

LinkedIn for Recruitment? No, Thanks

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Abstract:

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the ineffectiveness of utilizing LinkedIn as a recruiting tool for screening and subsequently selecting job candidates due to the ease of which inauthentic presentations of self are delivered. Using the works of Chiang & Suen, (2015); Davison, Bing, Kluemper, & Roth, (2016); Donath, (1999); Guillory & Hancock, (2012); Jansen, König, Stadelmann, & Kleinmann, (2012); Kuznekoff, (2012); Miller, (1995); Paliszkievicz & Madra-Sawicka, (2016); and Pearson, (2009) this paper highlights the fact that inauthentic presentations of self are achieved by employing impression management and self-presentation techniques on LinkedIn profiles. This means that recruiters are in fact not viewing the candidate as they are but as the candidate wishes to be perceived. Additionally, there are no standard measurement techniques for evaluation employed when using LinkedIn in this way and because of this advantages and or disadvantages are suffered unbeknownst to LinkedIn profile creators. The result is that we find the use of LinkedIn as a recruitment tool to be problematic at best and at worst, useless.

It has become the norm, among recruiters, to utilize professional social networks like LinkedIn to screen prospective employees (Chiang & Suen, 2015; Davison et al., 2016; Guillory & Hancock, 2012; Jansen et al., 2012; Kuznekoff, 2012; Paliszkievicz & Madra-Sawicka, 2016; Society for Human Resource Management, 2013; Tifferet & Vilnai-Yavetz, 2018). It is easy to think that this style of recruitment might be efficient. However, this paper will show that while professional social networks like LinkedIn can be useful recruiting tools, the profiles on such platforms should be viewed as idealized and therefore are inauthentic representations of a professional self. This paper will briefly examine LinkedIn, then go on to look at the presentation of self. Drawing from Pearson (2009), Paliszkievicz & Madra-Sawicka (2016) and Guillory & Hancock (2012) this paper discusses performances of self online and inauthentic presentations of self on LinkedIn. The work of Donath (1999) and Guillory & Hancock (2012) was used to illustrate veracity and identity concealment on LinkedIn profiles. Finally we will examine the usefulness, or rather, uselessness, of LinkedIn as a tool for recruitment, with help from the work of Davison et al (2016).

With more than 610 million users worldwide, LinkedIn is the worlds largest online professional social network (LinkedIn, 2019a). The purported vision and mission of LinkedIn is to boost economic opportunity for the global workforce and make them more productive and successful by being the conduit through which they connect (LinkedIn, 2019a). While this sounds altruistic and can indeed be very helpful we must remember that LinkedIn is a for-profit business and has no legal or moral obligation to ensure, or enforce people to provide honest representations of themselves or their skills and abilities. LinkedIn is the world's most popular online space to create and maintain professional networks over time. Employers, recruiters and head-hunters alike utilize LinkedIn to seek out and screen potential employees and in turn, job-seekers utilize LinkedIn to create the most professional profile they can to ensure they appear to be a perfect candidate to any employer (Paliszkievicz & Madra-Sawicka, 2016). The latter is where the inauthentic presentation of self is exhibited.

There are fewer online spaces where the performance of self is as consequential as LinkedIn. Success or failure in this arena can determine whether or not a person can achieve, or maintain, their desired lifestyle. There are few things worth lying for but this is one of them. This is not to say that everybody with a LinkedIn profile lies but I wish to highlight the perceived importance of success in the online job market. Like many online social networks LinkedIn has many customizable facets that comprise the online profile wherein the presentation of self can be exhibited in any way the creator deems worthy. These facets include spaces for: uploading a photograph (portrait); writing a biography; outlining your experience, skills, interests and endorsements. Each of these facets provides an opportunity for a recruiter to learn about a potential candidate, however, it is here that the inauthentic presentations of self can be found. Some of them are more useful than others at conveying misinformation.

