

Social network spying could lead to low returns

December 17 2013

Organizations looking to hire new staff should rethink their clandestine use of social networking websites, such as Facebook, to screen new recruits. William Stoughton of North Carolina State University, lead author of a study published in Springer's *Journal of Business and Psychology*, found that this practice could be seen as a breach of privacy and create a negative impression of the company for potential employees. This spying could even lead to law suits.

In one experiment, Stoughton's research team, consisting of Drs. Lori Foster Thompson and Adam Meade, examined the reaction of applicants to prospective employers' reviewing their [social networking](#) websites. In another part of the research, participants had to rate their experience with a proposed [selection process](#) through a simulated selection scenario. In both cases, participants rated how they felt about their privacy being invaded and if the attractiveness of an organization was diminished because of such strategies. In the second experiment, participants were also asked whether they'd consider seeking legal justice if social network screening occurred.

The results demonstrate that applicants perceived pre-employment screening of [social networking websites](#) as an invasion of privacy, and might even consider suing an organization for it. Such practices further reduce the attractiveness of an organization during various phases of the selection process.

Notably, Stoughton's team found that people are very sensitive to their

privacy being compromised, regardless of whether they are offered the job or not. It could even discourage candidates from accepting offers of employment if they interpret poor treatment of applicants as a preview or indication of how they would be dealt with as employees. Prior research has shown that people who do accept an offer of employment while being selected under unfair procedures are prone to unfavorable attitudes post-hire. The negativity resulting from perceived procedural mistreatment during the hiring process could carry forward onto the job, leading to low performance and high turnover.

Stoughton advises applicants to reconsider using their Facebook pages as private forums for casual discussion with their friends, and to rather adopt a much more guarded tone. He hinted at the demand for a new, so-called "scrubbing" service in which objectionable material is removed from clients' presence on the Internet. This might be especially valuable for people applying for sensitive positions, such as jobs requiring a security clearance.

"Social network spying on job candidates could reduce the attractiveness of an organization during various phases of the selection process, especially if the applicant pool at large knows or suspects that the organization engages in such screening," Stoughton notes. "Because [internet message boards](#) and social media provide easily accessible forums for job seekers to share their experiences and opinions with others, it is very easy for a soured applicant to affect others' perceptions of an organization."

More information: Stoughton, J.W. et al (2013). Examining Applicant Reactions to the Use of Social Networking Websites in Pre-Employment Screening, *Journal of Business and Psychology*. [DOI: 10.1007/s10869-013-9333-6](#)

Provided by Springer

Citation: Social network spying could lead to low returns (2013, December 17) retrieved 17 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-12-social-network-spying.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.