

## SPECIAL ISSUE

# Follow Me: The Use of Social Media in Recruitment

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The use of social media in the human resource arena continues to increase, including a growing use of the internet for pre-screening applicants during the recruitment process. This increase has sparked interest in how social media affects employee recruitment. Rooted in image theory and impression formation, this study explored the effects of an applicant's use of social media on the recruiter's perception of the candidate and the overall impact on candidate selection. Using a survey method, information was gathered from human resources

professionals from a variety of industries. Results support our hypotheses that positive social media is related to important recruitment outcomes such as fit, perceived interpersonal skills, and hiring recommendation. Additionally, an important moderator, applicant qualifications, was explored. Results have important implications for both managers and applicants.

*Keywords: Social media; recruitment; technology*

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The use of social media continues to increase as a means of communication within both personal and professional worlds for many individuals. Sites such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and a number of other sites have become the norm. These sites can be beneficial to applicants; however, they can also be costly, depending on the information shared. In addition to screening qualifications through resumes and applications, recruiters are reviewing an applicant's social networking sites (SNS) for relevant information. As we attempt to manage hiring in the "Era of Social Networking," recruiters are looking for information to further assess an applicant's hireability as well as determine their fit with the organization. The use of SNS is emerging as a prevalent factor in the hiring process in addition to the traditional forms of qualifications such as education, experience, and interview skills. As a result, the need

to understand the effect of SNS on candidates' ability to obtain employment is growing in importance.

Furthermore, employers are assessing the types of SNS applicants are utilizing, whether for personal or professional use, and what type of information the applicants are sharing. Only through continued research can answers be found to determine the importance, if any, of applicant use of SNS, the significance of that use, and the impact of information shared on SNS in relation to recruitment outcomes. The purpose of this research is to understand how SNS can help determine hireability and organizational fit. In addition, we explore the moderating effect of candidate qualifications. We first address the existing research on SNS, image theory and impression formation. Secondly, we explore research on organizational fit and hireability. Thirdly, we propose a model suggesting that job applicants' positive use of social media is related to hiring outcomes and this relationship is moderated by applicant qualifications. Finally, we present our findings from our survey testing the hypotheses and discuss practical implications, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Image Theory and Impression Formation**

Our research is based on image theory and impression formation. Image theory is a decision-making framework involving a single decision-maker who uses three different types of schematic structures or 'images' to make decisions (Beach, 1998). The value image focuses on the principles of the decision-maker. The trajectory image is their goals, and the strategic image is the plans to accomplish these goals. The objective is to avoid accepting candidates that do not fit with the principles (value image) or who may affect the implementation of plans (strategic image) for accomplishing goals (trajectory image).

Impression formation incorporates the need to form an impression of another person based on visual cues (Bar, Neta, & Linz, 2006; Lampel & Anderson, 1968). El Ouiridi, Pais, Segers, and El Ouiridi (2016) examined content on job applicants' social media, concluding that the presence of non-professional content is detrimental to the applicant's image and, ultimately, employment. Root & McKay (2014) also explored impression formation of applicants by examining student's awareness of SNS screening in

hiring. They discovered that applicants understand posts regarding negative stigmas such as drugs, alcohol, sex, and profanity may be considered by recruiters; however, they did not consider grammar or spelling to be of importance. They also do not consider posts or photos ‘tagged’ from others to be relevant. A similar study addressing impression formation in recruiting explored hirability rating and e-mail addresses. Van Toorenburg, Oostrom, and Pollet (2015) examined differences in formal and informal email addresses and concluded that informal email addresses had as much of an impact on hirability rating as spelling errors.

Another study conducted by El Ouiridi, Segers, El Ouiridi, and Pais (2015), explored SNS self-disclosure tendencies of applicants. Supporting the ‘posting paradox,’ this study suggested that awareness of inappropriate self-disclosures did not prevent applicants from engaging in this behavior. They also discovered that applicants who were more likely to self-disclose inappropriate content were older and less educated but more experienced professionally. Applicants with less work experience focused more on professional online image concerns resulting in career-oriented self-disclosures. Elias, Honda, Kimmel, and Chung (2016) conducted a study on hiring practices, social networking sites, and implicit bias using the impression formation as a framework. Their findings indicated that candidates who were able to communicate credibly and positively were hired while those with negative and inappropriate comments on SNS were often rejected. Next, we explore SNS and important recruitment outcomes in more detail.

