

Dr. Trilok Kumar Jain¹, Nidhi Malhan², Rinku Singhal³
Dean, ISBM, Suresh Gyan Vihar University, Jaipur, Rajasthan
PHD Scholar JJT University Rajasthan
St. Kabir Institute of Professional Studies Ahmedabad, Gujarat
jain.tk@gmail.com¹, nidhimalhan1@gmail.com², [rinkinghal.87@gmail.com](mailto:rinkusinghal.87@gmail.com)³

New screening methods getting use to get more applicant

Different types of pre-employment screening have always been part of the hiring process. Organizations have conducted background checks, contacted references, and met with applicants during the screening and interview process. Today, however, more and more organizations, large, medium, and small, are trying to find ways in which to reduce employee turnover rates in search of the absolute best qualified candidates. This means stepping-up the pre-employment screening process.

INTRODUCTION

Organizations now implement drug screening tests, electronic monitoring, personality tests, and more recently, social networking sites. What these tests aim to accomplish is to discover whether the candidates meet the standard competency levels and skill sets required for the job; whether they are a compatible match with the current culture of the organization – will they fit in and get along with their other co-workers; and finally, a general idea as to the type of employee the employer can expect. Pre-employment screening is used to either —screen in or —screen out applicants (Sprague, 2008). Statistically, it is estimated that over 100 million people, most commonly found among the college age population, have a personal social network site. At this point in their lives, many college students are naive about photos, comments, and other information that is posted on their personal social media sites. What college students neglect to realize is that in today's competitive environment, employers are *Googling* applicants and checking social networking sites to find any questionable information so as to not continue with their application. More commonly, human resource professionals in the state of Wisconsin use sites such as Consolidated Court Automation Programs (CCAP) to check the legal status of any or all applicants, depending on the nature of the job.

Human resource professionals would probe deeper into the background of interviewing applicants. However, the dilemma that arises by organizations using Internet sites such as Google, Facebook, Twitter, MySpace and CCAP to gain more information about candidates, is their ability to find too much information such as the candidates age, race, sex, political views, religious views, marital status, and sexual orientation. These are all factors that are *not* to be considered during pre-employment screenings, especially for organizations affiliated with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). Now that employers are just a few *Google* searches away from discovering job applicant information, there may be more discrimination and failure-to-hire lawsuits on our hands.

A growing trend in the business world today is to use internet search engines and social networking sites to screen job applicants. Employers are often responsible for the actions of their employees and want to know as much information as possible about their employees before investing the time and money required to incorporate them into their respective businesses. With “nearly 50% of resumes [containing] factual errors,”¹ it is understandable why employers are erring to the side of caution. In addition, “employee theft and fraud cost US retail businesses more than \$50 billion annually [and] the Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that 1.2 million to 2 million incidents of work place violence occur each year.”¹ According to Joseph Vater, a partner at the law firm of Meyer, Unkovic & Scott LLP, negligent hiring lawsuits against companies whose employees commit a violent act have been on the rise.² This has increased the necessity for employers to perform background checks on job applicants, and many companies have turned to the internet to find all available information on their prospective employees.² However, while it is important for companies to know who they are hiring, it is unethical to rely on information found on the internet in making hiring decisions.

With the click of a mouse, we are able to browse through an applicant’s social and personal life, religious views, sexuality, nationality, and race, information that is not supposed to influence hiring decisions. Research has shown that more and more human resource professionals are taking advantage of these resources as they become available. By researching local pre-employment screening practices, it was evident that using social networking sites as part of the screening process is a growing trend amongst many human resource professionals. This growing trend has not come without its pitfalls, however. Employees are being terminated for content found on their social media site and organizations are being targeted for unlawful access. After examining how businesses are utilizing social media sites during the pre-employment process, additional research is needed to better understand how businesses are preparing current employees for a culture where social media exists and creating policies and procedures which outlines appropriate social media use.

Fast-forward to the early 1990s, the birth of the Internet, and later Web 2.0 with the launch in 2004 of the social networking Web site Facebook. Facebook has transformed how hiring authorities such as recruiters and human resources professionals who are tasked with filling positions are able to learn about prospective employees. Most applicants today are still required to submit their resumes online or via other means in order to be considered for employment opportunities within organizations. In addition to this information, recruiters are now also able to log on to the Internet and nontraditional “applicant assessment” Web sites such as Facebook to get even more information on candidates than what is provided on a resume or in an application. It is this additional assessment and screening activity among some employers that can stretch legal, privacy, and even ethical boundaries. As the popular Web site

