THE IMPACT OF BOUNDARY-BLURRING SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES:
SELF-PRESENTATION, IMPRESSION FORMATION, AND PUBLICNESS

by

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Individuals have more opportunities than ever before to present themselves in public using social networking sites (SNSs). These sites allow users to make self-presentations by creating online profiles, containing text, photos, or videos, about themselves and their activities. While individual users generate these presentations, millions of individuals can potentially access them over many years. From the perspective of organizations developing these SNSs, the more people, the broader range of people, and the greater interaction among the people that use them, the more sustainable it is. However, individuals tend to live segmented lives and often develop different self-presentations depending on the audience. Maintaining one or multiple presentations is possible offline as long as the audiences are separate and little opportunity for interaction exists.   Online, tension can form between boundary-blurring expansion and boundary-preserving development of SNSs.   This dissertation seeks to develop better understanding of how boundaries blurred by SNSs affect impressions formed of job candidates. To examine the issue, two studies were conducted, one exploratory qualitative and one experimental. The first study investigates whether, how, and why SNSs are accessed to obtain information about candidates.   The second study develops and tests a model of how characteristics of the SNS environment affect impression formation and subsequent hiring decisions. Both studies found that SNSs can have both benefits and detriments for the job candidate by influencing the impression formed by a professional.

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PREFACE

"The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams."

-Eleanor Roosevelt

"If there's a will, there's a way."

-Maggie C. Silfee

This dissertation is lovingly dedicated to my mother, best friend, and confidant, Maggie C. Silfee. In the most unwavering fashion, she has given me the strength, courage, and confidence to pursue even my wildest dreams. I am the luckiest person in the world to have her in my life and by my side.

I would also like to acknowledge the top notch support of my family and friends. My grandparents, Carolyn and Burt Reed, for providing a bright-shining light at the end of the tunnel. My stepfather, Paul Silfee, for always being available for a laugh. My sister, Valerie C. Pike, for her refreshing words of wisdom. My close friends, Raymond and Tere Frost, for helping me find my path and calling. And to my boo, Vincent Ragosta, for ever so charmingly being himself.

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1.0   INTRODUCTION

"The [women's story] was a reflection of how the walls that separate parts of a person's life can be knocked down in the emerging world of online social networking."

Excerpt from the cover story of USA Today *titled "Social, work lives collide on networking websites" on January 18, 2008*

The Internet landscape has changed. Modern users have nearly ubiquitous access to the Internet and are more skilled with the technology. Nearly 65% of American adults have access to the Internet in their homes (Horrigan 2008). Using this access, users post on blogs, contribute to online communities, edit wikis, comment on articles, and upload and tag multimedia, such as videos, images, and slideshows – all new ways of engaging the Internet. With increased access, higher skill levels, and new technologies, users have more opportunities than ever before to present themselves in public by publishing information (Trammell and Keshelashvili 2005). These opportunities create a new frontier for public presentation and have been referred to as a "virtual public" because of the openness and lack of restrictions (Jones and Rafaeli 1999; Papacharissi 2002; Carter 2005). This frontier began with personal websites (e.g., Döring 2006; Marcus, Machilek et al. 2006) and has expanded into such technologies as social networking sites[1] (e.g., Facebook.com, LinkedIn.com), micro-blogging (e.g., Twitter.com), and virtual worlds (e.g., SecondLife.com). These technologies, especially those with acquaintance-verified identity claims, move computer-mediated communication one step closer to being a public

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[1] Throughout this manuscript, the abbreviation SNS will be used in place of the term "social networking site," and the plural "social networking sites" will be represented by SNSs.

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sphere as defined by Habermas, a place where societal problems can be discussed and the discussions can influence action (Dahlberg 2006). At the very least, it has been shown that problems associated with the technologies can be discussed and that these discussions can influence the actions of the technology's development team (Silver 2010).

The public presentations by users place information in the online public sphere and often make users' presence on the site known. One individual creates these presentations, but millions of individuals can potentially access them over many years. One website focused on allowing individuals to make presentations about themselves and others, Facebook.com, in 2008 reportedly had more than 67 million active users and more than half of these users visited the website daily (Burcher 2008). On average, these users spend 20 minutes on the website every day presenting and viewing others' presentations (Burcher 2008). In 2010, Facebook.com surpassed 500 million users and claimed that over half of these users accessed the site each day (Van Grove 2010). Individuals presenting on the site post updates on what they are doing or thinking, update their profile information, post pictures, and provide links to other websites of interest, such as news articles or shopping websites. Despite the opportunity to be anonymous, individuals engage websites such as Facebook.com to shed their veil of anonymity and create presentations for the public sphere.

The information provided by users in the public presentations includes information about themselves, their lives, and individuals they know. Self-presentations are conscious or unconscious attempts to control what impression other individuals form about oneself by transferring information (Leary 1996; Schlenker 2003). Whether they intend to or not, the public presentations by users of these technologies are, in essence, online self-presentations. This dissertation focuses on online self-presentations created in the public sphere provided by social

networking sites. SNSs allow users to create self-presentations and link their self-presentations with those created by others (Boyd and Ellison 2007). SNSs allocate space and provide tools for users to publish information about themselves and enable other users to view this information.

Social networking sites allow users to make self-presentations containing text, images, videos, and other types of media. When creating self-presentations, users often reveal their legal name (Kennedy 2006), or in some way associate their online identity with their offline identity, such as via unified identity management) (e.g., OpenID Foundation 2009). For example, social networking giants such as Facebook.com and LinkedIn.com have collections of self-presentations ranging in complexity from simply a name and email address to extremely elaborate profiles with many screens and links to multiple subpages. In addition to creating self-presentations, users perform such activities as posting news about themselves, reading information posted by their acquaintances about themselves, adding individuals to lists of acquaintances, playing games, and commenting on information posted by acquaintances (Boyd and Ellison 2007). When users create self-presentations in SNSs, the information they choose to include is often tied to a specific time period and to a particular understanding of their audience(Boyd 2004). Individuals tend to imagine an audience and create a self-presentation for that audience. As evidenced above, the use of SNSs is popular among Internet users. However, running an SNS as a business venture is more complex. The business model of social networking is discussed in the next section.

1.1   SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES, BUSINESS MODELS,

AND SELF-PRESENTATION

The many existing social networking sites are constantly changed and refined by designers and developers (e.g., Wortham 2009). Organizations invest resources in developing SNSs for users, and most SNSs do not charge a usage fee. As with any organization that intends to create value for its stakeholders, the organizations maintaining the SNSs need resources to operate and sustain themselves. They need resources to support the technology (e.g., servers), infrastructure, and people who develop and manage the SNSs. As of November 2008, Facebook.com had over 700 employees (Das 2008). In order to acquire resources, these organizations need to generate revenue, and they generate revenue by selling access to their user populations.

Organizations developing and maintaining SNSs have an asset that they can utilize to generate revenue – frequent access to a large group of users and information about these users. Users of some SNSs often visit on a daily basis and spend a significant amount of time using the sites. Additionally, the self-presentations generated within the SNSs attract new users, especially those who have been referred by someone currently using the site (Bateman 2008). This leads to growth in traffic and the number of registered users, hence creating value for the hosting organizations. Organizations are able to sell sought-after access to users by selling advertising space on the pages of the SNSs (Fou 2008; Hempel 2009). Selling the advertising space allows the organizations to generate resources. The organizations are, in essence, selling access to users' field of vision on a regular basis, similar to television networks selling advertising time in the middle of and between television programs. Furthermore, with information about the users, which the users contributed themselves and their acquaintances potentially verified, these

organizations are better able to offer advertisers the ability to target users that the advertisers are interested in reaching. In addition to selling the typical banner space, some firms also sell advertisements that mix with the existing content, such as an advertisement which is in the middle of a list of news from acquaintances or which is available to be sent to an acquaintance as an electronic token to add to their self-presentation (Klaassen 2008). Other firms are taking information that has been presented by the user (e.g., user's age) and including it in the advertisement to attract the user's attention (e.g., X item is very popular among Y year-olds.)

As the number of users of a SNS increases, the advertising opportunities in the system look more attractive to marketers. If half of Facebook.com's active users visit on a given day, the advertiser could have access to an audience of over 200 million, which is many times larger than the audience of a primetime television show in the United States (The Nielsen Company 2009). To generate the most resources and sustain the organization, the organization developing the SNS needs to attract and retain as many users as possible, both those that create self-presentations and those that view them, and collect information about these users. The users that create self-presentations are needed so that the users that want to view the self-presentations have a reason to visit.

Because of the need to attract and retain as many users as possible to generate value, it is necessary for the hosting organizations to encourage individuals to sign up and recruit other individuals. The organizations put pressure on individuals to invite their friends, family, and colleagues to sign up, and they tout their environment as the central location for social interaction (i.e. everyone is in the same place). To facilitate this, the organizations provide mechanisms making it easy to invite others to join, such as by having features where the environment will automatically scan contact information in email accounts. The strong push by

the hosting organizations creates environments where users' self-presentations are viewed by acquaintances from different contexts, such as acquaintances from one's personal life, one's family, or one's professional life. This expansion of use of the SNS is what the organization needs to generate resources and remain economically viable. Furthermore, when the expansion of use occurs across contexts, there is greater potential to reach new, untapped users. From the organization's perspective, the more people and the broader range of people that use the SNS to publicize and view information, the more sustainable the organization and its SNS are.

The expansion of SNS use creates a conflict between the hosting organizations and the behavior of the individuals engaging the sites. Individuals tend to live segmented lives and often develop different self-presentations depending on the context or audience (Goffman 1959; Havern 2004; Walther 2007), such as a professional, structured presentation for one's boss and colleagues and a casual, care-free presentation for one's college pals. Creating different self-presentations for different audiences is a long-studied phenomenon that is present in many contexts (e.g., Goffman 1959). Maintaining multiple presentations is possible as long as the audiences are separate and little opportunity for interaction among the audiences exists (Goffman 1959). To separate the audiences, boundaries are created between each of the audiences that are given distinct self-presentations (Petronio 2000), as shown in Figure 1. These boundaries are actively created and maintained by individuals so that they can continue to have different self-presentations for each audience. A *boundary* is a delineation between one context where an individual performs a given self-presentation and another context where said individual performs a different self-presentation.

Contexts

Personal

Family

Professional

Boundaries
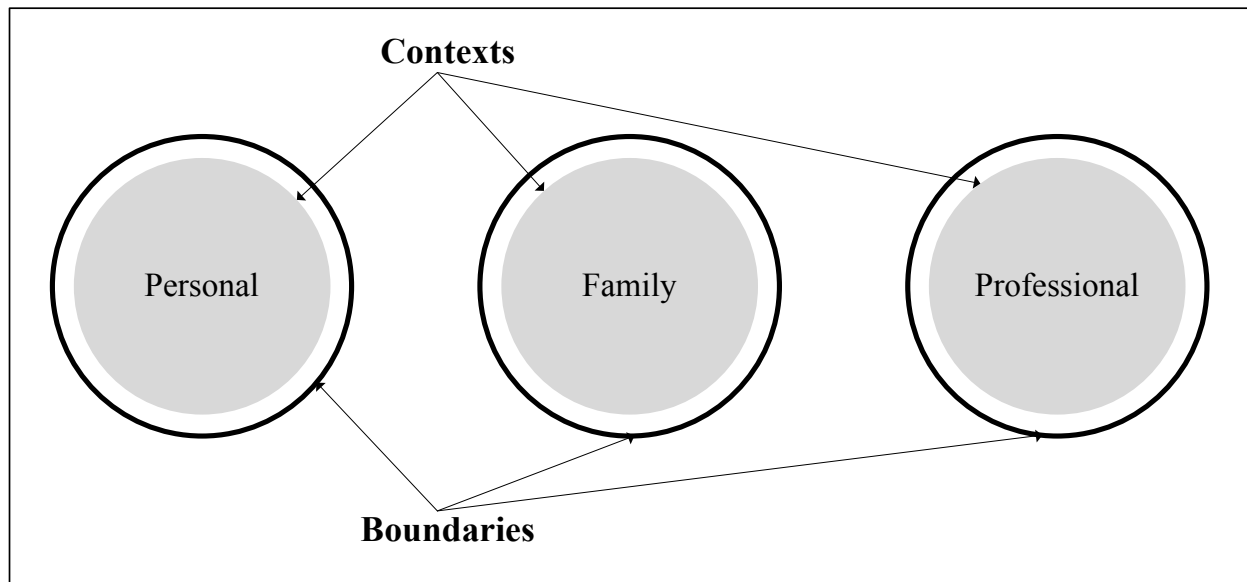
Figure 1. Different Contexts with Different Self-Presentations

Social networking sites benefit from large, broad-ranged viewing audiences and, thus, encourage multiple audiences or contexts to merge and interact. They market themselves as one-stop locations for social interaction. The hosting organizations need more and more individuals to use the SNSs and create self-presentations for others to view. However, individuals purposefully create and maintain these boundaries; hence their behaviors are not attuned to having one self-presentation viewed by multiple audiences. When creating online self-presentations, they are typically creating them for specific audiences (Boyd 2004) – not all audiences. Both the hosting organizations and the users attempt to make compromises and adjust their behaviors to both create visibility that can sustain the organization and create boundaries so that individuals feel comfortable creating self-presentations.

Developing compromises that meet the demands of both the organization and the users is extremely difficult as the two are in opposition: the hosting organization wants to maximize

visibility, and the users want to create limits on the visibility. The result of the compromising is *boundary-blurring*, or the merging of contexts in an electronic medium. The boundary-blurring creates confusion for the users of the social networking site, and this confusion leads the user to either create a composite self-presentation containing information previously presented in different contexts or create a self-presentation for a specific audience in their mind. Either way, the boundary-blurring social networking sites can allow a self-presentation from one context to be presented to another context, either intentionally or unintentionally. Rather than the separate contexts shown in Figure 1, SNSs create environments with merged audiences with individuals from different contexts, as shown in Figure 2.
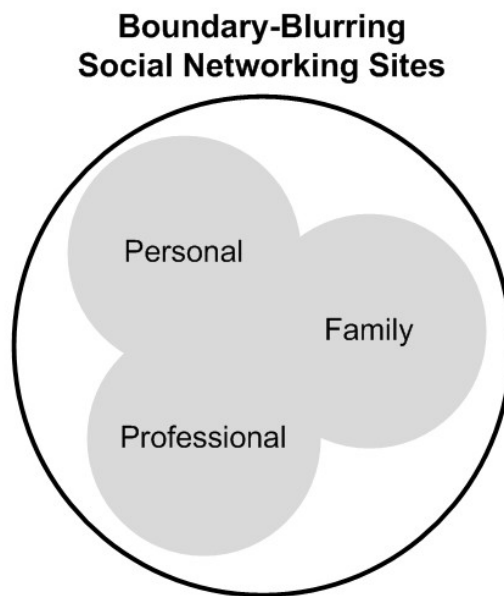
Boundary-blurring in SNSs encourages users to create a single, composite self-presentation which is presented to a merged audience.

Figure 2. Boundary-blurring in Social Networking Sites

Social networking sites generally only encourage users to create a single self-presentation in the site, which leads users to combine their many self-presentations into one. For example, Facebook.com invites users to present both personal information (e.g., relationship status) and professional information (e.g., current and recent employment). Creating a single, composite self-presentation minimizes the cost to the user of creating the self-presentation. Minimizing the cost of creating the self-presentation leads more users to create self-presentations, which subsequently creates value for the hosting organization. Encouraging users to create multiple self-presentations increases the cost of using SNS and may drive users away. Thus, SNSs generally do not offer an easy or obvious way of creating multiple self-presentations within the site. Managing the tension between the hosting organizations and the users is challenging, as evidenced anecdotally by complaints and reactions to some hosting organizations practices and policies (e.g., Facebook.com, MySpace.com, Google Buzz).

From the users' perspectives, the use of SNSs can be beneficial if their goals are aligned with the organization's goals of reaching and presenting to a large, broad-ranged audience (Ellison, Steinfield et al. 2006; Ellison, Steinfield et al. 2007; Zywica and Danowski 2008). These users are able to show self-presentations to many audiences from different contexts. These users are drawn to the boundary-blurring nature of SNSs which allows them to reconnect with individuals from the past, communicate with current acquaintances, and be contacted in regard to an attractive opportunity (Lenhart and M. 2007; Madden, Fox et al. 2007; Joinson 2008). Users that have no preference on who views their online self-presentation or that have the same self-presentation in all contexts will potentially benefit from and find satisfaction in using SNSs.

The use of SNSs can be detrimental for users whose goals are not aligned with the organization's goal of reaching and presenting to a large, broad-ranged audience (Finder 2006; George 2006; Hewitt and Forte 2006; Mann 2007). Users can experience one of many detriments, and the strong connection between users' offline identity and their online identity further magnifies the possibility of these detriments (Kennedy 2006; Boyd and Ellison 2007). Users that have preferences on who views their online self-presentations or who present selected information to different audiences in their lives will potentially suffer as a result of using SNSs (Mann 2007; Rosenblum 2007).

If the users' goals are not aligned with the hosting organizations' goals, the user will not be inclined to create a composite self-presentation that will be viewed by multiple audiences. Instead, the users will create a self-presentation for an audience they have in mind, and this self-presentation will be viewed by all audiences. The potential detriments of this include having sensitive information viewed by colleagues or prospective employers and having personal or professional information enter a context for which it was not intended. When the self-presentations are viewed by multiple audiences, there is also potential for interaction among audience members from different contexts. Again, this could lead to information being presented to an individual in a context for which it was not intended.

The tension between boundary-blurring expansion and boundary-preserving development is inherent in the current business models of the organizations and the user practices associated with SNSs. Joinson (2008) states, "The variety of uses to which Facebook is put by its users identifies particular challenges for the designers of such sites" (p. 8). The organization feels pressure to increase access to the self-presentations and further blur boundaries. Users feel pressure to create self-presentations because of the potential for benefit, though they are

influenced by the potential for detriment. Showing self-presentations to a large, broad-ranged, and merged audience creates a new unconstrained world. Previously, individuals were able to create self-presentations on a smaller scale and have more control over their presentations. The organizational and user desires a beneficial user experience exacerbate the potential for harm because detrimental experiences often occur when the social boundaries are blurred by the SNSs, which is likely to happen with expansion. Anecdotal evidence demonstrates that users' relationships with family and friends and the ability to obtain or keep a job can be harmed (Mann 2007; Rosenblum 2007). Some organizations have succeeded by developing a compromise between boundary-blurring and boundary-preservation, and others have failed as a result of not compromising[2]. These compromises include providing functionality that allows users to limit or manage who can view their self-presentations.

Organizations developing SNSs need to account for both the need to blur boundaries and the detriments of doing so. If users leave and encourage their acquaintances to leave after suffering detriments as a result of use, SNSs will lose their user base, which is critical for their business model. There is potential for the boundary-blurring nature of the sites, a characteristic that helps build and sustain them, to lead to their demise. Not only is it bad for the individual users, the boundary-blurring nature of SNSs can threaten the whole approach to social interaction online. This is a fundamental challenge for the business model utilized by these organizations and their future success.

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[2] Some organizations have implemented SNS technologies that allow users to specify certain acquaintances that can view their self-presentations. This acquaintance-linking capability is not part of the definition of a self-publicity technology. This acquaintance-linking capability is evidence of the compromise made between the goals of the organization and the goals of the users. The organizations have implemented the capability as a means of protecting users against detriment, and maintaining their user base.

Users suffering detriment as a result of using SNSs is potentially disadvantageous for SNSs and the firms which develop and maintain them. To examine the long-term viability of SNSs and these organizations, it is important to consider the potential detriments of boundary-blurring and understand how they can avoided. These detriments occur when a single self-presentation is presented to a merged audience of individuals from different contexts. When a boundary is blurred and the single self-presentation is presented, there is a looming question of whether and how it impacts audience members' impressions of the user (i.e. Is there an impact? Does it matter?). In other words, how damaging are the detriments for the users and how can they be avoided? More generally, how are SNSs affecting self-presentation and social interaction?

1.2   ONLINE SELF-PRESENTATION IN THE JOB MARKET

One context in which potential detriments from the use of SNSs are particularly salient is the job market. Creating self-presentations is critical for job candidates as they seek to demonstrate that they are well-qualified for jobs and well-suited to work in recruiting organizations. In this context, self-presentation is performed by both job candidates (Baron 1986; Knouse, Giacalone et al. 1988; Knouse 1994; Leary, Tchividjian et al. 1994; Wayne and Liden 1995; Tsai, Chen et al. 2005; Tong, Van Der Heide et al. 2008) and human resource professionals[3] (Ferris and Judge 1991; Kacmar, Delery et al. 1992; Cable and Judge 1996). Self-presentation has been studied in a variety of forms (e.g., self-presentation in a resume, self-

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[3] The term human resource professional will be abbreviated as HR professional throughout this dissertation.

presentation in the form of attire, self-presentation via non-verbal cues) with mixed results (i.e. self-presentation can have both positive and negative impacts).

