies focusing on a hitherto undeveloped research area, which scrutinises the relationship between social media and recruitment strategies in the context of facilitating international migration. The case study used to explore this activity is migrant workers from Poland seeking and engaging in employment in the UK hospitality sector. Using empirical findings, the paper outlines the role of the Internet fora as a transnational platform for job searching and job advertising, emphasizing migrants' role as recruitment agents.

Introduction

In 2004 the UK opened its labour market to Central and Eastern European (CEE) nationals and subsequently experienced a major influx of migrants, in particular from Poland (Salt and Rees, 2006). Since then, much academic work in migration, sociology and industrial relations has been devoted to Poles' presence in the labour market, their routes into employment and other working experiences. Although CEE migrants are able to move freely in the UK labour market post-2004, their choice of occupations supports Piore's (1979) theory of a dual labour market. Migrants tend to work in occupations associated with precarious working conditions - jobs in secondary employment (EHRC, 2009). Sassen's (2001) assumption of dual labour markets for migrant workers in the global city is also relevant, as 90% of all London low-paid employees were found to be migrants (Evans *et al.*, 2005). Whilst studies reported migrants' high qualifications, often to a tertiary level (Evans *et al.*, 2005; Janta, 2011), instead of contributing to the creation of 'more and better jobs' as proclaimed in 'the Lisbon strategy', they experience an occupational downgrading and 'brain waste' (Ciupijus, 2011).

Aside from the sector that many migrants enter, one of the reasons for this paradox of accepting employment beyond one's qualifications can be in understanding the migrants' use of recruitment strategies. Much of the research into diverse mechanisms of recruitment of Polish workers in the UK has focused on the use of agencies and subcontracting, social networks and word of mouth, while research that examines online resources of recruitment is lacking. This study aims to address this gap by analyzing recruitment practices in the production of international migration focusing on online resources. These issues deserve further attention, especially in light of the contentious debate in the UK surrounding the granting of labour access to Romanian and Bulgarian nationals in January 2014.

The world of work has been dramatically altered by Internet technologies ranging from operational and procedure activities to issues of time and place. The focus of this research is to explore how the Internet facilitates international migration processes. Through an exploration of a group of Polish migrant hospitality workers, it became apparent that the Internet not only assists with employment opportunities for migrant workers but it provides additional functions to job seeking. Jobs are advertised by employees who act as 'recruitment agents' and jobs are sought by migrants-to-be. The online environment enables migrants to have better access and be more in control of their choices in the labour market. The analysis of the Polish Internet sites reveals how limited employers' involvement is in the recruitment process. The website postings reveal that existing employees post adverts on behalf of their employers, who then manage the replies and discussions on behalf of their employers. Furthermore, present, past and potential employees create, control or even manipulate how the hospitality sector is perceived as an employer among their peers.

An investigation of online employment practices among migrants in the hospitality sector potentially extends the results of existing knowledge in the following ways. First, it advances our understanding of the recruitment strategies focusing on online resources in the production of international migration. A number of consequences can be seen for workers, employers and labour markets. Secondly, the study illustrates how migrants may become empowered when using those online resources, giving

them control of their labour choices. The level of control is further manifested by, in effect, the employees acting as 'recruitment agents' for their employers. As the employees post, manage, and liaise with potential recruits, they play a greater role in the recruitment process than would be expected if hiring was carried out in more traditional ways. The dominance of migrant workers employed in the hospitality sector has provided a vehicle for this research, however the findings are more widely applicable to other sectors where the recruitment of people from overseas is widely practiced.

Recruitment Strategies in an Enlarged Europe

The challenges facing British firms with recruitment and retention, and in some instances the desire for greater control, (see MacKenzie and Forde, 2009) has led some employers to seek labour from overseas. After the 2004 European Union Enlargement many companies refocused their recruitment practices and began seeking staff amongst CEE migrants, in countries with high unemployment levels. These practices are closely related to the images of 'good migrants' that exist among employers (Findlay *et al.*, 2013). A formal recruitment engine, The European Employment Service (EURES) was created to encourage the free movement of workers within the EU with an aim of linking together the Public Employment Services of the thirty one countries of the EEA through the EURES website (www.eures.europa.eu). The portal has shown a steady increase of employers, from 8,000 in 2007 (see Laskowska, 2007) to 36,000 and 1.5 ml jobs in 2013. Polish media has also reported a high attractiveness of seasonal jobs advertised on the site (Radio Zet news, 26.04.2013). In addition to EURES, a range of other recruitment strategies have been used by employers and employees. In examining the recruitment methods of Polish migrants, it is important to emphasize that they are subject to the labour demand at any given time. Findlay and McCollum (2013) outlined three phases in recruitment methods: Accession (2004-2005), Boom Years (2006-2007) and Recession: (2008-2010), and demonstrated how recruitment methods change over time. For example, while the use of agencies was dominant just after the EU Accession, the use of informal networks grew significantly during recession.

