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Journal of Personnel Psychology

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Social Networking Websites in Personnel Selection

A Signaling Perspective on Recruiters' and Applicants' Perceptions

Nicolas Roulin¹ and Adrian Bangerter²

¹University of Lausanne, Switzerland, ²Institute of Work and Organizational Psychology, University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland

Abstract. Industry surveys and media reports suggest that recruiters increasingly use social networking websites (SNWs) in the selection process, but corresponding scientific research is still limited. Using signaling theory, we examine SNWs as a new way for applicants to signal their qualities to recruiters. Results suggest that recruiters and potential applicants (students and graduates) both perceive professional SNWs (e.g., LinkedIn) as a potential antecedent of Person-Job fit information and personal SNWs (e.g., Facebook) as a potential antecedent of Person-Organization fit information. When evaluating the same SNW profile, recruiters and potential applicants focus on different sections of the profile (e.g., recruiters focus more on job-related information), but they tend to infer similar personality traits. Implications for using SNWs in selection are discussed.

Keywords: personnel selection, social networking websites, signaling theory

The use of social networking websites (SNWs) to gather information about applicants has been reported as an increasingly common selection practice (Brown & Vaughn, 2011; Dipboye, Macan, & Shahani-Denning, 2012; Karl, Peluchette, & Schlaegel, 2010). For instance, the proportion of US recruiters using SNWs in selection increased from 12% in 2006 to 45% in 2009 (Careerbuilder.com, 2009). Such practice is especially relevant for young graduates, for whom recruiters have limited background information (Du, 2007). Recruiters can access profiles' information, despite options available to applicants to limit access. Many applicants fail to activate privacy settings and recruiters can create their own profiles to infiltrate applicants' networks or hire young graduates or students to do so (Brandenburg, 2008). More recently, employers have started to ask applicants to provide full access to their profiles (Brown & Vaughn, 2011). Yet, despite the growing attention devoted to SNWs in the social sciences (Wilson, Gosling, & Graham, 2012), research in personnel selection is still limited. For instance, there is little empirical research examining what information recruiters actually collect from SNW profiles or potential differences between personal SNWs (e.g., Facebook) and professional ones (e.g., LinkedIn). Also, there is little research on applicants' perceptions of such practices and whether or not they converge with recruiters' actual practices. We examine these issues using a signaling perspective on personnel selection and

presenting data from a study with professional recruiters and potential applicants.

A Signaling Perspective on Using SNWs in Selection

Recently, Bangerter, Roulin, and König (2012) proposed a new framework for personnel selection based on signaling theory. They suggested that organizations (and recruiters) look for so-called *honest* signals of applicants' ability and commitment to the potential employment relationship. Honest signals constitute information about applicant's characteristics that are difficult to fake because they are beyond the conscious control of the sender (e.g., ability test scores) or because they require investment of costly resources (e.g., time and energy spent to obtain a university degree). Honest signals of ability include education credentials, job experience, or letters of recommendations. Organizations can use such signals to assess whether or not applicants possess the required abilities or skills for the job. As such, signals of ability correspond to antecedents that can be used by organizations to predict applicants' level of Person-Job (P-J) fit (Kristof-Brown, 2000). Similarly, honest signals of commitment to the employment

relationship include measures of applicants' motivations to join the organization, such as their willingness to move to another city or to accept a lower salary. Other signals, like applicants' personality and values, inform about the fit between the applicant and the organization and can thus be considered as indirect signals of potential commitment. Organizations can compare such signals with their organizational values or culture to assess whether or not the applicant will be a good fit with the organization and will be likely to be committed to the organization (i.e., accept an offer, and then remain in the job for a long period). As such, signals of commitment correspond to antecedents that can be used by organizations to predict applicants' level of Person-Organization (P-O) fit (Kristof-Brown, 2000). We note that the term "commitment" in this sense is similar but not identical to organizational commitment (e.g., Meyer & Allen, 1991). Moreover, applicants try to detect organizations' selection criteria and adapt their behavior to send the right signals (Bangerter et al., 2012). In turn, organizations may counteradapt to applicants' adaptations by changing their selection criteria or the way they interpret applicants' signals. Over time, cycles of adaptations and counteradaptations between organizations and applicants determine how signals emerge, evolve, and decline, but also determine the stability of a given signal.¹