Human resource professionals are provided with limited information and attempt to hire qualified professionals that fit well with the open positions and the organization. There is extensive literature on how a HR professional should locate and hire the best candidates (e.g., Ferris and Judge 1991; Judge and Bretz 1994; Cable and Judge 1996; Higgins and Judge 2004). Job candidates attempt to increase their chances of being hired by creating self-presentations in SNSs, allowing them to reach a large, broad-ranged audience. A survey conducted by the U.S. National Association of Colleges and Employers in 2008 found that 27% of employers turned to online sources including SNSs to acquire additional information on job candidates (Finder 2006; George 2006). There is evidence that SNSs create high visibility for job candidates to HR professionals because the professionals are turning to the sites to learn about candidates and gather additional information (Finder 2006).

However, the job market is merely one context for self-presentation, and the job candidate may create a self-presentation unique to this context. Hence, a situation is created where the HR professional receives a self-presentation (i.e. a resume) that may not be aligned with the self-presentation created by the job candidate in a public SNS. After all, organizations hosting SNSs want to create a one-stop location for information about individuals, rather than encouraging users to create distinct self-presentations for particular contexts. The boundary-blurring nature of SNSs leads to HR professionals having access to multiple, and potentially different, self-presentations from a job candidate. For example, users provide different self-presentations in a resume versus in a SNS or across different SNSs. The boundary-blurring nature of SNSs gives HR professionals access to self-presentations that were not necessarily

intended for them and may create confusion for the HR professional. The potential confusion experienced by the HR professional about the job candidate may lead to the candidate being perceived poorly and not getting an interview. The popular press anecdotally discusses some detriments suffered by job candidates (Mann 2007; Rosenblum 2007), which can include not being hired for a desired position and negatively affecting one's career.

1.3   RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this dissertation is to develop knowledge about how boundary-blurring by social networking sites affects impressions formed of individuals. In particular, this work examines impressions formed of job candidates by HR professionals. The goal is to determine the potential detriments of using SNSs and understand how damaging they can be. Knowing more about the impressions formed as a result of viewing information in SNSs can help users make more informed decisions when using the sites and help organizations develop environments which balance the tension inherent in the SNS business model between the need for high visibility and the potential for users to suffer harm from boundary-blurring.. This research will examine the following research questions:

- How do human resource professionals utilize social networking sites to learn about job candidates?

- How do self-presentations in social networking sites affect impressions formed by human resource professionals? How does the availability of self-presentations from other contexts affect the impressions formed by human resource professionals?

To investigate these research questions, a multi-study approach was taken drawing upon prior literature and theories. The first study explored the issue of social networking site use by HR professionals and focused on the questions of whether, how, and why SNSs are accessed to learn about candidates. To collect data, interviews with HR professionals and individuals involved in the hiring process were conducted. This qualitative data was analyzed to identify themes which characterize aspect of SNS use in the hiring process. The second study specifically addressed the impressions formed of job candidates by business professionals following the viewing of self-presentations in social networking sites. To test the hypotheses derived from Information Integration Theory, a controlled online experiment was conducted. The data was analyzed using partial least squares (PLS).

This dissertation provides details of these two studies, the findings, and the implications. First, existing literature on social networking sites and self-presentation is reviewed in Chapter 2 to provide a foundation for the theory and hypotheses that are developed in each of the studies. In Chapter 3, the tension between HR professionals seeking information and job candidates applying for positions is discussed. Further in Chapter 3, the qualitative data collection is discussed and the findings and implications of the thematic analysis are presented. In Chapter 4, the theoretical background and hypotheses for regarding impression formation in boundary-blurring contexts are discussed. Next, the empirical study is presented, including the data collection, analysis and findings. Lastly, an overall summary of the results and implications of this dissertation are discussed in Chapter 5 with limitations of and future directions for this work.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW AND BACKGROUND

The purpose of chapter is to provide a review of existing research on social networking sites. To provide background, the literature on self-presentation is also reviewed. Self-presentation is a concept from the social psychology literature. The focus will be on self-presentation and impression formation during the hiring process.

2.1 SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES

Many researchers agree that social networking is a growing area of research (Cooke and Buckley 2008; Ellison, Lampe et al. 2009) and have suggested that as a result of these sites, "the architecture that frames social life is changing" (Boyd 2007). In the information systems literature, SNSs have been compared to more traditional systems and identified as a promising research area (Parameswaran and Whinston 2007). SNSs are an interesting phenomenon to study because they record basic identifying information about individuals alongside information that was previously considered to be more personal (e.g., political party affiliation) and make it available for others to view for an indefinite period of time (i.e. potentially "forever"). Further, while traditional information systems focus on documenting business processes and information, SNSs focus on recording the interworkings of individuals' daily lives. In other words, traditional information systems recorded information about people (e.g., name, address), while SNSs are taking this further by recording information about what people like, do, and think (e.g., interests, hobbies, friends, events, opinions). Furthermore, these environments allow individuals to access

record their own information and information about others, which places them firmly in the category of Web 2.0 where users are generating content.

To allow users to record information about themselves, social networking sites, such as MySpace.com, Facebook.com, Linkedin.com, and Flickr.com, provide a combination of tools. Most commonly, these tools include the ability to create a profile and a list of friends. Each of these tools will be discussed further below. Other tools include the ability to create and join groups, to send messages between members visibly and privately, and to participate in discussion forums.

2.1.1 Social Networking Site Feature: Profiles

A key feature of social networking sites is the collection of profiles created by users. When creating profiles, users are often asked for their email address, first and last name, gender, date of birth, and preferred language. Other optional information which a user can contribute includes relationship status, sexual preferences, specific location (e.g., zip code, city, and country), political affiliation, religious affiliation, education history, and employment history. The profiles can also include, but are not limited to, images, videos, activities, general interests, entertainment interests, favorite books, and personal interests. SNSs typically provide designated space for each user to create their profile, and this space is structured around particular categories of information, completely unstructured, or a hybrid of the latter two. While users have the opportunity to create a new identity in these profiles, they often create their virtual identity as a representation of their offline selves, frequently by using their legal name or other identifying characteristic (Kennedy 2006). This allows a connection to be made between the online profile and the individual's offline identity.
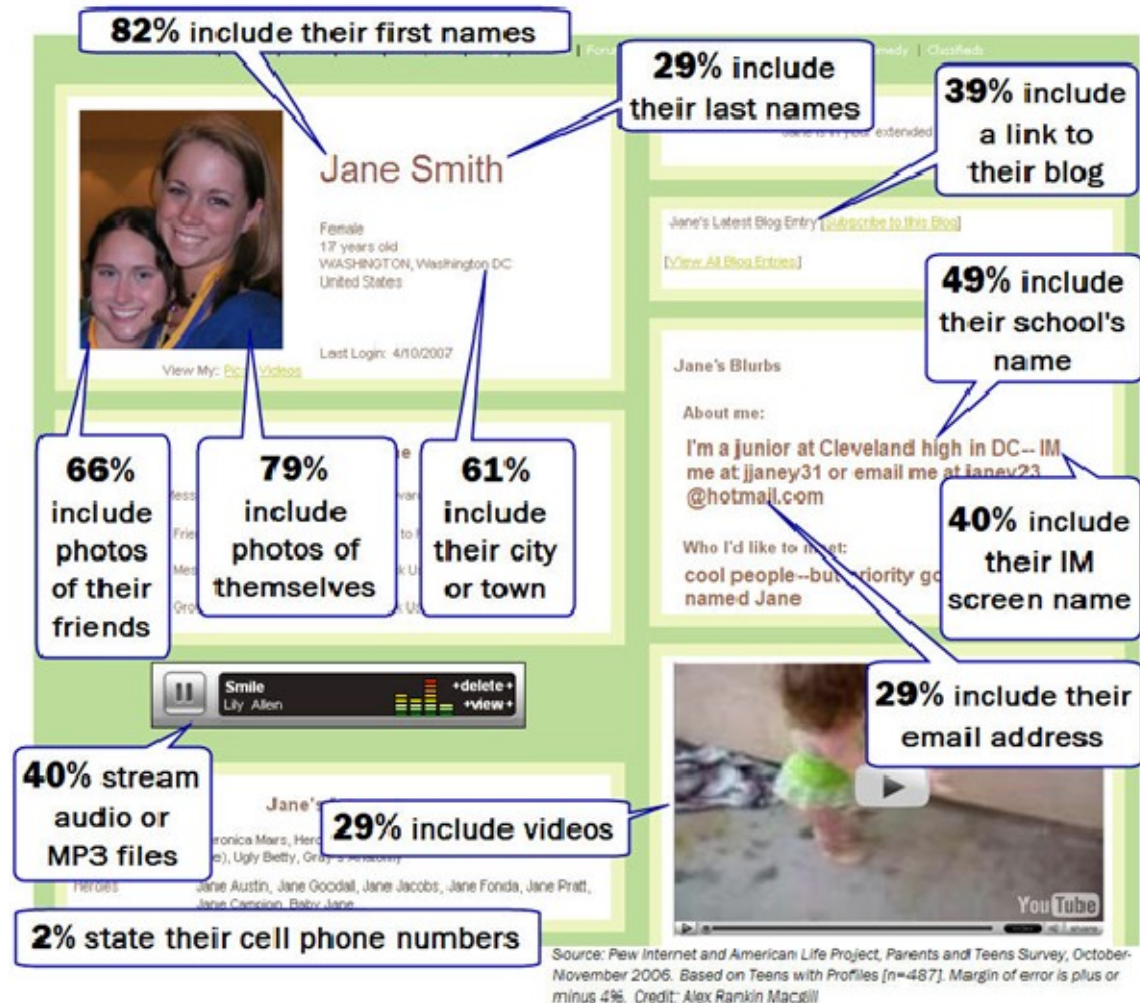
Figure 3. Example Profile with Rate of Information Disclosure (Macgill 2006)

The majority of the studies of profiles in social networking sites have been descriptive in nature, solely focused on examining the who, how, and what of profile creation and content (Boyd 2004; Boyd 2008). Boyd (2004) documented an early ethnographical study which examined how people use Friendster and other social networking sites, and found the tools to create a profile to be common across most SNSs (Boyd 2004). The profile, she suggested, is indicative of how an individual chooses to present themselves online, but it is often tied to a

specific time and to a specified understanding of the audience by the individual (Boyd 2004). To aid individuals in developing an understanding of their audience and generate traffic in social networking sites, the sites also offer tools for creating connections with others, or lists of friends. This list of friends is visible on the profile and is managed by the user.

2.1.2   Social Networking Site Feature: Connections

Another feature of social networking sites is the ability to document connections between profiles, or to create a list of friends or individuals that the profile owner is connected with. In most environments, both the individual initiating the connection and the individual he or she is attempting to be connected with must confirm the connection within the environment. Boyd (2007) suggests that lists of friends or connections allow individuals to record the audience they perceive is viewing their profile. Connections are typically displayed as part of the profile (Boyd and Ellison 2007), and thus are part of the self-presentation created by the users of SNSs.

When social networking sites debuted, the ability to create connections between individuals via their profiles was unique to these sites. Hence, the connections feature has received much attention in the literature. It has been suggested that individuals derive their connections largely from existing or offline groups of friends (Boyd 2007). This runs contrary to prior work on virtual communities that suggested that individuals are reaching out to new people online (Ridings and Gefen 2004). However, other research suggests that individuals approach their lists of connections in a variety of ways (Zywica and Danowski 2008) all in an effort to increase perceived popularity.

Profiles and connections are inherently related to each other in social networking sites as the profile acts as the node which can be connected to. As a result, the more information

available in the profile, the more likely the profile will be located and an individual will request a connection with it. Lampe and colleagues (2007) found that the size of the profile, or the degree to which it is completed, is positively related to the number of friends on one's friend list. In particular, providing information that indicates common referents (e.g., same high school, same hometown) can lead individuals to "friend" each other, or add each other to their connections, more often because common referents foster interaction and reduce search costs (Lampe, Ellison et al. 2007). These common referents also reinforce users' notions of the profile belonging to a particular context or being visible to a particular audience.

2.1.3   User Behavior in Social Networking Sites

A considerable amount of research has also examined social networking site users and behavior in these environments. Individuals in social networking sites are doing "fundamentally different things than those reported in early virtual community literature" (Ellison, Steinfield et al. 2006 p. 32). In early virtual community research, it was thought that individuals joined partially to meet new people (Ridings and Gefen 2004). In SNSs, it has been shown that users do not intend to meet new people, but rather are trying to enhance and enrich existing offline relationships (Ellison, Steinfield et al. 2006; Stefanone and Jang 2007). This suggests that, individuals will be uncomfortable with an environment that lacks boundaries.

When asked why they use social networking sites, users state that they like collecting things, like to feel like they belong, like to check-up on other people, like to write an autobiography, and use it because it is free (Nicol 2007). Similarly, Facebook users identified seven unique reasons why they find SNSs gratifying: social connection, shared identities, content, social investigation, social network surfing, and status updating (Joinson 2008).

Individuals that focused more on social connection have greater use frequency (i.e. more frequent visits to the site in a given time period), while individuals focused more on the content have greater time spent on the site (i.e. greater amount of time spent each day) (Joinson 2008).

Two groups of users have been identified in social networking sites: social enhancers and social compensators (Zywica and Danowski 2008). The social enhancers are extroverted, possess high self-esteem, and are popular offline, and these attributes are typically associated with users that are popular within the environments as well (Zywica and Danowski 2008). On the other hand, social compensators are less extroverted, possess lower self-esteem, and are less popular offline, but they strive for greater popularity in the environments to compensate for lack of offline popularity (Zywica and Danowski 2008). Both of these groups of users are thus highly active in the environments.

Fogel and Nehmad (2009) found that individuals with profiles in social networking sites are more risk-seeking than those that do not, and the men using these environments are more risk-seeking than the women. This suggests that SNS use is viewed as a risky activity. Privacy and information disclosure are of concern for users of SNSs (Dwyer, Hiltz et al. 2007) and of greater concern to women compared to men using the environments (Fogel and Nehmad 2009). This concern is reflected in the information published in the SNSs as more men than women display phone number and home address information (Fogel and Nehmad 2009). While the SNS business models support the notion that they will be most successful when users want to maximize their visibility, these studies suggest using a SNS with no boundaries and high visibility is perceived as being risky.

2.1.4   Demographic of Users of Social Networking Sites

Hargittai (2008) studied how demographic variables and social surroundings affect use and selection of social networking sites. Their research found that while the use of SNS is not correlated with demographic variables in a student population, use of specific SNSs is correlated with particular demographic variables. In other words, being of a certain gender or having a specific race does not affect whether one uses a SNS or not, but gender and race affect which SNS one is likely to use. Specifically, Hispanics were more likely to use MySpace.com than Caucasians, and Asians and African Americans were less likely (Hargittai 2008). Asians and African Americans were also more likely than Caucasians to use Xanga.com and Friendster.com, but this is possibly due to the popularity of these sites in Asian countries (Hargittai 2008). Lastly, students whose parents had lower levels of education tended to use MySpace.com, while students whose parents had higher levels of education tended to use Facebook.com (Hargittai 2008).

2.1.5   Perceptions in Social Networking Sites

Additional work in this area found that the use of social networking sites is strongly associated with social capital (Ellison, Steinfield et al. 2007). Tong and colleagues (2008) suggest that the amount of connections can be treated as a sociometric indicator and refer to it as "web-generated sociometric information." This experimental research found a curvilinear relationship between the size of the friend list and perceived popularity and extraversion of the friend list owner. In other words, greater or fewer friends documented in the SNS led other users to perceive the friend list owner as less popular or desirable. The number of connections,

according to the study, that led other users to perceive the friend list owner to be optimally popular and desirable was 300 friends (Tong, Van Der Heide et al. 2008).

2.1.6   Web 2.0 and Social Networking Sites

Social networking sites are often categorized as a Web 2.0 technology because they allow users to generate content (Baker and Green 2008). Cormode and Krishnamurthy (2008) compare traditional web technology, labeled as Web 1.0, with Web 2.0 technology such as SNSs. The research presents a unique insight into how former hubs for Web 1.0 technology have evolved over time to incorporate Web 2.0 features and how the features of various instances of Web 2.0 technology compare (see Table 1). The addition of social networking tools to these websites suggests these tools can be used as motivators of system use and other online behavior, such as purchasing.

Table 1. Social Networking Features of Popular Websites

Feature	Feature	Facebook	YouTube	Flickr	LiveJournal	MySpace	Amazon	eBay
Profile	Age	✓	✓		✓	✓		
	Location	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
	Gender	✓				✓		
	Testimonials	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
	Other	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Connections	Friends	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	Subscriptions		✓	✓	✓			
	Groups	✓		✓	✓	✓		

Adapted from Cormode and Krishnamurthy (2008)

The business models of social networking sites and other Web 2.0 technologies have been compared to business models of Web 1.0 technologies, and it has been argued that Web 1.0 business models will not work with Web 2.0 technologies given the nature of the activities the users are performing (Fou 2008). Users intend to be alone and obtain content in Web 1.0 environments, leaving them more open to advertisements, while users in Web 2.0 environments intend to socialize and create content, leaving them less open to advertisements (Fou 2008). Facebook.com is noted as the most successful social networking site to date with 700 employees (Das 2008; Lynch 2008) and expected 2008 revenues of $275 million (Hempel 2009) and is said to be developing user-engaged advertising where friends' behaviors in regard to a product or service are broadcast to other friends (Klaassen 2008; Lynch 2008). For example, if one's friend watched a preview for a movie and commented on it, this information would be broadcast to the individuals on his or her friend list (Lynch 2008).

2.2   PERCEIVING OTHERS: SELF-PRESENTATION AND IMPRESSION

FORMATION

Self-presentation, also known as impression management, is the process of disseminating information to others performed by an individual when consciously or unconsciously attempting to control how others perceive them (Leary 1996; Schlenker 2003). Some scholars treat self-presentation and impression management as one in the same (Leary 1996). Other scholars treat impression management as a subarea of self-presentation and define is as more goal directed and purposeful (Schlenker 2003). For the purposes of this work, the term self-presentation will be used to refer to this activity. This area of research examines two components: a.) what individuals do to try to shape the attitudes and behaviors of others, how they do this, and what motivates them and b.) how others respond to an individual's self-presentations and form such attitudes (Schlenker 2003). A smaller area of research has examined what happens when individuals become overly concerned with the impressions others are forming of them.

2.2.1   Self-Presentation

An individual's self-presentation is shaped by the individual's personality, the situation, and the audience being presented to (Schlenker 2003). The concept of self-presentation has generated a significant amount of research in social psychology over the last twenty-five years (Leary 1996), and it has been demonstrated to be a "fundamental feature of social life" (Schlenker 2003 p. 513). While individuals that are overly concerned with self-presentation are often referred to as vain, manipulative, or insecure, self-presentation is an unavoidable part of everyday social life (Leary 1996). Examples of self-presentation include describing prior job

experience to a HR professional during a job interview (Schlenker 2003), selecting attire for a date, and cleaning one's home before guests arrive (Leary 1996). It is generally understood that the course of an individual's life is influenced by how he or she is perceived and evaluated by others (Leary 1996). The research is based on the foundation work by Erving Goffman (1959), known for describing self-presentation as a performance on a stage, and Edward Jones (1964; 1990), who put forth the idea of strategic self-presentation and conducted numerous foundational controlled experiments on the topic. One of Goffman's (1959) main contributions is the idea that much can be learned about individuals by examining the appearances they create for others, or their self-presentations.

Individuals create self-presentations through a variety of actions, but it is not necessarily true that these actions are only conducted for the purpose of impression management. Ways in which individuals create self-presentations and examples are provided in Table 2. Individuals perform different levels of self-presentation depending on the degree to which they self-monitor, or assess the impressions they convey to others and adjust their behavior to convey the best impression for the situation (Snyder 1974). High self-monitors are very concerned about social appropriateness and will adjust their self-presentations based on the self-presentations of others and the situation. Low self-monitors are less sensitive and are either less interested in or less capable of adjusting their self-presentations.

Table 2. Means of Self-Presentation and Examples

Means of Self-Presentation	Example
Self-Descriptions	• "I am a pleasant person."
Attitude Expressions	• "I support gun rights."
Attributional Statements	• "My score is low, but the questions on the exam were tricky."
Memory Contrivances	• "Thanks for returning my book. I forgot that you even had it."
Nonverbal Behaviors	• Smiling
Social Associations	• "I saw Tom Cruise in New York this weekend." • Wearing a Pitt sweatshirt
Conformity and Compliance	• Leaving a large tip after receiving bad service at a restaurant
Sets, Props, and Lighting	• Displaying pictures of family on one's desk
Adapted from Leary 1996	

Individuals are motivated to create and maintain self-presentations by their goals. Goals focused on in the self-presentation literature include ingratiation, intimidation, self-promotion, exemplification, and supplication (Jones and Pittman 1982).