During the influx just after 2004, barriers to the growth of agency work and migration were evident (Ward, 2004) despite many companies starting to rely heavily on this method of recruitment. Insights from various low-paid sectors such as construction (Anderson *et al.*, 2006; Forde *et al.*, 2009; MacKenzie *et al.*, 2010), hospitality (Evans *et al.*, 2007; McDowell *et al.*, 2008) and agriculture (Findlay and McCollum, 2013) demonstrate that the employers' lack of time and effort in recruitment screening led them to use recruitment agencies. Over time, reservations over the use of agency labour by employers became prevalent, as findings from the above studies suggest. From the perspective of migrant workers, using employment agencies to obtain work in the UK has not been without challenges. The high cost involved, often equivalent to a monthly salary, in securing a job via an agency located in Poland is only one of the concerns (de Lima and Wright, 2009: 396). The lengthy process (around three months) involved in finding a job means that migrants tend to accept the very first position that is offered – often in more isolated parts of the UK (see Jentsch *et al.*, 2007: 43). Once in employment, precarious working conditions involving lowering

wages and intensifying work are evident. As noted by Sporton (2013), migrants tend to remain working for those employment agencies, becoming 'a pool of disciplined, docile workers whose precarious existence has contributed to their own subjectification' (p. 9). Language barriers and a notion of migrants' eventual return are associated with their compliance and acceptance of precarious working conditions.

Studies from the sociology of work and industrial relations capture how and why employers engage in active direct overseas recruitment strategies to attract migrant workers. According to Findlay and McCollum (2013), during Boom Years (2006-2007) many employers become actively engaged in direct overseas recruitment themselves. Their study of agribusiness demonstrates that an important factor in firms' decision to recruit directly from abroad was dissatisfaction with their experiences of using labour providers to source migrant labour, while being happy with 'good migrants' themselves – a finding echoed in the context of construction (Forde *et al.*, 2009). Although it was expected that direct recruitment from overseas became less common because of the effects of the recession and informal networks, in 2013 this method was still in place. In fact, two large companies, Tesco and Next, became at the centre of criticism when information about the numbers of workers recruited directly from Poland was revealed (The Guardian, 2013). Apart from numerous benefits of direct recruitment, some challenges remained. For example, Tuckman's (2010) study, focusing on three different sectors; a furniture factory, a Bus Company and a Fire and Rescue Service, points out the difficulties of controlling who was interviewed back in Poland and who actually arrived in the UK to work. In addition, employers felt that they should be facilitating migrants' settlement and helping with accommodation and language – additional obligations that employment agencies were not necessarily ready to pursue.

The web of social networks as a means for recruiting migrant workers has been well documented (Granovetter, 1983; Waldinger and Lichter, 2003). Both weak and strong ties are particularly important in the context of Polish migration and have become a significant recruitment channel. The importance of networks during the phase of planned economy may explain why this method remains attractive. The concept of transnationalism (Basch *et al.*, 1994) is also important here in understanding recruitment strategies of migrants and it will provide leverage in analysing migrants' relationships formed online. The transnational communities' framework has become a dominant concept in contemporary migration studies, despite claims that it is theoretically and analytically underdeveloped (Portes *et al.*, 1999). Hence, transnationalism is used here to understand the migratory flows between Poland and the UK. Transnational links between the two countries have been quickly formed contributing to the new types of migration such as circular movement between sending and receiving countries. Individuals can be recruited via family members and close friends (e.g. farmers in Norway are recruited through family networks over generations, see Andrzejewska and Rye, 2012) but the importance of weak ties, a distant relative or acquaintance ('znajomy') is often an important source of information about a job (e.g. White and Ryan, 2008; Ryan *et al.*, 2009; Gill and Bialski, 2011). In low-paid sectors securing jobs through 'referral schemes' – where companies use their own employees as *recruitment agents* (Moriarty *et al.*, 2012) is an outcome of growing transnational networks between Poland and the UK. This is associated with the Polish expression 'praca po znajomości' – a job gained through

someone's contacts. According to Findlay and McCollum (2013), this method became particularly dominant during Recession (2008-2010), although we should not underestimate the importance of strong and loose social relations from the very beginning of the influx from Poland to the UK.

