

Find your path: Access routes to a new job

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Abstract: *The intersection of employers' job offers and the expectations of the younger generation entering the labor market is facilitated through online platforms and traditional face-to-face interactions. For the younger generation, online platforms provide immediate access to job opportunities, allowing them to connect with potential employers with just a click. In contrast, traditional methods, such as job fairs, career centers, and site visits to employers, offer valuable face-to-face engagement. The job market has always been a competitive arena, and this research explores the common strategies employed by young technical university students in their job search. The study involved 1,695 students from five Technical Universities across four cities: Timișoara, Cluj-Napoca, Iași, and Bucharest. Data were collected between November 2022 and December 2023. The findings highlight several perspectives that should be considered regarding how students engage with both regional and global labor markets.*

Keywords: employers, young people, online platforms, references, labor market.

1. Introduction

The search for a workplace is fundamentally an investment in information gathering, aimed at securing a fulfilling job. The effectiveness of this research is closely tied to the costs associated with job prospecting (Okiemy & Etsiba, 2021). Job seekers can discover new opportunities through various channels, including informational networks, specialized public or private agencies, and career centers. Employers often advertise open positions directly on online platforms or at job fairs. Moreover, the local cultural context plays a significant role in shaping applicants' trust in potential employers and specific workplaces. Theories from the 1970s (Arrow, 1973; Spence, 1974) emphasize the importance of an individual's educational background in accessing employment opportunities. Additionally, an organization's image is crucial in attracting candidates, particularly during the early stages of recruitment. At this point, applicants have only a limited understanding of the job and the organization, leading them to rely on general impressions – essentially, the company's image – when deciding whether to apply.

Research indicates that an employer's image significantly influences both the quantity and quality of candidates. Organizations with a positive reputation are more successful in attracting a larger, more qualified pool of applicants (Lievens, 2017). In recent years, digital technologies have evolved rapidly and infiltrated

various economic sectors, fundamentally altering the traditional foundations of the labor market. This is mostly thanks to automatization, technology and globalization (Cismariu, Ciurel & Hosu, 2019). Digital platforms must be understood as intermediaries that reorganize life from both economic and social perspectives (Barley, 2015; Srnicek, 2017). These platforms have created unprecedented opportunities for workers, businesses, and society at large, driven by a wave of global innovation. However, they have also changed the rules of the game (Kenney & Zysman, 2019a), increasingly dominating communication spaces and continuing to shape transformations for both individual and institutional users.

For instance, Facebook stands out as a leader in the advertising sector, leveraging vast amounts of data from its 2.8 billion users to enable both individuals and organizations to reach diverse geographical markets effortlessly (Fumagalli et al., 2018). Communication platforms such as WhatsApp, Skype, Teams, and Zoom have become essential tools for maintaining business continuity, particularly in the wake of recent global challenges. Digital labor platforms have seamlessly integrated into our daily lives (ILO, 2021), reshaping the way we think about work and employment. Moreover, online news and media platforms are in fierce competition with traditional news outlets, significantly impacting their operations and the livelihoods of their workers. The internet has emerged as a primary platform for job searching and accessing employment opportunities, marking a significant shift in how individuals navigate the labor market. The advent of cloud infrastructure has dramatically transformed the news and media industry, particularly affecting young people who are preparing to enter the workforce.

Understanding the needs and behaviors of young people is a crucial step in facilitating their integration into the workplace and ensuring the specific success of organizations (Schroth, 2019). As these digital transformations continue to unfold, it becomes increasingly important for businesses to adapt and respond to the evolving landscape of labor and communication.

What happens in the Romanian market from this point of view, what is the youth's perspective, who will soon enter the labor market and how does local traditionalism interfere with the new tendencies towards the access of a new workplaces are some of the questions that this study set itself to answer.

2. Methodology

The primary objective of this paper is to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the various job search methods and employment access strategies employed by Romanian youth graduating from technical universities. Our aim is to identify the approaches that most effectively facilitate entry into the labor market. Data for this study were collected over a period extending from November 2022 to December 2023, focusing on students who are pursuing or have completed bachelor's and master's degrees within engineering disciplines. The participants in our survey were enrolled at five prominent technological universities in Romania: Polytechnic

University of Bucharest (UPB), Technical University of Civil Engineering of Bucharest (UTCB), Technical University of Cluj-Napoca (UTCN), Gheorghe Asachi Technical University of Iași (TUIASI), and Polytechnic University of Timișoara (UPT). For ease of reference, we will use the official acronyms of these universities throughout our tables and figures.

