APPLYING THE FIVE A'S MODEL FOR CANDIDATE JOURNEY MAPPING

Nguyen Thi Phuong Hao

Posts and Telecommunications Institue of Technology

Abstract - Along with the fast-moving evolution of technologies, the labor market has witnessed the shifting recruitment trend from conventional methods to modern hiring practices with the idea of a candidate-centric mindset. Consequently, the emerging concept of war for talent has risen strongly in this century since candidates have various employment opportunities without national border restrictions. First, the article presented the similarities between marketing principles and recruiting theories in different aspects. Then, the study applied the Five A's framework used to build customer journey, to shape the candidate journey. The research findings are likely to lay the basis for further studies on applying marketing philosophies to build employer brands to attract the high-skilled workforce.

Keywords - Candidate journey, candidate touchpoints, employer branding, five A's model.

I. INTRODUCTION

Human capital, particularly the high-performing groups, has been indisputably among the most valuable intangible assets for any business entity from various sectors. Despite multiple core elements influencing competitive edge such as high product quality, unique technology, low-product price, optimum supply chain management, etc., the human factor is becoming the greatest formidable one for sustainable growth of organizations [1]. Indeed, globally, many leading enterprises in different fields have adopted the principles of "employees first, customers second, and shareholders third" such as Facebook, Alibaba, FedEx, Google, Linkedin, etc. [2]. Since the employee-centricity approach would not only enhance the staff performance and productivity but also improve the company brand image [3].

In the digital age and globalization, job seekers currently face fewer challenges than other people in the past when technology was underdeveloped. For example, there are different sorts of recruitment channels, supported by the Internet, that enable candidates to approach job opportunities conveniently [4]. Besides, in the case of peak hiring seasons in mid-winter or fall, it becomes even more difficult for job seekers to maintain their concentration on a particular employer because this would minimize their chance of getting dream jobs.

Consequently, the global war for talents is becoming more and more competitive among organizations since the applicants stand in front of numerous alternatives for their work.

Thus, to build a strong employer brand to attract and retain highly-qualified labor, modern hiring methods, with the main idea of candidate centricity, gradually take the place of conventional recruitment techniques in which hiring managers hold a higher position. As a

result, in recent years, the hiring market has witnessed the popularity of employer branding practices playing a vital role in Talent Acquisition [5]. Branding is a term that originated from the marketing industry. Therefore, the application of the branding concept to the HR spectrum has been named employer branding. The CIPD defined employer branding as "a set of attributes and qualities – often intangible" that drive an organization to distinguished values, commit to provide specific candidate experience, and attract qualified talents that are highly adaptable in company culture [6].

Accordingly, this article's purpose is to explore the applications of marketing philosophy to improve the effectiveness of employer branding activities by using the 5 As model framework (Aware, Appeal, Ask, Act, Advocate) proposed by Philip Kotler [7]. In more detail, this paper aims to suggest a set of touchpoints that would help recruiters map their successful candidate journey. Finally, the objective of this study is to raise awareness of employers towards the rationale of transferring from conventional hiring methods to modern recruitment practices.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Recruiting in the new era

Previously, recruitment activities focused on filling vacancies to meet the demand for human capital at each department when employees resign or transfer to other teams. Normally, the traditional hiring process, which was given by Holm, includes five main steps summarized in Fig. 1 [8].
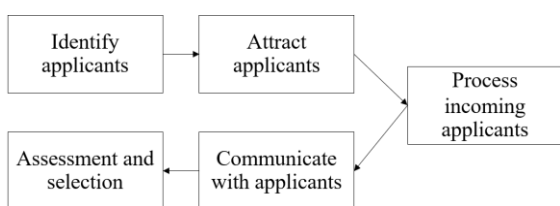

Fig. 1. Traditional recruitment process

Firstly, recruiters often analyze the open positions after receiving the hiring requests from department managers, such as writing job descriptions, building candidates' portraits, and determining job requirements. The second stage of the process is to attract candidates by posting job advertisements on select recruitment sources to approach qualified candidates, for instance, job posting sites, career fairs, employment centers, newspapers, etc. The curriculum vitae (CV) screening process follows after recruitment specialists receive applications from job seekers. In the fourth stage, hiring managers will send result notification letters for those who do not meet the job requirements, and only chosen candidates in the applicant pool can go to the final round. Conventionally, the human resources department will arrange interviews or other assessments such as tests, presentations, group discussions, etc., to evaluate the candidates in terms of skills, abilities, attitudes, and knowledge.

