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Strategies for Human Resources Professionals Using Social Networking Websites for Hiring Decisions

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Robert T. Solomon

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2019

Abstract

Strategies for Human Resources Professionals Using Social Networking Websites for

Hiring Decisions

by

Robert T. Solomon

MS, Troy State University, 1999

BS, Tuskegee University, 1989

Final Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

April 2019

Abstract

The use of social networking websites by employers without adequate strategies can lead to misuse of job applicant's information or discriminatory hiring practices. The purpose of this multiple case study was to identify strategies that some human resource professionals in the southeastern United States implemented to maximize the use of social networking websites in the hiring process. Signaling theory was used as the conceptual framework for this study. Semistructured face-to-face interviews were conducted with 8 purposefully selected human resource professionals who used social networking websites for at least 3 years to screen and select job applicants. Documentation of participating organizations was also reviewed to assess the guidance employees received for using social networking websites to inform hiring decisions. Two other sources of data included field notes and observations of participants during interviews. Interview transcripts and supporting documents were coded using a priori and emergent codes focused on identifying themes among strategies hiring managers used. A few of the themes that emerged from the thematic analysis of the interview data were professional social media, personal social media, and legal concerns. The results of this study may contribute to positive social change by providing human resource professionals and hiring managers with more knowledge for optimizing the use of social networking websites for cybervetting and hiring job candidates.

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Dedication

I dedicate this achievement to my God who strengthens me and makes all things possible. To my wife, Linda, you are truly the wind beneath my wings and I thank you for encouraging, loving, and supporting me through this process. To my friends, who prayed for me, prayed with me, and motivated me to continue this journey, thank you. I also dedicate this accomplishment to the memory of my mother, Mrs. Edith Solomon, who made her transition on July 4, 2018. I miss you every day, but I know I will see you again.

Acknowledgments

I thank my God for His amazing grace that allowed me to achieve this goal. For it is in Him that I live, and move, and have my being. Without God, none of this would be possible and I owe Him all the praise and glory for the great things He has done.

I am extremely appreciative of my chair, Dr. Brenda Jack, for her guidance and continued support throughout this process. I would like to thank other committee members, Dr. Kelly Chermack and Dr. Mary Dereshiwsky, for challenging me and providing feedback that made this study possible. I also thank my colleagues in the program for their encouraging words that inspired me to keep moving forward.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Traditional methods in which individuals communicate with one another are

being replaced with innovative use of social media platforms. The increased popularity of

social networking websites (SNWs) such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter is changing

the way individuals communicate massive amounts of information to others

instantaneously (Sameen & Cornelius, 2015). Social media originally intended for

personal use is being used by employers to investigate potential employees' personal

lives (Baumhart, 2015). Employers need to consider several managerial issues and legal

risks when using SNWs as part of the hiring practice (Nikolaou, 2014). To improve the

hiring process and mitigate legal risks, human resource (HR) professionals should

implement strategies to make the best use of SNWs. The focus of this qualitative,

multiple case study was to identify strategies that HR professionals should pursue to

optimize the use of SNWs to screen and select employees. As technology changes,

organizations employment practices may improve if HR professionals emphasize and

implement effective strategies for using SNWs to screen and select potential employees.

Background of the Problem

HR professionals play a role in attracting and acquiring talented people to fill job

vacancies. Similar to other business processes, the development of long-term talent

management policies can prepare HR personnel to hire the right employees to increase

business success and create a competitive advantage (Akey, Baozhen, Torku, & Antwi,

2017). Hiring professionals are turning to SNWs to gather information on candidates to

make hiring decisions (Berkelaar & Buzzanell, 2014). The use of SNWs to inform hiring

decisions presents ethical problems and legal challenges for HR professionals (Drake, Hall, Brecton, & Posey, 2016; Nguyen, 2014; Peterson, 2014). Ruggs, Walker, Blanchard, and Gur (2016) suggested that discrimination against minorities is more likely to occur because of employers' misuse of information obtained from SNWs during the hiring process. Several states and the federal government enacted laws to protect the rights of job applicants (Nguyen, 2014). The legality and usefulness of SNWs are still being tested and guidance for how HR professionals should proceed with implementing SNWs in the hiring process lacks clarity (Melanthiou, Pavlou, & Constantinou, 2015). The intent of this study was to gain a better understanding of SNWs used by HR professionals for screening and selection purposes and to explore strategies some HR professionals use to optimize SNWs to facilitate the hiring process.

Problem Statement

HR professionals use social media for recruiting, screening, and hiring practices but lack organizational boundaries and policies for doing so (Jeske & Shultz, 2016). As many as 92% of employers in the United States are using SNWs or planning to use SNWs to screen the background of job applicants (Priyahashini, Kumar, & Jha, 2017). The general business problem was that some HR professionals lack organizational social media policies, which can result in violations of employment laws (Reinsch, Ross, & Hietapelto, 2016). The specific business problem was that some HR professionals lack strategies to optimize the use of SNWs to facilitate the hiring process.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative, multiple case study was to explore the strategies that HR professionals use to successfully optimize SNWs to facilitate the hiring process in the southeastern United States. The targeted population consisted of HR professionals in four organizations in the southeastern United States who use SNWs to screen and select job applicants. The implication for positive social change included the potential to increase awareness among SNWs users in choice of content regarding their social media webpages and the possibility of that content being viewed by prospective employers.

Nature of the Study

In this study, I used a qualitative approach to explore the use of SNWs by HR professionals to screen and select job applicants. Qualitative researchers seek to answer questions about the experiences, meaning, and perspectives of social phenomena from the participants' perspectives (Hammarberg, Kirkman, & de Lacy, 2016). In contrast, quantitative researchers collect data to correlate two or more variables and perform mathematical analysis to identify causality and make generalizations about the whole population or to test a theory (Hafford-Letchfield, 2014). The quantitative research method was not suitable for this study because theories were not tested to explain the phenomenon of interest. Maxwell (2016) described mixed methods as researchers' joint use and integration of qualitative and quantitative approaches. To discover HR professional use of SNWs to screen and select job applicants, I did not use variables to compare data which is part of a quantitative portion of the mixed methods.

I used a case study design to learn about common perceptions and use of SNWs by HR professionals to facilitate hiring decisions. A case study is best suited to link similar meanings, patterns, and behaviors (Yin, 2018). The alternative designs that I considered included ethnography, narrative inquiry, and phenomenological research. Researchers conducting ethnographic research tend to immerse themselves in the culture and daily lives of the people they are studying to observe and interview the group participants (Mouncey, 2012). The ethnographic design was not suitable for this study because observations of HR professionals screening job applicants' SNWs for hiring decisions are infeasible and culturally exclusive. A narrative inquiry research design is drawn from individuals telling stories about lived and told events to make sense of their experiences (Rejno, Berg, & Danielson, 2014). The purpose of conducting this study was not to narrate participants' stories. Eddles-Hirsch (2015) argued that a researcher using a phenomenological approach is more concerned with firsthand descriptions of a phenomenon than an explanation for it. Based on the requisites of a phenomenological study, I did not choose a phenomenological approach.

Research Question

The overarching question to guide this study was: What strategies do HR professionals use for successfully optimizing SNWs to facilitate the hiring process in the southeastern United States?

Interview Questions

1. What strategies do you employ for using SNWs to facilitate the hiring process?

2. How have these strategies helped you optimize SNWs in the hiring process?

3. What phase in the hiring process do you use SNWS to gather information about job applicants?

4. How has gathering information from SNWs at the identified phase improved the hiring process?

5. What procedures do you follow to view job applicants' SNWs content, while at the same time, avoiding unlawful employment practices in the hiring process?

6. How have those procedures enhanced the job applicant pool?

7. What principles guide your organizational SNWs policy to inform hiring decisions?

8. How has following those principles contributed to your organization optimizing the use of SNWs to screen and select job applicants?

9. What are the advantages of using SNWs to screen and select potential employees?

10. What else would you like to share about HR professionals' use of SNWs to facilitate the hiring process?

Conceptual Framework

The basis for this study was signaling theory. Spence (1973) developed signaling theory and used this theory to offer an explanation of how signals from a job applicant can be received by an employer to assess whether a job applicant possesses certain qualities for the job. Spence identified the following key constructs underlying the

theory: (a) signaler, (b) signal, (c) receiver, and (d) feedback. Spence posited that an employer relies on signals from the information received from the applicant to predict suitability for the job. As applied to this study, signaling theory holds that I expected the theory propositions to allow participants to explore perceptions and strategies regarding the use of SNWs as they pertain to screening and selecting job applicants.

Operational Definitions

Cybervetting: Employer's use of online sources such as search engines, social networking sites, blogs, and other digital materials to covertly obtain information to make hiring decisions (Berkelaar, 2017).

The Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA): A United States federal law that regulates the collection, dissemination, and use of consumer information, including consumer credit information (Reinsch et al., 2016).

Negligent hiring: A claim resulting from a person filing a lawsuit because of injury or damages from an employee who the employer knew or should have known posed a risk, based on a pre-employment background check (Reinsch, et al., 2016).

Password Protection Act: A United States federal law that prohibits employers from demanding or requesting a job candidate or current employee to provide a password for access to his or her personal social media account (Baumhart, 2015).

Person-job fit: The match between a job applicant's qualifications and the duties associated with a particular job (Buettner, 2014).

Social networking websites (SNWs): Internet-based services that allow individuals to create public profiles, list other users with whom to share information, and view the

web postings of others whom they are connected (Stoughton, Thompson, & Meade, 2015).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are rudimentary beliefs relevant to any topic and perceived as universally held truisms (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). My first assumption in this study was that participants would answer the interview questions honestly. Devotta et al. (2016) emphasized that open-ended interview questions allow the researcher to solicit candid and honest responses from participants. The second assumption was that neither managers from the companies nor I would impose pressure on direct study participants to respond to questions in a particular manner. The third assumption was that face-to-face interviews would be the best approach to collect the data needed for this study. Many qualitative methods necessitate face-to-face interactions between the person conducting the research and the participant to gain input and specific examples of the participant's experiences (Ellard-Gray, Jeffrey, Choubak, & Crann, 2015). The last assumption was that the experiences of the study participants would differ from one another.

Limitations

Limitations are potential issues or weakness beyond the control of the research facilitator that can affect the outcome of the study (Helmich, Boerebach, Arah, & Lingard, 2015). The first limitation of this study was access to participants who could adequately address interview questions. The population for this study included HR professionals who provided in depth knowledge about using SNWs to influence hiring

decisions. Fusch and Ness (2015) stated a limitation in qualitative research occurs when researchers are denied access to informants to collect data. The second limitation for this study was my lack of hands-on experience with conducting semistructured interviews for a doctoral study. The personality and interpersonal skills of a researcher play a role in the quality of data that is collected from participants (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). Another limitation for conducting this study was the participants' concerns about confidentiality. Confidentiality is critical to research with human subjects and essential to receiving authentic descriptions from participants about the phenomenon being studied (Ummel & Achille, 2016).

Delimitations

Delimitations are boundaries set to define the scope of a study based on the framework, population, and methodological procedures (Thomas, Silverman, & Nelson, 2015). The population for this study was HR managers from the southeastern United States. Through this population, I defined the scope of this study. The boundary of the research sample was limited to HR managers from the southeastern United States. Although the focus of this study was centered around the use of SNWs to inform hiring decisions and the best strategies that employers should use when searching job candidates' social media webpages, I did not attempt to determine which SNWs are ideal for employers to search. In this study, I reviewed different SNWs employers use to screen job candidates and presented strategies employers can employ to optimize social media in the hiring process.

Significance of the Study

This study is of value to the practice of business leaders because it provides guidelines for some HR professionals to develop strategies for using SNWs to facilitate the hiring process. Jennings, Blount, and Weatherly (2014) explained that despite the wide-spread use of social media in the workplace and the legal issues surrounding the use of SNWs as screening and selection tools, only a small number of employers have policies outlining use of SNWs to check job applicants' background. Thomas, Rothschild, and Donegan (2015) noted that the type of information that employers look for and the methods that they use to obtain it are shaped by organizational policies. The legal issues and potential for HR professionals to misuse information from SNWs of job applicants are in the best interest of organizations to develop, communicate, and implement social media policies to guide use of SNWs by HR professionals during the hiring process.

Contribution to Business Practices

The contributions of this study to business practices are: (a) developing strategies to optimize SNWs during the hiring process, (b) implementing appropriate procedures for obtaining and using job applicants' social media content, and (c) reducing lawsuits attributed to HR professionals' misuse of information obtained from online social media platforms to make hiring decisions. Although some academic research is focused on the legal context of organizational use of SNWs, there is limited peer-reviewed research on the underlying problems of Internet searches being used to screen job applicants (McDonald & Thompson, 2016). The articulated findings of this study serve as

contributions to the limited empirical literature on human resource strategies to optimize Internet searches to screen and select job applicants.

Implications for Social Change

The implication for positive social change involves the influence upon HR professionals to avoid discriminatory hiring practices that negatively impact job applicants from minority populations. The misuse of information gathered from SNWs for screening and selection purposes raises concerns about unfair discrimination (Nikolaou, 2014). In a competitive business environment, the primary concern for employers is to identify and hire qualified applicants (Williams, Schaffer, & Ellis, 2013). When employers take appropriate actions to prevent employment discrimination, qualified job applicants who are members of minority groups gain opportunities to achieve their full potential. Job applicants from diverse backgrounds are given opportunities to contribute to the success of organizations. When applicants from minority backgrounds are hired and feel valued, they experience a feeling of inclusion which contributes to employee retention (Lindsey, King, Dunleavy, McCausland, & Jones, 2013). In inclusive environments, individuals from diverse backgrounds are treated fairly, appreciated for what they bring to the organization, and included in core decision-making (Nishii, 2013); therefore, when HR professionals take actions to eliminate discriminatory hiring practices, the potential to create workforces that reflect heterogeneous groups of individuals at all levels of organizations is possible.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

Prior to HR professionals using SNWs to screen and select potential employees, most employers obtained knowledge about job applicants' skills and personality traits through traditional means such as reviewing resumes, reading letters of recommendation, and conducting face-to-face interviews. The popularity of SNWs has changed the manner in which HR professionals screen potential employees (McFarland & Ployhart, 2015). With the increased popularity of SNWs, some employers assume that the online behavior of individuals reflects their offline disposition and use Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn to make inferences about applicants. While Higham (2014) and Carraher (2015) found that hiring decisions should be based on the quality of information that an employer receives about an applicant; for individuals who use SNWs, traces of online communications may be used by employers to discriminate based on race, sex, religion, age, sexual orientation, or personality traits, which may not be a true measure of their disposition.

The problem I addressed in this qualitative study was the lack of knowledge that some HR professionals have about organizational social media policies, which may result in violations of employment laws (Reinsch et al., 2016). The purpose of this case study was to discover the strategies that HR professionals use to successfully optimize SNWs to facilitate the hiring process. The purpose of this section is to present the literature related to HR professionals' use of SNWs to screen and select job applicants.

I based the review and critical analysis of the professional and academic literature on previous studies found in published books, peer-reviewed journals, and government

websites. I only selected those studies and theories that address strategies used by HR professionals in the successful optimization of the SNWs to facilitate the hiring process. To find literature relevant to the research study, I conducted an extensive search using Emerald Insight, EBSCOhost, ProQuest Central, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar. I only gave priority to peer-reviewed sources published within the last 5 years. I used the following terms and phrases to conduct the search: *HR professionals, Social Networking Websites, online recruitment and personnel selection, hiring decisions, cybervetting,* and *signaling theory.* My extensive analysis of the signaling theory led to the inquiry of eight subtopics: (a) primary constructs of underlying the signal theory, (b) supporting and contrasting theories, (c) use of social networking websites in the hiring process, (d) job applicant's brand on SNWs (e) social networking sites as signaling environments, (f) barriers to successful optimization of SNW in the hiring process, (g) strategies for optimizing employer's use of SNWs, and (h) best practices for HR professionals using SNWs. The information presented in this literature review fills the gap related to strategies that HR professionals may use to successfully optimize SNWs to facilitate the hiring process. This literature review includes materials from 90 peer-reviewed journal articles, 12 non-peer reviewed articles, and four web pages. A total 106 referenced literature sources, or 85% are within 5 years of my expected CAO approval, from 2014 to 2018.

Signaling Theory

Signaling theory served as the conceptual framework for this study. According to Taj (2016), signaling theory emerged from the work of Spence (1973), who put forth that

when an applicant applies for a job, information is provided to employers to highlight

personal skills and abilities, in an effort to make the applicant most suitable for a

particular job. Likewise, employers create positive images of their organizations to attract

the most efficient, trustworthy, and loyal employees. The information provided by the

applicant influences the screening processes of employers and their selection of the

applicant, who is best suited to fill a position. Even after collecting extensive information

and hiring an applicant, an employer may still be uncertain about the individual's ability

to carry out job-related duties and the responsibilities associated with a certain position.

Spence (1973) referred to the differences between the knowledge of an applicant about a

company and the knowledge of the employer about the abilities of an applicant to carry

out the duties required for a job as asymmetry information. A major purpose of signaling

theory is to analyze and to decrease asymmetry information between applicants and

employers.

Although some employers attempt to decrease asymmetry information about job

applicants, the decisions to hire job applicants are like a game of chance. Spence (1973)

contended that employment decisions are investment decisions made under uncertainty,

which Spence compared to a lottery. Spence (1973) noted that similar to investing in a

lottery, employers have a certain probability of winning and certain probability of losing

the chance to hire a productive employee because of asymmetry information. The chance

of an employer winning is determined by background knowledge and experience in the

job market and by signals and indices of job applicants. Signals are characteristics of

applicants that can be manipulated, such as engagement in activities outside of the

workplace. Indices are characteristics that applicants cannot manipulate, such as age, race, and gender.

