

Social Media Influence on Candidate Selection: A Model

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Abstract

Traditionally, resumes and cover letters have formed an important part of the input into decisions made by recruiters about job seekers. Research has shown that recruiters infer characteristics about candidates from their resumes, and use those inferences to make decisions about employability [4]. Given that participation of people in social media sites is growing exponentially [23], and the role of social media data's input into decision making about candidates has been increasing, this study lays the foundations to study the relationship between social media presence and the impact of that on the impressions formed by recruiters.

INTRODUCTION

Recruiting of job candidates is based on primary and secondary sources of information about the candidate. Information from primary sources is derived from direct contact such as interviews with the candidate. Secondary sources of information include a) information submitted by the candidate in the form of cover letters and resumes, b) data available about the candidates from references, and information about the candidate on the Internet.

Research questions that have been studied include the personality traits that are sought by recruiters, and how well those traits can be inferred from primary and secondary sources of information. There is a general set of traits that are considered attractive in future employees. According to Judge and Cable, the Big Five personality traits (neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness) generally were related to the candidate's preferred organization culture preferences [11]. The sought after traits can vary according to the job description. For example, according to Cole et al., conscientiousness correlated with employability ratings for conventional jobs (e.g., accounting) while extraversion was most associated with employability ratings for enterprising jobs (e.g., marketing) [4]. More recently, according to Thomas Friedman, traits sought by Google are learning ability, leadership, intellectual humility, ownership, and expertise in the field, with expertise being the least important attribute [8].

This study focuses on the research question related to how secondary information provided, advertently or inadvertently, by the candidate, is perceived by recruiters, and what personality traits are deduced from that information.

The role of secondary information is particularly important due to the recent rise in availability of social media information. Social networking has become a growing input provider into candidate selection along with résumés and cover letters [9]. Ninety two percent of businesses now use social media as a recruitment tool [10]. Data from the recruiting platform Jobvite shows that 93% of hiring managers will review a candidate's social profile before making a hiring decision [6]. The proposed hypotheses center around of how social media may be impacting recruiters' perceptions of job candidates.

The expected contribution from this study lies in the fact that this information is useful to job candidates wishing to create an online presence that showcase the personality traits that recruiters value. The hypotheses proposed take into account the possible impact of quantity and quality of social media presence on recruiters with varying characteristics. Hypotheses will also include possible value of some of the prominent social media sites in the context of job search based on which sites are more amenable to showcasing desirable traits.

BACKGROUND

Impression Formation and Job Recruitment

In this section, we highlight traditional models of impression formation as well as the role of ePersona in potentially affecting the impression formation process. In existing models of impression formation, the *perceiver* is the person forming an impression, while the *target* is the person about whom impression is formed. People form impressions about others based on *primary* (or direct) and *secondary* (or indirect) sources of information [25]. Primary sources of information include personal interactions (face to face or otherwise) including both verbal and behavioral cues. In the case of recruiting by corporations, secondary sources of information are usually available before primary sources of information. Searchable digital information about a person on the Web as *ePersona*, and the impression formed about the person based on the perception as *ePerception* [25].

Traditional models are grouped into two main categories: trait-based and stereotype-based. In the *trait-based models*, such as Asch's Configural Model and Anderson's weighted-average model, various traits of the target come together in the perceiver's mind to form a unified impression [2]. On the other hand, *stereotype based models* theorize that people rely on social categories or prototypes or stereotypes to form impressions since stereotyping reduces the amount of information to which perceivers must attend. Using a stereotype, a perceiver may infer the person's personality attributes without having to attend carefully to the person's behavior [22].

In the context of impressions formed by recruiters of job candidates, Macan and Dipboye studied the first impressions that a college recruiter forms, and the impact of those impressions on assessing and recruiting applicants. They found that interviewers' pre-interview impressions are significantly related to their evaluations of the applicant's performance in the interview. They offer many explanations for this ranging from the fact that interviewers' conduct of the interview could be biased in the direction of confirming their pre-interview impressions, to the fact that students with good grades, work experience, honors, and other impressive qualifications did a better job in answering the questions of the interviewer [17].

