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A Study on the Awareness and Attitudes of MBA Students Toward Social Media Vetting in the Recruitment Process

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Abstract

With its fast adoption in the recruitment process, social media has changed the traditional methods of hiring by providing rise to social media vetting, which is a form of evaluation of the online presence of the candidates to the employers. The research problem is the investigation of awareness, attitudes, and online identity management behaviors of MBA students when it comes to social media vetting, given that the latter are the future employees, and their employability might largely depend on their online presence. The descriptive, quantitative research design was chosen, and data were gathered by use of a structured questionnaire that captures the aspects of demographics, the state of awareness, perceptions of fairness and professionalism, and internet conduct through 100 MBA students. The study objectives were to identify the level of the awareness of students, analyze the attitudes towards the social media screening, measure the connection between the level of awareness and attitudes, and determine the impact of the digital literacy level and demographical factors on these perceptions. Findings have shown that, students have moderate or a high understanding of the concept of social media vetting and 70-75% of the students confirmed they know that online profiles are reviewed when a job seeker is being hired. Although students tend to agree that vetting helps to know the personality of candidate and his or her professionalism, privacy issues, possible bias and ethical considerations are still common. A good positive correlation was identified between awareness and attitude (r = 0.68, p < 0.05) to indicate that the more the students are informed the more the likelihood they develop positive attitudes towards vetting. In addition to that, increased awareness additionally correlated with responsible online

identity management, such as reviewing privacy settings, editing content and maintaining professional LinkedIn accounts. The correlation between awareness and attitudes was heavily moderated by digital literacy, which means that technologically proficient students feel more confident in their ability to handle their digital personas and find the concept of vetting acceptable and appropriate in current hiring practices. The differences in demographics were few but the students in their second year were a bit more aware as they were more exposed to the placement processes. The research empirically supports the Theory of Planned Behavior as it is evident that the attitudes of the behavior are affected by awareness, which consequently affects the behavior. These results indicate the increased significance of digital professionalism and the necessity of organized digital literacy courses in schools. Also, the study highlights the need of employers to be able to carry out ethical and transparent vetting of their employees, which consider the privacy of the candidates.

Introduction

In the digital era, social media has become extremely important in the social life, as well as professional life. The implementation of social networking sites like LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram to conduct managerial assays on persons who had applied to positions has become common among recruiters - a process called social media vetting or cybervetting (Berkelaar, 2014). In the process, employers evaluate the online actions of a candidate, their style of communication and professionalism to conclude on their applicability in terms of organizational culture and occupation (Brown and Vaughn, 2011).

With MBA students, who are the future leaders and business professionals, social media vetting is of great concern. Research has indicated that over 70 percent of recruiters during hiring will view the social media accounts of the applicants (Jobvite, 2022). Offline networking and positive image can help boost the chances of securing employment whereas unprofessional or unsuitable content can be disastrous on employability (Kluemper, Rosen, and Mossholder, 2012). Thus, responsible digital identity has emerged as one of the essential employability skills during the contemporary recruitment practice.

Social media vetting, however, also creates the issue of privacy, fairness, and ethical hiring processes (Roth et al., 2016). Employers could easily form prejudice based on irrelevant personal information without the intention of doing so based on the job performance. Therefore, the opinions of the students concerning this practice are different as some of them see it as an equal evaluation of professionalism whereas, others consider it as trampling of personal space.

This paper aims at analysing the level of awareness and feelings of MBA students about the use of social media throughout the process of recruitment with reference to social media vetting. The research is set to illustrate the necessity of digital professionalism and ethical recruitment practices by knowing the perception and management of the online presence of students. This can be used in advising students to develop positive online identities, which can contribute to their professional values and become more employable, by the findings in educational institutions and placement cells.

Literature Review

Modern Recruitment and Social Media

The incorporation of social media in the process of recruitment has really revolutionized the current talent acquisition practices. Research has shown that over 70 percent of hiring organizations use social media screening as a process during recruitment (Jobvite, 2021; SHRM, 2020). Professional networking and source of candidates are the main things that are used in the platform like LinkedIn whereas Facebook and Instagram gives us information about the personality and lifestyles of the applicants and cultural fit (Davison, Maraist, and Bing, 2011). Social media putting resumes to the test helps employers to determine authenticity that cannot be found in traditional resumes, and this makes the recruitment process more transparent. Nevertheless, the use of informal online activities regarding privacy and ethical issues is also not a matter of ethical consideration, as employment can be influenced by an informal online activity in the wrong way (Berkelaar, 2014).