The value of hiring through social networks in terms of cost saving and generating trust means that this approach is seen to suit both sides of the employment relationship. This allows employers to indirectly influence labour migration channels by delegating responsibility for selecting 'good' workers to migrants themselves (Findlay and McCollum 2013) who aim to delegate 'the right workers' in order to avoid their own embarrassment. Nevertheless, while hiring via networks is widely used, as McGovern (2007) notes: *'an unintended consequence of this practice is that information about jobs may become restricted to the ethnic groups that already have a foothold within the firm. In this way, hiring through social networks can become an exclusionary practice that gives the firm a nepotistic cast'* (p. 227). The corollary of this is labour segmentation and ethnic concentration within particular job categories, as confirmed elsewhere (e.g. see McDowell *et al.*, 2007 on the hotel sector). An increasingly important aspect of social networks concerns the ties developed and maintained online, yet there is a deficit of studies analysing the role of online relationships for workers searching for employment. In summary, the informality of recruitment indicates a relative ease in finding employment in the British labour market. It is also evident that over time the growing transnational links between those who remain in the UK and those who left, offers opportunities to ease the recruitment process.

In seeking to understand aspects of UK recruitment methods it is worth briefly outlining the hospitality sector. The recruitment of people to hospitality occupations and then retaining those employees has long been problematic (Baum, 2006; Riley *et al.*, 2002). Attracting workers to jobs that are both physically and mentally demanding, are often low paid and are associated with low status, has resulted in many employers struggling to fill vacancies, hence the move towards the employment of migrant workers (Janta and Ladkin, 2009). In the UK, Polish workers are the largest foreign national group, representing 38 percent of all non-UK born European Economic Area workers (State of the Nation Report, 2011: 46). The Labour Force Survey 2006/07 found that 43 percent of migrant workers in London pubs originate from Poland (People First, 2008: 1). Research shows that Polish migrant workers have filled vacancies both in metropolitan cities (McDowell *et al.*, 2007) and in remote areas (Baum *et al.*, 2007). The reasons for this have been well documented; willingness to improve English, a young and lively environment and easy access to jobs (Janta and Ladkin, 2009). Whilst media attention has often reported negatively on the influx of migrant workers, it is widely acknowledged that Polish migrant workers have been beneficial to the UK hospitality industry (Anderson *et al.*, 2006). Polish and other CEE workers have been able to meet labour shortages, mostly in low-skilled positions, and are often seen as the ideal workers (Matthews and Ruhs, 2007).

Social media, which enables users to rapidly create and share information with ease, complements fluid labour markets where there is an urgent need to match labour supply and demand. Increasing numbers of employers are using social media for recruitment, employee selection and screening (Jennings, 2010; Smith and Kidder,

2010), although evidence indicates that candidates' perceptions of this practice are not all positive with ethical concerns regarding privacy violations (Madera, 2012). Companies are also engaging with potential employees through blogs and YouTube (Kwok, 2009), an important strategy in searching for new employee talent. An additional rationale for the increasing move towards using social media for recruitment has been strategic cost cutting (Martin and Reddington, 2009) as HR operations have become consolidated and/or outsourced (Kwok, 2009). From the perspective of potential employees, social media can boost their job searching techniques, for example by using professional networking groups such as LinkedIn, or sites that host online CV and other job related content that is shared by recruiters such as VirtualCV (Maul and Wallins, 2010). An emerging area of research interest from the perspective of employees is use of online resources in relation to employer and employee relations. For example, Schoneboom (2011) analysed a case of firing a workblogger (the Waterstone's incident) that drew mainstream media attention highlighting that an individually operated blog can be helpful in pressuring the employer during an employee-employer dispute. Related to this, Richards and Kosmala (2013)'s study reveal expressions of employee cynism through blogging. The role of social media in all aspects of employment is likely to receive continued interest as new issues emerge.

