Measuring attitudes about viewing social networking profiles

during the hiring process

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Abstract

During the last two decades, social networks, including Facebook, have evolved from being used as an interactive online tool that enables people to connect, share and maintain relationships with personal friends and family, to being a goldmine of information for employers who want to find out more details about individuals whom they are considering for employment. The information that employers can find on online social network profiles can range from the most private to the most public aspects. Photographs, status reports, friend lists, likes, relationship details, biography information and membership to online groups can tell a lot about a person and can contribute to their overall image and personal identity -- and employers who are ready to hire are eager to view it.

In the earliest days of social networks, what was posted on a person's social network profile was highly guarded and considered personal information. In the name of privacy protection and fair treatment of individuals, public demands and media attention led to the development and introduction of charters, legislation, policies and codes of conduct that aimed to protect people's rights and privacy. These structures also attempted to guide user behaviour and caused employers to exercise great care when accessing and using information gleaned from personal social network profiles during the hiring process. Now it seems, however, that the tide is changing.

This project aims to measure and compare current attitudes of employers and job seekers about the practice of employers viewing the personal social network profiles of job applicants during the hiring process and job competitions. Results of a survey completed by both employers and job seekers will indicate that both groups believe that the practice of

viewing social network profiles by employers during the hiring process is now an acceptable practice, contrary to what earlier research and studies have shown. This finding, when compared to results of earlier surveys, indicate that there is a shift occurring at various levels of society including the personal, institutional and societal levels that is changing not only attitudes but also behaviours. The survey results from this project will be analyzed using sociopsychology theory of Structuration (Giddens 1984).

Introduction

Social networks have changed how the world views and treats public and private information. The blurring of lines between what is considered private and public is also changing the way employers access and use information found online when recruiting new employees. Legal uncertainty, public debate, ethical and privacy concerns, and issues regarding organizational policies and practice abound.

The topic of this research project addresses the attitudes of employers and job seekers about employers viewing personal social network profiles (e.g. Facebook) of people who seeking employment. This project will attempt to find trends between the two groups, differences and/or similarities in perspectives, and overall changes in attitudes that may have occurred over time. It is also hoped that, perhaps, this research may lead to finding more common ground and understanding about the benefits and disadvantages of using social networks for employers and job seekers as part of the hiring process.

When I started this study, it was my intent to determine if and how much employers turned to social media networks to gain information about potential employees during the hiring process, and specifically, to do background checks. After researching the topic more, it became clear that there was a great deal of prior research that established that employers did, in fact, admit to looking to social networks to learn more about potential job candidates. It was then that I decided to change the focus of my project to determine if, during a job competition, potential candidates found the practice of employers looking to social networks to view personal profiles to be acceptable and if they were concerned at all about issues such as invasion of personal privacy or unfair treatment based on assumptions or judgements that employers may make.

These seem to be reasonable questions to ask especially since the use of social networks has become so prevalent in our society and, as such, such an integral part of people's personal identities and daily lives.

The following section summarizes the background of the topic. It is followed by the purpose of this study, a review of the existing literature, a summary of Structuration theory, the theoretical framework that is used to analyze the findings.

The methodology for this research project follows in the next section which also includes an overview of data sources and data gathering techniques. Research findings follow within the context of the literature and theoretical framework, along with discussion about current and possible future trends. Shortcomings and limitations are also addressed in this paper followed by recommendations for further study and a final overview of the project.

Background

Today, social networks, such as Facebook, have become as commonplace as cars in our society. While social networks have only existed within the last few decades, their growth in user rates has been rapid. In 2013, 1.59 billion people in North America used online social networks (Statista, 2013). Facebook, launched in 2004 (Jenkins, 2013), remains the most popular social network with sharing between individuals, groups and organizations. At the end of the first quarter of 2015, Facebook alone reported 1.44 billion active users (www.statista.com).

With that many people inhabiting social networks, it is little surprise that employers turn to social networks to find information about potential hires—and there is much to find. In 2012, social networking was the most time-consuming online activity for Americans, followed by checking email, watching online videos and using search engines (Fox, 2013). In the United

States, people between the ages of 13 and 64 spend an average of 37 minutes on social networks out of every 180+ minutes spent online per day (Richter, 2013). Much of that time has users posting personal information about themselves including photographs, biography information, relationship details, and likes and dislikes. They are also connecting with other individuals, groups, organizations and causes. All of this contributes to establishing their online personal identity.

For job-seekers and employers, the use of social networks present advantages and disadvantages and potential risk and reward. For job candidates, sharing information online contributes to establishing their personal identity – but one that can be accessed by multiple viewers – known or unknown to them. Photographs, status posts, likes, and comments from friends can convey a person's personality, involvement in family, community and activities, and give a general sense about the person as a whole. Having a presence online, however also puts people at risk because it opens themselves up to the influence and contributions of others for shaping an identity by means as tagging, group membership and affiliations, and friend lists.

For job seekers, not having an online identity on social networks can also be disadvantageous. Employers may assume poorer socio-economic status, age, religion or geographic isolation. This creates the digital divide and is a disadvantage for non-users of social networks and for people that have no online identity and presence.

For employers, however, during the last two decades, the practice of viewing social network profiles has presented some advantages and challenges. It has also raised complex issues relating to privacy protection, and fair and equal treatment. In the past, employers wanting to view social network profiles created public demand for increased privacy protection for

individuals. Reports of privacy invasion made media headlines. Organizations sometimes found themselves in difficult positions when having information to defend a decision not to hire is prevented by privacy protection and permission of use. Trying to balance the interests of both groups is a challenge especially when reasons for use are different.

During the last few years, employers have integrated the use of social networks into their organizational hiring processes to do screening and background checks on people before hiring them as new employees (Davison, Maraist and Bing, 2011). For employers, social network profiles like those on Facebook offer quick and easy access to a great deal of information that is useful to verify information and to assess a person's character and values.

There is some discrepancy about the overall frequency of the practice as it seems to be changing. In the early days of social network, employers wanted to view personal profiles. Interestingly, as time progressed and as the number of social network users increased, the number of employers using social network profiles during the hiring process seemed to decrease. What is clear, however is that employers are reshaping their own procedures and regulations to reduce risks of being accused of privacy invasion, and unfair and unethical practices. Several strategies are recommended in the research to protect organizations from risk including hiring someone external to the hiring process to review social network profiles and online searches.

It seems reasonable that, as part of the hiring process, employers should be able to verify information about potential candidates to find the best candidate possible and to minimize and/or avoid putting their organization at risk with a bad hire. This is true for all sectors but even more so for advocacy and charitable organizations who operate using public funds and private donations. Because these organizations use other people's monies to fulfill a societal need, they

are held to higher account, and therefore, need staff who are capable of maintaining high levels of integrity, honesty and character. This is where the issue of protection of personal information and the ability to verify information and characteristics of potential new hires collide.

Purpose of the Study

This study seeks to determine if the rapid and wide-spread integration of social networks, such as Facebook, among personal, institutional and public spheres is changing attitudes and practices of employers and job candidates about whether or not it is acceptable for social networks to be used to do background checks on job candidates during the hiring process. The scope of this study will focus specifically on organizations and employees working for organizations that are funded with public funds and/or donations.

