

THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY
SCHREYER HONORS COLLEGE

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AN INVESTIGATIVE LOOK INTO HOW FACEBOOK IS BEING UTILIZED BY
COMPANIES AS A SCREENING TOOL IN THE HIRING PROCESS

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Abstract:

This thesis is an investigative look into how companies are utilizing Facebook as a screening tool when making hiring decisions on prospective undergraduate candidates. Currently, Facebook is the world's largest social networking site with over 630 million users globally (Facebook Marketing Statistics). Over 30% of the Facebook population is between the ages of 18 and 24, therefore it is not surprising that companies filling entry-level positions are tapping into this database in order to access candid information that might provide helpful insight on a potential employee. This paper examines the practice of using Facebook in recruitment & selection procedures from a corporate, consumer, and legal perspective. The findings of this research suggest that the majority of companies recruiting undergraduates consult social networking sites and make hiring decisions based off of everything from Facebook profile pictures, to wall conversation's, tagged photos, or even status updates. This study also proves that students are well aware of this occurring practice; results show that over 91% of job-seeking seniors have given thought to the appropriateness of their Facebook profiles while applying to jobs and 96% of these respondents stated their Facebook pages were private. Additionally, the large majority of student's surveyed and interviewed stated that they had taken precautionary measures such as blocking their photos and changing their usernames to ensure that their Facebook pages would not interfere with any job opportunities. Finally, this thesis also examines the legal constraints around using social media as a hiring tool and delves further into how screening the Facebook pages of potential employees could potentially break laws that are in place to prevent Employment Discrimination.

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Introduction:

It was only six short years ago when Mark Zuckerberg, then sophomore at Harvard University, had an idea that would drastically change the social environment of his generation forever. Facebook, the world's largest social networking site, has completely revolutionized society, affecting everything from daily social interactions among peers to the marketing strategies and advertising platforms of Fortune 500 companies. With hundreds of features and functions, Facebook gives its 630 million users plenty of opportunities to post an infinite amount of information about their personal lives; consequently, it's not surprising that this overflowing pool of data has become one of the most valuable resources for companies around the world to tap into. Along with changing the ways companies do business and college students occupy their free time, Facebook has also drastically affected the process of getting a job. Most recently, Human Resource professionals have started to utilize this social networking site as a screening tool when recruiting and hiring potential employees. With an endless amount of information available, Facebook has become an easy way to gain a lot of candid information about a candidate. This method is effective, easy, affordable and its dollar benefits far exceed the costs; therefore the high Return on Investment makes Facebook screening much more attractive to companies than the traditional methods (Reilly). Unfortunately, this trendy new recruitment tool comes as a threat to job-seeking members of the Facebook community- what was meant to be a funny reminder of a late night with friends might just turn into the photo that costs a college student a job.

My thesis investigates the practice of using Facebook as a hiring tool from every angle. It seeks to extend knowledge on how employers use the information revealed by

this social networking site in the candidate review process. Additionally, it examines the student's point of view on this procedure and includes personal anecdotes that shed light on how job-searching undergraduates feel about this use of their personal information, and what they are doing to prevent their online profiles from interfering with getting hired. Finally, it discusses the potential legal ramifications for companies who lean on social media as a tool for making hiring decisions.

History & Background of Facebook

Facebook was founded in February of 2004 and was initially created as a social conduit that allowed Harvard students to network and communicate with each other (Carolson). It took hardly anytime before the Facebook craze caught on and the site rapidly expanded to other Universities, first becoming available to other Ivy League populations and then eventually to all college students (Carlson). In less than a year Facebook made its services available to high school students across the country, and then finally to anyone age 13 or older with a valid email address. The constantly evolving website now offers its users everything from maintaining a personal profile to being “fans” of thousands of interests and companies, to attending and organizing events and belonging to special interest groups. Today, the company prides itself on being a “social utility that helps people communicate with friends, family, and coworkers in a trusted environment” (Press Room Statistics).

Currently Facebook has just over 630 million users internationally, and about 55% of this population is female with the remaining 45% made up of males (Facebook Marketing Statistics). Though the United States is the country with the largest number of users, over 70% of the Facebook population is currently international; in fact, over 70 translated versions of Facebook exist around the world (Press Room Statistics).

Currently, the 18-24 year old range is the largest demographic, composing about 30% of Facebook’s population. Of the individuals logged onto this social media site, over 50% admit to checking their profiles at least once a day. Statistics provided by Facebook indicate people spend over 700 billion minutes a month on Facebook (Press Room Statistics). Therefore, it comes as no surprise that HR professionals look to this heavily

trafficked site for insight into potential undergraduate candidates.

There are multiple features available to a Facebook user, and they are constantly changing and growing. First and foremost, members of this online community are provided a profile and homepage which they can customize and update according to their personal preferences. The user profile is Facebook's fundamental feature; on it individuals can provide contact information such as their full name, birth date, phone number, address, hometown, current city, school and work information. There is also space for more personal information such as relationship status, sexual orientation, likes, and interests. The profile also consists of core applications such as photos, events, videos, and groups, but the most prominent component of the profile is the user's wall. The wall is an ongoing culmination of comments posted by the user's friends, allowing anyone that has access to the user's profile to post comments, links, photos, or videos to the wall.