### **SNS and Recruitment Outcomes**

Social media plays an important role in today’s workplace dynamics. Cho, Park & Ordonez (2013) examined whether or not a company’s social media policy affects the potential candidate’s perception of their fit in the organization. Based on the results of this study, it was clear that the importance of social media is a positive relation in organizational fit and recruitment for potential candidates. Social media seems to have a significant importance to the “millennial;” however, it is important to understand the values people place on social media are different for everyone and can have different behavioral effects for people in the workplace, which explains why many management researchers explore interpersonal skills and fit.

Organizational fit is becoming increasingly more important to businesses that understand fit is as a potential retention strategy (Gardner, Reithel, Cogliser, Walumbwa, & Foley, 2012). Organizations are using different modes of technology and media to create an attractive culture for potential candidates, in order to “communicate knowledge about their culture to internal and external audiences” (Gardner et al., 2012, p. 587). By doing this, they hope to catch the eye of potential candidates who see themselves in such an organization. Gardner et al. (2012) conducted a study to examine the effects of recruitment messages and personality. The researchers utilized the Five-Factor model on the degree of subjective person-organization fit (P-O fit) potential. They sought to find if “the fit between an individual’s personality and an organization’s culture” may not only attract potential applicants but retain them (Gardner et al., 2012, p. 587). Other research suggests that use of SNS is a potential antecedent for both person-job and person-organization fit by both recruiters and applicants (Roulin & Bangerter, 2013).

Bohnert and Ross (2010) explored how content found on SNS influenced evaluation of job candidates. Evidence resulting from this study showed that job candidates with family-oriented or professionally-oriented SNS received higher ratings than those job candidates that portrayed alcohol-oriented SNS. The higher ratings were correlated with the possibility of an interview and, if selected, a higher starting salary. These findings supported the suggestion by popular press that SNS influence the evaluation of a job candidate. This study also investigated the importance of a resume in relation to content found on SNS. Participants who placed importance on the resume and participants who placed importance on SNS content rated the job candidates almost the same. This finding further suggested that SNS are emerging as an influential factor in the hiring process.

Similarly, Cooley and Parks-Yancy (2016) conducted a study examining the impact of traditional and SNS screening in recruiting. They concluded that employers use SNS to eliminate job applicants from consideration, specifically if there is an inconsistency among the traditional recruitment tools and their SNS. A similar study by Elias et al. (2016), supports these findings confirming that candidates have been hired or rejected based on the content and communication of their SNS.

**Hypothesis 1a:** The positive use of social media is positively related to a recruiters’ perception of interpersonal skills.

**Hypothesis 1b:** The positive use of social media is positively related to person-organization fit.

**Hypothesis 1c:** The positive use of social media is positively related to hiring recommendation.

**Hypothesis 1d:** The positive use of social media is positively related to an organization's likelihood to pursue an applicant.

### **Qualifications**

Next, we turn to applicant qualifications as a moderator of the SNS/recruitment outcomes relationship. Wade and Kinicki (1995) suggest that objective qualifications are subsets of the overall qualifications of an individual and indicate a four-factor model. The model indicates that overall qualifications, interviewing skills, interpersonal attraction (and subsets of each) all influence the hiring decisions, which in turn affects the fit within the organization and the candidate's probability of success. Kinicki, Lockwood, Hom, and Griffeth (1990) examined interviewers' perceptions following the interview suggesting it can be swayed despite the applicant's qualifications. The authors found that impressions affected the hiring recommendation more than qualifications. The indication from the authors' research is that some hiring managers may distrust the validity of the information on resumes and therefore use "interview evidence" to help be a predictor of the accuracy of the data in order to make decisions. Resumes also do not portray the communication skills and job attitude of the candidate. For the purposes of our study, we explore objective applicant qualifications and suggest that they moderate the SNS/recruitment outcome relationships in the following ways:

**Hypothesis 2a:** The social media/recruiter perception of interpersonal skills relationship is moderated by qualifications such that positive use of social media will be more important than qualifications.

**Hypothesis 2b:** The social media/person-organization fit relationship is moderated by applicant qualifications such that positive use of social media will be more important than qualifications.

**Hypothesis 2c:** The social media/hiring recommendation relationship is moderated by applicant qualifications such that positive use of social media will be more important than qualifications.

**Hypothesis 2d:** The social media/likelihood to pursue a relationship is moderated by applicant qualifications such that positive use of social media will be more important than qualifications.

## **METHODS**

The participants in the study consisted of 101 human resources professionals from a variety of different industries. Members of the local chapter of Society of Human Resources Management (SHRM) and human resources contacts of the researchers were invited to participate. Of the 140 members who were present at the local SHRM monthly meeting, approximately 35 members (25%) completed the survey. Approximately 68% of the additional human resources professionals contacted completed the online survey. The majority of the participants (62%) were over the age of 40. Sixty percent of the participants were female and 89% of overall participants completed a bachelor's degree or higher education level. The majority of the participants were Caucasian (63%), 31% were Hispanic, 4% were African American, 2% were Asian, and 1% were American Indian.

