Structured Abstract

Title
Employers' Use of Social Networking Sites in the Selection
Process

Purpose
This paper discusses human resources practices related to social
networking sites.

Design/Methodology/Approach
Authors used existing literature to present seven propositions
about social media implications in human resources.

Findings
Human resources practitioners are more frequently using social
media in recruitment, selection and hiring practices. At the
same time, organizations lack boundaries and policies for
doing so.

Conclusions/Recommendations
Human resource departments should encourage decision makers to document all information gathered via social networking sites, and make sure the information is valid and the site is
reliable.

Keywords: social networks, human resources, selection, privacy,
stigma, discrimination

Employers' Use of Social Networking Sites in the Selection Process

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Abstract

Organizations are increasingly turning to social networking websites for insight into prospective employees. While existing research addresses many of the facets of human resource selection, the context of social networking sites is unique. Issues such as privacy, appearance, stigmas, and discrimination require study in the context of social networking to bridge past research with evolving practice. This article discusses human resource practices as they relate to the use of social networking sites for hiring purposes. The authors present an overview of social networking sites, briefly discuss applicable existing literature, offer relevant theory and propositions, discuss potential impacts on stakeholders, suggest guidelines for practitioners, and conclude with future research directions.

According to the 2010 Nielsen statistics, social network or blog sites are visited by three quarters of worldwide online consumers, an increase of 24% in the past year alone (Nielsen, 2010). With the growth of social networking sites (SNS) and the vast amount of information that is provided within SNS, employers are more readily accessing these sites in order to gain insight into job ap-

plicants. According to Swallow (2011), 68% of employers have hired or rejected applicants based on information found on the individual's SNS, and 69% have rejected an applicant based on content found on SNS. Moreover, in 2012, *The Washington Post* reported that social network site users have been asked to provide information that would enable full access to personal SNS by prospective employers (Singletary, 2012). Although the popular press has reported on this topic, research remains limited on the use of SNS by employers and the extent of this issue remains under debate. This article discusses theory pertaining to how employers' use of SNS impacts organizations, job applicants, and society as a whole.

For instance, employers may be unintentionally or intentionally violating privacy laws by accessing SNS and delving into areas that are not relevant to the application process. Currently, there is not a great deal of legal precedence regarding social media in selection practices. However, litigation over the matter has increased (Kaufman, 2010). The long-term ramifications of SNS screening are poorly documented, and researchers are becoming more interested in the ethical dilemmas surrounding using SNS as well as the manner in which information is gathered and used by corporations regarding their potential and existing employees. Additional academic research needs to address employers' use of SNS in the selection process since use of this information in human resource decisions has implications for organizations and job applicants. Outcomes for this research should bring about awareness of the practice of using online information in hiring decisions and define boundaries for use of online information in hiring practices.

Data in SNS may bias judgments about applicants and prevent individuals from obtaining job opportunities. There is relatively little research on these issues in the human resource management literature, although Brown and Vaughn (2011), Davison et al. (2011), and Kluemper and Rosen (2009) represent extant literature. As organizations rely more heavily on information in SNS to make decisions, applicants may suffer from undue bias and stigmatization. Therefore, the primary purposes of this paper are to (a) foster research on these issues, (b) discuss factors that may create biases with use of SNS data, and (c) propose fair information policies that will enable organizations to collect information from SNS while ensuring better human resource practices. The outcomes of this study should raise awareness

of the use of online information in hiring decisions and provide a basis for future research.

Social Network Sites

Boyd and Ellison (2008) define social networking sites via three necessary criteria by stating that users must: "(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" (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). Websites such as MySpace, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter meet these criteria and are widely available to Internet users willing to share their information. Registering on one of these sites is typically free, relatively simple, and requires confirmation of a valid e-mail address. As their popularity has increased, these sites are becoming an important aspect of life for many Americans as well as other global citizens.