Key Constructs Underlying Signaling Theory

Four constructs identified in the signaling theory are: (a) the signaler, (b) the signal, (c) the receiver, and (d) the feedback. The signaling theory constructs help to explain a simple theoretical concept of sending and receiving information based on a single dyad characterized by a single signaler and receiver; however, signaling in the actual environment can involve multiple signalers transmitting several signals to different receivers. An understanding of the signal theory's four constructs is important to determining how job applicants communicate information to potential employers.

Signaler. The first construct of the signaling theory is the signaler. The signaler refers to an individual who has access to information that is of interest to another party (Sheehan & Bergman, 2016). The information possessed by the signaler is useful to individuals who do not have access the same information and who rely on the signaler for insight about an applicant (Polnaszek & Stephens, 2015). During the hiring process, the job applicant is the signaler because he or she has private information about their own personal traits and characteristics, which could influence HR professionals' decisions about their suitability for a job. Individuals other than applicants and employees, who have knowledge about an applicant's suitability for a job are also signalers (Sheehan & Bergman, 2016). The signaler conveys information to others by sending a signal.

Signal. The second construct of the signaling theory is the signal. The signal refers to the communication made by individuals who have private information which

can influence the decision-making process (Jordan, Hoffman, Nowak, & Rand, 2016). The objective of a signal is to communicate certain qualities about an individual. During the hiring process, job applicants communicate different qualities, or signals about themselves. Although an applicant may have both positive and negative information regarding their suitability for a job, the signaling theory purports that in most cases the signal communicates only reveals positive information to obtain a more favorable outcome (Taj, 2016). On the other hand, the manner in which job applicants present themselves may sometime relay negative information to potential employers (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). In many instances, negative information sent by job applicants are unintentional and are associated with the actions or behaviors of the applicants (Quek, 2016). Whether intentional or unintentional, when applicants use SNWs, the applicants are responsible for the signals relayed to the receiver.

Receiver. The receiver is the third construct of the signaling theory. Receivers are individuals who lack certain information needed to make important decisions (Menendez, Senthivel, & Isalan, 2015). Receivers, such as employers, are sometimes vulnerable to deception, misleading information, and manipulation of signals (Bruner, 2015). In many cases, receivers start the process of signaling through actions such as a decision to hire (Hoenig & Henkel, 2015). A signaler may produce a signal to satisfy the requirements of a receiver, who gains by being able to make informed decisions based on the signal produced (Connelly, Certo, Ireland, & Reutzel, 2010). Information obtained by HR professionals is used to determine the unseen ability of an applicant to meet the job requirements and how the applicant fits a company's profile (Ashuri & Bar-Ilan, 2016;

Stoughton, 2016). The ability of the receiver to process signals provides opportunities for the receiver to give feedback to the signaler.

Feedback. The last component of the signaling theory is feedback. Feedback refers to communication made by receivers concerning an issue of interest to signalers (Taj, 2016). Receivers send feedback to signalers, which are referred to as countersignals (Alsos & Ljunggren, 2017). Countersignals are part of the two-way signaling process that is important in the hiring process. HR professionals typically communicate with job applicants using countersignals, based on the signals received. When job applicants receive countersignals from HR professionals, the feedback helps applicants to determine if the signals were effective and if applicants achieved the intended purpose.

The signaling theory was an appropriate framework for this study for several reasons. First, the signaling theory helps to explain how some job applicants use SNWs to communicate their skills and abilities to employers. The theory also aided in explaining how some HR professionals use information found on SNWs to determine whether an applicant is suitable for a position. The theory proffered insight about how job applicants and employers alike may use SNWs to send signals about qualifications and organizations, respectively. The signaling theory was also an appropriate framework for this study because it can be used to explain how both applicants and employers can decrease asymmetry information.

Supporting and Contrasting Theories

The theory of screening. The theory of screening helps to explain how employers observe the differences in productivity of individuals to make hiring decisions.

Stiglitz (1975) pioneered the theory of screening as a means of providing pay to individuals based on their productivity. Stiglitz suggested that there are only two types of employees: those who are highly productive and those who produce at low levels. In the job market, applicants present only those signals that they want to show employers. For employers, there is no way to initially determine if an individual is being truthful about self-described abilities. Stiglitz suggested that at the onset of employment, all employees should be provided with the same wage. The employer should screen each individual by choosing one variable to measure the level of productivity and efficiency of each employee. Stiglitz also put forth that wages should be provided to employees based on either (a) a non-screening equilibrium or (b) a full-screening equilibrium. With a non-screening equilibrium, all employees earn a wage based on the average productivity of all employees. With the full-screening equilibrium, all workers earn a wage based on the productivity of the lowest performing individuals. The non-screening and full-screening equilibriums allow individuals with low productivity levels to benefit from the earnings of employees who have higher levels of productivity, but for individuals with higher levels of productivity, wages are decreased.

The signaling theory differs from the theory of screening. Stiglitz's (1975) screening theory is in opposition to Spence's (1973) signaling theory because the screening theory is based on the actual productivity of an individual rather than the potential of an individual to be productive. Stiglitz (1975) stated that when individuals are screened by characteristics such as education and gender, hiring decisions are subjective rather than objective.

Human capital theory. The human capital theory is also in opposition to the signaling theory. Cooper and Davis (2017) reported that the human capital theory emerged from the research of Becker (1962), who believed that education is a major catalyst that allows individuals to increase their productivity and to earn higher wages. The effect of education is documented in the wage differences between individuals who have obtained different levels of education. Becker also put forth that continuing one's education is an investment that should be pursued until the point at which marginal productivity gain and marginal opportunity costs are in equilibrium. Becker suggested that human capital is developed through the educational process and through a combination of an individual's characteristics, skills and abilities, performance, motivation to assist others, and willingness to learn. To the contrary, signaling theory suggests that the signals provided by the signaler are viewed as insights into the unseen characteristics of the applicant (Park & Patel, 2015). One way the signaler shows unseen characteristics to different groups can be attributed to the self-presentation theory.

Self-Presentation theory. The self-presentation theory offers a useful framework for explaining how or why individuals may portray themselves in particular ways to different audiences. The self-presentation theory involves an individual's conscious efforts to portray themselves and display behaviors in a positive light to create a persona for an audience so that certain social goals are achieved (Fox & Vendemia, 2016). In contrast to the signaling theory, Michikyan, Subrahmanyam, and Dennis (2014) stated that individuals provide information about themselves to gain acceptance and establish relationships in online communities. The goal of self-presentation is for individuals to

convince others to accept the images and roles that have been created and claimed for themselves (Chiang & Suen, 2015). Depending on the context or audience, individuals create different online self-presentations as a means of expressing themselves and compartmentalizing their lives (Marder, Joinson, Shankar, & Thirlaway, 2016). Some individuals use professional SNWs to promote their skills and abilities to attract employers (Sievers, Wodzicki, Aberle, Keckeisen, & Cress, 2015). Chiang and Suen (2015) conducted a qualitative research study to investigate how job applicants' self-presentation impacts employers' hiring recommendations and found that HR professionals make inferences from applicants' online self-presentations. Signals are designed to communicate relevant information about the sender to the receiver. HR professionals must decipher whether the qualities included in the job applicant's SNWs are honest signals or contrived self-presentation.

Use of Social Networking Websites in the Hiring Process

Individuals use social networking websites for their personal and professional lives. Duggan and Smith (2014) reported that in 2013, more American adults had at least two personal accounts on either Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, or LinkedIn. Nadkarni and Hofmann (2012) found that adults use Facebook to gain information, to gain social capital, to develop relationships, and to feel close to others. Adults' use of SNWs has become intertwined with the workplace (Drouin, O'Connor, Schmidt, & Miller, 2015). Weidner, Wynne, and O'Brien (2012) found that 60% of employees befriended co-workers on Facebook. With so much activity on SNWs, the use of SNWs has transformed the way HR professional assess and hire employees.

HR professionals are placing an emphasis on SNWs as a screening and selection tool to learn about job applicants. As of June 2017, more than 70% of employers surveyed communicated using SNWs to research potential job candidates, which was up from 60% in 2016 (Salm, 2017). In another survey conducted by the Society of HR Management, LinkedIn was used 93% of the time, Facebook was used 63% of the time, and Twitter was used 29% of the time by HR professionals to investigate job candidates before making hiring decisions (SHRM.org, 2016). Researchers at the Pew Research Centers (2014) found that about 74% of the individuals above the age of 18 years old have a social networking presence. Among Facebook, LinkedIn, Myspace, Twitter and other SNWs, the projected number of social media users world-wide is estimated to be around 2.77 billion ("Number of Social Network," 2018). SNWs are natural bridges for connecting job applicants to organizations (McFarland & Ployhart, 2015). With so many active SNWs users exchanging information online, some employers are taking advantage of personal information available in virtual environments.

The conventional means for assessing a job applicant's background and qualifications are being replaced with high-tech, computerized processes. Unlike with the use of traditional tools such as reviewing resumes and contacting former employers directly, HR professionals use SNWs to access information about potential employees, which may offer honest signals and less censored information about an applicant's future performance and fit for an organization (Mitrou, Kandias, Stavrou, & Gritzalis, 2014). HR professionals use of SNWs in the hiring process to conduct thorough investigations about applicants' criminal history and to recruit, hire, promote, and terminate individuals

is known as cybervetting (Berkelaar, 2017). Cybervetting may reshape the hiring process by supplementing traditional tools such as resumes and interviews to leverage information about job applicants. Researchers have documented how HR professionals apply SNWs to screen potential employees (Barnes & Lescault, 2012; Delaney, 2013; Parez, Silva, Harvey, & Bosco, 2013; Sameen & Cornelius, 2015; Wilder & Noble, 2017; Zide, Elman, & Shahani-Denning, 2014). Despite concerns about the use of social networking websites by HR professionals during the hiring process, the rapidly changing advancements in technology make it easier for employers and job applicants to connect.

LinkedIn. A social networking website that is mainly used for professional networking is LinkedIn. LinkedIn has more than 175 million users in over 200 countries of which about 58% are male and 42 % are female (Parez et al., 2013). Parez also noted that LinkedIn users span over four generations with most being ages 25 to 34 (33%) and ages 35 to 54 (33%). Although users of LinkedIn are undergraduate (47%) and graduate students (27%), some are non-college graduates makes up 25% of LinkedIn's user demographics (Parez et al., 2013).

LinkedIn users establish profiles for different reasons. LinkedIn is used to help some business professionals find jobs, make connections between applicants and employers, network with other business professionals, and to screen applicants. LinkedIn is a popular SNW used by HR professionals who wish to hire employees (Blacksmith & Poeppelman, 2014). HR professionals use LinkedIn to gather professional information about the fitness of applicants to fill particular jobs (Berkelaar, 2014; Parez et al., 2013). LinkedIn is gaining popularity as a screening and selection tool because

LinkedIn is easy to manage and relatively inexpensive (Chiang & Suen, 2015). LinkedIn is also a popular tool for employers to preview a diverse population of potential employees.

A few studies help to indicate LinkedIn's popularity among employers and how LinkedIn is being used in the hiring process. Barnes and Lescault (2012) found that 81% of Fortune 500 companies use LinkedIn to recruit and screen job applicants. Wilder and Noble's (2017) study of 160 employers in the United States, from Fall 2015 to the Spring of 2016, indicated how employers use LinkedIn to recruit recent college graduates for employment. Wilder and Noble hypothesized that HR managers did not actively use LinkedIn to screen and hire recent college graduates but instead used the SNW to recruit more experienced candidates. Wider and Noble found that 81% of the participants used LinkedIn to recruit new college graduates for employment almost as much as they used the database to find candidates with experience. The participants of the study indicated that LinkedIn was best suited for reviewing candidate's qualifications (64%), for locating potential candidates (55%), and for filtering candidates' qualifications (46%) (Wilder & Noble, 2017). The content presented in LinkedIn profiles can be deceptive of the actual identity of the job applicant (Zide et al., 2014). Although individuals know their private information, the choice of signals to pass to the receiver is informed by the intentions of the signalers. Content included in a job applicant's profile pertaining to hobbies and interests maybe intentional signals to catch the attention of potential employers (Zide et al., 2014). Hobbies and interests intentionally included in SNWs

profiles provide insight into potential employers about job applicants and how applicants might fit into the culture of the company.

Facebook. Facebook is a popular online social networking website that is used to connect people together in a virtual environment across different interests. As of the third quarter of 2017, Facebook acquired more than 2.07 billion active users worldwide, with as many as 214 million users in the United States ("Number of Monthly Active," 2018). Although non-professional SNWs such as Facebook are considered as recreational social media, some employers take an interest to scrutinize the information posted to the Facebook accounts of potential job applicants to determine employability (Aguado, Rico, Rubio, & Fernández, 2016). Nikolaou (2014) found that employers' use of Facebook to screen and select job applicants aligned with job applicant's personality traits which suggest an individual's person-organization fit. Job applicants should be cautious when divulging personal information on non-professional SNW accounts such as Facebook because comments and photos could negatively impact employment opportunities.

Facebook is used periodically by some employers to obtain an uncensored review of potential employees. Sameen and Cornelius (2015) surveyed 228 HR managers use of SNWs as part of the screening process for hiring job applicants. Sameen and Cornelius determined that Facebook was used 35.9% of the time to make employment decisions. HR managers used SNWs such as Facebook to screen applicants immediately after receiving their applications (Sameen & Cornelius, 2015). An important finding of Sameen and Cornelius' research included 43.8% of the time, the HR managers

did not hire candidates because the information found on applicants' SNWs reveal poor communication skills or untrue statements on applications. Root and McKay (2014) also researched the likelihood of employers checking potential job applicants' social media such as Facebook and found 82% of the university students believed employers would review SNWs when considering them for a job. The participants did not understand the importance of using good communication skills outside of the classroom or how potential employers would assess participants' association with groups or other individuals on social media sites. Because employers use non-professional SNWs like Facebook to evaluate potential applicants, SNW users should use proper grammar and avoid posting anything that a future employer would consider inappropriate.

Job Applicant's Brand on SNWs

Aligned with the signaling theory, job applicants (signalers) communicate signals meant to satisfy the requirements of the receiver (HR professionals). HR professionals produce feedback through countersignals which further inform signals produced by signalers (Shafranskaya & Potapov, 2014; Soler, Batiste, & Cronk, 2014; Gomulya & Mishina, 2016). The described interaction between the signaler and the receiver during the hiring process occurs through a medium called a signaling environment (Gomulya & Mishina, 2016). Job applicants often use the signaling environment to showcase their knowledge and skills to potential employers while minimizing shortcomings.

Through SNWs, HR professionals can observe signals that job applicants produce to foster positive images of their professionalism. Personal branding or self-promotion in SNWs refers to the deliberate and strategic self-marketing by a potential job seeker to

produce positive signals geared toward demonstrating their unseen qualities (Maher et al., 2015). The user-friendly nature of some commonly used SNWs such as Twitter and Facebook, have enabled the emergence of online digital personal branding which acts as potential sources of signals used by the hiring organizations in vetting individuals for job opportunities (Huang & Benyoucef, 2015; Maher et al., 2015). Job applicants who present strong professional branding through SNWs create the likelihood of getting the attention of employers to further their chances of being hired. Job applicants should take time to develop strong branding by emphasizing credentials that distinguish them from other candidates. Kleppinger and Cain (2015) studied digital branding among young professionals and noted that individuals who strategically create a personal online brand gain control over their SNWs signals to convey appropriate messages to receivers. A job applicant's endeavors geared toward enhancing self-presentation in SNWs can sometime be viewed as shameless efforts for "selling oneself" and as such makes SNWs lose their appeal (Kleppinger & Cain, 2015). Given that screening and selection process can be time consuming and costly, the use of SNWs in the hiring process could help HR professionals reduce time and cost by rejecting job candidates who fail to establish strong personal branding by highlighting their accomplishments and qualifications.

Social Networking Websites as Signaling Environments

Job applicants and HR professionals use SNWs to send and receive signals and countersignals. The use of social networking websites as signaling environments has significant possibilities in the hiring process and helps to illustrate the vast amount of information available to employers about potential employees. The manner in which HR

managers use social media to make employment decisions has evolved (Blacksmith & Poeppelman, 2014). Blacksmith and Poeppelman offered three major ways in which social media and technology have changed the hiring process. Although the use of social media by HR professionals has enhanced the hiring process, the use of SNWs to screen and select potential employees are associated with challenges as well.

The use of SNWs by HR professionals may be an effective way to job applicants who are actively seeking employment. Traditional approaches such as printed advertisements, job boards, and employment referrals have limited HR professionals' abilities to connect with the most suitable applicants (Blacksmith & Poeppelman, 2014). The use of SNWs by HR professionals provide ease for HR professionals to connect with active job applicant and passive job applicants such as individuals who are not actively seeking a job (Nikolaou, 2014). Because the most qualified applicants may be passive job applicants, HR professionals must use SNWs to seek new employees who may not necessarily be looking for employment.

Employers may also use SNWs to track and screen qualified applicants and to determine the number of interviews in which applicants have participated as well as the number of times applicants have been hired. A challenge for employers who wish to employ applicants through SNWs is that they must find ways build personal relationships from a lack of initial face-to-face interaction. Employers who once advertised job openings in print, must engage in ongoing conversations on multiple SNWs and post more compelling content to attract suitable applicants.

Before the use of SNWs, employers recruited the most suitable contacts through personal

means such as telephone calls and solicitations (Blacksmith & Poeppelman, 2014). The

most suitable candidates have access to videos, websites, assessment tools, and SNWs

that will allow them to compare and contrast employers to determine which organizations

they prefer. Employers are met with the challenge of rigorously organizing, presenting,

and consistently updating content through multiple sources.