Of the participants, over 95% had over five years of work experience and over 84% had at least one year of experience as a hiring manager. It is noteworthy that over 49% of the participants have used SNS to screen a potential applicant. The study was a (2 × 2) factorial design, with a total of four scenarios, and cell frequencies ranged from 22 to 28 participants per scenario.

### **Procedure**

We created an online and paper survey using an online survey tool. We distributed paper surveys to the local SHRM members during one of their monthly meetings. The remainder of the surveys were completed through an email link directing participants to the online survey tool. We created a scenario-based survey in which the participants were asked to make a determination on qualifications and their perception of the applicants' use of social media. Participants were then asked to determine whether they would invite the candidate to an interview and potentially offer the candidate a position.

Four different surveys were distributed that contained criteria consisting of the following: positive social media and high qualifications, positive social media and low qualifications, negative social media and high qualifications, and negative social media

and low qualifications. Participants were asked to imagine themselves as hiring managers for a supply company that caters to the needs of faith-based organizations, schools, and individuals. The company is currently seeking to fill the position of a regional sales manager and applicant resumes must be reviewed by the hiring manager.

Applicant qualifications were presented as high qualifications and low qualifications and a manipulation question was asked to determine the level of applicant qualifications. Participants then read a scenario related to reviewing applicant Facebook profiles. The profiles were presented as positive or negative and a manipulation question was asked to determine if the applicant had a positive or negative Facebook profile. See Appendices A and B for scenarios.

### **Experimental Conditions**

**Qualifications.** Applicant qualifications were the first factor. Qualifications were manipulated based on fictitious qualifications related to the position of sales manager and were randomly assigned. Participants of the high qualifications survey read statements such as: “Transformed sales team from order takers to sales consultants” and “Implemented technology solutions to manage costs and improve value to customers.” Participants of the low qualifications survey read statements such as “No experience transforming sales team from order takers to sales consultants” and “No implementation of technology solutions to manage costs and improve value to customers.”

**Social Media.** Applicant use of Social Media was the second factor. Participants were randomly assigned surveys that included scenarios of positive use of social media or negative use of social media. Surveys that included the positive use of social media read a review of an applicants’ Facebook page revealing no negative pictures and no “alarming and concerning comments from the applicant and their friends.” The surveys related to the negative use of social media read a review of an applicants’ Facebook page revealing negative photos as well as “alarming and concerning comments from the applicant and their friends.”

### **Measures**

**Recruiter Perceived Interpersonal Skills.** Recruiter Perceived Interpersonal Skills was measured using the Huang, Chen, & Lai (2013) three-item scale. Two questions included, “I expect this applicant to interact very well with me” and “I expect to enjoy

interacting with this applicant on the job very much.” These questions were answered on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Cronbach’s alpha for the items was .87.

**Perceptions of Person-Organization Fit.** Perceptions of Person-Organization Fit was measured using the Kristof-Brown (2000) four-item scale. A sample statement is: “I think this applicant is highly similar to our other company employees.” These questions were answered on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Cronbach’s alpha for the items was .95.

**Hiring Recommendation.** Hiring Recommendation was measured using the Tsai et al.’s (2005), and Howard and Ferris (1996) two-item scale. A sample statement is: “I am likely to invite the applicant for a second interview.” These questions were answered on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Cronbach’s alpha for the items was .85.

**Likely to be Pursued by Organization.** Likely to be Pursued by Organization was measured using the Stevens & Kristof (1995) two-item scale. Participants were asked to read two questions then rate the questions on a scale of 1 (low) to 7 (high). A sample statement is: “How likely are you or your organization to offer this applicant a job.” Cronbach’s alpha for the items was .93.

## RESULTS

The results support five of the eight hypotheses. As expected, the scenario with positive social media and high qualifications had the highest mean (5.48) and the scenario with negative social media and low qualifications had the lowest mean (2.38) for the dependent variable likely to be pursued by organization. A correlation matrix may be found in Table 1 outlining means, standard deviations, and correlations among study variables.



