Signaling your Religion: How Strength of Religious Identity Presentation over Social Media Effects Hireability Assessments

Emergent Research Forum (ERF)

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Abstract

The growing trend of employers screening the social media of job applicants has essentially altered both the process and environment of hireability assessments. Employers may now have access to information that previously they may have only “stumbled” upon during an employment interview. Using social media, individuals are able to share (signal) not only their religious identity but also provide “cues” as to the perceived strength of that identity.

Using both Signaling Theory (Spence, 1973) and Media Richness Theory (Daft and Lengel, 1986), this emergent research clearly differentiates between a conventional signaling environment and that of social media. Religion was selected for several reasons: 1) it often requires visible signaling to indicate group membership 2) previous research has found religious identity to be of high salience (Cosgel and Minkler, 2004) 3) recruiters report religious comments found on social media have caused them to disqualify an applicant from further consideration, and 4) it is a protected class in regard to employment.

The overarching theory utilized to frame this research is The Similarity-Attraction Paradigm (Byrne 1971), which helps to explain social media assessments effect on hireability. This paradigm suggests that similarity begets attraction (i.e. liking). That is, people like to be around others who positively reinforce their beliefs (Byrne & Clore, 1970). Likewise, those who are perceived to be dissimilar are associated with negative feelings and a lack of attraction (i.e. not liking) (Byrne, 1971). For a detailed review see Goldberg (2005).

This research will contribute to the field of Information Systems in multiple ways. While social media is studied in a variety of ways, empirical examination of identity presentation and signal strength in a media-rich signaling environment is new. Hence this research will contribute to the signaling literature via examination of the environment and the type and strength of the signal. This study has the potential to contribute to literature streams that examine bias in social media due to religious signals. Considering the many legal protections afforded to religion, beginning to understand how, or if, this information is used in hiring decisions, may aid practitioners in carefully crafting social media assessment policies to avoid potential legal ramifications.

REFERENCES