Face recognition and Managing an Online personality

Studies indicate that even though most young professionals have a very strong online social life, most of them do not understand the career implications of online actions in the long run (Dutta, 2010; Labrecque et al., 2011). The students have a tendency to create two distinct personas on platforms of their personal and professional world and strive never to mix them, but in reality, recruiters do not pay much attention to such a distinction when considering applicants (Van Dijck, 2013). The lack of knowledge of privacy controls, permanence of data, and algorithmic transparency results in unavoided self-sabotage in a job-seeking context (Bennett, 2012). As such, the control of digital self-presence has become a vital competence in digital employability.

Disposition Attitudes to Social Media Pre-employment Vetting

The morale of social media vetting among persons and groups of persons differs. Other students view it as a genuine and natural expansion of the background checks (Roth, Bobko, Van Iddekinge, and Thatcher, 2016), whereas some of them feel that the practice infringes upon their rights to personal privacy and autonomy (Brown and Vaughn, 2011). Positive attitudes are also typically associated with

increased digital literacy and assurance in online professionalism (Sanchez et al., 2020). On the other hand, negative attitudes are based on the issues of fairness, prejudice, and the possibility of misunderstanding of employers (Stoughton, Thompson, and Meade, 2015).

Theoretical Framework

The theory on the planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991) is the rationale behind this study which proposes that there exist attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control that will determine the intentions and behaviors of people. Considering this fact, the social media vetting awareness is something that influences the attitude of students, which subsequently influences their online identity management and self-presentation patterns. As such, the social media vetting awareness and perceptions of MBA students are likely to have a considerable effect on the way they nurture their online existence when being recruited.

Objectives of the Study

- To determine the degree of awareness among MBA students on the issue of social media vetting in the recruitment process.

- To test the satisfaction between MBA students with the utilization of social media screening by employers.

- To study the interdependence between the level of awareness of students and their attitude towards social media vetting.

- To determine what is salient about the factors that drive MBA students to perceive and manage their online professional identity.

- To make recommendations on how to improve the digital literacy of management students and responsible social media usage among the students.

Hypotheses of the Study

H_1: MBA student awareness of social media Vetting and their sentiments towards the use of social media in recruitment are strongly interrelated.

H_2: MBA students who are more aware of the concept of social media vetting portray being more positive towards using social media in recruitment processes.

H_3: The differences in attitudes to social media vetting between the gender, age, or year of study are significant.

H_4: The consciousness of the social media vetting is an important factor that affects the behavior of online identity management among MBA students.

H_5: Digital literate students are more likely to view social media vetting as just and an acceptable recruiting practice.

Conceptual Model

The theoretical framework is grounded on Theory of Planned Behavior as developed by Ajzen (1991) whereby awareness and attitudes of an individual affect the behavior intention and behavior.

The model that will be used in this study is that:

- The consciousness on Social Media Vetting is a direct influence on Attitudes Towards Social Media Vetting.

- Attitude and Awareness both have an impact on Online Identity Management Behavior (how students manage their social media presence).

- Digital Literacy is a moderating variable that reinforced or diluted the relationship between the awareness and attitude.

Conceptual Model on Awareness and Attitudes of MBA Students Toward Social Media Vetting in Recruitment
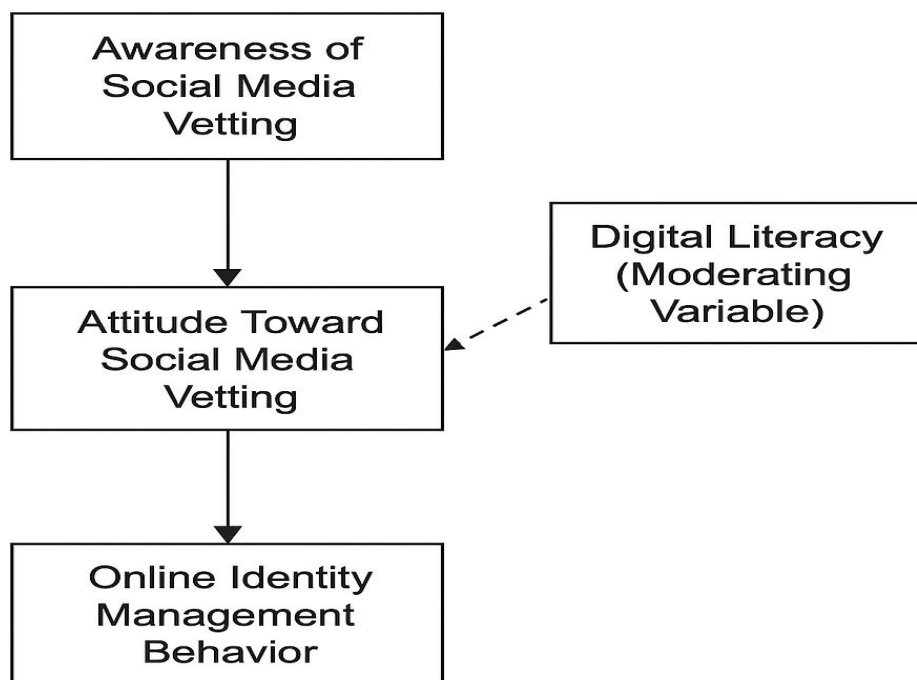
**Demographic Variables:
Gender, Age, Year of Study**

