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Applicant reactions to social network web use in personnel selection and assessment

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ABSTRACT

Human Resource (HR) professionals are increasingly using Social Networking Websites (SNWs) for personnel recruitment and selection processes. However, evidence is required regarding their psychometric properties and their impact on applicant reactions. In this paper we present and discuss the results of exploring applicant reactions to either the use of a professional SNW (such as LinkedIn) or a non-professional SNW (such as Facebook). A scale for assessing applicant reactions was applied to 124 professionals. The results showed more positive attitudes to the use of professional SNWs compared with non-professional SNWs. Both gender and age moderated these results, with females and young applicants having a less positive attitude than males and older participants towards the use of non-professional SNWs.

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Reacciones de los candidatos ante el uso de las redes sociales en selección y evaluación de personal

RESUMEN

Los profesionales de recursos humanos cada vez utilizan con mayor frecuencia las plataformas de redes sociales [*Social Networking Webs*, SNW] en los procesos de reclutamiento y selección de personal. Sin embargo, existe una necesidad clara de obtención de evidencias psicométricas acerca del impacto en los candidatos. En el presente artículo presentamos y comentamos los resultados de una exploración de las reacciones de los candidatos ante la utilización en el proceso selectivo de las SNW profesionales (i.e., LinkedIn) y las no profesionales (i.e., Facebook). Utilizamos una escala de reacciones de los candidatos aplicada a una muestra de 124 profesionales. Los resultados muestran una actitud significativamente más positiva hacia la utilización de los SNW profesionales que hacia los SNW no profesionales. El género y la edad parecen influir en dicha valoración en el caso de las SNW no profesionales. Las mujeres y los jóvenes tienen un juicio significativamente más negativo sobre la utilización de las SNW no profesionales que los varones y las personas de más edad.

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After Internet revolution in the 90s, a new hyper-connected world has emerged since 2005 due to the rise of Social Networking Webs (SNWs) (i.e., Facebook, LinkedIn, blogs, etc.). SNWs are applications aimed at creating and swapping content that users have developed themselves with other uses of these sites (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The monthly use rates are astonishing, with up to more than 1.5 million Facebook users, over 4 million Google+ users, and up to 3.3 and 2 million Twitter and LinkedIn users, respectively (Internet Live Stats, 2016).

Companies have not remained oblivious to such changes and have started using SNWs to increase their competitiveness. Particularly, the use of SNWs has been widely extended among human resources recruitment and selection processes (Stopfer & Gosling, 2013). Recent figures show that up to 83% of big international

companies use SNWs for personnel recruiting (LinkedIn 83%, Facebook 78%, and Twitter 45%; Society for Human Resource Management, 2011). A recent survey among Spanish HR administrators showed that 69% use SNWs for recruitment and selection (LinkedIn, 77%, Twitter, 29%, Facebook, 24%), 79% believe that those applicants who are active users of SNWS are more employable, and 33% confirmed that they had rejected applicants on the basis of the information contained in SNWs (Infoempleo-Adecco, 2014).

A clear distinction between recruitment and selection processes should be made when assessing the use of SNWs. Recruitment includes a set of activities aimed at attracting an acceptable group of candidates to a position. Conversely, selection is targeted at choosing from those who were attracted to the position the candidate who is ideally most suited for the position. This entails the use of assessment tools (Wilton, 2013). Such a distinction must be made because although the initial use of SNWs was restricted to recruitment, their extensive use has now become a format in which significant assessments are made.

Nonetheless, using SNWs for recruitment and selection assessment practices lacks *a priori* prescriptions about what should be done and how to proceed. It is defined as the process of reviewing applicants' existent information on the web and social networks (i.e., Facebook, LinkedIn) in order to make decisions regarding their hiring (Brown & Vaughn, 2011). However, whether such reviewing is focused on career profiles, other biographic information, or inferences about other non explicit dimensions or the user's self-presentation, it does not seem to be carried out in a methodic, systematic, and/or scientifically way. In fact, despite the significant extension of the use of SNWs according to corporate reports, research into their use and effects in terms of personnel selection issues is still scarce (Nikolaou, 2014).

Roth, Bobko, Van Iddekinge, and Thatcher (2016) believe that SNWs should be considered as selection tools, and therefore they should be studied according to their reliability and validity as assessment standards. Additionally, it is also relevant how examinees perceive the use of SNWs when they apply for a position (Roth et al., 2016). Positive applicant reactions to the general selection process are related to increased levels in self-esteem, greater organizational commitment,and a higher drive to recommend the organization to other people (Bauer, Maertz, Dolen, & Campion, 1998; Bauer et al., 2001; Bauer, Truxillo, Paronto, Campion, & Weekley, 2004; Fletcher, 1991; Maertz, Bauer, Mosley, & Posthuma, 2004; Ployhart & Ryan, 1997, 1998). However, despite the growing awareness of the psychological impact of the selection processes on applicants, much less is known about their reaction to the use of tools such as SNWs (Kluemper, 2013). Thus, it is necessary to explore the individual applicants' reaction to the use of SNWs in order to improve their use as assessment tools in recruitment and selection processes (Brown & Vaughn, 2011; Kluemper, 2013; Roth et al., 2016; Ryan & Ployhart, 2014).

