Social Media and Personnel Selection: How Does New Technology Change an Old Game?

Completed Research Paper

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Abstract

Research indicates employers use social media, such as Facebook and LinkedIn, to make decision regarding would-be employees. A scarce amount of academic research specifically examines the decision-making processes employers use when using social media to select the best job applicant for the job. This study focuses on how social media impacts hiring processes, investigating the impact of political attitudes expressed on social media impact managers' evaluations of how “hireable” job candidates are. This study also examines how individuating information, also known as job-related information, presented on social media influences employer decisions to hire job candidates. To test the research model, an experimental design was used to test how applicant political attitudes and individuating information displayed on Facebook and LinkedIn profiles, affect hireability evaluations. Our results indicate a number of significant relationships, including relationships between similarity, liking, and hireability, with moderating effects of social media platform proving significant as well.

Keywords: Social media, Behavioral science, Decision making/makers, Individual-level analysis, Psychology, Reference disciplines, Web 2.0, 21. Social Media and Digital Collaborations

Introduction

The advent of social media has influenced how users express themselves. A defining characteristic of social media is the social media profile, where job seekers may create one or more social media user profiles that depict their sense of “self” (Ellison & boyd, 2013) and may do so on multiple platforms (i.e., these platforms provide personal biographical information about job candidates). For example, on LinkedIn (a professional networking website), users may list their education, professional experience, skills, previous employers, professional certifications, organizational memberships and so on. However, a consequence of creating a public profile on a social media site is opening private information up to an unintended audience, including current and future employers. Even without job seekers’ passwords, employers can gain a wealth of information on public social media profiles. Some companies request that job applicants “friend” human resource managers or log into a company computer during the interview (McFarland, 2012). Recruiters may also view information about job seekers if they have publically available user profiles (if their privacy settings are on “public”). This practice may be especially troubling for individuals who are currently on the market for a job.

Evidence suggests, human resources (HR) staff, managers, and recruiters use social media websites when making hiring decisions for organizations. In fact, a number of employers, across multiple questionnaires, (89 percent, according to the American Bar Association and 91 percent, according to the Reppler Effect, 2011; 2012) claim they use social media sites to learn more about potential job applicants. Further, a study of 300 European firms suggests that as many as 1 in 5 job seekers lost a job offer due to their social media activity (Eurocom Worldwide, 2012). Many recent studies indicate employers do not hire job seekers who
have “troubling” Facebook profiles with, for example, pornographic pictures, high levels of profanity, or large amounts of alcoholism (Erwin, 2014; Bohnert & Ross, 2010; Peluchette & Karl, 2008).

Though it is documented that employers screen out employees with these “red flag” behaviors, much less information is known about, for example, how employers respond to job seekers who post indications of their political attitudes. Because social media encourages discussion and airing of opinions, it is reasonable for jobseekers/individuals to leverage platforms to express them. For example, one would expect an individual who is a firm supporter of legalizing marijuana to update her status to reflect this, or an individual who strongly supports gun control laws to air his attitudes openly on Facebook. Hence, in this study, we examine how job seekers’ expressions or statements about broad social and political issues affect raters’ assessments of their employability. Broadly, we investigate: how do job seekers’ statements about personal attitudes influence how employers view these individuals in terms of hireability? Specifically, the research question for this study is: do user attitudes about legalizing marijuana expressed by individuals on social media sites impact recruiters’ hireability ratings?

Our investigation of social media and recruitment is informed by Demographic Similarity Theory (specifically, the Similarity-Attraction Paradigm) and individuating information perspectives. Demographic Similarity Theory draws upon the Similarity-Attraction paradigm (and Social Identity Theory), maintaining that managers observe key personal attributes and attitudes expressed by applicants and prescribe positive characteristics to individuals whom they view as similar to themselves and negative characteristics to those who are not (for example, a staunchly Republican manager may positively evaluate an applicant who is very outspoken about his conservative political beliefs on Facebook) (see the logic in Byrne, 1971; Tsui et al, 1989; Tsui et al, 2002; Kunda et al, 1993; Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Previously, Demographic Similarity Theory has most commonly been studied using demographic variables, such as ethnicity and gender, in the organizational literature (e.g., McCarthy, 2010). This literature base is largely (almost completely) silent on the issue of how individual, politically-related attitudes may influence organizational practices, such as hiring. When viewing social media profiles, managers are also typically exposed to cues that indicate job-related characteristics, such as education, employment history, job-related skillsets and personality characteristics, would-be employees possess (individuating information) that may also impact how the applicants are evaluated (McCarthy, 2010; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Kunda & Spencer, 2003; Kunda & Thagard, 1996). We examine the importance of political attitudes and individuating information on hireability evaluations (evaluating how suitable an individual is for employment at an organization; this is further broken down in terms of how well applicants can perform job requirements – task behaviors - and whether the applicant will behave like a good organizational citizen - organizational citizenship behaviors).