In terms of privacy, Facebook has made it very easy for its users to customize privacy settings to suit their personal preferences. The company claims that they "focus on giving people control over their experience so they can express themselves freely while knowing that their information is being shared in the way they intend" (Controlling How You Share). However, unless a user takes special precaution to modify these settings accordingly, Facebook's default privacy setting allows anyone to gain access to a user's profile and all of the information available on it. Currently, the standardized settings permit anyone in the Facebook community to view a user's status, photos, wall post, and bio information. Therefore, Human Resource professionals are often very successful at locating a large amount of personal information and insight through on an individual through viewing his or her Facebook profile.

Literature Review

As Facebook continues to become an increasingly important part of the recruitment and selection processes in the business world, many articles and studies have recently been published analyzing the motives and ethics surrounding this trend.

In one paper, “An examination of College Students’ Awareness of Social Web Site Usage and Employability”, Donna Luse looks at students’ opinions of how their participation in social networking sites might affect their future job opportunities. In her article, Luse includes research that proves employers are consulting social media websites more than ever when making hiring decisions. She hypothesized that even though statistics indicate that the use of Facebook to screen applicants is becoming standard protocol, the vast majority of college students are unaware that “web socializing” could affect their future employability. Luse’s study reveals that 1/3 of the college business majors surveyed did not believe that their usage of social media sites affected job-interviewing or job-hiring decisions. Additionally, she uncovered that 42% of the survey respondents “indicated they do not believe website usage affects job employability.” She concluded that college students need to be more aware of “potential implications of their usage on social websites and their future employment potential.” My thesis includes a similar study surveying Penn State job-seeking seniors, yet reveals different results.

In another article, “LinkedIn and Facebook in Belgium: The Influences and Biases of Social Network Sites in Recruitment and Selection Procedures”, Ralef Caers and Vanessa Castelyns investigate how Human Resource professionals in Belgium use social media networking sites when selecting candidates. They surveyed 353 respondents

from all different types of industries and organizations, and found that Facebook has indeed become an instrumental tool in finding additional information about applicants and helping to decide which candidates to invite to interviews. Additionally, Castelyns and Caers looked at how HR professionals interpret and judge an applicant's Facebook profile picture. Though most information on Facebook can be kept 'private', Facebook profile pictures can be seen by anyone on the social networking site, and may be indicative of one's personality. Research included in the article showed that often times biases play a role in determining which applicants receive an interview; frequently, these biases are based off of traits such as age, facial attractiveness, gender, sexual orientation, race, and handicap- factors that can all be revealed by a profile picture. Their results show that while respondents claimed that Facebook profile pictures do not indicate traits such as emotional stability and agreeableness, about 40% of the respondents affirmed that they do see a correlation between Facebook profile pictures and levels of extroversion and maturity. Thus, Caers and Castelyns concluded that the practice of consulting social media increases the risk that a "selection bias may occur even before the first interview."

Clearly, lots of controversy has emerged as a response to the corporate world utilizing Facebook as a screening tool. In "Employer's Use of Social Networking Sites: A Socially Irresponsible Practice," Leigh A. Clark takes a stand on the "inexpensive, informal online character checks" claiming they are harmful to society. Clark feels as though there are not enough guidelines in place within the companies who use social networking sites to merit basing any sort of hiring decisions off of the information they reveal. In her article she states, "even though employers may have a legal right to use SNSs in this way and future employees expect them to do so, it is wrong for employers to

do this unless the information obtained in this manner is essential to the job.” The article uncovers that only 5% of companies using social networking sites in the recruitment and selection process actually have a policy in place to govern the practice. Additionally, Clark believes that viewing an employee’s Facebook profile is an invasion of privacy that crosses the boundaries between work and personal life. Because Facebook has become a conduit for communication and casual conversation between friends, Clark feels that using it to make hiring decisions “would be similar to allowing public restaurants to place bugs under each table and broadcast the hundreds of conversations that occur on a public feed for employers to view.” Hence, this article concludes that conducting online character checks is an invasion of an applicant’s personal privacy and an unethical practice that should be avoided by companies unless it is required for a legitimate business purpose.

This thesis looks further into the way that companies use an applicant’s Facebook profile, as well as students’ awareness and feelings surrounding this use of their personal information. Additionally, it also analyzes the potential legal ramifications for companies who choose to use social networking sites in this manner.

The Corporate Perspective

No matter the company or job description, hiring an individual to join an organization is a big investment and an important decision that is never taken lightly. The process often includes multiple rounds of interviews and interaction between members of the company and the potential employee so that the business can make the most informed decision possible before extending a job offer. Naturally, Human Resource employees want to gather as much information possible on a candidate so they can protect themselves from negligent hiring and ensure the candidate fits well with the company's culture and values. The truth is, "Employers have always been able to request background information on job applicants but have been restrained in doing so because of the cost and legal requirements...[but] now this norm is shifting, as employers are routinely conducting informal online background checks on people without the applicant's knowledge" (Clark and Roberts).

