

AN ANALYSIS OF THE INFLUENCE OF THE WRITTEN COMMUNICATION QUALITY OF THE SOCIAL NETWORKING SITE COMMENTS MADE BY OTHERS ON THE RECRUITERS' EVALUATION OF JOB CANDIDATES

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ABSTRACT

The information that is posted to social networking sites as has had many effects on the personal and professional lives of the people that use them. However, much of the studies that investigate these effects have focused on the information posted by the people that own the social networking site profile while little attention has been given to how social networking site users are affected by the information posted by others. This paper presents a conceptual model and proposed study to investigate the effects that the quality of the written communication made by others has on the perceived written communication skills of the social networking site profile owner by job recruiters and their desirability as a potential employee.

Keywords: Social Networking, Written Communication Skills, Employee Desirability

INTRODUCTION

The Internet has changed our daily lives and the way we communicate with other people with the use of social networking sites (SNS). SNS such as Facebook, Twitter, Google+, and LinkedIn are characterized by interactivity, user-generated content, real-time updates, rapid growth, and integration with mobile devices and existing websites [8]. Forming new relationships and reinforcing existing relationships are also among the major purposes of SNS [8]. The number of companies using SNS has increased tremendously over the past couple of years [8]. Organizations utilize the virtual communities to enhance their relationships with key stakeholders and the public at large [9].

Facebook is the most frequently used SNS, with over 901 million monthly users and 526 million daily active users [11]. Social network users provide personal information on a profile page and can upload photographs, videos, or brief status updates and connect with other users on the platform [11]. In addition, Facebook contains job search applications, such as LinkUp (companies can post job offerings), Inside Job, and virtual business cards [11]. However, the main purpose of Facebook is to give social network users the power to share information and connect users to one another.

In contrast, LinkedIn differs from Facebook because it is used for more professional purposes [11]. LinkedIn has over 161 million members and over 2 million companies are represented on the platform, including all Fortune 500 companies [11]. Specifically, LinkedIn allows members to create a profile similar to a curriculum vitae based on their professional experience, education, and affiliations to connect with other professionals they know [12]. The network of contact is used to maintain communication, trade information, and refer each other [12].

By actively participating in these social networking communities, users intentionally or unintentionally reveal personal information. Whether sharing information about themselves or creating connections with

others, social network users reveal clues about themselves, which can be linked to their identity [13]. The majorities of social network users recognize the public nature of these online communities and admit that others would be able to find out who they are from the information disclosed online [13]. As a result, the personal information presented in these online communities can create opportunities and challenges for job candidates and human resource (HR) professionals focused on recruiting [10].

HR professionals examine the available information on the Internet from SNS such as Facebook to gather further insight on the job applicant. The information on SNS may provide the HR professional further evidence related to the accuracy of the information presented on an applicant's resume [3]. According to the study conducted by [1], 68% of employers have hired or rejected applicants based on information found on individual SNS, and 69% of recruiters have rejected an applicant based on content found on SNS. Furthermore, a study by [2] found that the material posted on the job candidates SNS profile affected both their employee desirability (desire of the rater to grant an interview or hire the candidate) and the starting salary that the candidate would be offered if they were hired.

It is not just what is communicated on a SNS that can get them removed from job consideration, but how it is communicated as well. In fact, poor communication skills in SNS postings have been reported as a reason to exclude a candidate from further job consideration [3]. Since the majority of communication on SNS profiles is done via postings, we can assume that the communication skills most evaluated by the HR managers with respect to job desirability are written communication skills. Written communication is defined as the ability to clearly express information in writing and has been shown to be an important factor in hiring decisions [7] [6].

Furthermore, the way other's perceive us based on our SNS is not entirely dependent on the data that we post ourselves. A study by [15] examined the effects of wall postings by others on an SNS user's profile and the physical attractiveness of an SNS user's friends had on the perceived attractiveness of the SNS profile owner. Their findings indicated that male SNS profile owners were deemed more attractive when friends placed comments on their profiles that cast certain moral behaviors in a negative light, while female SNS owners were perceived as less attractive. Furthermore, the SNS owner's physical attractiveness was affected by the physical attractiveness in an assimilative pattern.

A gap seems to exist in the literature with respect to how the quality of the written communication observed in the posts on a job candidate's SNS profile affects their job desirability. Therefore, the research question addressed in this paper is: How does the quality of the written communication found in comments made by those other than the person that is the owner of a SNS profile affects the perceptions of the written communication skills that the SNS owner has and the SNS owner's employee desirability? The goal of this paper is to present a conceptual model and a proposed study to answer this question. The remainder of this paper will present the conceptual model guiding the research, discuss the proposed study, and then conclude with some final remarks and directions for future research.