**Theoretical Perspective and Hypotheses Development**

**Social media** is increasingly pervasive across work and home lives, comes in a variety of forms, and uses web and mobile technologies in different interfaces. That is, the term “social media” is an umbrella term that encompasses different social media “platforms” (varying interfaces and software combinations designed for user-generated content, interaction and connectivity). For example, Facebook is a sophisticated social media platform that allows its users to post information in the form of text, images, videos, etc. Note, because this study is conducted at an individual level, this review focuses on literature streams germane to understanding individual decision makers’ beliefs and behavior, rather than the organizations’ activities, per se (Ellison & boyd, 2006)

Given the widespread use of social media in recruiting, it is not surprising that the majority of the practical literature focuses on “how-to” guides for managers (Bates, 2013; Charlton, 2012) or overviews how employers use social media, discussing who uses it, what platforms they use, what information they take in about candidates and so on (Erwin, 2013; Schwabel, 2012; Eurocom Worldwide, 2012; Gallup Poll, 2014). Despite the advice coming from many sources, there is a lack of rules or standards for using social media to screen employees.

Human resource managers also do not always possess perfect information for optimal hiring decisions, coming from an environment that is dynamic and may offer up complex and contradictory information. When screening employees, managers try to gain a glimpse into who a job applicant is, through resumes, word of mouth, interviews and now, social media. Still, the manager is only receiving a partial snapshot of the applicant on the whole (in conjunction with information about other job applicants also being
Social media complicates decision making surrounding hiring job applicants because it opens up a new avenue for gaining personal information that otherwise might be unattainable or illegal to capture, including information about physical appearance, education, ethnicity, gender, political beliefs, etc. Thus, a recruiter, who has limited information processing ability, may feel even more overwhelmed by the information he is given by the applicant (or he has secured about the applicant in question). Instead, rather than adhering to best practices, the recruiter may focus on the most salient information in the social media profile (which may not be job-related, e.g., partying), which will “cue” his hiring evaluations. For example, a manager might immediately screen out an employee who constantly posts political views that oppose his own; these cues are most salient for the manager. Focusing on information in social media profiles as “cues” with which decisions are made may be beneficial, freeing up valuable mental resources for other, more mentally taxing (and job-related) endeavors. However, this may also lead to stereotyping.

Demographic Similarity Theory, a theoretical perspective suggests that, when forming an impression, individuals take in information to make observations about how similar they perceive they are to others, whether it is by demographic characteristics or personal attitudes. Such a perspective is grounded in Social Identity Theory. Social Identity Theory posits that decision makers have a natural tendency to categorize themselves and others (Dovidio & Hebl, 2005). That is, decision makers at least partially constructs their own social identities by categorizing themselves relative to others and giving positive or negative values to different categories (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Typically, decision makers are thought to be consistent, such they evaluate individuals from their own groups more highly than they do individuals from other groups (e.g., a self-continuity drive) (Goldberg, 2005). To maintain a positive sense of identity and decrease cognitive dissonance, managers will ascribe positive characteristics to those employees who belong to the same groups and negative characteristics to employees who do not (Abrams & Hogg, 1988). Thus, Social Identity Theory offers a very succinct basis for suggesting that similarity in political attitudes ought to have a favorable impact on personnel decisions. Relatedly, Relational Demography Theory also suggests that decision makers (e.g., managers) look at the cumulative differences across multiple categories (e.g., gender, ethnicity, age) to form a judgment of overall similarity others (Tsui et al, 1992). For example, more similar individuals are thought to get higher performance appraisal ratings. Similarly, Faultline Theory suggests similar results in group settings (Thatcher & Patel, 2011, 2012). Overall, a substantial volume of theory from Social Psychology and Organizational Behavior supports the importance of similarity on the judgments and behavior.

The Similarity-Attraction Paradigm forms the specific theory guiding our investigation (Byrne, 1971; Goldberg, 2005). This theory specifies the “logical chain” of how similarity influences decisions. Decision makers might learn more about a person in either a social or business-related situation and, based on what they know, make a judgment of the general similarity they have to the person in question. For instance, Jane, in reading Dave’s status about legalizing marijuana on Facebook, might feel that Dave “gets it,” is logical and is similar to her. Following the appraisal of similarity, decision makers are thought to add affect to this judgment and this results in the psychological state of “liking” another person. In our example, Jane is apt to conclude she likes Dave following her judgment that they are similar. Later, she is more apt to recommend hiring or promoting Dave based on this positive affect (more on this below).

In a social media context, through being privy to information cues made publically accessible through social media profiles, this indicates that managers will prescribe positive characteristics to applicants whose status updates, affiliations, pictures, etc. are similar to their own. Similarly, the Similarity-Attraction Paradigm suggests that, when managers perceive they are attitudinally similar to job applicants, this creates a positive “interaction” (or attraction) between the manager and the applicant; in other words, managers prefer the company of likeminded individuals or do not prefer the company of dissimilar individuals (Reskin et al, 1999). For a variety of reasons, including having a positive identity and personal attraction, managers “like” employees who they perceive are similar to them. Thus, we hypothesize:
H1: Managers’ evaluations of perceived similarity positively influence liking of job applicants.

When managers perceive they are similar to and like a job applicant, Demographic Similarity Theory suggests this will positively influence subsequent judgments of the job applicant (Goldberg, 2005). That is, the Similarity-Attraction Paradigm explicitly outlines the mediating variable of “liking” between similarity and subsequent judgments. Again, once Jane feels that she is similar to Dave, Jane is theorized to have a feeling of attraction towards Dave. For example, Jane believes she would enjoy talking with Dave or having lunch with Dave. This liking should then result in rating Dave higher in terms of how much Jane would like to hire or promote Dave. Liking has been “…related to many positive work-related outcomes, such as more positive superior–subordinate and mentoring relationships, communication, and job satisfaction” (Sacco et al, 2003, p. 853; McCarthy et al, 2010; Ensher & Murphy, 1997; Green et al, 1996; Tsui & O’Reilly, 1989; Turban & Jones, 1988; Vecchio & Bullis, 2001).