The final way in which SNWs have changed the hiring and recruiting process is

the onset of potential bias to screen applicants. Because of the element of discrimination,

Blacksmith and Poeppelman (2014) advised employers to adopt policies and

interventions to ensure fairness throughout each stage of the recruitment and hiring

process. Some SNWs such as LinkedIn give employers access to information which

reveals applicants age, race, religion, and other protected class information which could

lead to intentional or unintentional discrimination. Although some HR professionals

using SNWS to screen and select job applicants may discriminate against some job

applicants, the benefits of using SNWS as a screening and selection tool may outweigh

the risk of discrimination.

The use of SNWs to screen and select job candidates for employment saves HR

professionals time, money, and enhances the background check process before hiring a

candidate. Chu and Snider (2013) and Sameen and Cornelius (2015) agreed that a major

advantage of using SNWs in the hiring process is of the low cost and swift results. The

public nature of SNWs also makes it easy for HR professionals to access information

concerning job applicants in a short time (Nikolaou, 2014; Zide et al., 2014). Employers

also use SNWs in the hiring process to compliment traditional screening tools such as resumes and applications, and to enhance their hiring inferences of a job candidate's employability (Kasper, 2015). SNWs are effective and cost-efficient tools for HR professionals to obtain information about job applicants in a short amount of time. The use of SNWs to screen and select job candidates is not without critics.

HR professionals' use of social networking sites in the hiring process may be challenging to manage because scrutinizing a job applicant's SNWs from a professional perspective can be difficult. Drouin et al. (2015) agreed that employers are challenged with incorporating professional consideration about online postings of SNWs users because most are created with the intent of enabling users to partake in online means of fun, socializing, and deriving fulfillment from such interaction. The lines between personal and professional have become blurred because what an applicant shares with a friend through social media may send a negative signal to a prospective employer (Hazelton & Terhorst, 2015). An employer may also misconstrue the signal as undesired personality trait that a potential applicant possesses.

Job applicant's personality traits. Job applicants and HR professionals both use SNWs. Applicants may use SNWs to learn about job openings and the culture of a business organization. Employers may use SNWs to promote a core image and to attract high-quality employees who fit within the culture of the organization (Kluemper, Rosen, & Mossholder, 2012). Social networking websites also provide a wealth of information about individual's personality. Rapidly bridging the gap between the private and professional life, social networking websites are increasingly becoming an important tool

through which the personality of an individual may be assessed (Kleppinger & Cain, 2015). Human resource professionals use SNWs to assess job applicants' character and personality outside of traditional interview settings (Balint & Rau-Foster, 2015). The SNW content does not always accurately predict an individual's behavior in the work environment. The use of SNWs to assess personality traits are poor predictors of job performance (Reinsch et al., 2016). HR professional should consider that individuals create accounts in different SNWs based on contemporary trends and those accounts may be abandoned but not deleted; thus, HR assessment of a job candidate's personality may not be a true a reflection of the applicant.

The study of social media signals to rate an applicant's personality and fitness for a job is of interest to some scholars. Kluemper et al. (2012) conducted a study to determine how employers used SNWs to assess five major personality traits to determine the suitability and fit of potential employees. During the study, factors associated with the five major personality traits, known as the Big Five, were scrutinized (Kluemper et al., 2012). These factors included internal consistency, interrater agreement, and self-reported personality ratings, relations between SNW-based ratings, supervisor-rated job performance, and employability ratings, and academic success. Kluemper et al.'s research consisted of 586 undergraduate students, who attended university in the Midwestern United States and three individuals, who provided ratings Facebook profiles of the students. The students worked an average of one year and 26 hours per week in customer service, sales, and in clerical positions. To assess the personality traits, each participant completed the

International Personality Item Pool, which is a 60-item survey with five sections. The three evaluators used an employability assessment, which consisted of three questions: (1) "How qualified is this person for the job?"; (2) "How attractive is this applicant as a potential employee of an organization?"; and (3) "How likely would you be to offer this person a job?" For each question, the respondents provided a score of one to five with five being the highest ranking. Kluemper et al. (2012) found that employers should be trained on how to evaluate individuals' personality traits of individuals on SNWs effectively. Kluemper et al. also found that Big Five personality traits of agreeableness and emotional stability depicted on individuals' social media content correlated with supervised-rated performance after being hired. Based on the signaling theory, Kluemper et al. (2012) noted the personal preferences associated with a Facebook user account provide clues about the personality trait of the user and updates of different activities SNW users engage in act as behavioral clues to group people into the Big Five personality traits. Social networking websites ratings may be essential to informing HR professionals about an applicant's personality traits, fitness for a specific job, and fitness in the culture if an organization.

      SNWs and person-job fit. Determining a job applicant's person-job fit from social media content is another issue that some HR professionals consider when using SNWs to facilitate the hiring process. Person-Job fit is described as the match between a job applicant's qualifications and the duties associated with a particular job (Buettner, 2014). Roulin and Bangerter (2013) explained that social networking websites are appropriate signaling environments through which job applicants can send signals to

indicate fitness for job placement. For instance, researchers proposed that professional SNWs can be used to assess a job applicant's person-job fit (Bangerter, Roulin, & Konig, 2012), and personal SNWs can be used to predict an individual's person-organization fit (Roulin & Bangerter, 2013). The assessment of a job applicant's professional social media account compared to the tasks associated with a specific job may be useful to predict person-job congruence and applicant's future job performance.

The use of SNWs to inform hiring decisions may also afford hiring professionals opportunities to assess a job candidate's job-fit beyond what is listed in a resume or revealed in a job interview. Carr and Walther (2014) explained how employers used SNWs to determine job applicants' job-fit in the organization without direct interaction and found that information contained in applicant's SNWs helped employers form favorable or unfavorable impressions, person-job fit, and employability for potential job candidates. Carr and Walther noted that an applicant's negative self-disclosures in SNWs caused potential employers to assess job candidates as less employable and low person-job fit compared with those who post positive social media self-disclosures. The signals that individuals send about their qualifications and interpersonal attributes in a virtual environment help potential employers predict job-fit and could help employers project an applicant's person-organization fit.

SNWs and person-organization fit. The use of non-professional SNWs by employers may offer insight about the person-organization fit of a job applicant. The assessment of non-professional SNWs content may also denote character and personality trait indicators of person-organization fit of potential employee. Non-professional SNWs

content provides honest signals about the commitment of an applicant to the employment relationship with a potential employer (Bangerter et al., 2012). Hiring professionals who detect that the values of an applicant do not correspond to the culture of an organization will save money and time by avoiding a bad hiring situation for the organization.

HR professionals' review of non-professional SNWs may help predict an applicant's person-organization fit. Non-professional SNWs content in Facebook reveals information about the applicant's personality characteristics, attitude toward a current job, and ability to form productive relationships in the workplace (Chou, Hammond, & Johnson, 2013). Chou et al. studied 516 employed undergraduate college participants and found that participants who were more involved in using Facebook were often assumed to be more people-oriented individuals but did not necessarily have better relationships with their coworkers, participants with more Facebook friends cared less about their work performance than those with fewer Facebook friends, and participants who frequently updated their Facebook profile were likely to think about changing their jobs, compared with those who updated their Facebook profile less often. Projecting an applicant's person-organization fit is equally important as projecting the right person-job fit. HR professionals may be swayed not to hire applicants whose SNWs content project that they may have difficulties forming productive work relationships with coworkers, inability to focus on work, or be prone to change jobs frequently.

An employer may also be easily swayed not to hire an applicant because of comments, bad habits, and images about alcohol on the applicant's social media webpages. Hammer (2014) studied the effects that personal images posted to an

individual's SNWs and the comments associated with the images have on the evaluation of a job candidate. Using a sample population of 315 managers from various organizations throughout the United States, Hammer found that the majority of the participants noted alcohol related images influenced their decisions to not hire job applicants. Root and McKay (2014) studied college students (potential applicants) to assess what they thought employers considered important when researching social media profiles. Root and McKay found that students considered posts about drugs, alcohol, sex, profanity, and negative comments as reasons not to hire an applicant, but the students did not consider posts and photo tags by friends or grammar and spelling to be important to employers. HR professionals and potential employees sometimes may have stark, contrasting views of what is acceptable SNWs content. Hiring professionals should consider SNWs content of an applicant that predicts a poor person-organization fit to prevent personnel issues in the future.

Barriers to Optimizing SNWs in the Hiring Process

Fairness. An ethical dilemma that some employers encounter when using SNWs to screen and select job applicants is the perception of unfairness. Some job applicants disagree with potential employers viewing SNWs (particularly non-professional SNWs) because the information posted was not intended for assessment purposes (Black, Stone, & Johnson, 2015). Job applicants doubt the fairness of employers using SNWs when protected class information that the applicant did not disclose was revealed as part of the employers' social media search results (Reicher, 2013). When Madera (2012) explored the perceptions of 171 job candidates, the perceived fairness of HR managers using

SNWs as a part of the hiring process had a negative effect on the selection process.

Employers could positively affect perceptions of job applicants by creating a SNW policy

that supports legitimate business reasons for conducting SNWs searches. One reason to

help justify and validate the use of SNWs by HR professionals during the hiring process

is the prevention of negligent hiring. Screening applicants' SNW is critical to protect the

organization from being held liable for negligent hiring (Johnson, Lukaszewski, & Stone,

2016). Employers may find themselves in peculiar situations, facing challenges of

increased pressures to only hire safe employee, while at the same time adhere to

employment laws to not discriminate against job applicants (Peterson, 2014). Employers

must strike the right balance between conducting pre-employment negligent hiring

investigations and avoiding discriminatory practices against job applicants.

Invasion of privacy. Accessing information about a job applicant through an

Internet search may be considered an appropriate method for employers who use SNWs

as part of the hiring process. An ethical concern for HR professionals is invasion of

privacy of a job applicant. Although some employers may take the position that viewing

an applicant's SNWs without consent is fair game, given that information is made public

by the applicant (Baumhart, 2015). The Privacy Act of 1974, prohibits the disclosure and

the collection of information without the individual's written consent and as written, this

legislation does not include personal information collected by non-governmental agencies

(Edwards, 2016). The meaning of privacy differs among individuals, cultures and

nations, which makes privacy expectations among SNW users problematic (Drake et al.,

2016). Thomas, Rothschild, et al. (2015) suggested that HR professionals who use SNWs

to screen and select job applicant have blurred the lines between personal and professional work life of job applicants. Other scholars argued that when an employer views an applicant's SNWs content an applicant may think that an invasion of privacy occurred (Black et al., 2015; Drake, 2016; Schmidt & O'Connor, 2016). Avoiding situations that may violate the privacy of a potential employee is a challenge that HR professionals need to navigate while concurrently obtaining SNW information to make sound hiring decision.

The use of SNWs by HR professionals to gather information about job applicants may also cause irreparable damage to the reputation of an organization and lead to costly lawsuits, stemming from an invasion of privacy of job candidates. If an applicant perceives an invasion of privacy from an employer accessing the applicant's SNWs, a job offer will not likely to be accepted from the organization (Black et al., 2015). Stoughton et al. (2015) noted that a job applicant is more likely to file a lawsuit when the perception of privacy has been invaded. Applicants may also feel an invasion of privacy when they are compelled to provide login credentials as a condition of employment. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) provides rights to applicants under federal employment laws, the EEOC has failed to put policies into place which address issues of fairness and discrimination online (Edwards, 2016). The implementation of an appropriate processes for obtaining consent to view the social media content of applicants should be undertaken by HR professionals to prevent organizations from developing reputations of violating the privacy of individuals and from facing lawsuits.

Inappropriate access. Employers' requesting the login credentials of job applicants further compound the problem surrounding invasion of privacy perceptions of potential employees. Before the establishment of legal protection, job applicants capitulated to the requests of employers by providing personal SNWs login credentials (Baumhart, 2015). Baumhart stated that in a competitive job market, applicants may believe that refusing to meet the demands of an employer for their SNWs login credentials was not an option. California, Massachusetts, Ohio, South Carolina, Washington and Maryland enacted laws to prevent employers from demanding job applicants SNWs login credentials (Lieber & Chaney, 2014; Tufts, Jacobson, & Stevens, 2015). Maryland was the first state to make it illegal for employers to request job applicants' user names and passwords (Tufts et al., 2015). More than 36 other states have enacted or are in the process of establishing social networking laws to protect potential employees (Borman, 2014). Goodrum (2014) noted that the federal government passed the Social Networking Online Protection Act (SNOPA), Password Protection Act, and Stored Communication Act to prevent employers from requiring job applicants to provide SNWs usernames, passwords, or any other login credentials to gain access to the applicant's electronic communications. Taking the time to understand federal and state laws related to the use of SNWs to screen and select job applicants may assist HR professionals with avoiding violations of privacy laws. Some HR professionals may attempt to skirt privacy laws by other means to access the social media content of applicants.

Some HR professionals use duplicitous tactics to gain access to the SNW accounts of job applicants. Employers gather information from the SNW accounts of job applicants by asking job applicants to log into their social media accounts while employer representatives look over the applicants' shoulder to review the content of the site, asking an applicant to "friend" a company representative to review and gather information, or hiring a third party to collect information from the social media profiles of applicants (Fink, 2014). If HR professionals use the subterfuge of creating fake accounts or looking over the shoulders of applicants to obtain SNW information, the lines of privacy have been crossed (Fink, 2014). The attempt by some employers to justify snooping into SNWs of applicants as a way of conducting a thorough background check or as a reasonable action for sound business practices may lead to applicants filing lawsuits.

Employers requesting SNW login credentials of job applicants may have another negative affect on the hiring process. Schneider, Goffin, and Daljeet (2015) investigated the implications of employers' request for job applicants' SNW passwords and the personality traits of applicants who refused compared with those who complied with the request. Schneider et al. found that asking applicants for their social networking password and eliminating applicants who refuse had a negative impact in the following ways: (1) a reduction of more than half the applicant pool, (2) an adverse impact on minority groups, and (3) limited gains in job performance of the remaining applicant pool based on personality scores. HR professionals should avoid requesting applicants' user names and passwords to prevent diminishing the quality of the job applicant pool and increasing the risks of legal problems for the organization.

Discrimination. HR professionals must navigate the legal issues that may arise from using SNWs in the screening and selection process. HR attorneys have repeatedly admonished employers that using SNWs to research information about job applicants may lead to claims of discrimination and violation of privacy (Meinert, 2014). Meinert also reported that when Carnegie Mellon University evaluated more than 4,000 American employers' use of SNWs to screen job applicants, the employers discriminated against potential employees based on religious affiliation. For example, the employers were 14 times less likely to call Muslim applicants than Christians for interviews. Nguyen (2014) also argued that online background checks are unethical, but they may also put employers at legal risk of violating federal and state laws. Peterson (2014) reiterated that under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, the law prohibits an employer from discriminating against a job applicant, based on protected group status and EEOC hiring guidelines. SNW pre-employment searches may afford HR professionals opportunities to view protected class information which may negatively impact the hiring decision. For example, a job applicant's SNW profile may include photos, employers may make assumptions not hire the applicant based on characteristics related to the individual's race, gender, or family status (Thomas, Rothschild et al., 2015). Given that employers may come across legally protected information that is not usually obtained in the hiring process, HR professionals must determine how the information will influence the hiring decision and if the information will have an adverse impact on applicants.

HR professionals using SNWs as a screening and selection tool run the risk of violating federal and state discrimination laws. In pursuit of an employer's quest to

discover more information about a job applicant, a SNW search may reveal useful, decision-making evidence along with protected class information that could be used to discriminate against the applicant in the hiring process (Bannister, Jilka, & Ulrich, 2014). In the absence of an in-person interview, HR professionals may discriminate against an applicant, and the applicant may not be aware that an employment opportunity has been denied. Blommaert, Coenders, and Van Tubergen (2013) studied employment discrimination of job applicants, using principles of the signaling theory. Blommaert et al. finding that applicants with Arabic names signaled their ethnic origins to potential employers, and the employers discriminated against this group of applicants without the knowledge of the applicant. Some HR professionals using SNWs to screen and select job applicants may engage in discriminatory practices in obscured ways and the job applicant may not be the wiser because the use of social media removes discriminatory conduct from plain view to the unseen virtual environment.

Adverse impact. Another concern for employers using SNWs to facilitate the hiring process is adverse impact. When hiring policies of employers, regardless of neutral intent, adversely affect protected groups more than others, unintentional discrimination, also known as disparate impact or adverse impact, occurs (Reinsch et al., 2016). Employers searching SNWs of job applicants during the hiring process create the potential for disparate treatment because readily available protected class information (Kluemper, Davison, Cao, & Wu, 2015). Kluemper et al. argued that lower representation of underrepresented group with access to the Internet may bias the rater and may also lead to adverse impact. Strong SNW profiles for one group of applicants may give an

advantage over other groups such as older workers with no SNW profiles or minority

groups who are disproportionately represented on a particular professional SNW, lack

computers or access to the Internet (Calvasina, Calvasina, & Calvasina, 2014). HR

professionals use of SNWs to screen and select job applicants may have unintended

consequences of adverse impact against protected groups that result in organizations

facing costly litigations.