The emergence of a stable signal is thus the result of a process of reciprocal interaction between actors in a market. In this paper, we propose that information on applicants' profiles on SNWs may correspond to a potentially emerging signal of applicant ability and commitment (Bangerter et al., 2012). Currently, applicants post personal information on SNWs. Some job market actors (e.g., recruiters) may realize that such incidentally available information is revealing of some characteristic of another actor (e.g., applicants' personality). Recruiters may then start to use information on SNWs to glean information about applicants (Brandenburg, 2008). Applicants may become aware of this trend and adapt their behavior (e.g., by censoring content or strategically posting information). Recruiters may also adapt to applicants' adaptations in turn. Over time, these repeated adaptations and counteradaptations will either lead to the stabilization of an emerging signal or its decline and disappearance. If actors' subsequent behaviors are mutually reinforcing (e.g., if applicants do not post falsified information on their SNWs and if recruiters do not develop strategies to use SNWs as a way to invade applicants' privacy) the signal will stabilize. SNWs allow recruiters to gather information (e.g., competencies, job experience) they generally infer from résumés or cover letters to potentially predict P-J fit. In addition, SNWs allow collecting information to potentially predict P-O fit. For instance, SNWs can complement personality tests, since recruiters can attempt to infer applicants' personality from SNW profiles (Back et al., 2010; Klumper & Rosen, 2009). SNWs may also yield information about applicants' personal life that does not normally appear in résumés or cover letters, such as interests, relationship status, and political views

(Brandenburg, 2008). But as a first step to assess whether SNWs are emerging as an honest signal, it is necessary to demonstrate that recruiters' and applicants' perspectives converge regarding the type of information that can be transmitted through SNWs.

Given the increasing variety of SNW types (e.g., personal and professional), an optimal strategy for recruiters may be to look for different types of information in different types of SNWs (Roberts & Roach, 2009). For instance, information to predict P-J fit (e.g., work experience) is more likely to be found on professional SNWs (e.g., LinkedIn) that are generally built like extended online résumés. Information to predict P-O fit (e.g., interests) is more likely to be found on personal SNWs (e.g., Facebook) that have been originally created to exchange personal information with friends or family. Thus, professional SNWs are potential signals of abilities (i.e., to predict P-J fit) while personal SNWs are potential signals of commitment (i.e., to predict P-O fit) and we expect recruiters to perceive them as such:

Hypothesis 1: Recruiters prefer to gather (1a) information to predict P-J fit from professional rather than from personal SNWs, but (1b) information to predict P-O fit from personal rather than from professional SNWs.

A second step in demonstrating the emergence of SNWs as a new signal involves showing that applicants try to detect recruiters' selection criteria and adapt the signals they send. This step is especially important with SNW profiles, which allow users (e.g., applicants) to construct a deliberate and calculated online identity (Vazire & Gosling, 2004), manipulate the information on one's profile (Klumper & Rosen, 2009), and choose what information or photographs to publish to be viewed favorably (Siibak, 2009). But in order to best adapt signals, applicants should be aware of recruiters' use of professional and personal SNWs as signals of ability and commitment. This is similar to applicants preparing themselves for job interviews or tests and corresponds to applicants' attempts to "mind-read" organizations and detect their selection criteria (Bangerter et al., 2012). Signaling theory suggests that applicants' attempts to detect selection criteria and organizations' potential adaptation of their selection criteria in response to these attempts are essential to the emergence and evolution of signals. In the long run, applicants' attempts to detect how recruiters use SNW content should pressure organizations and recruiters to adapt their evaluation strategies, leading to one of two possible outcomes: On the one hand, if applicants' and recruiters' behaviors are mutually reinforcing, SNWs can reach a signaling equilibrium and become a stable signal, that is, one that is regularly used during the selection process. On the other hand, applicants and recruiters can constantly adapt their behavior to each other to develop an advantage. Such cycles of adaptation and

¹ See Bangerter et al. (2012) for examples of emerging, stable, and declining signals.

counteradaptation may lead to an arms race. An example would be recruiters developing new strategies to access personal information on applicants' SNW profiles and applicants trying to avoid recruiters accessing such information, or adapting their presentation of personal information to anticipate recruiters' behavior.

The increasing use of SNWs in selection has been largely covered in the media (e.g., Careerbuilder.com, 2009; Du, 2007). Also, some organizations inform university career centers that they use SNWs in selection (Roberts & Roach, 2009). And some universities have developed training programs to help graduates strategically use SNWs (Saedi & Nguyen, 2011). Therefore, it is likely that potential applicants in many job markets are currently aware that recruiters may be interested in using SNWs in hiring and will be able to anticipate their interests. This in turn suggests that their perceptions will converge with recruiters' actual signal detection criteria:

Hypothesis 2: Potential applicants perceive recruiters to prefer gathering (2a) information to predict P-J fit from professional than from personal SNWs, but (2b) information to predict P-O fit from personal than from professional SNWs.