Note that the Similarity-Attraction Paradigm specifies that liking is a mediator. That is, liking is the psychological mechanism through which similarity influences other judgments. A reviewer suggested that we consider liking as a potential moderator. While this is statistically possible, this would be difficult. The Similarity-Attraction Paradigm specifically invokes liking as a mediator (and not a moderator). Thus, such a course of action would be inconsistent with decades of treatment of psychological theory. In addition, moderation would appear less logical. As a moderator, the perceived similarity – hiring assessment relationship would depend on liking. As such, there is not a direct path/relationship between similarity and liking. This would be strange given Social Identity Theory has strongly suggested such a path/dynamic for decades. Further, if one “drew in” a direct path from similarity to liking and included liking as a moderator, the model suffers from lack of parsimony as paths proliferate and explanatory power may not expand. Overall, the clear explication of liking as a mediator in the psychological theories that explain this type of judgment suggests meditational processes.

Research in Organizational Behavior suggests that some support for the relationship between similarity and employment-related decisions. There are some cases in which in which similarity was related to decisions and other cases when it was not related to decisions. In terms of positive results, ethnic similarity was related to interview ratings (Prewett-Livingstone, Field et al, 1996) and performance appraisal scores (Mount et al, 1997). In other cases, ethnic similarity made little to no differences in interview ratings (Lin et al, 1992; McFarland et al, 2004) or performance appraisal ratings (Mobley, 1982; Pulakos et al, 1989). One reason for such a pattern of results is that most of the Organizational Behavior literature focuses on issues such as ethnicity, which may or may not influence hiring decisions. Early studies in political science suggest that political affiliation may be a stronger set of variables than race in decisions of choosing a marital partner or in the allocation of scholarship resources (Iyengar & Westwood, 2014). Yet, there is much more research in Organizational Behavior that indicates that the structure or standardization of the employment decision-making process is highly important in examining the results of employment decisions. That is, hiring decisions that are low in structure (those without clear guidance on what and how to measure various constructs, those low in procedures and policies), are more apt to be associated with larger influences of irrelevant information (e.g., see the meta-analysis by Huffcutt & Roth, 1998).

The social media context is typically low in structure. Analyses of social media policies (that were key in designing this experiment) suggest social media information in decision making process is notably lacking in structure, with over 54 percent of organizations claiming they do not have a social media policy in place to use for hiring decisions (SHRM report, 2014). Managers, who research multiple candidates, are likely inundated with a vast amount of information about job applicants, straining their cognitive resources. This lack of structure surrounding the use of social media, an environment that provides managers with many information cues, may inform the liking-hireability relationship. Further, the screening process may allow relatively little time for the manager (it is brief) – “although the focus is on gathering employment-related information, the relative amount of information gleaned in these limited inter-actions is likely to be low as compared with information gathered from extended interactions at work” (Sacco et al, 2003, p. 854). With this limited time frame and overabundance of information, managers may turn to the most salient information cues (not using all available information), using their liking of individual job candidates to make important decisions, such as hireability evaluations. With this reasoning, we hypothesize:
H2: Managers’ evaluations of liking of job applicants positively influences hireability ratings for (a) task and (b) organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB).

Demographic Similarity Theory only tells part of the story of the information managers may “pull” on applicants. Theories of **individuating information** indicate that, as managers try to glean a more overall image of job seekers, they are also likely exposed to job-related information about applicants as well, including attributes such as knowledge, skills, abilities or personality traits (McCarthy et al, 2010). Fiske and Neuberg (1990) suggest that managers know their decisions will be examined and compared, so they are highly motivated to present an accurate portrayal of each candidate. Individuating information is powerful because it “forces managers to focus on information that is reflective of job performance” (McCarthy et al, 2010, p. 337). Studies indicate that the presence of individuating information lessens the likelihood of managers using stereotypes to make decisions (for example, a Dunn & Spellman, 2003 study requiring managers to look up individuating information showed diminished memory for stereotypical information on applicants). The effect of attributes, such as personality (Caldwell & Burger, 1998) and cognitive ability (Schmidt et al, 2007), has been documented (McCarthy et al, 2005; Copus, 2005; Kunda & Thagard, 1996; Jackson et al, 1993). An implication, then, is that when job seekers supply individuating information on social media, it might mitigate the negative impact of their demographic or attitudinal characteristics.

Social media may be an important channel for gaining access to individuating information about job applicants. Through social media, job applicants routinely post individuating information, such as education, work experience, evidence of cognitive ability (via writing), and so on, about themselves, through the user profile, status updates, pictures, groups one is a member of, etc. For example, Klumpe and Rosen, using a sample of undergraduate students, found that the students could accurately discern Big Five personality traits from social media profiles if multiple raters were involved (2009). When managers are exposed to individuating information, research indicates it influences managerial decision-making, and through social media, recruiters are exposed to job-related information about applicants that may provide justification for evaluations of applicants in terms of how well they may perform on the job. With this in mind, we hypothesize:

H3: **Individuating information provided on job applicant social media profiles influences managers’ hireability ratings for (a) task and (b) organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB).**

The social media platform will impact how information is conveyed to recruiters. Research indicates that while social media can be classified by feature sets, often platforms have the same or similar feature sets, especially social networking websites, like Facebook and LinkedIn (boyd & Ellison, 2008). However, Facebook and LinkedIn are used for notably different reasons. LinkedIn is predominantly utilitarian and is used for building professional networks, while Facebook is hedonic; users detail personal details about their daily lives, professional or otherwise (Beer, 2008; van der Heijden, 2004). The Facebook social media platform is built for hedonic individual use; that is, members may consider the social network to be “fun” and “entertaining” (Babin, 1994); a 2008 social network analysis of 800 undergraduate students indicated many students used Facebook to communicate with friends and relieve boredom (Lampe et al, 2008).

