

BIG IDEA, IN BRIEF

Thinking of checking out job candidates on Facebook? Step away now...

3-MINUTE
READ

“ You could be setting yourself up for a discrimination lawsuit. ”

Many organizations require candidates to give them access to their Facebook page, and, according to one estimate, up to 70% of companies use social media scraping to learn more about job applicants.

A majority of search professionals and recruiters believe that information derived from social media sites is more accurate than information provided on résumés and applications.

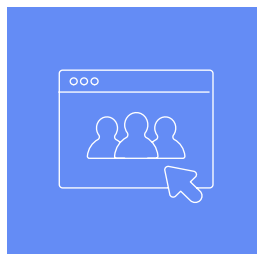
But a recent [study](#) in the *Journal of Applied Psychology* by Zhang et al strongly indicates that scraping social media sites in this way runs the risk of making discriminatory and potentially illegal judgements. For example, virtually all Facebook pages surveyed revealed gender and racial/ethnicity information, and, in most cases, allowed recruiters to identify an applicant's national origin and marital status. Nearly half the pages enabled recruiters to determine a candidate's sexual orientation.

Of course, information on social media that demonstrates education level, work-related and communication skills has a positive impact on recruiters. But discriminatory insights drawn

from web scraping also strongly influence recruiters' assessments—and, the study found, despite extensive training, recruiters could not avoid the influence of discriminatory information they found online.

Perhaps most damning, this ethically fraught route is also ineffective—recruiter selection assessments based on viewing Facebook pages had no value in predicting a new hire's subsequent on-the-job performance or likely retention.

So if an organization is truly committed to creating inclusive, fair and equitable employment practices, using social media postings to learn more about job applicants shouldn't be a means to answer the kind of questions recruiters wouldn't dream of asking a candidate.



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Source: Zhang, L., Van Iddekinge, C. H., Arnold, J. D., Roth, P. L., Lievens, F., Lanivich, S. E., & Jordan, S. L. (2020). "What's on job seekers' social media sites? A content analysis and effects of structure on recruiter judgments and predictive validity", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 105(12), 1530-1546.

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