According to Rynes and Gerhart, the most frequently mentioned determinants of fit of a candidate to a job were either job-related coursework or experience, and desirable personal characteristics such as articulateness, positive personal appearance, and good general communication skills [18]. According to Kinicki et al., hiring manager impressions of applicants shaped their recommendations more than did the applicants' resume credentials [14]. According to Blackman, unstructured interviews allow for the applicant's personality characteristics to more readily manifest themselves as the applicant's behavior is less scripted, and that leads to a more

accurate personality assessment [1]. Kristof-Brown concluded that recruiters discriminate between applicants' Person-Job and Person-Organization fit during early interviews when making decisions to hire candidates [16].

In the context of our study, we hypothesize that there is a need for candidates to make a good impression going into the interview, and that desirable personal characteristics that may be evident from social networking activity of applicants could be important inputs into the candidate selection process.

Data from Social Media in the Context of Impression Formation

The Web has emerged as the primary source of information for forming impressions about people. In the past few years, the rapid growth in participation of people in social media sites has led to an explosion in all kinds of personal and professional information available at a recruiter's fingertips. The question is how these new sources of information fit into the existing impression formation theories.

Following are the key characteristics of information from the Web and in particular, social media sites [25].

- **Sources of information:** These include personal homes pages, social and professional networking sites, organizational home pages, news articles, tweets, Facebook posts, blogs and so on. For instance, a study related to perceptions of e-businesses found that perceptions of flaws on a Website influenced users' perception of quality [Everard and Galletta, 2005-6]. Social media sites may themselves have attributes and positive or negative connotations such that presence or absence on a particular site may lead to an impact on the impression formed.
- **Ease of aggregation:** If a job candidate has a fairly unique name, a recruiter can use a search engine to bring up results about the candidate, and they can be quickly assimilated in the impression formation process that occurs during the Web search process. Given that many of the social media sites carry profile pictures, it easier to collate about the candidate. Even if the name of the job candidate is not unique, a combination of the name, picture and past associations can be used to triangulate and identify search results about the candidate.
- **Information Richness:** The richness (text, images, video, and audio) and depth of information now available online far exceeds the kinds of secondary information available throughout most of history via traditional publishing venues or public records. The richness of information can provide a lot of depth into the analysis of a fit of a candidate in the context of a recruiting search. This is particularly true in employability ratings for enterprising jobs where a recorded speech can give an idea of the public persona of the candidate. In case of certain professions, detailed reviews about individuals may be available online too.
- **Indefinite Persistence:** Candidates can control the persistence of the information about themselves using some privacy controls [26], but there are some pieces of information that cannot be erased easily from the Web. The commonly used social media outlets include Facebook, Twitter, Google+, Instagram and LinkedIn. Candidates can control

the extent of their presence on social networks which typically have privacy settings that could include limits who can connect with them, what content can be seen by whom, restrictions on ages of users by connecting to them, location of user, etc. Some social media sites provide more micro level privacy settings. For example, in some cases, the audience for each post can be controlled. This has led to court cases in Europe for the protection of the “right to be forgotten” [21].

- **Nature of Data:** Generally, candidates can share information in social media such as work and education, places that have lived, contact information, family and other relationships, links to other sites, their opinions, etc. Traditionally, Facebook has been used to share information that is more personal in nature, and LinkedIn is used for professional purposes. This is particularly relevant in stereotype-based assessment where a recruiter may infer the candidate’s personality attributes without having to attend carefully to the candidate’s behavior.