Managers may also treat hedonic and utilitarian platforms differently and this may, in turn, impact feelings of liking, as well as the influence of individuating information. First, since LinkedIn is intended to be used for professional networking and mostly reads like a job application, managers may approach this platform with a more objective, professional outlook, focusing more on individuating information and paying less attention to whether they “like” a job applicant or not. Similarly, since Facebook is intended to be the “fun, frivolous” platform, managers may be more likely to be more biased towards “extraneous” information, such as political attitudes, and may even expect to find “red flag” behaviors, such as excessive pictures of alcoholism. They also may take individuating information less seriously in such a lighthearted platform. We hypothesize:

H4: **The social media platform will moderate the perceived similarity and liking relationship. The use of a Facebook platform will be associated with a stronger relationship than the use of a LinkedIn platform.**

H5: **The social media platform will moderate the relationship between individuating information and hireability ratings for (a) task and (b) organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB). The LinkedIn platform will increase the strength of this relationship, while the Facebook platform will decrease it.**
The hypothesized relationships detailed above inform our model (Figure 1. Research Model).

**Figure 1. Research Model**

**Experimental Design**

To test our research model, an experiment was conducted. An experimental design was selected over the commonly used survey methodology because we were interested in manipulating political attitudes and individuating information across two different social media platforms; the design was also a means to reduce outside “noise” or distraction and as such, increase internal validity. Social media profiles were created that emulated Facebook and LinkedIn environments. We created stimuli that exemplified the political attitude supporting and opposing legalizing marijuana as well as included high and low levels of individuating information to answer Hypotheses 1, 2 and 3 in our research model. To measure the impact of platform, we created profiles in Facebook and LinkedIn (in an effort to answer Hypotheses 4 and 5 in our research model). Our experiment included three factors (political attitudes, individuating information and platform) with two levels each, associated with a \(2 \times 2 \times 2\) experimental design\(^1\) (shown, along with manipulations, in Table 1. Factor Table). This design was selected due to the authors’ desire to demonstrate results were not “issue specific” and were more generalizable (i.e., not just related to attitudes about marijuana; addressed further below\(^2\)).

Of course, there is always a dynamic tension between the complexity of the experiment in terms of the number of factors and the number of levels within the factors versus capturing all possible factors (which partially addresses realism). After reviewing the Organizational Behavior literature (and Social Psychology literature), we knew we had to a) manipulate the key variable of political attitudes and b)\

\(^1\) Our full experimental design was a \(2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 3\) design with political conditions emulating legalizing marijuana, gun control laws and the Affordable Healthcare Act with eight profiles created per political condition (for a total of 24 total profiles). Three conditions were selected to improve generalizability of results. We empirically tested for metric and structural invariance in our confirmatory factor analysis and research model testing. This is done by comparing the working model to a constrained model (a more restrictive model) and ensures that model relationships are “equal” in each political condition. For concision, only one political condition (legalizing marijuana) is discussed in this paper.
include individuating information (or we would make the mistake of lack of realism/model misspecification because most hiring decisions involved individuating information). Our review of the Information Systems literature highlighted the importance of platform and other factors. We attempted to balance parsimony of design (including key factors) with realism of design. Often, studies with more than three major factors are hard to implement and very hard to interpret due to complex higher order interactions. We also attempted to integrate realism through stimuli design. Given this is the first empirical study to examine this issue, we hope our balancing of issues was informative.

When crafting the social media profiles, our aim was to create/emulate what recruiters can access on Facebook and LinkedIn profiles without being intrusive (e.g., without asking for passwords or befriending the job applicant). First, we considered that many Facebook and LinkedIn profiles use “Privacy Settings,” only allowing for certain information to be viewed globally, or publically (for example, a Facebook user may elect to make some information available worldwide and other cues available only to “all friends” or “select friends”). Next, even profiles that are entirely accessible generally only display recent information, requiring a considerable amount of effort to pull up data beyond the previous month. Finally, all information provided on profiles was presented in the same manner (for example, the applicant posted the same article in both platforms) or was held constant (for example, profile pictures were the same in all conditions within one of our studies).

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<th>Table 1. Factor Table</th>
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<td>Factor</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Attitude</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individuating Information</td>
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<td>Platform</td>
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The process of creating the profiles for the experiment was a time-intensive effort that spanned over 6 months. To approximate authentic, publically-accessible social media profiles, the lead researcher reviewed over fifty Facebook and LinkedIn profiles of college students, paying particular attention to pairs of profiles (that is, individuals who had both a Facebook and a LinkedIn profile) and recording similarities and differences between the platforms, including information cues and their forms presented on each profile, as well as how information was presented. We were especially concerned with maintaining the “spirit” of each social media platform. For example, on Facebook, a user might express him feelings using more profane and/or casual language than on LinkedIn; the Facebook user would probably also post status updates at a greater frequency than on LinkedIn. Despite this, it was important to present information in a way that it remained consistent across both platforms as well, so as not to confound our experimental results. Initial versions of social media pages went through two rounds of pilot testing.