Currently, Facebook is the largest SNS in the world with over 800 million active users (Facebook, 2011). "The average user is connected to 80 community pages, groups, and events" (Facebook, 2011). Over 70 languages are available on Facebook, and users span the globe; over 75% live outside the United States (Facebook, 2011). SNS like Facebook allow users to connect with friends, make online acquaintances, promote events and causes, connect with individuals who have similar interests, post pictures, and provide "real-time" status updates of both important and mundane life experiences. In addition to Facebook, there are many other sites that vary in theme, extent of membership, demographics, and information distribution practices. It is the dissemination of large amounts of user-generated data that makes social networking such a powerful and popular tool for communication.

Social Networking Sites in Human Resources

With the increase in the number of users and the vast amount of information readily available, hiring managers are increasingly using social networking sites as a tool to gain additional insight into potential as well as existing employees and using the information as part of the screening process (SHRM, 2008). Although a range of selection laws protect individuals, there are few specific legal restrictions on use of information obtained from SNS. Thus, organizations are using

SNS to glean additional information about applicants. Use of this information may drive the decision to screen out individuals who appear to be heavy drinkers, drug users, practice a lifestyle inconsistent with organizational expectations, or other factors that the organization may deem undesirable in their employees. In fact, a study by Reppler, a social media monitoring service, found that over 90% of recruiters and hiring managers have visited a potential job applicant's profile on a social network during the screening process (Swallow, 2011).

Employers may contend that using this information allows them to make better selection decisions, but the data that they collect may have legal ramifications due to the wide range of personal information available and the manner of data collection. Often personal information on SNS is available through the online profile or can be deduced through network membership or pictures. This online information often discloses gender, marital status, race, religion, age, disability status, and other particulars. Many of these traits are considered protected classes and thus illegal to utilize in selection decisions. Once information is posted on a site and becomes available to the public, it does not constitute an invasion of privacy for the individual. Conversely, if an individual has strong privacy settings and an employer illegally accesses online information, that employer may be violating privacy rights. While employers may have the right to look at a public website, they may not legally decline to select an individual based on a review of the contents of a site if they are utilizing information to screen individuals based on race, ethnicity religion, sexual orientation, or other protected classes (Civil Rights Act, 1964).

Research has not thoroughly explored whether using SNS in employment selection is a reliable and valid predictor of organizational selection decisions. Moreover, while they may be a valuable information resource, we contend that SNS may also create a bias in the decision-making process and discriminate against the job applicant. Currently, there is not a method to ensure that data in SNS are accurate. Thus, organizations may be unfairly stigmatizing individuals based on inaccurate information posted on SNS.

Electronic Human Resource Selection
Technology has had a major impact on the way organizations function, including their human resource decisions. Technology has

changed the way human resource departments attract applicants (Stone, Luskaszewski, & Isenhour, 2005), deliver training to their employees, and administer employee benefits (Gueutal & Stone, 2005). The vast amount of information available on SNS has made these sites extremely attractive to recruiters as possible sources to learn more about potential hires. "[T]he more economical it becomes to obtain information about a potential employee's private life, the greater the likelihood employers will use it" (Heriot, 1993, p. 19). According to Shea and Wesley (2006), about 50% of the employers who attend college recruitment fairs use online technology to screen candidates. The study additionally indicates that employers are using both search engines and SNS in the prescreening process. Framingham (2008) showed that approximately 20% of managers are using SNS, and Taylor (2007) indicated that the number is closer to 25%. Suggesting an upward trend, Zeidner's (2007) study showed that 40% of employers are likely to use SNS as a resource in the near future. Each study indicates that a significant number of hiring managers are using the Internet as a resource to select job applicants. Additionally, the rapid growth of SNS and the familiarity of these resources in society will likely contribute to increased usage.

