Online Background Checks in Personnel Decision-Making:

Practices, Challenges, and Ethical Recommendations

Dissertation by:

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Acknowledgements

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Overview of Papers

The present cumulative dissertation was written from 2019-2022 at the Professorship of Christian Social Ethics and Social Policy at the Business Faculty of the Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt. It examines the ethicality of conducting online background checks in the process of selecting job applicants in four scientific papers:

Paper I: Habisch, A., Kletz, P., & Wack, E. (2022). Unpleasant memories on the web in employment relations: A Ricoeurian approach. *Humanistic Management Journal*, *7*, 347–368. https://doi.org/10.1007/s41463-022-00138-0

Paper II: Wack, E., & Habisch, A. (submitted October 2022). 'Please remember my mistakes': Why organizations should keep job applicants' unpleasant online information in reserve. *Employee Relations*, under review.

Paper III: Vosen[1], E. (2021). Social media screening and procedural justice: Towards fairer use of social media in selection. *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal*, *33*, 281–309. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10672-021-09372-4

Paper IV: Wack, E., & Habisch, A. (submitted November 2022). Social media discontinuance: A source of discrimination? *Human Resource Management*.

All papers in this dissertation represent independent contributions to scientific journals in the fields of Humanistic Management, Personnel and Organization Studies, yet they all critically evaluate online background checks in personnel decision-making on multiple levels of analysis: the micro-, meso-, and macro-level. The introductory section of this dissertation, therefore, serves to embed the four papers in the context of these three levels and provide a more detailed summary of the content of this dissertation.

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[1] This article was published under the author's birth name.

Contributions

For reasons of transparency, the following paragraphs describe the author's contributions to each of the aforementioned papers:

Paper I is co-authored with André Habisch and Pierre Kletz. It is based on a research idea by André Habisch and Pierre Kletz. Therein, André Habisch and Pierre Kletz provided the key input for the theoretical foundations of the paper. While the conception of the paper was a joint task, the author of this thesis carried out the literature research and writing.

Paper II is co-authored with André Habisch. It is based on a research idea by André Habisch and Pierre Kletz and builds upon the findings from paper I. The conception of the paper was a joint task. Besides the literature work and the writing of the paper, the main contribution of the author of this thesis was establishing the connection between Organizational Memory and the works of Paul Ricœur in the theoretical part of this paper. This paper is included as a manuscript submitted to *Employee Relations* in October 2022 and is under review at the time of thesis submission.

Paper III is single-authored by the author of this thesis.

Paper IV is co-authored with André Habisch. It is based on a joint research idea by André Habisch and the author of this dissertation. The author carried out the design, performance, and data analysis of the empirical study in this module. Writing and revising the paper was a joint task. This paper is included as a manuscript submitted to *Human Resource Management* in November 2022.

Introduction and Summary

Figure 1. Multi-level conceptualization of the dissertation papers

Module IV

Social Media Discontinuance: A Source of Discrimination?

Module III

Social Media Screening and Procedural Justice: Towards Fairer Use of Social Media in Selection

Module II

'Please Remember my Mistakes': Why Organizations Should Keep Job Applicants' Unpleasant Online Information in Reserve

Module I

Unpleasant Memories on the Web in Employment Relations: A Ricoeurian Approach

Micro-level

Meso-level

Macro-level

1 Aims and Scope

The present cumulative dissertation examines the ethicality of online background checks in the process of selecting job applicants in the form of social media screening and cybervetting. This research aim is explored following the structure of a multi-level analysis – a methodology used in a variety of research disciplines. In a business ethics context, it has been used to link business ethics with psychology (Islam, 2019), to study procedural justice (Naumann & Bennett, 2000), as well as forgiveness in the workplace (Fehr & Gelfand, 2012; Palanski, 2012). Furthermore, multi-level analysis has been applied to integrate ethics-related concepts into management education (Setó-Pamies & Papaoikonomou, 2016), or to analyse specific issues like racism (Ozturk & Berber, 2022) and gender equality (Taser-Erdogan, 2022) on three levels: the individual (micro), the organisational (meso), and the societal (macro) level. While the four papers presented in this dissertation can be assigned to each of the three levels (see Figure 1), it should be noted that the levels also overlap: For example, the argumentation in a paper may cover a societal issue on a policy level, yet it can produce recommendations and implications

for organizations and individuals, as well. The order of the papers in the main body is organized from broad to narrow: It begins with the more general question of the ethicality of online background checks on the broader societal level and ends with the issues of discrimination and rater bias examined on the micro level. The summary and contextualization of the four papers in this chapter begin by defining the key terms "cybervetting" and "social media screening", which represent different forms of online background checks.

