Assessing Applicant Employability Using Social Media for Talent Acquisition and Recruitment in IT/BPM Companies

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Abstract

The study aims to assess the extent of social media usage in talent acquisition in IT/BPM companies in Cebu and evaluate the insights of the applicants on the practice of using social media in character assessment for hiring decision. The quantitative method was employed to obtain data from two groups of respondents which constitute thirty hiring managers and ninety-six applicants. The study found that while hiring managers moderately practice social media background check to obtain additional information about the applicant, they seldom used it in hiring decisions because of the lack of formal or informal policy allowing or restricting the use of social media for that purpose. It is also found that there is a significant difference in perception between hiring managers and prospective applicants on user-generated content on candidate social media profile.

Keywords: social media, background check, cyber-vetting, character assessment

1.0 Introduction

The use of social media as an aid in the recruitment and selection process can offer a wide range of benefits. Organizations find recruitment through social media helpful because it decreases the time to fill and improve the quality of hire (SHRM, 2016; Jobvite, 2016). Social media potentially offers speed, efficiency, and ability to target and attract specific candidates in the recruitment process (Broughton et al., 2013; Kroeze, 2016). They are considered as people data hubs where recruiters can search and analyze huge networks of data to find potential talent (Headworth, 2015). Job seekers can market themselves to prospective employers and likewise find out a range of insights about the prospective employer to ascertain information on the company and its operations, cultural values, and future strategy to view profiles of existing staff members and discover opportunities for career progression (Walters, 2015). A study revealed that the Filipinos lead the world in the most time spent in social media, with an average daily use of three hours and forty-two minutes. Majority of the active social media users are the millennials, who constitute the largest cohort in the workforce (Kemp, 2016). Recruiters need to be where the candidates are. Leveraging through technology using social media into the traditional talent-acquisition practices is essential to strategically sourcing ideal talents while trying to ensure candidate organizational fit.

Various background-check practices are utilized in the recruitment process in different countries, and one of which is social media/internet searches.

Using the Internet to gather information concerning job applicants or existing employees to assess a person's suitability to the position or cyber-vetting is increasingly practiced as an extension to traditional background investigations (Rose et al., 2010; Berger, 2015; Payne, 2014). A report from Abate, et.al. (2015) identified social media/internet search as a standard practice in most countries in Asia, such as Australia, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, and the Philippines to name a few. The Philippines does not prohibit the use of social media for the background check for as long as the searches are necessary, justifiable, and proportionate with the purpose of the employer. Republic Act No. 10173 or otherwise known as Data Privacy Act of 2012 is the only law in the Philippines that exists to regulate all forms of background checks for acts intended to gather candidate information from a variety of sources, including social media or the Internet.

Several studies are conducted to discover relevant insights from information shared by users in social media. A CareerBuilder survey revealed that recruiters are turned off with provocative or inappropriate photographs, videos, or information, use of alcohol and drugs, discriminatory comments, negative comments about previous employer or fellow employee, and poor communication skills (CareerBuilder, 2016). A study conducted by Kluemper and Rosen (2009) examined the feasibility of using social media to improve the employment screening process and found out that user-generated content in a candidate's social media profiles can positively identify high and low performers. Websites such as Klout.com and Sociota use social media data to assign a social score to represent users' level of influence, while an increasing number of lenders, such as Kreditech, assign social media score to determine the creditworthiness of a borrower. On the other hand, companies like sterlingtalentsolutions.com offer social media searches to employers to help them gain insights about the prospective employee by weeding out trivial details and highlight information that is relevant to the position applied for, taking into consideration data protection of both the employer and the candidate. The availability of the individual's online activities has transformed the applicant screening process into an exercise of not only seeking for the right candidate based on expertise and qualification but also the desired behavioral profile and its suitability to the company's corporate culture (Ghoshray, 2013; Hoek et. al.,2016).

The study was aimed to assess the extent of use of social media in the talent-acquisition process among HR professionals in IT/BPM companies in Cebu City to determine the user-generated content considered in preemployment character assessment and understand how information gathered in social media influences hiring decisions. Moreover, it seeks to find out the difference in perception of hiring managers and job seekers on user-generated content on job seekers' employability.