Negligent hiring. The use of SNWs to screen and select job applicants may also

create a legal tightrope for HR professionals to walk to avoid negligent hiring. Employers

search the SNWs of job applicants to determine if applicants are dependable and

trustworthy in an effort to avoid negligent hiring situations (Black et al., 2015). A

negligent hiring claim results from a person filing a lawsuit because of injury or damages

from an employee who the employer knew or should have known posed a risk, based on

a pre-employment background check (Reinsch, et al., 2016). A thorough background

check could include searching the applicant's SNW accounts to determine if the

individual displayed undesirable behavior in the past. The problem is a SNW search

might disclose information about the applicant that cannot be legally used in the hiring

decision (Reinsch et al., 2016). Searching an applicant's SNW accounts to avoid a

negligent hiring claim may be another balancing act for HR professionals because

information may surface about race, religion, or other protected class information of an

applicant that should not be considered when making a hiring decision.

Reliability issues. Obtaining reliable information from job applicants' SNWs is

paramount for HR professionals to base hiring decisions. Reliability is the different ways

to show a measure is consistent and is a necessary condition for validity (Kluemper, Mitra, & Wang, 2016). Kluemper (2013) outlined three types of reliability which are relevant to HR professionals using SNWs to screen applicants: (1) test-retest reliability (consistent from one test administration to the next), (2) inter-rater reliability (the degree of consistency of test scores among difference raters) and (3) internal consistency reliability (the consistency of findings across separate sections of information within an assessment). When SNWs are not established as reliable measurements to screen and select job applicants for employment, the selection method cannot be considered valid.

The reliability of SNWs as a screening and selection tool can also be challenged because sometimes information can be false, exaggerated, or inaccurately posted by someone else other than the job applicant. The reliability of information obtained from the SNWs of job applicants may be misleading or untrue (Ladkin & Buhalis, 2016). Job applicants can alter SNWs profiles, manipulate social media content to project a particular image, or change information to reflect certain personality traits and job-related skills (Thomas, Rothschild et al., 2015). The challenge for HR professionals using SNWs for hiring decisions is whether the information contained in a job applicant's social media is trustworthy and authentic (Ladkin & Buhalis, 2016; Thomas, Rothschild et al., 2015). When using SNWs for hiring purposes, the absence of reliable information reduces the effectiveness of SNWs as a screening and selection tool.

The use of SNWs by HR professionals as a dependable screening tool may also be problematic because of inconsistent assessment procedures. Some raters use subjective, internally established criteria to evaluate job applicants in the absence of specific

selection criteria (Thomas, Rothschild et al., 2015). Roth, Bobko, Van Iddekinge, & Thatcher (2016) contended that unstructured social media assessments can also lead to lack of consistency because job applicants are assessed differently. Slovensky and Ross (2012) opined that the likelihood of raters mistakenly identifying a SNW profile of another user with the job applicant, postings from the job applicant with different information across multiple accounts, and the ability of individuals to create imitation accounts can also lead to inconsistences. Because of the inconsistences associated with raters' use of SNWs, the use of SNWs as a screening and selection tool is less reliable. Considering that job applicants can manipulate profiles or HR professionals may use different procedures to assess the SNW information of candidates, the information obtained from SNWs of job applicants may not be dependable sources and the use of SNWs by HR professionals may make some hiring decisions questionable.

Validity issues. The validity of using SNWs as a screening and selection tool can be disputed under many conditions. Van Iddekinge, Lanivich, Roth, and Junco (2016) found recruiters' ratings lacked validity because Facebook profiles were not related to job performance ratings. When a SNW profile is not job-related, a profile of the job applicant may be incomplete (Zide et al., 2014), leading the rater to set the value of unknown information at a subjectively determined level. The possibility of a HR professional accepting or rejecting an applicant could be based on false, inaccurate, or outdated information (Melanthiou et al., 2015). In a competitive job market, one candidate may create a false SNW profile to cast a disparaging image of another candidate in hopes of bolstering the likelihood of being selected for the job (Lusk, 2014). Given that

information from job applicants SNWs can be flawed, HR professionals' failure to obtain accurate information from job applicants' SNWs poses legal risks and further reduce the effectiveness of SNWs as a screening and selection tool.

The lack of validity regarding information found on SNW profiles of job applicants and the use of SNW content of job applicants to make hiring decisions raise concerns. Despite the growing number of employers using SNWs in the hiring process, only a few extant studies examine the validity of such practices (Becton, Walker, Schwager, & Gilstrap, 2017). Kluemper et al. (2012) found that Facebook profiles were valid predictors of self-reported personality traits and likelihood of employing job applicants. Van Iddekinge et al. (2016) reported that Facebook profiles were not related to an applicant's performance. Similarly, concerns about employers using SNWs to eliminate job applicants while so little is known about its validity have been voiced (Roth et al., 2016). Until issues of validity are established, organizations should carefully consider operationalizing SNWs as part of their screening and selection processes.

Although existing research on the validity of SNWs is deficient, different forms of validity are germane to SNWs being used as a screening and selection tool. Kluemper et al. (2015) argued that construct validity, content validity, convergent validity, concurrent validity, face validity, criterion-related validity, and incremental validity are important to validating SNWs as effective tools in the hiring process. Kluemper et al. noted that criterion-related validity is the most critical validity because it helps to establish that hiring decisions are based on job-related SNW content. Conversely, Davison, Bing, Kluemper and Roth (2016) recommended that HR professionals proceed

with caution when using SNWs because existing research on criterion-related validity is inconclusive. HR professionals should be conscientious of using SNWs to screen and select job applicants because SNWs may lack validity. Using information from a job applicant's SNWs for a hiring decision should be based on criterion-related validity before the practice is operationalized.

Strategies for Optimizing Use of SNWs by Employers

HR professionals use SNWs in different ways during the process of recruiting, screening, and hiring job applicants. While some HR professionals use SNWs to prove or disprove information provided by an applicant, other employers use SNWs to review writing samples, to learn more about an applicant's personality, to investigate organizations an applicant follows, or to find out whether an applicant uses illegal substances (Blommaert et al., 2013; Kluemper et al., 2012; Root & McKay, 2014). Employers may use SNWs to research such information, but may not use it to discriminate (Peterson, 2014). To avoid liability, HR professionals should seek consultation from experts, such as attorneys who practice Internet law and should make decisions about the use of SNWs for screening and hiring applicants based on federal and state laws and company policies (Ladkin & Buhalis, 2016). An amalgamation of the literature yielded several suggestions for optimizing employers' use of SNWs in the recruiting and hiring process.

Creating company policies. The formation of a well-founded SNWs policy to guide HR professionals and other employees involved in screening and selecting job applicants may be important to optimizing SNWs to facilitate hiring. The most popular

suggestions that researchers provide for optimizing employers' use of SNWs in the recruiting and hiring process is to create a company policy prior to using SNWs to screen and hire applicants (Drouin et al., 2015; Federal Trade Commission, 2014; Lieber & Chaney, 2014). The policy should reflect legal and consistent practices on which employers should base their hiring decisions; align with nondiscriminatory practices; and focus on valid predictors of job performance (Blount, Wright, Hall, & Biss, 2016). A well-written SNW policy for using social media as a screening and selection aid will help guide HR professionals and other employees and may prevent the organization from employment discrimination litigation.

A SNW policy for an organization to hire potential employees may involve a third-party expert responsible for screening job candidates. When developing the policy, employers should hire a third-party expert who is knowledgeable about EEOC guidelines, the Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Privacy Act of 1974 (Edwards, 2016; Lindsey et al., 2013; Reinsch et al., 2016). The third-party expert should also be knowledgeable of the legalities surrounding the use of SNWs in the hiring process (Melanthiou et al., 2015; Reinsch et al., 2016). Because some positions may require employees to be more engaged with the public, employers should either limit screening to only management positions or to screen for all positions (Blount et al., 2016; Drouin et al., 2015). The company policy should also explicitly list how HR professionals should conduct screenings and whether screening via SNWs will use general search engines or specific sites (Jeske & Shultz, 2016). Policies should also include the time that is needed to conduct screenings and explicitly state that applicants will not be asked to provide their

login information as requesting them to do so is a violation of state and federal law and should include a statement that informs that HR professionals will only use information found on SNWs to make non-bias employment decisions (Jeske & Shultz, 2016; Reinsch et al., 2016; Thomas, Rothschild, et al., 2015). Finally, the policy should specifically list the information that will be collected from SNWs such as screen shots and writing samples (Jeske & Shultz, 2016).

Using specific SNWs. HR professionals should use specific SNWs to screen job applicants. The specific websites should be listed in the company's policy. Some SNWs will require HR professions to create an account to view an applicant's information (Schneider et al., 2015; Thomas, Rothschild, et al., 2015). Usernames and passwords should reflect the business's name which will avoid HR professionals' Internet activity using personal accounts (Borman, 2014; Lieber & Chaney, 2014; Tufts et al., 2015). The usernames and passwords should also be documented and kept in a locked file and limited only to individuals who conduct screenings (Borman, 2014; Lieber & Chaney, 2014; Tufts et al., 2015). Individuals who conduct searches may also want to become familiar with basic techniques for conducting Internet searches so that specific sites and research information pertaining to an applicant can be quickly accessed (Borman, 2014; Schneider et al., 2015). Streamlining which social networking websites to search and establishing standard procedures for HR professionals to follow may decrease job applicants' claims against employers as being bias and unfair toward job applicants.

Submitting reports to hiring managers. Another approach for HR professionals to optimize SNWs should include gathering relevant information about job candidates

that is beneficial to managers responsible for hiring. Individuals who use SNWs to screen applicants should submit a detailed report to the hiring manager for each potential employee (Edwards, 2016). The report should only include information which can be used to verify information provided by the applicant, such as work history and job-related criteria (Appel, 2014; Berkelaar, 2014; Edwards, 2016); however, the reports should be written objectively and should not include any discriminatory or illegal information (Edwards, 2016). Each report should reiterate that SNWs were used only to supplement the job selection process and not to weigh more heavily than other factors during the process (Appel, 2014; Edwards, 2016). To protect employers against charges of discrimination, HR professionals should document when SNWs were used, the process used to screen applicants, the employment-related information that was collected, and any other documentation that came about as a result of screening an applicant (Appel, 2014; Edwards, 2016; Hazelton & Terhorst, 2015). In the SNW report, HR professionals should provide any cybervetting practices such as using Internet searchers to investigate an applicant's criminal history or arrest records (Appel, 2014; Edwards, 2016; Ghoshray, 2013). Employers should retain all documents collected from social media documents for at least two years (Appel, 2014). Information compiled in SNWs reports may be helpful to HR professionals and hiring managers, with making employment decisions are appropriate job-fit and organization-fit with the abilities, skills, and personalities of job applicants.

Engaging in on-going professional development. Appropriate and timely training for all employees may be essential to organizations optimizing SNWs to

facilitate the hiring process. Just as HR professionals must be knowledgeable about laws and policies that guide Internet use, employees within an organization should also be informed about specific laws which govern policies concerning the use of the Internet and SNWs to screen job applicants (Appel, 2014). Managers and their subordinates should specifically be made aware of how Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Privacy Act of 1974 are the basis for company policy (Appel, 2014; Edwards, 2016). As state legislatures and federal entities such as the EEOC update policies relating to SNWs, employers should also provide professional development to the staff, which may engage them in proactive measures to eliminate social media discrimination (Edwards, 2016). Given that HR professionals and hiring managers are the two groups responsible for reviewing applicant information, engaging all employees in on-going professional development about using SNWs to screen and selecting job applicants may prevent other employees from placing organization in potentially liable situations.

Best Practices for HR Professionals Using SNWs

  Consent from applicants. HR professional should gain consent as a best practice for using SNWS to facilitate the hiring process. Thomas, Rothschild, et al. (2015) recommends that job applicants give written consent to organizations before SNW searches are conducted as part of the hiring process. A job applicant should sign a disclaimer giving an organization consent to conduct a pre-employment background check to include social media (Thomas, Rothschild et al., 2015). By gaining a job applicant's consent to conduct a SNWs search, organization may avoid legal claims because the applicant is less likely to perceive an invasion of privacy (Melanthiou et al.,

2015). Although written consent may mitigate legal claims for employers, the consent may also give the applicant an opportunity to remove social media content that could impact the hiring decision (Lam, 2016). After obtaining consent, HR professionals should consider at what point the SNW screening should be conducted in the hiring process (Lam, 2016; Melanthiou et al., 2015; Thomas, Rothschild, et al., 2015). Legal issues may still prevail even after applicant's consent is given if the job applicant chooses not to give consent and conveys a negative signal that will end the hiring process or consents to SNW searches but argues that consent was given because of coercion (Lam, 2016; Melanthiou et al., 2015; Thomas, Rothschild, et al., 2015). Although gaining a job applicant's consent before conducing a SNW search can be a best practice for HR professional, obtaining the applicant's consent does not necessarily exonerate the organization from legal problems.

Creation of policy. Establishing a well-written policy to give organizational guidance to HR professionals and others on how to execute SNW screening practices is important. Social networking website screening policies should be written to communicate organizational rules to all employees and to minimize legal exposure (Schultz, Koehler, Philippe, & Coronel, 2015). The emergence of new laws and the rapidly changing nature of social media platforms are pushing organizations to face the challenges of developing SNWs policies (Drouin et al., 2015; Lieber & Chaney, 2014). Employers should create comprehensive policies regarding the use of SNWs in the hiring process and couple the policies with training to ensure employees are knowledgeable of what information should be used to screen and select job applicants (Federal Trade

Commission, 2014). Although the establishment of policies to govern pre-employment SNW screenings is critical to minimizing legal exposure, some organizations lack policies to guide HR professionals and other employees operationalizing SNW practices (Drouin et al., 2015; Lieber & Chaney, 2014; Schultz et al., 2015). The lack of polices that outline pre-employment screening is problematic for some organizations.

Some HR professionals lack organizational policies for using SNWs to screen and hire potential job employees. In a 2013 SHRM Survey of 651 HR managers, 57% of firms lacked a SNW policy for screening job candidates (Reinsch et al., 2016). Blount et al., (2016) surveyed 200 HR professionals who participated in college job fairs between October 2014 and March 2015 and found that 44% of the participants reported no organizational SNW policy for screening job applicants; while 39% had an organizational policy for using SNWs to screen and select job applicants. Blount et al. maintained that if a company lacks clear guidelines, the entire process of using SNWs to screen and select job applicants can be called into question. Given the lack of organizational SNW pre-employment screening policies, the risk of legal claims, including discrimination and invasion of privacy, may become onerous for some employers who use SNWs as screening and selection tools without proper guidance (Blount et al., 2016; Reinsch et al., 2016). Because more organizations are using SNWs to screen and select job applicants, creating an SNW policy to guide HR professionals and other employees will provide the guidance for optimizing SNWs and lessening the chances of legal problems.

Consistency in SNW screening practices. Consistency is also important for HR professionals using SNWs to screen and select job applicants. SNW screening practices

should be consistent across all candidates to prevent biases and legal challenges

(Delarosa, 2014). To ensure SNW screening practices being uniformed across applicants,

the process of screening applicants should be the same across the organization (Calvasina

et al., 2014). Bannister et al. (2014) recommended that an employee other than the

decision-maker should conduct the SNW screening, search for specific information, and

maintain the information in an uniformed way. The decision to perform the SNW

screening process in a consistent manner may prevent the decision-makers from seeing

irrelevant and inappropriate information that could affect the hiring decision (Bannister et

al., 2014; Calvasina et al., 2014; Delarosa, 2014). When employers adopt guidelines to

ensure the practice of SNW screening of job applicants is conducted in a consistent way,

applicants may be treated fairly and in compliance with the law (Bannister et al., 2014;

Calvasina et al., 2014; Delarosa, 2014). Completing SNW searches in a consistent

manner with all applicants and across the organization will help HR professionals adhere

to SNW policies that follow the law.

Third Party. During the SNW screening process, HR professionals could come

across protected, class information in social media profiles of job applicants. Some

employers may choose to outsource pre-employment background check responsibilities

to third party firms. Third party organizations conducting pre-employment screenings on

job applicants to include SNWs searches on behalf of the employer should avoid

disclosing protected class information about a job applicant to prevent claims of

discrimination (Sarode & Deore, 2017). Third party firms are required to obtain signed

authorization from applicants to comply with the FCRA (Reinsch et al., 2016). FCRA

requires third party agencies to disclose any information to applicants that may have adverse decisions, to include evaluation of qualifications for employment (Delarosa, 2014). By obtaining permission from applicants to conduct SNW searches, removing protected class information to the employer, and disclosing information that negatively impact hiring decisions, third party firms provide an invaluable service to help shield employers from discrimination claims.

Transition

Section 1 was a summary of the literature related to use of SNWs by HR professionals to screen and select job applicants. Presented first in this section was a synopsis of the strategy used to conduct the literature review. The theoretical framework was presented followed by key constructs underlying the theory as well as supporting and contrasting theories. Presented next was literature on the use of SNWs in the hiring process, job applicants' brand on SNWs, and SNWs as a signaling environment. Also presented was information relating to the barriers which optimize SNWs in the hiring process, legal issues related to the use of SNWs in the hiring process, strategies for optimizing employers' use of SNWs in the hiring process and best practices for using SNWs to screen and select applicants. Section 2 includes information about the project, specifically the purpose statement, my role in the research process, a description of the participants, the research method and design, as well as a description of the population and the sample. Section 2 also includes information regarding ethical research, the data collection instruments, organization techniques, and the procedures for analyzing the data. Findings are detailed in Section 3.

Section 2: The Project

Purpose Statement

The objective of this qualitative, multiple-case study was to explore the strategies that HR professionals use to successfully optimize SNWs to facilitate the hiring process. The targeted population consisted of HR professionals in four organizations in the southeastern United States who use SNWs to screen and select job applicants. The implication for positive social change included the potential of increasing awareness among SNW users in choice of content on their social media web pages and the possibility of that content being viewed by prospective employers.