Eight social media profiles were created in total. To create the social media profiles, the author first created real profiles in Facebook and LinkedIn and obtained permission from close friends and family members to use their profile pictures. Using the real profiles and Adobe Photoshop, the author created initial Facebook and LinkedIn profiles exemplifying each experimental condition. All profiles contained the same information: the job candidate graduated from a university located in Colorado in the class of 2014 with a bachelor's degree in Business Administration. This university was selected, first, because it came from a state with an even Democrat – to - Republican split (according to a 2014 Gallup poll, 40.3 percent of all citizens identify as “Democrats” and 44.1 percent identify themselves as “Republicans.”). Further, Colorado has reached national prominence for being the first state to legalize the use of recreational marijuana.

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Participants were randomly assigned to different treatments (i.e., viewed the social media profiles). Then participants were asked to respond to the manipulation checks and survey questions corresponding to the experimental conditions applied. Previous social media studies used similar designs (Mazer et al, 2007; Klumper & Rosen, 2009).

**Perceptual Measures**

We used previously established and validated scales to measure perceived similarity (Tepper et al, 2011), liking (Wayne & Ferris, 1990) and hireability (the Williams and Anderson's scale measures both task and organizational citizenship behaviors, as many organizational scholars believe job performance is function of both of these facts, 1990). All of these scales had established reliabilities of over .8.

**Manipulations**

Platform

Profiles were created in two separate social media platforms, Facebook and LinkedIn. Facebook was selected because since its inception in 2004, it has the most users, with 757 million members (Sedghi, 2014, numbers recorded as of December 31, 2013). Facebook is used in a number of social media studies (Nosko, 2006; Mazer et al, 2006; Klumper & Rosen, 2009). It is also considered a “fun, entertaining” website, creating the “hedonic” platform needed for this manipulation. LinkedIn was selected because it is a professional networking website, founded in 2003, with over 332 million members logging in (from LinkedIn’s press center, as of November 2014). This site is known for enabling professional networking as well as corporate recruitment and exemplified our “utilitarian” condition.

Political Attitude(s)

Legalizing marijuana was selected for a number of reasons. First, the issue has been extensively covered in the press (a quick search in Lexis Nexis from January 1, 2012 to October 17th, 2014 shows 2,642 articles were written about this topic). Next, the issue was current and polarizing. Though many states have legalized the use of medicinal marijuana, Colorado was the first state to legalize the use of recreational marijuana in 2012 (Ferner, 2012) and has since been the subject of debate over whether the rest of the nation should follow suit. A reviewer asked us to address the issue of marijuana legalization and political party. In the United States, this issue tends to “break” across party lines, with Democrats tending to support legalization and Republicans tending to oppose it (though it is not always a clean break, per se). It is possible that managers may interpret or assume a number of things about job applicants upon seeing a status update about legalizing marijuana but our study concerns the cognitions they may have (how much they have in common), as opposed to specific thoughts about the job applicant (i.e., Democrat vs. Republican, assumptions about achievement orientation, etc.). However, this is a somewhat different level of analyses in what we view political issue affiliation in our study rather than political party affiliation (though more research on both issues is likely needed).

For this experiment, there was a “supportive” level and an “opposing” level for legalizing marijuana. Our fictional applicant indicated his support of marijuana legalization in the form of a status update that shared an article on his profile (note, this manipulation was used across both the Facebook and LinkedIn profile in the “Supportive” condition) called, “Five Reasons Legalizing Marijuana is Great!,” along with a small picture indicating support of this political issue. For the “against” condition, our job applicant opposed the legalization of marijuana and posted an article as a status update; this condition was used across both Facebook and LinkedIn profiles as well. The article was called, “Five Reasons Legalizing Marijuana Stinks” and was accompanied by a small picture indicating opposition to the issue.

As a manipulation check, respondents were asked, on their post-viewing survey, “Does this applicant support about legalizing marijuana?,” followed up by an item asking the respondent if he/she supports legalizing marijuana (Yes/Maybe/No/Decline to Specify), and how strongly he/she supports or does not support legalizing marijuana, on a 7-point Likert scale (where 1 = Strongly Don’t Support and 7 = Strongly Support).

Individuating Information

The “high” condition of individuating information contained job-related information about our fictional employment candidates. In both platforms, the fictional employment candidate posted a manipulation in the form of a status update containing job-related information. For the “low” condition of individuating
information, the condition needed to contain information that was not related to the job applicant’s job, or KSAs (knowledge, skills and abilities appropriate for employing a job applicant). Instead, it was important to post information that was more innocuous in nature. For example, each fictional employment candidate posted individuating information on his Facebook or LinkedIn condition in the form of a status update containing information that was clearly not job-related (for example, a status update saying “Annnd it’s gone! Go Buffs!” in support of the local minor league baseball team). The “high” condition of individuating information contained job-related information about the fictionalized job applicant (a status update claiming, “I just received the Employee of the Month award for the month of June! 😊”).

An example of a profile used in the study is presented in Figure 2. Sample Social Media Profile.