CONCEPTUAL MODEL

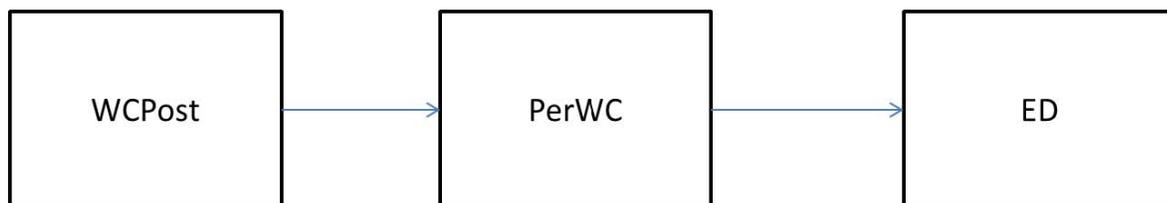
An increasing number of hiring managers and recruiters are using SNS to gather additional information on job applicants. In 2008, a survey found that 56% of employers had never used SNS as an HR tool; by 2010, over 80% of HR managers surveyed used or planned to use SNS in the hiring process [5]. HR managers have indicated that using SNS to screen job applicants is both an acceptable and increasingly important task to screen potential employees [4]. HR managers are looking for content on SNS that would allow them to make better hiring decisions. Part of this process is to review the information found on SNS profiles. These profiles contain written communication posted by individual users such as wall posting, comments, and status updates. However, those managers that give a cursory overview to

information posted on SNS may be more apt to consider this information to be representative of the person who owns the profile regardless of the information's context. Therefore, the written communication posted on SNS of the job applicant can affect various human resource decisions, including hiring, training, promotion, and termination [3].

As stated earlier, the purpose of this research is not to evaluate the affect that the written communication skills of the SNS owner has on his or her job desirability, but rather the written communication skills of others. As [15] has demonstrated the things that other's post on an SNS user's profile has an effect on how others perceive them. More importantly, they showed that the people evaluating the SNS owner on a characteristic (perceived physical attractiveness, in the case of their study) tended to incorporate the owner into the characteristics exhibited by the people that associated with them on their profile (the perceived physical attractiveness of their friends). Our investigation will investigate if a similar assimilative pattern exists with respect to written communication. In other words, will an SNS user be seen as having poor written communication skills if the people that post on their profile exhibit poor written communication skills in their posts? Figure 1 gives an overview of the influence of on the quality of posts to a user's SNS on the recruiters' evaluation of that user. Persons in the SNS profile owner's network post status updates, comments, or wall postings. We propose that the written communication skills exhibited in the posts made by others on an SNS user's profile (WCPPost) has a direct relationship to the perceptions that job recruiters have of the SNS profile owners written communication skills (PerWC). Prior literature has already established a relationship between (PerWC) and the employee desirability of the SNS profile owner (ED).

FIGURE 1

Conceptual model to examine the impact of the written communication quality of posts to a SNS profile made by others on the SNS profile owner



Based on the conceptual model, the following is hypothesized.

H1: Lower levels of WCPPost will have a negative impact on PerWC.

H2: Lower levels of PerWC will have a negative impact on ED.

These hypotheses will be evaluated in the study described in the next section.

DISCUSSION OF PROPOSED STUDY

This paper presents a proposed study to determine the influence of written communication posted on SNS on the recruiters' evaluation of job candidates. An experimental study would be conducted using a number of current recruiters and HR managers from various organizations that will be partially based on the study of the influence of SNS on the evaluation of job candidates by [2]. For the experiment, the research participants would be given a hypothetical SNS profile that consists of written comments from the SNS profile's owner and those of persons who are not the SNS profile owner. For each profile, the written communication of the SNS profile owner will be consistent with the standards of proper written

communication. The comments made by others will fall into groups that reflect one of the following: (a) poor communication skills and (b) good communication skills. For the purposes of this study, the messages exhibiting both good and poor communication skills will attempt to relay the same message. However the messages exhibiting good communication skills will adhere to the standards of proper written communication and the messages that exhibit poor communications skills will relay the message using a combination of internet abbreviations and slang obtained from urbandictionary.com [14] along with poor grammar.

As an illustration, take the example messages shown below. The first message is an example of proper written communication, while the second message is what we propose to use to exemplify poor written communication skills.

- Message 1: Thanks for everything. I had a very good time! I will see you later.
- Message 2: Thx for everything had a hella good time!! CUL8R

For each profile, the hiring managers would rate the applicant's desirability by having them rate first the communications skills of the SNS profile's owner and then their likelihood to hire the person depicted in the SNS profile on a 9-point Likert scale. We can then compare the results from the two groups using an ANOVA procedure to see if a statistically significant difference exists between the two groups. This, in turn, will let us know if the communication skills exhibited in the poor posts had an impact on the hypothetical SNS owner's PerWC and ED.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper is to present a conceptual model and proposed outline for a study to examine the effects that the written quality of the comments that others make on a SNS user's profile have on the perceived written communications ability and employee desirability of the owner of the SNS profile. It is our hopes to be able to present the preliminary findings of our study at the Western DSI Conference in April. We feel that this study will make a contribution to academia as it will fill a gap in the literature. While we found a study that investigated the influence that the posting of others had on an SNS user, it did not address written communication or employee desirability. Furthermore, we also feel that this study will make a contribution to practice in that it will better help SNS owners understand the effects that the posts may have on their employability so that they may take actions to mitigate any ill effects if they do exist.

This study is just the beginning in what we feel is a fruitful stream of research in this area. Future research could be done to examine the potential effects that the posts of others have on factors outside of perceived written communication skills. Regardless, given the widespread adoption and growing influence of SNS in the personal and professional lives of people around the globe, it is our opinion that any efforts to try to understand the effects of SNS use will be well spent.

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