explains, Facebook is “about sharing information with others – friends and people in your communities”. Because of what Facebook enables users to post, the Web site opens up the possibility for hiring personnel to easily retrieve potentially vast amounts of personal information on Facebook users (and prospective job applicants) if the information is accessible, some of which is legally-protected and private data. For example, Facebook encourages users to make their default privacy setting “Everyone” for certain personal content. If the user chooses this setting and posts accurate information about him/herself, the Everyone setting provides the greatest access to information, and therefore this content is viewable and accessible to anyone with an account on Facebook. The information which Facebook encourages users to post includes the user’s name, profile photo, gender, and networks. Facebook also encourages users to set their hometown and interests to the Everyone setting to enable people of similar backgrounds and interests to connect with one another. By default, a preview of the user’s Facebook information is also viewable to anyone using a public search engine such as Google, unless the user has established a separate privacy setting to prevent this. The person conducting a Google search does not need to have a Facebook account in order to access the Facebook user’s viewable information through a public search on the Internet.

Employers using Facebook to assess those applying for a job with them, are creating a new digital divide, as well as revealing how our freedoms with regard to virtual identity are being encroached upon increasingly by the world of work. Hundreds of millions of people have joined the online social networking site Facebook during the last six years or so. It has become one of the most popular tools for staying in touch with friends and family and other acquaintances. However, it is notoriously open by design and its opaque privacy settings mean that many people perhaps share more and more widely than they would otherwise do without realizing that prospective employers and others might see embarrassing or otherwise compromising aspects of their social and family life.

There have, of course, been numerous celebrated instances of a person's Facebook activity allegedly leading to summary dismissal because it was perceived as compromising the integrity of their employer and their company brand. How widespread this is difficult to say because such cases are relatively uncommon although given wide publicity by the scandal-loving elements of the media and blogosphere. "While employers are using Facebook to monitor their employees, they have also begun to use it as a screening tool when considering potential candidates," says de la Llama and colleagues, "Because this is a fairly new trend, a standardized set of guidelines has yet to be established, with employers often assessing job applicants in a subjective manner."

The team interviewed representatives from the areas of information technology, healthcare & wellness, education, law enforcement, food & drink, travel, advertising and suggest that their findings shed light on a growing trend. They hope to raise the ethical questions for debate surrounding whether or not employers should be using Facebook and perhaps other social networking sites to screen candidates. The question of whether employers are providing job candidates with equal opportunities if they are assessing online "image" prior to interviewing candidates must be raised. Of course, it is possible that one's Facebook activity is a perfectly acceptable window on to one's personality.

"Job seekers should be aware that their future employers are closely observing their Facebook profiles in search of a window into their personality," the team concludes. "Though this practice raises many ethical issues, it is an emerging phenomenon that is not slowing."

Screen the social media accounts of job applicants alienate potential employees -- making it harder for them to attract top job candidates. In some cases, social media screening even increases the likelihood that job candidates may take legal action against the offending company. "Perceptions of relationships with an organization seem to be significantly more favorable when the organization's social networking page has a human presence rather than an organizational presence. Levels of trust, commitment, and satisfaction from users all appear to be positively affected by the use of the human voice in social media."

PSYCHOLOGICAL TESTING

The term "psychological testing" covers a broad range of tests, including tests of cognitive ability and personality tests. Cognitive ability or aptitude tests attempt to measure the "potential to learn a specific body of knowledge."The costs of making bad hiring decisions and the difficulties of getting meaningful information from reference checks of prospective employees have led many employers to use personality tests¹ as part of their hiring process. Employers choose from a wide variety of tests in an effort to both weed out job candidates with undesirable traits, such as dishonesty, or tendencies toward violence or tardiness, and to judge the "fit" between the prospective employee and the job by seeking to identify prospective employees possessing personality traits likely to predict success in the job in question. Since the development of the first modern personality tests in the early part of this century, personality assessment has grown to a \$400 million-a-year industry. While some employers are convinced that personality tests are akin to astrology and tell no more than an interviewer could learn during a standard interview, other employers swear by them and are convinced that they are hiring better workers as a result of their use. The widespread use of personality tests as a means of determining which employees to hire raises a number of issues, ranging from the validity and reliability of the tests to concerns about invasion of privacy and discrimination against minorities. These issues raise the question whether the benefits of personality tests outweigh the costs of employing them. This article explores that question, considering whether personality tests are effective hiring tools, ² as well as the privacy and discrimination concerns implicated by their use. Neither of these concerns has been adequately addressed by the law, which does very little to regulate the use of personality tests.

Concerns for both job applicants and employees should move us in the direction of attempting to both decrease employers' reliance on personality tests and improve the tests that are used. Progress along both of those lines will serve the interest of employers by attempting to maximize their chances of making good hiring decisions, as well as the interests of employees in not being unfairly deprived of employment opportunities. It will also help mitigate the potential for other abusive uses of personality tests that might give employers unfair leverage over employees.

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