The aim of the LinkedIn profile is to present the person as being acceptable of consideration by a recruiter by attempting to prove expertise in an area and by attempting to show morality and ethicality as perceived by said recruiter (Miller, 1995). The performances of self online, as explained by Pearson, are "...disembodied, mediated and controllable..." meaning they are separate from the offline self – as if almost a completely new creation, and they are thoughtfully, carefully and purposefully constructed, this is especially the case with LinkedIn profiles (Pearson, 2009). The purpose of maintaining a LinkedIn profile is usually to expand current networks, become employed, or obtain better employment, so it is within the best interests of LinkedIn members to appear to others as the best self you can (Guillory & Hancock, 2012). This means thinking about - and manufacturing your profile according to - the perceptions of others (Guillory & Hancock, 2012; Paliszkiewicz & Madra-Sawicka, 2016; Pearson, 2009). According to Guillory and Hancock (2012), LinkedIn provides interesting opportunities for deceit that cannot be replicated in face-to-face interactions. Guillory and Hancock (2012) conducted a study that found that people were just as likely to lie on the resumes they provide on their LinkedIn profiles as they are within an old-school paper resume. Further to this, Guillory and Hancock (2012) attest to identity based deception

occurring more in computer mediated communication than in face-to-face interactions.

In discussing deception online, Donath (1999) explains the difference between assessment signals and conventional signals through an ethnographic lens and it's useful to draw upon that here. Assessment signals are those that are costly to the signaler but are reliable to whoever receives the message. Whereas, conventional signals are those that have little cost to the signaler but are less reliable in terms of the actual message (Donath, 1999). The example Donath (1999) provides is that of the stag with large horns. The horns show that this stag is strong and would make a tough adversary and a good mate. The horns are heavy and cumbersome which is costly for the stag in terms of energy output and these types of assessment signal are almost impossible to fake (Donath, 1999). According to Donath (1999), statements made during an interview are an example of assessment signals because they usually denote actual experience, whereas statements made within a LinkedIn profile are conventional signals and can be falsities or exaggerations. In reality, every aspect of a LinkedIn profile exemplifies a conventional signal that, in fact, cannot be trusted to be accurate or authentic.

Further to this, in a 2013 study, one quarter of organizations cited the doubtfulness of the veracity of the information contained in social network sites as a reason to not use sites like LinkedIn for recruitment (Society for Human Resource Management, 2013). This cannot be surprising information. Like Donath (1999), Pearson (2009), Kuznekoff (2012) and Paliszkievicz & Madra-Sawicka (2016) illustrate, self presentation is dependent upon the audience to which the self is presented. In the case of LinkedIn we are aspiring to achieve the best possible first impression online, yet also present ourselves as part of an online community. This requires careful selection and omission of information. Much of the time the concealment of identity occurs in omitting details, for example, if a person thinks they may like to work for an animal rights group one day they will not feature their love of hunting in their LinkedIn 'interests' (Donath, 1999). So what people are trying to do is make a good first impression while adhering to the unwritten rules of the cohort - an

activity that is fraught with fallacies (Paliszkievicz & Madra-Sawicka, 2016; Pearson, 2009). Interestingly, according to Donath (1999) when faced with a possible fallacy we are more likely to manipulate our interpretation of events (or things we've read) to align with the fallacy, rather than go back and change our views accounting for new information (Donath, 1999). .

Possible fallacies and exaggerations negatively impact on the ease and success of recruiting the best candidate for the job, but what about the deception performed on LinkedIn that can ruin people's lives through identity theft, cyber-crime and spreading viruses? Due to its success as a global networking platform, LinkedIn has gone from being a pool of recruits to a pond for phishing. Cyber criminals are taking advantage of the trust users have in LinkedIn to obtain private, identity authenticating information such as email addresses and passwords, as well as spreading viruses and committing other types of cyber-crime (Gray, 2018). Fake profiles are created with ease and both individuals and businesses are at risk. LinkedIn knows this and has created a site specifically to guide and educate users to protect their vital information (Gray, 2018; LinkedIn, 2019b). Luckily for the average user, criminals on LinkedIn tend to target bigger companies by sending fake emails to finance departments with the aim of fooling them into making large deposits into scammers accounts (Cropp, 2016). LinkedIn and cyber security experts make the recommendation that users only connect with people they actually know (Cropp, 2016; LinkedIn, 2019b). However, if we adhered to that guideline, LinkedIn would be nothing more than a glorified contacts list not unlike those currently on our cell phones.