Selection Process

According to Kluemper and Rosen, (2009) the broad characteristics shown on SNS may "be more practical than assessing more narrow aspects of social networking profiles that may be unavailable and/or inconsistent for a large segment of the profiles" (p. 571). The information provided on SNS conveys the applicant's behavior and interactions in a unique light, in a context not focused on career advancement. The individual's information on SNS may actually be a more accurate reflection of the person's attributes than standard selection methods. Sackett (2007) stated that résumés, interview, and job applications reflect an individual's "maximal" work performance rather than the "typical" performance. Thus, the SNS may be a better measure of a person's true job performance potential. By utilizing SNS, recruiters gain the opportunity to evaluate the applicant under different criteria outside of the traditional interview setting or applicant-supplied information such as a résumé, job application, skills assessment, interview, personality inventories, and drug tests.

It should be noted that if an applicant were cognizant that an interviewer would be looking at his or her SNS profile, then the applicant might modify the information to appear more favorable. Validity is also a concern since the data is mostly self-reported. However, most of the basic demographic information listed on a SNS has set boundaries, and the applicant has limited control over the content. The applicant can choose what is posted on his/her SNS, thus giving some credence to the fact that the interviewer can obtain a relatively reliable measurement of the applicant's personality from the information on the SNS.

Vazarie and Gosling (2004) also researched personal SNS in an effort to assess personality, which supports the use of SNS as a personality measurement. In addition to listing profile information, the SNS typically provides a list of the user's friends, interest groups, and special interests, which is a unique characteristic of SNS. Kleumper and Rosen's (2009) research on SNS utilizing three of the "big-five" dimensions of personality, intelligence, and global performance indicated that raters could accurately determine relevant organizational traits by using SNS information. This study also suggested that SNS might allow employers to make predictions of job performance "beyond what can be evaluated through personality assessment in the employment interview" (Kleumper & Rosen, 2009, p. 576). Moreover, the study indicated that such assessments might by beneficial since they take less time compared to other selection methods. However, due to a small sample size, making a full assessment based on their study would not be appropriate. The current state of research does not allow practitioners to tie the use of SNS in selection to any theory regarding personality.

Reliability

Whereas some researchers such as Kleumper and Rosen (2009) have shown the benefits of using SNS, it is important to point out that SNS information may not be reliable. Research by Stone-Romero (2005) strongly suggests that personality measures should not be used for selection purposes because they create a bias in the hiring decision process. The only time when personality measures should be used is if "there is a sound theory tying a personality trait to one or more important criterion measures and convincing evidence that the

supposed trait measure does not correlate with such characteristics of individuals as their race, sex, or age" (Stone-Romero, 2005, p. 264).

Currently, there is no research on the content validity of information gathered on using SNS as a method of screening applicants. Among various SNS, a variety in the level of detail is evident, almost all of which is based on user-generated or self-reported information. Some individuals only include minimal information about themselves and their professional qualifications on their profiles. The information is also dependent on the type of SNS. Facebook tends to have more social characteristics, whereas LinkedIn is designed for professionals. Other individuals may use SNS as a channel for advertising. With the high degree of variation in available data both within and among groups, it is extremely difficult to consistently evaluate job applicants across multiple SNS. Furthermore, since many of the SNS are not considered employment applications or legally binding documents, they are not required to be truthful, and therefore the information on these sites may or may not be accurate. If such information is not accurate and employers are making employment decisions based on unreliable and inaccurate information, what are the ramifications of these selection decisions? Also, if an employer makes a selection decision based on the information provided on a SNS and discovers afterward that the information is not reliable, does the company have recourse? This is especially problematic when the individual may not have known that his/her social network profile was accessed for selection purposes. Moreover, when employers use SNS as a tool to investigate applicants, they should ensure that the information they find on a social networking site is actually about the applicant they are researching and not someone else with the same or similar name.

Several studies have indicated that SNS profiles of high school and college students may not be authentic, even if it is the profile of the applicant being investigated; some people have created fake "explicit or unflattering" SNS profiles of "people they view as competition for jobs" (Gen Y'd, 2006). The individual who is the victim of this slander may not even be aware that the fictitious profile exists; yet this individual may suffer the adverse employment consequences nonetheless. The underlying issue behind employers using social networking profiles as "background checks" is that the information in these profiles may not be accurate or authentic. Additionally, the applicant

may never become aware that this information was used in the hiring process. We offer nine propositions about Social Networking Sites and the employment selection process.