In response to the limitless data available on the Internet, conducting an online search on job applicants has become a routine part of the recruiting and hiring procedure. If there is information publicly available on a candidate, chances are the company will see it. With today's technology, "every potential employer could be watching you. Whether it's through a blog, online profile or Google search, digging for digital dirt has become part of the screening process for job applicant's at companies of all sizes" (Correa, 2006). Professionals warn that anything found on the Internet will be added to the file of information already obtained in an effort to make the most educated decision possible.

In January of 2010 Microsoft commissioned a study through Cross-Tab

Marketing Research that explored the role of online reputation information in the candidate review process and investigated how consumers feel about this use of their information. This study included 275 Human Resource Professionals and about 330 consumers from countries around the world. Some of the most shocking findings show that checking online sources has become a formal requirement of the hiring process; in fact, 75% of HR professionals attested that their companies required them to screen an applicant online and thoroughly review available information before extending an offer to an applicant (Online Reputation in a Connected World). Additionally, after having reviewed the candidate's online reputation, 70% of the US recruiters admitted that they denied the applicant a position based on the findings (Online Reputation in a Connected World).

Though there is no way to validate whether or not the information posted on the internet is accurate or authentic, most recruiters are still willing to rely on what they find as a basis for making a decision regarding a candidate. In fact, 84% of US recruiters and HR professionals surveyed in Cross-Tab's study felt it is fair and proper to "consider personal data posted online". This of course includes social media sites such as Twitter, MySpace, and Facebook. Facebook profiles can reveal a variety of things about an individual, potentially including information that would be relevant to making a hiring decision.

When performing these online searches, there are a number of potential factors that HR professionals have reported sway them to reject candidates. First and foremost on the list of red flags are concerns raised about the candidate's lifestyle. This could include assumptions based off of information gathered from one's Facebook Profile. As Boston

attorney Renee Jackson writes, “By viewing the list of Pages an applicant supports on Facebook, employers may also be able to hypothesize as to another factor in the applicant’s candidacy: whether the applicant would be a good ‘fit’ with the organizations culture or values.” For example, if a recruiter saw a candidates profile and noticed that many of his interests and photos were involving alcohol it might raise a red flag that the candidate has a substance abuse problem, or is possibly irresponsible; two character traits that a company is most likely trying to avoid in an employee.

The second type of information that influenced 56% of the HR professionals to reject a candidate was inappropriate commentary and text written by the candidate. An anonymous source from the HR Department of an accounting firm reported that she has denied candidates interviews based off of inappropriate status updates on their Facebook Profiles. An example she provided was that she once came across an applicant’s status that read “Blacking out and getting wasted tonight.” She said, “ The job market is hard enough as it is, and students need to be very mindful about maintaining an appropriate online presence. It only takes one inappropriate photograph or comment to quickly make a negative impression on a company.” She went on to express that anything publicly posted on the Internet is “fair-game” and potential employees should make certain they are familiar with their privacy settings. A general rule of thumb she gave was, “if you wouldn’t want your grandmother reading or seeing something, than it should not be posted online.”

Additionally, another red flag the Cross-Tab study revealed was ‘comments criticizing previous employers, co-workers, or clients.’ There have been many recent instances of companies firing current employees due to social media misuse. One

company reportedly fired an employee for posting, “OMG I HATE MY JOB- My boss is a total pervy Wanker who keeps making me do shit stuff just to piss me off! WANKER!” (Worker Faces Music After Bagging Boss on Facebook) Unfortunately for this woman, she had forgotten she was Facebook friends with her boss and not only did he see the comment, but he responded to it and fired her. Clearly, companies looking to hire loyal employees do not find it favorable to see that the individual was publicly discussing matters or expressing opinions that should be kept confidential.

Aside from written comments, inappropriate photographs have also deterred many HR professionals from hiring an applicant; in fact, 55% of US HR professionals have turned down a candidate due to unsuitable photos, videos, and information that they located online (Online Reputation in a Connected World). 23-year old Bobby Mitchell*, alumni of the University of Vermont, shared that he was denied a job from a large computer company due to an inappropriate photo of himself found on Facebook. Mitchell’s uncle is employed by the company and forwarded the HR department Bobby’s resume for an entry-level marketing role. Not even a week later Bobby’s uncle received an email from his HR contact stating that they would be unable to invite Bobby to a first round interview due to a Facebook photo found depicting him smoking an illegal substance. Mitchell confirmed that he was aware that the photograph was online, but he didn’t think it was accessible to anyone but his immediate friends. “I really didn’t give much thought to it, and definitely didn’t expect anyone but my friends to look at it”, Mitchell said. He went on to attest that when his Uncle forwarded him the email from the HR employee, he definitely had a “much needed wake-up call”, and realized that there are no secrets on the internet. Bobby said that before he applied to any other jobs he

deleted all the inappropriate photos from his Facebook profile and de-friended anyone he was unfamiliar with. He also adjusted his privacy settings to make sure his profile was not public, and blocked his photographs from everyone.