Related studies focus on characteristics and motivations of social media participants. One study looked at what motivates people to participate in social media sites. Lim et al, [15] compared motives such as identity based, bond based, and comparison based, and concluded that communal attachments play an instrumental role in motivating people to participate in social media sites. Zhao and Rosson reported that using Twitter to stay aware of details about others’ personal lives, interests, and current moods create a feeling of connectedness [30]. Thus, participation of a job candidate in a forum such as Twitter may be indicative of the need to collaborate and connect. Yoo et al. studied social influences on Twitter user behavior, and concluded that social conformity positively affects the frequent use of Twitter [29]. Parice et al. suggest that employees with diverse Twitter networks tend to generate better ideas due to exposure to new people and ideas [20]. Cheung et al. studied the differences in impacts of consumer actions versus opinions on social media sites on consumer purchase decisions [3]. Such a difference could potentially exist between the impact of a candidate’s actual accomplishments versus information about their opinions and interests on recruiting decisions. Utz concluded that information on social media sites generated by others as opposed to information generated by oneself had stronger effects, and qualified the effects of self-generated information [24].

Clearly, the Web, and in particular, social media sites that bring focus to candidate’s personalities introduce new factors that may require researchers to revisit the hypotheses validated in prior models based on traditional information sources and communication media that predate the Web. To examine the validity of the assertion, we develop a research model that aims to answer some of the questions about the impact of the Web, and in particular, social media information, on impression formation in the context of assessing job candidates.

SOCIAL MEDIA IMPRESSION FORMATION RESEARCH MODEL

Recognition of the uniqueness of the Web can be seen in emerging studies of impression formation in the digital age [12] [13] [19] [27]. In this paper, we focus on the role of recruiters as observers of social media information, and impressions formed without personal interactions. We believe that with the emergence of the Web, traditional models of impression formation in the field of human resources will have to be updated to accommodate for factors unique to this new paradigm.

Recruiters can evaluate candidates from social media sites in a variety of ways. Typically, recruiters get resumes from potential candidates who can also provide references. Recruiters can also search social media sites such as LinkedIn for candidates with a specific skill set or background. Recruiters then do a supplemental web search of candidates for additional information. Based on the uniqueness of the candidate and his or her background, it may be easy or hard to find information. If data about the candidate can be identified, the recruiters then read about the candidate's activities on the social media sites. The recruiters then form an opinion about the candidate, and made a decision about whether to follow up with an interview call.

The paper proposes a model that details the various aspects of how recruiters go through the impression formation process while evaluating candidates from social media sites. There are two actors in this model: *Recruiters* and *Candidates*. The recruiter's role is to perform a search of desirable candidates that match a particular *Job Description* and accumulate a list of top candidates.

The inputs to a recruiter about a candidate are as follows:

- *Resume*: a brief written account of personal, educational, and professional qualifications and experience
- *References*: Individuals agreeable to provide testimony about a candidate
- *Social Media Information*: Information gleaned from social media sites

The impression formation process takes these inputs and amalgamates them with the characteristics of the recruiter themselves as well as his or her technical skills. The result is an impression of the candidate that is reliant not only on the traditional resume but also on the social media presence of the candidate. Figure 1 shows a synopsis of the model.

Figure 2 shows the various kinds of information that can be gathered from social media sites. The information from the various sites can be manipulated and targeted to appropriate audiences to create the "right" online presence. Dutta describes the various possible dimensions of ePersona creation. In his "Finding the Right Presence" model, he describes the following dimensions [7] :

- Social circles and activity
- Professional connections
- Ideas and opinions
- Extra-curricular professional activity (e.g., participation in professional associations)
- Testimonials by professional connections
- Endorsements of skills by professional connections