2.2.2 Impression Formation

The second component of the self-presentation literature examines how self-presentations are perceived by others and used to form impressions. Studies of impression formation build

upon the seminal, though controversy-producing, works of Fishbein and Anderson (e.g., Triandis and Fishbein 1963; Fishbein and Hunter 1964; Anderson 1965; Anderson 1971) which articulated models for predicting impression formation. This literature treats impression formation as an attitude change and focuses on how multiple sources of information, both new and old, are combined together to form an impression (Massaro and Friedman 1990). Anderson's (1971) Information Integration Theory suggests that each pieces of information has both a value and a weight. The value of the information is the observer's evaluation of the information, ranging from unfavorable to favorable. The weight of the information is the perceived importance assigned to the information by the observer. When information is obtained, it is combined with existing information about the person or item that is being observed. The controversy lies in how this integration or combination occurs. Fishbein's work suggests that the observer's attitude toward the person or object is the sum of the salient beliefs about the person or object weighted by the value one attaches to each of those beliefs (Triandis and Fishbein 1963). In other words, the information is converted into beliefs and then weighted. Alternatively, Anderson's Information Integration Theory builds upon this work and puts forth two potential models for the cognitive algebra which occurs during impression formation – the addition model and the averaging model. The addition model states that the value of each piece of information is multiplied by the weight, and then each of these figures is summed. The averaging model states that the value of each piece of information is multiplied by the weight, and then the weighted values are averaged. Evidence in research studies suggests that either one can be used. Significant research supports both the addition and averaging models, and the same results have been found using both models side by side (Anderson and Birnbaum 1976). Recent

work has built upon Anderson to develop computational models of impression formation and tested the models using simulations (Van Overwalle and Labiouse 2004).

Recent research examining impression formation in the social psychology literature focused on the role of social categories, social facilitation, first impressions, language usage, and priming. During impression formation, perceivers assign target individuals to social categories, and perceivers are able to assign individuals to more ambiguous social categories very rapidly (Rule and Ambady 2008). These social categories are used to associate a new target with existing knowledge about known targets. Individuals also associate preconceived beliefs about the social category with the newly assigned target individual (e.g., a non-smokers negative perception of smokers would be applied to someone new he meets that is a smoker). Some social categories carry strong beliefs about the category (e.g., being physically attractive is desirable). However, sometimes an individual is not representative of his or her social category. McConnell and colleagues (2008) found that in situations where these strong beliefs about a social group exist, it is very difficult for individuals to see past such beliefs when forming an impression of a target individual even after observing the target individual. A series of experiments found that the beliefs were associated with the target even after behaviors were exhibited to show otherwise (McConnell, Rydell et al. 2008), and this held whether the beliefs were either positive or negative. In other words, the associative knowledge provided when the target is assigned to a social category tends to "stick" to the individual. Additional, research has shown that when a target individual is assigned to a social category, the preconceived beliefs about the social category can bias how a target's ambiguous behaviors are perceived. It was found that the perceived strength of the category-related associations moderate the impact of social category cues on ambiguous information (Gawronski, Geschke et al. 2003). In other

words, the stronger the perceiver associates the target individual with the social category, the stronger the bias (either positive or negative) in how the ambiguous information is interpreted.

The formation of an impression can also be impacted by whether the perceive is alone or part of a group situation. Compared to being alone, the perceiver will intensify their impression when in a group situation, making a negative impression more negative and a positive impression more positive based on the drive theory of social facilitation (Thomas, Skitka et al. 2002). Initially, individuals also tend to perceive that the target individual possesses their own unique characteristics (Human and Biesanz 2011) and identify with targets who have similar economic and cultural capital (Tunca and Fueller 2009). A target individual's language usage also factors into the impression formed by audience members. Douglas and Sutton (2010) found that targets are seen as less desirable when they use abstract language, and targets are seen as more desirable when they use more concrete language.

A significant amount of research regarding how priming affects impression formation has been conducted. Priming is when information is provided in one context to influence the impression formed of the target individual in another context. A meta-analysis of this research was conducted, and the analysis showed that priming can lead to three potential biases (DeCoster and Claypool 2004). The first potential bias is assimilation and occurs when the prime becomes incorporated in the impression of the target. The second potential bias is anchoring and occurs when the prime is used as a standard to compare the target to. The third potential bias is correction and occurs when the impression to altered based on the prime. This research is important to consider because it shows how potentially irrelevant information can bias impressions formed.

2.2.3 Self-Presentation in a Hiring and Job Context

Self-presentation has been studied in the hiring context, and mixed results have been found (Giacalone 1985; Baron 1986; Broussard and Brannen 1986; Knouse, Giacalone et al. 1988; Knouse 1994). In traditional job search settings, self-presentation is performed by job candidates in the cover letter, in the resume, and during interviews. Once a job candidate has secured the position, self-presentation also occurs while performing job duties. However, even if an individual attends to it, the complexity of self-presentation can leave the employee in a precarious situation with potential detriments (Baumeister 1989; Wayne and Liden 1995).

In a study examining impressions formed of a job candidate based on reading his or her resume, Knouse (1994) found that incorporating explicit self-presentations into the resume enhances perceptions of interpersonal skills and self-confidence. Further, the job candidate was perceived to be more hirable, but at the same time, the interviewer was more likely to want to investigate the candidate's background further (Knouse 1994). Carefully worded self-presentation (e.g., strong statements of accomplishments and noteworthy qualities) in the cover letter leads to more favorable evaluations of the applicant because it leads the reader to perceive the applicant as more self-confident (Knouse, Giacalone et al. 1988).

In contrast, it has been shown that self-presentation can also lead to less favorable outcomes for the job applicant (Giacalone 1985; Knouse, Giacalone et al. 1988). Self-presentation via the resume leads to less favorable outcomes for the applicant if it creates ambiguity about the applicant (Knouse, Giacalone et al. 1988). Ambiguity is perceived negativity and can be treated as a "red flag" (Broussard and Brannen 1986; Knouse, Giacalone et al. 1988). Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that multiple attempts to influence the impression formed by the interviewer can lead to unfavorable outcomes for the job candidate,

following the idea that there can be "too much of a good thing" (Baron 1986). Baron (1986) found that utilizing two different tactics for self-presentation, emitting positive nonverbal cues and using a grooming aid (e.g., wearing perfume), during a job interview reduces the rating of the interviewee by the interviewer. However, either of the tactics alone increased the ratings of the interviewee by the interviewer (Baron 1986). It has even been shown that perceptions prior to meeting an individual can be especially influential in the perception and evaluation of the individual post-interaction (Dipboye 1982). This stream of work demonstrates that how one crafts his or her self-presentation can influence impressions formed of the this individual, even long before the individual knows he or she in being evaluated.

Once an applicant has the position, self-presentation also occurs while performing job duties. The effect of self-presentation on performance evaluations has been examined, and similar results have been found. Self-presentation has a negative effect on the perceived similarity between a subordinate and a superior, which has a positive association with performance ratings of the subordinate provided by the superior (Wayne and Liden 1995). Even if self-presentation is not perceived as boastful, it can still be harmful for the subordinate in that he or she can create impressions that he or she cannot live up to (Baumeister 1989; Wayne and Liden 1995).

2.2.4 Publicness

Because users create self-presentations in social networking sites and the focus is on their presentations, the sites can act as a gathering place for individuals. Some scholars have lamented that social gathering places have become less common in society (Oldenburg 1999; Putnam 2001), noting examples such as adult activity-oriented associations (e.g., Lions or Elks clubs) or

neighborhood restaurants, bars, and pubs. Other research suggests that social gathering has merely shifted from face-to-face gathering to computer-mediated gathering, in places such as social computing systems (Boyd 2007). A social network website can become a place for conversation and communication when individuals can interpret and create a social context (Boyd and Heer 2006). A similar shift has been seen in brand communities, where people would gather socially to express their common fondness for a particular brand (e.g., Harley Davidson, Apple), as discussed in the marketing literature (McAlexander, Schouten et al. 2002; Algesheimer, Dholakia et al. 2005).

Boyd suggests that the computer-mediated gathering creates mediated publics, or "environments where people can gather publicly through mediating technology" (Boyd 2007). Alternatively, some researchers have argued that SNSs create a different kind of public than traditionally thought of (e.g., main street or a town square) (Goffman 1959; Slevin 2000; Boyd 2007; Pike, Bateman et al. 2007). Boyd (2007) suggests that publics created by social computing systems are different in that they are persistent, searchable, replicable, and have an invisible audience. Pike and colleagues (2007) suggest that the publics created by social computing systems are different because the degree of publicness is more subjective and based on the perception the user has of the technological environment.

An issue that often arises in this new frontier is whether or not the users are aware of the access others have to their information, or the publicness of the information (Goffman 1959; Slevin 2000). When a group of people occupy a shared physical space, the participants are aware that others have essentially unrestricted access to their statements and actions, if only for a limited time. In contrast, in online spaces individuals may, or may not, form this awareness of others.

The perception that self-presentations online occurs in less public spaces may lead individuals to express themselves more freely. Some individuals believe that others cannot or would not want to access their information. Individuals sometimes perform self-presentations for short-term audiences and do not understand the larger consequences of their actions (Leary, Tchividjian et al. 1994; Martin and Leary 1999). Given the public nature of SNSs and the limited perceptions of individuals using them, many self-presentations created by an individual can all be accessed (DiMicco and Millen 2007).

2.2.5 Managing Impressions in Online Environments

The research questions considered in this project are situated in the overlap between research on social networking sites and the self-presentation and impression formation literatures. A small amount of research conducted in this area (Jacobson 1999; O'Sullivan 2000; Trammell and Keshelashvili 2005; Ellison, Heino et al. 2006; Weisbuch, Ivcevic et al. forthcoming) demonstrates that individuals use technology to aid in the creation of self-presentations (O'Sullivan 2000; Ellison, Heino et al. 2006). However, the utility and accuracy of forming impressions based on viewing an individual's online self-presentation are not known (Jacobson 1999; Weisbuch, Ivcevic et al. forthcoming). The research suggests that there is correlation between first impressions based on face-to-face interaction and first impressions based on viewing an individual's online self-presentation (Weisbuch, Ivcevic et al. forthcoming), suggesting that one could potentially substitute for the other.

Individuals use technology to aid in and create self-presentations. O'Sullivan (2000) suggests that "the impression management model…views people as active selectors among interactional channels as a means of managing their self-presentation" (p. 423). In particular,

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computer-mediated interactions are preferred by individuals when they desire greater ambiguity surrounding their self-presentations, while non-mediated interactions (i.e. face-to-face) are preferred by individuals when they desire clarity (O'Sullivan 2000). A preference for the type of interaction is especially strong when one feels threatened (O'Sullivan 2000).

Specific types of online environments, such as dating sites, text-based virtual communities, and blogs, have been the focus of impression management research. Ellison and colleagues examined the self-presentations of individuals using online dating websites and found a unique tension between individuals' desires for self-promotion and the need for accurate self-presentations (Ellison, Heino et al. 2006). On one hand, individuals want to enhance their online dating profile to appear more attractive to potential dates. On the other hand, individuals find it necessary to present themselves accurately in case a face-to-face meeting results after viewing the profile. Over time, participants become aware of this tension and create strategies for determining if a profile is credible, or has appropriately managed this tension, and knowledge of this tension also allows online daters to enhance their own profile (Ellison, Heino et al. 2006). After comparing first impressions garnered through viewing an individual's online self-presentation to first impressions garnered through face-to-face meeting, Weisbuch and colleagues (forthcoming) found that the two first impressions were correlated and that individuals who exhibited expressivity and disclosed online also tended to do so offline. On the contrary, research examining impression formation in text-based virtual communities through qualitative interviews found stark differences between the impression of the individual formed by a community member and the actual person (Jacobson 1999).

The impression management of bloggers has been examined as well. In a study which conducted a content analysis of self-presentations on "A-list" blogs, it was found that the "A-

list" bloggers self-disclosed in higher levels than regular bloggers, including sharing email addresses and phone numbers. Further, the bloggers' impression management strategies tended to be used to either demonstrate competence or for ingratiation as opposed to boasting or exaggerating one's abilities (Trammell and Keshelashvili 2005). This literature suggests that the content of the self-presentation, such as whether it contains text vs. text and photos, can influence both how individuals create their self-presentations and subsequently how the self-presentations affect the impressions formed.

2.3   SUMMARY OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW AND BACKGROUND

The literature review and background section has discussed prior research on social networking sites, in particular their content, the users, and user behavior, and self-presentation, in particular in the hiring context. While these studies have provided interesting and informative findings, they do not address the research questions posed in this dissertation - how do HR professionals utilize social networking sites to learn about job candidates and how these sites influence impressions formed of the job candidates? The following chapters discuss an exploratory study and an experimental study which focus on building upon the existing literature and examining the research questions. In particular, these studies attempt to discover how SNSs are used by HR professionals and their boundary-blurring features allow one audience member to view content from multiple contexts, as discussed in chapter one.

3.0   STUDY ONE

The goal of this dissertation is to develop a better understanding of how boundaries blurred by SNSs and the use of the technologies affect the impressions formed of individuals in the context of the job market. The job market and hiring context is a well-suited area to study this phenomenon because there has traditionally housed a boundary between one's personal life and professional life that can potentially be blurred. Also, as discussed in Chapter 2, prior research has focused on the significant role of self-presentation in the hiring process (e.g., Baron 1986; Tsai, Chen et al. 2005; Weiss and Feldman 2006). The formation of an impression of a potential job candidate is an important process, and it can be impacted by many sources of information (Thomas, Skitka et al. 2002; Van Overwalle and Labiouse 2004; Tunca and Fueller 2009; Douglas and Sutton 2010; Human and Biesanz 2011). Hiring a highly suitable candidate can positively impact an organization, and the costs of hiring new employees are significant. Furthermore, in slower economic times when organizations are challenged to be more productive with fewer resources, there is more pressure on HR professionals to accurately form impressions of the job candidates, which is an important step in the hiring of well qualified, highly suitable candidates.

In order to better understand the effect of boundary-blurring in the job market context, it is important to develop a rich understanding of the hiring process and the role which SNSs play in this process. To this end, first, the literature focusing on impression formation and selection of job candidates in the job market context will be discussed. Second, an exploratory qualitative study is described, which utilized HR professionals as the participants. The purpose of the study was to obtain a thorough understanding of how social networking sites are used in the hiring

process conducted by HR professionals and how they potentially influence the impression formed of candidates. The insights from this exploratory study will be used to inform future work, including the quantitative study in chapter 4.

3.1 PRIOR LITERATURE ON THE HIRING PROCESS

For an organization to function effectively, it needs the appropriate human resources – executives, managers, and associates. Finding and hiring the best candidates to fill open positions in the organization is resource-intensive and challenging. HR professionals use tools, such as network contacts, information systems, publication outlets, and search firms, to attract and learn about potential job candidates. As discussed in Chapter 2, information from these sources is integrated together to form an impression of the candidate and potentially change the recruiter's attitude towards the candidate.

Ferris, Judge, and colleagues suggest that a certain dynamic "fit" is desired between a candidate, a position, an organization, and an interviewer's preferences and expectations (Ferris and Judge 1991; Kacmar, Delery et al. 1992; Cable and Judge 1996). However, recruiters can be biased based on social categories which they assign candidates to (McConnell, Rydell et al. 2008; Human and Biesanz 2011) and priming effects (DeCoster and Claypool 2004). Finding and hiring the best-fit candidate can enhance an organization and lead to greater revenue streams, more customers and leads, increased organizational efficiency, and a congenial work environment (Weiss and Feldman 2006). Hiring a candidate who is a poor fit can lead to adverse effects. These potentially negative outcomes lead HR professionals to utilize any information they can obtain during the candidate hiring process.

3.2   RESEARCH QUESTION: THE ROLE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES IN THE HIRING PROCESS

Human resource professionals are under pressure to hire the best-fit candidates, but determining who these candidates are is challenging. With little information and potentially conflicting information about the candidates, the HR professionals face significant uncertainty. These professionals may attempt to reduce this uncertainty by using SNSs, which are portrayed as central locations for information about people (i.e. one-stop locations for social interaction and information). Thus, SNSs are potentially bountiful locations for information about potential job candidates. But what kind of information will HR professionals find, and what impact will this information have on the impression formed of the job candidates? SNSs contain self-presentations by individuals, and the self-presentations are in the form of profiles, images, videos, and social networks. Hence, the professionals will have access to self-presentations created by potential job candidates if they access SNSs. As mentioned, the job candidates use their own identity while creating self-presentations in SNSs (Kennedy 2006), and thus recruiters may be able to locate individuals offline. Further, the candidates will have designated a network of acquaintances that have potentially viewed the self-presentation and at least passively verified it, though no official verification exists (Rosenblum 2007). For HR professionals that struggle to find potential candidates for a position, will SNSs be used as a critical resource? For HR professionals that are drowning under stacks of resumes, is having an additional source of information for job candidates and information about them unappealing? In addition, the use of SNSs by HR professionals is not without its limitations. When HR professionals examine SNSs for information about a candidate, they can find inaccurate information, out of date information (e.g., website has not been updated), or information that is illegal to use in a hiring decision (e.g.,

date of birth, race, or religion in the United States). To answer these questions and better understand how the HR professionals are using SNSs to reduce their uncertainty, an exploratory qualitative study was conducted to address the first research question of this dissertation - *How do human resource professionals utilize social networking sites to learn about job candidates?* This qualitative study and the results are presented next.

3.3   METHODOLOGY AND DATA

The objective of this study was to develop knowledge and background on the hiring process employed by HR professionals and the role of SNSs in this process. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with HR professionals and recruiters with various levels of experience from organizations in a range of industries.

3.3.1   Participants Recruiting

To learn about the practices of recruiters and hiring managers, it was deemed important to conduct interviews with these individuals directly as opposed to a survey. Rich insight could be obtained through interviews that would potentially not come through in a survey due to the time pressures felt by the target participants. Further, a semi-structured interview style was used to allow the participants to guide the conversation and elaborate on topics they felt were relevant to their practice and the researchers. On a number of occasions, the participants provided extensive detail that would not have been otherwise available if another type of data collection had been utilized.

To recruit the participants for the interviews, a list of HR professionals was developed using a database of recruiters that have a relationship with a large university in the eastern part of the United States. Utilizing the contact information from the database, individuals from a diverse set of organizations (e.g., small businesses and Fortune 500 companies; local, regional, national, and international firms; a variety of industries and sectors) were contacted via email using the invitation shown in Appendix A. When multiple contacts were listed from one organization, only one individual was contacted at that organization (the first one alphabetically). In the first round, 82 individuals were sent email invitations. An additional 11 individuals were sent the email invitation in the second round. These individuals were asked if they would be willing to be interviewed by the researcher about their use of Internet technologies during the hiring process. The email indicated that the interview would last one hour, would take place via telephone or in person, and could be scheduled at their convenience by replying to the email or phoning the researcher. Out of the 93 emails sent, 13 were returned as undeliverable due to invalid email addresses. This was normal considering that the database of recruiters had been developed by the university over a number of years. From the remaining 80 individuals, 8 individuals declined to be interviewed, and 17 individuals responded and indicated that they were not in a position where they would be able to speak to the subject but they had forwarded the email to someone more appropriate. All attempts were made to correspond with the individuals who received the invitation from these 17. However, the forwarded invitations led to very few responses, even after follow-up emails were sent from the researcher. From the original 80 and their assistance, 25 individuals agreed to be interviewed and communicated this to the researchers, and 19 actually setup interview appointments with the researchers. The remaining 6 did not respond after numerous communication attempts following their original

willingness to be interviewed. Thus, the response rate was 23.8% exclusive of the forwarded email attempts, and 19.6% when the forwarded email attempts are included.

The individuals that were willing to be interviewed corresponded with the researcher via email or phone to set up the interview time and medium. In the end, all interviews were conducted via phone. At a designated time, the researcher phoned the participant using Skype to dial a landline or cellular phone number provided by the participant. Upon reaching the participant, the researcher explained the purpose of the interview using a specified introductory script and asked the interviewee if the call could be recorded. A majority of the participants (14 of 19) permitted the researcher to record the interview. Pretty May Call Recorder for Skype was used in conjunction with Skype to record the phone interviews. More often than not, the participant was not available when they had indicated they would be, and 30 minutes to 1 hour would pass before the interview could actual begin. On a number of occasions, the participant rescheduled the interview due to schedule conflicts.

3.3.2   Semi-Structured Interview Script and Procedure

Once the introductory script was read, the researcher began the interview. A semi-structured interview script was used. The interview questions were focused on the hiring process within the participant's organization, whether or not the participant utilized SNSs during this process, and the participant's perspective on the usefulness of SNSs. Basic questions, such as demographic information and organizational attributes (e.g., industry focus, frequency of hiring), were also be asked. The script used during the semi-structured interviews is shown in Appendix B.