Questions guiding this research are:

a) Do employers believe that as part of the hiring process they should be able to use online social networks (e.g. Facebook) to back their hiring decisions? and,
b) Do job seekers believe it is acceptable for employers to use online social network profiles to make their hiring decisions?

Theoretical Framework

This research project was analyzed using the lens of Anthony Gidden's Structuration theory (1984). Structuration is a very broad theory that offers a general theory of social organization (Jones and Karsten, 2008).

Central to the theory of Structuration is the relationship between individuals and society. According to Structuration theory, behaviour and structure are intertwined, and that structure (rules and resources) and agents (humans) are mutually dependent (May and Mumby, 2005;

Gehman, 2008). What this means is that in their daily lives, people go through a socialization process and become dependent of the existing social structures around them. Structures such as rules, appropriate forms of conduct, laws, etc., guide people's behaviours consciously and unconsciously. At the same time, however, people will also alter the social structures around them through their behaviours and with their actions during time and space. "Human agents draw on social structures in their actions, and at the same time these actions serve to produce and reproduce social structure." (Jones and Karsten, 2008, p 129).

Duality of structure. Duality of structure refers to "structure as the medium and outcome of the conduct it recursively organizes; the structural properties of social systems do not exist outside of action but are chronically implicated in its production and reproduction (Gehman 2008). Within the context of social networks, therefore, Structuration theory and the concept of duality of structure supports and influences how people behave, communicate, organize themselves, and conduct themselves online so that over time, these processes, rules, resources and actions are built into different the environment at different levels (i.e. individual, group, organizational and societal).

Modality. The concept of modality is another important part of Structuration theory. In Structuration theory, modality refers to the way structures are translated into actions. In the case of social networks, according to Structuration theory's principle of reflexive modality, people learn, understand and act upon the rules of appropriate and acceptable behaviour from observing what other users do and what other users will accept and reject.

Knowledgeability and routinization. Knowledgeability refers to what agents (humans) know about what they do and why they do it. Knowledge gained from the consciousness and

memory traces (Gehman 2008) play important roles in modality. Stemming from knowledgeable agents, ongoing actions and practices eventually become routines that establish themselves as institutionalized features of social systems via tradition, custom and/or habit. In Structuration theory, this is known as routinization.

Trajectory of the self. In regards to the role of technology and social media, Giddens refers to the concept of the "trajectory of the self" during the later stages of his development of Structuration Theory. (Jones and Karsten, 2008, p 134). This term is used to describe how individuals in contemporary society reflexively construct a narrative of personal identity. He refers to the "collage effect" created by electronic media, where events distant from the individual intrude upon their lives. This concept also applies to social networks and how individuals become intertwined with these online environments and how their presence, participation and engagement in these online environments contributes to people's own online identities.

These concepts of Structuration theory -- duality of structure, modality, knowledgeability, routinization and the trajectory of the self -- work together to create new standards and new normals within an environment. The relationships and patterns between these concepts help transform and reproduce a system that evolves in a new direction. In the online environment of social networks, as users change the way they use social networks and their attitudes towards them, the behaviours and practices of people within that organization evolve further. This is explained by Gidden's Structuration theory that organizations evolve over time and space, as will the social norms that will be guided by users' behaviours and attitudes about what is acceptable and unacceptable. As mentioned previously, people learn to how to conduct

themselves according to what they know, observe and understand consciously and subconsciously to be right and appropriate behaviour. Within the context of social networks, people's behaviour is influenced by what others deem as appropriate or inappropriate and from feedback of others—more so than from the existence of user codes of conduct, and other formal rules, legislation or structures.

In cases where employers look to social network profiles to determine the suitability of candidates for their organizations, it is difficult for employers to look past postings that go against social norms and offer them employment with their organization.

As we will see in the research in the literature review section, employers do, in fact, look to social networks to view personal profiles to assist in doing background checks on potential job candidates and to verify information and character. And what they see matter in the decision-making process.

Literature Review

Social networks are defined as "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system." (Kane, 2014) They are web-based tools and technologies that enable users to share information and turn communication into interactive dialogues with internal or external audiences (SHRM, 2011).

Existing literature about the use of social networks as part of the hiring process reveal discrepancies between what job-seekers believe to be acceptable practices by hiring organizations, and what employers believe to be fair and responsible for getting the best

candidate. For example, previous research suggests that job-seekers believe that information posted on social network profiles such as Facebook should be off limits to employers. They claim that social network profiles are an extension of their personal and private lives, even though it may be publicly accessed and viewed by people beyond their own friend lists and networks.

Employers, on the other hand, believe that any information found online about people – whether it is linked to a social network profile or not – is public information, and therefore, useful to identify promising candidates or red-flag candidates. However, the research also indicates that employers are taking steps to exercise caution to ensure breeches of privacy and rights of protected groups are not violated.

A review of the literature will be organized in categories: Why Employers use Social Networks as a Recruitment Strategy; Organizational Policy and Regulation; Type of Information and Potential Risks; Privacy Protection; and Ethical and Legal Concerns.

The following literature review includes findings and information published in professional publications, academic journals, research projects, industry surveys, and media articles and commentary pieces. Articles were sought to address issues in Canada and the United States. Several databases were searched including the University of Alberta's database and websites such as the Society of Human Resource Management (www.shrm.org) and CareerBuilder (www.CareerBuilder.com). With the exception of one article, reports that included statistics that were used to market software products for HR searches were rejected for this literature review. Key words for online searches included: social media, hiring, social networking

sites, Facebook, Twitter, employers, job searches, hiring processes, HR, background checks, online screening, legal issues, privacy protection.

While job seekers may assume most employers search social networks to get more information about potential job candidates (Clark, 2006), the research proves otherwise. An industry study shows that only 18 per cent of organizations actively use social networks to screen candidates during the hiring process (Society of Human Resource Management, 2011). The discrepancy between fact and fiction may be influenced by marketing claims of software products aimed at HR professionals that suggest as many as 91 per cent of employers use social networks at some point in the hiring process (Reicher, 2013).

The research also shows that while there had been growth in the number of employers who used social networks during the hiring process between 2008 and 2011, some are choosing to abandon the practice because they want to avoid potential legal risks, they were not able to verify data found on social networks, or they were unable to find information related to the job (SHRM, 2011). This begs the question of whether using social networks by employers is a good use of organizational time and resources.

Why employers use social networks as a recruitment strategy

Prior to the existence of online social networks, employers looking to recruit new staff would ask existing staff members and/or professional colleagues for recommendations, references and information about potential candidates. Face-to-face dialogue, personal contacts, and human relationships were at the core of this process. This was the social and cultural norm for organizations at the time which fits within the sociocultural tradition theory (Craig and

Muller, 2007) as “communication…process essentially involved with concepts such a social structures, identities, norms, rituals and collective belief systems. (p 365.)