Recruiters' and Applicants' Use and Interpretation of SNW Signals

Recruiters and potential applicants may well converge on what type of information professional and personal SNWs signal about applicants' qualities. Yet, when examining the same SNW profile they may differ in their focus of attention (e.g., focus on different content) or in their interpretation (e.g., infer different characteristics about the applicant). Potential applicants are not selection experts and they sometimes differ from experienced recruiters in the way they make hiring decisions. For instance, recruiters tend to focus on the most relevant cues while students use all cues available, even irrelevant ones (Barr & Hitt, 1986). Also students tend to focus more on academic qualifications when making hiring decisions, while professionals tend to focus more on work experience (Singer & Bruhns, 1991). When examining a SNW profile, experienced recruiters and potential applicants may also differ on the type of information they focus on. In exploring this issue, we only investigated personal SNWs (e.g., Facebook) profiles. Personal SNW profiles generally include a wider range of information about an applicant than professional SNWs. Also, because of the growing popularity of personal SNWs like Facebook (Wilson et al., 2012), both recruiters and (especially) potential applicants are more likely to be familiar with the structure and content of personal SNWs than professional ones. Facebook profiles are generally structured around main sections such as the *wall* (i.e., an open space where both the profile users and their *friends* can post comments, pictures, or videos), pictures, number of *friends* (people users are connected to), personal infor-

mation (e.g., birth date, relationship status), professional information (e.g., education, jobs), and interests (e.g., sports, music, literature). Recruiters and potential applicants may thus focus on different sections when evaluating a profile, but there is little theoretical basis to hypothesize on what section they will focus on. Therefore, we propose a first research question to examine this issue:

Research Question 1: Do recruiters and potential applicants focus on different sections when evaluating an applicant's personal SNW profile?

Personal SNWs such as Facebook were originally designed to exchange information with friends or family. Users' profiles may thus contain pictures or information that they do not want employers to access, such as negative private behavior or *faux pas* (e.g., criminal behavior, alcohol or drug abuse, partying) (Karl et al., 2010; Peluchette & Karl, 2008). Karl and colleagues suggested that such private behavior may not necessarily be reproduced at work, but they believed that recruiters may form a negative first impression and infer that, once hired, applicants could engage in counterproductive behaviors. Such an interpretation implies that recruiters may construe *faux pas* as predictive of lower P-O fit. Recent experimental studies with student evaluators have highlighted the potentially negative impact of such information (e.g., Bohnert & Ross, 2010; Hanley, Farabee, & Macan, 2010). Yet, except for recent surveys (Careerbuilder.com, 2009) or media stories (Du, 2007), there is little evidence that recruiters actually notice *faux pas* when evaluating SNW profiles. On the one hand, recruiters may notice *faux pas* and interpret them negatively like students do. On the other hand, if they indeed focus only on cues that are relevant to most jobs (Barr & Hitt, 1986), they may simply consider *faux pas* as irrelevant. Our second research question therefore examines whether or not recruiters and potential applicants actually focus on *faux pas* in SNW profiles.

Research Question 2: Do recruiters and potential applicants differ in their focus on *faux pas* when evaluating an applicant's personal SNW profile?

Recruiters are also likely to make inferences about applicants' qualities based on the information collected on SNW profiles. This information could be posted by the applicant. But information posted by third parties (i.e., *friends*) on someone's page (Walther, Van Der Heide, Kim, Westerman, & Tong, 2008) or simply the number of *friends* or their appearance (Utz, 2010) can also influence inferences made by evaluators. One type of inference that recruiters could make is related to applicants' personality (Bohnert & Ross, 2010). People can accurately infer applicants' personality or intelligence based on SNW profiles (Back et al., 2010; Kluemper & Rosen, 2009). For instance, Back et al. (2010) reported significant correlations between the actual personality of SNWs' profile owners (aggregated across multiple personality reports) and personality ratings by external raters based on the SNW profile. And perceived

personality may be influenced by the content of the profile or its orientation (Bohnert & Ross, 2010). Yet, participants in these studies were explicitly asked to evaluate targets' personality (e.g., using the Conscientiousness scale from the NEO FFI; Bohnert & Ross, 2010). We thus do not know whether evaluators of a SNW profile (i.e., recruiters or potential applicants) would spontaneously make such inferences without being asked to do so. This is important since spontaneous inference corresponds more closely to the way recruiters actually evaluate applicants' SNW profiles. Our last research question thus explores this issue.

Research Question 3: Do recruiters and potential applicants spontaneously infer different personality traits when evaluating an applicant's SNW profile?

We investigated these hypotheses and research questions in a study comparing the responses from a sample of recruiters and potential applicants who participated in an online survey on use of SNWs. We operationalized professional SNWs using LinkedIn and personal SNWs using Facebook. Participants also evaluated a fictitious Facebook profile relative to a fictitious job advertisement and commented on the profile in a free-response format. We subsequently coded and analyzed their comments.