With the substantial development of technology and especially the explosion of the internet in general and social media in particular, the hiring process at companies has undergone major changes for various reasons.

Firstly, the global upward trend of population aging has affected the labor market supply in many ways. According to the United Nations report, in 2020, the number of the elderly population aged 65 years or above was 727 million and predicted to reach a double in size in 2050 [9]. In Vietnam, the situation of an aging population is no exception to this tendency. As one of the fastest-aging nations in Asia, Vietnam has experienced a rapid rise in the number of older adults whereas the fertility rate has fallen to 2.12 children per woman in 2020 [10]. Consequently, this dramatically results in a shortage of human resources since the human lifespan is now longer.

Secondly, the demand for labor, especially the high-skilled workforce, is growing since Vietnam is becoming an ideal investment destination for many foreign companies [11]. Accordingly, to operate their business in the local branch offices, they offer numerous job opportunities for local candidates. That is why the war for talents occurs and has critical impacts on the shifting trend from traditional hiring to marketing-driven recruitment in which recruiters see themselves as marketers and consider candidates as customers [20].

Thirdly, the number of offshoring jobs, especially in the information technology field, has increased during the covid pandemic. Local employees can work remotely for overseas organizations but still receive competitive pay and benefits compared to other workers in the same market. For example, according to Business Insider Australian, there were 350 remote workers located in Ho Chi Minh City under management by a tech company in Melbourne within 12 months [12]. Also cited in the article, Tim Vorbach, CEO of Emapta - a leading staff outsourcing company in the Philippines, stated that "globally there is a booming demand for higher quality talent".

To prepare for those changes in the labor market, recruitment managers must first equip themselves with new perceptions about a talent-oriented mindset which shows in Table I [13].

Today, job seekers are in a position of power over employers, which is very different from the past since people have more choices in working opportunities. Specifically, the quality talents are now aware of the intrinsic values they can bring to an organization. Hence, they commonly interview with 2 - 3 companies simultaneously and ultimately accept the most attractive offer. Indeed, [14] also agreed that the relationship between employers and applicants has been transferred into a two-way linkage in which not only candidates need jobs, but companies also need candidates.

TABLE I
COMPARISON OF THE OLD AND NEW REALITY

The old reality	The new reality
People need companies	Companies need people
Machines, capital, and geography are the competitive advantage	Talented people are the competitive advantage
Better talent makes some difference	Better talent makes a huge difference
Jobs are scarce	Talented people are scarce
Employees are loyal and jobs are secure	People are mobile and their commitment is short term
People accept the standard package they are offered	People demand much more

When it comes to competitive advantage, the corporates often focus on their tangible assets, which only help businesses get superiority in the short term. Meanwhile, an abundant and high-quality workforce is one of the most effective driving factors of any organization's development [2]. In addition, also supporting the importance of human capital, Lawer concluded that "more than any other asset, talent provides the potential for long-term competitive advantage" [15].

Up until recently, there has been some controversy surrounding whether top performers are the ones who can bring an enormous change for the organization. Nevertheless, people can not deny the contributions of talented employees in improving business output. It has also been confirmed in many management studies that a few talents make a huge difference. Research has shown that extraordinary talent, accounting for 20 percent, is devoted to 80 percent of organization performance according to the Pareto effect [16].

The concept of the "war for talent" was first mentioned by Mckinsey et al. almost 20 years ago [17]. In the current shortage of high-quality

human capital, this idea has been still widely used so far. According to the General Statistics Office (GSO) of Vietnam reported on the labor and employment situation in the fourth quarter of 2020, high-quality workers only take 35 percent of Vietnam's labor market [18]. It would restrict Vietnam's economic growth in the context that the covid pandemic is still spreading, and the Fourth Industrial Revolution is taking place globally.