Role of the Researcher

In a qualitative case study, the role of the researcher is to serve as the primary instrument for collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and reporting data (Xu & Storr, 2012). I did not have any previous experience exploring the views, practices, and underlining meanings articulated by HR professionals who use SNWs to screen and select job applicants. I used knowledge and skills gained from being employed for 9 years as an HR manager to conduct unbiased, semistructured interviews. To further mitigate bias and avoid viewing data through a subjective lens, Yin (2018) recommended that a researcher identify personal opinions, assumptions, and perceptions before collecting data.

I established an interview process to ask questions and record answers for this study (see Appendix A). I also used an interview protocol as a procedural guide. An interview protocol helps the researcher to stay on-track and to collect information needed to answer the central research question (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). A researcher must

follow an interview protocol to adhere to the same process for gathering information from all participants (Sooniste, Granhag, Stromwall, & Vrij, 2015). The interviewing process for this study included: (a) greetings, (b) advising participants about informed consent and purpose of the interview, (c) turning on recording device, (d) introducing participants with pseudonyms, (e) beginning with first interview question and following through to the final question, (f) discussing member checking, and (g) thanking participants (see Appendix A).

One responsibility of a researcher is to conduct the study in an ethical manner and provide accurate and unbiased data (Schaller-Demers, 2015). Prior to conducting this study, I completed the National Institute of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research Protecting Human Research Participation certification and agreed to abide by *The Belmont Report's Ethical Principles and Research Guidelines for Protecting) Human Subjects of Research* (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services [USDHHS], 1979). I received permission to proceed with this study, and I was assigned approval number 08-01-18-0474690 from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct this study.

Upon receiving approval from the Walden University IRB, I gave a consent form to each participant to explain and promote interest in the study. In an effort to obtain IRB approval, I followed strict compliance with the ethical standards in the interview protocol for the Protection of Human Subjects as reported by the Belmont Report basic ethical principles (USDHHS, 1979). The three basic ethical principles of human subject research

that were adhered to during this study are (a) respect for persons, (b) beneficence, and (c) justice (USDHHS, 1979).

Participants

To identify strategies that some HR professionals use to optimize SNWs to inform hiring decisions, the participant eligibility criteria was that each participant work as an HR professional and regularly use successful strategies to optimize social networking sites to facilitate the hiring process. Ellard-Gray et al. (2015) noted that a primary challenge that researchers encounter is identifying potential participants within the population. Recruiting participants for research starts with targeting and soliciting volunteers for research (Kaba & Beran, 2014). Davison, Maraist, Hamilton, and Bing (2012) surmised that HR professionals are increasingly using Internet searches and social networking websites to discover detail and private information about job candidates.

To obtain data, I used purposive sampling to identify eight participants from four organizations in the southeastern United States. Sample sizes in qualitative studies tend to be nonrandom and small, with a goal of obtaining rich descriptions of the phenomenon of interest (Tavakol & Sandars, 2014). Small samples in qualitative research lead to concerns of the appropriateness and adequacy of the information to answer the research question (Trotter, 2012); therefore, qualitative researchers need to justify their sample size on the grounds of quality data (Cleary, Horsfall, & Hayter, 2014).

IRB approval is essential to every research study to decrease the chances of harming participants. Yin (2018) argued that the most important steps before proceeding with research are to gain the IRB's approval and follow its guidance. Afterwards, I

contacted the proper authority at each organization to introduce myself and explain the

purpose of the study. Anderson and DuBois (2012) posited that IRBs consider any harm

that can be posed by researchers conducting non-medical-study-related procedures to

include questions about sensitive and stigmatizing behavior or collection and storage of

personally identifiable information. Yin (2018) noted that a study about a contemporary

phenomenon in its real-world context obligates researchers to follow ethical practices.

To gain access to the target population, I contacted the chapter president of the

local Society for HR Management (SHRM) who helped identify HR professionals in the

southeastern United States who use SNWs to screen and select job applicants. The

SHRM president was knowledgeable of some HR professionals among the target

population who use SNWs to facilitate the hiring process. The relationship that I

established with the SHRM president provided a pathway to gain knowledge of the

appropriate route to access participants. Insight from an insider or gatekeeper who

understands the value of a research proposal can help a researcher gain access to

participants (Hoyland, Hollund, & Olsen, 2015). The process of building rapport to

recruit potential participants was facilitated by a representative of the targeted population

(Ellard-Gray et al., 2015). A community partner can help recruit participants who may be

hesitant about research (Bonevski et al., 2014).

I solicited interest from company officials to participate in the study and emailed

prospective participants to inform them about the purpose of the study, the problem being

investigated, and invite each of them to participate in the study after gaining informed

consent. I conducted this qualitative inquiry by establishing rapport with participants.

Establishing an open and honest working relationship with the research participants is a recommended approach to conducting qualitative research (Mukeredzi, 2012). Helping participants overcome anxiety and nervousness of participating in this study was essential to conducting data-gathering procedures. Successful interviews are based on the researcher's ability to build rapport with participants, in an effort to ensure comfort and participation without reservation (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Patton (2015) maintained that researchers demonstrate empathy and interest in participants when trust is established.

Montalvo and Larson (2014) emphasized that a responsible researcher must take the appropriate steps to ensure that research participants are fully informed about studies in which they participate. A researcher should also use a standard method such as an informed consent form for notifying participants about the purpose and duration of the study (Aluwihare-Samaranayake, 2012). I distributed a consent form to each participant. A consent form serves as an agreement between the participants and the researcher (Rodrigues, De Souza, De Torres, & Silva, 2017). The researcher must ensure information in the informed consent form is true and covers relevant aspects of the study being undertaken (Mandal & Parija, 2014). I gave a detailed explanation of the consent form, interview process, and the steps that would be taken to maintain confidentially during and after the research to further establish rapport and to gain consent from participants.

I took several data security measures to protect the participants' personal information, identities, rights, and the reliability of the research. I retained data for this study in accordance with Walden University's IRB requirement. Socially responsible and

acceptable research is based on ethical principles to include the protection of human subjects (Aluwihare-Samaranayake, 2012). I kept all of the data in a combination lockbox at my private home, and I had sole knowledge of the combination to open the lockbox. These security measures were necessary to ensure the preservation and protection of data. I will shred the research data after 5 years, which is the conclusion of the compliance storage period.

<div align="center">**Research Method and Design**</div>

Research Method

I used a qualitative approach for this study to explore strategies that HR professionals can use to optimize SNWs to facilitate the hiring process. Qualitative researchers seek to reveal, interpret, or obtain a deeper understanding of human experiences from the participants' perspectives (Kemparaj, & Chavan, 2013). Qualitative research is useful when research focuses on complex issues such as human behavior and felt needs (Isaacs, 2014). A qualitative research method is appropriate for researchers using open-ended questionnaires, face-to-face interviews, observations, and interview notes (Yilmaz, 2013). During the process of conducting qualitative research, the researcher usually addresses the questions of what, how, or why of a phenomenon instead of questions of a quantitative nature, such as how many or how much (Isaacs, 2014). Sanjari, Bahramnezhad, Fomani, Shoghi, and Cheraghi (2014) declared that qualitative studies tend to use methods that result in text production rather than numerical outputs. Upon interviewing HR professionals to achieve a better understanding about their use of SNWs to inform hiring decisions, I categorized the responses into specific or general

themes as a basis for organizing and reporting the results in the form of words instead of numbers.

I did not use a quantitative research approach to gain a deeper understanding of HR professionals' use of SNWs in the hiring process. A quantitative approach does not allow researchers to ask deep and probing questions to understand experiences and processes (Yin, 2018). A quantitative research method is used when a researcher uses variables to compare data in a systematic way and to make generalizations about the whole population (Yilmaz, 2013). McCusker and Gunaydin (2015) concluded that the use of tools such as surveys are employed in quantitative research to collect numerical data and test hypotheses. Quantitative research methods were not suitable for this study because I did not test any theories to explain the phenomenon of interest.

I did not use mixed methods for this study. Klassen, Creswell, Plano Clark, Smith, and Meissner (2014) asserted that mixed methods involve the deliberate collection of both quantitative and qualitative data and the blending of strengths of each to answer research questions. Qualitative methods provide more depth than quantitative studies, whereas the recurrent outcomes of quantitative methods offer better objectivity and generality than qualitative studies (Lund, 2012). Venkatesh, Brown, and Bala (2013) offered that a mixed methods approach can aid researchers in developing an in-depth understanding of different phenomena of interest that cannot be fully comprehended by using only a quantitative or a qualitative method. Because numerous forms of data are collected and analyzed, mixed methods research requires extensive time and resources for researchers to perform the multiple steps involved in the research process (Klassen et al., 2014). The

mixed methods approach was unsuitable for this study because the inclusion of quantitative inquiry would increase the timeframe to conduct the study.

Research Design

I used a multiple-case study approach for this study. A researcher may choose from several research designs when conducting qualitative research. Yin (2018) described a case study design as a pragmatic way to investigate a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within the context of the real world. Yin also stated that one case is enough to generate valid data; however, a multiple case study may be undertaken to reinforce the findings that generated from research. A multiple case study design can be used to understand and report the commonalities and differences of individual cases (Park & Park, 2016; Rule & John, 2015).

I gained an in depth understanding of the similarities and differences HR professionals use to screen and select job applicants by employing this multiple case study design. To ensure the quality of the findings of this multiple case study, I interviewed eight HR professionals who use SNWs to screen and select job applicants. Houghton, Casey, Shaw, and Murphy (2013) noted that when no new themes are identified from participants, data saturation is achieved. I did not expand the number of participants after concluding the eighth interview because I achieved data saturation.

Considering the characteristics of HR professionals using SNWs for hiring decisions in this study, I excluded other research designs, such as phenomenological, narrative, and ethnographic approaches. A phenomenological design allows the research facilitator to understand the meaning of lived individual experiences of a shared

phenomenon (Sanjari et al., 2014). The intent of a phenomenological approach is to amass an understanding about others' experiences and perceptions rather than processes and practices. The goal of this study was to gain knowledge about successful processes and practices that HR professionals use to optimize SNWs as a screening and selection tool in the hiring process; therefore, a phenomenological design was not appropriate for this study. A narrative design is used to describe how people explain and create meaning about experiences (Rejno et al., 2014). The narrative approach was not suitable for this study because my goal was not to document participants' stories or feelings about using SNWs as a screen and selection tool. An ethnography approach is used to explain an identifiable group's way of life, culture, and interactions with one another (Park & Park, 2016). This approach involves the research facilitator being inconspicuously immersed in a community; while collecting data on community member's behavior in a natural setting (Jervis & Drake, 2014). Research conducted for this study did not involve observing the culture or interactions of research participants; therefore, the ethnography design was not suitable for this study.

Population and Sampling

Sampling in case studies involves selecting cases and additional data sources to help the researcher best understand the topic being studied (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, & McKibbon, 2015). The sample population for this multiple case study included eight participants from four organizations in the southeastern United States. Participants in the sample population included HR professionals who successfully use SNWs to screen and select job applicants. For this study, the term, HR professionals, included organizational

personnel whose job function include duties to recruit, screen, and select job applicants for the organization.

Different types of sampling methods are available. When researchers use probability sampling, participants in the population have an equal chance of being selected (Acharya, Prakash, Saxena, & Nigam, 2013). Non-probability sampling involves selecting participants from a specific population (Uprichard, 2013). I used a non-probability sampling approach to select eight participants who use SNWs to screen and select job applicants.

Non-probability sampling includes (a) snowball sampling, (b) quota sampling, (c) convenience sampling, and (d) purposive sampling. Purposeful sampling is a common strategy for qualitative research studies (Suri, 2011); and a means for gaining an in depth understanding of the research question being posed (Guercini, 2014). Qualitative researchers use purposeful sampling to handpick certain individuals of interest to provide a vivid picture of a phenomenon (Tavakol & Sandars, 2014). Morse (2015) asserted purposeful sampling will allow a researcher to narrow the participant pool to answer descriptive research questions and to deliberately focus the study on a group. I used a purposive sampling method to deliberately identify and select HR professionals in the southeastern United States who could provide information and rich data about the use of SNWs to screen and select job applicants.

The population for this study was comprised of participants who possessed specific attributes and experiences. Researchers can establish a sample universe by way of a set of inclusion or exclusion criteria for participants (Robinson, 2014). Robinson also

maintained that boundaries are defined when researchers establish criterion for participants. The criterion for participants was individuals who work as HR professionals with at least three years of experience using SNWs to screen and select job applicants. Establishing criterion for the participants warranted that only knowledgeable individuals take part in the study. Bergerson and Huftlatin (2011) contended that researchers must ensure that when choosing participants for a study, that participants are knowledgeable of the topic. It was very helpful to me to select HR professionals who possess specific attributes. I gained an in depth understanding of participants' knowledge and experiences and provided strategies for exploring the research question.

The population for this multiple case study was 25 HR professionals with a sample population size of eight HR professionals from four organizations in the southeastern United States. The sample size for a qualitative study is affected by theoretical and practical considerations (Robinson, 2014). Onwuegbuzie and Collins (2007) recommended three to five participants as an adequate sample size for case studies. Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, and Fontenot (2013) opined that researchers conducting case studies use a minimum of four participants. I used a purposeful sampling to select eight participants from the total sample population for this multiple case study.

I was initially concerned about the data saturation when determining the sample size for this study. For qualitative research, sampling should continue until saturation is achieved (Trotter, 2012). I interviewed eight participants from four organizations to identify reoccurring information and themes. Qualitative information received from interviews can be used to determine reoccurring themes (Fakis, Hilliam, Stonely, &

Townsend, 2014). Data saturation occurs when the researcher obtains enough information to replicate the study and when no new information, themes, and coding emerge (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

I achieved data saturation after the sixth interview of the research process. Depending on the sample size of the population, data saturation may be obtained in as few as six interviews (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). If new themes surfaced, I could have conducted more interviews with additional participants until no new patterns or themes arose. Data saturation is reached when no new patterns or themes emerge (Fusch & Ness, 2015). When no new information surfaced after member checking, I achieved data saturation. Through member checking, I interpreted the responses to the interview questions and documented written transcripts for each participant to reflect their intended responses. Member checking is used to determine if the interpretations of the researcher correctly reflect the intended responses of participants (Brit, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016). I emailed the transcript to the related participant, allowed each participant three days to member check the transcript, and asked participants to respond by email with corrections to their answers. When I did not receive a reply from a participant by 6:00 p.m. of the third day, I considered no email reply as an approval that the written interpretation of responses was accurate.

Ethical Research

I conducted every aspect of this research process with integrity to maintain data validity. Jordan (2014) explained that a researcher demonstrates professional competence by honestly, accurately, and completely describing conditions under which data is

collected and analyzed. A foundation of trust has to be established to build good working relationships with participants and is essential in qualitative research (Petrova, Dewing, & Camilleri, 2014). I adhered to the rules of informed consent, informed participants about the process for withdrawing, and ensured the confidentiality and privacy of both participants and participating organizations.

I requested permission from senior officers at four companies to conduct this study (see Appendix B). Oye, Sorensen, and Glasdam (2016) indicated that gatekeepers can open or close the gate to participants in the recruitment process. The request included permission to interview HR professionals who use SNWs as part of their organization's employment screening and selection process. I submitted an individual letter of consent to each participant granting me permission to use information collected during the interview. The consent letter included the Walden IRB approval number, 08-01-18-0474690, for this study. The letter of consent also included an employee's signature line to grant the interview and to use the information collected during the interview. Participants had the option to withdraw from the interview process before beginning the interview or following the interview. There were no consequences for non-participation or for any participant who chose not to allow use of his or her interview. Interviewees did not receive any incentives or compensation for participating in this study.

I coded the participant names and stored them on a personal computer hard drive with a backup on a flash drive for 5 years with password-protected files to ensure confidentiality and protect the identity of the participants. Sanjari et al. (2014) recommended that qualitative researchers use pseudonyms and codes to maintain the

confidentiality of participants. To ensure that the names of the participants do not appear in the study, I used the identification and labelling of P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, and P8 from start to finish. To guarantee sustained confidentiality, after 5 years, I will erase the recorded interviews and shred written information. I also included the Walden IRB approval number for conducting this study.

Data Collection Instruments

In qualitative research, the researcher is the main instrument for collecting data (Kemparaj & Chavan, 2013; Leedy & Ormond, 2013; Pezalla, Pettigrew, & Miller-Day, 2012). Mayer (2015) noted that researchers typically use semistructured interviews, field notes based on personal observations, and companies' archival documents as secondary instruments to collect data from the study participants. With a qualitative case study, there needs to be a collection of data from a minimum of two potential sources of evidence: the interviews and the company archival documents (Yin, 2018).

In a semistructured interview, there is a series of open-ended questions, dutifully focused on the participants' responses and responds with follow-up questions to probe for the richest relevant information from participants (Doody & Noonan, 2013; Rowley, 2012). Use of semistructured interviews allows the researcher, as the main data collection instrument, the freedom to choose how questions will be formulated and how the questions are systematically arranged to collect the most reliable data (Ashton, 2014). I collected and reviewed secondary data in the form of archived documents related to the use of SNWs to facilitate the hiring process from each company participating in this study.

The archival documents included HR recruitment and selection manuals, and organizational SNWs policies used to guide HR professionals in the screening and selection process. For this qualitative, multiple case study, I benefited from different data sources such as interviews, notes of observations and actions, and archival documents to enhance the data reliability and confirm the findings. Bekhet and Zauszniewski (2012) noted that collecting data from multiple sources in a qualitative case study enhances the credibility and reliability of findings through methodological triangulation. By applying methodological triangulation through the different sources of data, I demonstrated rigor and enhanced the data credibility.