Concessions should be made to note that there are mechanisms in place online that encourage honesty but these can be easily circumvented (Guillory & Hancock, 2012). For example, a profile that links to other people becomes a source of reference for the person in question, but these could be friends or associates who will happily uphold the stretching of the truth, or an outright lie, to assist in job obtainment (Guillory & Hancock, 2012). Other online mechanisms that promote honesty include rating systems such as those found on eBay and AirBnB, which provide feedback about both the service

provider and the consumer, but no such function is provided on LinkedIn. This means that recruiters will only see the very best information a person chooses to provide about them.

The Australian Human Rights Commission (2015) suggest that when seeking candidates for a position, recruiters need to view information about potential candidates based on the selection criteria for the job in question and not take into account factors that could be discriminated against. This cannot happen by viewing LinkedIn profiles for two reasons. Firstly, because the information given on profiles on LinkedIn is that which has been deemed worthy of inclusion by the creator not necessarily with a particular job or position in mind at the time of creation (or during any subsequent updates to the profile). Secondly, because we cannot know which aspects of our identity, as displayed on LinkedIn, may be discriminated against. As explained by Guillory and Hancock (2012), a job seeker can “influence recruiter evaluations by impression management” but what if this happens in a negative way, relating to aspects of a potential candidate that cannot be controlled? In societies like ours, on old school paper resumes, it is not uncommon for Asian people to choose to use Western names, for women to choose more masculine names and for older people to leave out their date of birth entirely, for fear of discrimination. Imagine the lengths people will have to go to now, to avoid being discriminated against on LinkedIn! We cannot change the colour of our skin, yet, with a LinkedIn profile a screener can simply choose to not select a person based on this (Davison et al., 2016; Turnbull & Howman-Giles, 2014).

Despite the wealth of studies in this area the potential usefulness of social media as a personnel selection and hiring resource remains to be seen (Davison et al., 2016). Davison et al. (2016) attest to the need for there to be a “sound theoretical rationale” for using such sources and describe relevance, consistency, reliability and validity testing abilities as part of such a technique. In terms of standardization there are currently no adequate measurements for ‘scoring’ potential recruits on LinkedIn (Davison et al., 2016). Further to this, different recruiters and screeners will be looking for different things, and making judgments differently from each other based on what they see. In

other words they are “using their own idiosyncratic standards” for evaluation (Davison et al., 2016). Without an established criteria, profiles cannot be scrutinized equally and therefore diminishes the ability for the screener to employ consistent, reliable and valuable evaluation methods (Davison et al., 2016). Accordingly, Davison et al. (2016) break down some of the findings from the study done by the Society for Human Resource Management (2013) and conclude from this that highly trained and qualified Human Resource professionals have doubts about the usefulness of LinkedIn as a recruitment screening tool. If those that lead the industry in human resource management are in doubt about LinkedIn, we should be too.

LinkedIn is the world’s largest online space for professionals. It can be used reliably for expanding personal and professional networks and is a useful way to keep abreast of global and local business knowledge. However, using online social media profiles, like those on LinkedIn, to make recruitment decisions is a fruitless exercise, given that inauthentic presentations of self can, and are, provided. Impression management techniques are employed to fool recruiters and profiles on LinkedIn should not be relied upon for screening candidates. The profiles on LinkedIn are thoughtfully and purposefully crafted with the perceptions of the audience - the recruiter or the employer - in mind and are therefore a better representation of what people think employers want than being accurate representations of each individual person (Jansen et al., 2012; Pearson, 2009). Moreover, LinkedIn is an unreliable tool given there are no reliable measurement techniques or validity testing techniques that can provide fair and just reviewing of the profiles of potential job candidates. The profiles on LinkedIn take part in a “cozy conspiracy” whereby appearing to be flawless is the main concern (Miller, 1995). As we can see here, alternate performances of self are displayed on LinkedIn, therefore proving that through online impression management techniques, inauthentic professional self-presentations are made. Recruiters beware!

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