Method

Sample and Procedure

Our sample of recruiters was composed of 96 professional HR managers. Mean age was 40.01 ($SD = 7.69$) years, 51% were women, and most of them were either French-speaking Swiss (79.2%) or French (15.6%). Mean experience in personnel selection was 9.37 years ($SD = 6.14$). Recruiters were active in a variety of sectors, including banking (20%), manufacturing (20%), or technologies and medias (13%). Our sample of potential applicants ($N = 597$) was composed of 443 students and 154 graduates (i.e., currently working or unemployed). Mean age was 24.28 ($SD = 4.97$), 78.4% were women, and most of them were either French-speaking Swiss (72.2%) or French (22.3%). A large proportion of potential applicants (i.e., 40%) studied (or were currently studying) business, economics, or social sciences. The educational background for remaining of the sample was education sciences or humanities (24%), law (16%), engineering or hard sciences (10%), or others (10%).

Recruiters received an email message containing an invitation to participate in the study and a link to an online questionnaire. A total of 216 HR professionals were originally contacted, 133 went to the study website and 96 completed the questionnaire (i.e., a 44% response rate). Potential applicants were contacted by email (approximately 2,000 students were originally contacted, 193 went to the study website and 146 completed the questionnaire, i.e., a 7.5% response rate) or through a Facebook announcement containing a similar invitation which also encouraged

people to forward the invitation to members of their social network (snowball sampling; the invitation was visible for 2,231 persons, 610 went to the study website and 451 completed the questionnaire, i.e., a 20% response rate). All participants completed a short online questionnaire in French (average completion time was 13.3 min for recruiters and 12.1 for potential applicants). The first part of the questionnaire included measures of use/perceived use of SNWs in selection. The second part of the questionnaire included a short job description for a Junior Hiring Manager at a bank, the Facebook profile of a mock applicant for the job, and a free-response format question about the content they considered to be noteworthy in this profile.

Measures

Recruiters reported their use of Facebook (i.e., a personal SNW) and LinkedIn (i.e., a professional SNW) to gather information about applicants to predict their level of P-J fit and P-O fit, while potential applicants reported their perceptions of recruiters' use. For instance, items for recruiters were all phrased as "When I search an applicant's Facebook/LinkedIn profile, I look for information about his/her ..." A 3-item scale (professional experiences, competencies, and recommendations; $\alpha = .74$ for Facebook and $\alpha = .76$ for LinkedIn) was used as information to potentially predict P-J fit. A 3-item scale (personality, values, interests; $\alpha = .70$ for Facebook and $\alpha = .82$ for LinkedIn) was used as information to potentially predict P-O fit. All items were developed based on the antecedents of P-J/P-O fit from Kristof-Brown (2000) and measured on 5-point Likert scales, where 1 = *strongly disagree* and 5 = *strongly agree*. Moreover, we also measured participants' frequency of use of Facebook/LinkedIn in their private life using a 5-point Likert scales, where 1 = *never* and 5 = *very often*.

Coding

In the second part of the study, both recruiters and potential applicants read a short mock job description for a Junior Hiring Manager in a bank and examined the Facebook profile of a male applicant for this position. It contained all traditional sections of such profiles, including pictures (e.g., main profile picture, photographs of sport activities or parties with friends), number of Facebook *friends*, *wall* information (e.g., recent activities or friends' postings), personal information (e.g., name, birth date, relationship status, political orientation, favorites quotes), professional information (e.g., business education, internship in HR), and interests (e.g., interest in French literature, extracurricular activities). Participants were then asked to openly describe the content they considered to be noteworthy in a free-response format. We did not specify "noteworthy" with respect to personnel selection. Yet, because participants were informed that they would have to examine the Facebook profile of an applicant for the target job and answer some question about this applicant, it seems likely that this question was interpreted in relation to the selection.

Response length was equivalent for the two types of participants. The average number of characters used was 108.8 ($SD = 134.5$) for recruiters and 109.9 ($SD = 117.5$) for potential applicants, $F(1, 692) = .007, p = .93$. One of the authors content-analyzed descriptions according to the presence or absence of various features. Interrater agreement statistics (Cohen's kappa) for all features coded were computed based on the independent coding of 70 participants by two different coders (i.e., the authors) and showed sufficient to perfect agreement (.70–1.00).

Sections of Facebook Profile Mentioned

We coded whether or not participants mentioned information from the six sections of the profile mentioned above (i.e., pictures, wall, number of friends, personal information, professional information, interests). For instance, the description "he is engaged, cultivated, has a lot of friends, likes to do things well, is active in sports, and enjoys life" was coded as mentioning number of friends ("a lot of friends"), personal information ("engaged"), and interests ("active in sports").