Apart from wages and benefits, the candidates feel some concern about non-financial factors such as career advancement, cultural fit, lifestyle, etc. Whenever they feel that their current position is no longer challenging and suitable for their desires, they are ready to move on and find a better chance out there [4]. In addition, the growth of the Millennial generation in the labor workforce also makes the idea of a permanent job falling out of favor because of their high mobility [19].

In the Human Resources department, Talent Acquisition takes an essential role in the competition of acquiring the high-potential candidates [20]. According to [14], [21], Talent Acquisition refers to an ongoing hiring process including planning, attracting, hiring, onboarding, and assessing which aims to fill business demand with qualified talents. Unlike the traditional hiring method, which focuses on filling vacancies in the short term, Talent Acquisition is a more complex, proactive, and strategic approach. In this modern hiring concept, building the talent pool for an organization in the future is highly regarded. In other words, Talent Acquisition is a process of attracting and searching for potential candidates first and then continuing to monitor unselected applicants for available vacancies mapping in the future.
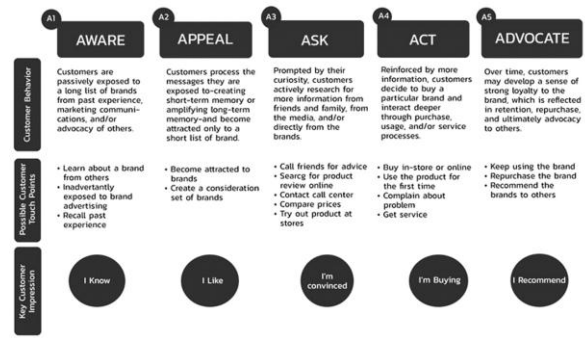
B. The Five A's framework

Fig. 2. Mapping the Customer Path throughout the Five A's

The old customer journey followed the AIDA model (Attention − Interest − Desire − Action) is now no longer applicable for the current technological era. Therefore, the Five's A framework proposed by Philip Kotler [7] has become the most effective tool for companies to map their customer path, which stands for Awareness, Appeal, Ask, Action, Advocate.

Following this model, a customer journey map represents the customer experience to brand over time or customer interaction with the business through the touchpoints during the buying process. This pathway includes five specific stages:

1) A1- Aware

The customer decision-making journey would begin when people have any need rising in life and start to find a solution to meet that demand. Therefore, at this stage, customers will be passively exposed to brands through advertisements, referrals from family or friends, social influencers, etc. In this period, the more attractive promotional activities and incentive programs the company provides, the more attention the customers will give to that brand.

2) A2 - Appeal

After passively interacting with multiple brands in the *aware* phase, customers start to analyze the information received and build short-term memory towards the brands they endorse. Accordingly, people are likely to pick

the most impressive brands and leave the unappealing names out of interest. The degree of brand attraction will vary between industries. For instance, in fast-moving markets with high levels of competition like consumers-packaged goods (CPG), the buyers tend to engage strongly with their favorite brand names. Besides, the age factor also affects how quickly purchasers react to brand appeals. As a pioneer customer group in the digital era, young adults are often the first responders since they find it harder to resist attractive brands than other groups.

3) A3 - Ask

The journey continues when customer curiosity is strongly activated. In this third step, people are eager to figure out more information about the brands they prefer from various channels, including online and offline platforms. Because, nowadays, customer behaviors are likely affected by many factors. Family or close friends can act as a consultant to customers on experience using certain products and services. Otherwise, they can browse through Facebook groups or review websites to have brief references from actual consumers. Some clients even stop by official stores to look over product features and quality, specifically high-value goods. Thus, at this stage, enterprises must be visible in different platforms where their brand can closely interact with the buyer to increase the possibility of being chosen in the next phase.

4) A4 - Act

When the purchasers are satisfied with the provided information, they will decide whether to *act* or not. In this period, bringing a fulfilling shopping experience has a sentimental value to consumers. The level of customer satisfaction will determine whether they continue to support and spread the brand for the business or not. A low-quality product or awful service attitude can also become a terrible, unforgettable impression in the customer's mind. Hence, providing excellent customer service is one of the crucial marketing strategies to build solid relationships with buyers.