I started the interviewing process, as per the interview protocol by, (see Appendix A), (a) greetings, (b) reiterating the purpose of the interview, (c) issuing the consent form to participants, (d) recording and addressing participants by pseudonyms/identification coding, starting with the interview questions, and (e) thanking each participant and scheduling an appointment for member checking. During each interview process, I used semistructured interview questions as the main data collection instrument to obtain descriptive responses with rich, in-depth data to answer the research question. Doody and Noonan (2013) stated that semistructured interviews with open-ended questions present the opportunity to induce the most valuable data from the study participants). During each interview, I used an audio recorder and made notes of observations and actions of participants. Upon completing each interview, I requested the related participant to provide a copy of the company's archival document that would form the secondary data. I used semistructured interviews techniques, interview notes of observations, and each

company's archival document to form the full set of data for the study. Ashton (2014) proposed that researchers can increase the study rigor by collecting data from more than one source in a qualitative case study, which in turn will improve the reliability and validity of the findings.

Ensuring the reliability and validity of the study instrument before starting the data collection process is the responsibility of the research facilitator (Kaczynski, Salmona, & Smith, 2014). The trustworthiness of the findings and outcomes of the study are shaped by the reliability and validity of the study data (Noble & Smith, 2015). I used the member checking technique to improve the reliability and validity of the interview questions as the main instrument for collecting data. Houghton et al. (2013) argued that member checking is a strategy that researchers use to ensure reliability. Member checking involves participants reading transcribed interview responses and providing feedback of the interviewer's account of the accuracy of collected data and interpretations (Lub, 2015). Transcript review is also used to verify the credibility of the results of a study (Brit et al., 2016). After transcribing each interview and interpreting the data, I provided a concisely written manuscript of each interview to the respective participant to ensure responses and perspectives of participant's use of SNWs to screen and select job applicants for employment had been accurately captured.

The semistructured interview questions that were used as the main data collection instrument to collect data from the prospective participants are included in Appendix C of this study. The interview protocol document that guided the interview process is listed in Appendix A of this study also. Appendix A includes the interview protocol, and

Appendix C comprises the interview questions as the main data collection instrument, as listed in the table of contents under the appendices section.

Data Collection Technique

In this qualitative, multiple case study, I employed the semistructured interview technique with open-ended interview questions to collect primary data pertaining to strategies for optimizing the use of SNWs to screen and selecting job applicants. I kept notes and documented observations of participants during each interview. Keeping notes will help the researcher understand what transpired during the interview and recall other information relevant to the study findings (Anderson, Bolton, Fleming, & Lord, 2016). Yin (2018) and Hammarberg et al. (2016) opined that in qualitative multiple case study, researchers can enhance the data credibility by evaluating a minimum of two sources for data collection. To demonstrate rigor and enhance the data credibility, I collected the secondary data from each company archival documents particularly the HR recruitment and selection manuals, and organizational SNWs policies used to guide HR professionals in the screening and selection process. Methodological triangulation is a strategy for collecting the secondary data from other sources, to confirm the reliability of the primary data collected from interviews (Noble & Smith, 2015). I collected organizational selection manuals and SNWs polices to confirm the data collected from the interviews.

The interviewing process was comprised of eight interviews with selective participants within four organizations in the southeastern United States, who used strategies to optimize SNWs to screen and select job applicants. To create a rapport environment during the interviews, l followed the interview protocol as described in

Appendix A to guide all the steps of the interviewing process. The interviewing process as per the interview protocol (see Appendix A) started with (a) greetings, (b) reiterating the purpose of the interview, (c) issuing the consent form to participants, (d) recording and addressing participants by pseudonyms/identification coding, starting with the interview questions, and (e) thanking each participant and scheduling an appointment for member checking. During each interview, I recorded the interviewee's voice using an audio tape recorder and labeled each tape of participant's recording to keep the data organized. Labeling the data with related tags can assist the researcher with maintaining confidentiality and organizing the data during the collection, handling, and analysis phases (Hashem & Ismail, 2015). Subsequently, I transcribed each interview, interpreted each transcript, and sent the interpretation report to the related participant for member check. I repeated this process until reaching the point of no new information being gathered.

After conducting each interview, I collected each company archival documents as a secondary source of data to crosscheck it with each participant's responses for enhancing the data reliability. The archival documents were comprised of human resource recruitment and selection manuals and organizational SNWs policies used to guide HR professionals in the screening and selection process. I used these documents to find strategies that each HR professional of the four organizations in the southeastern United States used to optimize SNWs to screen and select job applicants. After reviewing the archival documents content, I employed the methodological triangulation protocol to verify the reliability and validity of the data collected from the face-to-face interviews.

Face-to-face interviews give the researcher opportunities to become a part of the participants' environment (Collins & Cooper, 2014). Cakmak et al. (2015) noted that face-to-face, semistructured interviews with participants also provide opportunities to ask some probing and insightful questions to obtain helpful information and answer the research question. Face-to-face semistructured interviews also allow the interviewer to observe participants, note any physical observations, and record responses (Doody & Noonan, 2013). During the interviews, the research facilitator observes the study participants to gauge any signs of anxiety, diffidence, or discomfort toward a line of inquiry (Irvine, Drew, & Sainsbury, 2013). Face-to-face interaction with participants contributes to creating a cooperative environment that enriches verbal interactions, confidence, observation of body language and emotions, and increases the interest in providing reliable data (Miyata, Arai, & Suga, 2015). I considered the possibility of encountering some challenges that act as barriers for participants' cooperation such as cultural diversity, stress, and work obligations. To overcome cultural and stress challenges, a researcher needs to be familiar with participants' diverse cultural norms, respect them, treat them equally, create a friendly environment, and allow participants to decide the preferable place and time for conducting the interviews (Ashton, 2014; Vangen & Winchester, 2014).

The advantage of collecting archival documents as a second source of data is the enhancement of the reliability and validity of the data (Howe, 2012). I enhanced the reliability and validity of the data with the secondary documents. Archival documents allow the researcher to improve the validity of the study findings and gain a rich and

complex picture about the perceptions of the participants (Denzin, 2012). Disadvantages also existed in using the archival documents as the secondary source of data. Because some of the organizations had limited HR professionals, the archival documents were not well filed and organized, and consequently more time was required for examining and ordering the right procedure sequence.

Qualitative researchers use different techniques to increase the trustworthiness of the research that is conducted; that is, to ensure that the data is appropriately and ethically collected, analyzed, and reported (Carlson, 2010). Ensuring collection of reliable data is an essential element to enhance the reliability and validity of the study outcomes (Barry, Chaney, Piazza-Gardner, & Chavarria, 2014). Data reliability and validity depend on the reliability and validity of the instruments used for collecting data (Hammer & Berland, 2014). To enhance the reliability and validity of the interview questions, I involved each participant in the member check process. The member check process is used in qualitative research to validate the interpretation content related to interview transcripts (Grainger, Bridgstock, Houston, & Drew, 2015).

Participants checking the interpreted transcripts enhances the reliability and validity of the data collection instrument (Grainger et al., 2015; Harper & Cole, 2012). Particularly, to enhance the interview questions reliability and after transcribing the interviews, I involved each participant as a member check to validate the accuracy of the interpreted transcripts. After transcribing each interview, I interpreted each transcript and sent the interpretation report for each related participant to validate the meanings. Member checking allowed each participant who provided information to determine if

their stories were reported accurately (Koelsch, 2013). I involved the study participants in member checking. Research participants engaged in member checking interpret and validate the meanings of reports (Morse, Lowery, & Steury, 2014). The attainment of participants' validation through member checking on the developed ideas assisted in enhancing the reliability and validity of the data and supported the data saturation stage (Onwuegbuzie, Leech, & Collins, 2012).

Data Organization Technique

Data organization is inimitable to qualitative studies because creating a process to organize and manage a large amount of data can be overwhelming (Watkins, 2012). I used a research journal to document and organize data. Houghton et al. (2013) suggested that qualitative researchers use a research journal to retain an audit trail or account of the research process to include data collection and methodological decisions made during the study to enhance rigor, dependability, and confirmability. I used a research journal to aid in describing the thoughts of an experience of a particular day. The use of a research journal can help a researcher make sense of fieldwork experiences (Applebaum, 2014) and heighten the accuracy of recall, minimizing retrospective bias (Koopman-Boyden & Richardson, 2013).

I used earlier related studies to form coding themes. Researchers develop categories and coding scheming based on earlier related studies and theories (Mayer, 2015; Snelson, 2016). I placed the data from the interviews into the NVivo software system. NVivo software is used to help the researcher organize and compare data (Oliveira, Bitencourt, Zanardo dos Santos, & Teixeira, 2016). By organizing and

comparing the data, the researcher enhances the dependability and confirmability of the

data (Houghton et al., 2013). I also coded information gathered from each interview

beginning with PID1 for the first participant and ending with PID8. In qualitative

research, a coding system is developed to trace a path of the data from descriptive to

interpretative (Watts, 2014). I created an electronic folder titled Primary Interview Data.

The Primary Interview Data folder contained subfolders labeled PID1 to PID8. I retained

the data within the subfolders and saved it on a password protected computer. I also used

a locked storage box to secure raw data for 5 years in a home office. I will destroy the

collected data after 5 years.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is an essential step to conduct research and involves the researcher's

exhaustive efforts to focus on all the evidence to pursue a high-quality analysis that best

answers the research question (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013; Yin, 2018).

Organizing the data, reviewing the data, synthesizing the data, looking for matching

patterns, understanding and interpreting the data to uncover themes and deciding what

data is relevant are part of the data analysis process in a qualitative multiple case study

(Lawrence & Tar, 2013; Yin, 2012). In this qualitative, multiple case study, I analyzed

the data using Yin's (2012) data analysis method. The analysis process included the

following five steps: (a) compiling the data, (b) disassembling the data, (c) reassembling

the data, (d) understanding and interpreting the meaning of the data, and (e) concluding

the data.

After collecting and interpreting data, I conducted member checking, and used methodological triangulation to triangulate the interview data and the company archival documents. In the process of analyzing a qualitative, multiple case study data, I applied methodological triangulation protocol to crosscheck the data from multiple data sources. Methodological triangulation enables the person conducting the research to discover themes that lead to a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon (Denzin, 2012). I also used methodological triangulation to identify themes across both data sources that aided in the assessment, interpretations, and conclusions of the information collected.

Data Analysis Using Yin's Five Steps Method

For this study, I gradually developed the process of data analysis in a repetitive manner to ensure data convergence. Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton (2012) suggested data analysis include a constant moving backward and forward within the entire data set. I coded the data to document the best-related ideas and potential themes for answering the research question.

Compiling the Data

I performed transcription and interpretation of interviews in this step, and I emailed the interpreted report for each related participant for member checking and content validation. Subsequently, I employed the methodological triangulation technique to look for similar patterns between the interpreted transcription of each participant and the related company archival document. After preparing data, I started compiling the data by importing the textual reports into NVivo 12 from Microsoft Word.

Disassembling the Data

In the next step, I disassembled the data. Disassembling the data is the second

stage of data analysis (Essary, 2014), and is a formal process of coding the data

(Castleberry, 2014). Coding the data is categorizing and sorting all common features that

exist in the dataset throughout all the qualitative analysis and synthesis process (Azeem,

Salfi, & Dogar, 2012; Keenan, van Teijlingen, & Pitchforth, 2015). Neale (2016) opined

that coding the data consists of identifying meaningful patterns and themes. Emulating

this process, I uploaded the transcribed file for each participant to NVivo 12 software and

used the auto-coding feature to identify similarities in the data and prevalent themes.

Reassembling the data

After disassembling the data, I began the reassembling process. Reassembling the

data consists of arranging the data in different orders until ample themes emerge (Yin,

2012). In the data reassembling step, I considered data under several arrangements and

identified satisfactory themes, took out the coding results from the NVivo 12 software

and copied them to spreadsheets to search for matching patterns to formulate themes for

developing a set of strategies that would lead HR professionals to optimize SNWs to

facilitate the hiring process. Yin (2012) asserted that successful data reassembling takes

place in data analysis in the emergence of themes.

Understanding and interpreting the meaning of the data

In the next step, I searched to understand the data and interpret its meaning. The

process of interpreting the meaning of the data is where the researcher starts making

sense of the data and giving their own meanings (Crowe, Inder, & Porter, 2015). Yin

(2018) argued that the researcher's ability to understand the data is essential during the

interpretation process, as it will weigh heavily on the findings. As one who has worked as an HR manager and who is familiar with screening and selection practices, I had a clear understanding of the jargon and technical phrases expressed by the participants.

Concluding the Data

The final step in the data analysis process was concluding the data. The concluding of data involves developing a set of statements and narratives that highlight the findings of the study derived from a large set of ideas (Alase, (2017). I concluded themes that allowed readers to understand the findings and respectively answer the research question.

I transcribed, coded and identified related themes, and interpreted the meanings to present the study findings. Using NVivo 12 as a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) tool, I facilitated the analysis process. With NVivo 12, I conducted a quick and thorough analysis of the data. NVivo 12 aides the researcher with completing a thorough analysis of the data by importing, analyzing, codifying the data, and accessing generated results to look for patterns in the information provided by participants (Oliveira et al., 2016). I was also able to keep the data in a single location. Keeping the data in a single location provides ease of access to information and facilitated a continuous coding scheme (Zamawe, 2015). For this qualitative, multiple case study, the use of NVivo 12 increased the rigor of the data analysis process.

I assigned pre-categories from existing studies in the literature review and from the key concepts of the conceptual framework. Engaging topics and pre-codes from the literature review and from the conceptual framework concepts enhanced my focus on

important themes and aspects of the data (Vayrynen & Kinnula, 2012). Planned categories from the literature review and conceptual framework assisted in correlating the analysis findings with the results of existing studies in literature by confirming or disconfirming (Embi et al., 2013). Finally, I measured the data by the frequency of recurring themes and concluded the findings.

Reliability and Validity

The concept of reliability and validity was first used in natural sciences and later used in quantitative research in social science research (Yazan, 2015). Oleinik, Popova, Kirdina, and Shatalova (2014) argued that an essential component in research design is the assessment of the reliability and validity within a study. Houghton et al. (2013) maintained that qualitative research requires strategies to be implemented to ensure rigor. Confirmability, credibility, dependability, and transferability are strategies used by a researcher to attain rigor (Houghton et al., 2013). Assessment of reliability and validity are essential to ensuring the highest academic standards are met by researchers (Noble & Smith, 2015) and that researchers spend a minuscule amount of time convincing readers of the high quality in the research (Street & Ward, 2012).

Reliability

In qualitative research, reliability refers to the consistency of research procedures and proof that a study can be replicated with the same results (Leung, 2015; Yin, 2018). Street and Ward (2012) argued that the use of a formal protocol is a procedure used to establish reliability in case study (see Appendix A). Similarly, I recorded decisions and rationale throughout the research process. Recording thoughts about decisions made

throughout the research process enhance dependability (Houghton et al., 2013). As noted in this study under data organization and techniques, I used a log during the transcription process and maintained a research journal to document sentiments throughout the research process. Data quality ensured the dependability of this multiple case study. How the researcher collects and analyzes data are quintessential attributes to qualitative research (Yazan, 2015). Baskarada (2014) categorized a range of important data quality factors to include 1) accuracy, 2) objectivity, 3) believability, 4) reputation, 5) interpretability, 6) ease of understanding, 7) concise and consistent representation, and 8) relevancy. To improve the dependability of this case study, data source, investigator, theory, and methods, as described by Stake (1995), were used. Anney (2014) suggested that to enhance the dependability of the research, study participants should be given the opportunity to engage in member checking to correct errors and challenge misinterpretation of personal experiences about the phenomenon being studied.

Validity

The appropriateness of the tools, processes, and data denotes the validity in qualitative research (Leung, 2015). Validity refers to whether the findings of the research accurately evaluates what the research is supposed to evaluate (Noble & Smith, 2015). Qualitative researchers focus on describing participants' experiences of a phenomenon as accurately as possible with descriptive text rather than numbers (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). Techniques used to address validity were member checking, formal case study protocol, archival data, and triangulation (Street & Ward, 2012). Comparably, credibility is the tightly linking of evidence to a conclusion and is achieved through the

representation of qualified participants in the research study (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I

used member checking for participants to review transcribed interview. The use of

member checking allows participants to review transcribed interview results for accuracy

and meaning to ensure credibility of the participants' responses (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

In this study, methodological triangulation was conducted through semistructured

interviews and archival records.

In qualitative research, dependability is associated with the reliability of data

stability over time and under similar conditions (Elo et al., 2014). Bevan (2014) claimed

that researchers obtain dependability through credibility, method triangulation, steps for

duplicating the analysis, and by including an audit trail. For this study, I attained

validation through member checking. Researchers use member checking as a means for

allowing participants to recognize their words in an interpretive text (Morse, 2015). After

transcribing each interview, I translated each transcript and sent the interpreted report to

each related participant to validate the meaning. I also involved participants in the

member checking process to ensure accurate portrayal of participants' perspectives and

intended meaning of the interpreted transcripts.

Credibility refers to the believability of a study or the degree to which research

outcomes seem accurate based on the research process (Hays, Wood, Dahl, & Kirk-

Jenkins, 2016). Polit and Beck (2012) argued that the truth of the data or the participant

views and the way the data is interpreted and represented contribute to establishing the

credibility of a study. Polit and Beck (2012) noted that prolonged engagement with

participants, persistent observation if appropriate to the study, peer-debriefing, member-

checking, and reflective journaling are used to establish credibility. As a means of

establishing credibility for this study, I ensured that participants had the option to review

a written, succinct synthesis of their response to each interview question. Finally, I

maintained a research journal to record observations and thoughts throughout the

research process.