2.0 Methodology

The study utilized the descriptive research design method to learn how companies are using social media to help improve the talent-acquisition process. This method was employed to determine how HR professionals use social media data in hiring decisions and find out the impact of cyber-vetting on applicants' employability. The study covered the total population of all industry members of Cebu IT BPM Organization (CIB.O). The research instruments were distributed to all members. Out of fifty-nine, thirty (30) or fifty-one percent (51%) responded positively to the study. The respondents are comprised of top-level HR and technical managers who have influence in the talent-

selection process from local and foreign companies belonging to categories, namely, call center, software development, and other non-voice services (N=30).

The second group of respondents is composed of ninety-six graduating students and those who graduated within the last six months in computer courses, which include computer science (CS) and information technology (IT) from the researcher's institution, which constitute prospective job seekers for the IT/BPM industry. These respondents were selected because they are the fresh batch of prospective applicants who may have little to no experience in job applications (N=96).

This research adopts a self-administered questionnaire method with some questions adapted from various studies made in the same topic done in other countries. Two online survey questionnaires were created and administered to collect the data from the recruiters and job seekers. The first questionnaire aims to determine the extent of the use of social media for the data-driven talent-acquisition process. The survey would focus on the following areas: 1) demographic characteristics; 2) recruitment methods; 3) extent of utilization of social media in the recruitment and background check; and 3) user-generated content considered when performing social media character assessment. The second questionnaire aims to gather the job seekers' perception of using social media as part of the selection process. The survey focused on the following areas: 1) demographic characteristics; 2) perception in the use of social media in talent selection; and 3) perception on user-generated content viewed by hiring managers during character assessment.

The weighted mean of the responses is used to determine the corresponding interpretation, which represents the respondents' overall level of agreement. Responses on items related to respondents' demographics are represented as the ratio of the frequency of response for the attribute over the total number of responses. The difference in perception of both groups of respondents on the posts identified was tested using two-tailed t-test.

3.0 Results and Discussion
The Extent of Social Media Usage in Talent Acquisition

While it is a common practice for HR staff to use social media to support the traditional recruitment process (96.7%), viewing applicants' online presence is moderately practiced (mean=3.23) but is seldom utilized for hiring decisions (mean=2.37) though there were instances that applicants were rejected due to their posts in social media.

According to the recruiters, an applicant's social media profile moderately provides vital information on work-related potential or performance with an overall mean of 3.1, which means that they saw relevant information which will help them in finding the candidate suitable for the job.

Employers would like to learn more about the applicant's previous job experience, as well as verify truthfulness in the information specified in the resume to ensure the candidate fits in the organization. Figure 1 presents the most relevant information hiring managers are interested in knowing through the candidates' profile.

The top three reasons relate to work values and ethics, specifically on the applicant's integrity, as shown in Figure 2. Hence, hiring managers would like to bring in someone who has the right skill and work attitude to help improve the organization.

Information Hiring Managers Looked in Candidates' Profile

Category	Value
Attitude	2
Examples of written or design work	14
Cultural fit	18
Specific hard skills	15
Mutual connections	14
Industry-related posts	16
Length of professional tenure	16
Professional experience	22

Figure 1. *Information Hiring Managers Look At in Candidates' Profiles*

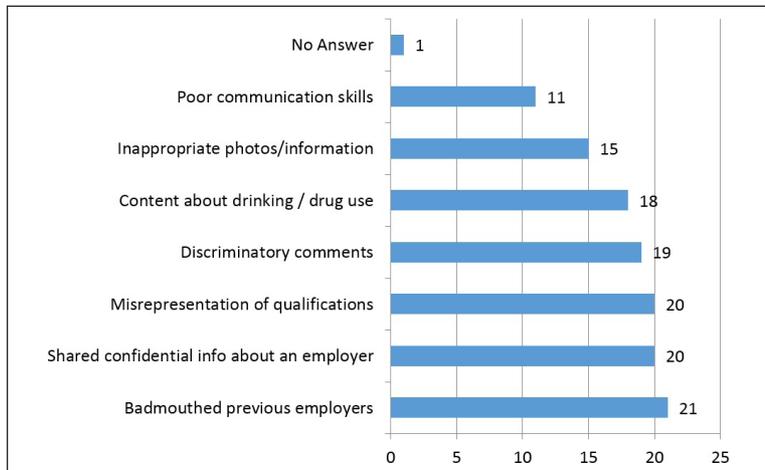| Category	Value
No Answer	1
Poor communication skills	11
Inappropriate photos/information	15
Content about drinking / drug use	18
Discriminatory comments	19
Misrepresentation of qualifications	20
Shared confidential info about an employer	20
Badmouthed previous employers	21

Figure 2. *Basis for Rejecting Job Applicants*

Social media data are mainly used during reference checks (46.7%) though even at the application (33.3%) and interview (23.3%) stages, hiring managers already take a peek on job seekers' profile. The information job seekers present in their social media profile is usually checked at mid-level management positions because these jobs already come with authority though others still find it useful even at the entry level. Figure 3 shows the stages in the recruitment process when social media is used by hiring managers.