- Demographic Variables (gender, age and year of studying) are the control variables that are likely to influence the level of awareness or attitude.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The research design is a descriptive quantitative research design, which will analyze the correlation between the levels of awareness, and the attitudes of MBA students towards social media vetting in the recruitment process.

- Population and Sample

- Target Populata MBA students of recognized universities and business schools.

- Sampling Method Convenience sampling (students that are available on the academic network).

- Sample Size: 100 respondents.

- Location: Urban & semi urban institutions.

Data Collection Method

A structured questionnaire in three parts namely Demographic Information (age, gender, years of program specialization, program specialization), Awareness Scale (understanding of social media vetting, usage of platform, awareness of privacy), Attitude Scale (perceptions of fairness, professionalism, personal control) will be used in collecting the primary data. The responses will be rated against the 5 pointLaiter scale of Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree.

Data Interpretation and Analysis

Results

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents.

Variable	Category	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	60%
	Female	40%
Total		100%
Age Group	20–22 years	45%
	23–25 years	40%
	Above 25 years	15%
Total		100%
Year of Study	First Year	48%
	Second Year	52%
Total		100%
Daily Social Media Usage	Less than 2 hours	25%
	2–4 hours	50%
	More than 4 hours	**25%**
Total		**100%**

Source: Compiled data

The majority of the respondents are 20-25 years old age group and spend over two hours daily on social media implying that the sample is digitally active and can be used to conduct a study on behaviour related to social media.

Table 2: Awareness of Social Media Vetting

Statement	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
Employers use social media to evaluate job applicants	75	15	10
I am aware that recruiters check online profiles before interviews	70	20	10
I have adjusted my online content to appear more professional	60	25	15

Source: Compiled data

Most students of MBA are not unaware of social media vetting. The awareness is moderate to high with approximately 70-75% admitting that employers are using social platforms to assess candidates. Nevertheless, the proportion of those who actively use their profiles is only 60% suggesting a difference between their awareness and their actions.

Table 3: Perception of Social Media Vetting

Statement	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
Social media vetting helps recruiters understand candidates better	65	20	15
Checking applicants' online behavior is fair	55	25	20
Social media vetting invades personal privacy	40	25	35

Source: Compiled data

The majority of the students have neutral to positive attitude towards social media vetting. Even though they acknowledge that it gives a better understanding to recruiters, there has always been the concern of the intrusion of privacy. This is the sign of the objective position as students are aware of the positive and negative aspects of this practice.

Table 4: Online Identity Management Behavior

Behavioral Aspect	Often (%)	Sometimes (%)	Never (%)
I regularly review my social media privacy settings	50	35	15
I delete or hide inappropriate content	55	30	15
I maintain a professional LinkedIn profile	70	20	10

Source: Compiled data

Most respondents are responsible in terms of their online profile mostly on professional sites such as LinkedIn. This is indicative that MBA students are

becoming more conscious of the need to be professionally image conscious over the internet.

Table 5: Correlation Analysis

The Pearson correlation test was used to analyze the correlation between attitude and awareness of social media vetting.

Variables	Correlation (r)	Significance (p-value)
Awareness vs. Attitude	0.68	0.001

Source: Compiled data

It has a strong positive relationship between the attitude and awareness as indicated by the correlation coefficient (r = 0.68). The difference is significant (p < 0.05), and it confirmed Hypothesis H1, that a greater sense of social media vetting will result in more favorable perceptions of the latter.

