

FEEDBACK REPORT FOR PARTICIPANTS

Social Media and Selection Decisions

SMU REB # 20-116

Research Project conducted by:

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The purpose of the present study was to examine (a) how Instagram posts affect candidates' chances of being recommended for a job, (b) what other information is extrapolated from Instagram profiles, and (c) how frequently Instagram is used for hiring purposes.

Context and Goals:

Social networking websites (SNWs) have become a popular method to gather information about applicants during the selection process. According to CareerBuilder (2018), approximately 70% of employers use social media to screen out candidates. This is almost a 600% growth in SNW usage for selection purposes since 2006 (12% to 70%; Grasz, 2006).

One of the reasons why SNWs are gaining traction among employers is because they provide unique information that is not usually accessible in an applicant's resume or cover letter. For example, on SNWs, such as Facebook and Instagram, applicants typically post about their interests, hobbies, leisure activities, political views, sexual orientations, relationship status, and religious beliefs. This information can then be used by employers to assess and make evaluations about applicants.

Although there is an ample amount of research that explores how Facebook is used as a selection tool, little is known about other personal SNWs, such as Instagram. Therefore, this research examined the role of Instagram for hiring and selecting purposes.

Research Method:

Participants were recruited on Prolific, with three screening criteria: (1) 18 years or older, (2) residing in the United States, and (3) current job duties include recruiting and/or hiring. A total of 149 hiring professionals, residing in the United States were recruited and participated in the survey (100% completion rate). Participants were between the ages of 18-77 ($M = 41.31$ years, $SD = 12.50$), 67.8% were male, 80.5% were White, and 77.9% had at least a university degree.

Participants read a scenario illustrating a hypothetical situation in which they were working as an HR professional in a consulting firm. They were asked to evaluate eight highly qualified candidates for an HR associate position in their fictitious organization. The participants were provided four fictitious Instagram posts from each candidate, and asked to rate the favourability of the candidate.

The Instagram profiles varied in the following elements:

- whether red flag pictures (i.e., bathing suit and alcohol pictures) were present or neutral pictures were present (i.e., vacation or hobby pictures).
- whether personal view captions (i.e., caption about political and/or social beliefs) were present or neutral captions were present (i.e., caption about vacation or hobby).
- whether high social connections (i.e., 800+ likes and 30+ comments) were present or low social connections (i.e., 5-15 likes and 2-5 comments) were present.

Main Findings:

The experimental study demonstrated that certain types of Instagram posts are perceived as more controversial to hiring professionals. More precisely:

- Posts that contained bikini and alcohol pictures were generally perceived as unfavourable to hiring professionals.
- Individuals who post pictures with alcoholic beverages may not only be perceived as unprofessional, but it is possible that the employer may be concerned that this individual would engage in counterproductive work behaviours, if hired for the position.
- Those who posted about political and/or social beliefs were viewed as more controversial and extreme. However, perceptions of employment suitability of these candidates may be dependent on whether these views align with those of the hiring professional.
- The amount of likes or comments on posts were generally not influential when hiring professionals were asked to evaluate the candidates.
- A profile containing limited posts or stringent privacy setting (i.e., having a private account) was evaluated favourability in terms of employment suitability.

In addition, we found that many hiring professionals are using Instagram to inform hiring decisions.

- 56.4% of hiring professionals currently view applicants Instagram's for hiring purposes.
- The majority of these hiring professionals indicated that the information found on applicants Instagram is valuable, with many hiring professionals using this platform to search for negative information about the candidate.