Faux Pas

We coded whether or not participants mentioned *faux pas* in applicants' profile (e.g., excessive partying, drug, or alcohol abuse). For instance, the description "[...] the picture where he is sitting on the floor with friends drinking alcohol and (maybe) smoking joints" was coded as mentioning a *faux pas*.

Inferences About Applicant's Personality

We coded participants' inferences about personality traits of the applicant, using the NEO PI-R model (Costa & McCrae, 1992) as a coding basis. We coded any personality descriptors mentioned into 10 categories defined by the two extreme ends of the continuum for each of the Big Five personality traits (i.e., open, low openness, extroverted, introverted, conscientious, impulsive, agreeable, disagreeable, stable, neurotic) using the definitions and adjectives from the NEO PI-R. For instance, the description "a young man, sociable, ambitious [...]" was coded as mentioning traits pertaining to extraversion ("sociable") and conscientiousness ("ambitious").

Results

We examined our hypotheses simultaneously using a $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2$ mixed-model ANOVA (see Figure 1). Type of information (P-J fit vs. P-O fit) and type of SNW (Facebook vs. LinkedIn) were entered as within-subjects variables, whereas type of participant (recruiters vs. potential applicants) was entered as a between-subject variable. Moreover, because of the large proportion of women in the potential applicant sample, we included gender as a between-subject control variable. Only participants using (for recruiters) or knowing (for potential applicants) both types of SNWs were included in this analysis (i.e., $N = 30$ recruiters and 226 potential applicants). We found no main effect of gender, $F(1, 252) = .76, p = .38, \eta^2 = .0002$, partial $\eta^2 = .003$, and none of the interactions including gender were significant. We found no effect of the type of participant, $F(1, 252) = .04, p = .84, \eta^2 = .0001$, partial $\eta^2 = .0002$. Thus, we cannot reject the hypothesis that recruiters' use of SNWs to gather information about applicants and potential applicants' perceptions of such use are the same. Moreover, results showed a type-of-information by type-of-SNW interaction, $F(1, 252) = 178.85, p < .001, \eta^2 = .22$, partial $\eta^2 = .42$. Hypotheses 1a and 1b stated that recruiters preferred to gather (1a) information to predict P-J fit from professional than from personal SNWs, but (1b) information to predict P-O fit from personal than from professional SNWs. Mean comparisons suggest that recruiters preferred to gather information about antecedents of P-J fit from LinkedIn ($M = 4.16, SD = .64$) rather than from Facebook ($M = 2.70, SD = .83$), but preferred to gather information about antecedents of P-O fit from Facebook ($M = 3.54, SD = .83$) rather than from LinkedIn ($M = 3.36, SD = 1.01$). Yet, only the difference for antecedents of P-J fit was significant (at $p < .05$), providing full support for Hypothesis 1a but not for 1b. Moreover, Hypotheses 2 stated that potential applicants perceive recruiters to prefer gathering (2a) information to predict P-J fit from professional than from personal SNWs, but (2b) information to predict P-O fit from personal than from professional SNWs. Mean comparisons suggest that potential applicants perceived recruiters to prefer gathering information about antecedents of P-J fit from LinkedIn ($M = 4.06, SD = .72$) rather than from Facebook ($M = 2.47, SD = .83$), but perceived recruiters to prefer gathering information about antecedents of P-O fit from Facebook ($M = 4.12, SD = .55$) rather than from LinkedIn ($M = 3.20, SD = .76$).²

² Although only 30 recruiters used both Facebook and LinkedIn in their selection process, more recruiters used only one SNW. Means computed on the full data available were similar to those obtained with $n = 30$ for the use of LinkedIn to gather antecedents of P-J fit ($M = 3.95, SD = .62, n = 65$) and P-O fit ($M = 3.02, SD = .97, n = 65$), and the use of Facebook to gather antecedents of P-J fit ($M = 2.63, SD = .87, n = 36$) and P-O fit ($M = 3.54, SD = .82, n = 36$). Similarly, although only 226 potential applicants knew both SNWs (i.e., knew LinkedIn), all of them but one knew Facebook, and means computed on the full data available were similar to those obtained with $n = 226$ for the use of Facebook to gather antecedents of P-J fit ($M = 2.61, SD = .87, n = 596$) and P-O fit ($M = 4.07, SD = .59, n = 596$).