In the present day, post-2004 and the launch of Facebook and other social networks, a shift is occurring from using traditional social structures within HR recruitment, screening and hiring processes. Search processes based in human interaction and dialogue are being replaced with online methods. As quoted in an article published by the Society for Human Resource Management), “The hunt for talent in today’s world delves into a new theatre of technological possibilities.” (SHRM, 2008)

Reasons vary for why employers use these online technological theatres. A survey conducted by SHRM (2008) reveals that employers used social networks because of the ability to target people within a specific geographic region, contact potential hires easily, create online communities focused on the organization, attract qualified candidates, and disseminate job and organizational information (p 17). In short, using social networks is convenient.

Time and money are also factors. As economies became more fragile and hiring departments became increasingly stretched, employers looked to social networks to help save time in the recruiting process. According to SHRM (2008), 51 per cent of employers use social networks to get information about a person in a short period of time; while 69 per cent use social networks to recruit people who might not have otherwise contacted the organization. This makes it possible for employers to find more qualified people at a low cost which is particularly important and doable even for small businesses (Brown and Vaughn, 2011).

Social network searches can address applicant integrity and honesty. Resumes and cover letters tend to highlight only positive characteristics and the research shows that a large

percentage of applications are not completely factual. One study found that as many as 41 per cent of 5.8 million resumes contained errors in education, employment experience or credentials (Slovensky and Ross, 2012). Clues about personality traits and personal characteristics can also gleaned from social network profiles which can be used to predict organizational fit, predicted behaviour within the organization, and chance of success (Kluemper, Rosen and Mossholder, 2012).

Another reason HR professionals turn to social networks is to find information about candidates. As many as 49 per cent of HR managers claim they tend to find more information on social networks than from a candidate's resume, cover letter or curriculum vitae (SHRM, 2008). While there is a variety of information that can be gleaned from social networks, it is important for employers to consider context (Brown and Vaughn, 2011). An article in HRFocus (No. 8) states:

> "Most employers don't go out deliberately looking for derogatory information on job applicants' social media sites, but many of those who go searching on Facebook and Twitter tend to find dirt anyway" as cited from a 2012 survey conducted by CareerBuilder.com. (2013).

Other employers view social network profiles to assess and measure personality and characteristics, learn likes and dislikes, and review endorsements, associations and affiliations (Davison et al, 2011). This knowledge, claim employers, helps them correlate job relevant traits with job performance which, they say, can help determine job success.

Organizational policy and regulation

Existing literature shows that organizations are taking seriously the need to have defined policies and regulations in regards social network use during their hiring processes, and more organizations are putting in place their own policies in regards to social network use and nonuse. In 2008, 72 per cent of companies did not have a formal or informal policy with regards to using social networks to screen job candidates (Davison, Maraist, Hamilton, and Bing, 2012) but in 2011, that number dropped to 56 per cent.

In developing policies and regulations, organizations address three main categories: job relevance, type and amount of information, and privacy protection (Brown and Vaughn, 2011). The purpose of having policies and regulations in place is to ensure candidates of consistent and equal process, and to protect the organization against claims of discriminatory and unfair treatment. Random social networks searches can make the hiring process too subjective. Jennifer Sullivan Grasz, vice present of corporate communications at CareerBuilder, says:

"If you conduct a social search for one candidate, you should do the same for all, and information being taken into consideration should be specific to the position at hand," (HRFocus, 8).

Several strategies for effective policies and regulation in regards to viewing social network profiles are noted in the literature. They are:

1. Be clear to the purpose of viewing social network profiles, i.e., are they verifying facts, collecting additional factual information, or determining fit of the potential candidate to the organization or suitability of the applicant to the position (Slovensky and Ross, 2012).

2. Clearly identify the timing of when searches are done during the hiring process. According to the literature, the best time to use social networks is near the end of the hiring process as a background check and not an evaluative process (Michaluk, 2015).
3. Information gleaned from social networks must be relevant to the position that they are being considered for and constructs should be put in place before candidates are searched. To this point: "Employers must give conceptual consideration to the constructs they are assessing when conducting employment screens." …"Without job-relevance, there is no legal basis to make screening decisions of applicants based on data garnered from a social network site profile." (Brown and Vaughn, 2011)
4. Hire or task someone other than the decision-maker within the organization to conduct social network and online searches and ask them to provide a report that contains only feedback based on objective search criteria (Michaluk, 2015). This strategy also addresses questions about storing and safeguarding of information found on social network sites about applicants (Slovesky and Ross, 2012).
5. Provide training of HR professionals in using social media (Nash, 2009) and in nondiscriminatory practices (Calvasina, Calvasina, Calvasina, 2014). Training of HR professionals in regards to social network functionality, as well as basic nondiscriminatory concepts, privacy protection and ethical issues, lessens the risk of unfair practices and bias.
6. Define, keep track and decide what technologies they will use and won't use so that candidates are treated fairly. Slovensky and Ross (2012) refer to facial recognition

software to search photos of candidates posted online. Definitions and pre-determined technology work to provide a more even playing field.

7. Have a social media policy that speaks to every type of communication that is publishable on the internet (Wright, 2013) developed in a way that is suitable for the organization's industry and culture. It should also align with employee handbooks and codes of conduct.
8. Include areas within organizational policy that discuss use business-related social media; confidentiality; copyright, fair use and financial disclosure; transparency/disclaimers; language; content approval; and disciplinary process (Calo, 2010).

Type of information and potential risks

The literature suggests that if employers use social networks to do background checks on job candidates, they use only information that is relevant to the position. Yet some employers make decisions about job candidates using information from social networks that is not job relevant (Brown and Vaughn, 2011). This presents risks for employers as there is no legal basis relative to job performance or competency that could support the organization's decision. The best advice from legal experts to HR professionals who do search social networks is to seek and use only job-relevant information (Fisher, 2011).

Motivations of job-seekers for using social media can also present problems for employers. While employers tend to use social networks to screen candidates and do background checks, job seekers use social networks to develop relationships and project impressions (Protzman, 2013). In essence, this is how job seekers use social networks to shape their own online identities. In some cases, this can lead to negative and undesirable results for employers.

Information posted by job-seekers may be distorted or exaggerated in their attempts to find social acceptance and professional prestige.

On the other hand, but equally problematic, some job-seeker profiles may show high levels of self-monitoring. For example, job-seekers may not post involvement in illegal activity on their social network profiles, however, a quick Google search of publicly accessible information (e.g. online newspapers) can reveal to employers if applicants have had any legal issues in the past (Slovensky and Ross, 2012). Not discovering this information, can put organizations at risk. For example, in the U.S., employers have found themselves in situations of negligent hiring practices by not doing thorough enough criminal records or background checks. If an employee acting as an agent of the company commits an illegal, unethical or immoral act, the company can be found liable. Diligent hiring practices that include criminal record checks and online background checks can save companies from potentially putting their stakeholder groups at risk from the potential harmful actions of new hires.