To gather data, we utilized an online anonymous questionnaire hosted on the Isondaje.ro platform (www.isondaje.ro/sondaj/693286480/). This platform was chosen for its user-friendly interface, cost-effectiveness, and the ability to facilitate complex crosstabulation of responses. The questionnaire featured a five-point Likert scale for responses, where a score of 5 indicated "full agreement" with a given statement, and a score of 1 represented "complete disagreement." In our research, we successfully collected a total of 1,695 valid surveys. These responses provide a substantial dataset for analyzing the job search behaviors and employment access strategies of technical university graduates in Romania.

2.1 Results and discussions

The research aims at highlighting the features that young people pay attention to find and access employment on:

2.1.1 Profile sites from Romania (myjob.ro, hipo.ro, ejobs.ro, bestjobs.ro, undelucram.ro, munca.ro)

The useful item for finding a workplace "profile site from Romania" is perceived differently by students, with the difference between the groups resulting from the value of ($F_{4, 1777}=5.993, p=0.000$). (Table 1).

Table 1. ANOVA test results for the useful item in finding a workplace "profile site from Romania"- comparison between universities

Multiple Comparisons						
Dependent Variable: Q18.1. Profile sites from Romania (myjob.ro, hipo.ro, ejobs.ro, bestjobs.ro, undelucram.ro, munca.ro, etc)						
(I) Q1 Universitatea:	(J) Q1 Universitatea:	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
UPB	UTCB	.294*	.081	.003	.06	.52
	TUIASI	.295*	.082	.003	.06	.53
	UPT	.326*	.085	.001	.09	.56

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

The differences between universities are presented in the lower graph (Figure 1). ($\text{Mean}_{\text{UPB}} = 3.62 / \text{Mean}_{\text{UTCB}} = 3.22$; $\text{Mean}_{\text{UPB}} = 3.62 / \text{Mean}_{\text{TUIASI}} = 3.21$; $\text{Mean}_{\text{UPB}} = 3.62 / \text{Mean}_{\text{UPT}} = 3.19$).

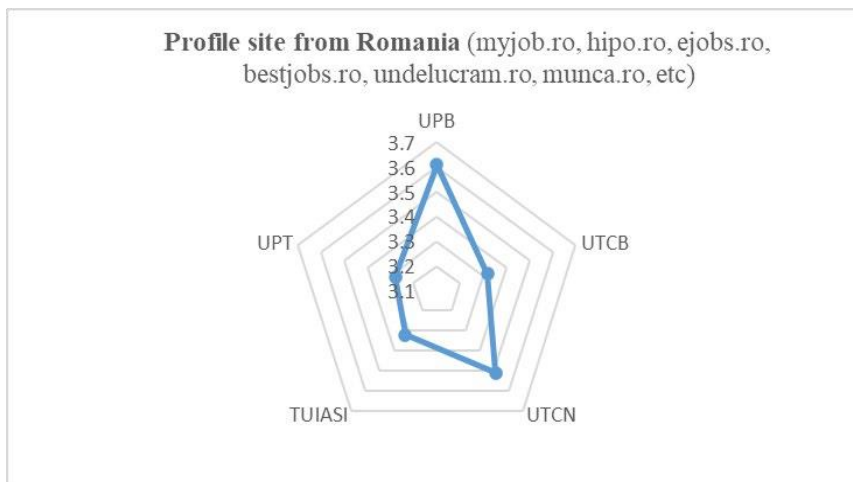


Figure 1. Graphical representation for useful channels in finding a workplace “profile site from Romania”- comparison between universities

We could argue that students from the University of Technology and Business (UTB) exhibit a notable openness towards exploring the job market as they seek to identify suitable employment opportunities. This proactive attitude is particularly evident in their eagerness to investigate a wide array of job offers and prospects within the engineering sector. In contrast, students from the Polytechnic University of Timișoara (UPT) and the Technical University of Iași (TUIASI) tend to be more reserved when it comes to searching for opportunities, often limiting their exploration to Romanian job sites. Furthermore, it is worth noting that students from the Technical University of Civil Engineering Bucharest (UTCB) display a distinct disinterest in job offers from the construction sector, which they often find unappealing. This aversion to certain fields further emphasizes the diverse preferences and attitudes toward job searching among different university students. Interestingly, students at the Technical University of Cluj-Napoca (UTCN) rank second, following UTB, in terms of their interest in job offers presented on Romanian websites. This indicates a growing awareness among UTCN students regarding the importance of actively engaging with the job market and exploring various opportunities that align with their career aspirations. Overall, these trends highlight the varying degrees of enthusiasm and strategic approaches to job searching among engineering students from different institutions in Romania.