2 Defining Cybervetting and Social Media Screening

Employers have increasingly started using social media for HR purposes (Henderson, 2019; Lam, 2016). The practice of obtaining information about workers from informal and non-institutional online sources to make personnel decisions is generally referred to as "cybervetting" (Berkelaar, 2014). It makes use of a mixture of sources, such as search engines, social media sites, aggregators, e-commerce, virtual worlds, or (micro-)blogs (Berkelaar, 2017; Berkelaar & Buzzanell, 2014). In the literature, the particular use of social media searches in the selection process has often been referred to as "social media screening" (e.g., Jeske & Shultz, 2019) or "social network screening" (e.g., Kluemper, 2013). While potential overlaps may exist between a more general internet search and the exclusive use of social media, authors like Kluemper et al. (2015) and Roth et al. (2016) make a clear distinction between social media screening and a general internet search that makes use of a variety of sources. However, both phenomena are associated with a number of different legal and ethical issues (see Kluemper et al., 2015) which serve as a starting point for this dissertation.

3 Problem Statement

Applicant information from the web can assist employers in a number of ways when making employment decisions: It may help verify application documents (Brown & Vaughn, 2011) or draw conclusions on applicants' future job performance (Roth et al., 2016). This way, the practice of cybervetting not only allows employers to predict applicants' personalities (Kluemper & Rosen, 2009; Rosen et al., 2018) and person-organization fit (Becton et al., 2019), but may also help to avoid the risk of irresponsible or even criminal employee behaviour (Kluemper, 2013). Thus, applicants can be refused if the employer finds content like

provocative or inappropriate photographs, the display of substance abuse, or negative comments on previous employers or colleagues (Brown & Vaughn, 2011). However, applicants may also be dismissed based on demographic information, such as ethnicity, gender, age, or disability status, which represents discrimination against protected groups (Brown & Vaughn, 2011; Kluemper & Rosen, 2009). Some authors also point to the possibility that those applicants who are not present on social media could be at a disadvantage in the hiring process (Alexander et al., 2019; Black & Johnson, 2012; Slovensky & Ross, 2012). Apart from potential discrimination against protected groups or persons who decide to discontinue social media, online information on candidates may as well be untrue, incomplete, or taken out of context (Lam, 2016; Slovensky & Ross, 2012). This questions the very accuracy of cybervetting. The most frequent criticism as to the ethicality of cybervetting, however, is that employers' access to applicant information on the web raises privacy concerns (Black et al., 2015). Given the large number of active users of social media platforms, the practice of screening applicants online has the potential of affecting both, applicants and employers, to a great extent and to have a significant impact on HR decisions (Brown & Vaughn, 2011).

Despite the existence of the above-mentioned issues, online background checks on candidates do not seem to be well understood by researchers and practitioners (Roth et al., 2016). A research gap in this field (e.g., Becton et al., 2019) leaves practitioners with a lack of clear guidelines or best practices on the use of online information in selection (Davison et al., 2012; Landers & Schmidt, 2016). As it is particularly the "dark side" of digitalization that seems to be under-researched (Turel et al., 2021), this dissertation answers the call for more research-based guidance in the use of online information in recruitment and selection. Thereby, it also critically evaluates existing solutions to the most pressing legal and ethical issues in this context: For example, so-called ephemeral technologies, like automatic expiration dates for personal information, have been proposed in the literature to allow users to determine how long their information will be accessible online (Bannon, 2006; Manny & Carter, 2015; Mayer-Schönberger, 2011; Mitrou & Karyda, 2012). Since such technological solutions clearly have their limitations (Ausloos, 2012; Mitrou & Karyda, 2012), scholars have also called for adequate legal responses to issues like privacy invasion (Kwak et al., 2021). In the European Union (EU), the need for legal regulation manifested itself in the right to be forgotten. This policy was established by the European Court of Justice (ECJ) to grant individuals the possibility to have links to web pages containing inadequate, irrelevant, or excessive digital information removed (Kim & Kim, 2017). While the right to be forgotten has received

considerable praise for defending users' privacy rights (Lindsköld, 2018), other scholars have criticized it for effectively forcing people to forget (De Baets, 2016) and dealing with unpleasant information on the web in an inadequate way (Garcia-Murillo & MacInnes, 2018). In this area of tension between hiring organizations' need for information on job applicants and the legal and ethical issues presented by online background checks, the present dissertation contributes to the literature by addressing the following three key questions:

- Should hiring organizations' access to applicants' private information on the web be restricted by legal and technological means? (Macro-level)
- Under what conditions can online screening of applicants in the selection process be considered a fair hiring practice? (Meso-level)
- To what extent does the practice of social media screening lead to biased decision-making among hiring managers? (Micro-level)

The following sections provide an overview of the contents of the individual papers within this dissertation, seeking to address these questions.