Privacy protection

The protection of one's privacy is a growing area of concern. Heightened media coverage and public demand has swayed some corporate decision-makers to revise their HR practices regarding the use of social networks. One such case, was brought to light in 2009 when, after a massive public outcry citing privacy invasion, a public-sector employer was forced to repeal its own policy of asking all job candidates for usernames and passwords as part of the application process (McCullagh, 2009). Until 2009, the City of Bozeman, Montana, required all prospective employees and applicants to submit "any and all, current personal or business websites, web pages or memberships on any Internet-based chat rooms, social clubs or forums, to include but

not limited to: Facebook, Google, Yahoo, youTube.com, MySpace, etc." (Richer, 2009). The City claimed the practice to be consistent with other types of background investigations. However, after public outcry about invasion of privacy and some bad publicity, the City abandoned its own policy.

In Canada, employers who have asked job candidates for social network usernames and passwords have been charged by provincial commissions to have violated Human Rights Codes (Campbell, 2012). Facebook, itself, has issued statements that anyone asking their users for access to their accounts violates Facebook's Statement of Rights and Responsibilities and that the company may initiate legal proceedings to protect its users in appropriate circumstances (Michaluk, 2015).

But in some corporate arenas, the literature shows a differing view. In a CareerBuilder study, just 17 per cent of employers considered social network background checks to be an invasion of personal privacy (Slovensky and Ross, 2012). This view can create legal difficulties for employers and can put themselves at risk for potential discrimination claims as biographical information relating to protected rights (e.g. religion, race, gender, sexual orientation, etc.) can be determined from social network posts and profiles. (Brown and Vaughn, 2011). Employers should also be careful when "googling" someone. Because the internet is publicly searchable and the act of "googling" someone is not an invasion of privacy (Brown and Vaughn, 2011), employers should still ensure that the information they find online and used in their decision making does not invoke privacy breaches.

A master's thesis by Corey J. Protzman (2013) included a survey of 25 individuals who had been applying for jobs within a one-year period, and were asked to gauge their use of social

media and social media awareness during the employer screening processes. The results showed that participants believed employers should not be viewing their social network profiles. Interviews from five employers also indicated that while they use social networks to screen applicants, they do not have any corporate guidelines or rules from another governing body to regulate this practice.

Protzman's research indicates that employers agree that information posted and published on social networks was fair game for employers to access and form judgments on character, professionalism and attitudes (p 16). At the same time, some employers are hesitant to reveal their exact practices when it comes to using social networks for HR processes and decision making. This attitudinal gap between employers and job seekers, and lack of constructs, even in career-related contexts, presents difficulties for job-seekers.

One consideration arising from the literature is that employers should take note of is that organizations may experience is a diminished desire of potential high-caliber employees to agree to come work for them if it is discovered that their social network profiles were viewed by the organization as part of the hiring process (Stoughton, Thompson, Meade, 2015). In some cases, the knowledge that a potential employer viewed a candidate's social network sites lessened the companies' attractiveness as a potential employer. Potential hires believed that, because their privacy had been invaded, not even a positive job offer could "moderate the relationship between screening and justice" (p 84).

Issues for job seekers in building social network identities

Online profiles with information posted openly or for the viewing of specified individuals can both help or hinder their job opportunities (SHRM, 2009). This applies to job seekers of all ages, backgrounds, qualifications and skill.

As more people engage on social networks, more personal information becomes publicly accessible when it is shared by other people. This makes it easier for employers to find information without privacy breeches. At the same time, it also means that people's online identities are being developed with the influence of others.

People need to be aware and take responsibility for what is posted about them online (Clark and Roberts, 2010; Karle, Peluchette and Schlaegel, 2010; and Zhang, 2010). A poll commissioned in the United Kingdom's Press Complaints Commission reported that 42 per cent of web users aged 16-24 knew someone who had been embarrassed by information uploaded onto the Internet without their consent; and 78 per cent of adults would change the information that they publish about themselves if they thought it would be published in mainstream media. (Strategic Direction, 2011).

As a way to minimize risks, many job-seekers are taking measures to protect their privacy and avoid oversharing with potential employers. According to 2014 CareerBuilder survey of workers conducted by Harris Poll, 47 per cent said they only share posts with friends and family, 41 percent have their profile set to private, and 19 per cent kept separate professional and personal profiles. Twenty-eight per cent of workers said they do not use social networks.

The research also shows, however, the use of privacy settings on social network profiles can have negative consequences for job seekers. In a research paper by Jade Pech (2013), it was

reported that the amount of information completed on a social network profile, as well as the amount of information publicly accessible, are factors that influence HR staff. Her findings showed that more private settings used by potential hires raised more skepticism in the minds of employers; potential hires who had more complete information filled in on his/her social network profile received more favourable rankings by potential employers; and potential hires who had fewer privacy settings and more information available to the public on their social network profiles received more favourable evaluations regarding personal characteristics and skills by potential employers than those with private or no social network profile. Similar results regarding privacy settings were also found in research by K. Kluesner (2013).

While a large amount of literature points to damaging effects of social media posts in regards to securing employment, other research indicates that online information about candidates and personal posts on social networks can help them secure employment.

An article about a survey conducted by Careerbuilder.com reported that 33 per cent of employers found information about candidates that made them more likely to hire them. Employers claimed that background checks on social networks:

- gave them a better sense of a candidate's personality and potential fit with company culture (46 per cent)
- provided background information that supported professional qualifications (45 per cent)
- conveyed a person's professional image (43 per cent)
- identified them as a well-rounded person with a wide range of interests (40 per cent)
- proved that the candidate has great communications skills (40 per cent)
- provided evidence that a candidate was creative (36 per cent)

- showed that the person received awards and accolades (31 per cent)
- showed that other people posted positive comments and references (30 per cent)
- showed that a candidate interacted with the companies social media accounts (24 per cent)
- showed that a candidate has a large number of followers and/or subscribers (14 per cent)

"It's important for job seekers to remember that much of what they post to the Internet—and in some cases what others post about them—can be found by potential employers, and that can affect their chances of getting hired down the road," Rosemary Haefner, vice president of Human Resource at CareerBuilder.

Using social networks to contact potential employers can also improve job seekers' chances of getting hired. The same CareerBuilder survey (Haefner, 2009) noted that 24 per cent of employers sited this as a finding during online background checks and a reason for hiring a candidate.

In an opinion-based article, Ricker (2014) says that candidates can also do their own checks and research about employment within their companies by using social networks. For example, a job seeker can pose the question, "what's the best part about working there, or what direction does the company see itself in over the next few years."

A social network presence can also reveal to employers what kind of professional personality candidates are developing (SHRM, 2008). Pictures, posts, comments, geo-location, etc., can reveal a candidates interests, hobbies, friends, mobility and connections. This information can also reveal if candidates are involved in any volunteer and/or community activities, and external organizations. This additional information can make an impression with

employers. With more than 30 million small businesses with active pages on the social network (Ha, 2014), a great deal of opportunity to connect. Conversely, job seekers, themselves, can determine their own fit with organizations and discover if they hold similar values, likes and dislikes, and if they are working towards supportable and shared goals (Kluemper, Rosen, Mossholder, 2012).

This information and other findings outlined in the literature review have aided in the formulation of the study methodology.

