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Impact of COVID-19 on the Behavioral Intention of Job Seekers Towards E-recruitment: A Post-COVID Study

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ABSTRACT

Restrictions on face-to-face social interactions due to COVID-19 made traditional recruitment limited, pushing both employers and job seekers to rely on e-recruitment. This shift highlights the importance of understanding the willingness of job seekers to adopt this technology. The purpose of this paper is to examine the impact of COVID-19 on job seekers' behavioral intention toward e-recruitment. A modified Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) was used for the purpose of the study. Behavioral intention of the job seekers was thought to be affected by Perceived Ease of Use (PEU), Perceived Usefulness (PU), Subjective Norms (SN), and COVID-19. 441 job seekers were surveyed using a structured questionnaire developed around the model's premise. The collected data were analyzed using structural equation modelling (SEM). The study identified a positive relationship between the dependent and independent variables. COVID-19 was found to have a significant direct impact on the behavioral intention of job seekers toward e-recruitment. The study findings imply that recruiters must consider COVID-19 when designing their online recruitment process. This paper offers guidance for HR professionals, businesses, e-recruitment service providers, and job portals regarding the strategy for designing their online recruitment process, platforms, or websites to attract a large pool of job seekers. This study contributes to the existing literature on job seekers' intentions to use e-recruitment technology in developing countries.

KEYWORDS: Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), Structural Equation Model (SEM), COVID-19, e-recruitment

1. Introduction

Among the various fields where internet technology has caused major shifts, job recruitment is one of them (García-Izquierdo et al., 2010; Pfieffelmann et al., 2010). Job seekers today overwhelmingly favor using the internet as a means of job search and application. Also, e-recruitment portals are viewed as a practical way of accessing extensive information quickly about recruiting organizations and job positions (Sylva & Mol, 2009). Bangladeshi job seekers conduct their searches online using

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specialized job portals, social media, and company websites. Bdjobs.com, bdjobs today, ejobscircular, chakri.com, chakrir khobor, bd jobs careers, and careerjet.com.bd are all well-known job portals in Bangladesh.

As maintaining a relative position in the competitive job market is essential for employers and job seekers, electronic recruitment has become a very useful tool in today's digital era. This method not only enables job seekers to apply for multiple jobs while managing their time and cost efficiently, but also provides employers with a greater opportunity to find qualified candidates. People use the internet more than any other source to look for jobs, making it the most popular recruitment resource overall (Khan et al., 2013). The quality of websites is the primary factor that draws potential applicants to e-recruiting systems rather than traditional recruitment systems (Hafeez & Farooq, 2017).

The widespread spread of SARS-CoV-2 in 2019 caused direct and immediate effects on health and overall human existence (Fong et al., 2020; Wu & McGoogan, 2020). A major threat to society was postulated as the global economic and labor markets were severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic (Asian Development Bank, 2020). Technological advancements and digitalization have been very helpful throughout the pandemic, encouraging an increasing number of businesses to adopt digital hiring practices.

Thus, the following questions are addressed in this study: What is the perception of job seekers toward e-recruitment? What factors are influencing their intention to use e-recruitment the most? Does COVID-19 have an impact on job seekers' behavioral intention toward e-recruitment?

The motivation for the study was driven by the following factors. First, the internet is increasingly being used for recruitment purposes (Holm, 2012; Sylva & Mol, 2009). Second, internet users' number in Bangladesh is steadily expanding, currently at 129.18 million (Islam, 2016; বাংলাদেশ টেলিযোগাযোগ নিয়ন্ত্রণ কমিশন, 2023.). Third, though over 60,000 jobs were advertised on Bdjobs.com in 2019 as a direct result of Bangladesh's 7.9% annual economic growth in 2018 (Asian Development Bank, 2020), after the declaration of the pandemic in March 2020 in Bangladesh, internet job advertisements dropped dramatically according to the Asian Development Bank (ADB). The quantity of internet job listings continued on the upswing, with data from later in 2022 surpassing that of 2019. Since 2020, the market has been subject to ups and downs caused by COVID-19 waves.

The study's main objective was to find out the impact of COVID-19 on job seekers' behavioral intention toward e-recruitment. The specific objectives of the paper were to

- Evaluate the behavioral intention of e-recruitment among job seekers after COVID-19.
- Identify the factors influencing job seekers' behavioral intention towards e-recruitment.
- Find the relationship between COVID-19 and job seekers' behavioral intention toward e-recruitment.