2.1.2 Foreign profile sites (indeed.com, careerbuilder.com, etc.)

The useful item in finding a workplace “*Foreign profile sites*” is differently perceived by students, with the difference between the groups resulting from the value of ($F_{4, 1777} = 2.915, p = 0.020$). (Table 2).

Table 2. ANOVA test results for the useful item in finding a workplace “Foreign profile sites” - comparison between universities

Multiple Comparisons						
Dependent Variable: Q18.2. Foreign profile sites (indeed.com, careerbuilder.com.)						
(I) Q1 Universitatea:	(J) Q1 Universitatea:	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
UPB	UPT	.272*	.086	.016	.03	.51

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

In the lower graph (Figure 2) are presented the differences between universities (Mean_{UPB} = 2.85 față de Mean_{UPT} = 2.48)

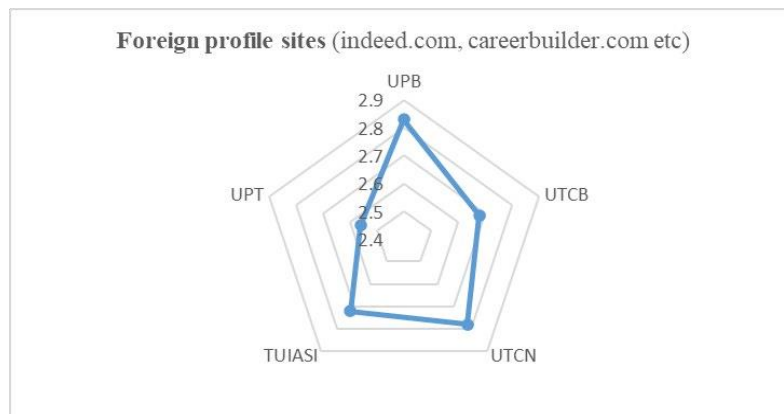


Figure 2. Graphical representation for useful channels in finding a workplace “Foreign profile sites”- comparison between universities

Similar to Romanian profile sites, UPB students exhibit a strong interest in foreign marketplace offers, followed by UTCN and then TUIASI. It's important to note that most Polytechnic students specialize in automation and computer science, which significantly increases their chances of securing remote online work with international firms compared to those in production roles. The least interested group remains the UPT students, partly because Timisoara's market already hosts large companies from countries such as Germany, France, Austria and Italy.

2.1.3 Job fairs

The useful item in finding a workplace “Job fairs” is differently perceived by students, with the difference between the groups resulting from the value of ($F_{4, 1777}=4.039, p=0.003$). (Table 3).

Table 3. ANOVA test results for the useful item in finding a workplace “Job fairs”- comparison between universities

Multiple Comparisons						
Dependent Variable: Q18.3. Job fairs? (What channels are useful for you for employment)						
(I) Q1 Universitatea:	(J) Q1 Universitatea:	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
UPT	UTCN	.295*	.084	.005	.06	.53

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

In the lower graph (Figure 3) are presented the differences between universities (Mean_{UPT} = 3.51 față de Mean_{UTCN} = 3.11)