On the other hand, job seekers think that it's somewhat appropriate for hiring managers to use information posted on their profile with a mean of 2.92. This result suggests that the applicants are aware and anticipate it as part of the process albeit the possible absence of consent in performing online background checks that might have a considerable impact on employability. They are agreeable with some reservations to profile screening as a basis for hiring decisions since people may portray a different personality in the virtual world.
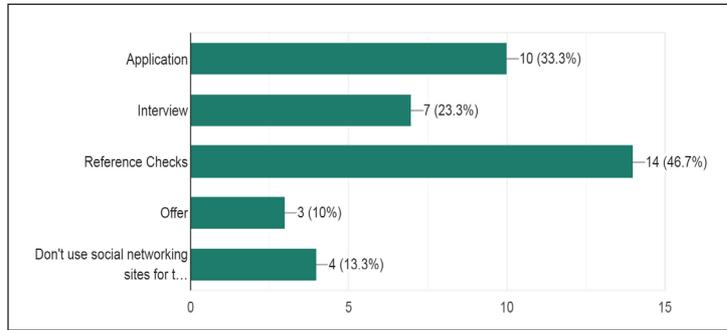
Figure 3. *Social Media Usage on Stages of the Recruitment Process*

The Existence of Social Media Recruiting Policy

Most of the companies (86.7%) surveyed have neither formal nor informal policy allowing or restricting the use of social media in hiring decisions, as shown in Figure 4. A social media review policy defines legitimate items to look for in reviewing social media (Conlan, 2018).
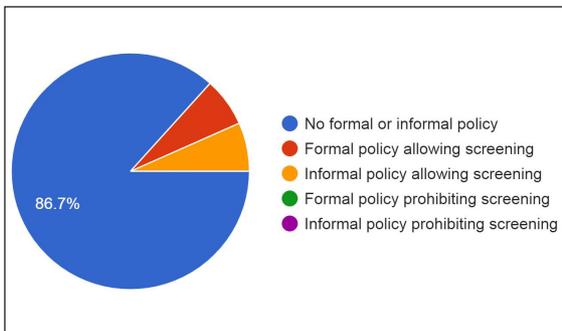

Figure 4. *Existence of Social Media Recruiting Policy*

The lack of formal or informal social media review policy for the majority of the companies suggests that the decision whether or not to use information from social media is upon the discretion of the hiring managers which might not be revealed to the candidates during the recruitment process. The lack of a clear policy towards the use of user-generated content shared in social media poses a challenge to employers while being compliant with the legalities of data use. A clear social media policy would prove helpful to the employers to obtain the information needed to support background check while removing the perception of possible discrimination against applicants.

User-Generated Content Affecting Job-Seeker Employability

User-generated content in the form of text, photos, videos and the like created and shared by jobseekers may reveal information which may negatively or positively affect chances of employment. Hiring managers found user-generated content such as references to doing illegal drugs, rude or bullying posts and comments, use of profanity, posts of sexual nature, text and photos related to alcohol consumption, personal/emotional disclosure, and improper grammar, spelling, and punctuation to leave a negative impression. Posts on travel, sports and leisure, creative works portfolio, community outreach, and volunteering activities were considered positive. Other contents which hiring managers see as neutral include use of internet slang, posts about coworkers, supervisor, and job, gaming behavior, and social activities.