Control Variables

Though research results as to the impact of gender and ethnicity are mixed in psychology, they are popular variables in many studies using Demographic Similarity Theory (McCarthy et al, 2010). We measured these demographic factors, as well as sexual orientation, age and work experience. We also measured individual cognitive absorption, a user’s deep involvement with social media, using the Cognitive Absorption scale developed by Agarwal and Karahanna (2000) and social desirability using the Marlow and Crowne social desirability scale (Reynolds, 1982). As a procedural control, we also controlled for information presented in the profiles that was not directly relevant to the manipulations.

Most notably, we used interview experience as a control variable in our analyses. We were fortunate to have roughly 2/3rds of our sample with experience conducting hiring interviews. We entered experience as a binary variable into our calculations as a covariate such that the structural model we report below has the effect of interviewing experience “partialed out” of our results in a statistical sense (i.e., the variance due to experience is accounted for in our covariate and does not add noise/variability to the structural model).

Results

To analyze our factor structures and the hypotheses in our research model, structural equation modeling (SEM) was used. SEM was selected because our study sought to simultaneously test the paths between the variables in our research model. EQS 6.2, a multivariate statistical software analysis package, was used to run our structural equation models; this software package tests for nonnormality of data using Mardia’s Coefficient, a statistic that identifies nonnormality of data and the cases that contribute most to it (Ullman, 2006). Our Mardia’s Coefficients were high for both our confirmatory factor analysis and our structural model, indicating nonnormality of data. Byrne (2006) provides a solution for non-normal data, suggesting that using a robust methodology and the Satorra-Bentler chi-square statistic (as well as other robust measures of fit) provides stable and correct statistics, so we used the ML robust method in EQS and used robust measures of fit. Tests for skewness and kurtosis fell within acceptable bounds.

Sample Characteristics

We invited 270 individuals to participate in our study. A total of 191 individuals participated, putting our response rate at 71 percent. Consistent with prior research that examines social media and HR decisions (Kluemper & Rosen, 2009), our sample frame consisted of individuals living in the Greenville/Spartanburg area and survey respondents consisted primarily of graduate business students from a Southeastern university in the United States and recruiters from a local company (n > 300 employees) through contacts of the dissertation author. Graduate students were selected (with the majority being MBA students) because many of them have business experience and have been (or will be) involved with recruitment. As a data check, we inserted a survey item at the end of the experiment, asking subjects if they have experience with interviewing candidates for jobs. Thus, most of our participants (65.9%) had actual experience in hiring and were not just study proxies for individuals with hiring experience (this was also statistically controlled for in our SEM). Sample characteristics are described in Table 2. Sample Characteristics.
Figure 2. Sample Social Media Profile
Table 2. Sample Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Characteristic</th>
<th>Value</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male (57.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>22-25 years old (66%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>White (63.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Orientation</td>
<td>Heterosexual (88.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Level</td>
<td>Master’s –Business Administration (MBA) (61.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced Interviewing Job Applicants</td>
<td>Yes (62%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced Evaluating Applicants Using Social Media</td>
<td>No (83.2 percent%)</td>
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</table>

**Confirmatory Factor Analysis**

To verify the dimensionality and reliability of the scales used in this study, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Our final model showed acceptable fit (shown in Table 3. CFA and Structural Model Fit Indices). Our scales all demonstrated acceptable reliability (perceived similarity’s Cronbach’s alpha = .92 and Composite Reliability = .93, the liking scale’s Cronbach’s alpha = .9 and Composite Reliability = .91, hireability – task’s Cronbach’s alphas = .92 and Composite Reliability = .97 and hireability – OCB’s Cronbach’s alphas = .9 and Composite Reliability = .9). We determined the convergent validity of our measures by examining the average variance extracted (AVE) for construct items, with scores of .5 or higher indicating convergent validity. The AVEs for our scales were all higher than .63. Further, we also found evidence of discriminant validity by using the square root of the construct’s AVE for was higher than the inter-construct correlations for our measures.

**Common Method Bias**

Common method bias can threaten inferring causality in behavioral science research. In one sense, we did not have method variance between our manipulated independent variables (profiles) and our ratings of hireability since one was manipulated via social media platforms and one was a series of ratings on Likert type scales. Nonetheless, we used both procedural and statistical remedies to control for method bias, using multiple methods of measuring our perceptual measures and experimental manipulations, protecting of respondent anonymity and reducing evaluation apprehension (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Also, when informing subjects of their IRB rights in their informed consent letter, we assured respondents that their answers were anonymous, and all personally identifying information was secure and confidential. We also repeated this guarantee in the recruiting email. We also told our participants that there were no right or wrong answers, and to respond to all questions as honestly as possible. Social desirability was unlikely to occur in this study, since respondents were judging other people (not reporting on their own behavior), though we did control for it as an extra precaution. As a result of our precautions, the likelihood that common method bias might occur was effectively reduced.