In qualitative studies, transferability is the extent to which findings are useful to

persons in other settings (Polit & Beck, 2012). Polit and Beck also stated that the reader

determines how applicable the findings are to their situations. Qualitative researchers

focus on the participants and their story without saying this is everyone's experience

(Connelly, 2016). Amankwaa (2016) recommended that researchers provide vivid

pictures that will inform and resonate with readers. Researchers may also enhance

transferability by providing a rich, detailed description of the context, location, and

people being studied (Amankwaa, 2016; Connelly, 2016), and by the analysis and

trustworthiness of the data being evaluated (Connelly, 2016). I selected participants who

provided rich, thick, detailed descriptions of strategies used to optimize SNWs to

facilitate the hiring process. In addition, I used a research journal to document particular

aspects of this qualitative multiple case study. Amankwaa (2016) suggested researcher

could improve transferability by using a research journal and maintaining records to be

reviewed by others.

In qualitative research, conformability refers to the researcher's capability to

show that the data represents the participants' responses and not the researcher's biases

and viewpoints (Amankwaa, 2016; Polit & Beck, 2012). Houghton et al. (2013) stated

that confirmability is closely linked to dependability and the strategies for establishing both are the same. Inquiry audits can be used to establish both the dependability and conformability of the data (Kemparaj & Chavan, 2013). I ensured conformability through the creation of an audit trail and the writing of the final research report. The research report highlighted deficiencies of the study and provided clear links between the study's findings and the experiences of the participants in the study (Guba, 1981).

Data saturation is important for qualitative research (Hancock, Amankwaa, Revell, & Mueller, 2016). Researchers conducting qualitative studies place emphasis on obtaining a comprehensive understanding of phenomena by continuing to sample until achieving saturation or until no new substantive information is obtained (Palinkas et al., 2015). Failure to accomplish data saturation can have a negative effect on research quality and content validity (Fusch & Ness, 2015). For this multiple case study, I coded participants' responses to interview questions to determine emerging categories, patterns, and themes. Onwuegbuzie et al. (2012) opined that the basis for coding involves collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data until data saturation derives reliable and credible themes and research findings. The quality of data signifying no new themes or patterns excluded the need for justifying a large sample size. Goldberg and Allen (2015) contended that based on the epistemological premise of the phenomenon being studied, a sample size is justifiable for achieving data saturation. This study began with a sample size of eight HR professionals. Data saturation was attained, so I did not have to increase the sample size by gathering interview data from additional participants. After transcribing the information gathered from the participants, I gave interpreted reports to

related participants to review and validate the meaning until no new information was identified.

Transition and Summary

Section 1 was a summary of the literature related to use of SNWs by HR professionals to screen and select job applicants. Presented first in this section was a synopsis of the strategy used to conduct the literature review. Afterwards, the theoretical framework was presented followed by key constructs underlying the theory as well as supporting and contrasting theories. Presented next was literature on the use of SNWs in the hiring process, job applicants' brand on SNWs, and SNWs as a signaling environment. Also presented was information relating to the barriers which optimize SNWs in the hiring process, legal issues related to the use of SNWs in the hiring process, strategies for optimizing employers' use of SNWs in the hiring process and best practices for using SNWs to screen and select applicants. Section 2 includes information about the project, specifically the purpose statement, my role in the research process, a description of the participants, the research method and design, as well as a description of the population and the sample. Section 2 also included information regarding ethical research, the data collection instruments, organization techniques, and the procedures for analyzing the data. Section 3 included a presentation of the study findings, application to professional practice, implication for social changes, recommendations for action and future research, reflections, and conclusions.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The objective of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies some HR professionals in the southeastern United States use to inform hiring decisions with the use of social networking websites. Eight HR professionals participated in this study and provided me with the primary data to answer the research question. The secondary data included observations, field notes, and company archival documents. Based on the participants' responses to the interview questions, I identified five themes: (a) using professional SNWs to screen for skills, (b) reviewing personal SNWS to screen for personal behavior, (c) finding the right person based on person-job fit and person-organization fit, (f) uncovering potential legal concerns, and (g) training employees on SNWs and hiring practices. The findings from this study help to show that some HR professionals who successfully use SNWs to screen and select job applicants apply similar strategies.

Presentation of the Findings

The research question of this study was: What strategies do HR professionals use for successfully optimizing SNWs to facilitate the hiring process in the southeastern United States? Human resource professionals are increasingly using SNWs to screen job applicants and make hiring decisions (Aguado et al., 2016; Black et al., 2015; Nikolaou, 2014; Roberts & Sambrook, 2014;). According to Stoughton et al. (2015), the percent of employers using Google or SNWs to screen job candidates range from 27% to 65 %. Employers use of SNWs provide unique ways to obtain job related information about an

applicant that might not otherwise be as transparent using traditional resources such as

resumes, cover letters, interviews, and references (Thomas, Rothschild, et al., 2015). In

the hiring process, employers should use all tools available to gather relevant information

about job candidates, help eliminate candidates, and distinguish the ideal candidate for

the job.

Employers in a competitive environment should seek opportunities to employ the

best and brightest job candidates in a cost-efficient and timely manner. Some companies

use SNWs as part of the screening and selection process to gain a competitive advantage

(Aguado et al., 2016). Dutta (2014) suggested that organizations implementing strategic

human resource management practices engage in activities that delivers value and

manage costs. The use of SNWs to screen job applicants allows HR professionals to

conduct background checks from anywhere, faster, and at little cost (Melanthiou et al.,

2015). The money spent on background checking can be significant, but using SNWs to

screen applicants may reduce expenses for hiring new employees into the organizations.

Employers should develop SNW strategies to check the background of job applicants

quickly and in a cost-effective way to gain or maintain a competitive advantage.

The use of SNWs to inform hiring decisions may give HR professionals insight

into job applicant's abilities for a particular job. A resume is a universal tool in the job

search process (Novak, 2017); however, a resume is a snapshot in time of a job

applicants' work experience and qualifications. Human resource professionals' review of

a potential candidate's SNWs such as LinkedIn generally includes: (a) past employment

history, (b) relevant job-related education, (c) volunteer experiences, (d) causes, (e)

projects, (f) languages, (g) certifications, (h) publications, (i) education, (j) discussion posts and comments, (k) recommendations, (l) endorsed skills and expertise, (m) interests, (n) honors and awards, and (p) contact information (Paliszkiewicz & Madra-Sawicka, 2016). Paliszkiewicz and Madra-Sawicka argued that information in a job candidate's profile allows the reviewer to make judgments about the source, credibility, and trustworthiness of the information to determine the social and professional attractiveness of a potential employee. The use of SNWs serves as a supplemental vetting tool to see if a candidate demonstrates the person-job fit (Rosen, McLarty, Esken, Solomon, & Taylor, 2014). Human resource professionals' use of SNWs to facilitate the hiring process may offer a good sense of the potential professionalism and abilities of a job candidate. Human resource professionals should consider using professional SNWs such as LinkedIn to crosscheck information in an applicant's resume.

Human resource professionals' use of personal SNWs such as Facebook to screen and select job applicants may give employers insight about a candidate's person-organizational fit. Social networking websites such as Facebook contain information that gives employers a glimpse of the informal life of a job candidate and their attitude toward other jobs and former employers (Rosen et al., 2014). Human resource professionals can form opinions about job applicants' reliability, lifestyles, and attitudes toward employers and other individuals based on online postings (Stankiewicz & Bortnowska, 2016). The use of SNWs by employers to inform hiring decisions provides a glimpse into the lives and conduct of job applicants outside of work hours. Information collected from SNWs of a job applicant helps the employer identify character traits or behavior to avoid

negligent hire lawsuits (Black et al., 2015). Learning the type of social media content that a job applicant posts and how a job applicant interacts with others online may give employers an idea of how a potential employee will interact with colleagues or represent the organization.

Some employers are reluctant to include screening the SNWs of applicants as part of the hiring process. Some employers do not use SNWs as a screening and selection tool because of fear of defending a discrimination claim or crossing the line between public and private information about a job applicant may result in lawsuits. Roth et al. (2016) studied the validity and reliability of SNWs as assessment tools and concluded HR professionals should consider using SNWs in the hiring process. To minimize the risks associated with using SNWs to screen and select job applicants, HR professionals need to develop policies and follow procedures (Schultz et al., 2015). Duggan and Smith (2014) suggested that HR professionals could mitigate the risk of litigation by doing the following: (a) developing a SNW policy, (b) distributing and training all employees on the SNW policy, (c) designating a non-decision maker to screen SNWs of applicants, or (d) hiring third-party vendors to conduct SNWs searches. The themes I identified in this study were: (a) using professional SNWs to screen for skills, (b) reviewing personal SNWs to screen for personal behaviors, (c) finding the right person based on person-job fit and person-organization fit, (d) uncovering potential legal concerns, and (e) training employees on SNWs and hiring practices. In the following section, I present the five themes that emerged from my thematic analysis of the participants' responses to the interview questions.

Theme 1: Using Professional SNWs to Screen for Skills

The theme of employers using professional SNWs to determine the skills of job applicants emerged from Interview Question 1. LinkedIn is the largest professional SNW with more than 350 million active users (McCabe, 2017). Employers perceive LinkedIn as a more professional SNW than Facebook (Melanthiou et al., 2015; Roldan, Sutanonpaiboon, & Burkhard, 2017). The primary design of LinkedIn allows applicants to present their professional credentials, use theme groups to interact and establish contacts, or search for employment opportunities (Dietel, 2017). Using LinkedIn gives employers the most convenient way to identify the qualifications and skills of applicants (Ladkin & Buhalis, 2016). As applied to this study, 100% of the participants acknowledged LinkedIn to be a professional SNW to show work experiences, education and training, and skills of job candidates.

Employers use LinkedIn to view professional profiles of job applicants for specific job skills and to make employment decisions (McCabe, 2017; Stoughton et al., 2015). For example, responding to Question 1, Participant 1 (hereafter referred to as P1) said, "We use LinkedIn as a professional website that allows us to see if a candidate has the skillsets to get the job done." Participant 4 (P4) explained, "Looking at professional social media such as LinkedIn, I can see if a person possesses the work experience and abilities that we are seeking for a particular job." Participant 5 (P5) explained, "We tend to look primarily at LinkedIn to collect information about applicants' professional background. We want to see what type of skills or work that they have done in the past, professional contacts, and professional affiliations and associations."

The unanimous responses from participants demonstrated that HR professionals consider LinkedIn to be a professional SNW used to review the work experiences, job skills, and professional associations and contact of job applicants. LinkedIn is the most popular and preferred SNW used by hiring professionals to screen job applicants (Sameen & Cornelius, 2015; Stoughton et al., 2015). The study findings indicated that HR professionals use LinkedIn profiles of job applicants as a strategy to inform hiring decisions.

Theme 2: Reviewing Personal SNWs to Screen for Personal Behaviors

A review of personal SNWs of job applicants is a strategy that some HR professionals use to make hiring decision (Aluri & Tucker, 2015). Employers screen and select job applicants using nonprofessional SNWs (Jeske & Shultz, 2016). Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr, and Vine are nonprofessional SNWs that an employer can use to discover information and form a complete picture about a job applicant (Reinsch et al., 2016). For this study, 100% of the participants considered nonprofessional SNWs to be personal SNWs used to stay in contact with family members and friends. For example, P1 stated, "Facebook is a personal SNW and people tend to be themselves and open about their lives." Participant 6 (P6) explained, "People put their true selves on their personal websites and you get to see who they are outside of the work environment." Ladkin and Buhalis (2016) explained that SNWs such as Facebook are personable and individuals often to let down their guard. The unfiltered information on the personal SNW of a job applicant allows HR professionals to gain a favorable or unfavorable

impression of a candidate. Human resource professionals may reject or hire a job applicant based on the online impression made by a candidate.

The review of personal SNWs postings of potential employees is a good strategy that employers could use to determine the personality characteristics of job applicants (Stoughton, Thompson, & Meade, 2013; Rosen et al., 2014). Some researchers suggest that the review of personal SNW of job applicants as a strategy gives employers a supplemental screening tool to determine the person-organization fit and the person-job fit of job applicants (Rosen et al., 2014). As indicated in this study, 87% of participants reviewed personal SNWs of job applicants to help make employment decisions. Question 1, P1 explained, "Facebook is more personal, and we use it to get a glimpse of the candidate's personality and what they like to do outside of work." Question 2, Participant 2 (P2) said:

The younger generation coming into the workforce spend so much time on personal social media and tend not to have a filter for using social media platforms. Their postings on personal social media lets you know if what they told us in an interview setting, as far as their personality and recreational activities, or lines up with the person we would want to hire. It is really has been eye opening.

Question 2, Participant 3 (P3) declared, "We also look at the personal social media to get a picture for the person who wants to work in our company." Question 1, P5 expressed, "We check non-professional social media. We mainly check Facebook to gain some insight about the applicant's character and judgement. Overwhelmingly, the

findings of this study help to conclude that most HR professionals review postings on personal SNWs to identify personal attributes and characteristics of job applicants.

Seven of the eight participants' responses to the interview questions aligned with Stoughton et al.'s (2015) and Jeske and Shultz's (2016) statements that employers review of postings from job applicants personal SNWs is a strategy to screen and select job applicants. The study findings indicated that some HR professionals reviewed personal SNWs as a strategy for screening and selecting job applicants. As applied to this study, seven of eight participants attested to reviewing personal SNWs as a strategy for screening and selecting job applicants.

Theme 3: Finding Right Person Based on Person-Job Fit and Person-Organization Fit

The theme of finding the right person based on person-job fit manifested as a theme from the participants' responses to interview questions. Participants described the right person as an individual with the knowledge, skills, and abilities that best match the job requirements. The "right person" as described by participants inferred person-job fit. Stoughton et al. (2015) argued that person-job fit conceptualizes the similarities between the qualifications of an applicant and the job requirements. Employers use information on job applicants' SNWs to maximize fit and to make hiring decisions (Baumhart, 2015). Some employers claim not use the professional SNWs of job applicants to screen candidates but to match the qualifications of candidates with job descriptions (Cooley & Parks-Yancy, 2016). Hoek, O'Kane, and McCracken (2016) stated that employers assess job candidates' LinkedIn profiles to determine hard skills and person-job fit.

The theme of finding the right person, as it relates person-job fit, emerged from Interview Questions 1, 2, 4, 7, and 8. For this study, 100% of participants indicated that they screen SNWs of job applicants to predict person-job fit. Participants' strategies to optimize the use of SNWs to screen and select job applicants focused on using professional SNWs of job applicants to assess person-job fit. For example, P1 responded to Question 1 by saying, "I would say to vet a potential employee and to make sure we are getting the right employee for what we are looking for, we look closely at the professional social media such as LinkedIn." Question 2, P3 explained, "We want to match the right people with the right position. Looking at the professional social media tell us if the person has the right skills and experience to do the job." "Using social media for screening job applicants has given us more tools to find the right person," stated Participant 7 (P7) in response to Question 4. Relevant information found on SNWs of a job applicant can signal to employers that a job applicant is the best candidate for the job.

Another reason employers review the SNWs of job applicants is to measure a candidate's fit with their company (Roth et al., 2016). All participants for this study referred to the right person as the individual whose SNWs postings depicted the best fit in the culture of an organization. Person-organization fit can be inferred from the SNWs of job applicants (Alexander, Mader, & Mader, 2016; Roulin & Bangerter, 2013). Some organizations espouse the practice of reviewing posts, comments, interest likes, and pictures of job applicants to assess personality traits and fit in the company culture (Melanthiou et al., 2015). According to Rosen et al. (2014), employers use Twitter and Facebook more often than other personal SNWs to acquire information about the

lifestyles of job candidates. Rosen et al. also suggested the use of a job applicant's

Twitter as a supplemental tool for determining both person-job fit and person-

organization fit.

An employer conducting an online search of the SNWs of a job applicant can

learn how an applicant might be a good fit for the organization (Kluemper et al., 2016).

Assessing personalities of job applicants is a strategy that HR professionals use to screen

and select candidates (Davison et al., 2012). Human resource professionals explore

SNWs of job applicants to determine the soft skills such as communication skills and

well-roundedness of job candidates.

Theme 4: Uncovering Potential Legal Concerns

A legitimate concern for HR professionals is legal risks of discovering protected

class information of job applicants through social networking searches. Question 5, P1

stated, "When it comes to us staying on the right side of the law, we make sure that we

are not discriminating against someone because of what we may see on social media. We

are making sure that we look at that potential employee through a clear lens." Question 5,

P2 said, "We worked on implementing our policy and putting procedures in place to

serve as a road map or boundaries for abiding by the law for HR Staff to research a job

applicant's social media." Question 5, P5 explained:

> If there are criteria to judge each applicant, then you have to be consistent.
>
> Whatever criteria is established, that criteria need to be documented and applied
>
> consistently. You have some type of documentation to say, that I evaluated John
>
> Doe's or Jane Doe's social media against the criteria of the standard. Rating the

social media of job applicants against established criteria can help defend against lawsuits.

Once an employer sees protected class information about a job applicant, the information cannot be unlearned. Question 5, P6 acknowledged:

There are a lot of ways to discriminate against people using social media as a screen tool. You must make sure you don't do anything illegal when making hiring decisions. You can't not see a person's race or gender, but you have to limit what you see to the requirements for the job. You have to use criteria that you rate the content of each applicant's social media page, as it relates to the job.

Question 5, P7 responded, "Social media opens up a lot of doorways for things and once you see something out there, you can't unsee what you know." The review of protected class information on the SNWs by employers may become a basis of a lawsuit if a job applicant believes an unfavorable hiring decision was made based on that information (Jodka, 2018). Organizations should take appropriate steps to mitigate lawsuits from job applicants who believe discriminatory employment decisions were made based on protected class information found on social media.