Table 1  
*Correlation Matrix*

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Qualifications	1.47	.50	---					
2. Social Media	1.50	.50	.07	---				
3. RPSkills	3.07	.76	-.13	-.61**	(.87)			
4. PO Fit	2.96	.95	-.15	-.73**	.70**	(.95)		
5. Hiring	3.16	.99	-.24*	-.64**	-.67**	.89**	(.85)	
6. Pursued	3.96	1.72	.36**	.61**	.61**	.82**	.87**	(.93)

\*\*p<.01; \*p<.05

*Notes.* Coefficient alpha reliability estimates are in parentheses along the diagonal. RPSkills is recruiter perceived interpersonal skills; PO Fit is perceptions of person-organization fit; Hiring is hiring recommendation; Pursued is likely to be pursued by organization.

### Manipulation Check

A manipulation check was utilized in order to validate the manipulations. A sample manipulation check item for the qualifications manipulation is: “This applicant has high qualifications.” Participants answered on a 5-point Likert scale for the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with the above statement. An independent sample t-test was used to test for significant differences across the groups. Mean for low qualifications was 2.93, while the mean for high qualifications was 4.20 ( $p < .01$ ).

The applicant use of social media manipulation check was a 5-point Likert scale. A sample manipulation check item for the social media manipulation is: “This applicant has a positive use of social media.” The mean for the negative social media was 1.82, while the mean for positive social media was 4.03 ( $p < .01$ ).

### Hypotheses Tests

The factorial design ( $2 \times 2$ ) was tested using an analysis of variance (ANOVA) in order to test the relationships depicted in Table 2. Hypothesis 1a states the positive use of social media is positively related to a recruiters’ perception of interpersonal skills. The main effect for use of social media is  $p < .05$  and supports the hypothesis. Hypothesis 1b

states the positive use of social media is positively related to person-organization fit. The main effect for use of social media is  $p < .01$  and supports the hypothesis. Hypothesis 1c states the positive use of social media is positively related to hiring recommendation. The main effect for this hypothesis is supported at  $p < .01$ . Hypothesis 1d states the positive use of social media is positively related to the organization's likelihood to pursue an applicant. The main effect for this hypothesis is supported at  $p < .01$ .

We then looked at the moderating effect of qualifications. Hypothesis 2a states the social media/recruiter perception of interpersonal skills relationship is moderated by qualifications. The effect of this hypothesis is supported at  $p < .05$ . This interaction is graphed in Table 2. When it comes to the recruiter's perception of interpersonal skills, positive use of social media is more important than the applicant's qualifications. The remaining hypotheses (H2b-H2d) were not supported.

Table 2  
*Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)*  
*Recruiter Perceived Interpersonal Skills*

Source of variance	Type III SS	df	MS	F
Social Media	22.56	1	22.56	63.9**
Qualifications	0.40	1	0.40	1.13
Social Media x Qualifications	1.42	1	1.42	4.04*
Error	34.59	98	.35	

\*\*p<.01, \*p<.05

*Perceptions of Person-Organization Fit*

Source of variance	Type III SS	df	MS	F
Social Media	48.99	1	48.99	119.45**
Qualifications	0.89	1	.89	2.17
Social Media x Qualifications	.38	1	.38	.93
Error	40.19	98	.41	

\*\*p<.01, \*p<.05

*Hiring Recommendation*

Source of variance	Type III SS	df	MS	F
Social Media	38.88	1	38.88	70.23**
Qualifications	3.73	1	3.73	6.74*
Social Media x Qualifications	.28	1	.28	.52
Error	54.25	98	.55	

\*\*p<.01, \*p<.05

*Likely to be Pursued by Organization*

Source of variance	Type III SS	df	MS	F
Social Media	102.25	1	102.25	63.69**
Qualifications	29.77	1	29.77	18.54**
Social Media x Qualifications	.00	1	.00	.00
Error	157.32	98	1.60	

\*\*p<.01, \*p<.05

## DISCUSSION

Social media plays an important role in the recruiter's perception and the potential hireability of a candidate. It is especially interesting to note that positive use of social media is even more important than applicant qualifications on the recruiter's perception of interpersonal skills.

### Implications

This study provides several implications for both theory and practice. Practically speaking, it is vitally important that applicants ensure only positive social media is visible to potential employers. Candidates may want to spend time "cleaning up" their SNS before entering the employment market so that only positive information is shared. Information obtained from social media sites appears to provide recruiters information to determine perceptions of whether a candidate will fit within the organization and also whether or not they will be recommended for future employment. This finding supports the image theory decision-making framework in recruiting. In this study, recruiters utilized SNS to accept candidates that fit with the values of the organization or those who may affect the implementation of plans for accomplishing organizational goals as perceived through portrayals on SNS.