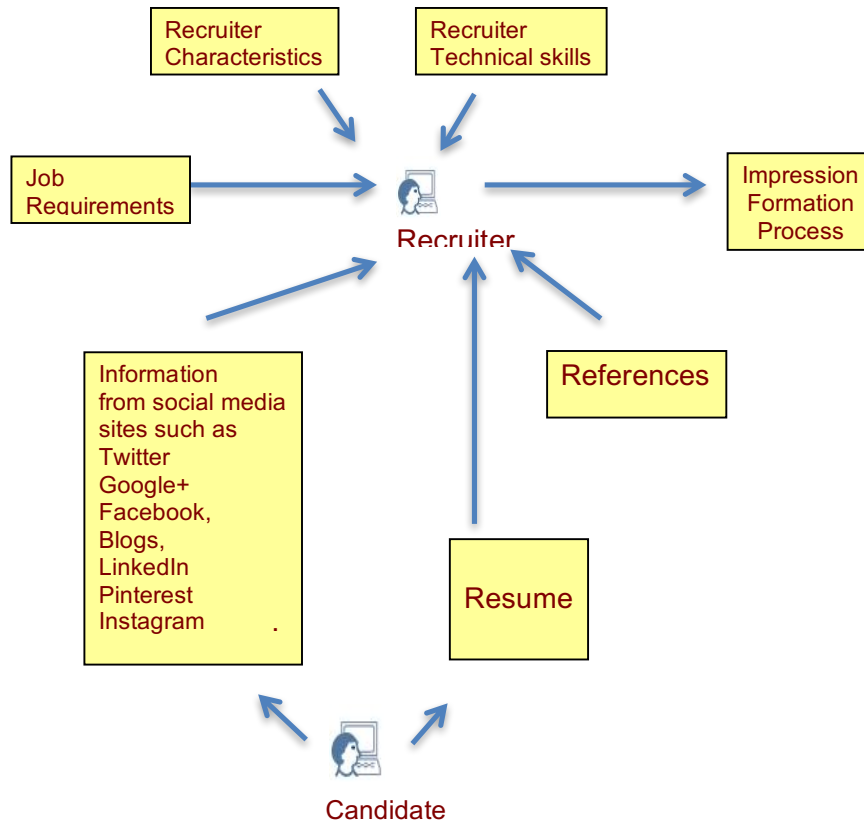


Figure 1.
Impression Formation Process of Job Candidates by Recruiters

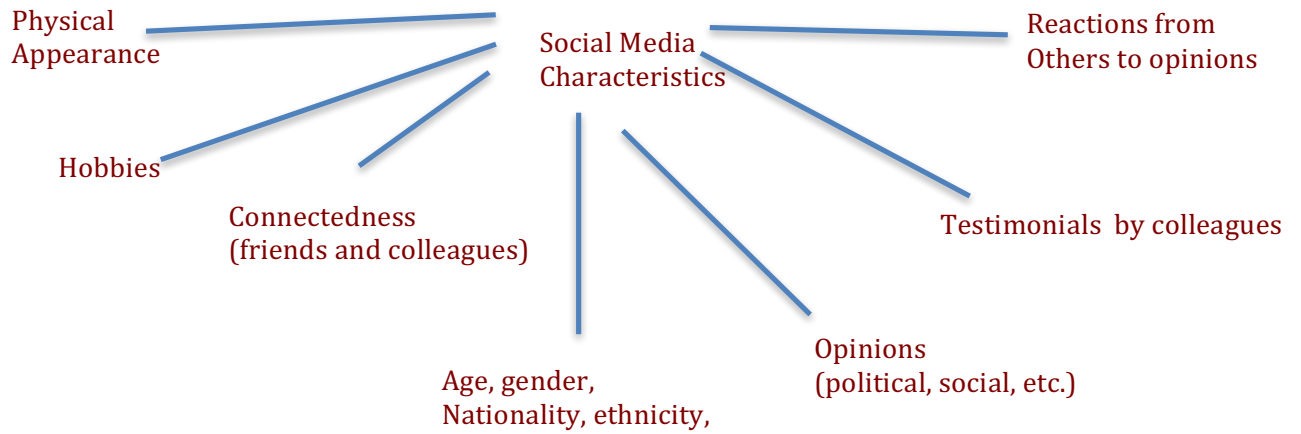


Figure 2.
Social Media Characteristics

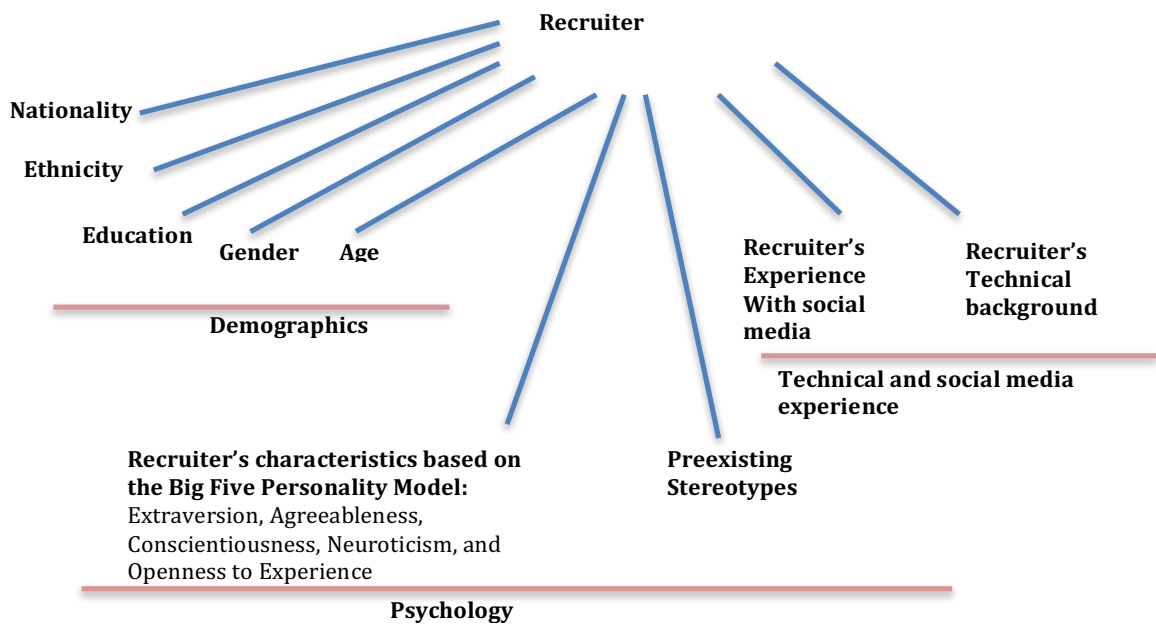


Figure 3.
Factors Impacting Recruiters

Figure 3 shows that recruiters, themselves, have characteristics that could affect their impression formation processes. Recruiter demographics such as age, gender, etc. could play a role. The recruiter's personality is another factor. The recruiter's presence and experience with social media could also influence them. Last, but not the least, the recruiter's pre-existing stereotypes could affect the process too.

The research model provides a framework for empirical investigation of the impact of the social media presence on impression formation. The four main research areas in this model are –

- (a) How does presence on social media itself impact impression formation?
- (b) Are various social media sites perceived differently by recruiters?
- (c) Do endorsements and testimonials affect impression formation?
- (d) Does quantity of social media activity in terms of connectedness affect impression formation?

Seven hypotheses are proposed to address each of the above research areas. H1 addresses the question about whether presence on social media matters. Hypotheses 2, 3 and 4 tease out the effect of presence on professional sites such as LinkedIn versus more social sites such as Facebook, and the presence on both types of sites is also taken into account. Hypotheses 5, 6 and 7 focus on LinkedIn (the commonly accepted social media site for professional purposes) to research the impact on connectedness, endorsements and testimonials.

H1: Positive impression is formed by absence on social media.

H2: Positive impression is formed by presence on social media such as Facebook and Instagram.

H3: Positive impression is formed by presence on social media such as LinkedIn and Twitter (with posts of technical nature)

H4: Positive impression is formed by presence on social media such as LinkedIn and Twitter (with posts of technical nature), as well as presence on social media such as Facebook and Instagram, and leads to follow up interview calls

H5: Positive impression is formed by presence of testimonials on LinkedIn.