Proposition 1: Information from Social Networking Sites is not a reliable measurement tool for recruiters to use as a personality index of job applicants.

Applicant Appearance

Research shows that the appearance of an applicant, such as physical attractiveness, is positively related to various criteria and can influence the outcome of interviews (Motowidlo & Burnett, 1995). In fact, facial attractiveness has been found to be a significant predictor of interview evaluations (Shahani-Denning, Dipboye, & Gehrlein, 1993). Hosoda, Stone-Romero, and Coats (2003) have demonstrated that attractive individuals fared better than their less attractive counterparts in a variety of job-related outcomes. Langlois et al. (2000) also demonstrated that attractiveness influences decisions in the workplace when they found that attractive adults were judged more positively on occupational competence, social appeal, and interpersonal competence. Studies by Arvey and Campion (1982) demonstrated that attractiveness is related to higher job evaluations depending on the type of jobs. According to Dipboye (2005), attractive individuals and what is labeled "attractive" across various individual differences (e.g. age, sex, and race) have positive effects on evaluations. In fact, according to Langlois, et al. (2002), more attractive individuals experienced more success and received higher salaries than their less-attractive counterparts. Physical attractiveness ratings were stronger predictors of evaluations of employability than were objective characteristics (Dipboye, 2005). Dion, Berscheid, and Walster (1972) showed that physical attractiveness could lead to a "halo effect," which occurs when a positive characteristic of an individual dominates the way the individual is perceived by others. In this situation, more attractive individuals may be perceived as more talented, intelligent, kind, and honest. According to Klesges, Klem, Hanson, Eck, Erst, O'Laughlin, Garrot, and Rife (1990), an interviewer's hiring decisions were affected by the applicant's weight. Disclosure of physical disabilities can also influence hiring decisions. Applicants who acknowledge their physical disability can be rated more favorably,

but if they do not disclose their disability, they receive lower ratings if they have poor qualifications, but higher ratings if they have good qualifications (Henry, 1994).

Past work has shown a bias against unattractive individuals among recruiters (Dipboye, 2005). According to research by Griffin and Langlois (2006), unattractive individuals are perceived as significantly less sociable, altruistic, and intelligent than individuals with more attractive faces. According to Ito, Larsen, Smith, and Cacioppo (1998), a consequence of this negative bias is that attitudinal and behavioral expressions are more strongly influenced by negative input than positive input. The negative stimuli tend to illicit stronger reactions (Peeters, 2002). The research of Cacioppo, Larsen, Smith, and Bernston (2004) linked negativity bias to brain activity and demonstrated that the negativity bias is automatic. Overall, there is strong evidence of an attractiveness bias in work settings (Bull & Rumsey, 1988; Jackson, 1992; Stone, Stone, & Dipboye, 1992). These studies suggested that compared to less attractive individuals, attractive people tend to fare better in terms of criteria such as perceived job qualifications (Dipboye, Fromkin, & Wiback, 1975; Quereshi & Kay, 1986), with hiring recommendations (Cann, Siegfried, & Pearce, 1981; Gilmore, Beehr, & Love, 1986), predicted job success (Morrow, McElroy, Stamper, & Wilson, 1990), and compensation levels (e.g., Frieze, Olson, & Russell, 1991; Roszell, Kennedy, & Grabb, 1989). Future research should examine whether there is a bias against applicants who are less perceived as less attractive on their SNS. It is possible that a bias exists against applicants with physical stigmas. As more recruiters utilize SNS in the prescreening process, they may be unduly influenced by the information provided on the sites, which may alter the applicant's job opportunities. While attractiveness may not be the most important factor in a personnel decision, it may be a deciding factor when decision makers are faced with difficult choices among job applicants or with several individuals with similar qualifications (Hosoda, Stone-Romero & Coats, 2003).