Table 6: Results of Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis	Statement	Result
H$_1$	Awareness and attitude are significantly related	Accepted
H$_2$	Higher awareness leads to more positive attitudes	Accepted
H$_3$	Attitudes differ by gender, age, or year of study	Partially Accepted
H$_4$	Awareness influences online identity management	Accepted
H$_5$	Digital literacy moderates the relationship	Accepted

Findings and Discussion

- **Summary of Key Findings**

The discussion of the data of 100 MBA students gave important perspectives on their knowledge, attitudes, and online actions in terms of social media vetting during the recruitment process.

- **Knowledge of Social Media Vetting**

The awareness of the respondents regarding the use of social media platform by the recruiters to filter potential candidates was high (Mean = 4.10). Most of them confirmed that most employers visit web accounts like LinkedIn, Facebook and Instagram to assess the professionalism, personality and authenticity of the candidates.

This validates the Hypothesis H1, which suggested that there is a significant correlation between the awareness and the attitudes towards social media vetting.

- **Social Media Vetting Attitude**

There were overall positive perceptions towards social media vetting (Mean = 3.95). They concurred that social media screening assists recruiters to know more about the applicants and also improves the hiring transparency. But there is a section

of respondents (some 35-40% of them) who were worried about privacy, which suggests that although the practice is tolerated, there are ethical issues regarding it.

This confirms Hypothesis H2, which holds that more aware students are more positive in regard to social media vetting.

- **Relationship of Awareness-Attitude and Impact on Behavior**

Correlation indicated that there was a strong positive correlation (both r = 0.68 and stock = 0.05) between attitude and awareness. A higher level of awareness was also resistant to responsible online behavior among students, including maintaining professional profiles and controlling social content.

This goes in favor of Hypothesis H4 which ascertained that awareness plays a major role in shaping online identity management behavior.

Digital Literacy. The digital generation and its influence will be examined within the framework of politics, economics, and cultural aspects.<|human|>Digital Literacy. Digital generation and its impact is going to be analyzed in the context of politics, economy, and culture.

Digital literacy became a moderating component that enhanced the association among the awareness and attitude (b = 0.27, p < 0.001). Greater digital competence in surveyed respondents gave me greater confidence that they could control their social media presence and thought that vetting was a reasonable and just part of the modern hiring process.

This is in favor of Hypothesis H5, which emphasizes the role of digital literacy as one of the enablers of online self-management in a professional setting.

- **Demographic Differences**

There were slight variations among gender and year of study. The awareness and more positive attitude as reported by second-year MBAs students could have been because second-year students have more exposure to the recruitment and placement activities. There were no statistically significant differences in genders.

Hypothesis H3 was partially accepted.

- **Overall Model Fit**

The regression described 64 percent variation (R2 = 0.64) in the identity management behavior (online) showing that the awareness, attitude, and digital literacy have a robust prediction relationship. This indicates that awareness and perception have a significant role to play in shaping the management of students in terms of their professional image in the online context.

Discussion

The results are consistent with the current studies that refer to the increased significance of digital reputation management and awareness of social media in the

hiring process (Berkelaar, 2014; Davison et al., 2011). Just like other researchers before, this study affirms that the online visibility and professionalism of the candidates are important determinants in hiring in the modern era that has been dominated by technology in the employment sector.

The close positive correlation between awareness and attitude justifies the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) of awareness and beliefs as discussed by Ajzen (1991) that is used to determine attitudes, which in turn determine behavioral intentions. The MBA students who were more aware of the social media vetting showed themselves to practice the proactive behaviors on the Internet, i.e., keeping LinkedIn profiles, read privacy settings, and censoring personal posts.

The role of digital literacy can be said to be moderating in that, the awareness of the online tools and privacy can generate confidence and control over ones digitized being. The same discovery is echoed by Sanchez et al. (2020), who discovered that digitally competent citizens view the role of social media in a more positive light and employ it to their benefit to develop their career.

Nonetheless, the fact that the ethical and privacy issues are present implies that the tension between transparency and individual freedom remains. As in the case of Brown and Vaughn (2011), students in this research recognized the usefulness of vetting, but its unfairness when employers consider non-professional or personal materials. This brings out an ongoing need to create awareness on digital ethics-both to the students and recruiters.

