



# Research using job advertisements: A methodological assessment



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## ARTICLE INFO

Available online 20 November 2016

### 1. Introduction

Job advertisements are announcements about specific job openings. Also called “job ads,” “job announcements,” “job postings,” “position announcements,” or “position descriptions,” they are written statements that describe the duties and responsibilities of an available position; the experience, education, skills, knowledge, and/or other attributes required for the job; and the hiring organization, salary range, and other benefits. The main purpose of a job ad is to attract the right candidate for an open position. Thus, the content of a job ad reflects the employer's expectations of prospective employees. As part of a wider recruitment process designed to attract suitable qualified candidates for a job, job ads have been the most commonly used means of recruiting personnel in a labor market.

In addition, job ads have been viewed as a valuable guide for both employees and employers. They give employers guidelines to recruit, promote, train, and supervise employees with maximum effectiveness. They help employees understand what the job requires, and those who want to be competitive in the job market can tailor their preparation to meet the employer's expectations. Job ads also have been viewed as a practical information source for researchers, educators, policymakers, and higher education institutions to explore the nature of dynamic labor markets. This is especially the case when a gap between education offerings and employment opportunities has been acknowledged, as well as when there are high levels of unemployment and a shortage of job seekers with critical skills (e.g., Mourshed, Farrell, & Barton, 2012). Thus, job ads have served as a source to diagnose real-time demand for jobs and competency requirements, providing a tool to structure curricula to help students meet the workforce needs.

Employers rarely post job openings in newspapers anymore, but instead advertise job openings on their websites or through online classified sites, government-run job banks, and free or fee-for-service job boards. They also find better value and exposure by promoting jobs through social networks such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter. Recent research reports that jobs advertised online now reflect at least 70% of

all openings (Carnevale, Jaysundera, & Repnikov, 2014). Compared to point-in-time snapshots provided by survey-based labor market data, online job data shows great promise in providing real-time insights into current and ongoing workforce needs, and they offer the ability to improve the accuracy of labor market forecasts.

In library and information science (LIS), job ads have proven to be an appealing and useful source for research. This is because they include “the knowledge, skills, and abilities the library believes to be important at that particular point in time” (Lynch & Smith, 2001, p. 410) and “the everyday terminology used by information professionals” (Stoker, 1999, p. 67–68). The analysis of job ads has been regarded as an established approach to illustrate emerging job market trends, identify the evolution of the library workforce over time, and further predict possible future trends. Furthermore, the findings of job ads have provided input for curriculum development and redesign in LIS education.

### 2. Problem statement

Despite a growing number of studies examining job ads in LIS, inconsistencies among researchers' methodological practices remain. A number of research studies with different purposes and intended audiences have adopted different methodological approaches for selecting, collecting, analyzing, and presenting the data contained in job ads. This inconsistent methodological approach in the research makes it difficult to compare findings and draw definitive conclusions.

While one paper (i.e., Applegate, 2010) examines the sources of job ads and attempts to define how representative the data sources are, there is a lack of literature reporting in sufficient detail on the methodological approaches and procedures employed in the studies of job ads. Additionally, there is little guidance on how to collect and analyze job ads. This is important to note because the accuracy of the interpretation and the inferences depend heavily on the rigorous process of job ads collection and analysis; standards of rigor and research guidelines are essential to support researchers in developing and publishing high-quality work.

This paper identifies the methodological approaches and procedures employed in LIS research that used job ads as data. The following research questions are addressed in this study:

- What is the methodological practice and progress in the job ad studies?
- What are important implications for the practice of and future direction for job ad studies?

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### 3. Literature review

There is a robust body of research analyzing job ads in LIS. According to Beile and Adams (2000), content analysis studies of librarian positions appeared in the literature as early as the 1950s. The focus of such studies can be grouped into five categories based on their target audience and purpose.

First, a number of studies have been conducted to gain understanding of the changing demands and patterns of the overall library workforce or to gain perspective on the job market over time. Most of those studies, except Gerolimos and Konsta's (2008) study that includes job ads from multiple countries, were intended to determine the changing qualifications required of library professionals within one country; countries include the United States (Starr, 2004), United Kingdom (Andrews & Ellis, 2005; Orme, 2008), Australia (Kennan, Willard, & Wilson, 2006; Pamment, 2008), Ireland (Cullen, 2004), and South Africa (Raju, 2014).

Second, there are studies that addressed specific library sectors. A large number of studies focused on academic librarianship, while a few targeted special libraries, such as law librarianship (Tice, 2001) and health science/care librarianship (Cooper & Crum, 2013). Some studies of academic librarianship focused primarily on entry-level positions for those who recently graduated and have no prior library work experience (Reeves & Hahn, 2010; Sproles & Ratledge, 2004). The job market in the archives profession has also been investigated (Cloonan & Norcott, 1989; Davies & Ellis, 2003).