4 Content of the Cumulative Dissertation

4.1 Paper I: Unpleasant Memories on the Web in Employment Relations: A Ricœurian Approach

This paper critically evaluates the right to be forgotten as an EU policy intervention to protect citizens against third-party access to personal online information. In a cybervetting context, users have increasingly expressed the desire to have unpleasant information about themselves removed from the web (Kim & Kim, 2017). In order to protect users' privacy and to limit companies' access to personal information, the right to be forgotten was established by the European jurisprudence, offering individuals the possibility to have links to web pages containing inadequate, irrelevant, or excessive digital information removed (Kim & Kim, 2017). The contribution of this paper to the discussion on forgetting on the web in a recruitment and selection context is twofold: First, it defends that a denial of access to information on the web by law is an unsuitable approach towards the promotion of human dignity and flourishing in contemporary Human Resource Management practices. Reviewing the work of the French hermeneutic philosopher Paul Ricœur (1913-2005), it demonstrates that memories on the web

cannot be erased completely through a right to be forgotten and that such a right can only provide an illusion of protection for applicants and employees. Thereby, this contribution relies on Ricœur's (2004) concept of *memories kept in reserve*, which postulates that forgetting is not binary, but a matter of more or less, which implies that memories deemed forgotten can reappear at any time. Such a conception of memory neglects any attempt of making a piece of information forgotten forever. Second, in an attempt to make the mere reliance on a right to be forgotten unnecessary in personnel decisions, an approach to the use of online information in selection that shows consistency with the principle of Humanistic Management (Melé, 2016) is proposed. Such an approach is based on Ricœur's (2004) concept of *easy* and *difficult forgiveness*, which inspires organizations to establish and nourish a forgiving and failure-tolerant culture. Furthermore, in employment relations characterized by forgiveness, managers and leaders would act as role models in their daily dealing with (prospective) employees' mistakes. This contribution concludes that enabling applicants and employees to take a qualified stand on their past and look beyond their mistakes is more beneficial to both sides than forgetting enforced by law.

4.2 Paper II: 'Please Remember my Mistakes': Why Organizations Should Keep Job Applicants' Unpleasant Online Information in Reserve

This paper provides a critical analysis of remembering and forgetting negative personal information on the web in an Organizational Memory Studies (OMS) context. In general terms, OMS conceptualize an organization as a collective that stores information (Fiedler & Welpe, 2010). In a hiring scenario, managers often conduct online background checks to obtain additional information on job candidates (Berkelaar, 2017) – thus collecting information that flows into the organization as organizational memories. However, such background checks have led many applicants to reach out to legal and technological solutions that claim to make unpleasant online memories forgotten (Kim & Kim, 2017; Mayer-Schönberger & Cukier, 2013). In this area of tension, this module makes the following contributions to the literature on recruitment and selection, as well as OMS: First, it challenges the antagonism of remembering and forgetting in relation to negative personal information on the web discovered in the hiring process. Second, it questions the effectiveness and social value of approaches aimed at permanently erasing information from the web. Third, it formulates guidance to practitioners for responsible handling of applicant information from the web. To do so, the

OMS literature is reviewed and interpreted through a philosophical lens by turning to the works of the French philosopher Paul Ricœur and the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs. Thereby, the different conceptions of memory in organizations either as "storage bins" (Walsh & Ungson, 1991) or as complex, dynamic, social processes (Corbett, 2000; Feldman & Feldman, 2006) are critically discussed. As both, Ricœur and Halbwachs, contradict the dichotomy between completely forgotten memories and those available for recollection, this paper relies on the concepts of *memories kept in reserve* (Ricœur, 2004), as well as *silent memories* – a Halbwachsian conception of collective memories proposed by Foroughi and Al-Amoudi (2020). It concludes that legally or technologically enforced forgetting on the web fails to provide true protection from a memory in a hiring situation. As remembering in an organization is a complex social process that hardly lets a memory disappear completely, such approaches that aim at erasing unpleasant memories from the web represent only an illusion of protection for job applicants. Thus, a failure-tolerant selection process that makes the erasure of unpleasant memories from the web unnecessary is seen as superior to any attempt to make information from the web forgotten.

