



# Hiring through Social Media Networks: Potential Issues and Challenges

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**Abstract :** The modern information technologies have changed the conduct of businesses. With the advent of social media, organisations have changed their way of hiring process. Social media platforms play a major role in advertising jobs, screening candidates and even branding of employers. Screening candidates through these platforms has become a major part of the overall recruitment process so as to avoid negligent hiring. However, despite several benefits, employers face certain challenges and issues which are highlighted in this review paper. These challenges include discrimination and biases, violation of privacy, reliability and validity of information, and procedural justice. Organisations shall therefore be cautious while using such platforms for hiring purposes. Moreover, a social media policy would help employers and professionals to understand the standardisation of the process and the point up to which they can seek information of the candidates so that legal and ethical issues do not arise. This review paper will help organisations guide about the importance of social media policy and how information through social media can be timely and effectively used.

**IndexTerms:** Cybervetting, LinkedIn, procedural justice, professional social media, social media recruitment.

## Introduction

For better or worse, the advent of Internet has made availability and collection of information is easier than ever before. Social media sites, in particular, has provided a platform to connect with others, view information and upload content. Social media has changed the recruitment landscape in organisations today and the trend goes well beyond marketing. It has become the mainstream for organisations, and savvy companies are increasingly using social media trends in hiring (Brotherton, 2012). Social media is mostly being used in two ways; first to recruit candidates by publicizing job opening, and second for conducting background checks of the candidates. Smart employers are harnessing social media as a part of their recruitment strategy to reach as many potential candidates as they can (Segal, 2014).

Social media websites like LinkedIn and Facebook have become an important platform in hiring procedures (Koch et al., 2018; Nikolaou, 2014). Apart from the ease of placing jobs, HR professionals can even check the candidates profile to understand the fit of the person with the organisation. Employers have the right to investigate applicants, however, the advent of online screening have raised legal concerns and is a major focus of legislation and litigation. This raises questions that what shall an employer do in between negligent hiring and online information gathering. This paper therefore aims to point out the different challenges and issues HR professionals face while hiring from the

social media. It then tries to find out the solutions that HR professionals can undertake so they minimise such issues, plan the procedure in a better way and take better decisions while hiring their candidates.

## **Social Media Hiring**

The number of employers using social media for screening candidates is all-time high. According to a survey by CareerBuilder in the US in 2017, 70% of employers use social media to screen candidates which has increased by 10% last year and 59% in 2006 (Newswire, 2017). More than half of the employers do not hire if the candidate has no online presence. Thus, social network sites are becoming a key part of HR department and 30% of employers have someone dedicated for the task. The screening of profile checks involve information that supports their qualification for the job, presence of professional online persona of the candidate, what others are positing about them and a reason for not hiring them. More than half of the employers did not hire a candidate as they found offensive content on the candidate's profile. These included inappropriate video, photographs or information, information related to use of drugs or drinking, discriminatory comments related to gender, religion or race, bad-mouthing fellow employees or previous company, lying about qualifications, possess poor communication skills, linked to criminal behaviour, shared confidential information about previous employers, unprofessional screen name, lied about an absence and posting too frequently (Newswire, 2017). Almost similar results were found in another study conducted by Career Builder in 2018 in the US. However, CareerBuilder (2018) further states that 7% of the candidates are even planning to start using SNSs to research job candidates. Moreover, social networking digging on potential job candidates is being done across all sectors, highest being in IT (74%) and manufacturing (73%), followed by non-retail/retail sales (59%).

Not surprisingly, social media screening in pre-employment is not new. Many studies have confirmed that employers can be more efficient as screening allow high quality 'match.' This results in more and more digging of information about the applicants so that the best match between the applicant and the employer's organisation could be achieved (Slovensky & Ross, 2012). Historically, pre-employment screening techniques for gathering information about candidates included interviews, written applications, background and reference checks, credit checks and pre-employment tests like polygraph, medical, drug, psychological and ability tests (Ecker, 1994).

Social media has become a quick, convenient and cost-effective way for organisations to expedite the recruiting process. Whether it is a new job posting through LinkedIn groups or reviewing candidates' Facebook or Twitter accounts before an interview, social network sites provides it all. For example, placing an ad on social media is very cheap when compared to placing an ad on a newspaper. Moreover, any correction or information can be modified in the social media ad as compared to its counterpart (Hosain, 2021). Additionally, social media provides candidate information verification (Levashina et al., 2009), enhance employer branding (Sivertzen et al., 2013), and accessibility of information at a low cost (Jacobs, 2009). However, employers while taking employment decisions sometimes cross the lines of infringement, discrimination and personal privacy. On the other hand, if they avoid using social media, they may face negligent hiring and damages for messages posted by candidates and employees. Although it has become an obvious resource for pre-employment screening, HR departments shall draw a fine line between appropriate and problematic use. If social media screening is used inappropriately, it could result in several risks to the organisations.