In addition, the Internet has played a role for migrant communities during different phases of their movement (Hiller and Franz, 2004) with numerous sites available to help facilitate new migrant communities (González and Castro, 2007). Research indicates that the Internet plays an important role as an information point and as a tool for sustaining diasporic communities in virtual space (Garapich, 2008; White and Ryan, 2008; Janta and Ladkin, 2009; Galasinska, 2010). Poles are one of the most computer-savvy nations in the world (Internet Worlds 2012; New Media Trend Watch, 2012), with social networking sites (SNS) being widely used at home and abroad. For example, a Polish SNS – *Nasza klasa*, created in 2006, (later rebranded as *nk*) reached 14 million users in 2010 (nk 2012); this was later replaced by *Facebook* which saw an increase of 79% from Polish users in 2011 (Onet, 2012). These sites play an important role in the employment context, connecting people with similar interests, experiences or careers (*A society of Polish Chefs* or *Working in a 5* hotel made me insane* on Facebook is an example of this). Internet fora have also been used by trade unions as a way of communicating with the Polish community (Fitzgerald *et al.*, 2012).

It is important to recognise the value of online sources for migrants, especially after their arrival in a new country. Garapich (2008) listed various types of support migrants can find on the Polish fora, such as obtaining information on employment, accommodation, healthcare, British education and various family matters. Indeed, *'Polish migrants can learn from new titles [from title threads] not only how to get a National Insurance card, find jobs and minimise the risks associated with migration, but also how to claim benefits, use trade union membership, sue a dishonest employer, or lobby local politicians* (Garapich, 2008: 743).

Research Approach

The findings of this research are taken from a wider study which explored the experiences of Polish migrant workers who had chosen to come to the UK to work in

the hospitality sector (Janta and Ladkin, 2009; Janta, 2011; Janta *et al.*, 2012). The project applied a mixed-methods approach to allow an understanding of respondents' lives at work and beyond. Following Miles and Huberman (1994), the first stage of the research involved exploratory fieldwork, using netnography (Kozinets, 2010), followed by six interviews conducted with hospitality workers in an established seaside holiday destination in the UK. This led to the development of an online survey, which was distributed on the migrants' online fora and SNS and resulted in 315 usable questionnaires. The findings from the questionnaire were further explored in the next round of qualitative data obtained again through netnography. This helped to illustrate, explain and corroborate the quantitative findings obtained from the survey. While the quantitative data provided information on migrants' profiles, job scope or motivations for accessing hospitality employment, allowing for a comparison between geographical locations, gender and age, qualitative data provided deeper insights into the nuances of individual narratives. The integration of qualitative and quantitative approaches took place on three levels: firstly, integration within design (each method was informed by the previous one, the qualitative component of the study helped in the instrument development); secondly, integration within data collection (open-ended questions and space for comments were included in the quantitative survey); and thirdly, integration in an interpretation stage (qualitative and quantitative results were examined together).

For the analysis and discussion which follows, we concentrate on the qualitative Internet research dimension of the study and use the findings obtained through netnography. Netnography, introduced and conceptualized by Kozinets in the 1990s, is a form of ethnography that has been adapted to the study of online communities. Due to the high growth in Internet fora, with little or no cost and easy access to rich data, this form of data collection is increasingly popular across disciplines. Kozinets (2010) recommended selecting active and rich fora as a source of data and postulated that a researcher's identity and intentions should be disclosed with permission sought from users. Today his approach is used in a modified form using postings that are publicly available. This form of data collection has been labeled 'observational' or 'passive' netnography (Beaven and Laws, 2007) as the research was not disclosed. The names of participants have been deleted to ensure anonymity.

Kozinets (2010) suggests that sampling in netnography is purposive, focusing on carefully chosen message threads. Indeed, relevant threads were found by examining headings or by using the foras' search engines. A number of sites, with significant traffic, all written in Polish, were identified: *mojawyspa.pl* (my island) with 23,000 threads, *ang.pl*, a site dedicated to those learning English, with more than 72,000 threads, and *gazeta.pl* – the biggest forum with more than 7,400 different fora on it and more than 102 million written posts with 7474 different fora including a forum called: 'Work in Great Britain and Ireland' with 152,000 posts. Other posts with smaller levels of traffic were also used for analysis when the threads were relevant and contained substantial exchanges (e.g. *networkpl.com*, *glasgow24pl*).