Even though the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) have been used for various research, according to Chen et al. (2011), the Technology Acceptance Model

(TAM) is more appropriate for online contexts due to its usability and robustness in information systems applications. Hence, in various research domains including wireless Internet services (Lu et al., 2005), e-learning communities (Liu et al., 2010), and mobile commerce (Sun et al., 2009), this model has been implemented. Furthermore, a number of studies (Brahmana & Brahmana, 2013; Ekanayaka & Gamage, 2019; Karim et al., 2015; Kashi & Zheng, 2013; Yoon Kin Tong, 2009) that focused on exploring the significance of e-recruitment adoption by job seekers have utilized this model.

To identify and interpret the determinants that influence the behavioral intention of job seekers concerning online recruiting, an extended version of TAM has been employed in this study by emphasizing perceived usefulness (PU), perceived ease of use (PEU), behavioral intention of TAM, and incorporating external variables such as COVID-19 and subjective norms (SN). For comprehending the complex elements that influence the intention of job seekers in adopting e-recruitment, the theoretical expansion recognizes the significance of social influence, an aspect that is often disregarded in the conventional TAM framework. The study uses empirical methods to examine the effects of COVID-19, which is an exogenous variable, and offers valuable insights into how environmental elements influence the intentions of an individual to use electronic recruitment. For comprehending the behavior of e-recruitment adoption post-pandemic, this study's results provide empirical support for the research model's effectiveness.

The study's results provide empirical support for the model's effectiveness in understanding the behavior of e-recruitment adoption post-pandemic. Also, valuable insights are offered in this study for policymakers and professionals in the field of e-recruitment, where organizations can focus on modifying their e-recruitment approaches in a manner that aligns with the preferences and requirements of job seekers.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

According to Melanthiou et al. (2015) and Melanthiou et al. (2015), recruitment is referred to as "practices and activities that an organization carries out to identify, attract, and influence job candidates' choices and hiring the best candidates based on experience, organizational fit, and skill." The internet has altered the recruitment process for both employers and potential employees, making e-recruitment a strategy that businesses use to find and hire qualified candidates cost-effectively using the internet (Allden & Harris, 2013).

Hafeez and Farooq (2017) found that website quality is the main reason candidates choose e-recruitment over traditional recruitment. College students' attitudes about online recruiting were found to be highly related to aspects such as information provision, user-friendliness, and website usability, according to Teoh et al. (2013). However, employed job seekers prefer e-recruitment to study the job market value, and word-of-mouth from successful users may spread the technology quickly (Yoon Kin Tong, 2009).

Jayabalan et al. (2019) found that innovativeness and optimism positively affect the behavioral intention regarding e-recruitment, but discomfort and insecurity have adverse effects among

Generation Z members. According to Moghaddam et al. (2015), interactivity, vividness, information content quality, search engine optimization, attractiveness, and effectiveness, and website ranking of an e-recruitment website positively impact the behavioral intention of job seekers.

Kashi and Zheng (2013) applied TAM and signaling theories to 332 Iranian job candidates. According to the study, the company's online presence seems to leave a favorable impression on job seekers. Brahmana and Brahmana (2013) discovered that e-recruitment systems must be accessible and entertaining to attract candidates.

According to Seetharaman et al. (2020), "Many new challenges were faced by society, including business disruption, rapid environmental change, and unexpected and frequent dangers due to the COVID-19 pandemic." While businesses have boosted their recruitment efforts in response to COVID-19-related uncertainties (Akkermans et al., 2020), they have also experienced the strain of a lack of available workers. As a result, many businesses have turned to online tools for the recruiting and selection processes (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020).

With the prior decade demonstrating a clear tendency towards internet-facilitated recruitment procedures, particularly within large-scale international organizations (Anderson, 2003; McManus & Ferguson, 2003), technological developments have fundamentally transformed the recruitment paradigm. As employers lean towards utilizing e-recruitment, it is important to know how job seekers view this online recruitment process and whether they intend to use it or prefer the offline recruitment process. Because if job seekers do not accept e-recruitment platforms for job search and application, employers may fail to optimize recruitment strategies. Even though the previous studies about e-recruitment recognized the factors influencing the intention of job seekers to use e-recruitment, no recent paper has explored this topic after the global COVID-19 pandemic and examined its impact. Thus, this gap is addressed in this study by using a framework to find its impact. As the Technology Acceptance Model is extensively used, especially in the area of e-recruitment mentioned earlier, it is utilized in this study with two external variables, subjective norms and COVID-19, drawing from the past validated studies discussed in the following.