Mitchell is just one of the many students who's Facebook presence has interfered with a job opportunity; it is extremely important for job-seekers to be aware of what they are posting on the internet and what information they are choosing to share with people outside of their immediate friends.

*Mitchell's name has been changed for privacy concerns

The Consumer Perspective:

Between hard statistics and overwhelming popular opinion it is a fact that Facebook has become a key driver in the social lives of millions of individuals. Created primarily for social networking purposes, Facebook is most often used to keep in touch with peers, see what others are up to, and share personal information with friends. However, now that Facebook has become such an integral component of the job application process, many of its users are having second thoughts as to how they are utilizing the website and whether or not the use of information by employers is an invasion of personal privacy.

According to findings presented in “Online Reputation in a Connected World”, most individuals find it reasonable that recruiters and HR professionals refer to social networking sites to research their applicants. However, many people expressed great concern over the “scrutiny of photos, videos, and other personal content.” Similarly, the Cross-Tab market research study showed that eight out of ten Americans surveyed admitted to taking some sort of steps to safeguard the privacy settings on their profile (Online Reputation in a Connected World).

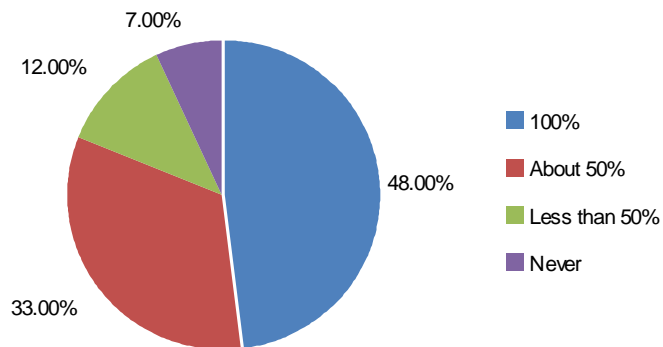
A similar study was conducted at Penn State, surveying 100 undergraduate students in order to observe their general Facebook behavior and obtain their opinions on this controversial use of their Facebook profiles. All individuals surveyed were senior students at Penn State who are currently actively searching for a job for post-graduation. The survey is presented on the following page.

Facebook Survey Given to 100 Penn State Seniors Searching for a Full Time Position

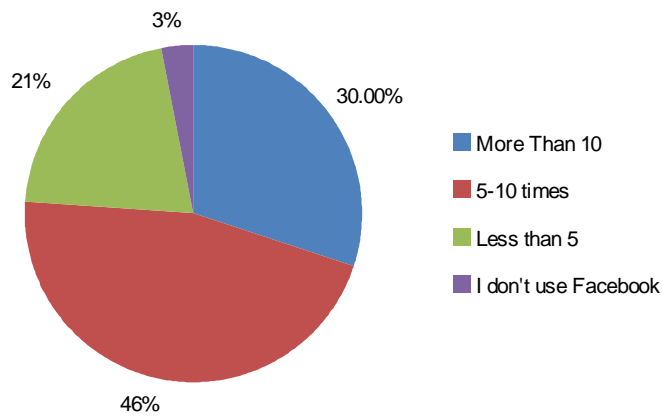
1. When you open an Internet browser, how often is Facebook the first website you go to?
 - a. 100%
 - b. about 50%
 - c. less than 50%
 - d. Never
2. On average, how many times do you visit Facebook a day?
 - a. More than 10
 - b. 5-10
 - c. Less than 5
 - d. I don't use Facebook
3. Do you have a Facebook application on your Mobil Phone?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
4. Do you take special care when customizing your privacy settings?
 - a. Yes, I have customized settings that I have chosen
 - b. No, I just use the default privacy settings
5. Have you given any thought to the appropriateness of your Facebook profile or altered it in any way while applying to jobs?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
6. In a survey done by Microsoft, 80% of Human Resource professionals in the United States admitted to checking candidates Facebook Profiles before hiring them for the job. Do you think this is fair?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
7. Do you think it is fair to not hire someone based on what can be publicly viewed on their Facebook profile?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
8. Do you have your photos blocked?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
9. Do you have your full name as your Facebook?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
10. Can anyone view your Facebook Profile?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

Survey Results

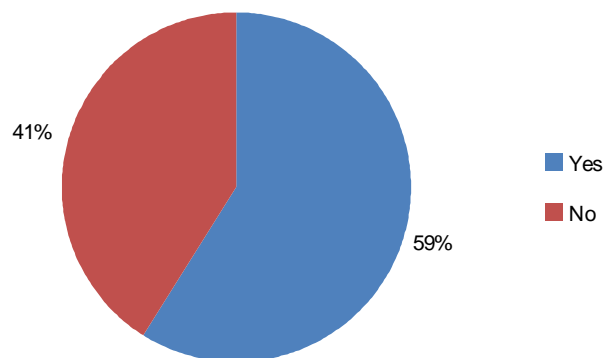
Question 1: When you open an internet browser, how often is Facebook the first website you go to?