5) A5 - Advocate

The definition of customer loyalty gradually has changed since the Internet became an indispensable part of human life. Today, the loyalty concept is not necessarily about buying one product provided by a solely favorite brand like in the past. Clients currently may not need to purchase but spontaneously recommend the product name they love to other consumers. In the *advocate* stage, the relationship between customers and brands is thoroughly well-built. People are willing to repurchase and share a positive message about the products or services to other buyers.

In reality, customers do not always go through all five stages in their buying process but can skip some of them. People are likely to bypass the *ask* period in fast-moving consumer goods such as packaged food, beverage, toothpaste, shampoo, etc. Due to the relatively low price point, buyers do not spend time researching and evaluating options. In addition, the purchase takes place regularly so that customers already have expectations and preferences related to some brands from previous experience. On the opposite side, the *ask* stay may take some time in B2B or B2C industries (real estate, tourism) because many stakeholders are involved in the decision-making process. In summary, building a journey map will help companies understand customer touchpoints precisely. A successful journey is when customers want to join from the beginning and go to the bottom of the map.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study conducts a theoretical method to theorize the adoption of marketing philosophies to recruitment practices based on their analogy. In detail, the article applied the Five A's framework in marketing to build the candidate journey to attract high-quality talents. Firstly, the author makes a direct comparison between recruitment and marketing in various aspects. Secondly, the study analyzes candidates' behaviors during their job-seeking process. Finally, the research proposed possible touchpoints for the employer in each stage by acquiring secondary data from different sources which emphasize the role of building employer brand in Talent Acquisition such as published journals, marketing books, government data, and trustworthy websites.

A. The parallels between marketing and recruitment:

To take the lead in the war for talent, companies should focus on implementing the talent acquisition strategy. Six core factors of an effective one are listed below [22]:

- Workforce planning
- Brand building
- Sourcing and recruiting
- New technologies
- Comprehensive onboarding
- Use of data analytics

Therefore, building an employer brand is one of the six critical elements that help organizations acquire quality talents. Hence, it is crucial for hiring managers to identify practical ways to make their brand stand out in front of job seekers. This idea is similar to the marketing philosophy in which brand managers focus on raising brand awareness in customers' minds compared to their competitors. Also supporting the similarity between candidate experience and customer experience, [23] believed that recruiters appeal to ideal candidates by applying the way marketers make company brands visible to targeted customers. In addition, it was mentioned that the tasks of marketing specialists and recruitment staff have something in common, for example, a marketer sells products or services whereas a recruiter offers job opportunities [24]. To sum up, adapted from [25], Table II describes the parallels between terms in recruitment and marketing.

TABLE II
SIMILAR CONCEPTS BETWEEN RECRUITMENT AND MARKETING

Recruitment	Marketing
Job	Product
Terms and conditions of employment	Product features
Employee	Customer
Recruitment	Marketing and sales
Retention	Customer service
Human resources	Marketing and customer service

Generally, the candidate journey is similar to the path a customer experiences during their decision-making process. Both customers and job seekers have to go through multiple touchpoints, at which they have engagements with the business brand and employer brand, and lengthy thoughts before they make a decision. For instance, candidate experience touchpoints could be job advertisements, career sites, company social media pages, or even their friend recommendation.

B. Candidate journey

As discussed previously, employers, to win in the war for talent, should consider their candidates as customers. When candidates are to be put at the center, like customers, there is a strong need to understand their decision-making along the job-seeking journey to optimize candidate experience for better hiring results.

These objectives can be helped achieve with some marketing tools. Accordingly, applying the Five A's model in mapping a candidate journey will be entirely reasonable and applicable for those organizations. Indeed, the candidate also passes through five different periods before obtaining suitable job opportunities similar to the customer journey crossover five stages. Details of each phase in the job-hunting process are described as follows:

1) A1 - Aware

Whether they are newly-graduated students seeking a challenging working environment or senior full-time employees but no longer feel interested in their current daily tasks, it is high time to start the journey to find a dream job. At the first stage, candidates would interact passively with the employer brand across multiple means. In terms of electronic sources, they would accidentally browse job ads through recruitment websites, Facebook, Linkedin, Youtube, etc. Besides, some advice from close friends or highly experienced staff are likely to become the most reliable information about the job opening. In addition, the applicants can recall previous experiences they had with the employer in the past, such as a former interview, a job fair, or career counseling. In some cases, headhunters may approach quality talents to provide attractive offers affecting candidate decision-making in the *aware* phase.