Methodology and Study Approach

The rationale for this research project is based on the desire to separate reality from perception, fact from fiction. The researcher wanted to determine if job seekers and hiring employers believed that it was acceptable for employers–especially in not-for-profit and public sectors where personal integrity is so important–to look at social network profiles to help them determine who would be their next new employee.

The researcher also wanted to get a sense of whether employers now were choosing to look at online social network profiles less frequently because of the potential risks discussed in the Literature Review section. Within the last couple of years, comments heard by the researcher by some people who work in hiring and HR capacities indicated that employers are categorically not viewing social network profiles, including those on Facebook, of potential job candidates during the hiring process. Reasons cited included respect for privacy, maintaining separation between work and private lives, and potential legal issues.

Key considerations taken into account when selecting the methodology for this study included the need to access participants in a time and cost effective manner. It was also

necessary to reach a sample group who would be able to draw upon their own existing knowledge and experience. Because the emphasis of this study was to measure attitudes and perceptions about the use of social network profiles during hiring processes, opportunities for qualitative responses were also included in the research tool. Qualitative research methods can be used to obtain information and gauge feedback such as thought processes and emotions (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

Scope of Study

This is a small study. It uses a purposeful sample to ensure manageable and ease of access to participants in a cost and time efficient manner. Because the researcher wanted to focus on attitudes among people who worked for organizations that used public funds and/or donations, invitations of participation were strategically sent to participants who worked in the sectors of education, health, environment/conservation, job skills/employment, and post-secondary education. Invited participants were also selected because of their wide range of experience, age, education, skill sets, and exposure to online technology.

Participants for the purposeful group were also selected to ensure that there was an equitable number of people who could identify themselves as decision-makers in the hiring process, or as applicants in a job competition. To make this distinction among respondents, and so that data and responses could be attributed to a specific group and then later be compared, a categorical question was included at the beginning of the survey so that respondents could identify which group they were a part of and from which perspective they were basing their answers from, i.e. as someone who had hiring responsibilities with their organization, or as someone who had been a candidate in a job competition.

This approach would help in the data analysis to ensure that both groups were represented equitably.

Data Collection, Findings and Analysis

Data was collected using an online web-based survey that was emailed to a purposeful sampling of participants who are employed with or who have applied to work for not-for-profit and publicly funded organizations. The online survey along with the letter of informed consent and additional information about the project was emailed to 66 potential respondents. A hyperlink to the online survey was including in the email and ensured that all responses would be submitted confidentially, anonymously and unable to be linked to individual respondents. It was hoped that this approach would encourage among respondents a sense of trust and the will to be honest and forthcoming in their responses as this topic could be seen as sensitive for some participants.

Respondents had five working days to read the invitation of participation and the letter of informed consent, present any questions to the researcher that they may have had, and complete the online survey. At the end of the five day period for which the survey was open, 22 of the 66 respondents completed the survey, resulting in a return rate of 33.33 per cent.

The first question asked participants to categorize themselves as someone who was involved with hiring for their organization, or if they were/had been a candidate in a job competition. Of the total number of respondents, 59.09 per cent reported that they were involved in hiring processes for their organization, and 40.91 per cent indicated they had been a candidate in a job competition(s).

The remaining survey questions were designed to let respondents provide quantitative data and also qualitative data so that respondents could give further explanation and context to their responses. It included three main questions that aimed to determine if respondents believed that it was acceptable for employers to look at the personal profiles of job candidates on social media like Facebook, if information viewed on social network profiles should influence an employers' decisions, and if they believe it was advantageous for job candidates to have social media profiles. The following is a breakdown of participant responses given collectively and categorically by respondent type.

When respondents were asked if they thought it was acceptable for employers to search social network profiles during a job competition, 90.91 per cent of all respondents indicated that they thought it was acceptable. Broken down categorically, 92.3 per cent of respondents with hiring responsibilities indicated that it was acceptable, and 88.89 per cent of job candidates responded that it was it acceptable. Common themes arising from respondents' additional comments included the notion that the online world of social media and online social networks are public domain and, therefore, accessible to and usable by anyone, including employers. Respondents from both groups also expressed a strong belief that social network profiles provide additional and reliable information about job candidates that speaks to their personal characteristics, personality, values, identity and potential fit within the organization. It is for these reasons, they conclude, that it is acceptable for employers to view the social network profiles of job candidates, and that social network profiles are a legitimate source of background information for employers to reference.

This result, supported by additional comments made by members of the hiring group and members of the job candidates group indicate that, overall, the practice of viewing social network profiles has wide-spread acceptance among the working population. This attitude is a shift from earlier public views and findings from previous studies that indicated that there was a strong desire to define and maintain greater distinction between what was considered private information and what was considered public information, especially when it is found online. In fact in this research project, just one respondent from the hiring group and just one respondent from the job candidate group were decidedly opposed to the practice of employers viewing social network profiles and to agreeing that information found on social networks should influence their decisions about whether to hire or not to hire. As stated in the response of this job candidate, "Personal lives should not impact their chance at careers." (Respondent #7)

Responses to the question about the acceptability of employers viewing social network profiles present an interesting finding. While job candidates overall said it was acceptable for employers to view social network posts, they also said that employers should consider information viewed on social networks, like Facebook, "with a grain of salt" because social networks, like Facebook, are not platforms for professional purposes (Respondent #2 & #20). This indicates that for job seekers, context is important. Most users on these types of social networks use them for personal purposes. The posts they make on their personal profiles are not made to establish an online identity to support professional/work-related purposes and goals.

This response also echoes earlier research that suggests that employers should be careful when viewing social network posts because they could be inflated, exaggerated and crafted to impress, which could leave to false and/or misinterpreted impressions. That said, however, these

posts can also be viewed as more authentic about the individual as they are not crafted with the objective of impressing employers. Either way, context is important to keep in mind.

The next question asked respondents if they thought information on social network profiles should influence employers' decisions to hire or not to hire. More than 81.28 per cent of all respondents said, yes, that it should influence employer decisions; while just 18.18 per cent of all respondents said that it should not. Broken down by group, 92.3 per cent of respondents involved in hiring decisions said that, yes, information found on social network posts should have some influence; while 66.67 per cent of job candidates said the same.

For respondents in the hiring group, one of their main reasons for viewing social network posts is to get a sense of candidates' personality, values, involvement in community activities, interests, etc. Their comments indicated that, generally, they are not looking for information about skills, abilities and work experience relative to the position; they are looking to see if the candidate was suited with the right type of personality to fit will within the organization. As one respondent stated, "Personality and suitability is (a) huge part of working as a team. Technical portions of work can be taught." (Respondent #3)

Job candidates concur. One job candidate's comment best summed it up when he/she stated, "The employer can find the best person that has the same ideas and values as others that work for the company." (Respondent #7). This finding indicates that there is agreement among both groups that employers are not looking for information about professional and technical skills on social network posts, but instead, looking for qualities that demonstrate that job candidates are well-rounded individuals and have the ability to communicate well, interact favourably, and get along in society. They are looking for people who are knowledgeable about a

range of topics and have a range of interests. They also look for people who understand social norms and adhere acceptable behaviours.