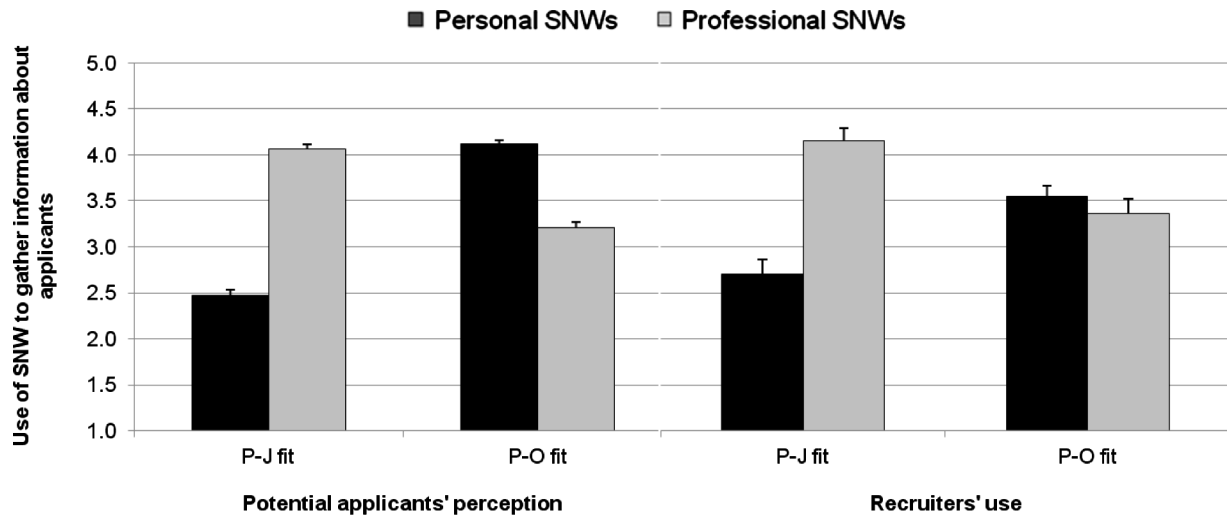


Figure 1. Information gathered by recruiters and perceived as being gathered by potential applicants on two types of SNWs to potentially predict P-J fit and P-O fit. Bars represent standard errors.

Both differences were significant (at $p < .05$), providing full support for both Hypotheses 2a and 2b.³

We used chi-square tests to examine Research Questions 1, 2, and 3 (Table 1). We first investigated potential differences between recruiters and potential applicants in the sections of the mock Facebook profile they mentioned after examining it (Research Question 1). We found that recruiters mentioned the section of the profile containing potentially job-related information (i.e., the professional information section) more often than potential applicants, $\chi^2(1, N = 668) = 10.18, p < .01$. Recruiters also mentioned the personal information section, $\chi^2(1, N = 668) = 4.92, p < .05$, and the number of friends, $\chi^2(1, N = 668) = 6.35, p < .05$, more often than potential applicants. Potential applicants mentioned pictures and the wall more often, $\chi^2(1, N = 668) = 7.28, p < .01$, and $\chi^2(1, N = 668) = 4.34, p < .05$, respectively. These features correspond to the sections of the profile containing less-job-related information. There was no significant difference between potential applicants and recruiters regarding the interests section, $\chi^2(1, N = 668) = .40, p = .52$. We then investigated potential differences between recruiters and potential applicants regarding faux pas (e.g., alcohol abuse) mentions (Research Question 2). Potential applicants noticed content related to faux pas more often than recruiters, $\chi^2(1, N = 668) = 4.12, p < .05$. We finally investigated potential differences between recruiters and potential applicants in the personality inferences made based on the SNW profile (Research Question 3). About one-third of participants made spontaneous references to personality traits in their response. Both recruiters and potential applicants mostly mentioned characteristics that were coded as conscientious and extroverted. We found no significant difference between

recruiters and potential applicants for open, low in openness, extroverted, introverted, agreeable, disagreeable, conscientious, and stable. But recruiters mentioned more often than potential applicants characteristics that were coded as impulsive, $\chi^2(1, N = 668) = 10.85, p < .01$, and neurotic, $\chi^2(1, N = 668) = 17.72, p < .01$.

Discussion

In recent years, both media (Careerbuilder.com, 2009; Du, 2007) and the scientific literature (Brown & Vaughn, 2011; Dipboye et al., 2012) have described a growing interest of recruiters in SNWs as a new source of information in the selection process. But empirical research is still relatively scarce. The present study was an attempt to fill this gap.

We found that recruiters use professional SNWs to infer applicants' ability (i.e., to assess characteristics predictive of P-J fit) and personal SNWs to infer applicants' commitment to the potential employment relationship (i.e., to assess characteristics predictive of P-O fit). Moreover, our analyses could not reject the hypothesis that potential applicants' and recruiters' perceptions are the same. These results are based on a small sample of recruiters and thus limited statistical power. But this constitutes initial evidence that applicants' perceptions of recruiters' use of these websites may correspond to recruiters' actual use, thus suggesting that SNWs may be emerging as a signal. However, our results suggest that potential applicants (i.e., students and graduates) and recruiters tend to differ in the way they analyze an applicant's Facebook profile. First, they seem to

³ Participants who used LinkedIn more in their private life seem to use LinkedIn (or perceived recruiters to use it) more to gather information about antecedents of P-J fit ($r = .25, p < .01$) but not information about antecedents of P-O fit ($r = -.06, p = .31$). Participants who used Facebook more in their private life seem to use Facebook (or perceived recruiters to use it) more to gather information about antecedents of P-O fit ($r = .08, p < .05$) but not information about antecedents of P-J fit ($r = .01, p = .76$).

