

Making allowances for job seekers on Facebook

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Your inappropriate Facebook profile, posts and photos could lose you your next job, according to an in-depth study of employers from six different industries. The conclusion of a paper to be published in the *International Journal of Work Innovation* this month reveals that many employers are using the Facebook profiles of job candidates to filter out weaker applicants based on perception of lifestyle, attitudes and personal appearance.

Vanessa A. de la Llama, Isabel Trueba, Carola Voges, Claudia Barreto and David J. Park of the School of Journalism and [Mass Communication](#), Florida International University in North Miami, suggest that employers using Facebook to assess those applying for a job with them, are creating a new digital divide, as well as revealing how our freedoms with regard to [virtual identity](#) are being encroached upon increasingly by the world of work.

Hundreds of millions of people have joined the [online social networking](#) site Facebook during the last six years or so. It has become one of the most popular tools for staying in touch with friends and family and other acquaintances. However, it is notoriously open by design and its opaque [privacy settings](#) mean that many people perhaps share more and more widely than they would otherwise do without realizing that prospective employers and others might see embarrassing or otherwise compromising aspects of their social and family life.

There have, of course, been numerous celebrated instances of a person's

Facebook activity allegedly leading to summary dismissal because it was perceived as compromising the integrity of their employer and their company brand. How widespread this is difficult to say because such cases are relatively uncommon although given wide publicity by the scandal-loving elements of the media and blogosphere.

"While employers are using Facebook to monitor their employees, they have also begun to use it as a [screening tool](#) when considering potential candidates," says de la Llama and colleagues, "Because this is a fairly new trend, a standardized set of guidelines has yet to be established, with employers often assessing job applicants in a subjective manner."

The team interviewed representatives from the areas of information technology, healthcare & wellness, education, law enforcement, food & drink, travel, advertising and suggest that their findings shed light on a growing trend. They hope to raise the ethical questions for debate surrounding whether or not employers should be using Facebook and perhaps other [social networking sites](#) to screen candidates. The question of whether employers are providing job candidates with equal opportunities if they are assessing online "image" prior to interviewing candidates must be raised. Of course, it is possible that one's Facebook activity is a perfectly acceptable window on to one's personality.

"Job seekers should be aware that their future employers are closely observing their [Facebook](#) profiles in search of a window into their personality," the team concludes. "Though this practice raises many ethical issues, it is an emerging phenomenon that is not slowing."

More information: "At Face(book) value: uses of Facebook in hiring processes and the role of identity in social networks" in *Int. J. Work Innovation*, 2012, 1, 114-136

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