UNSW Webinar: Why candidates’ social media profiles are a waste of time for recruiters

UNSW Business School research has found there is little to no correlation for recruiters between a job candidate’s social media profile and potential on-the-job performance or retention levels.

Since the advent of social media, employers and recruiters have been known to examine candidates’ social media profiles as part of the recruitment process.

Opinions vary about the ethics of the practice, but very little is known about whether it actually provides employers with accurate indications of a candidate’s suitability for the position, future performance, or length of stay in a position.

Liwen Zhang, a lecturer in the School of Management at UNSW Business School and her colleagues have created three studies in order to produce some answers to these questions.

Using Facebook sites as their source, the experiments covered:
1. A content analysis of job seekers’ social media sites,
2. Whether job seekers’ social media information is related to recruiter evaluations, and
3. Whether structuring social media assessments affects criterion-related validity.

“We tried to standardise the process to help improve the validity of these assessments. We provided training to recruiters, and provided more standardised evaluation forms, and tried to have multiple recruiters to assess the same applicants,” says Zhang, who was speaking ahead of a UNSW Business School webinar on Facebook Assessments for Hiring: Opening Pandora’s Box which will be held on Wednesday 21 October.

“But the results show that this does not really appear to improve the prediction of future job behaviours or withdrawal intentions.”

Do recruiters check out candidates’ social media profiles?
The belief of some recruiters in the utility of accessing candidates’ social media is not borne out by the studies, and Zhang urges a cautious approach to the practice in advance of more research in the area.

But the studies also throw up more general questions about the practice. Recruiters understandably want to get to the “real” person who might not be revealed in a resumé or an interview.

What, for example, of a candidate who reveals racist attitudes on their social media: something which would surely be a concern in our increasingly diverse workplaces?
“Applicants’ discriminatory posts and behaviours are often not welcomed at the workplace,” says Zhang.

“We categorise such behaviours and statements as ‘information that may be a concern to an organisation’.

“According to behavioural consistency theory, I think it could be fair for organisations to review this information from social media and use it in staffing decisions.

“However, if recruiters use applicants’ ethnicity or marriage status information obtained from social media sites, this will raise legal concerns.”

Of course, if candidates don’t want their social media accessed by recruiters, they can change their privacy settings accordingly (although few do).

“There are some theories and conceptual papers suggesting that recruiters may be suspicious about job candidates with incomplete information, for example, missing social media profiles,” says Zhang.

And while she is not aware of any recruiters directly insisting on access to candidates’ social media, “we do see recruiters [effectively] demanding access in various ways, such as using a social media profile login to create an application profile, or to sign a consent agreement.”

“When anyone examines an applicants’ Facebook profile, it just looks like they are opening a Pandora’s box,” says Zhang.

Zhang will present a BusinessThink webinar on Facebook Assessments for Hiring: Opening Pandora’s Box on Wednesday 21 October from 12:00–1:00 PM AEDT. For more information please register or read What’s on job seekers’ social media sites? A content analysis and effects of structure on recruiter judgments and predictive validity.

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