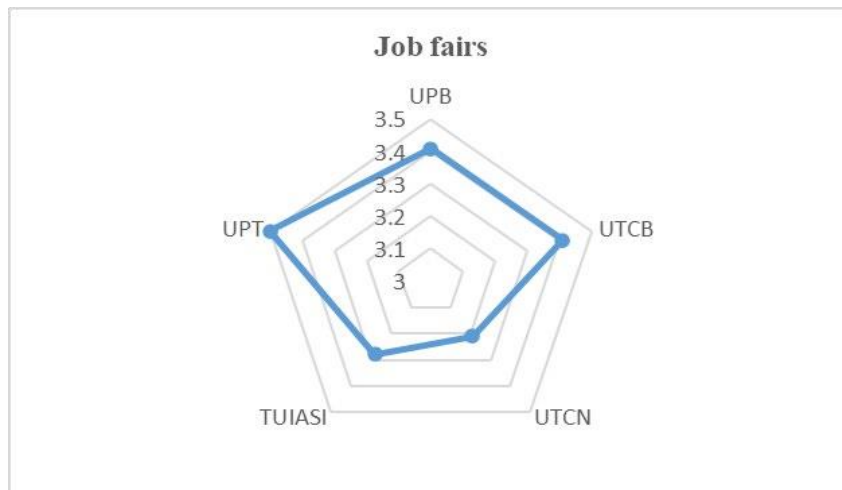


Figure 3. Graphical representation for useful channels in finding a workplace “Job fairs”- comparison between universities

UPT students benefit from direct access to numerous large companies and multinationals in Timisoara, which often seek to recruit them for internships, offering valuable hands-on experience. In contrast, UTCN students tend to be more cautious and skeptical about job opportunities from major companies, possibly due to concerns about alignment with their skills or intense competition. This hesitation may result in missed opportunities to connect with potential employers and gain insights into the job market, potentially affecting their career paths. Students from both universities must engage with these companies, as internships can provide essential experience and networking opportunities. Encouraging participation in recruitment events and workshops can boost their confidence and help them make informed career decisions.

2.1.4 LinkedIn account

Students perceive the useful item in finding a workplace “LinkedIn account” differently, with the difference between the groups resulting from the value of ($F_{4, 1777}=5.854, p=0.000$). (Table 4).

Table 4. ANOVA test results for the useful item in finding a workplace “LinkedIn account” - comparison between universities

Multiple Comparisons						
Dependent Variable: Q18.4. Cont LinkedIn (What channels are useful for you for employment)						
(I) Q1 Universitatea:	(J) Q1 Universitatea:	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
UPB	UTCB	.312*	.091	.006	.06	.57
	UTCN	.275*	.093	.031	.01	.54
	TUIASI	.409*	.091	.000	.15	.67

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

In the lower graph (Figure 4) are presented the differences between universities ($\text{Mean}_{\text{UPB}} = 2.88 / \text{Mean}_{\text{UTCB}} = 2.45$, $\text{Mean}_{\text{UPB}} = 2.88 / \text{Mean}_{\text{UTCN}} = 2.49$, $\text{Mean}_{\text{UPB}} = 2.88 / \text{Mean}_{\text{TUIASI}} = 2.38$).

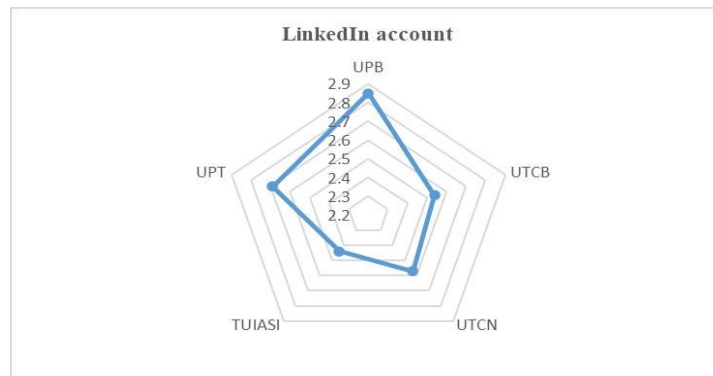


Figure 4. Graphical representation for useful channels in finding a workplace „LinkedIn account”- comparison between universities

LinkedIn is highly regarded by students at the University Politehnica of Bucharest (UPB) as a key tool for finding job opportunities. Its user-friendly interface and extensive network enable students to connect with potential employers easily. After creating a personal account, users can showcase their skills and experiences, helping employers identify suitable candidates. The platform also allows students to build a professional online presence, highlight achievements, and engage with

industry professionals. LinkedIn offers features like job postings, company profiles, and networking groups to facilitate communication between job seekers and employers. Additionally, it provides resources such as articles, webinars, and online courses to help students enhance their skills and stay updated on industry trends. By using LinkedIn effectively, UPB students can improve their chances of securing suitable employment and advancing their careers in a competitive job market.

2.1.5 Facebook account/social media

The useful item in finding a workplace “Facebook account/social media” is differently perceived by students, with the difference between the groups resulting from the value of ($F_{4, 1777} = 7.659, p = 0.000$). (Table 5).