Accordingly, the present paper attempts to analyze applicants' reactions to SNWs when used for this purpose. Unlike previous studies, we have taken into consideration the specific SNWs used: (a) those designed for recreational purposes, such as Facebook, and (b) those which have professional uses, such as LinkedIn. We have also evaluated factors such as the role of different sociodemographic variables (i.e. gender, age, and professional status on the applicants' reactions). The aim of this work is to improve the use of SNWs as recruitment and selection tools by practitioners in human resources.

Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

Applicant reactions have been used to study applicants' perceptions of the selection process (Anderson, Salgado, & Hulsheger,

2010; Chan & Schmitt, 2004; Hausknecht, Day, & Thomas, 2004; Ryan & Ployhart, 2000). This study addresses both the attitudes, emotions, and cognitions people exhibit when facing a recruitment and selection process (Ryan & Ployhart, 2000), and their behavioral intentions (McLarty & Whitman, 2015).

Several approaches have been used, although Chan and Schmitt's model (Chan & Schmitt, 2004; Schmitt & Chan, 1999) is the most frequently used theoretical framework in most studies in the field. The model suggests that there are three specific dimensions to be taken into account: (a) the face validity the applicant attributes to the different assessment tools they had to tackle, i.e., to what extent the candidate considers the assessment tools are related to the job, (b) applicant's perception about whether such assessment tools have the capacity to predict future job performance, and (c) the applicant's perception about the fairness of assessment tools. These three dimensions combined represent the overall applicant reactions to the selection assessment procedures. The former, face validity and predictive validity, are related to the relationships between the job applied for and the assessment tools (Chan, Schmitt, Jennings, Clause, & Delbridge, 1998; Gilliland, 1993, 1994; Gilliland & Chan, 2001), and relate to the face characteristic of the selection process. The latter, perception of fairness, is related to the global judgment process (Hausknecht et al., 2004).

It should be noted that SNWs differ from each other with respect to the amount and type of information they are aimed at obtaining. There is a key distinction between those aimed at recreational or non-professional use (npSNWs, i.e., Facebook) and those professionally oriented (pSNWs, i.e., LinkedIn) (Nikolaou, 2014). npSNWs users usually post personal information such as personal events and photos (Stopfer & Gosling, 2013). On the contrary pSNWs users provide information about their current and past positions, the professional projects that they have been involved in, as well as their contributions to professional organizations (Nikolaou, 2014).

HR administrators could use these networks in different ways. The pSNWs are supposed to be used for a person-job match, whereas the npSNWs are used for a person-organization fit (Bangerter, Roulin, & Konig, 2012; Roulin & Bangerter, 2013). In addition, applicants' perception about their use might also be different. Studies have indicated that the examinees showed a more positive attitude toward some assessment instruments (i.e., interviews, knowledge tests, performance samples) than toward other instruments (intelligence or personality tests). They also showed strong negative attitudes toward other tools, such as graphology (e.g., Anderson et al., 2010). Therefore, the selection process could be more positively or negatively appraised according to the tools the applicant has to face (Reeve & Schultz, 2004).

Previous research into applicant reactions to SNWs is scarce and inconclusive. Even though there is evidence of negative reactions to Facebook (Gustafson, 2012), there is also evidence of non-negative reactions to the use of SNWs (Sanchez, Roberts, Freeman, & Clayton, 2012), as well as a lack of a relationship between the negative reactions and a decline in the appeal of the organization or any behavioral intention to choose them (Siebert, Downes, & Christofer, 2012). However, the specific characteristics of SNWs (particularly npSNWs) should lead to a negative appraisal by the applicant because the information posted by the users is not intended for assessment purposes (Black, Johnson, Takach, & Stone, 2014). In fact, the more intrusive the SNWs exam, the greater the applicants' repudiation of their use (Siebert et al., 2012). Moreover, people seeking a job seem to value pSNWs (i.e., LinkedIn) as a more effective tool for finding work than npSWNs (i.e., Facebook; Nikolaou, 2014). Accordingly, we set the following hypothesis:

*H*1. Participants will show more negative reactions to npSNWs compared to pSNWs when they are used as selection tools.

According to the very few studies that exist, it appears that the applicant's gender, age, and professional level may influence their