4.3 Paper III: Social Media Screening and Procedural Justice: Towards Fairer Use of Social Media in Selection

While the first two papers negate the more general question of whether employers should be denied access to candidates' online information by law, this module provides a systematic review of the literature on legal and ethical issues related to social media screening in the selection process. The central question of this paper is whether social media screening can be considered a procedurally fair selection practice on the organizational level. Thereby, the concept of *procedural justice* is used: It studies the fairness of the process by which decision outcomes are attained (Cropanzano & Ambrose, 2002; Gilliland, 1994; Hartman et al., 1999), as opposed to the fairness of the decision outcomes themselves, which is represented by *distributive justice* (Colquitt et al., 2001; Gilliland, 1993; Hartman et al., 1999). To make an assessment of the procedural justice of social media screening, the legal and ethical issues, along with recommendations for its use discovered in the literature are discussed against Leventhal's (1980) rules of procedural justice: consistency, bias suppression, accuracy, correctability, representativeness, voice, and ethicality. The analysis against these factors reveals that social media screening in itself cannot be considered a procedurally fair assessment

tool: If it is carried out in an arbitrary, unsystematic manner, social media screening opens up opportunities for infringements on privacy, unfair discrimination, and adverse selection based on inaccurate information. Therefore, the article extracts a number of recommendations for practitioners from the literature, which can be summarized in three key recommendations: Firstly, it is important for employers to standardize the social media screening process and to assign clear responsibilities among the involved parties to avoid differential treatment of job candidates. Secondly, the employer needs to ensure that the information obtained through social media screening is relevant to the position that needs to be filled, which can be achieved through a job analysis. Thirdly, it is important to allow for an adequate degree of transparency and two-way communication with applicants and to inform candidates that social media profiles may be checked in the selection process.

4.4 Paper IV: Social Media Discontinuance: A Source of Discrimination?

The fourth paper represents an experimental survey study examining whether qualified job candidates who are not visible on social media are discriminated against in a social media screening scenario. Thereby, this paper addresses one of the key aspects from the previous literature review article, as the importance of potential discrimination of non-users was also highlighted by the referees of the third paper. While the practice of social media screening makes valuable low-cost information about job candidates accessible to employers (Brown & Vaughn, 2011; Chauhan et al., 2013; Jeske & Shultz, 2016), previous research suggests that candidates who do not maintain a social media profile can be at a disadvantage in the hiring process: For example, a research agenda article by Roth et al. (2016) discusses indications that missing social media information about a candidate leads to increased uncertainty about his or her attributes, potentially resulting in the devaluation of that person's skills as compared to others who provide such information. As little empirical research has provided evidence of such outcomes in social media screening, this paper examines whether the absence from social media may effectively result in unfair discrimination. Thereby, the definition of discrimination by Heckman (1998) is used, according to which discrimination occurs when an otherwise identical person is treated differently based on that person's race or gender, whereby race and gender as such do not have any direct effect on productivity. It is thus hypothesized that candidates with no social media presence are less likely to be invited to employment interviews than similarly (H1) or even less qualified (H2) candidates who provide social media

information. The two hypotheses were tested using a 2 x 2 survey experiment examining the likelihood of call-backs for fictitious candidates based on their degree of qualification and their social media presence. For that purpose, two different samples were established, which were comprised of business students (study 1) on the one hand, and more senior members of the workforce (study 2) on the other hand. Contrary to previous findings whereby job-irrelevant information discovered on social media impacts hiring managers' perceptions (Wade et al., 2020), in this study, participants mostly neglected the job-irrelevant social media information in the presence of sufficient job-relevant information. Thus, no discrimination against highly qualified candidates with no social media information could be proved. However, the study provides evidence that a positive or neutral social media profile raises the chances of advancing in the selection process for *highly* qualified candidates, but not for *low-qualified* candidates. This observation may be explained by *negativity bias* (see Becton et al., 2019), or even a *halo/horn effect* (Holzbach, 1978; Shin & Ki, 2019; Turkmenoglu, 2020). Hence, the results in this article give rise to a number of recommendations: On the one hand, employers are advised to structure the social media screening process in a way that avoids differential treatment of candidates. On the other hand, it is recommended that applicants provide as comprehensive professional information (on the web) as possible to make employer screening of their non-professional online appearances unnecessary. Furthermore, the findings invite future research to investigate the effects that may have led to the different outcomes for highly and less qualified candidates, as well as the differences between the two samples more in depth.