The legal risks for employers using social networking websites to inform hiring decisions can be minimized if HR professionals conduct social media searches, instead of a hiring manager. Question 5, P4 explained:

Using criteria allows us to reduce or minimize biases in the hiring process. HR representatives are not generally working directly with applicants. This makes screening SNWs more streamlined for HR representatives to rate applicants'

social media based on set criteria for social media. This also reduce likelihood of

discrimination occurring in the process.

Jodka (2018) argued that employers may avoid some legal issues by establishing

polices that prohibit those in the interview process and decision-makers from conducting

social media background searching on job applicants. A strategy that can be used to

minimize legal risk for employers using SNWs to screen and select job applicants is for

employers to delegate SNWs searches to HR professional instead or individuals involved

in the hiring process.

Some HR professionals adopt different strategies to improve the use of SNWs

during hiring process. The use of SNWs by HR professionals may lead to legal

challenges. Human resource professionals are less likely to use SNWs for screening

purposes because of legal risks, but non-HR hiring managers are more likely to use

SNWs to screen job applicants due to the easy access of perceived treasure trove of

information (Kluemper et al., 2016). Employers using SNWs to screen and select

potential employees should plan to avoid legal risks (Jodka, 2018). Formulating and

implementing a comprehensive online background check search policy can minimize

risks and help to reduce legal exposure (Duggan & Smith, 2014). To maximize the use of

SNWs of job applicants to screen and select job applicants, organizations should cultivate

strategies for developing and implementing organizational policies for using SNWs to

facilitate the hiring process.

Theme 5: Training Employees on SNW and Hiring Practices

The theme of training employees on SNWs and hiring practices emerged from Interview Questions 7 and 8. Three of four participating organizations had written policies for using job applicants' SNWs to inform hiring decisions. Reinsch et al. (2016) argued that employers should have written SNWs policies that outline the search process and who will conduct the search. For example, Question 7, P1 stated, "Principles that guide our SNWs policy is for our staff to follow the law, follow our policies, and be consistent." One participating organization did not have a written policy for using SNWs to screen and select job applicants. Companies that lack clear guidelines for using SNWs to facilitate the hiring process may face questions about using SNWs to screen and select applicants (Blount et al., 2016). A strategy for companies to maximize the use of SNWs to screen and select job applicant is to develop and implement organizational SNW policies and provide training for all employees about the organization's use of SNWs to facilitate hiring. (Kluemper et al., 2016).

Participating organizations for this study that had SNW policies used prescribed criteria for vetting job applicants, according to participants. A common strategy used by employers is to view SNWs content of job applicants for potentially disqualifying information such as drug use, discriminatory comments, misrepresented qualifications, or shared confidential information from current employer (Kluemper et al., 2016). The review of all job applicants' SNWs to make hiring decisions should follow the same standards and only a few trained individuals in the organization should review SNWs of job applicants (Thomas, Rothschild, et al., 2015). Participant 3 responded to Question 7 by saying, "We have a set of criteria that we use that is standard for a social media search

of a job applicant and we inform and train hiring managers in the organization that the process is handled in HR." A strategy for HR professionals to optimize the use of SNWs is to adhere to established criteria for screening SNWs of job applicants.

Participants for this study acknowledged the importance of training HR professionals and other employees on the use SNWs to screen job applicants. Question 8, P5 responded:

Making sure that all of the managers understand our policy and that we must be consistent in following the policy and why we do the things that we do when it comes to social media screenings, has helped us tremendously. So, this involves educating and training employees about our policy and the possible ramifications if we do something to violate a person's rights.

Training employees on the appropriate use of SNWs to screen and hire job applicants is key to not exposing the organization to legal actions (Schultz et al., 2015). Implementation of a SNW policy by employers for how employees should use SNWs to screen and hire candidates will curtail the potential misuse (Hurrell, Scholarios, & Richards, 2017; Roberts & Sambrook, 2014). Employers should develop a strategy to train employees delegated to screening SNWs of job applicants to prevent misuse of information that may lead to lawsuits.

In the development and implementation of strategies for using SNWs during the hiring process, employers should train HR professionals to understand the appropriate techniques for screening SNWs of job applicants to avoid the misuse of information or engaging in discriminatory hiring practices. Training HR professionals on the type of

information that is legal to use and providing sanitized reports to hiring managers will help organizations optimize the use of SNWs to inform hiring decisions (Reinsch et al., 2016). As applied to this study, responses from participants echoed the assertions of Reinsch et al. (2016) on the importance of educating and training employees to enhance the use of SNWs to screen and hire potential employees

Findings Related to Signaling Theory

Human resource professionals could optimize the use of SNWs during the hiring process by assessing the signals or clues from social media postings of job applicants. Bangerter et al. (2012) applied signaling theory to identify the use of SNWs in hiring decisions. Signaling theory suggest that applicants convey signals to potential employers through postings pertaining to current and past positions, involvement in work-related projects, and contributions to professional organizations which increase the chances of being hired (Nikolaou, 2014; Roth et al., 2016). Roulin and Bangerter (2013) adopted signaling theory to infer person-job fit from professional SNWs of job applicants. Davison et al. (2016) recommended employers focus on employment-based SNWs such as LinkedIn that contain work-related behaviors of job applicants. Using signal theory, employers should compare the qualities conveyed in SNWs postings by potential employees to assess person-job fit. The study findings indicate that HR professionals could maximize the use of SNWs to assess the person-job fit of applicants by implementing strategies to review professional SNWs for hiring decisions.

Human resource professional could achieve optimal use of information posted on personal SNWs of job applicants to assess person-organization fit. Signaling theory

applies an interaction situation between two parties in which one party seeks information

regarding the other party that is not easily discernable (Ashuri & Bar-Ilan, 2016).

Signaling theory suggests that applicants form impressions about potential employers

based on cues attained from the organizations (Kluemper et al., 2016).

      Employers consider information from personal SNWs of job applicants as honest

signals regarding the abilities and potential commitment of job candidates (Roulin &

Bangerter, 2013). Employers also consider some postings on personal SNWs of job

applicants as indicators of personality traits to assess person-organization fit (Kluemper

et al., 2016). Employers should develop strategies for assessing personal SNWs of job

applicants to hire the right candidate the first time. The study findings indicate that

employers assess signals from personal SNWs of job applicants to determine personality

traits, potential commitment, and person-organization-fit.

Applications to Professional Practice

      The identification of strategies that HR professionals use for optimizing SNWs to

screen and select potential employees is important to employers overcoming the

managerial and legal issues associated with online vetting of job applicants. The

implementation of best practices by HR professionals to use SNWs of job applicants to

assess knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSOs) and personality traits, along with

predicting job performance should decrease legal risks (Kluemper et al., 2016). The

findings of this study could contribute to information sharing among HR professionals

who are seeking strategies for using SNWs as tools to enhance the hiring process.

Employers who lack strategies may use the findings of this study to develop policies and

procedures to guide HR professionals on how to reap the benefits of using SNWs to screen and hire job applicants while at the same time reduce the legal issues associated with online searches as part of employment background check practices.

Employers use SNWs to increase their competitive advantage (Aguado et al., 2016). Findings from this study could provide businesses with the knowledge on how to integrate online background check screenings and hiring practices to reduce time to hire new employees, enhance competitive advantage by selecting potential job candidates with the right skills, abilities, and personal attributes, diversify employee population, and achieve organizational goals. Based on the study findings, the most significant contribution to the professional practice may be the identification of potential strategies that HR professionals may use to maximize the benefits of SNWs to screen and select job applicants, which may help HR professionals identify the best candidate for the job.

The use of SNWs to screen and select job applicants present several areas of concerns for employers (McDonald & Thompson, 2016). Employers take risks of violating Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and other laws when reviewing SNWs of job applicants for hiring decisions (Reinsch et al., 2016). The finding of this study could contribute to the literature about the use of SNWs by HR professionals to facilitate hiring. New HR professionals may use the study to understand the importance of adopting strategies that include developing and following policies and procedures as guidelines for using SNWs in the hiring process which may prevent lawsuits.

Reinsch et al. (2016) argued that employers should (a) have a written policy relating to the use of SNWs in the screening of applicants, (b) be consistent with

screening all applicants, (c) keep written records show how social media policy was implemented and (d) understand what information can and cannot be considered when using SNWs. The finding of this study could help HR professionals implement sound strategies for improving the hiring process, diversifying applicant pools, reducing cost and time to make hiring decisions, and increasing the competitive advantage by hiring the best job applicant. The findings of this study may aide employers across industries gain helpful information on to use SNWs to screen and select potential employees.

Implications for Social Change

The misuse of SNWs to screen and select job applicants is a cause of managerial and legal issues that some HR professionals need to solve to improve the hiring process (Nikolaou, 2014). By implementing comprehensive strategies to address managerial issues and minimize legal risks, HR professionals could optimize the use of SNWs in the hiring process. As demonstrated in this study findings, applying sound strategies might assist HR professionals with maximizing the use of personal and professional SNWs of job applicants to assess person job-fit and person-organization fit, respectively, while avoiding unfair and discriminatory hiring practices. With enhanced hiring practices, employers will expand their job applicant pools, which may lead to employing diversified workforces and building inclusive teams that share decision-making throughout organizations.

The study findings may contribute to positive social change by assisting HR professionals to apply successful strategies for using SNWs to enhance the hiring process and to gain adequate knowledge to establish effective SNWs policies. Some HR

professionals could use the information from this study to overcome managerial issues and legal risks of using SNWs to facilitate hiring. New HR professionals could use the information gained from this study to establish their awareness and knowledge of how to use SNWs in the hiring process and avoid discrimination and unethical behavior when vetting job applicants, thereby contributing to diversified organizations.

The public might learn from the strategies HR professionals use to optimize SNWs to screen and select job applicants. Social media users might become more mindful that potential employers conduct background checks of the social media and make hiring decision based on what applicants post on professional and personal social media platforms. As a result of this study, some individuals learning more about the use of SNWs by employers during the hiring process may become more cognizant of their posting and engage in online activities that reflect appropriate online behavior.

Recommendations for Action

A well-planned business strategy is essential for organizations that use or intend to use SNWs as tools to screen and select job applicants. The use of SNWs in the hiring process can be a benefit to organizations, if strategically managed (Kluemper et al., 2016). I recommend that HR professionals should implement effective strategies to optimize SNWs as a viable tool for facilitating hiring procedures.

To enhance the hiring process, HR professionals should develop polices as part of their strategies for using SNWs to screen and select job applicants. Organizations can benefit from developing and implementing appropriate policies for using SNWs to inform hiring decisions (Reinsch et al., 2016). I recommend that HR professionals should

develop SNWs policies as part of their strategies to help address the managerial issues and legal risks that may arise to obtain the maximum benefits of using SNWs to research and hire job applicants.

Some human resource professional lack strategies for optimizing the use of SNWs to screen and select job applicants. The study findings show that some HR professionals use a combination of strategies to make hiring decisions. I recommend HR professionals should have adequate training and experience to employ appropriate strategies for using SNWs as screening and selection tools. I will disseminate the results of this study to participating organizations and other interested HR professionals through professional development training, workshops, seminars, conferences, blogs on social media, publications, and academic journals.

Recommendations for Further Research

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies that some HR professionals in the southeastern United States employ to optimize the use of SNWs to facilitate the hiring process. This study was limited to a qualitative multiple case study involving eight HR professionals in the southeastern United States. Robinson (2014) suggested that the use of a larger sample size of participants might generate different themes. I recommend future studies include larger sample size of participants with various roles and responsibilities to include different levels of HR professionals and hiring managers in different geographical locations.

I have limited expertise and knowledge in the doctoral research process. Another limitation of this study was my abilities to conduct interviews and accurately capture the

intended responses of the participants to the interview questions. Novice researchers sometimes lack the abilities to recognize opportunities to probe responses from participants, which can result in the researcher not gather relevant data (Doody & Noonan, 2013). I recommend that experienced researchers from related disciplines involving screening and selecting potential employees conduct future research.

The study was limited by confidentiality concerns of participants. Although participating organizations and participants received written documentation from me assuring them that I would adhere to the highest ethical standards to maintain their confidentiality, some participants initially recruited for the study declined to participate because of concerns about confidentiality. A researcher must keep the confidentiality of participants to help build trust while conducting research (Doody & Noonan, 2013). I recommend future research involve experienced researchers who are skilled in building rapport with participants to establish confidentiality.

Reflections

The aim of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies that some HR professionals in the southeastern United States apply for using SNWs to screen and select job applicant. While conducting this study, I understood that HR professionals could use different strategies to use SNWs to facilitate the hiring process. From the study findings, I gained a thorough understanding of the research problem and discovered some HR professionals use SNWs strategies to screen and select job applicants in the hiring process. My reflections on the experiences within the DBA doctoral study process show that I acquired a richer understanding of the research process, which made a positive

change regarding my preconceived ideas and values and personal biases. The understanding I gained from completing this doctoral study improved my skills in conducting scholarly academic research.

I used the purposive sampling technique to select 8 HR professionals who had at least 3 years of experience using SNWs to screen and select job applicants. Using the purposive sampling technique to select participants, I could see the improvements in my networking and interpersonal abilities. I chose the qualitative research method and conducted semistructured interviews which enabled me to interact with the participant. Conducting semistructured interviews provided me the opportunity to improve my listening and communication skills. Conducting the interviews at the organizations where the participants work at convenient times and private rooms contributed to respondents being able to express themselves freely and provided an opportunity for me to obtain a deep understanding of the strategies that some HR professionals use to optimize SNWs in the screening and selection of job candidates.

Reflecting on the responses of the participants, I achieved data saturation after conducting the sixth interview for this study. I used NVivo 12 to assess the primary data and to develop nodes to search for emerging themes and patterns from the responses of participants. I noted that HR professionals use a combination of similar strategies to maximize SNWs in the screening and hiring process. Of particular interest is the knowledge that HR professionals' (1) review both professional SNWs and personal SNWs to screen job applicants, (2) select the candidate that is the right person for the job and right fit for the organization based on the SNWs postings, (3) assess the legal risk of

using SNWs in the hiring process, and (4) acknowledge the need to provide training to

employees throughout the organization as major strategies for using SNWs to screen and

hire potential employees. The study finding changed my predispositions on how the use

of SNWs are used to screen and select job applicants because I gained first-hand

knowledge from HR professionals in the field.

Summary and Study Conclusions

Human resource professionals face challenges on how to use social networking

websites to screen and select job applicants. The aim of the qualitative multiple case

study was to use the signaling theory as a lens to identify strategies that some HR

professionals use to facilitate the hiring process. Using open-ended questions, I

conducted semistructured interviews with eight HR professionals to collect data to

answer the research question. Five themes emerged from the thematic data analysis of

data indicating the strategies that some human resource professional use to screen and

select job applicants with SNWs in southeastern United States. The themes are (a)

professional social media, (b) personal social media, (c) the right person, (d) legal

concerns, and (e) training.

Human resource professionals who are facing challenges using SNWs to screen

and select job applicants may use the findings of this study to enhance their hiring

practices. By enhancing their hiring practices with SNWs to screen and select potential

employees, HR professionals might expand and diversify their job applicant pool, which

may foster creativity and innovation of an organization. Using signaling theory as a lens

for this study, which involved HR professionals, may fill a gap in the literature. The study

findings support the conclusions of previous scholarly research pertaining to the use of

social networking websites to facilitate the hiring process.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

   I.   Greet participant(s).

  II.   Present consent form, go over contents, answer questions and concerns of participant(s).

 III.   Give participant copy of consent form.

 IV.   Turn on recording device.

  V.   Follow procedure to introduce participant(s) with pseudonym/coded identification; note the date and time.

 VI.   Begin interview with question #1; follow through to final question.

 VII. Follow up with additional questions.

VIII. End interview sequence; schedule member-checking appointment with Participant(s).

 IX.   Thank the participant(s) for their part in the study. Reiterate contact numbers for follow up questions and concerns from participants.

  X.   End protocol.

Appendix B: Letter of Cooperation

Name of Organization
Name of Site Authorization Official
Email Address of Site Authorization Official

September 14, 2018

Dear Walden Student,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled **Strategies for HR Professional Using Social Networking Websites for Hiring Decisions** within the (Name of Organization). As part of this study, I authorize you to interview two HR professionals who have used SNWs for at least three years to screen and select job applicants, review existing social media policies for screening and selecting job applicants, conduct member checking of participant's responses, and disseminate the results of your study to participants. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion.

We understand that our organization's responsibilities include: an accessible private room (i.e. vacant office or conference room) for interviews at our company. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting and that this plan complies with the organization's policies.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the student's supervising faculty/staff without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,
Name of Site Authorization Official
Email Address of Site Authorization Official

Name of Study Site Authorization Official

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Appendix C: Interview Questions

The following are open-ended questions used for this study:

1. What strategies do you employ for using SNWs to facilitate the hiring process?

2. How have these strategies helped you optimize SNWs in the hiring process?

3. What phase in the hiring process do you use SNWS to gather information about job applicants?

4. How has gathering information from SNWs at the identified phase improved the hiring process?

5. What procedures do you follow to view job applicants' SNWs content, while at the same time, avoiding unlawful employment practices in the hiring process?

6. How have those procedures enhanced the job applicant pool?

7. What principles guide your organizational SNWs policy to inform hiring decisions?

8. How has following those principles contributed to your organization optimizing the use of SNWs to screen and select job applicants?

9. What else would you like to share about HR professionals' use of SNWs to facilitate the hiring process?