2.1 Technology Acceptance Model

To get deeper insights into computer usage behavior, the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) is further expanded, leading to the development of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) by Bagozzi et al. (1992). While in TAM, Davis et al. (1989) identified Perceived Ease of Use and Perceived Usefulness as critical factors influencing computer adoption, TAM2 by Venkatesh and Davis (2000) incorporates social influence alongside cognitive instrumental processes, which builds on the findings of Taylor and Todd (1995). Due to its limited predictive power, attitude was omitted from TAM2. Hence, this study's research framework excludes the Attitude construct. According to a literature review by Chen et al. (2011), the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is more appropriate for online environments than theories such as the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). The authors argue that the TAM's focus on usability and robustness in information system applications makes it more suitable for online contexts. Thus far, this model has been implemented in various research domains, including wireless Internet services (Lu et al., 2005), e-

learning communities (Liu et al., 2010), and mobile commerce (Sun et al., 2009). TAM has been utilized in a number of studies (Brahmana & Brahmana, 2013; Ekanayaka & Gamage, 2019; Karim et al., 2015; Kashi & Zheng, 2013; Yoon Kin Tong, 2009) to examine the significance of e-recruitment adoption by job seekers.

According to Davis et al. (1989), "Perceived ease of use is the extent to which people anticipate that employing a certain technology will be simple and easy." The ease with which a website may be navigated is directly proportional to the number of visitors that the site receives, and a major draw for potential employees is the site's user-friendliness (Moghaddam et al., 2015). Other research also identified it as an influential determinant of job seekers' behavioral intention (Brahmana & Brahmana, 2013; Ekanayaka & Gamage, 2019; Karim et al., 2015).

"The degree to which users believe that e-recruitment is superior to traditional forms of recruiting and will improve their daily lives as a result measures the perceived usefulness of an e-recruitment system" (Tangaza et al., 2017). Perceived usefulness influences job seekers' tendency to use e-recruitment, according to some studies (Ekanayaka & Gamage, 2019; Kashi & Zheng, 2013; Yoon Kin Tong, 2009). Under the discussion above, the following hypotheses were proposed:

H1: Perceived ease of use positively affects job seekers' behavioral intention towards e-recruitment.

H2: Perceived usefulness has a positive effect on the behavioral intention of job seekers towards e-recruitment.

2.2 Subjective Norms

Fishbein and Ajzen, (1977) defined subjective norms as "a person's perception that most people who are significant to him think he should or should not perform the conduct in question." Subjective Norm has been incorporated into both the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) models. Several studies (Oliveira et al., 2016; Ramayah et al., 2009; Venkatesh & Davis, 2000), among others, have linked it to behavioral intention. Favorable comments from friends, relatives, colleagues, and acquaintances encourage people to try new technologies (Schepers & Wetzels, 2007). Thus, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H3: Subjective norm has a positive effect on the behavioral intention of job seekers towards e-recruitment.

2.3 COVID-19

Technology played an essential part in ensuring that links with the outside world were maintained throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and the extensive implementation of the lockdown period (Manuell & Cukor, 2011). In a number of investigations, the impact of COVID-19 on organizational performance, along with the usage of IT, has been investigated, and the findings of these investigations have revealed the existence of such an impact (García-Milon et al., 2021; Song et al., 2022). Thus, the following hypotheses were developed:

H4: COVID-19 has a positive effect on the behavioral intention of job seekers towards e-recruitment.

The research framework is depicted in Figure 1.

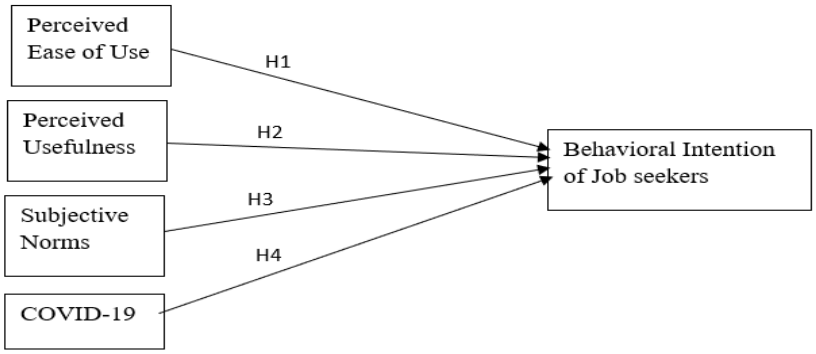

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Setting

The absence of studies examining COVID-19's effect on online recruitment made exploratory research more appropriate for this study (Zikmund et al., 2010). Those seeking employment in Bangladesh were the study's target group. Due to its low cost and extensive use in information systems research, convenience sampling was used in this study (Rahman et al., 2016).