3.3.3 Sample

Nineteen recruiters and hiring managers were interviewed by the researcher for the study. Eleven of those interviewed were from Fortune 1000 companies (57.9%), and 15.8% of the organizations for which the participants currently worked are either non-profit or government organizations, 36.8% worked for public organizations, and the remaining 47.4% worked for privately held organizations. A majority of the participants were employed by the organization for which they recruit job candidates (73.4%). The largest sector represented in the sample was the services sector (57.9%). The sample is described in Table 3. The first column indicates whether the participant is responsible for hiring within their own organization (internal) or for other organizations which contracted out this task (external). The second column describes the organization the participant works for. Due to the mix in the size and type of companies, different characteristics are discussed.

Table 3. Qualitative Study Sample Description

#	Hiring for	Organizational Characteristic	Nature of the Organization	Sector	Industry	Job Title
1	Internal	Fortune Global 500	Public	Healthcare	Healthcare Equipment	Human Resources Generalist
2	Internal	Fortune Global 500	Public	Healthcare	Drug Manufacturing	Business Consultant
3	Internal	Fortune 500	Public	Consumer Goods	Auto Manufacturers	Director of Constructive Purchases
4	Internal	Fortune 100	Private	Services	Business services	Experienced Hire Recruiting Manager
5	Internal	Fortune 100	Private	Services	Business services	MBA Campus Recruiter
6	External	Regional	Private	Services	Business services	Senior Search Consultant
7	Internal	Fortune 1000	Public	Services	Drugs wholesale	Account Acquisition Specialist
8	External	Small business	Private	Services	Business services	Owner
9	Internal	Fortune 500	Public	Technology	Computer Systems	University Recruiting Program Manager
10	Internal	Fortune 500	Public	Consumer Goods	Food	Director of Talent Acquisitions
11	Internal	Global	Private	Industrial Goods	Chemicals	Human Resources Representative
12	Internal	Fortune 500	Private	Industrial Goods	Metal Fabrication	Corporate Recruiter
13	Internal	Fortune 1000	Public	Services	Specialty Eateries	Senior Recruiter

14	External	Small business	Private	Services	Business services	Sales and Marketing Placement Manager
15	External	Small business	Non-profit	Services	Business services	Human Resources Strategist
16	External	Small business	Non-profit	Services	Business services	Talent Manager
17	Internal	Fortune 1000	Public	Services	Specialty Eateries	Finance Manager
18	Internal	National	Government	Regulatory	Business services	Chief Recruiter
19	Internal	Small business	Private	Services	Business services	Human Resources Representative

Of the 19 participants interviewed, 42.1% of were male (see Table 4). The age distribution of the participants was broad, as shown in Table 5, and nearly half of the participants were aged 36 to 45. The average tenure in the recruiting profession was 8.68 years among the participants. The tenure was evenly distributed, as shown in Table 6.

Table 4. Gender Distribution of Participants

Gender	Percentage of Participants
Male	42.1% (8)
Female	57.9% (11)

Table 5. Age Distribution of Participants

Age (Years)	Percentage of Participants
25 to 35	26.3% (5)
36 to 45	47.4% (9)
46 to 55	21.1% (4)
56 to 65	5.3% (1)

Table 6. Recruiting Profession Tenure Distribution of Participants

Years in Profession	Percentage of Participants
0 to 4	26.3% (5)
5 to 9	21.1% (4)
10 to 14	36.8% (7)
15 and over	15.8% (3)

3.4   ANALYSIS

During each of the interviews, the researcher recorded extensive notes. Following each of these interviews, the notes were compiled into a more organized document, and for the 14 interviews that were recorded, the electronic recordings were transcribed verbatim. Once the verbatim transcripts were created, the transcripts were edited for clarity (e.g., removed nonsense words, edited grammar without changing meaning) and anonymized (e.g., company name removed and replaced with [Company X]). The edited transcripts were then combined with the interview notes and used for the analysis.

To identify themes in the data and find relevant quotes, the researcher read the notes and transcripts numerous times. After this, the researcher identified pertinent ideas referenced in the notes and relevant passages in each of the transcripts. Then these ideas and passages were compiled into a two-column table with the idea in one column and passages in another. Using this table, the ideas and passages were grouped to identify themes and meaningful quotes for illustration purposes were selected. At some points, the researchers referred back to the original transcript or notes to gain greater clarity on what the participant meant by a particular passage. The process was very fluid and allowed the researcher to be fully immersed in the data. While most of the themes emerged organically, the researcher paid particular attention to carving out

two themes with tension between them. At first glance, it would appear that the participants were sharing the same idea, but upon further investigation it appeared that actually two distinct idea were being shared that were in conflict to with other (e.g., importance of social networking sites vs. pitfalls of use). This two-step process was similar to other qualitative data analysis processes employed to find emerging themes (Gioia, Price et al. 2010) . These themes are discussed below with the illustrative quotes. For a theme to be considered significant and included in the findings, it needed to be mentioned directly or implicitly by at least three participants during the interviews. The full set of themes is presented in Appendix C.

3.5   FINDINGS

The qualitative data collection was conducted to answer the first research question - *How do human resource professionals utilize social networking sites to learn about job candidates?* The data was analyzed to find themes in the data related to this research question. A number of themes emerged from the data during the analysis described above, including when and how SNSs are used and what role recruiters perceive SNSs taking in the hiring process. The findings are divided into five sections. The first section provides a summary of the hiring processes described by the HR professionals. The second section describes the change in the use of SNSs and how HR professionals approach the technology. The third section focuses on how social networking sites are used by HR professionals and three themes of use. The fourth section discusses how self-presentations in SNSs are used by HR professionals to form impressions of candidates. The last section discusses how boundaries are blurred by social networking sites and how HR professionals approach SNS and boundary-blurring.

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3.5.1 Social Networking Sites in the Hiring Process

The analysis of the interviews clearly demonstrated that social networking sites are used and when they are used by the recruiters in the hiring process. Two points in the hiring process were consistently identified as times when SNSs are used: while searching for candidates and while gathering information about candidates. A summary of the hiring processes described by the participants to the researcher is shown in Figure 4, and these two points are indicated with a red box. This summary was developed based on the interviews with the recruiters as the conversations began with the recruiter describing the hiring process within their organization and what technologies were utilized during this process. It should also be noted that the first phase, receive notification of new position and distribute it widely, also frequently involved Internet technology but not usually SNSs. The Internet technologies mentioned included job listing websites, such as Monster.com, HotJobs.com, Ladder.com, and CareerBuilder.com, and the organization's careers websites. In regard to posting open positions on SNSs, such as LinkedIn.com, one recruiter stated, "[LinkedIn does] have kind of a job board in there…it is very similar to Monster, CareerBuilder and HotJobs - those websites that are a job board - but it is specific to LinkedIn. It has different functionality but the basics are still the same. You post a job and people apply" (Senior Recruiter, Specialty Eateries company). This quote and others that were collected by the researcher indicate a potential transition from job posting sites to social networking sites like LinkedIn.com because of the additional networking features the technology provide. This is similar to the results found by Cormode and Krishnamurthy (2008) where e-commerce sites (Web 1.0) were adopting features found in SNSs (Web 2.0) to encourage purchase behaviors. However, this adoption is reversed as the SNSs are adopting features from job board websites (Web 1.0), rather than the job board sites adopting social networking features.

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The two points in the hiring process where social networking technology are utilized will be discussed further in the next two sections.
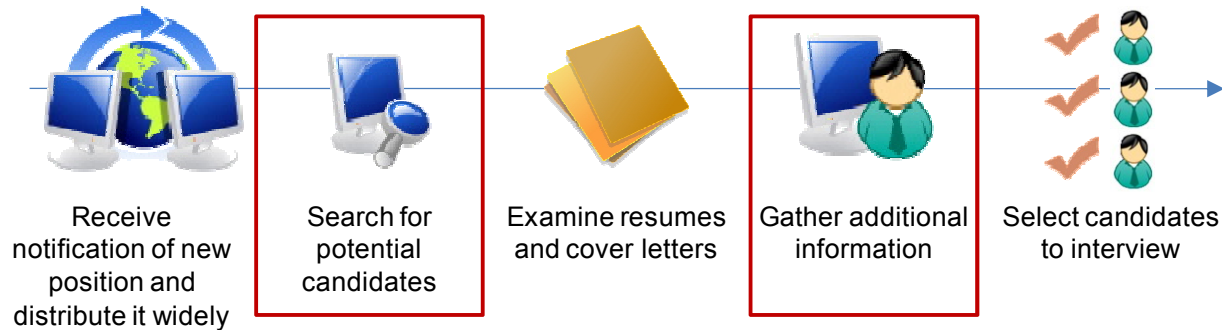

Figure 4. Hiring Process from the Recruiter Perspective

3.5.2   Increasing Importance of Social Networking Sites

Overwhelming, the recruiters reported that social networking site use in the hiring process is increasing and becoming more important to successful candidate searches. While they agreed on the increasing use of SNSs, they did not all believe that they should personally use the technology themselves.   The perspectives varied often depending on whether the individual worked as an internal or external recruiter. Internal recruiters were enthusiastic about the power of these technologies, such as in their ability to source candidates more efficiently financially. The recruiter below, who recruits internally, discussed how candidate searches have changed in the last decade and how SNSs have reduced the need to hire external recruiting firms. Reducing the need to hire external recruiting firms can save an organizations time and money.

I mean gone are the days back in the 90's where we had to take large sums of

money and pay head hunters and search firms to find candidates. We really have

learned internally how to do that. We have sourcing specialists who sit here in the

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US some of which are assigned by industry, by recruiter, by region who help the life cycle recruiters help find candidates. Then we also have sourcing specialists who sit in what we call our US/India regions. I personally have one sourcing specialist outside of this country who is dedicated to working with me…We work towards using a variety of methods in finding candidates on the Internet and social networking.

-Recruiter, Business services firm

Some external recruiters agree with internal recruiters that using SNSs is, in general, useful. An external recruiter below discusses how she uses the technology. She was particularly surprised with how successful she was in placing a candidate she found through a SNS.

I find [LinkedIn] phenomenal. It's a great professional networking site. I think over time it has deemed some really good credibility as a really useful site. If a person is putting up a LinkedIn site, they are putting up that information about them, no one else is. Its young, accomplished professionals out there that want to keep a good network especially with the way the market has been over the past 12 months people want to use technology to their advantage… I made a placement last year that was solely based on LinkedIn. I didn't know about her, hadn't been given her name, she wasn't in our system. I had just done a blind search, she was on profile from what I had saw I called her and we built a really nice relationship I told her about the position, she interviewed and 3 weeks later she was accepting the position…It's the way people are communicating now a days. We are trying to move with the dynamic but also keep those pieces that we always used in place that we know work.

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On the other hand, some external recruiters reported that SNSs are not as useful for them. They suggest that the information they have in their own databases is sufficient to conduct successful candidate searches and that SNSs have similar or redundant information compared to what they already have. Further, external recruiters view SNSs as potential competition for their search services because SNSs take information similar to the information in their own databases and make it available to individuals for little costs. The two recruiters quoted below discuss how they view SNSs, such as LinkedIn.com, as competition.

LinkedIn is our ally and also our competition. LinkedIn for us is if we have

someone in our database that we haven't spoken to in the last year to 3 years very

often they are not there anymore when we reach out to them in the database.

LinkedIn is a wonderful tool for updating that person. I would say 75% of the

people we are contacting have a profile on LinkedIn.

-Recruiter, Business services firm

I guess [LinkedIn] could be considered competition, I am newer to using it but I

find it can be useful. I find that people have responded with it so I haven't found it

to be competition personally.

-Owner, Business services firm

Lastly, one recruiter speculated that SNSs are not used as much as they could be. While he has used SNSs to recruit candidates, the percentage of candidates from these sources is still small compared to other sources, such as the company website.

I [have] gotten recently very good feedback [on using Facebook]. I have gotten a

couple of candidates that I have sourced directly from Facebook. I sourced a

configuration management engineer directly from Facebook, but unfortunately he

declined my offer after accepting it because he got a counter offer from a 3rd

employer. But it is successful; a lot of recruiters do not use it to their advantage. I

know what's out there, I know what the capabilities are, and it's free - so it's

pretty fun and easy... For [Company X] it's fun because [Company X] is already

a well know brand. When we pool our candidates 10% would still come from

social media. Normally the bulk of referrals are through an employee.

-Account Acquisition Specialist, Wholesale drugs firm

The data collected provides ample indication that social networking sites are used by recruiters during the hiring process. However, recruiters each described different ways which they approach the technology, whether they view it as competition or not. These methods for using the technology are described in the next section.

3.5.3   Use of Social Networking Sites by Human Resource Professionals

Analysis of the interviews led to the identification of three themes regarding use of social networking sites by HR professionals. The first theme related to using SNSs to search for potential candidates for an open position. The HR professionals described a number of methods for searching for candidates in SNSs and how they approached the features provided by the technology. The second theme involved using SNSs to complete candidate synopses. The HR professionals described how they use SNSs to gather additional information about candidates

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they were aware of and use that information when deciding whether to either continue or discontinue pursuing the candidate. The third theme involved using SNSs to establish common ground. The HR professionals described how they use SNSs to learn about candidates prior to meeting them, virtually or face-to-face, to facilitate the interaction. Each of these themes is discussed below. While questions were framed around social networking sites in general, when discussing the technology the recruiters mentioned such websites as Facebook.com, LinkedIn.com, Twitter.com, and MySpace.com specifically.

3.5.3.1 Searching for Candidates

The findings of the study show that SNSs are used when recruiters search for potential candidates. After receiving a job requisition, recruiters access SNSs to find suitable candidates. When asked how she finds potential candidates, one recruiter stated, "We use a variety of methods, and we use Monster.com, we use the Ladder, we use LinkedIn. We do some social networking, we blog. We use college recruiting to use that as a pipeline. We do cold calling, employee referrals" (Human Resources Generalist, Healthcare equipment manufacturer). As the recruiter mentions, SNSs are utilized during the hiring process alongside transitional recruiting means. The results of the searches are contacted for further information or to ask for a referral. The use of SNSs to search for candidates is one indicator that self-presentations may affect the impression formed of a candidate by a recruiter during the hiring process, and at the very least, the self-presentations aid job seekers in being noticed by recruiters.

The participants described a variety of ways which they conduct the searches for candidates in SNSs. The first way described was using the keyword search functionality to search for potential candidates and using terms from the job descriptions as the keywords. The recruiters find unique and important keywords in the job description, and search using these

keywords in SNSs. In essence, the recruiter is attempting to find a match between the keywords and information that an individual has included in their self-presentation in the SNSs. The recruiter's quote below describes how she searches for particular keywords, and then decides whether or not to pursue that individual based on his or her self-presentation in the SNS.

> *[In LinkedIn.com,] you can do keyword searches. So I might type in state government, or I might type in a little more detail and type in health information exchange systems. Just whatever it is that I may be looking for. Then it may bring up particular profiles of people that might match my keyword search. You can search on that site by geography or in a variety of ways. The profiles of the professionals are not all that detailed but sometimes I can get a sense of whether it is someone I want to follow up with.*

> *-Recruiter, Business services firm*

The recruiter states that the self-presentations, more specifically profiles, are not very detailed. This raises an interesting question: do more detailed self-presentations in SNSs aid job seekers? On one hand, having a more detailed self-presentation could lead to the job seeker appearing in the search results of more recruiters. On the other hand, having a more detailed self-presentation could make it easier for the recruiter to eliminate the job seeker from the search if the appropriate self-presentation was not created and maintained. This topic would benefit from future research considering the degree of use of SNSs described in the interviews.

 Recruiters that utilize SNSs to search for candidates discussed how the technology helps them find individuals that fit special requirements for a position, such as background in a particular area or a specific combination of skills. This is highlighted in the comment above by the owner of the business services firm when she discussed searching for an individual with a

background involving an "organic" food producer. Previously, it was more difficult for the recruiters to find these candidates who possess niche requirements. The recruiter quoted below describes how he uses a variety of methods, including SNSs, to identify candidates with niche requirements.

> *...we will use multiple methods for sourcing. Whether it's utilizing our own*
>
> *database or hitting the job boards like Monster.com or CareerBuilder. We will*
>
> *normally post the position first on those websites and a few other sites that are*
>
> *niched towards what we are looking to do. Then we will use social mediums like*
>
> *LinkedIn and Facebook. I work with a few local organizations that will be niched*
>
> *in a diversity perspective or a technical profession perspective…*
>
> *-Account Acquisition Specialist, Wholesale drugs firm*

This suggests that adding more detail to one's self-presentation in SNSs will assist job seekers in being found by recruiters searching for candidates because niche keywords will be matched with the candidates' self-presentations.

Another method for conducting search discussed by the participants was searching based on geography. The recruiter quoted above mentioned geographical search and conducts internal hiring, and thus is looking for potential candidates in her own geographic region. However, recruiters that are working under contract for a separate organization or that hire for a large region (e.g., recruiter hiring for all northeast U.S. offices) often have to source candidates that are not located in their own geographic region. This makes the geographic search capabilities even more useful, and this situation is described below. This recruiter tends to search first based on geography due to her role as an external recruiter, while the internal recruiter above searched first based on keywords due to her already strong network in her local region.

You can put in a city, where the job is located, then I will do a radius depending

on what type of job it is - maybe a 50 mile radius or something - then I will put in

the job title or if it's a position that has any kind of specification with it…recently

I worked on a position that was an organic, then I will put in organic, then

broaden the search that way so it's not just the city, then generically see if the

word organic is in their title and see if anybody pops up. So usually I do location,

job title, then usually a keyword...

-Owner, Business services firm

There was also a pattern among the comments made by recruiters that suggested that they gauge the potential candidates' level of interest in particular topics, such as specific areas of work, specific industries, or software applications, by the presence or absence of this information from the self-presentation. Below, one recruiter comments on the inclusion of a particular software application in one's Facebook profile as an indicator of their zeal towards to the software application.

[Using Facebook has] been fun, actually, because Facebook is not the normal

routine to go find a job. There are different programs like Marketplace where you

can post jobs at that are free for employers. There's a place now for employers to

advertise on Facebook. When you do do a search inside of Facebook for people,

it's going to be more miss than hit because people out there are not going to say

they are a SharePoint developer or make that public, but [of] the people that do

post that, you know [they] have an interest in that. I send a warm email message

through Facebook. I prefer the email method through Facebook because of the

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nature of Facebook, but in LinkedIn it might be a different story. I might send

them an email and call them because it's a more professional route.

-Account Acquisition Specialist, Wholesale drugs firm

This quote also illustrates how the recruiting process is more nuanced that collecting resumes and matching the indicated skills sets with the desired skill sets in the job description. As discussed in the prior literature, a certain dynamic "fit" is desired between a candidate, a position, an organization, and an interviewer's preferences and expectations (Ferris and Judge 1991; Kacmar, Delery et al. 1992; Cable and Judge 1996). This quote suggests that viewing of self-presentations in SNSs may be one way to assess how strong the fit will be between the candidate, the position, the organizations, and the recruiter's preferences and expectations.

The participants interviewed also utilized the connections feature of SNSs during their searching. The connections features of SNSs allow individuals to connect their profiles with those of others. The recruiter's quote below describes how the connections can be utilized to find candidates similar to previous well-fit candidates and employees. In this particular quote, the recruiter discusses how she was searching for graduates from a particular program from which they had previously hired graduates. By accessing the previous hire's list of connections, the recruiter is able to find other potential candidates with similar backgrounds.

If we are looking for someone, typically, we are doing a keyword search other

than their name. Like Facebook, if we are looking for an industrial engineer. We

would be searching under schools. For students who went to Pitt for an example,

then looking at their major and education on there - Bachelors, industrial

engineering - so we are doing kind of a search. Not necessarily taking a name and

searching on there but we are using the tool to source candidates...usually once

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you find one you can look through their list of friends and find people they are

going to school with and majoring with.

–Human Resources Generalist, Healthcare eequipment firm

This quote brings up the interesting question of how a job seeker's list of connections can benefit him or her when applying for a job. There is evidence that one's social network, as explicitly represented in a SNS, can impact the hiring process, and this study illustrates that the details of this influence should be investigated in future research.

In addition to access the connections of others, the recruiters described utilizing their own connections, both first degree and multi-degree, in SNSs. Specifically in regard to using LinkedIn.com to find candidates, one recruiter stated, "It would be one of three ways. We would either post on that site, we would also use our networks on that site and call into our networks, or we would search the database by name and try to get connected through individuals that we may have in our network to connect us with other individuals." (Director of Talent Acquisitions, Food products firm). This quote illustrates the importance of the connections feature found in most SNSs. The recruiters described using this visual record of one's relationships as an indicator of one's professional goals and as a tool to reach into extended relationships.