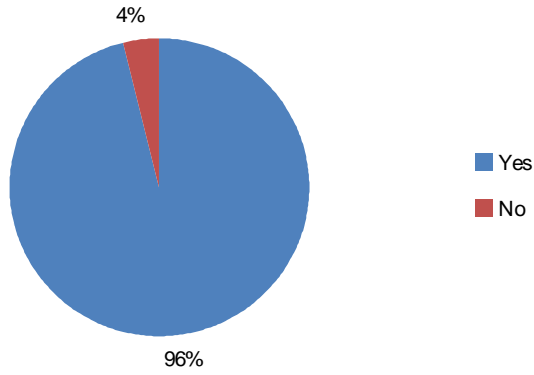
Question 2: On average, how many times do you visit Facebook a day?



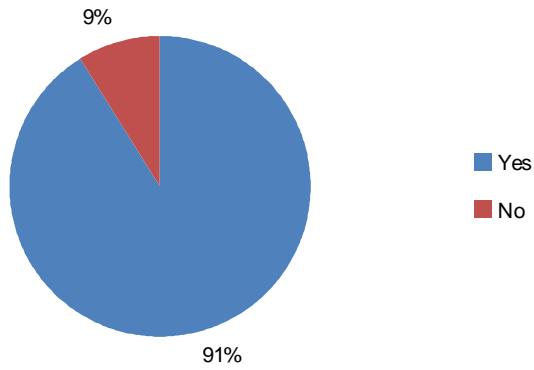
Question 3: Do you have a Facebook application on your mobile phone?



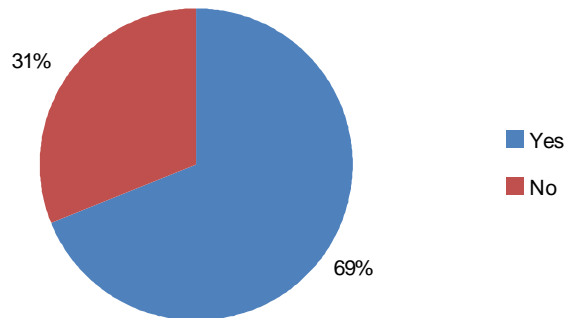
Question 4: Do you take special care when customizing your privacy settings?



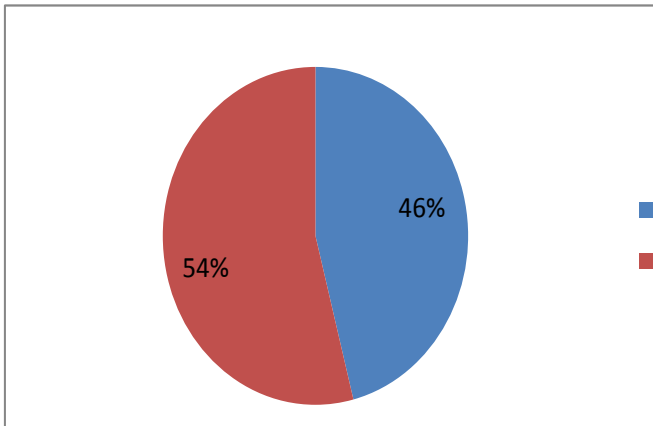
Question 5: Have you given any thought to the appropriateness of your Facebook profile or altered it in any way while applying to jobs?



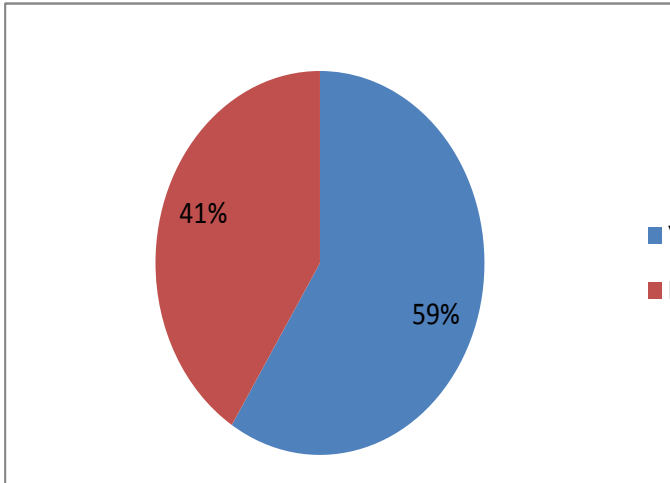
Question 6: In a survey done by Microsoft, 80% of Human Resource professionals in the United States admitted to checking candidates Facebook Profiles before hiring them for the job. Do you think this is fair?



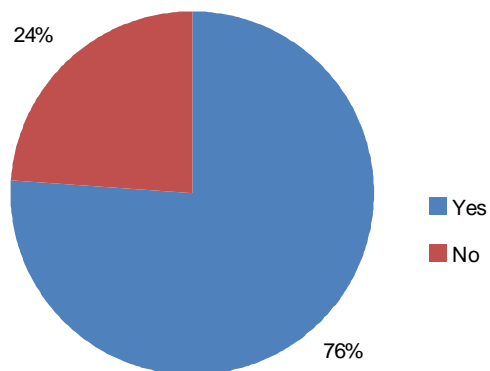
Question 7: Do you think it is fair to not hire someone based on what can be publicly viewed on their Facebook profile?