5   Conclusion

Taking the findings from the four papers altogether, it is to conclude that online background checks on applicants do not represent an irresponsible selection practice per se. Rather, their ethicality depends on the way the online screening is executed and how hiring organizations deal with possible past mistakes discovered about an applicant on the web. Conclusions and recommendations for responsible use of online information in the hiring process can thus be formulated on the macro-, meso-, and micro-level:

On the *macro-level*, this dissertation argues that a legal policy like the right to be forgotten does not represent an appropriate solution to handle unpleasant memories on the web. Rather, it can only provide an illusion of protection for applicants and employees because it is

impossible to enforce a complete erasure of unpleasant information on the web. In an environment in which online information gets shared and copied across different platforms by a variety of people, it is impossible to guarantee a complete erasure of traces from the web and from people's minds, neither can law-making effectively forbid anyone the mere search for information. If unwanted information is retrieved during the search process, or if employees are later confronted with the behaviours they wanted to conceal during the selection process, this may lead to even worse consequences. As a result, such an attempt to protect applicants' privacy may end up in a distortion of the employee-employer relationship, as it establishes a climate of distrust from the very beginning. While in this dissertation, an approach to personnel decision-making based on forgiveness is promoted that should make legal and technological erasure mechanisms unnecessary, one limitation exists here: In extreme cases like content published on social media without a person's consent, identity theft, or libel, a policy like the right to be forgotten can protect victims from harm.

On the *organizational level*, it is concluded that the ethicality of applicants' online screening strongly depends on the way the screening is organized and how possible unpleasant information about candidates is handled. The preconditions for a responsible online screening begin with the organizational culture that allows people to make mistakes, address them openly, and learn from them. By evaluating candidates beyond possible negative online information, online background checks can be used in the sense of a responsible HR practice that benefits the company and its (potential) employees in the long term. While the careless and arbitrary use of online screenings results in a variety of negative consequences for both, hiring organizations and employees, the online screening of applicants should be designed in a fair and just manner. As a helpful contemporary tool in identifying the right job candidate and avoiding irresponsible employee behaviour, social media screening can be considered a socially acceptable practice under the following circumstances: It has to be applied systematically, consistently, transparently, and with a careful eye towards the skills and qualifications needed for the position to be filled.

The *micro-level* implications and recommendations in this dissertation mostly concern individual hiring managers, as well as applicants. The implications for hiring managers, again, start with the proposition that organizations would benefit from adopting a failure-tolerant culture: Through leading by example and exercising forgiveness, individual managers and leaders can actively shape a climate of forgiveness in their daily actions. This also includes the

manner in which negative information is addressed in the hiring process. Through active engagement and two-way communication with candidates and employees, managers are better able to evaluate candidates in light of their online history, rather than through mindless scrolling of social media profiles. However, one limitation also exists concerning the extent to which managers should forgive applicants and employees: Some companies bear an increased responsibility towards their stakeholders when making personnel decisions in order to reduce the risk of irresponsible or even criminal behaviour. Therefore, managers may only have a limited capacity to forgive past mistakes. At the same time, hiring managers need to be mindful of issues that may cause harm to the candidate in the context of a social media screening process, such as privacy invasion, discrimination and biases. In this context, paper IV examined whether the absence of a candidate's social media profile leads to unfair discrimination in the selection process. However, in this dissertation, no proof of discrimination against highly qualified candidates without any social media profile was detected. As study participants relied mainly on job-related criteria when evaluating candidates for the job opening, the present dissertation suggests an already responsible and mindful evaluation of social media information among the two samples. Nevertheless, this research gives reasons to look out for unconscious rater biases, thus recommending to sensitize hiring managers toward such issues, for example in the form of trainings. Conversely, the study results imply that when applying for a position, applicants should be aware that their online presence could be viewed by the potential employer. Papers I and II show that any attempt to remove unpleasant information from online records to improve one's reputation does not represent an adequate approach to handling such negative memories. Instead, they should be taken as an opportunity to learn and grow. Whether there exists any negative piece of information on a candidate on the web, or if the candidate does not disclose any private information on the web at all, one key recommendation to applicants is to provide as neat and complete professional information as possible: A comprehensive and professionally-looking (online) appearance may even make it less likely that the employer turns to unprofessional sites to search for additional information on candidates. Professional social networks like LinkedIn may thus be used to complement applicants' traditional application documents.