The connections feature was mentioned by all of the recruiters that discussed their use of social networking sites to search for candidates. These quotes and others suggest that the connections contained in the self-presentations in SNSs may be important in addition to what information is put forth by the individual in the profile. Individuals can be located via individuals they are connected with, which lead job seekers and recruiters to establish contact.

Lastly, recruiters spoke about was the ability to find candidates that were not currently looking for a new position. The recruiters called these passive candidates. These passive

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candidates are valuable to recruiters because they can either be convinced that a better opportunity exists for them or they can refer the recruiter to someone who is qualified and looking. One recruiter discussed how she is able to turn passive candidates into active candidates using LinkedIn.com.

> *A lot of people that are on Linked in aren't necessarily job seekers. They are what*
> *we call passive candidates. So we use it as a tool to reach out to someone who is*
> *not on Monster.com. Someone may not be looking for a job at all but when we*
> *find their LinkedIn profile we might be able to peek their interest by introducing*
> *them to a position that we have available. Therefore turning a passive candidate*
> *into an active one.*
>
> *–Human Resources Generalist, Healthcare equipment firm*

The interviews demonstrated that SNSs are used in hiring processes as the recruiters were familiar with such sites such as LinkedIn.com, Facebook.com, and Twitter.com. Further, the recruiters described accessing these sites to conduct searches for potential candidates.

3.5.3.2 Completing a Candidate Synopsis

Based on the discussions with the recruiters about their use of social networking sites during their hiring processes, the second time SNSs are used is when recruiters gather additional information about candidates. Many of the recruiters believe that SNSs have helped them conduct their work and locate qualified potential candidates they have lost contact with. A senior search consultant described this type of situation by stating, "[LinkedIn] has become a huge part of our recruiting practice …[it] has been a great social media lead for us. We have used

that a lot in terms of finding candidates that we have lost…" In these instances, recruiters are already aware of a potential candidate and are searching for information about that candidate.

SNSs are often accessed passively without the potential candidate knowing they are being considered. When the recruiter is trying to decide whether or not to pursue a candidate which he or she has little information about, the recruiter will search for the candidate's profile in SNSs. Below, a recruiter describes how a potential candidate's LinkedIn.com profile leads her to follow-up with the potential candidate or not.

> *… usually what happens is we have the LinkedIn information prior to having seen*
>
> *a resume. So if we are contacted by someone we do not know, we use their*
>
> *LinkedIn profile, and we use that as a gauge line to see if they are qualified. Then*
>
> *contact for an actual resume and once we received a resume we really don't refer*
>
> *back to the LinkedIn profile because the resume is more comprehensive.*
>
> *–Human Resources Generalist, Healthcare equipment firm*

This recruiter is again referring to the lack of detail in the self-presentations found in SNSs, which was mentioned by a recruiter in section 3.5.3.1.

SNSs also provide a means for recruiters to passively filter through potential candidates they received from another source. A recruiter below describes how she had a list of potential candidates she became aware of at a conference, and she used LinkedIn.com to gather additional information about them.

> *…Say we attended a conference within a certain industry. Usually if you are an*
>
> *attendee you receive a list of other attendees, then we go and call some of those*
>
> *people to network with and tell them here are some openings we have, do you*
>
> *know anyone who might be a fit? So there are times we are doing things like*

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LinkedIn and cold calling and just general networking outside of [Organization

X].com and outside of job boards. I would say LinkedIn is the social network site,

if you can even call it a social networking site, that we recruiters use most outside

of the job boards…

<div align="right">

-Recruiter, Business services firm

</div>

Recruiters also discussed how SNSs can aid in helping them further reduce their candidate pools by gathering additional information. For example, one recruiter talked about using SNSs to search for information about candidates that she was not already aware of so that she could narrow down the group of ten candidates she had identified out of hundreds initially (Chief Recruiter, Government agency). This demonstrates that SNSs can play a crucial role in the critical steps of hiring process where key decisions are made on who to call back.

Lastly, there was also a pattern of recruiters mentioning using SNSs as a way to gauge the personality and character of a potential candidate. As one recruiter stated, it is a means for "checking the bases" (Talent Manager, Non-profit consulting organization). Recruiters indicated that if the potential candidate did not want them to see the information they posted, then they should not have posted it. As one recruiter stated, "Anything that is on that site we look at as fair game because you wouldn't put it there if you didn't want somebody to see it" (Senior Search Consultant, business services firm). Recruiters were approaching SNSs as a way to further develop their impression of the candidate. Recruiting felt that they had enough education and experience-related information, but they did not have the information that would allow them to determine if the candidate's personality and character would match that of the organization, a concern which has been discussed a significant part of the hiring process in recent literature (e.g., Del Giudice 2010). Recruiters have started using SNSs as a source for this information.

In addition to gathering information to complete the synopses, recruiters are using the information as part of their impression formation and decision making processes. If recruiters find information in SNSs that they do not believe indicates the candidate is well-suited for the position, this information is used as an additional source. When deciding whether to pursue a candidate with such a self-presentation in a SNS, recruiters indicated that they are not willing to engage potential candidates that have such inappropriate information.

We are using the social networks more for the college hires because for the most

part they are not going to have information on LinkedIn. And also it's sort of a

character check in addition to verifying education background….

–Human Resources Generalist, Healthcare eequipment firm

This further complicates the question raised above as to how job seekers should approach the use of SNSs and what should be included in their self-presentations. While there is evidence that additional detail may help them be found by recruiters (e.g., via keyword matches or geography matches), there is also evidence that demonstrates that some additional information can be perceived negatively by recruiters. In other words, if certain details are found in a SNS profile, then the candidate is excluded from further consideration because the HR professional becomes uncertain.

If we see something in their profile that we don't think is appropriate, then we just

don't even bother asking them for a resume.

–Human Resources Generalist, Healthcare equipment firm

The discussions of gathering information about a known potential candidate via SNSs and using SNSs to filter potential candidates are both indicators that the technology aid recruiters

in generating or adding to a synopsis of the potential candidate. Since the generation of or addition to the candidate's synopsis is being done with information from SNSs, then the candidate's self-presentation in the SNSs can affect the synopsis and potential selection into the desired candidate pool.

3.5.3.3 Establishing Common Ground

Additionally, and somewhat unexpectedly, many recruiters discussed using SNSs to facilitate initial communication between themselves and individuals that they are only loosely connected with. The recruiter below discusses how she uses SNSs to gather information about a potential candidate before she calls him or her on the telephone, which allows her to better guide the conversation and discuss relevant topics.

> *Sometimes before you want to call someone you think you have common ground*
>
> *with you want to if you can find out a little more about them before you launch*
>
> *that call. So we use it in terms of you can plug the person's name in and see when*
>
> *they graduated from school, what part of the country they are from, their career*
>
> *progression essentially. Sometimes people don't spend a lot of time on them but in*
>
> *[my industry] it's pretty popular. It's also a pretty open tool for people to use. So*
>
> *when we call people we will know a little bit more about them before the actual*
>
> *conversation, and it makes it more of a natural flow… I had just done a blind*
>
> *search, she was on profile from what I had saw I called her and we built a really*
>
> *nice relationship …*

> *-Senior Search Consultant, Business services firm*

The recruiter describes how she is gathering information to establish common ground between herself and the candidate. This pattern indicates that SNSs are being used to gather information that is not typically available to recruiters, such as personal interests. Further, this indicates that it might be fruitful for job seekers to provide such information in SNSs so that recruiters can access it. Providing this information can allow job seekers and recruiters to establish relationships, which can be beneficial for both parties in the short and long term.

3.5.4 Self-Presentations in Social Networking Sites

In addition to discussing the use of social networking sites, the researcher asked the participants what specific types of information they were seeking to find in SNSs and what stood out when they accessed the technology. When asked about viewing potential candidate's personal websites, one participant stated, "It might be a nice topic once we get into an interview to tell me about. If it sounds interesting, then I might be interested in a second interview with the candidate." (Business Consultant, Drug manufacturing firm). In general, the recruiters noted that it is helpful for them to see such self-presentations and as much relevant information in SNS as possible. Initially, recruiters reported looking for much of the same information in SNSs profiles as they would in resumes and cover letters. One recruiter described what she looks for below.

I would definitely say what their interests are, where they went to school, how

well they did in school, what extracurricular activities they were involved in, what

groups they belong to…So as an employer, if we pulled your information - if there

is something you don't want people to see, I would suggest you don't put it up

there.

As shown, the recruiter reported looking for education background and various types of experience. Both of these are items that would be listed on a standardized resume or in a cover letter. This recruiter also discussed looking at the candidates' interests, as was also mentioned in the end of section 3.5.3.3.

Some SNSs allow individuals to rate or refer each other and each other's work, another form of establishing a connection between individuals' self-presentations. Most recruiters who discussed the ratings or referrals indicated that they carry little weight in their hiring processes. The recruiters' quotes below bluntly refer to their lack of interest in the referrals in SNSs.

I don't really give [the online referrals] any thought. I have been asked by people who used to be employed by [Organization X] but I don't think seeing a referral would make me more apt to contacting somebody and certainly not seeing one doesn't make a difference.

-Recruiter, Business services firm

I don't put a ton of weight on their [online] recommendations because anyone can write them a recommendation but I do look at who they are networked with, who their friends are, because sometimes I will know those people. So I really go by referrals, I know recommendations are nice but you can always get your friend to write you a recommendation so I don't put a lot of weight on those.

-Owner, Business services firm

Rather than referrals, which are an alternative means of establishing connections between individuals, recruiters emphasized their focus on the connections that an individual built inside of

the SNSs, as mentioned in the first sentence of the quote above. The recruiters mentioned that they wanted to see evidence of conscientious networking, rather than just networking with anyone and everyone using the technology. One recruiter mentioned that he notes the "quality of a candidate's network" and looks for "professional networking" and "discriminating, purposeful connections" and to see if there is an overlap between his network and the candidate's network (Finance Manager, Specialty Eateries company), and a similar theme was aired in other recruiters' interviews. By utilizing this feature, recruiters are suggesting that the quality of the explicit networks captured in SNS an indicator of the candidate's networking ability, existing connections with other professionals, and their foundation of potential job candidates to referrals and customers to attract.

Another feature that recruiters reported looking at in SNSs is the groups a potential candidate belongs to. Groups were identified as useful for finding individuals with specific interests, but were not mentioned an as indicator that would strongly influence whether an individual would be pursued. The recruiters' quotes below describe how they joined a group with a specific topic to find potential candidates that were knowledgeable on that topic or get referred to potential candidates.

> *To see people for the Siebel QA position, I would have joined the Siebel QA group*
> *and maybe posted in there or talked to people in that group about "hey does*
> *anybody know a Siebel QA person"…But the groups do have value…When I am*
> *looking at somebody's profile when I run a search, I don't bother looking at the*
> *groups because groups are a starting point they are not a qualifying point.*
>
> *-Senior Recruiter, Specialty earteries firm*

If they are not what we are looking for we utilize some other websites such as

Facebook and LinkedIn. My favorite is LinkedIn right now. I am able to

accomplish quite a few things. I joined several groups for specific positions I am

looking for. For example a Tax position, International Tax is not very common

here in Pittsburgh. Unless I want to go through an agency I want to identify those

good candidates so I would go onto LinkedIn and join a couple of tax groups and

then communicate with those individuals in those groups and potential identify a

good candidate that I could talk to about the opportunity and if those people are

not the right candidates maybe I can get a referral from them. So maybe it's not a

direct recruitment source but maybe you are networking to identify candidates for

future opportunities as well...

<div align="center">

-Recruiter, Metal fabdication firm

</div>

However, as the next quote represents, not all recruiters have been successful utilizing this technique.

...I have joined some of those groups, and I don't find them useful to me. I used to

look at that, but I guess I haven't be quite as successful with those groups so I

don't look at that too heavily...

<div align="center">

-Owner, Business services firm

</div>

Lastly, recruiters discussed the issue of photographs of candidates in SNSs. All recruiters that discussed this adamantly stated that the photographs do not influence their decisions. However, one recruiter mentioned that it can be convenient to know what a candidate looks like,

especially when recruiting under contract. This is in line with the use of SNSs to establish common ground, as discussed in section 3.5.3.3.

Yes, I look at [pictures on LinkedIn profiles], it makes it more human. Especially if someone has a nice smile and looked friendly because I know they are going to represent me at their interview so I want to make sure they look eager and takes time on how to look and professional.

-Owner, Business services firm

If you are looking for a job and you have your profile on LinkedIn or if you are passively open to new opportunities…don't have a photo, don't have your drunken party pictures from last night, don't have your modeling pictures up, but it also doesn't have to be a professional head shot either. It really doesn't matter as long as it's appropriate for the tool or social network that you are in. Twitter is going to be a completely different picture - it might not even be a person - it could be whatever on Facebook… so think about the tool you are on. I only notice it when it's completely inappropriate and then I just go to the next one.

-Senior Recruiter, Specialty eateries firm

The recruiters' discussions of the aspects of the self-presentations they consider relevant in SNSs provides a nuanced and conflicting perspective. Some aspects of the self-presentations, such as lists of connections, are consider useful by recruiters, while other aspects, such as referrals or ratings, are not. It is especially interesting how recruiters consider lists of connections useful, but do not consider referrals very useful. The referral is essentially a

connection with additional information about the relationship between the individuals, and many job candidates seek these out in an effort to improve their self-presentations in SNSs.

3.5.5 Blurring Boundaries with Social Networking Sites

The issue of SNSs blurring the boundaries between different contexts, such as personal and professional, was a theme throughout the interviews with the recruiters. In recognition of the potential for boundary-blurring, some recruiters were hesitant or did not use specific SNSs because they were not interested in the content contained within then. The owner of a business services firm that recruits candidates for other organizations suggests below that one specific SNS, Facebook.com, is a social site and is thus not a site where information about one's career would be presented, based on her prior use of Facebook.com.

> *To me, [Facebook is] more of a social site, and it's not driven for business so*
> *people don't communicate information even about their current job on there. So*
> *it's more of a way to find people rather than find out about them besides social*
> *information. It doesn't have a page where you can post your resume. At least I*
> *haven't seen that, if it does nobody that I know has done that.*
>
> *-Owner, Business services firm*

In addition to suggesting that professional information is not presented in boundary-blurring SNSs, the recruiter below suggests that utilizing the technology is not part of the already diligent hiring process and boundaries should be maintained (e.g., "their personal life is their personal life"). However, it is interesting to note that he makes an exception for extremely negative information at the end.

It's one of time and one of sticking with our process. We care about

understanding how well candidates will do on the job; their personal life is their

personal life. We interview them, we look at their resume and their academics,

their work experience, their community involvement and how well they

interview...We don't really care what they do off the job as long as it's not

criminal.

-Director of Constructive Purchases, Automobile manufacturer

This quote illustrates that the recruiter is maintaining the existing boundary between personal and professional, and thus does not use Facebook.com as source during the hiring process. In addition to maintaining this boundary for job candidates, recruiters talked about how they managed their own boundaries between their personal lives and professional lives. The recruiter's quote below illustrates how she approaches maintaining this boundary by using LinkedIn.com for her professional interactions, Facebook.com for her personal interactions, and not mixing the two.

I only use LinkedIn. In terms of finding candidates I try to keep my Facebook

profile separate. I don't mix that with candidates. [Facebook] doesn't seem very

professional to me. I don't use that kind of medium. If I did I would probably make

a whole different website or a whole another Facebook account.

-Senior Search Consultant, Business services firm

The actions taken to maintain the boundaries, as illustrated by the quotes above, are in contrast to other discussions where recruiters stated, "Anything that is on [social networking sites] we look at as fair game because you wouldn't put it there if you didn't want somebody to

see it" (Senior Search Consultant, Business services firm). This quote suggests that boundary-blurring is appropriate behavior during the hiring process and that it should be expected by the job seekers. The recruiter's quote below also illustrates the use acceptance of boundary-blurring, especially considering that stories about it were passed between offices on different continents.

...I have heard stories about our office in Germany. I do not know if it's anything methodical or thought out. Stories of people that were found on Facebook that were coming in for an interview. I do not think they have done it to say yes or no, or to look for addition info to grant them an interview or not. Frankly there are so much bits of information coming in; just due to the sheer volume of resumes that we get; it's just not a good investment of our time. If it's not on their resume it's not something I am going to spend my time on...

-Business Consultant, Drug manufacturing firm

While there may be aspects of the technology and the intent of the job applicant, from these interviews it is apparent that the agency of the HR professional is also a significant factor in the maintaining or blurring boundary.

3.6   IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

This first study addressed one of the research questions of this dissertation - *How do human resource professionals utilize SNSs to learn about job candidates?* – by conducting an exploratory qualitative study. Data was collected via semi-structured interviews with a sample of HR professionals and analyzed for emerging themes and patterns. The findings demonstrated

support for the research question as illustrated by the quotes discussing the use of SNSs by job candidates during the hiring process and how impressions are formed using the self-presentations found in SNSs. Not only is social networking technology used during the hiring process, there is evidence that the use is increasing and that it is used differently across the group of recruiters interviewed. Social networking sites are not treated like a simple repository of factual information about candidates, which is in contrast to how recruiters utilize their in-house candidate management systems and other Internet technologies, such as job boards and career websites. The use of SNSs is more nuanced and complex, as illustrated in the section discussing the use of SNSs, and the technology is frequently viewed as a public space open for observation of candidate's behaviors. Inside of the self-presentations, different aspects, such as personal interests, groups, and connections, are used to form an impression of the candidate.

3.6.1 Limitations

As with any study involving data collection, the findings must be qualified by a number of potential limitations. First, the findings were based on a small sample of 19. While 19 is small, it was deemed appropriate because this study was exploratory in nature and involved lengthy interviews. Second, the diversity in the organizations which employ the participants in the sample reduces the ability to compare across participants and organizations. Recruitment of job candidates is a different process in a Fortune 500 Global company versus a small business, and this was discussed by the participants themselves. Whether this also leads to differences in how they approach the use of SNSs in unknown. The diversity in the organizations was a result of how the sample was developed. The goal was to end up with a diverse set of perspectives, but this carries limitations as well. In the future, an additional round of interviews could be

conducted which samples similar organizations (e.g. retail or manufacturing) exclusively so that comparisons can be more appropriately made across the organizations.

Third, some participants indicated that his or her organization had a policy regarding the use of SNSs during hiring. While this was very few and did not seem to impact the participants' behavior, this could be a potential bias in the data.

Fourth, the semi-structured interviews allowed the participants to frequently guide the conversation and include anecdotes of their choosing. While this led to a rich data set, employing a semi-structured interview technique does incorporate some bias in the data because topics can be mentioned by one participant and not another participant, and this does not mean that the second participant disagrees with the first. In other words, absence of data about a particular topic means neither agreement nor lack thereof – it is simply unknown.

3.6.2   Implications for Research

The findings of this exploratory study show that impression formation following the viewing of self-presentations in SNSs is a wide area of research with many unanswered questions. The varied uses of SNSs by the participants demonstrate that individuals are still unsure of how to best use SNSs. Also, as discussed in the literature review and background section, very few research articles have attempted to investigate the intersection of impression formation and social networking technology. With some SNSs having over 500 million users and businesses utilizing these sites to reach consumers every day, researchers should consider exploring how SNSs impact the impression formed by users of individuals or businesses who create self-presentations in the sites. In particular, researchers should focus on developing a better understanding of how self-presentations in SNSs impact impression formation in each of

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the uses illustrated in this study: searching for candidates, completing candidate synopses, and establishing common ground.

3.6.3 Implications for Practice

This exploratory study provides many implications for practice and specific implications for each of the interested subgroups: individuals who create self-presentations in SNSs, HR professionals and hiring managers, and SNS providers. First, for individuals who create self-presentations in SNSs, they should be aware that their self-presentations may be viewed by HR professionals and hiring managers when they apply for a job and that this information will be factored into the impression formed. Thus, their self-presentations should only contain information that they want to be seen by the HR professionals. Also, HR professionals are looking for individuals that have a presence in SNSs and utilize them to network with others in their profession.

Second, HR professionals and hiring managers can learn from this research how their colleagues are using SNSs to search for candidates and learn about them and to establish common ground and generate conversation topics for interviews and meetings with candidates. The participants interviewed generally showed that they are successfully using SNSs to find candidates that are suitable to hire, and HR professionals that are not using SNSs can realize these benefits by using them.

Third, SNS providers can learn from this research how they can design the sites to better suit the needs of users and create customized experiences for both types of users – HR professionals and individual job candidates. For HR professionals, SNS providers could incorporate better search options so that the flood of potential candidates can be filtered. For

individuals on the job market, SNS providers could offer a filter or screening mechanism that would allow them to create a clean and professional self-presentation. Also, SNS providers could allow individuals to view who has looked at their profiles or the IP addresses of viewers. Further, SNS vendors should take note that some HR professionals are not using SNSs because of their boundary-blurring nature. Measures could be taken to create environments that are less boundary-blurring and more boundary-preserving.