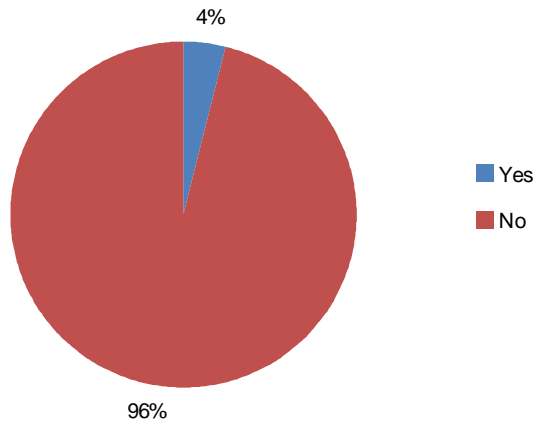
Question 8: Do you have your tagged photos blocked?



Question 9: Is your username on Facebook your first and last name?



Question 10: Can anyone view your Facebook profile?



Survey Analysis:

From looking at responses to the first question, it is immediately evident that Facebook occupies the majority of Penn State students' time on the Internet. We see that 47% of the pool answered that Facebook was always the first website the student went to when opening an internet browser, and 32% admitted that about half of the time it was the first internet site visited. Though these statistics seem surprising, they are inline with insight provided by various students. When asked about her Facebook habits, senior Finance major Lauren Mlynski replied, "No matter what my intentions are when opening an Internet Safari window, I always automatically log into Facebook. Even if I am trying to do work or check my email, I literally find my fingers typing in the address without even thinking about it. It has become a sick addiction and it's sad to say that I cannot imagine what our social lives would be like without it." In keeping with this, about 30% of the sampling pool attested that they visited Facebook 10 or more times a day, and 46% answered that they visited Facebook at least 5-10 times daily. And if constantly signing on "the Book" every time Mlynski uses the internet wasn't enough to satiate her social curiosity wasn't enough, she also admitted to receiving constant updates and notifications regarding any activity on her Facebook profile to her cellular phone. Aside from only accessing Facebook from a computer, most major cell phones such as Blackberries and I-phones have created applications that enable their customers to check their profiles and participate in Facebook's main functions via their cell phones. When surveyed, 59% of the Penn State seniors admitted that they had this application installed on their cell phones, drastically increasing the time they actually spend on the social networking site. All of this data makes it evident that students are constantly using the social networking

site, and many will admit that it has become some sort of an addictive habit. Therefore, based off of these findings one would assume that because students invest so much of their time and interest on the site, their profiles would be a good indication of their personality or the way they would like to be perceived by others; information that would in fact be valuable to recruiters.

The survey also explored students' use of Facebook privacy settings. Results show that 96% of the seniors take care to customize their privacy settings. Though there are a wide variety of privacy combinations available, 59% of the students have chosen to make all of the photos of themselves private and blocked from anyone seeing them. As aforementioned, recruitment professionals admitted that incriminating photos were one of the main things that interfere with job opportunities, and it seems as though Penn State students are being sensible about this. Another precautionary measure that 24% of the respondents have taken is was changing their username to something aside from their first and last name. Senior Elementary Education major Angela Laverinc stated that she appears on Facebook under her first and middle name, Angela Marie. She said that because she is currently student-teaching, she wants to make sure her students cannot search for or find her on the social networking site. Laverinc said, "I am well aware that even though I have strict privacy settings, anything that I post on the Internet is technically public. I feel as though having my first and middle name is just an extra way to do all that is in my power in order to prevent my Facebook profile from falling into the hands of anyone I might not want it to."

Finally, this survey also provides insight on student's feelings surrounding their Facebook profiles being looked at by prospective employers. 91% of the students attested

that they had given thought to the appropriateness of their profile while applying to jobs, and 69% said they thought it was fair for companies to check a candidate's Facebook profile before hiring them. Part of the 31% that did not feel this was fair is senior Public Relations major Ashley Zawatski. Zawatski said, "A company should not have access to your personal life and your relationship with friends. It's like eavesdropping in on a personal conversation." She also went on to state that anything found on a Facebook page is no indication of how successful someone will be at work. Zawatski provided an example to back up her opinion, stating, "A picture of a teacher drinking a beer should not be an issue- she's completely legal, and this is not grounds to make an assumption about how well she could do her job." Though she does not feel this practice is fair, she has taken extensive measures to protect herself from becoming a victim of Facebook, and since she has successfully gotten a full-time position at a consulting firm.

Results of the survey also showed that 54% of the respondents felt that not hiring an individual based off of what could be publicly viewed on their profile was not fair. Laverinc said, "It's not fair, I feel like it's almost like reading someone's diary and punishing them for it." She also expressed that she felt as though there were certain things on her Facebook profile, such as comments her friends put on her wall, that were out of her control and should not be held against her when being considered for a position.