Based on the researcher's ease of access, units are chosen for inclusion in the sample in convenience sampling, which is a non-probability method. To gather information, an online questionnaire was designed. The survey was disseminated through various social media platforms, and data collection was open for three months from November 2022 to February 2023. The participants were provided with the purpose of the study and confidentiality of their responses. They willingly engaged in the survey and were duly informed of their option to discontinue their responses at any point. Four hundred forty-one participants submitted their responses. Construct measurements in the research model were modified from existing research to make them more applicable to the e-recruitment context in Bangladesh (Appendix A).

3.2 Data Collection

There were two distinct sections to the structured questionnaire. Collecting respondents' demographic information was part of section A, while section B measured their opinions on perceived usefulness, subjective norms, behavioral intention, and COVID-19. The latter section consisted of statements, and a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) was used for measurement. Forty responses were used in a pilot reliability test, which showed Cronbach's alpha higher than the cutoff of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2011). By using the PLS-SEM analysis method, the proposed extended Technology Acceptance Model was validated. The respondents of the survey are concentrated in the age group of 20-25, which is a limitation, as the results may not be fully generalizable to older job seekers whose recruitment preferences may vary.

3.3 Statistical Analysis Method

Given the exploratory nature of examining new dynamics post-pandemic, PLS-SEM is particularly suitable because it is designed for predictive research and theory development, making it more suitable for your research goals compared to CB-SEM, which is more suited for confirming established theories. PLS-SEM allows for focusing on predicting key target constructs and identifying the relationships between variables in complex models, which aligns well with our study's goal of understanding the new behavioral patterns influenced by the pandemic.

4. Result Analysis

4.1 Demographic Information

Among the 441 respondents, male respondents were high in percentage, 53.3%, whereas female respondents were 46.7%. Most respondents were in the age group of 20-25 (60.5%). The least number of respondents were of age 18-20 (2.7%). Among the respondents, 60.3% were looking for a job, 29.9% were already in service, and 9.8% intended to be self-employed. A substantial number of young respondents in the sample are justified by the study's emphasis on the impact of COVID-19 on e-recruitment. Younger individuals, often being more tech-savvy and early adopters of digital solutions, provide critical details of their behavioral intentions towards e-recruitment platforms. According to various studies, including (Teoh et al., 2013), younger job seekers are major users of e-recruitment platforms due to their familiarity with digital technologies and preference for online interactions.

4.2 Measurement Model Assessment

4.2.1 Factor Loadings

According to Pett et al. (2003), "factor loadings indicate the strength of the relationship between items and their corresponding underlying constructs and can take on values between -1.0 and +1.0. A greater association is shown by higher absolute values." Therefore, the retention of all items inside their respective constructs was validated by the fact that all factor loadings in the current study exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.50, as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1: Factor Loadings

	BI	COV	PEU	PU	SN
BI1	0.806				
BI2	0.683				
BI3	0.798				
BI4	0.771				
COV1		0.759			
COV2		0.846			
COV3		0.804			
COV4		0.823			
PEU1			0.791		
PEU2			0.729		

	BI	COV	PEU	PU	SN
PEU3			0.804		
PEU4			0.627		
PEU5			0.710		
PU1				0.616	
PU2				0.739	
PU3				0.751	
PU4				0.717	
PU5				0.694	
PU6				0.718	
SN1					0.826
SN2					0.805

4.2.2 Common Method Bias

By employing the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), the multicollinearity and potential common method bias are evaluated. As shown in Table 2, the values of VIF remained below the prescribed upper limit of 5 (Hair et al., 2011). Furthermore, the affirmation that the model is free from substantial common method bias is found by the inner model VIF values of below 3.33 in Table 3 (Kock, 2015).

Table 2: Multicollinearity Statistics (VIF) for indicators (Outer Model)

ITEMS	VIF
BI1	1.706
BI2	1.318
BI3	1.693
BI4	1.487
COV1	1.687
COV2	1.957
COV3	1.747
COV4	1.875
PEU1	1.738
PEU2	1.571
PEU3	1.925
PEU4	1.452
PEU5	1.483
PU1	1.382
PU2	1.553
PU3	1.647
PU4	1.575
PU5	1.689
PU6	1.491
SN1	1.572

ITEMS	VIF
SN2	1.453
SN3	1.610

Table 3: Multicollinearity Statistics (VIF) (Inner Model)