Third, a large body of research has been devoted to specific positions or functional areas in libraries. Cataloguing has been the most common subject of such research (Chaudhry & Komathi, 2002; Hall-Ellis, 2005; Khurshid, 2003; Towsey, 1997; Zhu, 2008). Other areas of specialization include serials (Kwasik, 2002), reference (Wang, Tang, & Knight, 2010; White, 2000), collection development (Robinson, 1993), instruction (Albrecht & Baron, 2002; Clyde, 2002; Gold & Grotti, 2013), outreach (Boff, Singer, & Stearns, 2006), and youth services (Adkins, 2004). Subject librarian is also a position that has been investigated extensively; specific subject areas, such as science and technology/engineering (Meier, 2010; Osorio, 1999), business (Nielsen, 2013), and music (Clark, 2013), have been reviewed.

Fourth, job ad analysis has often been conducted to identify the requirements of relatively new development fields or emerging positions. A number of studies published in the early 2000s examined announcements for electronic librarians or electronic resource librarians (Albitz, 2002; Croneis & Henderson, 2002). In the late 2000s, a large number of papers on metadata librarians (Park, Lu, & Marion, 2009; Han & Hswe, 2010) and digital librarians (Choi & Rasmussen, 2009) appeared. Recently, studies have been conducted to explore the emerging field of digital curation/data curation (Kim, Warga, & Moen, 2013; Si, Zhuang, Xing, & Guo, 2013; Xia & Wang, 2014).

Finally, particular skills and other requirements for positions have been targeted in a number of job ad studies. Such skills include technology (Mathews & Pardue, 2009; Zhou, 1996), foreign languages (Zhang, 2008), project management (Kinkus, 2007), and management and leadership (Cullen, 2004). Grimes and Grimes's (2008) study is notable as it investigated the requirement for the master's degree in LIS in academic libraries.

Although there is no consensus in the literature regarding which particular qualifications and skills are in demand by employers, previous studies reviewed here have exhibited some common themes. They confirmed that job requirements for LIS professionals have evolved dramatically since the late 1990s as developments in information technology changed the nature and scope of librarianship, regardless of its specialized functions. Library staff members are expected to perform a variety of complex duties and responsibilities. Many of these duties have come to require non-traditional skill sets, highlighting a growing demand for computer technology competencies. Further, position titles have become more complicated, reflecting an emergence of jobs which combine several functions.

### 4. Research method

A systematic review was conducted to illustrate the methodological application of previous job ad studies. A systematic review is a process of assessment and interpretation of all available research related to a research question or subject of interest. The systematic review could be considered a cousin of meta-analysis in that both owe their conceptualization to work by Light and Pillemer (1984). While both meta-analysis and systematic review focus on the results of individual studies, the latter method pays particular attention to the methodology underlying the studies. Procedures and techniques for systematic review are well established and widely applied in other disciplines, particularly medicine and business. The systematic review often employs "a rigorous methodology for searching, research, retrieval, appraisal, data extraction, synthesis, and interpretation" (Ciliska, Cullum, & Marks, 2008, p. 135). Thus, the approach has been considered to be "the most reliable and comprehensive statement about what works" (Petrosino, Boruch, Soydan, Duggan & Sanchez-Meca, 2001, p. 20).

To identify prior job ad studies, systematic searches were first conducted on several databases, including Library & Information Science Abstracts (LISA); Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts (LISTA, now LIS Source); Library Literature & Information Science Full Text; ERIC; Web of Science; and Google Scholar. The searches were carried out using the keywords "job ad," "position announcement," "job posting," "job description," "position description," and their derivative forms. The methodology sections of papers were reviewed to select primary studies on job ads. Additionally, the references of the articles retrieved from the databases were browsed and searched to ensure that all published studies on job ads had been found.

Studies were included if they were published in a peer-reviewed journal before January 2015 and were published in English. They were included if they were an application of the method; that is, if job ads were collected and analyzed to address an objective of the study. Studies were excluded if the article was just a discussion of the method or if job ads were used as input to develop other data collection tools. These criteria served as a means of judging the relevance of a study. The combination of the search strategy outlined above and study inclusion criteria resulted in a total of 106 research articles.

For each article, the methods and results sections were examined to assess the methodological approaches and procedures for data collection and analysis. Then, each article was coded based on the following features: publication year; journal title, research questions/hypothesis; selected study variables; data source (source from which job ads were sampled); sampling period (timeframe in which the study collected job ads); sample size (the number of job ads collected); analysis techniques; analysis software used; and reliability assessment. Each article was read and coded by two authors. After independently coding articles, the authors met to resolve differences in their coding, discussing discrepancies to arrive at a final decision for all features of each article.

Cross-tabulations were conducted to determine whether there were associations between:

- number of data source and types of data source,
- sampling period and number of data source,
- sampling period and types of data source,
- sample size and sampling period,
- sample size and number of data source,
- sample size and types of data source, and
- data analysis technique and number of selected study variables.

For these analyses, sample size, sampling period, the number of data sources, and the number of selected study variables were categorized into three groups by the first and last quintiles. Each type of data source used was categorized into one of two groups based on whether the source was used or not used. Similarly, each type of selected study

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