Table 1. *User-Generated Content that Affects Candidate Employability (n=30)*

Content	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Mean	Interpretation
References to doing illegal drugs	0%	10%	90%	-0.90	Negative
Rude or bullying posts and comments	0%	13%	87%	-0.87	Negative
Use of profanity	0%	17%	83%	-0.83	Negative
Post of a sexual nature	0%	20%	80%	-0.80	Negative
References and photos related to alcohol consumption	0%	53%	47%	-0.47	Negative
Personal / emotional disclosure	0%	63%	37%	-0.37	Negative
Improper grammar, spelling and punctuation	0%	67%	33%	-0.33	Negative
Use of internet slang	0%	77%	23%	-0.23	Neutral
Posts about coworkers, supervisor and/or job	17%	53%	30%	-0.13	Neutral
Gaming behavior	13%	67%	20%	-0.07	Neutral
Social activities	27%	70%	3%	0.23	Neutral
Travel	43%	57%	0%	0.43	Positive
Outdoor recreation and/or sports	53%	47%	0%	0.53	Positive
Family oriented posts	73%	27%	0%	0.73	Positive
Volunteering work and charity donations	83%	17%	0%	0.83	Positive

The Difference in Perception of Job-Seekers and Hiring Managers on User-Generated Content That Affect Employability

Table 2 shows the difference in perception of the two groups of respondents on the identified user-generated contents. The two-tailed t-test was used to determine if there is significant difference in the perception of both groups, where a resulting p-value of less than the level of significance of 0.05 suggests no significant difference in perception.

It is logical that there is no difference in perception in both groups on items related to illegal drugs, posts of sexual nature, profanity, and bullying due to the perceived notion of its negativity. However, it is interesting to note the differences in perception in the use of internet slang, alcohol consumption, and improper grammar, spelling, and punctuations, which might be okay in the applicants' view but is otherwise not pleasing for the HR. For instance, improper grammar and spelling and emotional disclosure for the applicant are neutral, while the HRs perceive them to be negative.

The significant difference in perception of the two respondents on most user-generated content suggests that the candidate's digital footprints have a varying degree of impact on candidate employability. Hiring managers have their interpretation of the content, thus, candidates need to be cautious in posting those types of content to avoid negatively affecting hiring decisions.

Table 2. *The Difference in the Perception of Applicants and HR on Posts that Affects Candidate Employability*

POST	p-value	Interpretation
References to doing illegal drugs	0.002	No significant difference
Use of profanity	0.001	No significant difference
Rude or bullying posts and comments	0.002	No significant difference
Posts and photos related to volunteer work and charity donations	0.033	No significant difference
Posts of sexual nature	0.048	No significant difference
Personal/emotional disclosure	0.123	With significant difference
Family oriented posts	0.171	With significant difference
Posts about coworkers, supervisor, and job	0.181	With significant difference
Gaming behavior	0.309	With significant difference
References and photos related to alcohol consumption	0.276	With significant difference
Social activities	0.312	With significant difference
Use of Internet slang	0.489	With significant difference
Improper grammar, spelling, and punctuation	0.700	With significant difference
Outdoor recreation and sports	0.861	With significant difference
Travel	0.969	With significant difference
Overall	**0.584**	**With significant difference**

level of significance α= 0.05

4.0 Conclusion and Future Works

The findings of the study, which are also supported by the literature, suggest that a shift to data-driven recruitment practices is becoming a common practice not only in Cebu but also in different parts of the country and even the world. Social media provides a vast amount of information that employers have at their disposal to ultimately attract candidates suitable not only for the position applied for but who are a fit to the organization's culture and ways. Prospective applicants should therefore carefully manage their online presence so as not to put at risk employment opportunities. With the passing of the Data Privacy Act of 2012, employers are now careful in using social media data even if it is considered as a publicly available source to avoid the risk of discrimination claims. A clear policy to provide comprehensive guidelines on the use of social media for hiring is therefore necessary, alongside proper documentation of information obtained from these sources and a protocol to consistently enforce to all prospective applicants and current employees. The process is much easier to track and document if available tools and technology are used to transform processes from traditional to digital.

While there are no clear laws that exist regulating the use of social media in talent acquisition, it is recommended that the Philippine lawmakers enact laws to specifically regulate the use of social media not only in hiring but also in how people act in the virtual world to minimize, if not to eliminate, abuses

and bad practices and provide provisions to penalize violators. Though the Department of Information and Communications Technology has already formulated an administrative order on social media, its implementation is limited only to the use of social media by government agencies and employees.

The data used in this study is limited to the IT/BPM industry in Cebu. In order to provide insights at a greater scale, a further study may be pursued to evaluate the extent of social media usage in talent acquisition in other industries such as the academe and business and government institutions at a wider geographical coverage.

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