The results of the survey also revealed that if employers find posts that are interpreted as socially inappropriate, negative, offensive or unprofessional, it is difficult for them to get passed that. One survey respondent from the hiring group shared a story where he/she decided not to interview a job applicant who had a “Keep Calm and F___ Off” shared as a public post on her Facebook wall. This particular post influenced this employer to not to contact her for an interview. The employer was also inspired, as a result of this finding, to check social network profiles more often. (Respondent #16)

An interesting note about the responses to the questions in this survey is that there is little reference to privacy legislation or demand for greater protection of privacy. Only one respondent who was part of the hiring group stated that employers need to exercise caution when viewing social network posts so that they do not put themselves at risk of violating human rights legislation which could potentially put them in a position where they could be accused of themselves discriminating against protected classes. (Respondent #12) None of the respondents in the job candidate group reference privacy protection legislation or rights protection in their responses. Only one respondent in the hiring group said that employers should not be influenced by social network posts (Respondent #22). This same respondent also answered that there is no advantage for candidates to have social network profiles. The trend of these accumulative responses from this one individual demonstrate that these views are clearly in the minority and not reflective of the employer group as a whole.

Another point regarding the low frequency of mentions about privacy protection, it seems that social structures such as privacy legislation, codes of conduct, etc., that originated from public demand, does not seem to be as widely heeded today as it once was in previous studies. The rationale for this could be explained with concepts discussed earlier as part of Structuration theory. As social network technology becomes more intertwined in our society, its acceptance and prevalence in our lives is causing attitudinal shifts. This, in turn is causing behavioural changes, which will eventually become routinized within our society that it becomes a new and widely accepted social norm.

The final question in the survey asked respondents if it was advantageous for job candidates to have their own personal social network profiles. Overall, the majority of respondents from both groups (85.71 per cent) said that, yes, there is an advantage for job candidates to having a social network profile as long as the content is positive. As one respondent from the hiring group commented, “If a candidate is displaying a positive, well-rounded positive profile he or she has a very good chance of being selected.” (Respondent #19) A job candidate also responded, “I believe that it is a great advantage to have a social network profile IF it is done correctly to give you a positive influence on your potential employer.” (Respondent #16)

Overall, respondents with hiring responsibilities indicated that they view social media profiles because employers are able to gain a better sense of the person as a whole. Often they can deduce candidates’ interests, their ability to conduct themselves well personally and professionally, their level of engagement at all levels of society (i.e. family, community, globally), their values and their day-to-day activities. They see this as an advantage.

Respondents in the hiring group do not indicate that they use social network profiles as a means to intentionally seek out negative or defamatory information, but instead, get a sense of the overall quality of character.

It was noted by respondents in both groups, however, that it would be a disadvantage for job candidates to have a social network profile if content was negative or showed illegal or inappropriate activity. This is consistent with results from earlier research studies.

Characterization of Attitudes

Because this survey was designed to gauge attitudes and perceptions, a table was used to chart answers from each respondent to see if any identifiable trends and commonalities would emerge. The following chart provides a visual portrayal of each respondents' answers, broken down by group – employers and job candidates. After looking at the information, three employer profile types emerged. They are: 1) "All's fair game" employer; 2) the "No harm, no foul" employer; and 3) the "80/20" employer.

TABLE 1

EMPLOYER/HIRING GROUP PROFILES BASED ON RESPONSES

Respondent No.	Viewing social network profiles is acceptable	Content on social network profiles should influence hiring decision	Having a social network profile is an advantage	Employer profile type
Employer 1	+	+	+	All's Fair Game
Employer 2	+	+	+	All's Fair Game
Employer 3	+	+	+	All's Fair Game
Employer 4	_	_	_	No harm; no foul
Employer 5	+	+	+	All's Fair Game
Employer 6	+	+	+	All's Fair Game
Employer 7	+	+	_	80/20
Employer 8	+	+	+	All's Fair Game
Employer 9	+	+	_	80/20
Employer 10	+	+	+	All's Fair Game
Employer 11	+	+	+	All's Fair Game
Employer 12	+	+	+	All's Fair Game
Employer 13	+	+	+	All's Fair Game

Employer Profile 1: All's Fair Game

Responses provided by employers in "All Fair Game" profile believe that, because online networks are publicly accessible, anything found on social networks about job candidates is usable information and can be used to influence employers' hiring decisions.

In this survey, the majority of employers fit into this profile. These employers want to get a sense of the "whole person" from social network profiles and are not looking for specific job-related characteristics. These employers could be classified as risk takers and are less fearful of authoritative resources that rule that they should not look at social network profiles to research job candidates because it could violate privacy legislation, policies or codes of conduct. These employers would also likely be users of technology themselves, and be open to new forms of technology as it develops.

Employer Profile 2: No risk, no foul

The second type of employer profile emerging from their responses is the "No Harm; No Foul" employer. These employers do not believe it is acceptable for employers to view social network profiles, they do not think information gained from social networks should influence hiring decisions, and they do not believe that having a social network profile is an advantage for job candidates regardless of whether it is positive or not.

In this research project, employers fitting into this profile are in the lowest numbers. Their answers indicate that they tend to be more concerned about adhering to authoritative resources and would not take any steps that could be interpreted as going against a rule or policy, or be in violation of a piece of legislation. Employers in the No harm; no foul hold a black and white view of the world. There is no grey area. These employers' decisions are based on the

lowest potential risk and do not think outside the box to find creative solutions to a challenge. They hold firm in the position that online networks should be kept separate and outside of the hiring process. This position clashes with the views of employers fitting the All's Fair Game profile.

Because of the No harm; no foul's anti-social network perspective, it is reasonable to predict that the employers' experience and understanding of the technology is limited. It is also reasonable to conclude that these employers compartmentalize the use of social networks for specific functions. They likely do not view social network profiles as a part of a job candidate's personal identity, and they are also likely not full-fledged participants users of online social networks overall.

Employers in the No harm; no foul profile would have an extremely difficult time working with employers who embark on All's Fair Game tactics.

Employer Profile 3: The 80/20s

Employers fitting within this category are generally in favour of using social networks to learn more about potential job candidates but exercise some caution in taking the information that they find into account when making their hiring decisions. They, too, want to get a sense of the whole person from social network profiles and are looking for favourable information that could be used to support their decision. They also believe that social network profiles provide job candidates with an advantage as long as they convey a positive image.

Because of their support of viewing to social network profiles, it is reasonable to conclude that they understand the role that social networks play in conveying people's overall identity and character. Employers in the 80/20 profile would likely not compartmentalize people

and their conduct to specific settings, networks and environments such as professional, personal, community, etc. These employers want to see job candidates as a whole person integrated in different settings, i.e. personal, community, etc. These people, like the "All's fair game" profile-types are also likely adopters and users of social network technology as well.

