Facebook Used as a Recruiting Tool

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Social media has become a valuable tool for employers in the hiring process. In a recent study, 77% of executive recruiters claimed they used search engines during the job screening process (Spon, 2010). According to a 2006 Career Builder survey, 12% of 1,150 employers used social networking sites in the hiring process. Of those survey participants, 63% made hiring decisions based on social networking sites such as Facebook (Spon, 2010). As the hiring process becomes increasingly competitive with the economic recession, more job seekers will gain work experience and a postsecondary education. Since the cost of hiring new applicants is high, companies need to minimize turnover rates by choosing the right applicant for the position. Applicants now not only have to worry about necessary experience and education for positions but also about the professionalism of their social networking profiles.

The increasing number of applicants competing for jobs has made decisions to hire from just a resume and interview difficult. High applicant numbers and fierce competition make using social profiles in the hiring process appealing, since employers can discover additional information. In a 2009 study, Kluemper and Rosen compared personality traits and social profiles. They found that conscientiousness, agreeableness, and emotionally stable personalities are less likely to post problematic content that would negatively influence an employer's hiring decision. The traits of conscientiousness, agreeableness, and emotional stability are what employers seem to value in their employees. The fact that these traits can be conveyed through social networking sites is valuable to employers. In addition, applicants are likely to place their everyday thoughts, pictures from past events, employers, colleges, relationship status, family members, favorite musical groups, movies, television shows, quotes, books, and activities on this profile, making the use of Facebook a valuable tool in the hiring process.

According to research, social media has become a valuable tool in the hiring process. A study that compared social networking profile printouts, emphasizing alcohol, family, or career-related content, found that applicants are more likely to be chosen for a managerial position if they have a family or a professional-oriented profile rather than an alcohol-oriented profile (Bohnert & Ross, 2009). Also, applicants with a more professional profile were given a higher rate of pay in a manager position for a company (Bohnert & Ross, 2009). Another study revealed that applicants did not want employers to see alcohol-related content (Peluchette & Karl, 2008). Results suggest that applicants have a good idea what characteristics (e.g., professionalism) employers are looking for in applicants and recognize that having alcohol-related content in their social networking profiles can have adverse effects on their job search.

Spon (2010) looked at negative, positive, and private Facebook profiles and concluded that applicants with negative profiles are rated lower in regard to candidate pursuit and are less likely to be offered an interview than any other candidates that applied for the position. This research suggests that social profiles can make the selection process more risky for the applicant. Applicants' social media profiles provide access to all kinds of personal information for the employer that they would not receive in just an interview, resume, or cover letter. While checking an applicant's social profile may not be illegal, those employers deem it unfair to seek irrelevant information on a potential employee who meets the required qualifications (Mckenzie, 2010). Still, other employers see social media profiles as very valuable to the hiring process and continue to use them until doing so becomes illegal. Previous research found that 20% depicted sexual activity, 25% had seminude or provocative photos, and 50% contained profanity (Peluchette & Karl, 2007). Employers would never see these personal characteristics in an interview or on a resume. Peluchette and Karl (2008) noted that males are more likely to post

risky photos on their Facebook profiles than females, whereas females are more likely to post romantic and love pictures. Peluchette and Karl (2008) also suggested that females are more worried than males about the content of their profiles. Thus, there may be gender differences in the social profiles, such as content of information and how it used in the hiring process.

Considering that past research has shown the negative impact of social profiles on an employer's first impression of the applicant and female applicants have been shown at a disadvantage in hiring, we wanted to further understand whether gender *and* professional or unprofessional Facebook profiles impact the likelihood that an applicant will be hired. Our primary hypothesis was that participants (i.e., employers) are more likely to choose applicants with professional profiles when given Facebook as a recruiting tool. However, we suspected that applicants' gender will not influence the participants in the hiring process. Instead, the hiring process would be based on the individual characteristics of the applicant and how qualified he or she is for the professional position.

Method

Participants

Participants ($N = 36$; 17 men and 19 women) were college students enrolled in psychology courses. Participants ($M_{age} = 22$) were asked if they were familiar or not familiar with Facebook. All but two participants indicated they were very familiar with Facebook. Students received one credit for their class's research participation to participate in the study.

Materials

Participants were given one of four application packets for this study. All packets contained the same company mission statement, a job description, and a resume for a human resources generalist. To indicate the gender of the applicant, the resume either had the name

Courtney Johnson, *Gary Thompson*, *Sarah Williams*, or *Ted Nielsen*. The packet also contained one of four versions of a Facebook page, which indicated the gender of the applicant and included professional or unprofessional content. Professional content included things like pictures of family, travel, and pets. Unprofessional content included things like sexually suggestive pictures, drinking, and drug use. The four Facebook versions were as follows: (1) male, unprofessional; (2) female, unprofessional; (3) male professional; or (4) female, professional. The applicant packet also contained a questionnaire that asked participants a series of demographic questions and their feelings about the job applicant. One question was used to determine the likelihood that the applicant would be hired. Participants rated the likelihood that they would hire the applicant on a Likert Scale, ranging from 1 (*definitely not*) to 5 (*definitely would*).