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Abstracts in the Cumulative Dissertation

Unpleasant Memories on the Web in Employment Relations:

A Ricoeurian Approach

André Habisch   Pierre Kletz   Eva Wack

Abstract

Cybervetting has become common practice in personnel decision-making processes of organizations. While it represents a quick and inexpensive way of obtaining additional information on employees and applicants, it gives rise to a variety of legal and ethical concerns. To limit companies' access to personal information, a right to be forgotten has been introduced by the European jurisprudence. By discussing the notion of forgetting from the perspective of French hermeneutic philosopher Paul Ricoeur, the present article demonstrates that both, companies and employees, would be harmed if access to online information on applicants and current employees would be denied. Consistent with a Humanistic Management approach that promotes human dignity and flourishing in the workplace, this article proposes guidance for the responsible handling of unpleasant online memories in personnel decision-making processes, thereby following Ricoeur's notion of forgetting as "kept in reserve". Enabling applicants and employees to take a qualified stand on their past is more beneficial to both sides than a right to be forgotten that is questionable in several respects.

Keywords

'Please Remember my Mistakes': Why Organizations Should Keep Job Applicants' Unpleasant Online Information in Reserve

Eva Wack   André Habisch

Abstract

When hiring new employees, managers often conduct online background checks on applicants. This practice has led many applicants to reach out to legal and technological solutions that render unpleasant online memories forgotten. With this article, we question the effectiveness and social value of approaches aimed at permanently erasing information from the web. Furthermore, we provide practitioners with guidance toward responsible handling of applicant information from the web. In this conceptual article, we review the literature on organizational memory and interpret it through a philosophical lens by turning to the works of the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur and the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs. We conclude that legally or technologically enforced forgetting on the web fails to provide true protection from a memory in a hiring situation, as remembering in an organization is a complex social process that hardly lets a memory disappear completely. As a result, legal and technological approaches that aim at erasing unpleasant memories from the web represent only an illusion of protection for job applicants. Alternatively, we propose a selection process that makes the erasure of unpleasant memories from the web unnecessary. Previous literature on organizational memory has already criticized a purely mechanistic view of memory in organizations, by which memories are treated as objects that can be retrieved and deleted on demand. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first article that establishes a connection between organizational memory and the use of online information in selection.

Keywords

Employment relations; failure tolerance; organizational culture; organizational memory; philosophy; recruitment and selection

Social Media Screening and Procedural Justice: Towards Fairer Use of Social Media in Selection

Eva Vosen

Abstract

Companies have started using social media for screening applicants in the selection process. Thereby, they enter a low-cost source of information on applicants, which potentially allows them to hire the right person on the job and avoid irresponsible employee behaviour and negligent hiring lawsuits. However, a number of ethical issues are associated with this practice, which give rise to the question of the fairness of social media screening. This article aims to provide an assessment of the procedural justice of social media screening and to articulate recommendations for a fairer use of social media in the selection process. To achieve this, a systematic literature review of research articles pertaining to social media screening has been conducted. Thereby, the benefits and ethical issues relating to social media screening, as well as recommendations for its use have been extracted and discussed against Leventhal's (1980) rules of procedural justice. It turns out that without clear guidelines for recruiters, social media screening cannot be considered procedurally fair, as it opens up way too many opportunities for infringements on privacy, unfair discrimination, and adverse selection based on inaccurate information. However, it is possible to enhance the fairness of this practice by establishing clear policies and procedures to standardize the process.

Social Media Discontinuance: A Source of Discrimination?

Eva Wack   André Habisch

Abstract

Social media platforms have presented individuals with sheer endless possibilities for networking, creating and exchanging information. Yet, overwhelming social demands, privacy concerns, and even a lack of access to new technologies have led many users to discontinue social media usage. Simultaneously, companies screen and select applicants on social media. As previous research suggests that employers may view missing social media information with suspicion, we ask if non-users of social media face disadvantages in hiring: Are they discriminated against? In this study, we employ a 2 x 2 experimental survey design to verify whether absence from social media may result in discriminatory behaviour towards job applicants. We conduct the study with two samples: The first comprises business students, and the second consists of more senior members of the workforce. Although this study does not confirm discrimination against non-users of social media in the selection process, it adds to the literature in two respects: Firstly, it shows differences in call-back between highly and less qualified candidates as a result of social media information. Secondly, it suggests unintentional, systemic rater biases. Against these findings, we formulate recommendations for applicants and employers and give recommendations for future research in this field.

Keywords

Decision-making; selection-methods; social networks