H6: Positive impression is formed by evidence of connectedness on LinkedIn

H7: Positive impression is formed by endorsements from others on LinkedIn

EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

The experiment described below is designed to validate our theoretical model, and test the hypotheses. Four ePersonas of candidates A, B, C and D will be created (See Table 1). ePersona A has no social media presence. B is present on Facebook and Instagram. C is present on Twitter and LinkedIn. D is present on all four social media sites. Each persona's presence on social media will be represented in a form of a screen shot of the first page of their online profiles.

ePersona	Facebook?	Instagram?	Twitter?	LinkedIn?
A	No	No	No	No
B	Yes	Yes	No	No
C	No	No	Yes	Yes
D	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Table 1.
ePersonas

Candidate A

- A) Resume with a gender neutral name, with technical degree from a state university, affiliations with some technical societies, and work experience in a couple of technical companies
- B) No social media presence

Candidate B

- C) Resume with a gender neutral name, with technical degree from a state university, affiliations with some technical societies, and work experience in a couple of technical companies
- D) Social Media presence on Facebook and Instagram

Candidate C

- A) Resume with a gender neutral name, with technical degree from a state university, affiliations with some technical societies, and work experience in a couple of technical companies
- B) Social media presence on Twitter and LinkedIn

Candidate D

- A) Resume with a gender neutral name, with technical degree from a state university, affiliations with some technical societies, and work experience in a couple of technical companies
- B) Social media presence on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn.

A job description for a mid-managerial position of technical nature will be created. A sample of 10 recruiters in the tech industry will be presented with the following data about 4 candidates for a mid managerial position. The established Five-factor model will be used to record and calculate recruiter perceptions.

Goldberg [1993] concluded that the robustness of the 5-factor model provides a meaningful framework for formulating and testing hypotheses relating individual differences in personality to a wide range of criteria in personnel psychology, especially in the subfields of personnel selection, performance appraisal, and training and development. Cole, et al. found that, despite being largely unreliable and invalid, recruiters' inferences of applicants' extraversion, openness to experience, and conscientiousness predicted the recruiters' subsequent employability assessments of the applicants. They also noticed that the reliability of the validity of the inferences to be mixed with possible exceptions of the traits related to extraversion and openness to experience [5]. One study [15] compiled measurement items from various prior studies. These were used to measure bond-based, identity-based and comparison-based attachments to social media participation.

The five-factor model comprises of a hierarchical organization of five basic personality dimensions: Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness to Experience [28]. All four candidates will be rated by recruiters on the following behavioral characteristics based on the Five-factor model.

- a) desirability
- b) confidence in the desirability rating
- c) commitment to excellence
- d) ability to work as an effective team member
- e) ability to manage multiple tasks
- f) ability to handle conflict
- g) interest in working with people
- h) ability to manage anger
- i) ability to take direction
- j) curiosity
- k) ability to adapt to new situations

This list of behavioral characteristics has been adopted from previous work done to identify traits that are considered desirable in college project team members. The goal of the pretest was to find out (a) which broad personality traits (the five dimensions in the Five-factor model) were considered important by students in the context of the teammate selection task, and (b) which behavioral characteristics are associated with those traits. These were then ranked according to desirability from the point of view of potential team members [25].

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

This work is part of a larger project whose goal is to study the impact of social media presence on job search results. This paper focuses on the fundamental questions about presence or absence on social media having an impact on perceived employability. It also tries to tease out the differences in presence on personal sites such as Facebook and Instagram, and on professional sites such as LinkedIn and Twitter.

Our current study, as described in this paper, focuses on the effect of sheer presence on social media, demographic information, endorsements, testimonials and connections on impressions formed by recruiters. Our future studies will consider the effect of quantity and quality of social media activity, recruiter characteristics as shown in Figure 3, and characteristics of specific social media sites (independent of the participants) on the recruiter perceptions. A further step will be to see whether recruiter perceptions based on social media data match candidates' true personalities.

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