2) A2 - Appeal

In the next period, candidates will process recruitment information acquired and only retain in mind employer brands that deeply impress them. Usually, some factors touching their emotions are likely to be dynamic workplace culture, professionalism, competitive salary package, etc. It is particularly true with youngsters who are eager to experience brand new challenges. In other words, amongst

various names, job seekers begin to filter and focus their thoughts on a few specific brands in the *appeal* stage.

3) A3 - Ask

After being persuaded by several loved recruitment brands, the candidate comes to figure out more about the company information and the job description in various ways. First, they can approach their friends or acquaintances who are working at that company for practical advice. Otherwise, they may get a brief reference from review websites to have different perspectives. In another way, the applicants can contact the recruitment department for further queries directly via Facebook fan page, phone, or email. There are a few talents even interviewing for two to three positions concurrently before making the decision.

4) A4- Act

Following the *ask* stage, the job seekers now choose the most appropriate option based on previous considerations. It means that they accept the offer from their favorite employer brand and are ready to join the company immediately. In this step, organizations should focus on candidate experience during their onboarding, offboarding, or orientation training to ensure whether they are pleasant or not. For instance, on the first working day, the employee feels disappointed about the unfriendly welcoming manner for newcomers. As a result, their unfavorable opinion is likely to create bad images for the employer brand.

5) A5 - Advocate

Over a while, the bond between the candidate and the employer brand becomes closer. People gradually gain a deeper understanding of the company culture and turn into advocatates. The cohesion is likely to be shown in being a great team player when

working on a project or the spirit of supporting colleagues between different departments. In the last phase, employees do not intend to change their careers when being approached by headhunters because they believe in corporate values. Even though the business outcomes may be pessimistic, the advocatates still consider staying with the company on and on. Another manifestation at this stage is that the supporters are voluntarily willing to introduce opening vacancies or internal programs and activities inside the business to friends and relatives with a joyful cheer.

IV. PROPOSING CANDIDATE TOUCHPOINTS

Candidate touchpoints involved the series of interactions between a candidate with an employer brand in any form of communication. When job hunters encounter these touchpoints, they will have a range of chances to compare with previous perceptions or begin to shape a new sense of the employer brand. Candidates' attitudes and emotions are primarily manipulated by what they have obtained over touchpoints, which can be satisfactory or unpleasant. Every touchpoint immensely contributes to converting potential talents into official employees in the future of any organization.

Although multiple business entities may have the same candidate journey applied to the Five A's model, their candidate touchpoints will vary depending on the financial state, human assets, type of hiring process, etc. However, in general, there will be three categories of touchpoints that companies should think about to develop practical and beneficial branding strategies.

1) Touchpoints created by the employer

The first group that this article would like to mention is touchpoints intentionally created by the employer. Specifically, the brand management team would make a clearly defined communication plan for each period in an organized manner. Table III recaps the summary of the author's recommendations for well-suited touchpoints for each stage.

TABLE III
TOUCHPOINTS CREATED BY THE EMPLOYER

Stage	Proposed touchpoints
A1	- Email marketing for target candidates - Organize company tours or softkill workshops for students - Share successful stories on social media
A2	- Appealing job postings on Facebook / Linkedin/ Websites - Joyful videos about company culture
A3	- Professionalism and openness in interview sessions - Prompt response for candidate matters via email or company fan page - Friendly and informative conversations over phone call
A4	- Warm welcome kit for newcomers - Informative orientation training programs - Fully-furnished working desk - A helpful mentorship program for new employees
A5	- Fun employee engagement activities: sports tournaments, team-building, happy meals, charity days, birthday celebrations, etc. - Recognition awards for dedicated staff - Long service awards for loyal employees