3.6.4   Implications for Study Two

Each HR professional interviewed developed his or her own way of utilizing SNS technology and incorporated it into the hiring process employed by his or her organization. The elicitation of the hiring processes demonstrated how significant the potential role for SNSs is and showed the different areas where SNSs can impact the process. With the use of SNSs in the hiring process came a discussion of whether boundaries are blurred when HR professionals access SNSs and self-presentations created by job candidates and whether or not the information viewed should be considered. The findings demonstrated a clear, unanswered question of how significantly the information viewed in the SNSs affects impressions formed by HR professionals. Many HR professionals indicated that they attempted to maintain boundaries on their own despite the boundary-blurring nature of some SNS. However, given existing research on first impressions and priming (DeCoster and Claypool 2004; Human and Biesanz 2011; Weisbuch, Ivcevic et al. forthcoming) and the potential impact of viewing self-presentations in SNSs, future work should investigate whether the information in the self-presentations impacts the impression formed, whether HR professionals desire to incorporate it into the impression or not. This question will be addressed in the next chapter.

3.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter discussed an exploratory qualitative study with the goal of better understanding the hiring process and how SNSs are used during the process. In the next chapter, this dissertation builds upon the findings regarding the impact of boundary-blurring and focuses further on how recruiters form impressions of the candidate after viewing the self-presentation in such sites. This first study is used to inform the hypotheses that are investigated and provide context and background for interpreting the results of the experimental study.

4.0   STUDY TWO

The overarching goal of this dissertation is to theorize how the use of social networking sites, which blur boundaries, affects impressions formed of the individuals presenting themselves in the sites. The chosen context for studying the formation of impressions is the job market, where HR professionals form impressions of job candidates. Prior research suggests that impression management is a complex process (e.g., Baron 1986; Tsai, Chen et al. 2005; Weiss and Feldman 2006). Study one, described in Chapter 3, began the exploration of the role social networking sites play in impression formation demonstrating that SNS's role in both hiring and impression formation is nuanced and contingent.

Building upon the findings of study one, this chapter describes the theoretical development, hypotheses, methodology, and findings of a second study. In contrast to study one's qualitative data, this second study uses quantitative data gathered through an online impression formation experiment using a job market context. The purpose of the study was to test hypotheses built upon theory about how SNSs impact the evaluation of a job candidate. These hypotheses predict how different factors surrounding self-presentation in SNSs influence HR professionals' impressions of a candidate.

4.1   THEORY AND BACKGROUND

Drawing from the literature regarding self-presentation and impression formation, this section begins with a discussion of why social networking sites are a unique source of

information about job candidates, fundamentally different than previously studied forms of self-presentation, such as interviews and resumes. This section then theorizes how a HR professional forming an impression incorporates information from a SNS and proposes hypotheses about how HR professionals and hiring managers use these impressions during subsequent evaluations of a candidate.

The impression formed of the job candidate is captured by the dependent variable candidate suitability. *Candidate suitability* is the degree to which the individual forming the impression of the candidate believes that the candidate is well-matched with the target position. In a hiring context, a HR professional or hiring manager gathers information to determine the candidate's suitability. This dependent variable is an adaptation of impression favorability, a common focus of studies in the self-presentation and impression formation literature (Hamilton and Huffman 1971). Building on studies of impression favorability, candidate suitability is expected to be important because it represents the HR professional's attitude towards the job candidate, and it strongly impacts whether the job candidate will be asked to interview, allowed continue through the interview process, and be hired for the position (Baker and Spier 1990; Higgins and Judge 2004).

4.1.1   Uncertainty Reduction through Observation

Individuals work to reduce situated uncertainty (Leary 1996; Hogg 2005). According to Hogg, "[c]ertainty renders existence meaningful and confers confidence in how to behave and what to expect from the physical and social environment within which ones finds oneself" (2005). Individuals attempt to form impressions of others in part to reduce their uncertainty about them, and they form impressions by observing the individuals (Berger and Douglas 1981).

The types of observation identified in prior literature include interactive, active, and passive (Berger and Douglas 1981; Hogg 2005).

Interactive observation involves a direct exchange between the individual forming the impression and the target individual (i.e., who the impression is being formed of) (Berger and Douglas 1981). During this direct exchange, the target individual is aware that he is being observed and knows the focus of the observation. Examples of interactive observation include questioning and explicitly interviewing. Active observation occurs when the individual forming the impression conducts an indirect but proactive exchange to learn about the target individual (Berger and Douglas 1981). The exchange can be with the target individual or with a third party. In active observation, the target individual is aware that he is being observed but is not aware of the focus of the observation, or which aspects of the self-presentation are being evaluated. Because the actions of the observer are less visible to the target, the target individual has a harder time deciphering what is being evaluated. Examples of active observation include questioning others about the individual or creating an artificial situation to observe the individual. Passive observation is when the individual forming the impression observes the target individual with there being no effect on the target individual (Berger and Douglas 1981). In passive observation, the target individual is neither aware of the observation or its focus during the actual observation. Examples of passive observation include hiring a private investigator to trail the target individual or unobtrusively observing someone in a public setting (e.g., park, coffeehouse). It is desirable to conduct as many different types of observation as possible to reduce the most uncertainty when forming the impression (Berger and Douglas 1981). To reduce the most uncertainty about a job candidate, HR professionals and hiring managers can utilize each of these types of observation.

In a hiring context, HR professionals conduct interviews and evaluations of the job candidate (i.e. target individual) to interactively observe the candidates (Dipboye 1982; Baron 1986; Forsythe 1990; Rosenfeld 1997). Resumes are a form of active observation given the standardization of the content and style (Knouse, Giacalone et al. 1988; Toth 1993; Knouse 1994; Nemanick and Clark 2002; Cole, Feild et al. 2004; Cole, Feild et al. 2009). Job candidates are aware that a resume will be viewed by the individual forming the impression because the candidate gave it to him or her, but are not aware of what particular aspects will be focused on. Artificial scenarios can also be created for an individual to engage and act upon, and references are collected and contacted to actively observe the candidates. HR professionals recruiting candidates conduct interactive and active observations to reduce uncertainty, and the literature has discussed the potential benefits and dangers of these observation strategies (e.g., Baron 1983; Forsythe 1990; Rosenfeld 1997; Nemanick and Clark 2002; Del Giudice 2010). In both interactive and active observations the job candidate is aware that he or she is being observed and has the opportunity to craft his or her self-presentation for the audience being presented to. Self-presentations via resumes, the most prevalent type of observation in the hiring process (Dipboye and Jackson 1999), afford individuals the opportunity to be aware that they will be observed by the individual forming the impression. Because of this knowledge, the candidate can craft, to a certain extent, the self-presentation in the resume to be suitable for the audience.

With passive observation, the job candidate does not have the opportunity to craft his or her self-presentation for the particular audience because the candidate is neither aware of the observation or its focus (Berger and Douglas 1981). Thus, passive observation is considered one of the most informative types of observation as the individual forming the impression is less likely to think that the target is acting or performing to the audience (Berger and Douglas 1981).

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While passive observation can be informative, it is also more difficult to conduct. Observing a job candidate without the candidate knowing they are being observed is not part of the typical hiring process, largely because it would be too difficult, expensive, and often impossible to setup (Dipboye and Jackson 1999). However, passive observation can be conducted via social networking sites because HR professionals can observe the self-presentation created by the job candidate without the candidate being aware of the observation or its focus (Boyd 2007; Boyd and Ellison 2007; Kennedy 2009). This avenue for passive observation is relatively inexpensive compared to other methods. The potential importance of passive observation and the reduced expense create an opportunity for passive observation via SNSs to play a significant role in forming an impression of job candidates. The self-presentation passively observed may play an especially significant role because the HR professional may be less likely to discount the self-presentation as simply a performance or acting.

4.1.2   Passive Observation through Social Networking Sites

Social networking sites are online environments where individuals can create self-presentations and other individuals can view the self-presentations (Boyd 2004; George 2006; Dwyer, Hiltz et al. 2007). When someone views another individual's online self-presentation, the individual that created the self-presentation is typically not aware that his or her self-presentation is being viewed (Boyd 2007). A situation where an individuals' self-presentation is viewed without the individuals knowing they are being observed or the purpose of the observation is passive observation (Berger and Douglas 1981). Hence, SNSs create a situation for passive observation to occur. HR professionals utilize SNSs to conduct passive observation, as discussed in study one's findings. HR professionals use SNSs to search for candidates,

complete candidate synopses, and establish common ground. Each of these methods allows HR professionals to conduct passive observation and hence reduce uncertainty about the job candidate, and to form an impression of a candidate regarding their fit with the organization and the open position. When searching for candidates, HR professionals view self-presentations in SNSs and can gather information beyond what is available on a resume (e.g. professional experience, education, certifications), such as inferred passion for specific types of work or conceptual areas. When completing candidate synopses, HR professionals search for self-presentations in SNSs created by a particular candidate to determine whether the candidate should be pursued based on characteristics previously unavailable (e.g. evidence of connectedness within the local professional community). HR professionals also view send-presentations in SNSs to learn about candidates and gather information for establishing common ground, such as a similar alma mater, family situation, or overlapping interests (evidence for each of these uses was found in study one).

Passive observation in SNSs creates an opportunity for HR professionals to gather new information about the job candidate. As discussed in Chapter 3, HR professionals typically access SNSs to gather information in addition to having the candidate's resume. In some instances, the resume is viewed first, while in other instances, the resume is viewed after the self-presentation in the SNS. Both the resume and the SNS profile are spaces where the job candidate engages in self-presentation. Self-presentations via the resume are often conducted in adherence to professional standards and norms for resumes (Knouse, Giacalone et al. 1988; Toth 1993). However, in SNSs the standards and norms are not based on professional protocol but rather are localized to the individual. Self-presentations via SNS are guided by each individual's developed set of standards and norms. The individual, to a greater or lesser degree, can develop

this set of standard and norms. As a result, individuals creating and maintaining self-presentations in SNSs craft their self-presentations based on their own developed standards and norms and their specific understanding of who the audience is (Boyd 2004).

Based on the results of study one, HR professionals evaluate a candidate's resume and SNS profile prior to forming an impression of the candidate. The collecting and reading a resume is a form of active observation, and the viewing a SNS profile is a form of passive observation. These types of observation are conducted to determine whether the job candidate should be interviewed, which is a form of interactive observation. Conducting many different types of observation reduces uncertainty for the HR professional (Berger and Douglas 1981), and it is this quest for reduced uncertainty that drives the HR professionals to observe the candidate's self-presentations in as many ways as possible.

4.1.3   Perceived Audience Impacts Self-Presentation

When individuals create self-presentations, they are influenced by the audience they are creating it for. Individuals consider who is going to see the self-presentation and the goal of the self-presentation. To achieve the best outcome and accomplish their goals, individuals adjust the self-presentation to reflect the desires of the audience (Jones and Pittman 1982). Thus, it is likely that two self-presentations intended for different audiences, both created by the same individual, will be different. An individual's resume and SNS profile are two different self-presentations potentially created with different goals and for different audiences. Thus, the resume and the SNS profile may contain different information. Further, a resume is viewed actively (the individual is aware of the audience) and the SNS is viewed passively (the individual is not aware of the audience). The potential for the self-presentations to be different is one of the

reasons why the HR professional wants to view multiple self-presentations and/or conduct different types of observation to reduce uncertainty. However, since the self-presentations are different, conflicts can exist between the two. These conflicts can lead the HR professional to experience ambiguity in regard to the impression formed (Daft and Macintosh 1981), and can negatively affect the candidate. In regard to the evaluation of a job candidate by an HR professional, the question is will a self-presentation that was not intended for use by HR professionals influence the impression formed of the candidate? Does a self-presentation from a boundary-blurring SNS influence the impression formed of a job candidate by a HR professional?

This second study addresses the second research question: How do the more diverse self-presentations in social networking sites affect impressions formed by HR professionals? How does the availability of self-presentations from other contexts affect the impressions formed by HR professionals?

In the next section, the research model will be developed which predicts how different perceived audiences affect the impact the SNS profile on impression formation. Then an online experiment, which tests the research model, will be described in section 4.3.

4.2   RESEARCH MODEL

Self-presentations via SNSs provide additional information for the HR professionals and hiring managers, and Anderson's Information Integration Theory (1971) suggests that this information will influence the impression formed based on both the value and the weight assigned to the information by the observer. The value of the information can be discussed by

looking at the extremes – a negative self-presentation and a positive self-presentation. A negative self-presentation via a SNS does provides information that is inconsistent with the self-presentation viewed in other sources and/or provides information that indicates the candidate's qualifications do not match those of the job. Thus, the HR professional's perception of the candidate suitability's would not increase when this information is incorporated. A positive self-presentation via a SNS provides information that indicates the candidate's qualification match those of the job. Thus, the HR professional's perception of the candidate suitability's should increase when this information is incorporated. Studies have also shown that information presented by or associated with a job candidate can stick to him or her despite additional behavior or information presented (Gawronski, Geschke et al. 2003; McConnell, Rydell et al. 2008).

> *Hypothesis 1:* *The value of the self-presentation via a social networking site by a job candidate is positively associated with the human resource professional's impression of candidate suitability.*

In addition to value, Information Integration Theory (1971) suggests that the weight assigned to the information influences the impression formed. The weight assigned to the information, or how important the person forming the impression thinks the information is, affects the relationship between the value of the information and candidate suitability. The addition model of Information Integration Theory suggests that individuals add the information from multiple sources to form an impression after factoring in the weight assigned to each source (Anderson 1965; Anderson 1971; Massaro and Friedman 1990). Information obtained via

passive observation of a job candidate in a SNS can act as a source when forming an impression, and since the information is obtained passively, the weight assigned to it may increase.

However, SNSs create an opportunity for passive observation because the candidate is not aware of the observation and the audience is unknown. When an individual creates a self-presentation, he or she crafts it for a particular audience and, even if this audience is unknown, imagines the intended audience. As a result, individuals often have multiple self-presentations that they present to different audiences (Goffman 1959; Havern 2004; Walther 2007). While multiple self-presentations for different audiences are considered natural and socially acceptable, creating multiple self-presentations for the same or similar audiences is often viewed as suspect (Goffman 1959; Goffman 1963). Goffman's theory is based on the assumption that an individual viewing a self-presentation created by the target individual will only view that one self-presentation, and not others that the individual would create for other contexts because of boundaries between the contexts. A context includes both a particular audience and a particular goal-directed activity (e.g. friends and socialization or colleagues and conducting business). However, SNSs have created situations where boundaries between the contexts can be blurred. As defined above, boundary-blurring is the merging of contexts in an electronic medium. Goffman's theory does not take into account boundary-blurring and the potential results of creating a self-presentation in a space that blurs boundaries.

Creating a self-presentation in a space that blurs boundaries can affect the weight given to the information presented during impression formation. Impressions are formed by considering both the information available and the context in which the information was presented (Dunning 2003). Social networking sites can blur the boundaries, allowing an individual from one context to view a self-presentation intended for another context. Boundaries are blurred when the

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individual viewing the self-presentation is operating in a different context than the context the subject intended the self-presentation for. For example, boundary-blurring is high when the individual viewing the self-presentation in a SNS is from a professional context (e.g., HR professional, hiring manager, colleagues, supervisor) and the self-presentation was created for a personal context (e.g., friends, family). Boundary-blurring is low when an individual is viewing the self-presentation in a SNS in a professional context (e.g., HR professional, hiring manager, colleagues, supervisor) and the self-presentation was created for the same context. Boundary-blurring occurs in SNSs because they do not filter or segregate audiences based on the context an individual places them in within their lives. Instead, SNSs have tended to become associated with a particular type of self-presentation associated with a particular context. For example, LinkedIn.com is associated with self-presentation for a professional context. This was frequently voiced by the HR professionals interviewed in study one. However, these associations are not regulated and are ambiguous for many individuals, especially young professionals.

The degree of boundary-blurring associated with a SNS profile impacts the weight given to the information. As a result, boundary-blurring is expected to alter the relationship between the value of the self-presentation and the impressions formed about candidate suitability. When boundary-blurring is low, the relationship between the value of the self-presentation via the SNS and candidate suitability will be strengthened because the self-presentation is crafted for the audience viewing it and will be more useful for the audience. In other words, when an individual from a professional context is viewing a self-presentation intended for a professional context (e.g,. in LinkedIn.com), it is expected that the information will be weighted more strongly because it is viewed as more useful, as evidenced by the results of study one. When boundary-blurring is high, the relationship between the value of the self-presentation via the SNS and

candidate will be weakened because the self-presentation is not crafted for the audience viewing it and will be less useful. In other words, when an individual from a professional context is viewing a self-presentation intended for a personal context (e.g., in Facebook.com), the information will be weighted less strongly because it is viewed as less useful.

> ***Hypothesis 2:*** *The degree to which the social networking site containing a self-presentation is boundary-blurring negatively moderates the relationship between the value of the self-presentation via a social networking site and human resource processional's impression of candidate suitability. When boundary-blurring is high, the relationship will be weakened, and when boundary-blurring is low, the relationship will be strengthened.*

This hypothesis was modeled after prior research which investigated moderators of information which influences impression formation (Gawronski, Geschke et al. 2003).

While boundary-blurring can influence the weight associated with the information gathered from self-presentations via social networking sites, it can also create opportunities to reduce ambiguity in the impression being formed. Impression ambiguity is when there are multiple and possibly conflicting interpretations of the available information. This definition builds upon equivocality as studied by Daft and colleagues (Daft and Macintosh 1981; Daft and Lengel 1986). Ambiguity is different than the concept of uncertainty that was discussed above. Uncertainty results from a lack of confidence in the impression formed (Ronis and Lipinski 1985), and it is perceived by the individual forming the impression. Similarly, ambiguity is also perceived the individual forming the impression. However, impression ambiguity refers to a lack of clarity in the impression formed due to the multitude of information and the perception

that the information can be interpreted in multiple ways (Daft and Macintosh 1981), while uncertainty occurs when information is scarce and additional information is desired to form the impression.

A strong theme in the self-presentation literature is that individuals will present different versions of themselves to different audiences (Goffman 1959; Havern 2004; Walther 2007). When the number of self-presentations viewed increases, the potential for acquiring new information not previously viewed also increases. For example, a HR professional may view certain information in a self-presentation via a resume (e.g., employment history) and completely different information in a self-presentation via a SNS (e.g., hobbies, movies the candidate likes). As these self-presentations may not be intended for audiences in the same context, different information will be contained in each self-presentation. The additional information can act as social cues for individuals forming the impression of the target individual. Prior research has shown that social cues, such as biographical information, in online environments aid in impression formation by reducing ambiguity (Tanis and Postmes 2003). Tanis and Postmes state, "[s]uch social cues give people a strong sense that they know with whom they are interacting, despite the fact that objectively their knowledge of the person is scant" (2003). In boundary-blurring environments where the contexts are merged, the individual forming the impression potentially views additional information. In a job market context, the boundary-blurring SNS may provide additional information previously unknown to the HR professional or hiring manager. This additional information can act to reduce the ambiguity in the impression of the job candidate. This implies that, the more an SNS blurs boundaries, the more impression ambiguity can be reduced by the information provided in its profiles.

Hypothesis 3a: The degree to which a social networking site containing a self-presentation is boundary-blurring is negatively associated with the human resource professional's impression ambiguity.

A competing argument can be made regarding self-presentations in boundary-blurring SNS and ambiguity. Explicit self-presentation can lead the viewer of the self-presentation to desire additional background information or perceive increased ambiguity, as was shown in a study where explicit self-enhancing and enhancement by association self-presentations were added to resumes (Knouse et al. 1988). These self-presentations were viewed as extending beyond what would typically be included in a resume and outside of the norms and standards typically associated with documents in this category. The explicit self-presentations increased ambiguity as the HR professional felt misled (Broussard and Brannen 1986; Knouse et al. 1988). One could argue that profiles in SNS are explicit self-presentations as they are intended for an unknown audience for the purpose of creating an impression. The viewing of multiple self-presentations also leads to increased ambiguity (Baron 1986). Profiles in boundary-blurring SNSs will potentially be different than self-presentations in resumes, and the HR professionals will perceive that the job candidate has multiple self-presentations. This perception can increase ambiguity of the impression. Thus, the profiles in boundary-blurring SNSs will be perceived negatively and increase the ambiguity in the impression formed by the HR professional.

Hypothesis 3b: The degree to which a social networking site containing a self-presentation is boundary-blurring is positively associated with the human resource professional's impression ambiguity.