## **Issues and Challenges**

### ***Discrimination and Biases***

Andersson & Wikström (2017) highlights the first major legal issue arising from the use of social media hiring is high potential for discrimination accusations. Where traditional resumes had limited demographic information and included job relevant information only, social media provides an ample of information. Screening an applicant on social media prior to an interview exposes interviewers to information which are unrelated to job and may be inappropriate to ask in assessments. However, employers become aware of protected information of the candidates

through their social media profiles (Brown & Vaughn, 2011). Information like the candidate's race, religion, nationality, gender, disability, sexual orientation and marital status gets revealed which an interviewer would never ask in a face-to-face interview (Elzweig & Peeples, 2009; Hazelton & Terhorst, 2015; Thomas et al., 2015). Similarly, information about lifestyle choices which has no impact on employee's work also gets revealed which might be registered in the subconscious mind of the professionals (Ünal et al., 2012). All such information may affect their assessment and increases chances of discrimination.

The Internet is generally considered as a 'public' platform, however, it tends to create many legal issues when candidate's social media public profiles are screened by organisations. When a hiring manager comes across such information, it may influence the hiring decision for the candidates either intentionally or unintentionally. This leads to violation of discrimination laws. Hazelton & Terhorst (2015) further states that employers could also face discrimination claims against them by an applicant if they feel they were not called upon on such discriminatory bases. Companies have been sued by candidates as they believed they were rejected because of their online content posts (Half, 2017).

### ***Violation of privacy***

Using social media for hiring purposes has been accused for privacy at times. There have been concerns about data protection and access. Moreover, security has always been a concern when employers use candidates' data for screening purposes (Gross et al., 2005). This has been said for several reasons. First, the posts on SNSs are meant for friends and family, and data which fall under the private domain are viewed by potential employers (Tabibi, 2012). Second, most off-duty behaviour are revealed which has nothing to do with job. For instance, use of off-duty behaviour is restricted to be used by employers in the US (Bennett-Alexander and Hartman, 2009). Third, discrimination could result with social media profiles containing details like sex, religion, national origin, race and so on. Although such information is available publically, it may intentionally or unintentionally affect the decision of the manager and lead to violation of national legal protections of the candidates (Landers and Schmidt, 2016). Park et al. (2014) state that private information are also exposed if hackers use and access such social media networks. Additionally, applicant's connections with other employees of a company on social media network might allow surveillance of other employees to a company (Jeske & Shultz, 2016).

### ***Reliability and Validity of Information***

Getting information alike for all the candidates becomes difficult for HR professionals. Generation Y and Z are mostly active on social media and tend to be comfortable sharing their personal and professional lives on the Internet. In other words, some professionals may share their personal information online more freely and frequently than others (Thomas et al., 2015). Moreover, passive candidates may just want to discuss about the new opportunities with the companies and may not update their profile in a way an active candidate would do. Hence, not up-to-date or minimal profile is a result which leaves recruiters confused or make them take negative decisions (Suen, 2018). Similarly, every job seeker might not be using social media or might be limiting information according to his convenience (Zhang et al., 2020). Very few candidates provide detailed information which makes difficult for employers to decide on the candidates. Hence, over-relying on such sites may not be beneficial for recruiters as they remain confused and could also result in wrong choice (Rana and Singh, 2016). This could raise a concern for people who are economically less advantaged, which might relate to certain ethnic and racial groups (Segal, 2014). Employers also receive several unqualified applications and hence need to review more e-mail and resumes. Additionally, fake profiles also become a problem as it wastes time and energy of the employers and even result into wrong hires thereby increasing the cost.