Table 5. ANOVA test results for the useful item in finding a workplace “Facebook account/social media” - comparison between universities

Multiple Comparisons						
Dependent Variable: Q18.5. Facebook account/Social media (What channels are useful for you for employment?)						
(I) Q1 Universitatea:	(J) Q1 Universitatea:	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
UTCB	UPB	.322*	.086	.002	.08	.56
UTCN	UPT	-.288*	.091	.016	-.54	-.03
TUIASI	UPB	.250*	.087	.041	.01	.49

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

In the lower graph (Figure 5) are presented the differences between universities ($\text{Mean}_{\text{UTCB}} = 2.98 / \text{Mean}_{\text{UPB}} = 2.60$, $\text{Mean}_{\text{TUIASI}} = 2.88 / \text{Mean}_{\text{UPB}} = 2.60$, $\text{Mean}_{\text{UTCN}} = 2.80 / \text{Mean}_{\text{UPT}} = 3.10$)

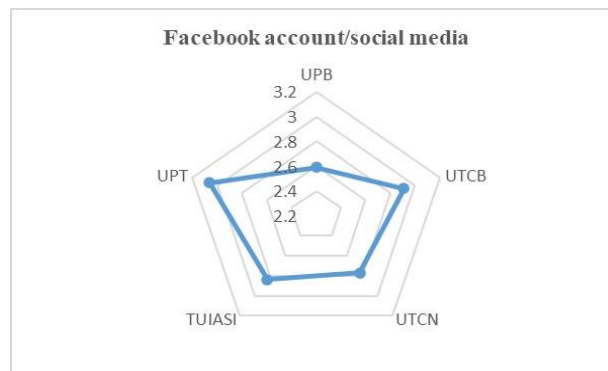


Figure 5. Graphical representation for useful channels in finding a workplace „Facebook account/social media”- comparison between universities

Students at UPB tend to be skeptical about finding job opportunities through social media, in contrast to their peers at UPT, who exhibit greater confidence in this approach. UPB respondents likely recognize the potential for discovering job openings through Facebook groups shared by colleagues and friends. Additionally, an increasing number of companies are leveraging social media for self-promotion and recruitment.

2.1.6 Career centers

Students perceive the useful item in finding a workplace “career centers” differently, with the difference between the groups resulting from the value of ($F_4, 1777=5.430, p=0.000$). (Table 6).

Table 6. ANOVA test results for the useful item in finding a workplace “career centers” - comparison between universities

Multiple Comparisons						
Dependent Variable: Q18.6. Career centers (What channels are useful for you for employment?)						
(I) Q1 Universitatea:	(J) Q1 Universitatea:	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
UPB	UTCB	-.339*	.084	.001	-.57	-.10
UTCB	UTCN	.295*	.085	.005	.06	.53

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

In the lower graph (Figure 6) are presented the differences between universities ($Mean_{UTCB} = 3.17 / Mean_{UPB} = 2.70, Mean_{UTCB} = 3.17 / Mean_{UTCN} = 2,74$).

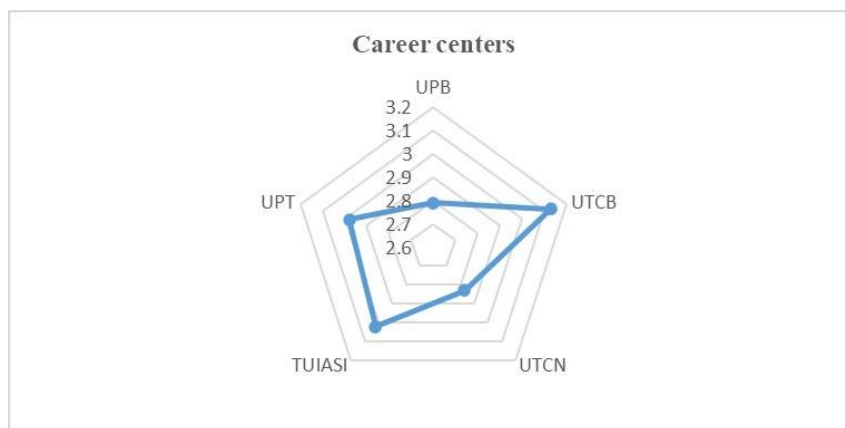


Figure 6. Graphical representation for useful channels in finding a workplace „career centers”- comparison between universities

Career centers are primarily recognized by UTCB students, with significantly less acknowledgment from students at UTCN or UPB. Many of these career centers operate within the universities, enabling students to establish collaboration contracts with various companies through their services. The leadership team at the Career Counseling and Guidance Center from UTCB has the opportunity to enhance accessibility for all parties involved, thereby increasing the chances of success for everyone.