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During impression formation, ambiguity is perceived negatively and can be treated as a "red flag" (Broussard and Brannen 1986; Knouse, Giacalone et al. 1988). In other words, increased impression ambiguity hurts the impression formed of the candidate, and reduced impression ambiguity benefits the impression formed of the candidate. Impression ambiguity occurs when the audience member is presented with a multitude of information and believes that the information could have multiple interpretations. Boundary-blurring SNSs create situations where a multitude of information is available to audience members, and thus impression ambiguity can increase. This increased impression ambiguity can harm candidates. On the other hand, boundary-blurring SNSs have the potential to aid the job candidate if they can reduce the ambiguity by presenting one consistent self-presentation, as suggest in hypothesis 3b, because reduced ambiguity can positively affect the impression formed of the candidate, which is measured by candidate suitability.

> ***Hypothesis 4:*** *Impression ambiguity perceived by the human resource professional in regard to the job candidate is negatively associated with candidate suitability.*

These hypotheses present an potential paradox regarding the use of boundary-blurring social networking sites during the hiring process to gather information about job candidates. The first hypothesis represents the baseline that additional positive information about the candidate will improve the impression formed of the candidate. The second hypothesis, however, suggests that if this information is gathered from a boundary-blurring SNS, the information will be given less weight because the HR professional will view it as being out of context. However, the third (a) and fourth hypotheses combined suggest that if gathered from a boundary-blurring SNS, the

information will also act to reduce ambiguity about the candidate, which subsequently improves the impression formed of said candidate. The third(b) and fourth hypotheses combined suggest that if the information is gathered from boundary-blurring SNS, the information will act as a red flag and increase ambiguity, which then hurts the candidate. The outcome of this experiment discussed in the next section will determine whether information obtained from boundary-blurring SNSs can simultaneously both harm and benefit the job candidate or whether the information only acts to harm the candidate. This complete model is presented in Figure 3 and will be tested in the next section.
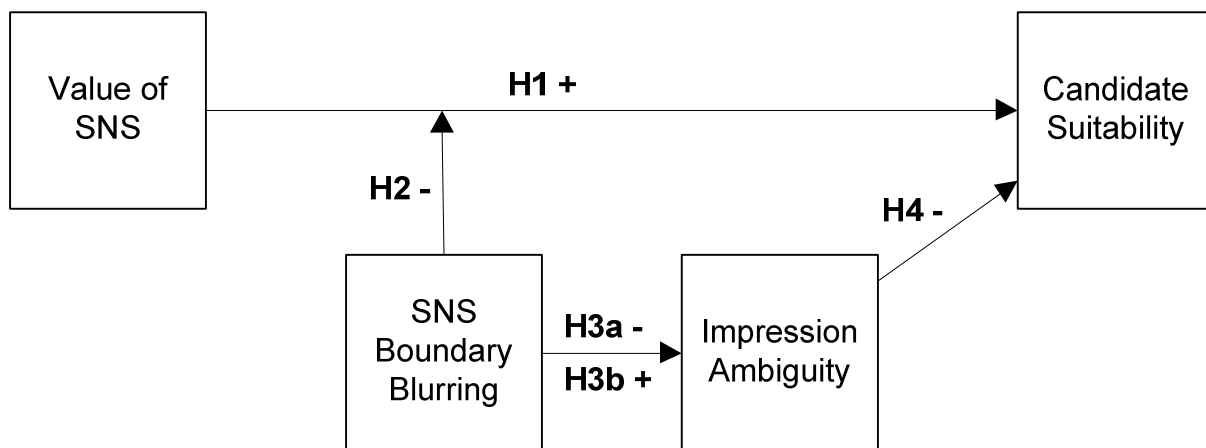
Figure 5. Model of the Impact of Boundary-Blurring SNSs on Impression Formation

4.3   METHODOLOGY AND DATA

To test the research model an online experiment was conducted. Consistent with the research questions, the experiment's context was the evaluation of a job candidate. Participants

were recruited via face-to-face and email announcements targeted at individuals with professional experience earning an advanced degree on a part-time basis. Similar samples have been used in prior studies (e.g., Knouse, Giacalone et al. 1988). Information about their professional experience and hiring experience was collected and controlled for. Face-to-face, flyers containing the invitation script and web address of the online experiment were distributed. The email invitation was send to 646 individuals, including the individuals that were recruited face-to-face. The email contained the same invitation script and web address as the flyer distributed face-to-face. Individuals were offered a small incentive for participation ($5 gift certificate to a local coffee shop/café).

After receiving the invitation, participants went to the web address provided which allowed them to participate in the online experiment. After reading brief instructions, the online experiment presented the participant with a job description and a self-presentation in the form of a profile in a social networking site for a potential candidate for the position. A 2 (low vs. high value of the self-presentation via SNS) x 2 (low vs. high SNS boundary-blurring) between subjects experimental design was used, and the treatment was randomly assigned to each participant by the experiment system. The job description was the same for all participants, and the self-presentation via the SNS varied based on the assigned treatment, discussed below in section 4.3.2. After the participants reviewed the job description and the self-presentation via the SNS (i.e., the treatment), they answered questions regarding the candidate's suitability for the job described and the ambiguity in their impression of the candidate. Items to check the treatment manipulations and controls were also included. The amount of time the participants spent reading the job description, reading the self-presentation via SNS, and completing the entire experiment was also recorded to be able to filter our participants that did not take the task

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seriously. This experiment was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the researcher's university. All information about the job candidate used in the profile was fictional but adapted from an existing individual, and the photographs were used with permission. The experiment was conducted in August of 2010, and a pilot test was conducted prior to the full experiment.

4.3.1 Participants

To recruit participants, an invitation to participate in an online experiment was distributed face-to-face and via email. The invitation was send to 646 individuals via email, and this email list included the individuals that were recruited face-to-face. The email was sent by the list owner, who is a known and significant individual to the participants. A reminder email was sent one week later. This invitation was sent to 646 individuals, and 212 clicked on the web address in the invitation to begin the experiment. Of the 212 who began the experiment, 141 completed it. Following established procedures for calculating response rates for surveys in online environments (Ridings et al., 2002) produced a response rate of 32.8%. 60.3% of participants were male, and all of the participants were college graduates. Table 7 presents the education background of the participants.

Table 7. Education Background of Participants

Highest Level of Education Completed	Percentage of Participants
4-year college degree	23.4%
Some graduate school	65.2%
Master's degree	8.5%
Doctoral degree	1.4%
Professional degree (JD, MD)	1.4%

Excluding the five participants that did not indicate their age, the average age of the participants was 29.2 years. The age distribution of the participants is presented in Table 8.

Table 8. Age Distribution of Participants

Age (Years)	Percentage of Participants
22 to 25	27.0%
26 to 29	32.6%
30 to 33	17.0%
34 to 37	12.1%
Over 37	7.8%
No response	3.5%

Excluding the twelve participants that declined to answer, the average number of years of business experience among the participants was 6.0 years, and the range was from 1 year to 28 years. The participants were also asked about their involvement in reviewing resumes and filling open jobs in their current position. 43.3% of the participants indicated that they had reviewed resumes in the last year in their current position. 34.0% of the participants indicated that they had been involved with filling an open position within the last year. As noted, this experiment was conducted in the third quarter of 2010. This timing is potentially significant because of the decline in hiring and high unemployment experienced in the year prior to the experiment.

4.3.2 Treatments

Referring to the conceptual model shown below in Figure 6, the grayed constructs were manipulated to create the treatments, and the white constructs were measured.

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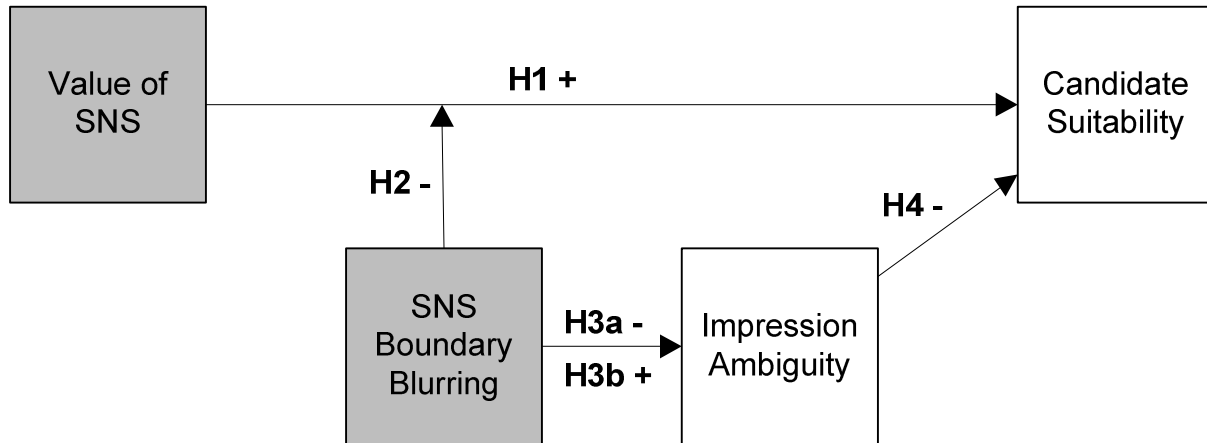
Figure 6. Model with Manipulated and Measured Constructs

Four treatments were developed to achieve the 2x2 between subjects online experimental design. The design is shown in Table 9. Each of the four treatments is shown in Appendix E.

Table 9. Experimental Design

		Social Networking Site Boundary-blurring	
		Low Boundary-blurring (LinkedIn)	High Boundary-blurring (Facebook)
Value of the Self-Presentation via Social Networking Site	Low Value (negative indicators of candidate fit)	**Treatment 1:** Negative indicators in LinkedIn	**Treatment 2:** Negative indicators in Facebook
	High Value (positive indicators of candidate fit)	**Treatment 3:** Positive indicators in LinkedIn	**Treatment 4:** Positive indicators in Facebook

The four treatments were developed to mimic the look of two popular social networking sites, LinkedIn.com and Facebook.com. LinkedIn.com is a social networking site where individuals provide professional information about themselves in profile format alongside a photo, which is optional. The information in LinkedIn profiles shows what one would include on a resume with additional details. Typically information presented includes:

- contact information (e.g., email address, cell phone number)

- location

- industry or sector of interest

- employment experience

- education

- connections to others

- group membership within LinkedIn

- what communication the individual is interested in receiving (e.g. career opportunities, expertise requests, getting back in touch)

- recent activity performed by the individual on the site (e.g. connections made, updates to the profile).

Facebook.com is another popular social networking site, and arguably the largest utilized by individuals in the United States. Facebook.com is used to all types of communication and interaction, not just professional. Similar to LinkedIn, individuals create profiles which contain information and frequently a photo of themselves, which is optional. Facebook offers many additional means of customizing one's profile including uploading photos, videos, and adding additional applications for games, surveys, and other forms of interactions. Individuals are also more free to write comments on their profiles and communicate openly. Typically information presented includes:

- basic information (e.g. sex, relationship status)

- contact information

- education

- employment history

- philosophy and musings of the individual

- arts and entertainments interests

- sports interests

- activities and other interests

Given the nature of the profiles in LinkedIn and Facebook and how individual tend to communicate within each SNS, LinkedIn was deemed to be a low boundary-blurring site due to its professional content, and Facebook was deemed to be a high boundary-blurring site due to its mix of content. The use of these SNSs for this purpose was based on data collected in study one and was tested in the pilot study. The results confirmed the use of LinkedIn and Facebook for low and high boundary-blurring, respectively. To create the treatments, the look and feel of a LinkedIn and Facebook profile were created by the researcher using a graphic design program, including the logo and visual design. While there are many options available to users of LinkedIn and Facebook when customizing their profiles, the basic profile look and feel was used for each factor in the study.

To modify the treatments to represent low and high value of the self-presentation via SNS, a resume from an existing individual which currently holds a job similar to the job description used for the study was anonymized and modified to better match the job description (with permission from the individual). For the high value factor, the prior work experience and was made to closely match what would be desired by a recruiter when searching for a job candidate. From there, a less desirable candidate profile was generated which still had experience in the same industry (Information Technology) but did not closely fit the job described in terms work experience. For example, for the high factor, the candidate had experience as a Systems Specialist, and for the low factor, the candidate had experience as a Business Analyst, which was described more similarly to the job description used in the study. Whether the candidate was representing the low vs. high value or low vs. high boundary-blurring, the same or similar information was presented, including the name of the individual, education background, the profile photo, contact information, and connections' names. In the

pilot study, a different photo used in LinkedIn profiles vs. Facebook profiles, but the pilot results showed that this biased the participants. Thus, for the full study the same photo of the candidate was used for all four treatments.

In summary, the differences between the low vs. high boundary-blurring treatments included only the look and feel of the site, or the "wrapper" around the information. For low boundary-blurring, the LinkedIn wrapper was used, and for high boundary-blurring, the Facebook wrapper was used. The differences between the low vs. high value of the self-presentation treatments included only the different work experience. Each of the treatments is shown in Appendix E.

4.3.3   Measures

The items used to measure the constructs were adapted from previous established studies and modified to meet the context. All items were measured using a 7-point Likert scale anchored with "1 = Strongly Disagree" and "7 = Strongly Agree." The items measuring candidate suitability were adapted from a study which focused on make hiring judgments (Christiansen, Rozek et al. 2010) and are shown in Table 10.

Table 10. Items for Candidate Suitability (DV)

	Items	Loading
CANDSUIT1	I would interview this candidate for the business analyst position described.	0.891
CANDSUIT2	I feel confident that the candidate would be a good business analyst.	0.851
CANDSUIT3	It would be accurate to say there is a good fit between the candidate's qualifications and the tasks that would be required on the job.	0.940
CANDSUIT4	The candidate is suitable for the business analyst position described.	0.924
CANDSUIT5	The candidate's qualifications fit well with the described business analyst position.	0.909

The items measuring impression ambiguity were adapted from prior studies on ambiguity and equivocality (Daft and Macintosh 1981; Dennis and Kinney 1998) and are shown in Table 11. All items used were first vetted and refined by the researcher and were tested for good psychometric properties following the pilot test. Control variables included gender, age, highest level of education completed, resumes reviewed in the last year, and involvement in filling open positions in the last year.

Table 11. Items for Impression Ambiguity

	Items	Initial Loading	Final Loading
IMPRAMBG1	Different people could form different opinions about this candidate.	0.798	0.810
IMPRAMBG2	Most people would clearly agree on what information is important and unimportant to consider when forming an impression of the job candidate. [reversed]	0.459	dropped
IMPRAMBG3	The information needed to form an impression of this candidate can be interpreted differently by different people.	0.857	0.862
IMPRAMBG4	More than one reasonable impression could be formed about this job candidate.	0.890	0.882
IMPRAMBG5	The information can be interpreted in several ways and can lead to different impressions of the candidate.	0.873	0.886
IMPRAMBG6	The information used in forming an impression of the candidate means different things to different people.	0.741	0.783
IMPRAMBG7	The impression of the job candidate is ambiguous.	0.530	dropped

In place of a dummy variable, the items which were included to check the manipulations were used to measure SNS boundary breaking. These items measures the degree to which the participant believed that they were crossing the boundary from a professional environment (i.e., the context of their candidate evaluation task) into another context.

Table 12. Items for SNS Boundary-Blurring

	Items	Initial Loading	Final Loading
BNDYBLUR1	The site shown, [insert treatment context], is a site for professional networking. [reversed]	0.929	0.928
BNDYBLUR2	The site shown, [insert treatment context], is a site for social networking.	0.863	0.864
BNDYBLUR3	The site shown, [insert treatment context], is a site for finding and contacting business acquaintances. [reversed]	0.885	0.884
BNDYBLUR4	The site shown, [insert treatment context], is a site for finding personal contacts, such as those from one's hometown.	0.877	0.878
BNDYBLUR5	The site shown, [insert treatment context], is a site for finding personal contacts, such as those from one's alma mater.[reversed]	0.036	dropped

These data were employed in a simultaneous test of structural and measurement models using Partial Least Squares, Smart PLS 2 (Ringle et al., 2005), which is well suited for detecting differences with small sample sizes (e.g., Qureshi and Compeau, 2009, Barclay et al., 1995, Chin, 1998). The adequacy of the measurement model was assessed using three common tests of convergent validity (Hulland, 1999, Chin, 1998). Items loaded on their intended constructs greater than 0.7, indicating that there was more shared variance between a construct and measure than error variance (Carmines and Zeller, 1979) (see Table 10, Table 11, and Table 12). Second, the internal consistency of each construct was assessed using composite reliability (Werts et al., 1974) (see Table 13). Third, the average variance extracted (Fornell and Larcker, 1981) was calculated for each scale (see Table 13). All scales exceeded Chin's (1998) guideline of 0.5, meaning that at least 50% of variance in indicators was accounted for by its respective construct.

The square root of AVE for each construct exceeded all respective inter-construct correlations, providing further evidence of discriminant validity (see Table 13).

Table 13. Convergent and Discriminant Validity

		# of Items	Response Mean	Std. Dev.	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE	1	2	3	4
1	Candidate Suitability	5	5.10	1.16	0.94	0.96	0.82	0.91[a]			
2	Impression Ambiguity	5	5.26	2.05	0.79	0.85	0.56	-0.155*	0.75		
3	SNS Boundary-blurring	4	3.96	1.92	0.91	0.94	0.79	-0.107	0.160*	0.89	
4	Value of SNS	1	1.50	0.50	n/a	n/a	1.00	0.492**	-0.182**	0.082	1.00

[a] Diagonal elements are the square root of Average Variance Extracted
*p<0.10
**p<0.05

To assess discriminant validity, the correlations of items with their intended constructs was examined, and it was found that all items correlated most strongly with their in-tended construct (see Table 14Table 13).

<div align="center">**Table 14.** Item Crossloadings</div>

	CANDSUIT	IMPRAMBG	BNDYBLUR	SNSVALU
CANDSUIT1	0.890	-0.135	0.097	0.435
CANDSUIT2	0.850	-0.241	0.192	0.399
CANDSUIT3	0.942	-0.143	0.063	0.510
CANDSUIT4	0.921	-0.210	0.068	0.412
CANDSUIT5	0.910	-0.138	0.094	0.457
IMPRAMBG1	-0.220	0.893	-0.196	-0.175
IMPRAMBG3	-0.100	0.835	-0.192	-0.103
IMPRAMBG4	-0.010	0.228	0.036	-0.110
IMPRAMBG5	-0.154	0.883	-0.144	-0.182
IMPRAMBG6	-0.006	0.673	-0.020	-0.089
BNDYBLUR1	0.063	-0.107	0.896	0.071
BNDYBLUR2R	0.102	-0.228	0.899	0.065
BNDYBLUR3	0.141	-0.143	0.854	0.149
BNDYBLUR4R	-.080	-0.178	0.895	0.008
SNSVALU	0.492	-0.182	0.082	1.000

4.4   FINDINGS

The hypotheses were tested by examining the size and significance of the structural paths in the PLS analysis and the percentage of variance explained. The results of the PLS analysis are shown in Figure 7.

Value of SNS

VALUESNS1 —1.00—

β = 0.427**

Candidate Suitability
R²=25.6%

0.890 — CANDSUIT1
0.851 — CANDSUIT2
0.942 — CANDSUIT3
0.921 — CANDSUIT4
0.910 — CANDSUIT5

β = 0.082

β = -0.096*

SNS Boundary Blurring

0.896 — BNDYBLUR1R
0.899 — BNDYBLUR2
0.854 — BNDYBLUR3R
0.895 — BNDYBLUR4

β = 0.196**

Impression Ambiguity
R²=3.9%

0.894 — IMPRAMBG1
0.835 — IMPRAMBG3
0.229 — IMPRAMBG4
0.883 — IMPRAMBG5
0.673 — IMPRAMBG6

*p<0.10
**p<0.05

Figure 7. Measurement Model and Findings

Hypothesis 1 predicted that the value of the self-presentation in a social networking site would be positively associated with candidate suitability. The results of the PLS analysis showed support for Hypothesis 1 (H1 supported, ß = 0.427, p<0.05). In other words, the more positive the value of the self-presentation in a social networking site, the more suitable the candidate will be perceived by the individual evaluating him or her. Hypothesis 2 stated that the degree to which the social networking site blurs boundaries negatively would moderate the relationship between the value of the self-presentation in a social networking site and candidate suitability. In other words, the more the SNS blurs boundaries, the weaker the relationship between the value of the self-presentation via SNS and candidate suitability. Hypothesis 2 was not supported (H2 not supported, ß = 0.082).

Hypothesis 3a suggests that the degree to which the social networking site blurs boundaries is negatively associated with impression ambiguity perceived by the evaluating individual. In other words, the more the SNS blurs boundaries, the more impression ambiguity will be reduced. The results of the PLS analysis shown in Figure 6 did not support Hypothesis 3a. The competing Hypothesis 3b suggested that the degree to which the social networking site blurs boundaries is positively associated with impression ambiguity perceived by the evaluating individual. The results provide support for Hypothesis 3b (H3b supported, ß = 0.196, p<0.05). Hypothesis 4 argued that impression ambiguity is negatively associated with candidate suitability. The measurement model showed support for Hypothesis 4 (H4 supported, ß = -0.096, p<0.10). In all, the estimated model explained 25.6% of the variance in candidate suitability. None of the control variables (gender, age, highest level of education completed, resumes reviewed in the last year, and involvement in filling open positions in the last year) were found to be significant. The measurement model is presented in Figure 7.