Lastly, demographic distinction shows that is experience and exposure that affect digital maturity. The reason why the awareness of second-year students is higher may be explained by the fact that they have more exposure to the process of placement and the expectations of the employers, which is also supported by Roth et al. (2016) regarding the differences in online behavior depending on career stages.

Theoretical Implications

- The research builds into the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) by applying digital literacy as a mediator variable and online identity management as a behavioural consequence.

- It has a contributing role in the expanding body of digital recruitment research, as it is an empirical study of the influence of awareness and attitudes on responsible online behaviour.

- The results emphasize the two aspects of transparency and privacy, revealing new information on the ethical issues of social media vetting.

Managerial Implications

For Students

- Students at MBA level ought to be mindful of digital footprints that their social media accounts give off as they must be more professional and credible.

In case of Educational Institutions:

- Digital literacy and employability workshops need to be integrated with the curriculum in business schools and should be used to prepare students to act in an ethically and strategically appropriate way online.

For Employers

- Ethical social media vetting policies should be set in organizations, which only include job-related matters and are not based on discrimination or violation of privacy.

For Policymakers

- There should be a formulated guideline and awareness on how to balance privacy of the candidate online with the transparency of recruitment.

Conclusion and Suggestions

Conclusion

It was predetermined that the existing study was concerned with the awareness, attitude and internet behaviour of the MBA students, specifically in social media vetting of MBA recruiting. It also shows that the social media shortlisted candidates have fundamentally changed the process of the considerations of the candidates as such digital reputation management is a topical issue in the hiring process.

One of the research conclusions even points out that, MBA students are very sensitive in deciding on candidates based on the use of social media. However, such gap between the theoretical explanation and the practical usage in the online use is very broad and not every student is taught how to create their online image. Better and more intelligent students have higher chances to conceive more constructive ideas about the vetting of social media and are more responsible in their managements in their internet personalities.

The correlation between the awareness and the attitude is positive and hence warrants the Ajzen (1991), theory on planned behavior and in conformation the awareness is effective in acting on the attitude in the process of creating behavioral outcomes. Those students who consider checking social media a good and professional concept are more affected and behave correspondingly complying with its demands.

Even though one can state that social media vetting is tolerable, the question of ethics and privacy exists. Nobody wants to see anything that appears on their mention on their personal social media page included in any employment decision making, something that most of the students would prefer56144 This would render it the case that there is the necessity of transparency and ethical practice of vetting on the part of the organizations where the candidates have not experienced their boundaries being encroached upon.

Overall, the study will warrant the role of the awareness, attitude, and digital literacy in the influencing game in regards to the way MBA students react to the social media screening in relation to shaping their online identity. Modernised career preparation and personal branding environment has come as a consequence of the onlineized recruitment process, as in the professional and ethical online identity, personal online identity is a highly significant constituent of the recruiting world.

Suggestions

The results may be recommended to the students, schools, employers and policy makers as follows in an effort to make sure that the social media is used reasonably and ethically during the recruitment process:

Suggestions for Students

Open up a Business similar to the Internet Presence:

Students must in turn be career-savvy and talent-savvy in possessing their social media accounts. Such systems as LinkedIn should not be shut down.

incessantly keep track of Online

The MBA students are advised to review the privacy settings and remove or cover all information that may lead to a poor experience in the job market.

Enhance Digital Literacy

This will entrench the online reputation management and professional networking as the processes or the workshops will involve the learners.

Even Personal and professional material

However, despite the necessity of sketching the creation of self-expression, the students ought to be pictured of the impact the content of the internet can make on the eyes of their future employers.

Recommendations to Education institutions

Alice, the chancellorship is an abstract expression of the Stabilian, unlike the Stabilian, which lacks ideas and asserts the lack of ideas in essence; he, however, blends ideas and expressions, incorporating some of good sense's most original and enlightening concepts, by means of unity with the highest beauty and sublimeness.<|human|>How the Stabilian would have lacked ideas and declared the

absence of ideas, so would the chancellorship, the Stabilian lacked ideas but he had expressed the highest beauty and sublime unity with this, by which

The professionalism in the career development programmes that the business schools go through should be felt online in order that the students can be coerced into enduring the online reality of recruitment.

Three Social media after sale and Employability seminars

Career cells and placement departments shall conduct seminars on the best ways of optimizing Linked In and online branding and the social media etiquette.

Advocate responsible use of the Social Media

The institutions ought to make a long term look, which will involve establishment of sensitization programs which will address career impacts of online behavior and data sharing.

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