Stigmas toward Applicants

Another consideration in the context of SNS is that human resource managers may be stigmatizing applicants advertently or inadvertently by using online information sources. Individuals are stigmatized to the extent that there is a negative discrepancy between

their virtual social identity and their actual identity (Goffman, 1963). According to Goffman, the term normally refers to conforming to expectations about what is usual, typical, or standard. "Virtual social identity" refers to the perceiver's conception of what an individual should be based on social norms. The actual social identity of the person is the actual perception of how the perceiver views the individual. Most stigma literature indicates that people generally have negative reactions toward stigmatized persons. These individuals have attributes that deviate in some way from expectations of what is normal (e.g., attractive, non-handicapped, white, male) and the stigmatized individual can illicit negative affect in addition to being devalued (Kleck, 1969). Individuals who have various types of stigmas may experience unfair discrimination in the workplace (Stone, Stone & Dipboye, 1992; Goffman, 1963). Discrimination occurs when decision makers use "data from invalid measures or observations (e.g., age, attractiveness, disability, race, and sex) as a basis for making decisions about who will or will not be offered one or more desirable outcomes" (Stone-Romero, 2005) such as a job offer or promotion.

According to Goffman (1963), there are three classes of stigmas: (1) abominations of the body (e.g. physical malformations or unattractive physical characteristics), (2) blemishes of character (e.g., aberrant personality traits, addictions, criminal history, unusual proclivities, or radical views), and (3) tribal stigmas (e.g., nationality, religion). It is feasible that information leading to perceptions about each of these categories is present on SNS. The extent to which a stigma negatively affects an individual's social identity can be influenced by the type of stigma the individual possesses.

The reaction to stigmatized individuals also depends on the type of stigma. Research on social stigma by Jones (1984) described how people bring cognitive and effective expectancies into relationships with others that are influenced by socially based definitions of deviance and prescriptions for dealing with deviant individuals. The expectations people have about others tends to bias the way they are perceived. Thus, applicants with a stigma may encounter interviewers who exhibit negative affects toward the applicant during the job selection process. Moreover, the concern with using SNS for job candidates is that the data collected may advertently or inadvertently discriminate against individuals and the measures may not be accurate. Some of the data available on SNS may be protected, and

employers may be precluded from ascertaining certain informa-
tion. However, when it is readily available on the profile page of the
job applicant, employers have the ability to readily access this data.
When employers gain information about applicants from their SNS
regarding a protected class of information that they would not have
obtained otherwise, they may open themselves up to discrimination
claims from applicants who received adverse treatment as a result of
the information.

Gender Discrimination

Research suggests that the effect of physical attractiveness is
stronger for female subjects than for males. According to Gillen
(1981), attractiveness is related to femininity but not to masculinity,
and therefore, attractiveness is more salient when rating women than
men. Research suggests that women rate physical attractiveness as
more important to them, and that men also perceive attractiveness to
be important for women (Feingold, 1990). Both men and women per-
ceive attractiveness to be more important for women than for men.
Accordingly, research demonstrates that both men and women raters
tend to hold women to a higher standard for physical attractiveness.
Therefore, the negativity that may result from interacting with a
physically stigmatized individual may arise because the stigmatized
individuals do not conform to the norms of physical attractiveness.
Because physical attractiveness tends to be more important for female
targets than for male targets, stigmatizing facial features might draw
more attention when the target is female (Miller, 2003).

A study of gender and attractiveness bias in selection decisions
was conducted by Marlowe, Schneider, and Nelson (1996), with man-
agers rating four equivalent résumés with pictures that varied on gen-
der (male/female) and attractiveness (highly/marginally attractive).
The study showed a main effect of attractiveness with highly attrac-
tive applicants rated more favorably than with marginally attractive
applicants. The results showed a significant interaction with gender.
Managers rated marginally attractive women less favorably than
attractive women, attractive men, and marginally attractive men. A
similar pattern emerged for ranking decisions whereby highly attrac-
tive women were ranked higher than marginally attractive women,
while there were no significant differences between the rankings of
highly and marginally attractive men.