Procedure

Participants completed the study in groups of three. Participants were seated at different tables, so they could not see each other's applicant packets and could answer the questions without being influenced by other participants. After an explanation of the study, participants received an informed consent form to sign. Next, participants were given one of the four application packets. Each application package was coded with a number on the top page to keep track of which version each participant received. All conditions had the same number of participants. The participants were given fifteen minutes to complete the study. After they completed the study, participants were debriefed and thanked for their participation.

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Results

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All 36 participants were included in the analysis. A 2 (professional versus unprofessional) x 2 (male versus female) factorial analysis of variance was performed to

determine if the type of Facebook profile influenced being hired for the position. There was a statistical significance for professionalism, $F(1, 32) = 14.59$, $p < .05$. Applicants with professional Facebook profiles ($M = 3.8$, $SD = .88$) were more likely to be hired than applicants with unprofessional Facebook profiles ($M = 2.6$, $SD = .96$). There was no statistical significance for gender, $F(1, 32) = 1.501$, $p > .05$. Male applicants ($M = 3.4$, $SD = 1.12$) were not more likely to be hired than female applicants ($M = 3.0$, $SD = 1.06$). There was not a significant interaction between gender and professionalism, $F(1, 32) = .574$, $p > .05$. Thus, the effect of professionalism on the likelihood of being hired did not change based on the gender of the applicant.

Discussion

We hypothesized that professionalism of the Facebook profile would influence the likelihood of being hired for a professional position and that the applicant's gender would not influence the likelihood that they would be hired. The statistical analysis supports our hypothesis: there is not a significant interaction between gender and having a professional or unprofessional Facebook profile. Moreover, applicants with professional profiles appear to be more likely to be hired for the job. Therefore, job applicants should consider what information they make available on their Facebook profile or on any other social networking site. Results also reveal that males are not more likely to be hired over females regardless of the professionalism of the Facebook profile.

Given the limited research on gender and social networking profiles, we are able to add to existing studies of research in the area. Future research should consider exploring the influence of applicants' gender in the hiring process based on their social networking profiles to explore the further generalizability of these findings to other populations or larger sample sizes.

A limitation to this study is the sample size. It would have been beneficial to have more than sixty participants due to our design factorial to ensure that the study would have adequate power to detect a true effect. However, it should be noted that despite the small sample size, statistically significant results were found. This suggests that the size of the effect is large enough to be detected in a small sample. Another limitation to this study is that all the participants were college students. College students are not likely to have experience in hiring employees, so they may choose applicants based on different criteria than human resource professionals. Moreover, college students may be more influenced by Facebook profiles than adults who may not have as much experience with social networking. It should be noted though that Facebook is growing in the adult population, so more and more people are gaining experience with social networking sites. In addition, business professionals might take the study more seriously in contrast to college students who are sometimes not truly interested in research but want to earn extra credit.

Another limitation is the fact that we were only able to make a screen print of the photo page of the Facebook profile used in this research. Being able to provide the entire Facebook profile could have been more beneficial to the research. In fact, the Facebook profiles had to be staged with fake pictures that did not always look like the same person. Thus, using Facebook profiles created with the help of a volunteer may increase the believability of the experimental manipulation.

In addition, future research could look at the gender of the participant and the gender of the applicant to see if the gender of the hiring manager influences the likelihood of one gender being hired over the other. Also, researchers could focus on the type of position for which the company is hiring. It would be interesting to see if males are still more likely to be hired for

management positions than females. Thirdly, future research could look at real life hiring processes of a company by having the applicant go into an interview with a resume and then have the hiring manager look at the social networking profiles of the applicant to see if the combined assessment would influence the hiring manager's decision.

Finding a professional job is a very competitive process, made even more difficult given the high unemployment rates in the United States. Employers are now looking for more information about their applicants so that they can better assess an applicant's character and degree of professionalism and to supplement information provided by interviews and resumes. Although our research does not indicate an interaction effect of gender and professionalism of social networking profiles on the likelihood of being hired, our findings suggest that professionalism of profiles by itself may influence the decision-making process during the applicant screening phase for a job position. Therefore, applicants should consider what information they place on their Facebook profiles. Indeed, applicants should be wary of placing personal information they do not wish everyone to see on their profiles.

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