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Involvement of Social Media Profiles in the Hiring Process

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Introduction

Abstract

In recent years, social media has become a popular tool in the recruitment and selection process for employers. Many companies see it as a more cost efficient screening process than traditional background checks and interviews. However, its use comes with a greater risk for the company and potential applicants in terms of privacy violation and discrimination. This article will examine the rising popularity of the use of social media in the recruitment and selection process. In addition, it will explore the role social media plays in the hiring process from the viewpoint of employees in their respective companies versus undergraduate students who are among the applicant pool.

The Law

“It shall be an unlawful employment practice for an employer to fail or refuse to hire or to discharge any individual, or otherwise to discriminate against any individual with respect to his compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment, because of such individual’s race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.”

— Title VII, Civil Rights Act of 1964

“An employer may not require, coerce, or request an employee to: (A) disclose the login information for a protected personal online account; (B) disclose the content of the account, except that an employer may request an employee to add the employer to, or not remove the employer from, the set of persons to which the employee grants access to the content; (C) alter the settings of the online account in a manner that makes the login information for, or content of, the account more accessible to others; or (D) access the account in the presence of the employer in a manner that enables the employer to observe the login information for or content of the account.”

— Employee and Student Online Privacy Protection Act

Research Questions

Do recruiting policies align with applicant’s belief that recruiters use social media profiles in their hiring decisions?

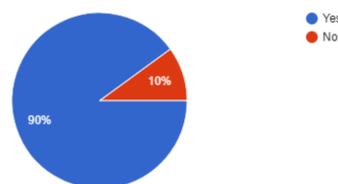
Can recruiters still view an applicant’s social media profile if the profile is private?

Results

Survey Results

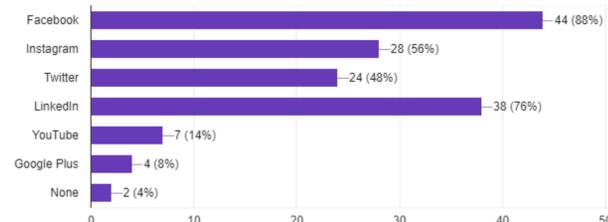
Do you think that job recruiters view these profiles before making hiring decisions?

50 responses



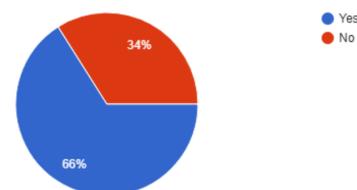
Which of these profiles do you think job recruiters view before making hiring decisions? (check all that apply)

50 responses



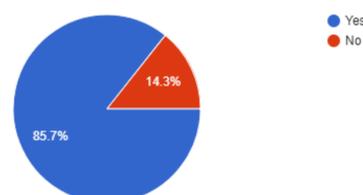
Do you think that job recruiters can still view your profile even though it is private?

50 responses



Do you think job recruiters consider posts you are tagged in for their hiring decision?

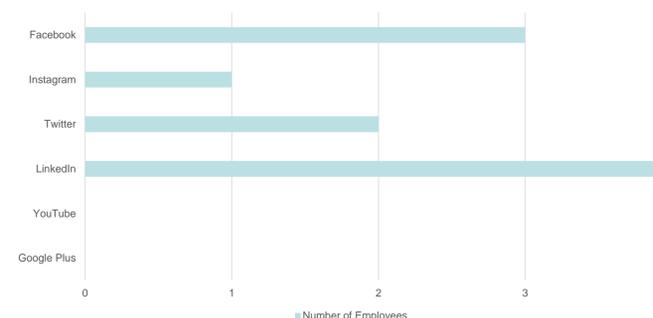
49 responses



Interview Results

4 out of 4 employees reported viewing at least 1 of the 6 social media profiles listed below during the hiring process.

What social media outlets does your company look at?



1 out of 4 employees reported still being able to view an applicant’s profile despite privacy settings.

3 out of 4 employees reported to consider posts applicant’s are tagged in.

Methods

To gain insight on the applicant pool’s viewpoint of the use of social media in the hiring process, I created a thirteen question survey using Google Forms. Google Forms allows you to distribute the link for your survey to any email and immediately generates charts of your survey results. I began the distribution process by emailing the surveys out to all of the student’s in my classes. After this method proved to be ineffective to reach my target of fifty responses, I decided to take an alternate route. Thus, I began approaching students directly in my residence hall and the library to ask if they could take a few minutes to fill out my survey. This method proved to be much more effective, so I continued with this approach until all of my surveys were filled out.

To gain insight on the practices of employees involved in the hiring processes of their respective companies, I put together a collection of sixteen interview questions to shed some light on real-life company procedures. To complete the interviews, I reached out to four employees I knew that work in a variety of industries who are all involved in hiring applicants that were willing to sit down with me.

Conclusion

As a result of my research, I have found that applicant’s may not be fully aware of employee practices involving social media profiles in the hiring process. For example, while 90% of applicants were aware that recruiters view their profiles during the hiring process, there is still 10% of the applicant pool I surveyed that was unaware of this. This fact is substantial since all of the employees I interviewed reported viewing at least one of applicant’s profiles.

Subsequently, I found that a lot of my research findings fell into a grey area involving this particular topic. Since social media is relatively new, laws regarding using social media to screen applicants are still developing. For example, the Employee and Student Online Privacy Protection Act protects the content on employee’s profiles similar to privacy settings. However, one of the four employees I interviewed reported still being able to find a way to see private profiles. In addition, the Title VII Civil Rights Act of 1964 states that an employer cannot refuse to hire someone based off of protected characteristics that may be available through social media profiles. Since three out of four of the employees I interviewed reported to view social media profiles before interviews with applicants, this leaves a lot of room for bias and discrimination before even meeting applicants, It is here where companies can find themselves facing discrimination lawsuits from applicants.