Relationships	VIF
COV -> BI	1.471
PEU -> BI	2.058
PU -> BI	2.135
SN -> BI	1.866

4.2.3 Reliability and Validity

Reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR), which measure internal consistency. Cronbach's Alpha values ranged from 0.760 to 0.824, while CR values were between 0.850 and 0.883, surpassing the minimum recommended threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2011). These results confirm the constructs' reliability (Table 4). Both convergent and discriminant validity were utilized in order to evaluate the construct's validity. Due to the fact that the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each and every construct was more than the required threshold of 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), convergent validity was determined to be present. This demonstrates that the items effectively converge to reflect the structures that they are supposed to represent (Table 4). For the purpose of determining whether or not constructs are distinct from one another, the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio were utilized in order to evaluate the concept of discriminant validity. As a result of the fact that the square root of the AVE for each construct was higher than its association with other constructs, discriminant validity was demonstrated when looking at Table 5. In accordance with the recommendations made by Teo (2010), all of the HTMT values were lower than the threshold of 0.90, which further confirmed the discriminant validity (Table 6). Figure 2 visually represents the measurement model.

Table 4: Convergent Validity and Reliability

Constructs	Items	Convergent Validity and Reliability			
		Outer loadings	Composite Reliability	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha
BI	BI1	0.807	0.850	0.587	0.763
	BI2	0.680			
	BI3	0.800			
	BI4	0.770			
COV	COV1	0.759	0.883	0.654	0.824
	COV2	0.846			
	COV3	0.804			

Constructs	Items	Convergent Validity and Reliability			
		Outer loadings	Composite Reliability	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha
	COV4	0.823			
PEU	PEU1	0.791	0.854	0.540	0.787
	PEU2	0.729			
	PEU3	0.804			
	PEU4	0.627			
	PEU5	0.710			
PU	PU1	0.616	0.857	0.500	0.799
	PU2	0.739			
	PU3	0.751			
	PU4	0.717			
	PU5	0.694			
	PU6	0.718			
SN	SN1	0.826	0.862	0.675	0.760
	SN2	0.805			
	SN3	0.834			

Table 5: Discriminant Validity- Fornell & Larcker Criterion

	BI	COV	PEU	PU	SN
BI	**0.766**				
COV	0.500	**0.809**			
PEU	0.671	0.441	**0.735**		
PU	0.649	0.435	0.684	**0.707**	
SN	0.637	0.535	0.559	0.587	**0.822**

Note: The square root of AVE is represented with Bold font

Table 6: Discriminant Validity- HTMT Ratio

	BI	COV	PEU	PU	SN
BI					
COV	0.626				
PEU	0.850	0.540			
PU	0.828	0.528	0.859		
SN	0.837	0.669	0.721	0.756	

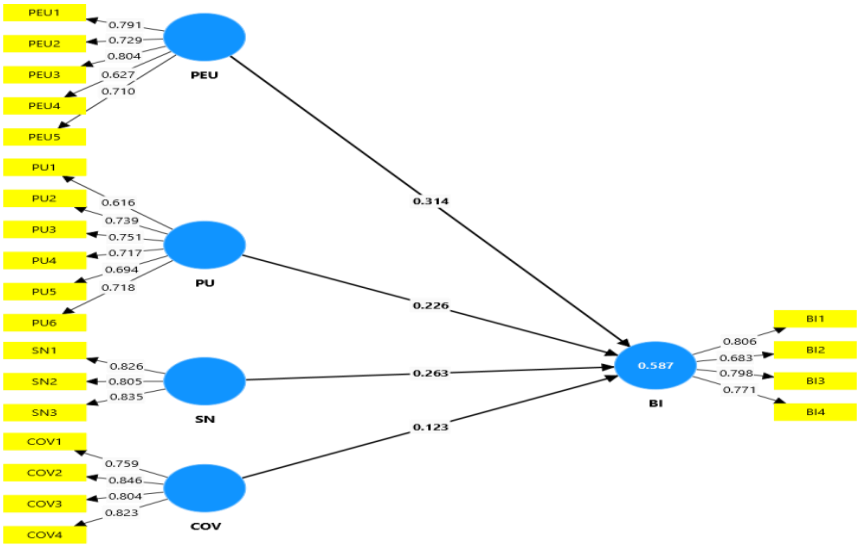

Figure 2: Measurement model of Behavioral Intention of Job Seekers Towards E-Recruitment

4.6 Structural model

To estimate the hypothesized links between the constructs, the PLS-SEM algorithm was used. The outcomes in Table 7 show the path coefficients generated by bootstrapping. In addition, the PLS method yielded substantial R^2 values for the endogenous latent variables (Table 8).

Table 7: Direct Effect Hypotheses

Hypotheses	Beta Coefficient	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P values	Result
H1: PEU -> BI	0.315	0.060	5.226	0.000***	Supported
H2: PU -> BI	0.226	0.067	3.350	0.001***	Supported
H3: SN -> BI	0.263	0.063	4.190	0.000***	Supported
H4: COV -> BI	0.123	0.056	2.198	0.028**	Supported

Note: *** represents significance at the 1% level and ** represents significance at the 5% level.