Threads relevant for the study were extracted from the material and analysed using thematic analysis, defined as 'a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data' (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 79). The findings presented here are organised by these identified themes, with examples of original quotes from the respondents translated into English. Regarding participants, online exchanges on

the Polish sites take place between 'pre-migrants', those looking for advice and 'settled' migrants, willing to share their knowledge in relation to job search, language use and other information. A high number of threads however are launched by 'pre-migrants' who typically are looking for informational support to facilitate the move (Hiller and Franz, 2004). Some of participants had just secured a job position and needed further guidance; others may still be based in Poland but actively trying to find a job in the UK. Overall, the 'posters' have a range of different experiences and needs.

Information exchange, control and the Internet

The findings are presented in relation to two main areas. Firstly, the role of the Internet as a transnational platform for job searching and job advertising will be presented. Secondly, the ways in which Internet fora are used as a form of knowledge exchange and support will be explored.

Transnational Job Searching Platform

Transnationalism is important in understanding the recruitment strategies of migrants as it provides support for analysing migrants' online relationships. Internet fora soon became an alternative method of seeking employment as it provided an easier and quicker way of looking for work, without financial cost, and is often supplemented with 'insightful knowledge' from other migrants. Actively seeking work in the UK using Polish fora may provide opportunities for securing employment before migrating:

'Hello, I'm looking for some info on work at restaurants, bars and hotels in Manchester. Perhaps there is someone who knows about any vacancies. Unfortunately, my English is not too good but I have work experience in a kitchen'. (gazeta.pl, 23.01.07)

'Hi mates, I have inquiry, do you know any hotels that would employ a Polish man:) me, in maintenance, my contact (...)' (ang.pl, 25.09.2005)

'MA, good English, looking for work in the UK or Ireland as a waiter, receptionist or office clerk' (gazeta.pl, 02.10.05)

Messages left by those willing to migrate range from specific jobs in certain locations to any job opportunities in the UK or Ireland. For many, their lack of English fluency is the main reason for searching for jobs in hospitality (Janta and Ladkin, 2009). For others, their job seeking seems inappropriately matched to their qualifications – as in the case of an individual with a tertiary education willing to work as a waiter. Indeed in the hospitality sector, foreign employees tend to be overqualified as confirmed elsewhere (Baum *et al.*, 2007; Janta, 2011).

Seasonality exists in a range of sectors and hospitality is prone to variations. Seasonal jobs coincide with the availability of students', with some not only returning to the same employer for two to three years, but also recruiting their friends and family members (De Lima and Wright, 2009). Internet fora are often used by CEE students to find summer jobs:

'Hi. I'm a second year student and I'm looking for summer work abroad. I'm interested in bar/ waitressing work'. (gazeta.pl, 11.05.2007

'Hi, last summer I was working as a waitress for the first time (...)' 'I was there 3 months – the whole summer, I sorted out all over the Internet before I left, then, over the phone – the manager gave me a ring to check up my English' (ang.pl 5.05.2007, 6.05.2007)

The high staff turnover in the industry, which can reach 90-100% in some hospitality establishments (Lucas and Mansfield, 2008), means that the management is in constant search of new workers. Some managers asked their foreign employees to post messages on fora in order to access a specific community of potential employees:

Work as kitchen porter.

Unfortunately, I'm taking applications today only, later on a colleague from the restaurant will be asking among her acquaintances. Requested is info on the level of English + whatever may be relevant, unfortunately, you will have to commute to Braesden...my email:@googlemail.com. Greetings. (forum.glasgow24.pl, 18.04.2007)

Job for a Restaurant Manager - £23,000 annually

We are looking for a Restaurant Manager to work in a beautiful 4 hotel in the South of England. If you have a minimum two years experience in a similar position and speak English, you are very welcome to send a CV to: bristol@.....co.uk or (PHONE NUMBER REMOVED) (gazeta.pl, 26.06.2006)*

As organisations utilise their own employees as *recruitment agents* (Moriarty *et al.*, 2012) they typically 'pull in' (ściągać) their own family members, friends, neighbors and acquaintances, which leads to 'chain migration' (White and Ryan, 2008; Andrzejewska and Rye, 2012). The implications of such advertising however may lead to producing a segmented workforce, an outcome than can be seen in the UK hotels (see McDowell *et al.*, 2007). Using employees as a channel of recruitment adds another dimension as it eases the employers' obligations relating to facilitating newcomers' settlements as this can also be managed by the employee.

Empowered Migrants and Virtual Support Network

The findings from this research point to Internet fora being used for other functions other than job searching; they point to a number of implications that impact on migrants' status.