Table 1. Percentage of recruiters and potential applicants mentioning SNW profile sections, mentioning *Faux Pas*, and making inferences about personality traits

| Personality trait | Recruiters | Potential applicants | Total | χ^2 |
|------------------------------|------------|----------------------|-------|----------|
| SNW profile sections | | | | |
| Picture | 33.3 | 49.6 | 47.7 | 7.28** |
| Wall | 5.1 | 13.4 | 12.5 | 4.34* |
| Number of <i>friends</i> | 16.7 | 8.0 | 9.0 | 6.35* |
| Personal information | 56.4 | 43.1 | 44.7 | 4.92* |
| Professional information | 39.7 | 23.1 | 25.0 | 10.18** |
| Interests | 28.2 | 31.7 | 31.3 | .40 |
| <i>Faux pas</i> | 19.2 | 30.3 | 29.0 | 4.13* |
| Personality trait inferences | | | | |
| Open | 1.3 | 3.4 | 3.1 | 1.01 |
| Low openness | 0 | 0.7 | 0.6 | .47 |
| Extroverted | 14.1 | 14.1 | 14.1 | .00 |
| Introverted | 0 | 0.3 | 0.3 | .26 |
| Agreeable | 2.6 | 2.0 | 2.1 | .09 |
| Disagreeable | 5.1 | 2.5 | 2.8 | 1.66 |
| Conscientious | 16.7 | 19.2 | 18.9 | .29 |
| Impulsive | 9.0 | 2.2 | 3.0 | 10.85** |
| Stable | 1.3 | 3.2 | 3.0 | .03 |
| Neurotic | 5.1 | 0.3 | 0.9 | 17.72** |

Note. $N = 668$ (78 recruiters and 590 potential applicants). * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

focus on different sections of the profile. Recruiters focus more than potential applicants on *professional information* (i.e., education and experience) and *personal information* (i.e., demographics, marital status) sections, which correspond to information they traditionally find on applicants' résumés. But they also focus on the number of *friends*, which may indicate the scope of applicants' network. As one respondent wrote: "He has a lot of friends, which may suggest a good network." On the other hand, potential applicants focused more than recruiters on *pictures* and *the wall*. Overall, recruiters focus more than potential applicants on sections containing potentially job-related information, and less than potential applicants on sections less-related to the job. Differences between experienced recruiters and potential applicants in hiring decisions (Barr & Hitt, 1986) may thus also apply to SNW profile evaluations. Second, potential applicants focused more than recruiters on *faux pas* (Karl et al., 2010). As such, *faux pas* may not be perceived as the most relevant information by recruiters, who may focus more on the personal or professional information available in an applicant's profile. Finally, and despite focusing on different sections of SNW profiles, recruiters and potential applicants tend to infer similar personality traits from the profile. Both mainly perceived the mock applicant as conscientious or extroverted. Yet, recruiters perceived the mock applicant as impulsive and neurotic more frequently than potential applicants. Therefore, when receiving the same signal (i.e., the same SNW profile), experienced recruiters and potential applicants tend to have different analytical strategies (i.e., focus on different sections) but end up making similar interpretations about an applicant's commitment (i.e., inferring similar personality traits) to potentially predict P-O fit.

Our findings advance research on signaling theory by highlighting that SNWs may be currently emerging as a new signal in personnel selection (Bangerter et al., 2012). Yet, it is not clear whether signals of ability and commitment sent by applicants through their profiles can be considered as honest signals. Honest signals should be associated with investment cost (i.e., be costly to send for applicants) and cheating cost (i.e., involve risks in situation of falsification) (Bangerter et al., 2012). On the one hand, applicants can easily select and manipulate the information they post of their profile (Kluemper & Rosen, 2009; Siibak, 2009), making SNWs susceptible to honest impression management (e.g., online self-promotion), but also to deceptive impression management (i.e., cheating). Such behavior would be difficult to detect by recruiters and undermine the value of the signals. On the other hand, applicants' profiles are primarily designed for contact with friends (or family members), can be edited by friends (e.g., by posting pictures or comments; Walther et al., 2008), and generally correspond to the actual qualities (e.g., personality) of the applicant (Back et al., 2010), thus making the signals more difficult to falsify without consequences. But future research is needed to examine potential applicant manipulation of their profile and the actual validity of recruiters' inferences made from SNW profiles.