Legal Perspective:

Historically, Employment Discrimination has always been an issue in the workplace; over the past century the United States has created and passed various laws in an effort to ensure that Americans are being treated fairly and equally in the office. However, the legislation can become a bit blurry and indefinite when the employee is out of the office. There has always been a fine line between the work place and the privacy of an individual's personal life and this is exactly the principal at question when examining the practice of using Facebook as a hiring tool from a legal standpoint.

Employment Discrimination occurs when employers "adversely single out employees or applicants on the basis of race, age, gender, sex, sexual orientation, national origin, disability, religion, or various other reasons" (Employment Discrimination Law). The laws that were formed in order to prevent this occurrence are made up of both federal and state statutes. Among the discriminatory practices that these laws prohibit, "bias in hiring and firing" is included (Employment Discrimination Law). Additionally, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 classifies race, religion, sex, national origin, age, sexual orientation, relationship status, and various other personal data as "protected class information" that is illegal to ask in an interview (Greenstein). However, this type of information is exactly what a Facebook profile reveals. Therefore, when the company conducts an online background check on a candidate it is highly likely that they will become in possession of information they otherwise were not supposed to have.

Currently, there are various opinions on this subject in the legal world. According to lawyer Nancy Schess, "If you go on a search engine and you can find [protected information], then you can look at it" (Greenstein). The real issue at hand is what you do

with the information. In Greenstein's article, "Is it Legal to use Social Network Data When Hiring?", he gives the example of a company discovering through an applicant's Facebook status that she is 3 months pregnant. He discusses how the possession of this information could easily affect the company's decision of hiring this woman knowing she will be out of work in just 6 months, even if she is highly qualified for the position.

Currently, Facebook's privacy settings require that each user's name, profile picture, gender, and networks are publicly available to everyone on Facebook because "this info is essential to helping you connect with your friends and family" (Facebook.com). However, is this information essential to helping a company decide whether a candidate is the right person for a job? Even if a user chooses to make her entire profile private and exclusively viewable to her friends, Facebook will still allow everyone to view her profile picture. This alone can be controversial for companies performing Internet checks on applicants because it could allow for an HR person's bias to prevent a candidate from even receiving an interview. For example, suppose an HR professional at a firm is racist and discovers through viewing her profile picture that the job applicant at question is an African American. Though it would be very difficult to prove that this was the reason the woman did not receive an interview, it is a plausible outcome that could cause legal controversy for the company. As Ralf Caers and Vanessa Castelyn assert in their article in the *Social Science Computer Review*, "Frequent biases in selection interviews are decisions based on age, gender, sexual orientation, race, facial attractiveness, facial maturity...and applicant name, and social networks allow these biases to occur even before the first interview takes place." According to findings presented in this article, 40.2% of the 398 HR professionals surveyed believe that the

applicant's profile picture can be directly correlated to the individual's level of extraversion, and 43.4% see a correlation with maturity. Therefore, if a young undergraduate looking for a job has a profile picture of himself drinking on the beach with friends, chances negative conclusions surrounding his maturity level might be drawn by companies who see this photo. Though there is zero concrete evidence that a picture of a young man legally drinking a beer would make him any less qualified or successful performing a certain job, this could be a conclusion that will be drawn by a recruiter who sees this photo. In this instance there is clearly "bias in hiring" taking place and this is exactly what employment discrimination laws aim to prevent (Employment Discrimination Law). Hence, lawyers are warning employers who engage in this practice that they "document a legitimate business rationale for rejecting applicants and make sure that hiring decisions are not motivated by information found on an applicant's social networking site" (Wise).

Aside from outward biases affecting the selection process, disparate impact and disparate treatment are additional legal threats that companies using this method must be wary of. Disparate treatment occurs when an applicant is singled out and treated differently than the others; in terms of this topic, a disparate impact violation would occur if Human Resources consulted the Social Media pages of some applicants and not others, or evaluating the information found on these sites differently for different candidates (Thomas). Disparate Impact, on the other hand, could potentially occur when an employer relies only on social media to look for applicants (Reilly). For example, if a company is only interested in hiring someone they can first investigate via Facebook, thousands of people who do not have Facebook pages would be discounted. Leaving this

percentage of the labor force out of eligibility for the job is illegal and something that employer's should be aware of when deciding how to conduct recruitment and selection processes (Reilly). In order to safeguard against disparate impact and disparate treatment claims, lawyers are suggesting that companies have very strict policies and guidelines dictating precisely how to use Facebook in the hiring process. Furthermore, they should make sure they do not rely exclusively on social media while choosing who to hire.

Facebook has not only become a part of the recruitment and selection process in the United States, but internationally as well. Currently, laws are being drafted in Germany that would "ban employers from profiling job applicants on social networks." (Pop). If the legislation is passed, any companies would be allowed to run Internet searches on candidates, but only through publicly accessible information or professional websites like Linked In. Otherwise, if they are caught viewing Facebook profiles in the hiring process they could be charged up to 300,000 Euros (Pop).