More notably, the relationship between the positive use of social media and the recruiter's perception and recommendation supports that impression formation is also used in recruiting. Recruiters form an impression of the candidate based on the applicant's SNS. These 'cues' are positively related to the recruiter's perception of the candidate's interpersonal skills and person-organization fit. This ultimately is positively related to the recruiters hiring recommendation and likelihood to pursue an applicant.

Additionally, since social media does have an impact on recruiter perceptions, it will be important for organizations to be cautious of the overall use during recruitment. Van Iddekinge, Lanivich, Roth, and Junco (2013) examined the relationship between recruiter ratings of applicant's SNS and their performance after hire. This study suggested that the recruiter's ratings were unrelated to supervisor ratings, turnover intentions, and actual turnover of the newly hired applicant. Naturally, the study did not address the performance of applicants who were eliminated based on negative or inappropriate SNS interactions. This raises interesting questions regarding the validity of using SNS as a

hiring tool. Supporting results from previous studies, it is likely important for organizations to provide a significant amount of training to avoid potential law violations such as Equal Employment Opportunity and other employment laws.

### **Limitations/Areas for Future Research**

A primary limitation of this study is that it was limited to only human resources professionals. There are a number of hiring managers that are involved in the recruitment process and their perception of social media was not obtained. To have a more balanced perception of hiring in the workplace, it would be beneficial to have a larger research body that included both human resources professionals, hiring managers, and other business professionals who may not be hiring managers but take part in the interview process.

Another limitation of this research was the use of scenarios. SNS screening in practice should be studied in the future. Third, since our sample is based on human resources professionals in the United States, and mainly the Southern states, we have limited our research. By not including other regions of the country, we may have excluded some important demographic variables. Future research should include participants across the United States and even globally.

Social networking sites have garnered more attention recently and we have provided theory and evidence to suggest social networking sites can have a major impact on candidate hireability. Research suggests that organization fit and recruiter perceived interpersonal skills in relation to SNS are highly correlated. Based on our research findings, it is clear that the use of social media sites is continuing to increase and recruiters are using them to inform important hiring decisions.

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## Appendix A

### Qualification Manipulation

#### High Qualifications

- Transformed sales team from order takers to sales consultants
- Recognized as number one ranking for sales region on numerous occasions
- Successful design and implementation of strategic sales strategies utilizing a top down selling plan
- Increased \$1 million territory by 25% (\$250,000) in 12 months, through collaborative team effort, by reactivating 20 dormant accounts
- Implemented technology solutions to manage costs and improve value to customers

OR

#### Low Qualifications:

- No experience transforming sales team from order takers to sales consultants
- No sales region ranking recognition
- No design or implementation of strategic sales strategies utilizing a top down selling plan

- No territory increases either individually or through collaborative team effort
- No implementation of technology solutions to manage costs and improve value to customers

## **Appendix B**

### **Social Media Manipulation**

#### Positive social media

In addition to performing a criminal background check, you generally check the applicants' social media profile. As you are reviewing Applicant A's profile, you find no negative pictures of the applicant. The majority of Applicant A's photos show Applicant A surrounded by family and friends or in a professional environment. You find no photos of the applicant in compromising positions or surrounded by inappropriate activities. As you read Applicant A's Facebook posts, you find no alarming or concerning comments from the applicant or their friends.

OR

#### Negative social media

In addition to performing a criminal background check, you generally check the applicants' social media profile. As you are reviewing Applicant A's Facebook profile, you find numerous photos of the applicant in compromising positions at what appears to be an adult entertainment establishment. The applicant is scantily dressed in a majority of the photos and almost always holding an adult beverage or surrounded by liquor bottles. As you read posts on the applicant's Facebook page, there are numerous alarming and concerning comments from the applicant and their friends.

## **Appendix C**

### **Survey Questionnaire**

1. This applicant has high qualifications.
2. I think this applicant fits the demands of the job.
3. My colleagues will think this candidate is qualified to do this job.
4. I think this applicant is qualified for this job.
5. This applicant has a positive use of social media.



6. I expect this applicant to interact with me very well.
7. I believe this applicant will be able to get along with all types of people who could be encountered in this type of job.
8. I expect to enjoy interacting with this applicant on the job very much.
9. I think this applicant is very suitable for our company.
10. I think this applicant is highly similar to our other company employees.
11. My colleagues will likely agree with me that this applicant is very suitable for our company.
12. I am convinced that this applicant is suitable for our company.
13. I consider this applicant suitable for employment in this organization.
14. I am likely to invite the applicant to a second interview.
15. How likely are you or your organization to offer this applicant an on-site visit?
16. How likely are you or your organization to offer this applicant a job?