**Hypotheses Testing**

Our research model demonstrated good fit, shown in Table 3. CFA and Structural Model Fit Indices.
Table 3. CFA and Structural Model Fit Indices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fit Index</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>CFA</th>
<th>Structural Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Satorra-Bentler Chi-square (S-B Chi-square)</td>
<td>Measures goodness-of-fit for small sample sizes, large models and/or nonnormal samples (Satorra &amp; Bentler, 1999)</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>2023.2, d.f. = 1155</td>
<td>1882.35, d.f. = 1304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bentler's Comparative Fit Index (CFI)</td>
<td>An incremental or comparative fit index that assesses fit of a structural model in comparison with the null model (Satorra &amp; Bentler, 1999)</td>
<td>&gt;.90</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), RMSEA Intervals</td>
<td>A &quot;badness&quot; of fit index, where values closer to 0 are better; includes model parsimony and sample size (Hooper et al, 2008)</td>
<td>≤.05, 0.08</td>
<td>.05, .06</td>
<td>.05, .06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR)</td>
<td>The square root of the difference of residuals of the sample covariance matrix and hypothesized model (Hooper et al, 2008)</td>
<td>≤.08</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. CFA and Structural Model Fit Indices

Figure 3. Hypotheses Testing

The results of our hypotheses tests are shown in Figure 3. Hypotheses Testing. We found empirical evidence supporting H1 (b = .49, β = .72, SE = .06, t = 8.74, p < .001), H2A (b = 1.15, β = .67, SE = .21, t = 5.57, p < .001) and H2B (b = .99, β = .67, SE = .18, t = 5.59, p < .001). That is, our data supported the relationships of perceived similarity to liking and liking to ratings of hireability. We did not find support
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for H3A (b=.08, β = .04, SE = .14, t = -.59, p > .05) and H3B (b = .14, β = .07, SE = .13, t = 1.10, p < .05) (individuating information was dummy-coded in our analysis, were 0 = low individuating information levels and 1 = high individuating information levels). Thus, individuating information did not influence hireability ratings (in this case, in the presence of information for this political condition).

To test hypotheses H4 and H5a and H5b, we created interaction terms and ran a general linear model in SPSS using composite variables, following it up by examining the simple slopes of the significant interactions. We also tested the interactions using latent variables in our structural model in EQS and by running a multilinear model using composite variables. Using the interaction term, we found that H4 was not significant at F(1,126) = <1.0, .72. H5A (F(1,171) = 17.65,<.001) and H5B (F(1,171) = 15.02,<.001) were both supported, indicating a case of moderation. We tested this further using analysis of variance (with our hireability variables serving as dependent variables, interactions as fixed factors and all other variables, including control variables, set as covariates). We found that, the means for the Facebook platform are significantly higher than for the LinkedIn platform for both task and organizational citizenship behaviors for both H5A and H5B. The means are shown in Table 4. Simple Effects.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4. Simple Effects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Task Behaviors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Platform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individuating Information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean difference</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* = p < .05, ** < .001

Table 4. Simple Effects

Discussion and Conclusion

Our study addressed the issue of political affiliation and hiring judgments. The variable of political affiliation has been largely ignored in both Organizational Behavior and MIS literatures. We found substantial support for the potential importance of political attitudes in our results.

Specifically, in our experiment, we expected to find a relationship between perceived similarity and liking of applicants. As expected, a strong positive relationship existed between perceived similarity and liking of job applicants. When our respondents perceived that they had a lot in common with the fictional job applicants in our experiments, they increasingly liked, or positively related with, the job applicant. Further, when our respondents indicated increasing numbers for “liking” the fictional job applicants, the respondents also ranked the applicants as increasingly hireable in terms of task performance and organizational citizenship behaviors. The similarity → liking → hireability relationship existed regardless of the website (platform) it was viewed on. It is not unreasonable to think that managers view and respond to this more extraneous, politically-minded, information the same way, regardless of the platform (for example, a manager might view a politically-worded status update the same way on LinkedIn as one Facebook; we assumed that managers might be more appalled by contrasting political beliefs expressed on LinkedIn, a professionally-oriented network that may be considered less appropriate for posting about politics, causing managers to have stronger negative feelings about applicants. This was not the case, however). The implication is that, in a social media context, managers do have feelings of liking job applicants they perceive they are similar to and this process occurs across social media platforms, which in a sense increases the generalizability of a parsimonious model on decision-making.

We did not find support for the impact of individuating information (job-related information) on hireability evaluations but this relationship was significant moderated by social media platform (a case of complete moderation). However, through examining the simple slopes of the interaction, we saw that the
moderation relationship was actually different than we hypothesized. Our evidence indicates that the Facebook platform actually strengthens this relationship (though we hypothesized that the utilitarian platform, LinkedIn, would strengthen it). Perhaps managers expect to see individuating information on a purposeful platform, such as LinkedIn, where individuals largely broadcast their job applications (work experience, personal accomplishments, awards won, professional skills and abilities, etc.), but on a more fun, entertaining platform, such as Facebook, where an assortment of information is arranged in a number of ways, work-related status updates may “stand out” to managers more and prove to be more salient cues.

The study contributes to existing MIS theory in a number of ways. First, our theoretical review shows that social media research has been lacking from the Organizational Behavior/Human Resources perspective. In particular, previous studies have examined presentation of identity on social media, privacy concerns, the juncture between real-life and online relationships and security issues surrounding social media (Ellison & boyd, 2006). We identified a gap in MIS literature where little to no current literature examines social media from an Organizational Behavior/Human Resources standpoint. To contribute to the field, we studied social media from a human resources angle, asking how managers use it to make screening and hiring decisions. First, we conducted the study from a social media context (more will be discussed, below, as well) using an experimental design to create realistic-looking social media profiles and then asking our subjects, MBA students and other graduate business students, to evaluate the job applicants based upon the information presented in the social media profiles. We also evaluated the importance of the social media platform on the relationships tested within our research model.