Proposition 2: Recruiters will view more attractive women more positively than less attractive women on profiles on social networking sites. Profiles that depict attractive women will be viewed more positively by human resource decision makers than profiles depicting less attractive women.

Proposition 3: Profiles on social networking sites that depict attractive men will be viewed more positively by human resource decision makers than profiles depicting less attractive men.

Proposition 4: Profiles on social networking sites that depict men will be viewed more positively by human resource decision makers than profiles depicting women.

Age Discrimination

Perceptions of physical attractiveness tend to decline with age. The effects of age and physical attractiveness tend to be more salient for women than for men (Deutsch, Zalenski, & Clark, 1986). In their study, college students rated photographs of both sexes at three different ages. The data showed that the attractiveness of both men and women were perceived to decline with age, but the decline was stronger for women than for men.

Proposition 5: Recruiters will view older men and women less positively than younger applicants on SNS. Profiles on social networking sites that depict younger applicants will be viewed more positively by human resource decision makers than profiles depicting older applicants.

Proposition 6: When comparing social networking site profiles of comparably aged men and women, human resource decision makers will view men's profiles more positively than women's profiles.

Fair Hiring Practices

While the use of SNS may be beneficial, it may be facilitating unethical hiring practices. Currently, employers are not required to disclose the information they gather on SNS to make screening decisions. There is a growing concern about the collection and use of data by organizations during the screening process of job applicants. Stone and Stone (1987) showed the effects of missing data and how individuals who attempted to protect their privacy suffer from this unforeseen bias. The use of information from SNS may create a

bias in selection decisions. Although there has been a marked increase in personality assessment for personnel selection, research by Stone-Romero (2005) cautions us about using personality measures for selection purposes. Moreover, Helen Nissenbaum's (2004) essay on "Privacy as Contextual Integrity" indicates that in determining threats to privacy, we need to consider the nature of a situation or context. What may be appropriate in one situation may unethical in another context, and there is a need to create an ethical impact assessment and establish appropriate guidelines or prescriptive rules. Stone and Stone (1987) demonstrated how individuals who chose to protect their privacy on job applications may suffer undue bias. Rights to privacy should outweigh the need of employers to know confidential and private information. Thus, legislative action or respective organizational policies may be needed to deter collection of sensitive, private, and other information outside of the traditional scope of hiring decisions.

Proposition 7a: Human resource decision makers will view job applicants without a social networking site profile less positively than those who have a social networking site profile.
Proposition 7b: Human resource decision makers will view job applicants with a social networking site profile more positively than those who do not have a social networking site profile.

Disparate Treatment and Disparate Impact
    In the court case of Griggs vs. Duke Power (1977), the Supreme Court recognized two legal theories of employment discrimination: disparate treatment and disparate impact. The doctrine of disparate impact holds that employment practices may be considered discriminatory and illegal if they have a disproportionate "adverse impact" on members of a minority group. Disparate treatment involves intentionally treating members of a protected class differently than others. A disparate impact is unintentional, whereas disparate treatment is intentional. Federal legislation enacted in 1991 states that if employees prove that a practice causes a disparate impact, then the employer must demonstrate that the practice "is job related for the position in question and consistent with business necessity (Shariff, 1999, p. 138)." However, can employers demonstrate that an organization's use of social networks was job-related and consistent with business

necessity? Does such use meet the criteria required to show content, criterion-related, or construct validity? To avoid disparate treatment claims, it is important that employers implement the same selection process for each applicant and the same criteria for selection. Job requirements and other employment selection procedures that have a disparate impact may not be discriminatory if the employer can justify the use of the procedure as job-related and consistent as a business necessity. However, there may be no alternative selection procedures that are equally valid with less adverse impact (Harpe, 2009). If organizations are using SNS for some applicants or evaluate information found on these sites differently for each applicant, the employer could be liable to claims of disparate treatment.