Table 8: R^2 and R^2 adjusted

	R-square	R-square adjusted
BI	0.587	0.583

From Table 7, it is seen that perceived ease of use → behavioral intention (β= 0.315, t= 5.226, and p <0.001) implies that job seekers prefer e-recruitment platforms that are easy to understand and operate. Perceived usefulness→ behavioral intention (β= 0.226, t= 3.350, and p= <0.001) suggests that job seekers are influenced to use the platforms when they believe it improves their job search efficiency and effectiveness. Subjective norm→ behavioral intention (β= 0.263, t= 4.190, and p <0.001) indicates that social trends and recommendations from peers encourage job seekers. Lastly, COVID-19→ behavioral intention (β= 0.123, t= 2.198, and p <0.05) implies that pandemic-related safety concerns influenced job seekers to prefer online recruitment. All the independent

variables have a significant and positive impact on job seekers' behavioral intention toward e-recruitment. Thus, hypotheses 1,2,3, and 4 were supported by these findings. Figure 3 represents the structural model.

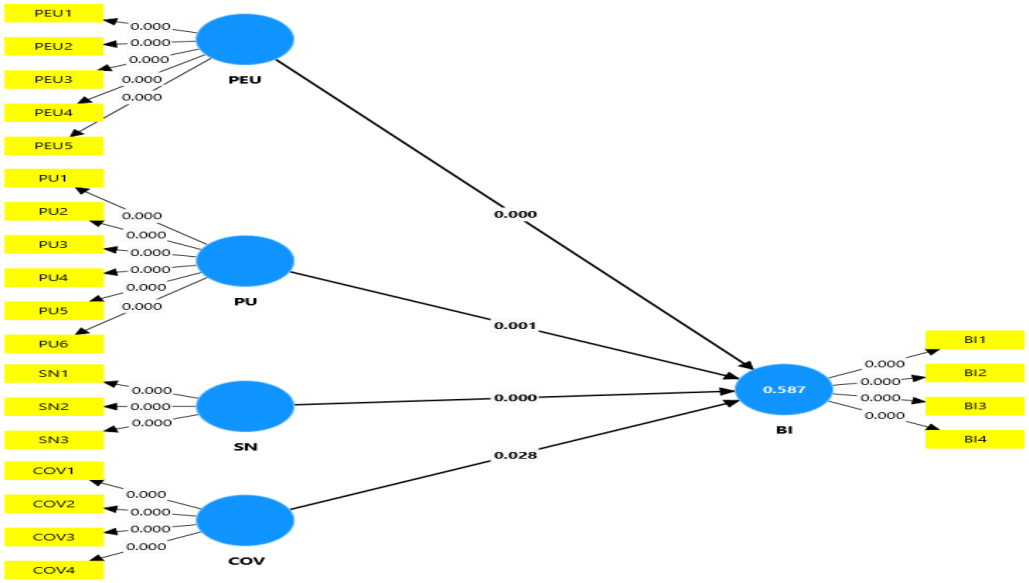

Figure 3: Structural Model of Behavioral Intention of Job seekers Towards E-Recruitment

5. Discussion

The modified TAM used in this study included Perceived Ease of Use (PEU), Perceived Usefulness (PU), and Subjective Norms (SN) as predictors of job seekers' behavioral intentions toward e-recruitment. The findings revealed that all these variables have a positive relationship with behavioral intention, supporting the robustness of TAM in predicting technology acceptance in the context of e-recruitment. Affirming previous findings (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000), the result of this study found that both the perceived ease of use (Brahmana & Brahmana, 2013; Ekanayaka & Gamage, 2019; Moghaddam et al., 2015) and perceived usefulness (Kashi & Zheng, 2013; Tangaza et al., 2017; Yoon Kin Tong, 2009) to be significantly influencing the job-seekers' behavioral intention towards e-recruitment. So, job seekers want online recruitment platforms that ensure user-friendliness, minimize mental effort, and provide reliable information about job vacancies, detailed job descriptions, and feedback services for job seekers. Also, as opposed to the conventional technique of applying for jobs, significantly less time should be required to apply using the online recruitment process. Subjective norms are found to have a significant impact on job applicants' behavioral intention (BI), which supports the theories put forth by Fishbein and Ajzen (1977), Ajzen (1991), and Venkatesh and Davis (2000). Correspondingly, this finding about subjective norms lines up with what Oliveira et al. (2016) and Ramayah et al. (2009) found. Individuals' subjective norms, such as those set by friends, family members, and coworkers, influence their intentions concerning engaging in online recruitment, as Lewis et al. (2003) found interesting results when they concluded that social effects, such as department peers, senior executives, and others, have little effect on the adoption of new technologies. Hence, job seekers' intentions can also be influenced by word-of-mouth about online recruitment platforms.