Job candidate profiles

Analysis of the data and comments from the job candidate group show a similar pattern as the employer group from which profiles can be applied. Based on the survey results, three main profiles of job candidates also apply and can be identified in the same way as the employer profiles, but this time, groups can be categorized as: All's Fair Game, For My Eyes Only, and the 80/20s.

Table 2 provides a visual analysis of the data and provides descriptions of each of three job candidate profiles. These are: 1) All's Fair Game 2) For My Eyes Only, and 3) the 80/20s.

TABLE 2

JOB CANDIDATE PROFILES BASED ON RESPONSES

Respondent No.	Viewing social network profiles is acceptable	Content on social network profiles should influence hiring decision	Having a social network profile is an advantage	Job candidate profile type
Job candidate 1	+	+	+	All's Fair Game
Job candidate 2	+	+	+	All's Fair Game
Job candidate 3	-	-	-	For My Eyes Only
Job candidate 4	+	+	+	All's Fair Game
Job candidate 5	+	-	+	80/20
Job candidate 6	+	+	+	All's Fair Game
Job candidate 7	+	+	+	All's Fair Game
Job candidate 8	+	-	+	80/20
Job candidate 9	+	+	Did not answer	All's Fair Game

Job Candidate Profile #1: All's Fair Game

The majority of job candidate respondents fit within this category. Job candidates in this group believe that information posted on social networks is public information, and therefore, available to employers who want to view them. They also believe that information found on social networks can be used to influence hiring decision. Again, as stated for the employer profile, this is an interesting finding given that in the early days of social networks, there was

much demand from the public about the protection of personal privacy. It also shows a shift in public attitudes regarding a broader understanding about the place that social networks hold as an extension of people's personal and public identity. Job candidates in this profile would have no objection if employers in the All's Fair Game and 80/20s viewed their social network profile.

Job Candidate Profile #2: For My Eyes Only

Job candidates in this group are the polar opposite to the All's Fair Game profile. They are unanimously opposed to employers looking at social network profiles and do not believe that information gleaned from social networks should be used by employers to make hiring decisions.

This group also seems to be black and white in their perspectives about social networks – in the same way that the No Harm; No Foul group is for employers. One respondent's comments very clearly stated, "People's personal lives should not impact their chance at careers." And "It is not an employer's business to pass judgement on a person's ability to do their job based on personal photos" (Respondent #7)

With such strong and diametrically opposing views, it is reasonable to conclude that the For My Eyes Only group of job candidates would greatly protest if they learned that the All's Fair Game and the 80/20s employer groups viewed their social network profiles. They would not have to worry about the No Harm; No Foul group because the No harm; no foul employers would be too fearful of retaliation if it were ever found that social network profiles were viewed. For My Eyes Only group would be at odds to some degree with the 80/20s employer group. This particular profile seems to be becoming the least common now, in contrast to earlier times where it would have had more subscribers.

Job Candidate Profile #3: The 80/20s

Similar to employers within the 80/20s category, the 80/20s profile of job candidates find it acceptable for employers to view social networks but they do have some concern that it may introduce bias for or against a candidate before the employer and job candidate are able to meet (Respondent #17). Job candidates in this profile believe that information on social networks does contribute to one's overall personal identity and that having a profile on social networks may offer some advantages as long as posts are positive. That said, they also think that employers should pay more attention to social networks that are designed for professional purposes such as LinkedIn.

Because of their support of viewing to social network profiles, it is reasonable to conclude that they understand the role that social networks play in conveying people's overall identity and character. They may also have a tendency to compartmentalize people and social networks specific to purpose, i.e. professional and personal. Job candidates in the profile are also likely adopters and users of technology overall. Job candidates in this category would have no issue if employers viewed their social network profiles.

Discussion

This survey has brought to light some interesting findings and observations. The first is that with 92.3 per cent of employers and 88.89 per cent of job candidates stating that it is acceptable for employers to view social network profiles as part of the hiring process, it appears that most respondents feel that this is not as controversial or questionably an activity that some members of the public believe it to be as indicated in media reports (Clark, 2009). As well, with the same percentage (92.3 per cent) of hiring employers believing that social network content

would influence hiring decisions, and just 66.67 per cent of job candidates believing the same, does that mean that social network users will be editing in their posts more? Not necessarily.

Employers were clear in their explanation of the types of activities that would influence them to decide against a candidate. They used words such as “illegal,” “inappropriate,” “risky,” and “offensive” to describe content. These words indicate judgements that speak to actions that go against societal rules (e.g. laws), moral rules and social norms. According to Giddens theory of structuration, the act of deciding against individuals with negatively perceived content as described earlier would be legitimized even though it is subjective.

The growing acceptance and understanding that employers are viewing social media profiles as part of hiring process will also likely lead to a shift in attitudes where some candidates will no longer turn down a position if it became known that an employer viewed their social media profile before making a job offer. This behaviour was suggested in earlier research.

What was previously viewed as a questionable practice, is now becoming a societal norm. This explains another trend found in the research that people are categorically opposed to employers viewing social network profiles and vigilant in their demands for personal privacy are noticeably decreasing. In this study, the percentage of people who responded in this regard was 9.1 per cent. Other previous research shows that number to be approximately 17 per cent. While this group may want to propel privacy protection-related issues into the public eye via the media to create attention, they, generally, would not have the support of the general population in present times that they may have once had a decade ago. As indicated earlier, there is general acceptance in society that anything put on social network profiles media, is fair game.

The last significant point observed as part of this research project is that, unlike in previous studies that showed that employers are viewing social network profiles less, employers are actually viewing social network profiles more – and job candidates, generally speaking, don't mind. This shift in attitude and behaviour could lead to some interesting decisions and interpretations in future cases that fall under privacy protection laws and charters. Will the spirit and interpretation of these laws and charters be able to keep up with evolving cultural norms and values being created by the growing use and integration of technology and social networks in our culture as people continue to act upon each other and influence future behaviours? Time may tell.

The following limitations and biases have influenced the design, data collection and conclusions in this study:

- The small size of the invited participants make it difficult to apply these findings to the entire population of not-for-profit and public-sector organizations.
- Delays in the ethics approval process led to having to shorten the period of time for which survey respondents could respond to complete the survey
- E-mail distribution of the survey during the summer season prohibited responses from some potential participants as they were away for vacation. The short window for which the survey was open may not have been long enough to accommodate them upon their return.
- There was an episode of inadvertently missing the "save" function after edits were made to the survey's last question which made for erroneous wording, and as a result, ambiguity. This made the answer choices unclear and therefore, forced

respondents to make an assumption about how the answers would being interpreted. However, the opportunity for respondents to provide further explanation in the open ended section helped provide clarity.

- The researcher's lack of expertise of research methodology may have limited additional opportunities to gain more data and insight.

Conclusion

The results of this survey show that for both groups -- people who are responsible for hiring new employees and for people who are job candidates -- social network profiles will likely play a role in the process. In today's society, social network profiles are an important part of people identities and for people who are applying for new jobs, they need to take care and pay attention to the information that they have on their social network sites so that it conveys the personality and image that they want, and the image that employers want to see. Employers want to see status posts, photos and other aspects convey a positive, well-rounded individual. Job applicants should also ensure content is conducive to social norms and values. If someone wants to be viewed as a desirable job prospect, there is little room for non-conformity, non-compliance and other signs that the person may go against the grain of what society sees as the norm and acceptable.