In the United States, there is not yet any legislation in place that specifically addresses this trending business practice. However, there have been many issues that have cropped up in the media bringing attention to the legalities of using Facebook when hiring. For example, in February of 2011 a Maryland man was asked to provide his Facebook log-in information at a recertification interview for a government position. The American Civil Liberty Unions has responded to the Press Secretary and Maryland government on his behalf, stating that "no one 'deserves to have the government snooping about their private electronic communications'" (Collado). According to many lawyers, it is only a matter of time before courts are seeing many more of these cases. According to Greenwald, "Observers say "failure to hire" lawsuits are far smaller in

number than other types of employment litigation, such as those involving termination or charging retaliation, but they do expect litigation to emerge from employers' growing use of social networking sites. Use of these sites could be used as evidence in litigation, even if it is not necessarily the primary motivation behind a lawsuit, they say". Similarly, LA attorney Anthony Zaller cautions, "I have a feeling you're probably going to see lawsuits, and the burden is going to be back on the employer to show the 'protected category' did not enter into its 'decision to hire or not hire'"(Greenwald). Clearly there is a lot of controversy surrounding this practice and most of the risk falls on the employers who choose to view this information when screening a candidate.

Conclusion:

After researching and analyzing the practice of using Facebook as a hiring tool, it can be concluded that there are varying risks and opinions present from the Corporate, Consumer, and Legal perspectives.

From a business standpoint, companies who choose to utilize Facebook in this manner feel that it is a great way to gather more information on a candidate and results in more informed hiring decisions. Research confirms that 75% of HR professionals attested that their companies required them to screen an applicant online and thoroughly review available information before extending an offer to an applicant, and 70% of these respondents admitted to not hiring someone based on their findings (Online Reputation in a Connected World). Professionals I consulted during my research verified that inappropriate photos, statuses, or comments were the leading cause behind applicant's being denied a job or an interview. Because it is most likely that this trend will continue to become standard procedure in many offices, professionals advise anyone applying for a job to be familiar with their Facebook privacy settings and refrain from posting anything on the Internet that could hurt their chances of being hired. However, the companies that are conducting these Facebook screenings also face risks themselves; there is a lot of ethical and legal controversy surrounding this practice. As a result, it is very important for businesses that choose to partake in this practice to enforce policies and create guidelines that govern how Facebook should be used and exactly what information is okay to base decisions off of.

After exploring the Consumer standpoint on this issue it can be concluded that the majority of job applicant's are aware that potential employers perform Internet

background checks, but feel this use of their personal information is unethical. Results of this study confirmed that the vast majority of job-seeking undergraduates belong to this social networking site; in fact 76% of respondents claimed to visit the website at least 5 or more times a day, and many constantly receive Facebook notifications on their mobile telephones proving that college students are very connected on Facebook. However, despite their constant usage of this site, over 91% of Seniors said they had given thought to the appropriateness of their Facebook while looking for jobs, and 96% had customized their privacy settings so that their pages were private. Interviews with various students also revealed that many people choose to take additional precautionary measures such as blocking photos and changing usernames, so that potential employers do not have access to any of their personal information. Even though students are aware that Employer's are using Facebook as a hiring tool, many still do not agree with the practice; 54% stated they do not think it is fair not to hire someone based off of what can be publicly viewed on their Facebook profile. Additionally, interviewed students felt that this practice is an invasion of their personal privacy and that there is no correlation between what is on an individual's Facebook profile and whether or not they will perform well in the workplace.

Legally, scrutinizing candidates' Facebook profiles is very risky and makes companies easily susceptible to Employment Discrimination lawsuits. Because there is a fine line behind the type of information that can legally support a hiring decision, lawyers are urging human resource professionals to be very careful to ensure that a legitimate business reason to not hire someone rather than a selection bias. Lawyers also predict that litigation and lawsuits will increase as a response to the growth of this practice, and eventually lead to legislation that helps to govern exactly what is legal within this arena.

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WORK EXPERIENCE:

Ernst & Young Summer 2010
FSO Business Advisory Intern

- Worked on a credit risk engagement at a large banking client to consolidate counterparty reference data
- Assisted team by updating weekly progress reports and helped to prepare weekly presentations to client
- Created and formatted spreadsheet of Basel II Financial Disclosure requirements
- Operated as team leader for an internship project, focusing on Greece's debt crisis and pension reforms

FINANCE/BUSINESS EXPERIENCE:

THON Finance Captain: Penn State's Dance Marathon Fall 2010-Present
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- Responsible for tracking the total of all monetary donations for the largest student run philanthropy in the world, raising approximately 7.8 million dollars annually
- Accountable for entering all corporate checks into the database system and verifying all entries are accurate
- Oversee all fundraising efforts and help 350+ student organizations manage their finances throughout the year

Vice President of Finance

Spring 2008-Spring 2009

Kappa Alpha Theta

- Managed all of chapter's financial reports, expenses, and dues
- Constructed and maintained a budget of approximately 75,000.00
- Collaborated with a focus group and other executive board members

ACTIVITIES:

Philanthropy Chair

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- Organized and planned 3 campus-wide philanthropy events
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- Managed focus group and lead efforts to devise and promote innovative events