It has been claimed that employers get and check veracity of information and it is assumed that profiles of the candidates reveal undisclosed or hidden truths (Brown & Vaughn, 2011; Thomas et al., 2015). In other words, individuals present their true self online and do not list any misleading information. However, there is plenty of articles which talks about do's and don'ts of creating an image over social media profile (Haefner, 2009). This means that information on social media might not be true as has been thought and it might be just for the sake of impression

management from the job-seekers end. Candidates update information that is seen as socially desirable (Kroeze, 2015). Faking of applicants is yet another issue that has come up where candidates exaggerate about how well they fit with the job and even lying about their work experience or education (Donovan et al., 2014; Levashina & Campion, 2007). With polished profiles to impress employers, it becomes difficult for employers to rely on the impressions made by the candidates. Before shortlisting a candidate, recruiter properly screens the candidates to ensure they suit the profile and the organisation. However, social media profile of the candidates might not be complete as many people refrain from providing every single detail on such sites. Thus, varied, inaccurate and incomplete information makes the comparison between applicants unreliable (Kroeze, 2015). Hence, the overall validity and reliability of the information is not consistent resulting in inconsistent selection.

### ***Procedural Justice***

Various studies confirm that job-seekers and employees feel that proper procedures are not undertaken while taking hiring decisions over social media profiles (Brown & Vaughn, 2011; Landers and Schmidt, 2016; Stoughton et al., 2015). As discussed above, the validity and reliability of information is often compromised because of the incomplete, inaccurate and different types of information on social media profiles of the candidates. This could result in poor comparability and hasty rejection decision on the part of the employer (Brown & Vaughn, 2011; Kroeze, 2015) resulting dubious use of social media content in the hiring purpose (Thomas et al., 2015). Moreover, HR professionals may perceive information on social media in the wrong way. Any negative information on the candidate's personal profile might be taken in the work context. For instance, information related to political affiliations obtained via social media affected the selection decisions (Roth et al., 2020; Suen, 2018). Despite focusing on job relevant information, they focused on information which are not required to be assessed for job selection. Moreover, as employers violate privacy and ethical standards, applicants question them on the procedural justice making them less attractive (Hurrell et al., 2017). Despite of having relevant qualifications, they were not selected as they were negatively perceived because of the social media (Becton et al., 2019). Hartwell et al. (2022) further claims a lack of consistency in screening and evaluation procedures. If such procedural justice and fairness is not adopted, it tend to form negative image of the candidates towards the company.

### ***Conclusion and Recommendations***

Social media platforms has emerged as an important tool in the recruitment and selection of candidates. It promotes job postings, helps in employer branding and screen potential hires. However, there are several issues and challenges that organisations face. Employers may face discrimination and bias issues which can lead to legal issues under various laws. Candidates may even think that employers using social media for screening purpose as violating their privacy thereby making them less attractive employers. Moreover, procedural justice could be violated if the employer relies on posts by candidates which are not relevant enough for the recruitment and selection process. Yet reliability and validity of information is another issue by which recruiters result in inconsistent selection. As discussed, all the above challenges and issues could lead to several legal and ethical implications. With different kinds of information over social media, it requires employers to be mindful to select information and categorise whether it is job related or not. Since much information available online is not job related and can lead to wrong interpretations, employers must draw a line, which yet again is difficult. Employers shall make sure that they do the same searches for every candidate in their screening process and even wait for an initial face-to-face interview (Half, 2017). To reach potential talent, organisations shall not solely depend on social networking sites, rather they shall diversify their recruiting approaches. Moreover, they can have a recruitment process wherein a smart system screens performance of the candidates, an automated system evaluates their knowledge without involving any bias and finally an Applicant Tracking Software (ATS) that helps hiring a candidate in a 'true social sense.'

Miller & Munday (2015) in their study show that norms are subject to negotiations and moral work. They state that some level of spying is acceptable and is considered to be smart. As Backman & Hedenus (2019) reveal that some recruiters consider online information as public that are not protected by privacy settings. Moreover, they say that it



is the job-seeker who has chosen to seek publicity by disclosing their private information on public platforms. It is the responsibility of the job-seeker to keep his information to a private realm. However, if recruiters try to access inaccessible information and hack someone's private network or even perform extensive searches is not appropriate (Backman & Hedenus, 2019). Hence organisations shall have proper policies stating the right use of social media platforms for vetting candidates and including not to dig too deep. Moreover, proper training to the HR professionals who are involved in the recruitment process shall be ensured so that they do not cross the lines and remain bias-free as well as maintain procedural justice in the overall process. Additionally, they should borne in mind that the information available on social media platforms of the candidates may not be accurate and hence verification shall be done by other means as well. Moreover, both employers as well as job-seekers shall be aware of the legal and ethical issues.

This review paper will help policy makers in organisations to formulate and implement policies with proper guidelines so as to avoid any legal and ethical issues. It might also help in efficient and timely utilisation of social media information for recruitment purposes.

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