The results of this survey also indicate that current attitudes and actions among those with hiring responsibilities and job candidates are changing from previous attitudes that held a hard line on a "no view" position of social network profiles by employers. This change can be explained by the concept of reflexive modality, i.e. when the behaviours and actions of others within society is influenced by what they know and understand to be acceptable overall.

At one time, the protection of personal privacy was the cornerstone of the discourse about employers using social network profiles. Now, despite the introduction of legislation, charters, and codes of conduct aimed to increase the level of personal privacy for users of online social networks, people are choosing not to adhere to these institutional rules. On one hand, users are posting information about themselves that they know could potentially be viewed and used by an employer, however, they seem to accept the notion, that in today's society, online environments are to a large degree public spaces that can be accessible by anyone and are, publically, fair game.

On the other hand, employers, while faced with the potential of violating privacy legislation, are choosing to source social network profiles if they are publicly accessible and to use the information in their decision making processes. Employers' needs to hire people whose character and personality best fit the organization and are of least risk to the organization publicly takes higher priority that infringing on people's claim to privacy protection. In this regard, it seems that technology is shaping people's attitudes, actions and behaviours instead of institutional rules that now seem out of date.

Today, online environments have become just one more forum in our modern society where people co-exist and establish their own personal identities. In essence, they build their personal brand as they interact with the technology. As another environment where more people are becoming engaged, it makes sense that employers would also turn to that environment to observe conduct and to get a sense of the personality behind the name.

Recommendations

The research findings suggest that social networks do have a place in the hiring process and that they benefit both employers and job candidates in the hiring process. For job candidates, frequent reviews of content that has been not only posted by themselves but also posted by others (e.g. photo tags, invitations to join groups, comments on status posts) is a wise practice. For employers, while the research findings demonstrate that job candidates overall have few objections of them reviewing social network profiles, it would be wise for them to ensure that they maintain boundaries of their search, and that they don't intentionally go looking for something controversial.

Suggestions for Further Research

This research project was designed to provide insight into current attitudes and perceptions about the use of social network profiles of hiring employers and job applicants. Factors influencing these attitudes and perceptions were also explored. This study contributes to the existing body of research related to this topic within the context of sectors that operate with public and/or donated funds. The research was conducted based on individual perceptions and experiences. Future studies examining whether there are differences in factors that contribute to people's behaviours would be valuable.

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APPENDIX A

Participant invitation (e-mailed)

Hello. As you may know, I'm enrolled in the University of Alberta's Master of Arts Communications and Technology program. As a graduation requirement, I am conducting a research project in the area of communication and technology that aims to measure:

a) Do employers believe that as part of the hiring process they should be able to use online social networks (e.g. Facebook) to back their hiring decisions?

b) Do job seekers believe it is acceptable for employers to use online social network profiles to make their hiring decisions?

It is a very timely and relevant topic in today's growing use of social networks and one that I'm sure you would be able to offer some very valuable and insightful contributions.

I invite you to take part in this project by completing an online survey by clicking on this weblink (https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/9X9RMV5). The survey should take between 10 to 15 minutes to complete. All responses will be confidential and will not reveal your identity or your organization. When the project is complete, if you would like to receive a copy of the final report summary, I would be pleased to send you one at your request. More information is detailed in the attached information letter and consent form.

My faculty supervisor for this project is Dr. Thomas Barker, Faculty of Extension, University of Alberta. This project is being conducted in accordance to and under the approval of the Research Ethics and Management Office of the University of Alberta. If you have any questions or concerns, you are welcome to contact them by calling 780 492 2615 or emailing reoffice@ualberta.ca.

I sincerely hope you decide to take part in this project. The online survey will remain open until July 31. If you have any questions, please feel free to email me or call me at 780 678 9105 (cell) or 780 673 0014 (home). Thank you for your consideration and participation.

Cathy MacKenzie

APPENDIX B

Faculty of Extension, Master of Arts, Communications & Technology program
University of Alberta
Edmonton, Alberta

INFORMATION LETTER and CONSENT FORM

Study Title: **Measuring Attitudes About Viewing Social Network Profiles during the Hiring Process**

Research Investigator:

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Supervisor (if applicable):

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780-492-0627

Background

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are part of the working population. Your participation would be very much appreciated as the results of this study will be used to support my capstone project which is a graduate requirement for the University of Alberta's Master of Arts, Communications and Technology program.

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to gauge the level of acceptance among the working population and of employers of viewing social network profiles (e.g. Facebook) of jobseekers. This information will support a larger body of research that aims to bring clarity and transparency to responsible social network use by individuals and employers.

Study Procedures

The research procedures includes the completion of an online survey. Your consent to participate in the research is implied by completion of the survey. The survey will take approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete. Return of the surveys will be automatic once respondents submit their answers online. Once the data is collected, I, as the principal investigator will review it with my academic supervisor. If you have questions prior to your participation in the research project, please contact Catherine MacKenzie at cam4@ualberta.ca or 780 678 9105.

Benefits

Benefits to you as a participant that may arise include a greater understanding of existing employer practices and a better sense of jobseeker awareness of how their Facebook profiles can affect their opportunities for hire. There are no monetary benefit or compensation to you for being part of this study and there will be no costs to you for being involved in the research.

Risk

There is minimal to no foreseeable risks to you that may arise from your participation in the study.

Voluntary Participation

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. The participation is completely voluntary.

Confidentiality & Anonymity

This research is intended only for the purposes of completing my master's project. No participants will be personally identified in final report.

The identities and organizations of those who are asked to take part in the study will be kept confidential and will be known to only myself and my academic advisor. Specific responses will not be tied to identifiable participants in the dissemination of the research and final report. The data will be kept secured in a locked cabinet for five years following completion of research project. The password for the online survey results will also be protected and when appropriate destroyed in a way that ensures privacy and confidentiality.

As a participant, you are welcome to receive a copy of a report of the research findings. If you would like a copy, please email me at cam4@ualberta.ca.

Further Information

If you have any further questions regarding this study, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor at the U of A, Dr. Barker.

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615.

APPENDIX C

Measuring Attitudes about Viewing Social Network Profiles during the Hiring Process

1. I have read and understand the information letter and the consent information for this project. I also had the opportunity to contact Catherine MacKenzie at cam4@ualberta.ca if I had questions.

   Yes
   No

2. Please choose the statement that best relates to you.

   I am involved in hiring processes for my organization
   I have been a candidate in a job competition(s)

3. Many employers look to find information about job candidates on social network profiles as part of a hiring competition. Do you think it is acceptable for employers to search social network profiles during a job competition?

   Yes
   No

   Please explain your answer.

4. Do you think information on a social network profile should influence the employer's decision to hire or not to hire?

   Yes
   No

   Please explain your answer.

5. Do you think that having a social network profile is an advantage or disadvantage in creating a potential hiring profile?

   Please explain your answer.