Our findings also have implications for research on SNWs in selection. Since experienced recruiters and nonprofessionals (i.e., potential applicants) differ in the way they analyze and (to some extent) interpret SNW profiles, results from previous studies involving students as evaluators of SNW profiles (e.g., Bohnert & Ross, 2010; Hanley et al., 2010; Kluemper & Rosen, 2009) may not generalize to recruiters. For instance, Hanley et al. (2010) stressed that negative pre-interview impressions based on

evaluating a Facebook profile including *faux pas* may impact post-interview hiring decisions. Yet, their sample was composed of students. And since less than 20% of recruiters actually mentioned such *faux pas* when examining SNW profiles, their impact may be lower than previously suggested. Therefore, further research examining how the content of SNW profiles actually influences selection outcomes should be conducted with actual recruiters. Moreover, the importance of *faux pas* may also depend on the availability of such information as compared to more positive and/or job-related information (e.g., job experience, positive recommendations). Future experimental studies could manipulate the content of profiles (e.g., the proportion of *faux pas* as compared to professional information) to assess their impact on recruiters' perceptions. Future research may also try to replicate the above results about inferences made by profile evaluators using a professional SNW (e.g., LinkedIn).

Our results also have practical implications for organizations and applicants. Organizations may want to use SNWs as part of their selection process, but may be concerned about potential legal issues (Brandenburg, 2008) or negative applicants' reaction (Stoughton, Thompson, Meade, & Wilson, 2012). Previous studies stressing potential ethical and legal issues (e.g., invasion of privacy) related to such practice have focused mainly on personal SNWs (e.g., Facebook) (Brandenburg, 2008; Brown & Vaughn, 2011; Clark & Roberts, 2010). Professional SNWs (e.g., LinkedIn) may represent a practical alternative for recruiters. Such websites may limit ethical or legal issues and negative reactions, because applicants build their profiles for professional use (including job search) and expect employers to view them (Stoughton et al., 2012). But more research is required to examine the advantage (e.g., cost reduction, quality, and quantity of information available) and disadvantages (risk of applicants manipulating information, potential discrimination) of using professional SNWs in selection. Moreover, when entering the job market, applicants may want to spend time constructing a deliberate and calculated online identity (Vazire & Gosling, 2004) and make a good e-impression on recruiters (Hanley et al., 2010). Our results suggest that they should worry less about smaller *faux pas*, such as pictures of parties with friends, and focus more on developing the professional information section in their profiles (i.e., the section most often mentioned by recruiters).

This study has limitations. Our results are based on sample composed of Swiss and French participants and should be replicated in other countries. Our sample of recruiters was also small for some analyses, resulting in limited statistical power (e.g., when comparing recruiters' and applicants' perceptions). As such, our results should thus be replicated in future studies. We also note that, as compared to standard response rates for online surveys (e.g., Cook, Heath, & Thompson, 2000; Deutskens, de Ruyter, Wetzels, & Oosterveld, 2004), our response rate was relatively high for recruiters but relatively low for potential applicants. In the first part of our study, we examined the type of information recruiters were looking for in professional versus

personal SNWs *in general* (and potential applicants' perceptions of it). Future research could examine information-gathering strategies on SNWs that are *job-specific*. Moreover, observed differences between recruiters and potential applicants in their way of analyzing a Facebook profile may also be due to generational differences. Recruiters and potential applicants were 40 and 24 years old on average respectively. Potential applicants may also be more used to Facebook profiles than recruiters. Indeed, 84% of potential applicants reported using Facebook "often" or "very often" in their personal life, as compared to 25% for recruiters. Also, results of the second part of the study are based on the Facebook profile of only one mock applicant for only one specific job (i.e., junior hiring manager at a bank). We do not know to what extent participants paid attention to the job description and thus if their responses (e.g., sections of the profile mentioned, personality inferences) were specific to this job or reflected a more general way of analyzing SNWs profiles. Moreover, the educational background of a large proportion of our sample of potential applicants was not in HR, management, or banking. Future research should replicate these results with other types of SNW profiles, other types of jobs, or actual applicants for specific jobs.

In conclusion, SNWs represent a promising way for applicants to send signals about their ability or commitment to recruiters. Professional SNW profiles may work as an extended online résumé, allowing applicants and recruiters to exchange detailed job-related information, with low cost and without the legal or ethical issues associated with private SNWs. This study is only a first step in investigating the potential of SNWs in selection and calls for more research including professional recruiters.

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Nicolas Roulin

University of Lausanne
 Faculty of Business & Economics
 HEC
 Internef Building
 Office 613
 Lausanne, VD 1015
 Switzerland
 Tel. +41 21 692-3684
 Fax +41 21 692-3305
 E-mail nicolas.roulin@unil.ch