'Hotel English'

One major theme that is present in online fora is that of English, including its fluency, language requirements, accents or specific industry vocabulary. Janta *et al.*, (2012) identified different techniques migrants use to develop their language fluency and point to the crucial role of the hospitality sector in this reflective learning. Acquiring English skills is a reoccurring theme on these fora and a concern of many who are willing to find jobs in the service sector. Before the job interview, and prior to start day, migrants-to-be post messages and seek help from current employees. One of the

threads was posted by a nervous candidate and entitled: *'Interview – waitress – on Friday help me!!!'* which followed a long list of examples of questions provided by an 'experienced' forum user that may be asked during a job interview:

'What do you like about waitressing? Are you good at multi-tasking? Are you physically fit? What's the longest amount of time you've spent on your feet? How do you learn new things?' (ang.pl, 27.05.2008)

Many queries come from newly arrived migrants seeking advice on basic English phrases that are needed when facing the customers:

'What can I get you? What would you like? Can I take your order? Are you ready to order yet?' (05.04.2006). Another user added more: *'I'll be here with you in a minute. Is everything okay so far?'* (05.04.2006) and advised further that if there is an empty plate on the table, one can say: *'Are you done with it, please?'* (ang.pl, 04.04.2006)

[...] It is worth memorising some basic phrases... I can give you some examples... Hi, would you like a table for 2/3/4...? Maybe this one? Or the one over there? (you should always suggest a few;)) Smoking or non-smoking? Later on we pass a menu. After a while we ask politely: Are you ready to order or shall I come back? After serving a meal we say to a customer "enjoy your meal" :) and later we need to do a so-called backcheck and we ask: "Is everything ok with the food? Are you ok with drinks?" Obviously with a big smile :) When the customer pays, we need to thank him and when he leaves we need to thank him again, invite him for next time and wish him a good day :) (gazeta.pl, 20.02.2006)

Those messages include specific industry phrases but also many cultural clues, rules and procedures typically used in services in Britain. They also point to the lack of English skills among hospitality employees, which is a common issue in this industry (see Dawson *et al.*, 2011). Many newcomers arrive speaking little or no English and take up service jobs hoping to improve their English and then move to more suitable jobs. The hospitality industry has been historically treated by many as a 'stopover' to more suitable careers (Riley *et al.*, 2002; Janta and Ladkin, 2009). Arranging employment over the Internet and on the telephone may seem challenging for both parties. For example, Tuckman (2010) reported that during the interviewees conducted at-a-distance all candidates spoke English. Despite that, after their arrival many of them were unable to communicate, showing how desperate in need of work those workers were.

Other experienced users act as 'experts' and offer advice regarding the level of English that is required for a particular job:

'If the English is weak – only washing dishes in a restaurant, nothing more' (networkpl.com, 02.09.2005)

This is a common theme on these fora, but such posts can turn into hostile discussions and critical comments. Indeed, discussion on Polish fora can easily become heated and polarized (see Galasinska, 2010). Nevertheless, migrants' are willing to spend their time sharing local knowledge that they have acquired performing service jobs in

the UK. Their comments contain insights about linguistic needs but also provide some cultural clues of behavior that can only be acquired from interacting with the hosts.

'Flaming' Hotels

While the Internet may offer benefits for employers looking to recruit staff, it does not come without risk. The term 'flaming' refers to hostile, abusive or insulting comments that are posted online and represent different degrees of hostility (Thompson and Foulger, 1996). As the following posts illustrate, migrants may use Internet sites to warn potential employees about discriminatory and unethical practices:

"The summer is approaching and many people will surely go to England for work. I would like to warn those people against a hotel in (NAME REMOVED). The name of this hotel is (IN CAPITAL LETTERS) and it is located by the seaside next to (LOCATION REMOVED). The hotel is run by a married couple. They are both really mean and unfair. They pay per day, not per hour. It is £25 per day and you have to stay there literally all day long. (...) He is not fair. He says one thing and then doesn't keep his word. He is not willing to employ legally. (...) My brother worked there for two days and that was enough. After the two days he gave up and had problems to get his money." (ang.pl, 06.06.2007).

