

Can social media lead to labor market discrimination?

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A new *Journal of Economics & Management Strategy* study investigates whether social media may be used as a source of information for recruiters to discriminate against job applicants.

For the study, researchers set up an experiment that involved sending more than 800 applications from two fictitious applicants who differed in their cities of origin, a typical French town (Brives-la-Gaillarde) or Marrakesh, Morocco. This [information](#) is available only on their Facebook profiles, not on the resumes or the cover letters sent to recruiters. The investigators selected job openings published in over several months in mid-2012 on the French public agency for employment website Pôle emploi.

A significant 41.7% gap between the two applicants' callback rates highlighted that personal online profiles are used by recruiters as a source of information to discriminate against applicants of foreign origin.

During the experiment, the Facebook default

layout changed as Facebook introduced sub-tabs within profiles. This change reduced the salience of the information related to the applicants' language spoken. After the layout change, the difference in callback rates faded away. This suggests that the screening conducted by the employers does not go beyond the main pages of profiles. It also indicates that [design](#) choices made by online platforms, such as which information is displayed and how it is displayed, may have important consequences on the extent of discrimination.

"This study illustrates that design choices made by online platforms can dramatically affect a decision like calling back, or not, an applicant for a job interview. Internet companies should integrate this fact into their design thinking," said co-author Dr. Matthieu Manant of University of Paris-Sud.

More information: Matthieu Manant et al, Can social media lead to labor market discrimination? Evidence from a field experiment, *Journal of Economics & Management Strategy* (2018). [DOI: 10.1111/jems.12291](https://doi.org/10.1111/jems.12291)

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