Organizations that rely heavily on SNS information in the selection and screening of applicants may also be inadvertently omitting particular candidates. It is possible that particular minorities may be underrepresented on SNS. Particular groups of individuals may have more online presence while other groups do not access the Internet readily. Moreover, older applicants who face more of a digital divide may not be comfortable providing data on SNS, and therefore may be less likely to have a presence. Also, particular protected classes of individuals may be more or less likely to provide information on their individual profiles. When organizations rely on SNS as a key measure of potential employees, or give preference to applicants with a certain SNS trait such as more friends or online references, they may be exposing the organization to potential disparate impact claims.

Proposition 8: Job applicants with minority status are more likely to be underrepresented on social networking sites than job applicants without minority status.
Proposition 9: As age of the job applicant increases, applicants are less likely to be represented on social networking sites.

Organizational Privacy

The concept of organizational privacy is important to both organizations and employees (Stone & Stone, 1990). The conflict underlying employee privacy is twofold: (1) employers have an interest in obtaining and using personal information about their employees; (2) employees may be concerned about the use of information outside normal selection practices (Duffy, 1982a, p. 595). Organizations

collect information to help ensure that individuals within the organization, or potential employees, have the propensity to behave in a manner that reflects organizational norms (Katz and Kahn, 1978; Schwartz, 1968). Collection of information by the organization may lead individuals to perceive a threat to their right to privacy (Stone & Stone, 1990).

Organizations that utilize information found on SNS may acquire information outside the normal job application parameters and expose their organization to other potential liabilities. The content may be suggestive of information that is protected under employment laws. This includes approximations of the individual's age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and physical characteristics such as disabilities. Managers need to become more cognizant of the fact that accessing information related to protected class status, evaluating or verifying qualifications, using leisure activities as a basis for decision-making, and asking friends or contacts to provide references are not legal practices.

Conclusion and Future Research Suggestions

Although managers and human resource practitioners are more frequently utilizing SNS in the recruitment, selection, and hiring processes (Clark, 2006; Grasz, 2009), it does not come without inherent problems. The primary goal of our paper is to bring light to some of the issues regarding the use of SNS by organizations for selection purposes. More empirical research needs to be conducted in order to evaluate the impact of utilizing SNS in the recruitment, selection, and hiring process. These issues merit further research because they have implications on how corporations collect and utilize data from SNS. Moreover, this discussion has ramifications in the broader context of human resource management. Similar research is warranted beyond the single human resource function of selection, with future opportunities in the context of promotion, termination, pay, and other decisions.

Currently, organizations lack boundaries and policies for utilizing SNS (Deloitte, 2009; SHRM, 2008). We recommend that policies be developed by the organization to ensure fair and uniform procedures in evaluating SNS information. To avoid accessing protected class information, a third party may be needed to filter information and forward only information that does not violate federal and state laws

to organization decision makers.

Another important consideration for human resource professionals electing to allow policies for searching publicly available information from SNS is whether to disclose this practice to applicants. Doing so may cause applicants to preemptively alter their profiles in a more socially desirable way, thus reducing access to certain information. However, failure to do so may be perceived by applicants who learn of the practice later as an unfair hiring procedure or an invasion of privacy. We recommend that applicants be advised in advance and give corporate approval so their SNS can be accessed as part of the application process.

Human resource departments should encourage human resource decision makers to document all information gathered from SNS and used in screening as well as identifying reasons for follow-up or screen-out decisions. Organizations need to ensure that the sites are reliable and that the information is valid when choosing to use SNS in the selection process. The rubrics developed by subject matter experts should be included in each applicant's personnel file, as should any printed screen shots of profile aspects that may have affected the screening decision.

As technology changes, human resource departments must adapt. Social networks have allowed the exchange of vast amounts of data in a quick and efficient manner, and provide organizations with a new tool for gathering information. Although it is only natural to want to use this information in a variety of applications, policy and research should guide the actions of decision makers. Organizations that properly utilize valid data in an ethical and legal manner for recruitment, selection, and hiring process will benefit from not only better selection procedures, but also ultimately form a better workforce.

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