Because there was no prior scale to assess the influence of COVID-19, adaptation measuring items from earlier research done in different fields was used for this study (Hochwarter et al., 2008; Song et al., 2022). The study identified that COVID-19 has a significant and direct impact on job seekers' behavioral intentions towards e-recruitment. This finding is consistent with the general observation that the pandemic has enhanced the usage of digital technologies across various domains. Our findings suggest that the urgency and necessity imposed by the pandemic have likely shifted job seekers' perceptions, making them more receptive to e-recruitment platforms.

6. Conclusion

The study set out to explore how COVID-19 affected job seekers' intentions and what role perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and subjective norms had in shaping their behavioral intention in relation to e-recruitment. To address the literature gap on COVID-19's impact on e-recruitment adoption, COVID-19 has been utilized as an external variable to test for an association between the stress imposed by the pandemic and the behavioral intention of job seekers. The study provides partial support to the research model and reaffirms the significance of both external factors (as exemplified by peers, friends, or family) and job seekers' internal opinions (as reflected in online recruitment's perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use) in shaping their behavioral intention. COVID-19 was found to be significantly influencing job seekers to use e-recruitment, showing that job seekers are drawn to using e-recruitment because of COVID-19.

6.1 Implications

With an increasing number of internet users, web browsing for job search has also increased, specifically due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Recruiters, potential employers, government agencies, and e-recruitment portals can design their websites or e-recruitment processes in accordance with the study's findings concerning job seekers' preferences, perceptions, and intentions regarding e-recruitment, as well as their intention to utilize it. Consequently, this will allow them to effectively attract and hire suitable candidates for the available job positions. Besides, recruiters need to take into account the possibility that a pandemic can affect the behavioral intention of job seekers to employ e-recruitment and integrate pandemic-related considerations into their recruitment strategies. So, they should design their websites according to the change in job seekers' intentions.

The research framework makes a valuable contribution to the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) by emphasizing the significance of subjective norms in the e-recruitment adoption area, which very few researchers have explored. Also, by highlighting the direct impact of the pandemic on the adoption of e-recruitment technologies, this study provides groundwork for future research to further explore the evolving dynamics of job seeking and recruitment in a post-pandemic world.

6.2 Limitations and Future Research Directions

The data were collected from a single developing country, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other national or cultural contexts. Using convenience sampling is a methodological limitation as it may not represent the entire population correctly. Furthermore, utilizing cross-sectional research only captures a snapshot in time. Due to the real-time nature of data collection, longer-term effects could not be determined. We recognize the need for future research work with a more diversified and representative sample of job seekers to validate and extend our findings. Future

studies should aim to incorporate participants from different age groups, industries, and levels of experience with recruitment processes by utilizing probability-based sampling (eg, stratified or random sampling). The future investigation could be a longitudinal study, cross-country, or comparative studies tracking job seekers' intention to use e-recruitment over time and in different economic or cultural settings. Additional research is necessary to gain new perspectives on the comprehension of these events, especially considering the scarcity of studies on how COVID-19 affects job seekers' intention to participate in online recruiting. Therefore, it is believed that this research would set the underpinning for future studies on similar subjects, and future studies can extend the current model by incorporating additional variables such as trust, perceived risk, digital literacy, etc.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Data availability statement

The dataset linked to this investigation is not accessible to the public because of the confidentiality and privacy obligations placed upon the study participants. However, obtaining it from the corresponding author is possible upon request.

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Appendix A: Constructs, Measuring Items and Sources