2) True touchpoints

True touchpoints are those which are unmanageably built by the employer. It is a real sense of the company brand after candidates communicate with the staff or recruiters in person. The situation may occur at a conference, at an interview session, or at the working place. If true touchpoints are negative emotions, corporatations should be ready to receive bad news. For instance, job seekers can complain everywhere about their awful interview experience at the company in which they have to wait for one hour. First, the brand image would get worse because of the recruiter's unprofessional manner. Second, the

company may fail to attract talents since the candidate feels disrespected. Additionally, the arrogant attitude of recruitment specialists is also an actual touchpoint. Since these touchpoints are uncontrollable, the brand management team needs to be aware of the direct interactions with applicants. Only a minor mistake can strongly influence the employer brand that has been built for a long time.

3) Unexpected touchpoints

Both true and unexpected touchpoints are actual events shaped from candidate experience by having direct or personal contact. However, they are slightly different since the third group of touchpoints conveys a more positive message to talents. It could be when the employees proudly share their friends about their company values. Another situation is that the candidates write about their impression interview with a certain employer. Otherwise, it could be the general admiration from outsiders of a business's social contributions. These cases are unforeseen because job seekers willingly promote the employer brand but not for their interests. Occasionally, corporatations can intentionally build unexpected touchpoints. For example, they may force their staff to share positive things about company value or cooperate with KOLs (Key Opinion Leaders) to polish their brand name. But after all, only genuine values are meaningful, spread, and last long. It is also the ultimate ending that any employer strongly desires.

CONCLUSION

In the fast-changing working place, employer branding takes a crucial role in appealing to the high-skilled workforce. Indeed, companies have to deal with recruiting costs and time-wasting if they fail to attract the right person. Hence, the HR department must concentrate on promoting the recruitment brand

to the target audiences for building the talent pool in the future.

Employer branding is a long-lasting and recurrence process. Enterprises must constantly modify their brand strategies, apply up-to-date knowledge and technologies following national social and economic development. Besides, the employer needs to be aware of the importance of candidate experience to their brand movement. More specifically, the recruiter's responsibility is to guide candidates along with a pathway through appropriate touchpoints at which they have interactions with the company brands.

In general, the article figured out the closeness between marketing and recruitment activities that result in the Five A's model application to shape candidate journeys. Hence, for further research, many practical marketing principles can also be used to improve hiring methods.

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ỨNG DỤNG MÔ HÌNH 5A TRONG VIỆC XÂY DỰNG HÀNH TRÌNH ỨNG VIÊN

Tóm tắt - Cùng với sự phát triển nhanh chóng của công nghệ, thị trường lao động ngày nay dần chuyển đổi mô hình tuyển dụng từ truyền thống sang hiện đại với tinh thần chủ đạo là lấy ứng viên làm trung tâm. Điều này dẫn đến các cuộc chiến tranh giành nhân tài diễn ra ngày càng khốc liệt hơn khi ứng viên sở hữu nhiều cơ hội việc làm thậm chí xuyên quốc gia và vùng lãnh thổ. Bài viết nghiên cứu về sự giống nhau giữa các nguyên lý trong marketing và tuyển dụng. Thông qua đó, tác giả đã ứng dụng mô hình 5A trong xây dựng hành trình khách hàng để tạo ra hành trình ứng viên. Kết quả nghiên cứu đã tạo một nền tảng cơ bản cho các nghiên cứu tiếp theo có thể ứng dụng các lý thuyết trong marketing để xây dựng thương hiệu tuyển dụng nhằm thu hút được nguồn nhân lực chất lượng cao.

Từ khóa – Điểm chạm ứng viên, hành trình ứng viên, mô hình 5A, thương hiệu tuyển dụng.

Nguyen Thi Phuong Hao was born in Tay Ninh province (Vietnam) in 1994. She received her bachelor's degree in Business Administration from International University - Vietnam National University in 2016. In 2019, she obtained an MBA degree from Western Sydney University. After 3-year of working in the human resources field, she became a lecturer for the Department of Business Administration of the Posts and Telecommunications Institute of Technology, Ho Chi Minh City Campus. Her research interests include organizational behavior, recruitment practices, and employee motivation.