"(...) wages....it all depends on a hotel, even among NAME REMOVED hotels it varies: each hotel may have a different owner and have a different policy. The owner of my hotel is, unfortunately, a (NATIONALITY REMOVED) woman, who is stingy and 'pull in' others (A HOSTILE NAME FOR CERTAIN NATIONALITIES REMOVED) and pays them ridiculous money as for them it is like 'America'. (...) " (gazeta.pl, 23.11.06)

For some migrant workers', precarious conditions combined with language barriers make them vulnerable to exploitation. Past research has reported cases of failure to pay wages (or to pay the minimum wage) and disproportionate wage deductions for housing that is provided with the job (Anderson *et al.*, 2006; Wright and Pollert, 2006). As the above quote from gazeta.pl indicates, employers' awareness of UK salaries as compared with wages in the migrants' home country is seen as a justification for unfair practices. However, employees can resist and shape relations with employers. While migrants can use their access to the community to advertise potential jobs on behalf of their employers, equally, they can do the opposite and warn co-nationals about particular employers and their practices. The importance of weak ties in accessing the labour market is more important than just learning about job opportunities. The ramifications of negative comments are serious and may cause reputational damage for the hotel owners, both as an employer and service provider. From the employers' perspective it is difficult to control these digital posts, especially when they are written in Polish, and they are unable to respond.

Conclusion

This research has explored how Internet technologies facilitate international migration, with a view to advancing our understanding of recruitment strategies used

by Polish migrants seeking employment in the UK hospitality sector. In particular, it has examined the underdeveloped area which considers the links between social media and employment recruitment in the context of migration. The dominance of migrant workers employed in the hospitality sector has provided the empirical setting for this research and the analysis has pointed to the support network provided through weak transnational ties between co-nationals in the UK and Poland.

Many commentators suggest that social media is transforming lives at an unprecedented rate, including those of migrant workers, who have been described as *connected migrants* (Diminescu, 2008). As this study has shown, migrants-to-be are able to draw on the support provided by their co-nationals via social media. Migration research demonstrates that 'a friend', someone who 'pulls the migrant in' is usually the one offering social, financial and instrumental support as well as helping to facilitate the movement overseas (White and Ryan, 2008). While 'a friend' plays a role in providing the initial address or helping open a bank account, the significance of weak ties in the recruitment process is evident. There are opportunities to find a job before leaving home and consequently, reducing the risk associated with migrating. Through weak ties, migrants-to-be not only find job offers and learn about the working environment, but they can also be given prior warning of unscrupulous employers and employment practices. Settled migrants may contribute to discussion fora for nostalgic reasons or to ease their own loneliness, but this also provides new migrants with insiders' knowledge about job opportunities, linguistic needs or unscrupulous employers.

The theme of support points to issues of trust and solidarity but also to the notion of migrants' *empowerment*. Specifically, the relevance of migrants' position in providing support and knowledge and their 'power' performed in an online environment in controlling and manipulating is a crucial issue here. Various defined in the literature, Khwaja's (2005) interpretation of empowerment is especially relevant here: 'information and influence, which together allow individuals to identify and express their own preferences, and provides them with the bargaining power to make informed decisions' (273–274). In this context, posting a message in Polish, about a dishonest employer, on a popular site for migrants seeking jobs may be seen as a form of empowerment. In contrast to dominant perceptions which view migrants as low-paid, exploited labour, MacKenzie and Forde (2009) contend that, many do not see themselves solely as exploited labourers but also as citizens making conscious decisions for whom low-paid and low-skilled work in Britain serves as a temporary choice. As they become embedded in the local community and labour market, migrants' aspirations develop beyond their initial acceptance of long hours and low pay. Of course, this is not to claim that under-employed or discriminated migrants are *empowered*, but using Internet sites as a form of power may be such a tactic or coping strategy that migrants themselves adopt in order to deal with abusive employers.

The findings also demonstrate the significant role played by existing migrant employees in acting as *recruitment agents* for their employers. Migrants in a new destination become involved in the worker-driven mode of recruitment as they are handed full responsibility for choosing relevant fora to attract specific nationalities and selecting the right employees. In addition, employer's obligations, such as facilitating the ease of settlement for newcomers, is also passed on to employees.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this research. When using an emerging research method like netnography, the ethical dimensions of conducting undisclosed research may not be fully refined. A further limitation is that the majority of Polish participants have a high level of education and computer literacy and so further research with migrants with less skills or limited Internet access would be welcome. The nature of the occupations (often temporary rather than permanent) for which employers are seeking workers may also cause some bias in the findings. Despite these limitations, opportunities for the connected migrant will only increase with Web 2.0 technologies as social media will become ever more prominent for those on the move and in search of employment.

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