Constructs	Measuring items	Source
Perceived Ease of Use	PEU1- I think applying for and searching for jobs using the internet is easy.	(Davis et al., 1989; Yoon Kin Tong, 2009)
	PEU2- According to me, interacting with the online job application process is clear and understandable.	
	PEU3- I think it is easy to learn searching and applying for jobs online.	
	PEU4- I feel that web-based recruitment sites and their application process do not require a lot of mental effort.	
	PEU5- I feel it is easy to collect all the required documents (e.g. certificates, recommendation letter) for submitting the job application online.	
Perceived Usefulness	PU1- I feel using web-based platforms to submit resumes saves time compared to the traditional method.	(Davis et al., 1989; Moghaddam et al., 2015)
	PU2- I think the e-recruitment sites/ prospective employers provide all the information required to apply for a job online.	
	PU3- According to me, e-recruitment sites/ prospective employers offer a variety of careers/jobs to apply for.	
	PU4- I think the e-recruitment sites/ prospective employers provide information such as FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions).	
	PU5- According to me, the e-recruitment sites/ prospective employers provide a feedback service.	
	PU6- I feel that using e-recruitment sites/ prospective employers' websites enables me to compare similar vacancies in other organizations.	
Subjective Norm	SN1- Most people who are important to me think I should use e-recruitment platforms.	(Fishbein & Ajzen, 1977; Lu et al., 2005)
	SN2- I feel social influence in using web-based recruitment procedures.	
	SN3- Seeing my friends/colleagues using e-recruitment platforms encourages me to use them.	

Constructs	Measuring items	Source
Behavioural Intention	BI1- Given that I have access to e-recruitment technology, I intend to continue using web-based recruitment systems.	(Davis et al., 1989; Yoon Kin Tong, 2009)
	BI2- Given that I have not used web-based recruitment procedures earlier, I am actively planning to use e-recruitment platforms in the near future.	
	BI3- I will recommend other job seekers to use e-recruitment/online platforms.	
	BI4- I intend to continuously update my job-based profile on online platforms/company websites.	
COVID-19	COV1- COVID-19 has made me feel that searching and applying for jobs online is easy.	(Hochwarter et al., 2008; Song et al., 2022)
	COV2- The COVID-19 pandemic has made me feel that searching and applying for jobs online is more useful compared to the traditional method.	
	COV3- The COVID-19 pandemic has caused me to feel the social influence of using e-recruitment platforms.	
	COV4- The COVID-19 pandemic has inspired me to plan on using e-recruitment platforms to apply for and search for jobs.	

Appendix B: Demographic information of respondents

Measure	Items	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	235	53.3
	Female	206	46.7
Age	18-20	12	2.7
	20-25	267	60.5
	26-30	146	33.1
	30-35	16	3.6
Current employment status	Looking for job	266	60.3
	In service	132	29.9
	Intention to be self-employed	43	9.8
Internet experience	Less than 2 years	27	6.1
	2-4 years	88	20.0
	5-7 years	181	41.0
	More than 7 years	145	32.9
	Desktop	11	2.5

Measure	Items	Frequency	Percent
The device used for searching and applying for jobs	Laptop	33	7.5
	Mobile phone	53	12.0
	Desktop and laptop	6	1.4
	Laptop and mobile phone	183	41.5
	Desktop and mobile phone	21	4.8
	All three of them	134	30.4
Internet connection used	Mobile data	25	5.7
	Broadband	139	31.5
	Wi-fi	130	29.5
	All	147	33.3
Frequency of using e-recruitment technology	Daily	138	31.3
	Once in two-three days	117	26.5
	Once in three-five days	88	20.0
	Once a week	64	14.5
	Other	34	7.7
Number of platforms known	Less than 3	120	27.2
	3- 6	227	51.5
	7- 10	82	18.6
	More than 10	12	2.7

Appendix-C: Discriminant Validity- Cross Loadings

	BI	COV	PEU	PU	SN
BI1	0.807	0.37	0.539	0.538	0.502
BI2	0.680	0.388	0.422	0.439	0.433
BI3	0.800	0.375	0.579	0.513	0.501
BI4	0.770	0.405	0.505	0.494	0.513
COV1	0.32	0.759	0.295	0.247	0.347
COV2	0.455	0.846	0.443	0.403	0.463
COV3	0.411	0.804	0.339	0.37	0.456
COV4	0.415	0.823	0.333	0.363	0.448
PEU1	0.598	0.337	0.791	0.554	0.461
PEU2	0.483	0.349	0.729	0.483	0.402
PEU3	0.518	0.338	0.804	0.534	0.413

	BI	COV	PEU	PU	SN
PEU4	0.37	0.271	0.627	0.441	0.344
PEU5	0.46	0.322	0.710	0.493	0.426
PU1	0.467	0.251	0.45	0.616	0.342
PU2	0.489	0.331	0.54	0.739	0.419
PU3	0.483	0.33	0.5	0.751	0.436
PU4	0.441	0.262	0.462	0.717	0.398
PU5	0.401	0.341	0.471	0.694	0.47
PU6	0.459	0.331	0.468	0.718	0.428
SN1	0.522	0.443	0.475	0.478	0.826
SN2	0.525	0.443	0.447	0.509	0.805
SN3	0.525	0.432	0.457	0.46	0.834