We also contribute to the referent field of Organizational Behavior. Many of the studies in Demographic Similarity Theory focus primarily on demographic variables, especially gender and ethnicity, with few studies covering the importance of individual attitudes. Our study focuses especially on political attitudes expressed on social media user profiles. This represents an important broadening of the fundamental nature of the Similarity-Attraction Paradigm by suggesting researchers should focus on a completely new group of variables: political affiliations! We also contribute to this literature stream by indicating a new context through which this theoretical lens should be considered: social media networks. Plus, we contribute to the growing literature stream on individuating information, finding that the website itself may impact the power of individuating information. In this case, individuating information did not have a direct effect on ratings of hireability. Instead, the similarity and liking variables had an effect instead of individuating information. One interpretation of these findings in our data is that political effects are powerful even in the presence of individuating information, a trend opposite that found in OB (e.g., Olian et al., 1988).

Our study has practical implications for managers and HR decision makers. Our findings did show that social media platforms, such as Facebook and LinkedIn, can provide job-related and non-job-related information cues to decision-makers, and from those cues provided on user profiles, decision-makers may tend to like job applicants who are perceived as more similar to them; liking the job applicants may impact hireability evaluations as well. Further, in our study (that emulated Facebook and LinkedIn platforms), whether our subjects used Facebook, a platform that typically has more personal and entertaining information about job applicants, or LinkedIn, a more professionally-oriented platform, did not strengthen this relationship, interestingly.

Decision makers may note that finding and evaluating individuating information about job applicants should be the focus of using social media (if organizations choose to use it). For example, managers might instruct employees to pay extra attention to qualities of applicants such as education, skills, languages spoken, awards, and so on. To do this, the organization should develop uniform, standardized criterion for evaluating information found about applicants online so all applicants are evaluated consistently. All applicants should be forewarned that their social media profiles may be viewed (perhaps job descriptions, especially descriptions provided online, should include this).

The findings of our study also have important implications for job applicants. Since our results do indicate a moderating influence of social media platform, with Facebook increasing the relationships, applicants may also use social media platforms, particularly ones that are hedonic in nature, to demonstrate individuating information for employers (for example, applicants might use multiple social media platforms to create a consistent image and to demonstrate KSAs, such as communications or technical skills). Also, since we found that perceived similarity, liking and individuating information all have a role
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in making hireability evaluations, this suggests that individuals who are on the job market should become familiar with and use privacy settings available in the different social media platforms. Applicants should research the organization carefully and take them to learn their social media policy(s), if there is one, and should, most importantly, know their rights involving social media.

Even though our model was initially tested and pilot-tested, further testing and refinement should be done for many reasons. First, though our study is likely high in internal validity, it may lack ecological validity (real-world semblance, though we made efforts to address this by using fictional social media profiles, keeping most of the information consistent and innocuous, having an extensive profile development process, pre- and pilot-testing measures, etc.). Though using social media platforms in real-life is preferred for ecological validity, we were unable to create profiles in the real platform due to our large number of manipulations and our need to keep profiles consistent to avoid confounding data.

Second, our study relied largely on a student sample though it consisted MBA and other graduate business students, the majority having actual interviewing experience. Further this variable was controlled in our experimental model. However, future studies should endeavor to use managers, recruiters or organizational samples when possible. Third, individuating information was measured using two levels (“high” and “low”), though this might not have encapsulated all the levels and types of individuating information that can be used in this context. Though few studies in IS or social media specifically measure individuating information in a social media context, it has been measured in many ways in psychology (McCarthy et al, 2010). We also only focused on accomplishments at work, but it is important to note that individuating information may manifest in a variety of ways, such knowledge, skills, abilities and personality traits (Lee, 1997; Caldwell & Burger, 1998, and discerning personality traits has been studied in social media, such as Kluemper and Rosen’s 2009 study, though not to infer individuating information) and behaviors (Locksley et al, 1980).

There is also substantial future research needed in this area. There are many more pressing political issues both in the US and abroad. More research into other issues would increase the generalizability of our work. While our study primarily focused upon how political attitudes expressed on social media influence hireability rankings, future studies may explore other demographic or attitudinal attributes in a social media context, such as applicant attractiveness or religious beliefs. The richness of the information provided is another potential avenue for research and can impact how it is received (Dennis et al, 2006); future endeavors might evaluate how the “richness” of cues about an individual’s personality expressed on social media, through images, text, video, applications, and so on, may impact employers’ perceptions of employment candidates. Further, future endeavors might focus on how employers respond to how job applicants behave across platforms (for example, do employers rate job applicants higher who project an image of consistency across platforms? Does this hold true if the image is inherently negative or do employers prefer candidates who “behave” on networking platforms, such as LinkedIn, and are more explicit on Facebook?). Factors, such as propensity to judge, openmindedness and attention/time spent per profile, as well as number of profiles viewed and even exhaustion and affective state prior to the experiment, may also be studied in the future.

In conclusion, we found that the stance our fictionalized job applicant took on a key political issue on social media was related to respondent’s measures of perceived similarity (how much they felt they had in common with said fictionalized applicant) and their overall positive feelings (liking) of the applicant. In turn, this liking had a direct effect on the hireability of the applicant. Thus, political affiliation appears to “matter” in the hiring process. Interestingly, this occurred in the face of individuating information, which could have potentially counteracted the influence of political affiliation. Further, we found that these effects generalized across both Facebook and LinkedIn platforms. Political attitudes “matter,” even in the face of job-related-information and regardless of the website, or platform, it was viewed on.

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