

**FEEDBACK REPORT FOR PARTICIPANTS**

**Job Seekers' Impression Management and Attitudes Toward  
Employers' Use of Social Media in Selection**

**SMU REB # 17-521**

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## **INTRODUCTION & GOALS OF THE PROJECT**

Research suggests that employers are increasingly using social media (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn) as an informal method to gather information about job applicants, and potentially making screening or hiring decisions, during the selection process (Roulin, 2014). However, research is still relatively silent on the way applicants react to employers visiting their social media profiles, or how they attempt to control their image online.

The purpose of this research was twofold:

- First, we investigated applicants' attitudes toward employers' use of Facebook profiles to make decisions in the selection process. We initially identified three types of attitudes based on past research on technology and social media: privacy invasiveness (applicant discomfort with having their personal information, such as profiles, pictures, etc. accessed by organizations without their permission/knowledge); validity (applicant perceptions of the effectiveness of organizations using social media profiles as a tool for applicant selection); and justice (applicant perceptions of the fairness of organizations using social media profiles as a tool for applicant selection). There were no measures in the current literature that assess applicant attitudes toward employers using social media in the hiring/selection process. Our first goal was thus to validate a measure of applicant attitudes.
- Second, we investigated applicants' impression management tactics on Facebook. We initially identified four types of impression management from past research (e.g., Roulin & Levashina, 2016): Honest self-promotion (positive statements to describe ones' qualities, past accomplishments, or future plans); deceptive self-promotion (inventing qualities to create a falsified image of a good applicant); image repair (censoring - deleting or editing previously posted content believed to potentially negatively impact one's reputation with employers); and image protection (intentional monitoring of content posted, to filter any information that could be perceived negatively by employers). Again, there was no existing measure in the literature. Our second goal was thus to validate a measure of applicant impression management.

Our project goal was to collect responses from participants to test the factor structure and reliability of the two new scales described above. We also aim at testing their convergent and divergent validities, by collecting data on other measures. For instance, we believe that someone who scores high on a Facebook addiction scale will be more permissive toward the idea of employers using their profile information in the hiring process (i.e., have more positive attitudes). To ensure that we are not simply measuring overall attitudes towards privacy invasion (vs. specific to the hiring process), we also included a measure of internet users' information privacy concerns.

## **PARTICIPANTS, DATA COLLECTION, & ANALYSES**

A total of 504 North American participants were recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk, an online survey platform. The characteristics of the sample were:

- 47.8% female.
- The average age was 34.7, with a range from 18 to 73.
- Over 76% of participants identified as Caucasian, with 8% Black/African American, 6% Asian, 4% Hispanic/Latino, 0.6% Native/Aboriginal/Indigenous and 2% Other/Mixed.
- 47.2% of the sample had post-secondary education (Bachelor, Masters, or as far as Doctorate).
- Over 90% of the participants were currently employed, with more than 40% of participants work at least 40 hours a week.

Participants completed an online questionnaire including the following measures:

- Demographic information
- Our two newly developed measures
  - Applicant Attitudes Toward the use of Social Media in Employment Selection
  - Facebook Impression Management
- Measures taken from past research
  - The Bergen Facebook Addiction Scale
  - Internet Users' Information Privacy Concerns scale
  - A general Impression Management Scale on social media
  - A social desirability measure
  - Parts of the NEO Personality Inventory-Revised

We analyzed responses to our two new measures to obtain finalized and reliable versions, using a technique called Exploratory Factor Analysis. This technique allows estimating which questions are related to a common theme, and eliminating questions that were superfluous or unrelated to the others.

## **MAIN FINDINGS**

Our final **Applicant Attitudes Toward the use of Social Media in Employment Selection** included three factors (i.e., three types of attitudes):

- **Privacy Invasiveness** (e.g., “I would be concerned if I knew a potential employer might access my Facebook profile, “I would feel personally disrespected by a potential employer viewing my Facebook profile”)
- **Validity** (e.g., “a potential employer could accurately assess my personality based on my Facebook profile”, “a potential employer could accurately assess how reliable I am based on my Facebook profile”)

- **Justice** (e.g., “it is fair for a potential employer to make a hiring decision based on information they acquired from my Facebook profile”, “I think it is fine for a potential employer to document information from my Facebook profile in any way”)

Our final **Facebook Impression Management** measure included four factors (i.e., types of tactics used by people online):

- **Honest Self-Promotion** (e.g., “I ensure that my profile is updated to capture all my professional experiences”, “I post my personal accomplishments on Facebook”)
- **Deceptive Self-Promotion** (e.g., “I exaggerate my professional accomplishments on Facebook”, “I have tried to find out about an organization’s culture and then used that information to fabricate my posts”)
- **Professional Image Repair** (e.g., “I have deleted negative comments I made that would reflect poorly on me”, “I delete my posts which are controversial”)
- **Unprofessional Image Repair** (e.g., “I have deleted pictures of myself drinking”, “I have deleted pictures of myself partying”).

Regarding the attitudes, participants reported average scores on all three types, with means scores of 3.14 for *privacy invasiveness*, 2.39 for *validity*, and 2.49 for *justice* (all on a 1-5 scale). We also found that individuals who perceived employers assessing their Facebook profiles to be more *invasive*, lower *validity* perceptions, and lower *justice* perceptions also experience more concerns in general about privacy on internet. Individuals who spend more time on Facebook perceived employers assessing their profiles to be more *valid*. Although men and women did not significantly differ on *privacy invasiveness* or *validity*, men reported higher perceptions of *justice* than women.

Regarding impression management, participants reported using tactics to different extent, with means of 2.27 for *honest self-promotion*, 1.32 for *deceptive self-promotion*, 2.38 for *professional image repair*, and 1.70 for *unprofessional image repair* (all on a 1-5 scale). We also found that impression management behaviors were more prominent for younger respondents and people who were employed or worked more hours weekly, but less prominent for more conscientious and humble individuals.

If you have any question about this research or our findings, please contact [nicolas.roulin@smu.ca](mailto:nicolas.roulin@smu.ca).