2.1.7 Recommendations

The most appreciated channels for being hired are recommendations from other people. The cumulative average obtained is 62.4%. UPT finds itself above the average with 68.5%, followed by UTCN with 63.1%.

This average highlights some important aspects: a) it indicates our cultural component and our relation-based system; b) the belief that the references of a person recognized in his field of activity or with an important social status can facilitate access to the labor market, especially when the professional experience of young people is reduced; c) familiarization with accessing a job abroad, where the references are included in the application file; d) the tendency to trust the employer more, if the references to apply for the job comes from an employee of the respective institutions; e) it shows that individuals are more confidently choosing a job after receiving references from friends or family.

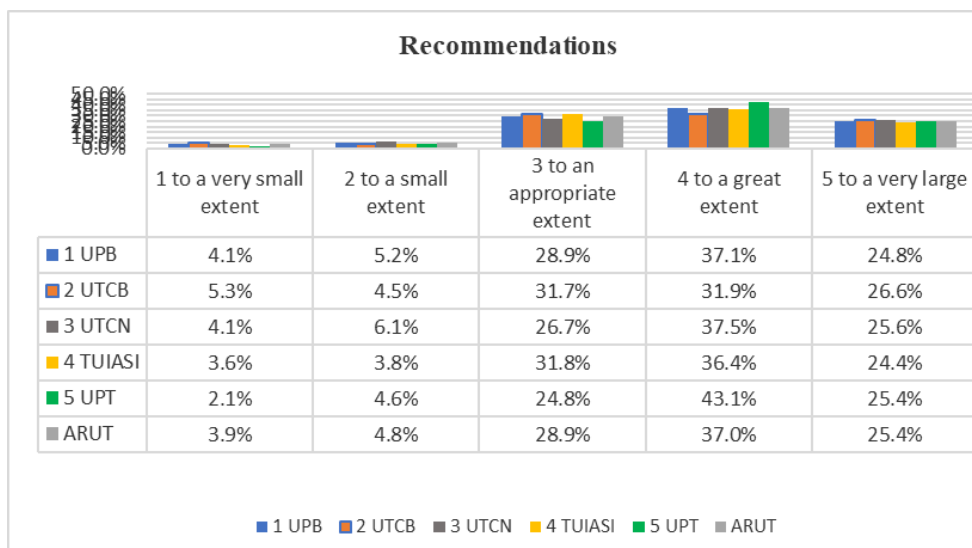


Figure 7. Graphical representation for useful channels in finding workplace „recommendations”- comparison between universities

3. Conclusions

Young Romanians from Technical Universities utilize formal and informal methods to secure employment. The most valued approach for finding a job is through recommendations from others, reflecting our cultural emphasis on relationships. Students from the Polytechnic University of Bucharest are the most satisfied with profile-based job sites in Romania, followed closely by those from the Technical University of Cluj Napoca. In contrast, students from the Polytechnic University of Timisoara and the Technical University of Civil Engineering of Bucharest are the least confident about securing a job through these platforms. The research indicates that students from UPB, particularly those from Cluj, show a greater interest in accessing foreign job sites compared to their peers at UPT. Career fairs rank third in terms of trust, but Technical University of Cluj-Napoca students express the least optimism regarding these events. Professional platforms like LinkedIn and social media sites such as Facebook, as well as international profile-based sites and career centers, are viewed with skepticism by students from technical universities. Recommendations/references remain the most appreciated channels for job placement, with the Polytechnic University of Timișoara leading in this regard. Students from UTB also consider Romanian and foreign job sites, including LinkedIn, as valuable resources. Accessing profile-based sites in Romania correlates with students' intentions to remain in the country after graduation. Students from UTCB particularly value career centers, while those from UPT favor career fairs. Long-term exploration of students' perceptions of job entry channels can provide important clues for educators and career counselors to provide young people with relevant and useful information for their decisions in choosing employers.

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