4.5   IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

Study two addressed the second research question: How do self-presentations in social networking sites affect impressions formed by human resource professionals? How does the availability of self-presentations from other contexts affect the impressions formed by human resource professionals? The results of this study found that when individuals obtain information from self-presentations created by job candidates in social networking sites, this information can both benefit and harm candidates' prospects of being evaluated favorably. These results are

consistent with the findings of study one in that they both show that the effect of boundary-blurring SNSs on impression formation is nuanced.

First, if the value of the self-presentation in the SNS is positive, it will provide additional positive information for the HR professional to incorporate into the impression formed, and the perceived suitability of the candidate will increase. This result holds whether the social networking site containing the self-presentation is boundary-blurring or boundary-maintaining as the moderator of boundary-blurring predicted in hypothesis 2 was not significant. This suggests that having a self-presentation publicly available in a SNS while on the job market can benefit the candidate.

Second, if the self-presentation viewed is in a boundary-blurring SNS, the ambiguity perceived in the impression by the HR professional is increased. This increased ambiguity can harm the job candidate as increased ambiguity reduces the perceive suitability of the candidate. Thus, while having a self-presentation in a boundary-blurring SNS does not affect the weight placed on the information obtained from the self-presentation (i.e., the moderator in hypothesis 2), having a self-presentation in a boundary-blurring SNS indirectly affects candidate suitability through impression ambiguity. The positive and negative arms of the results are show in Figure 8. While there are both positive and negative aspects of having a self-presentation in a SNS, empirically, the detriment does not compare to the benefit as it is much larger. However, this is partially due to how candidate suitability was measures and the fact that individuals reviewing candidates have a large pool to draw from and can quickly dismiss candidates.
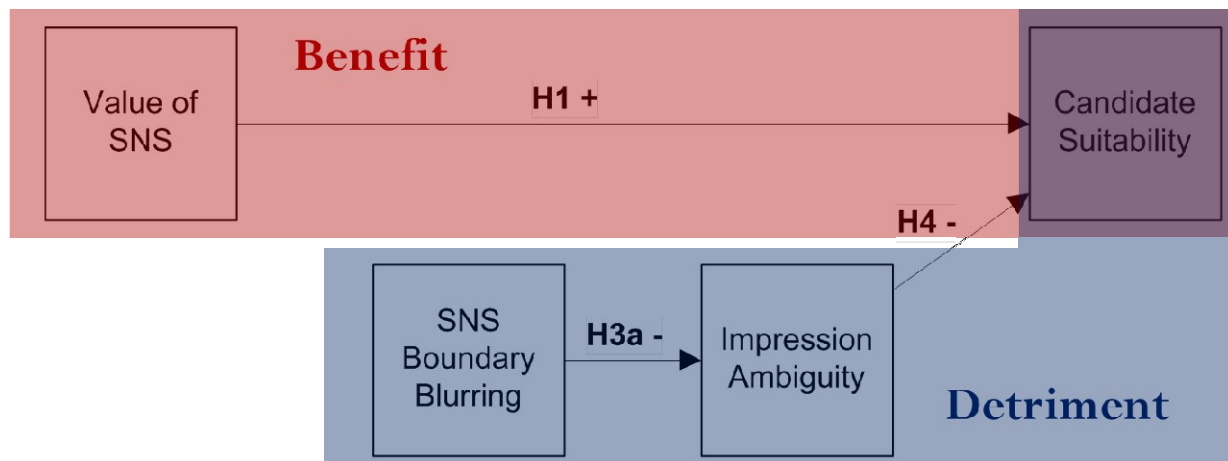
Figure 8. Positive and Negative Aspects of Self-Presentation via SNS

4.5.1 Limitations

As with any empirical study, the findings must be qualified by a number of potential limitations. First, the data was gathered from a small group of professionals pursuing an advanced degree part-time. While gathering data from students is not optimal, Gordon et al. (1986) suggests that one can improve the external validity of studies that involve student participants by using students with demographic and interest profiles similar to participants that would be used that are not students. In this respect, the participants involved in this study were, in fact, also practitioners with professional experience and a large portion had experience in reviewing resumes or the hiring process (see page 94 for details). Given the similarity of the participant profile to the profile of the target sample, it is not anticipated that the results were affected by this limitation.

Second, while a large portion of the participants has experience in reviewing resumes or in the hiring process, the fact that all of participants did not have experience in the hiring process is a limitation of the study. Of the 212 participants, 43.3% indicated experience in reviewing

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resumes, and 34.0% indicated experience in the process of hiring others. These variables were included as controls, however, and they were not found to significantly affect the dependent variable, candidate suitability.

Third, the experiment only focused on the evaluation and formation of an impression for one job candidate. The participants only considered this one job candidate, and they did not compare this job candidate to other potential candidates. While this is a noted limitation of the study, conducting the online experiment in this fashion created a controlled experiment and allowed for comparison across the different treatments. Future studies could examine whether similar results are found when participants are asked to examine multiple, different job candidates and form impressions of each.

The fourth limitation of this study is that the SNS profile was not sought out by the study participant. The findings of study one suggested that HR professionals search for social networking site profiles created by job candidates for a variety of reasons. The data also suggested that, in some instances, HR professionals and others involved in the hiring process will distribute SNS profiles of a job candidate amongst themselves. However, the findings did not suggest that social networking profiles are frequently provided for the HR professionals by the job candidate. Instead, it stood alone. Future research could examine whether similar results are found if the participant was asked to make the decision whether to search for the SNS profile of the job candidate and, if desired, conduct the search himself. One could argue that allowing an individual to search for the profile would strengthen the weight given to the value of the SNS profile because the individual acquired the information and would be more comfortable using it. This potentially sheds light on why the moderator SNS boundary-blurring was not found to significantly moderate the relationship between SNS value and candidate suitability. In future

studies, it could be useful to reduce some of the control in the experiment by allowing participants to search.

Lastly, a limitation of this study was the conservative nature of the treatments. The treatments did not include unprofessional pictures or comments that one often finds in social networking sites. The creation of the SNS profiles was by design as the goal was not to look at the effect of such pictures and comments, but this may have affected the ability to find a significant result for the moderator, SNS boundary-blurring. Future studies utilizing different treatments (e.g., more sensational in nature) may find that SNS boundary-blurring is a significant moderator.

4.5.2   Implications for Research

The findings of this research demonstrate that impression formation is influenced by information viewed in social networking sites, and it is not a straightforward process. Prior research on impression formation has considering one self-presentation as part of the impression formation, but this research suggests that multiple self-presentations should be considered, especially when boundary-blurring SNSs are accessed. Study one demonstrated that individuals are accessing SNSs to learn about individuals, or in this case job candidates. Building on study one, study two shows that viewing information about the individual in a SNS influences the impression formed, in this case candidate suitability. While study two hypothesized that the amount of influence would be moderated by the boundary-blurring nature of the SNS, the results did not confirm this. Instead, the boundary-blurring nature of the SNS influences the perceived impression ambiguity, which in turn affects the impression of candidate suitability. The boundary-blurring nature of the SNS, though, is perceived by the audience member, not the

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individual creating the self-presentation. Future work could consider whether there is a significant difference in how SNS profile viewers and SNS profile creators perceive the boundary-blurring nature of the SNS.

4.5.3   Implications for Practice

Study two provides a number of implications for practice, including for individuals creating self-presentations in SNSs, HR professionals viewing self-presentations, and SNS providers. First, this study highlights the tension between individuals creating self-presentations in SNSs and SNS providers. As previously discussed, some individuals using the site would like to preserve boundaries, and others would like to blur the boundaries. SNS providers, however, have the goal of blurring boundaries and attracting a large, broad, merged audience to the site as they generate revenue via advertisement sales. This study shows that individuals with self-presentations in SNSs can suffer detriment when on the job market if their self-presentation does not contain information aligned with what the HR professional is looking for. The self-presentation can become a "red flag" for the HR professional. Individuals creating the self-presentations in SNSs need to consider that the goal of the SNS provider is to attract a large, broad, merged audience and need to adapt their self-presentations to this environment. On the other hand, SNS providers need to consider the desires of the users of the SNS when making policy decisions. Otherwise, they may push all of the users away.

For the HR professionals and hiring managers, this study demonstrates that they need to be strategic about how they use SNSs and which ones they use, and executives managing these individuals need to consider that the use of SNS may need to be regulated. HR professionals and hiring managers are turning to SNSs to learn about job candidates, but this can also create more

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ambiguity about job candidates as evidenced in study two. This ambiguity can lead some individuals to "burnout" on SNS self-presentations because of the information overload and boundary-blurring induced ambiguity. This "burnout" is future area of work that could be investigated in all contexts, not just the job market.

4.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter discussed a theoretical approach and an experimental quantitative study with the goal of better understanding how SNSs influence the impression formed of a candidate's suitability. In the next chapter, study one and study two will be discussed together to provide a synthesis for this dissertation.

5.0   DISCUSSION

The purpose of this dissertation was to develop knowledge about how boundary-blurring by social networking sites affects impressions formed of individuals. This work focused on how HR professionals forming impressions of job candidates are influenced by self-presentations from boundary-blurring social networking sites. The goal was to determine the potential detriments of using SNSs and understand how damaging they can be for job candidates. This research will examined the following research questions:

- How do human resource professionals utilize social networking sites to learn about job candidates?

- How do self-presentations in social networking sites affect impressions formed by human resource professionals? How does the availability of self-presentations from other contexts affect the impressions formed by human resource professionals?

5.1   SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Two studies were conducted to investigate these research questions, one exploratory and one hypothesis-testing. The first study explored the issue of social networking site use by HR professionals and focused on the questions of whether, how, and why SNSs are accessed to learn about candidates. A series of interviews with HR professionals and hiring managers was conducted by the researcher, and this data was analyzed for themes. The findings demonstrated that SNSs are accessed by HR professionals and hiring mangers during the hiring process, and

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these sites are used for a variety of purposes. The SNSs are used to search for potential candidates to fill an open position, to obtain additional information about a known candidate and complete the candidate synopsis, and to acquire information for the purpose of establishing common ground with a job candidate. Overall, the use of SNSs during the hiring process was found to be on the rise amongst HR professionals and hiring managers, and it was nuanced in that each individual develop his or her own strategy for the use of SNSs.

The second study specifically addressed the impressions formed of job candidates following the viewing of self-presentations in SNSs. To test the hypotheses derived from Information Integration Theory, a controlled online experiment was conducted. The results of the PLS analysis demonstrated that when individuals obtain information from self-presentations created by job candidates in social networking sites, this information can both positively and negatively impact the impression formed of the job candidate and the evaluation of the candidate. In other words, creating self-presentations in a SNS can both benefit and harm candidates' prospects of being evaluated favorably. These results are consistent with the findings of study one in that they both show that the effect of boundary-blurring SNS on impression formation is nuanced. While positive content viewed by a HR professional in a SNS positively impacts the evaluation of the candidate, if the self-presentation is in a boundary-blurring SNS, it can create ambiguity which negatively impacts the evaluation of the candidate.

The two studies together provide insight into the research questions posed. Both studies showed that self-presentations in SNSs affect impressions formed of the target individual. In particular, they showed the HR professional's impression of the job candidate is impacted by information available in SNSs, which was the first research question. In the first study, HR professionals and hiring managers described how they accessed SNSs and the strategy they took

in utilizing the SNSs. The second study found that the information presented by a candidate in a SNS profile impacts the perception of the candidate's suitability for a position. Both studies also provided evidence regarding how self-presentations in SNSs affect impressions formed by professionals evaluating a job candidate. In particular, the focus was on self-presentations in boundary-blurring SNSs. The nuanced impact of boundary-blurring SNS was explored in both studies. While the research showed a self-presentation in a SNS can influence the impression formed, the exploratory work in study one and the hypothesis-testing in study two both suggest that the value of a self-presentation in a SNS trumps the effects of boundary-blurring. However, it may be the case that candidate suitability is not always a continuous variable as measured in study two. Instead, boundary-blurring SNS can function by creating ambiguity which taints the impression of the candidate and tips it into a negative impression. This is supported by the anecdotes put forth by the HR professionals and hiring managers in study one which discussed getting a bad feeling or becoming concerned about a candidate. While a profile in a boundary-blurring SNS can create impression ambiguity and taint the impression, the research found that this is not empirically enough to overcome the effect of the value of the self-presentation in the SNS.

5.2   IMPLICATIONS

The objective of this dissertation is to describe how self-presentations in SNSs affect impressions held by individuals and decisions made based on those impressions. Developing this understanding can assist individuals who are trying to create self-presentations within SNSs and organizations that are trying to develop SNSs as part of profitable enterprises. SNSs can

blur boundaries when they attempt to create environments that are large, broad-ranged, and open to merged audiences. This research found that when SNSs blur boundaries, this information is accessed by audiences that were not necessarily the audience the users of the SNSs intended when they created their self-presentations. Further, the information in the self-presentations can both benefit and harm the users during the hiring process. This suggests that before the boundary-blurring SNSs are constructed and used, the potential impacts of their use should be considered thoroughly by both the organization creating the SNS and the users.

While these studies found that creating self-presentations in SNSs can benefit and harm the target individual, other research has found that individuals creating profiles in SNSs do not necessarily want their self-presentations to be viewed by others (Bateman, Pike et al. 2011). This research discussed the creation of a self-presentation for a particular, imagined audience, and the idea that a boundary-blurring SNS allows other audiences to view the self-presentation as well. However, recent research suggests that while users may imagine an audience, they do not want it viewed by the Internet public. This suggests that the tension in the business model discussed in chapter one may be even stronger because users may not be interested in receiving any of the benefits from having a public self-presentation in a SNS, even the ones found in the present research study.

This dissertation covered an area of SNS research previous more deserted – what happens after self-presentations in SNSs are viewed by an audience. Future research in this area should be careful not to assume that an audience only views one self-presentation created by the target individual, as was previously done (1959). Instead, the possibility of an audience viewing multiple self-presentations should be considered, and attention should be paid to how the multiple self-presentations are integrated together when forming an impression.

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The findings of these studies also suggest that while the users of a SNS are creating the self-presentations, it is the perception of the SNS held by the audience member that matters. This could potentially create detriment for a user if he or she perceives the SNS as one type of environment, and the audience member perceives it as another. Future work could examine this issue in SNS, but also in other areas such as dating websites.

As discussed in chapter 4, uncertainty leads individual to gather additional information about the target individual. Thus, HR professionals turn to SNSs to find additional information about job candidates and reduce uncertainty. However, based on the results of study two, turning to a boundary-blurring SNS, while it may decreased uncertainty, increased impression ambiguity. The effort to reduce uncertainty is thus hampered due to the increase in ambiguity. In other words, the attempt backfires. The increased ambiguity can create stress for the individual and question whether additional information gathering was even worth it. The individual may also consider changing his or her behavior to not conduct information gathering in the future. This could lead to an interesting question for the organizations – should HR professionals be forced to look at boundary-blurring SNSs even though it created ambiguity and stress? Or is it not worth it because these job candidates would be filtered out in some way eventually? Future work may examine how organizations should approach regulating the use of boundary-blurring SNS in the workplace and its potential impacts.

Boundary-blurring SNSs, with their large, broad, and merged audiences, are unprecedented, and as a result, many individuals have not been able to adapt to the opportunities (or threats) which they present. Individuals have readily adopted SNSs, but the idea that SNSs have created a new world for self-presentation is often realized too late for the adopting users.

As SNS researcher Fred Stutzman stated in an interview, "There is no real-world parallel. You don't go walking round the mall telling people whether you are straight or gay" (George 2006).

5.3   LIMITATIONS

As with any research study, the findings must be qualified by a number of potential limitations. First, a limitation of this study is that the focus of the study, self-presentations in SNSs, is frequently diluted by the self-presentations involved in the hiring process, resumes and interviews. Given the long standing tradition of examining resumes and interviewing job c candidates, self-presentations in SNSs are, at best, considered third in terms of significance. The HR professionals and hiring manager indicated that the resume will always trump everything else and be the strongest source for information prior to the interview. This is especially interesting considering that the resume and interview are active and interactive observations, respectively, and that passive observation is considered a better source (Berger and Douglas 1981).

Another limitation of this research is that it studies a phenomenon that is still in development and changing rapidly – behavior surrounding social networking sites. Social networking sites, such as Facebook and LinkedIn, are constantly releasing new policies and changing different aspects of their websites. No major changes took place during or immediately before or after any of the data collections period for either study, so the results of the studies are not currently impacted. However, the ability to compare these results to the results of a future study could be limited if SNSs change the way they function dramatically.

Lastly, a limitation of this study is that did not consider the first half of impression management – the actions taken by the individual that is creating the self-presentations in the social networking sites. This limits the ability to discuss the entire impression management process, but these questions could be addressed in future work

5.4   FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The future directions for this research can be broken into short term and long term actions. In the short term, an additional quantitative data will be collected for study two to increase the sample size. In the current study, a 2x2 between subjects design was utilized. As mentioned in the limitations for study two, the treatments were conservative. In the additional data collection, a 3x3 between subjects design will be implemented, adding a third level to each factor which will focus on a less qualified resume (lower SNS value) and a SNS that is very boundary-blurring (MySpace). Since the current treatments will be reused, the data will be combined with the data from this study as long as the participant profiles are similar.

Another short term goal is to further analyze the qualitative data collected in study one. The current data was analyzed for themes related to the research questions. In the future, the data could be coded by multiple researchers to examine both the research questions in this paper and additional research questions. Additional HR professionals and hiring managers could also be interviewed to supplement the small sample.

The work discussed here examined SNSs that blurred boundaries versus others that did not. Future work could examine when boundary-blurring is more dependent on how an

individual engages the technology, such as in the case of Twitter. In this instance, boundary-blurring can occur within the technology, rather than being a characteristics of the technology.

The focus of this study was to examine how self-presentations in SNSs affect impressions formed. In the long term and to continue this research stream, a new study will be conducted which examines the first half of this process – how self-presentations in SNSs are created and maintained to manage impressions. This study will build more strongly on the work of Goffman (1959), and consider different tactics that individuals take when creating self-presentations in SNSs.

6.0 APPENDIX A. INVITATION FOR STUDY ONE

Hello [Name of Contact],

My name is Jacqueline Pike, and I am a PhD Candidate and instructor in the Katz Graduate School of Business at the University of Pittsburgh. I am conducting a study looking at how human resource professionals use the internet to acquire information about job candidates. The goal of the study is to examine how online presentations by the job candidates affect interviewing and hiring processes. I am conducting this study so that my colleagues and I can better guide our students during their job searches.

As part of this project, I am interviewing human resource professionals to get a better understanding of if and how they use online environments, such as social computing websites and personal websites, to acquire information about job candidates.

Would you be willing to talk with me about your use of online environments during interviewing and hiring processes? The discussion, which would be conducted over the telephone, would take no more than one hour.

Participation in this study is voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw at any time. If you are willing and able to talk with me, let me know and I will find a time that works well for your schedule. Please contact me via email at jpike@katz.pitt.edu or via phone at 412.624.3537.

I sincerely appreciate you taking the time to consider talking with me.

Yours truly,
Jacqueline Pike
PhD Candidate and Visiting Instructor
Katz Graduate School of Business
University of Pittsburgh
jpike@katz.pitt.edu
412.624.3537

7.0   APPENDIX B. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL/TEMPLATE

This protocol provides a structure for organizing discussion and notes with human resource professionals. The questions below are the guides and prompts on which the interviewer can expand. Questions may be added during the interview to follow-up on potentially interesting or significant items.   However, even if the specific questions are not used, to maximize the value and increase comparability, it is important to address each of the broad topic areas in the outline. This outline also provides a basis for recording the results of the interviews. It should be used by interviewers to take notes during the discussion and to organize the extended notes prepared after the interview.

Session Information

Session Date:		Interviewer(s):	
Subject Name:		Organization Name:	

Introduction

Thank you for volunteering to speak with me. My name is Jacqueline Pike, and I am a PhD Candidate and instructor in the Katz Graduate School of Business at the University of Pittsburgh. I am conducting a study looking at how human resource professionals use the internet to acquire information about job candidates. The goal of the study is to examine how online presentations by the job candidates affect interviewing and hiring processes.

As part of this project, I am interviewing human resource professionals to get a better understanding of if and how they use online environments, such as social computing websites and personal websites, to acquire information about job candidates.

Participation in this interview is completely voluntary. If you feel uncomfortable in any way, you can stop this interview at any time without giving an explanation. While I will ask you questions, please feel free to comment on related subjects and expand on your answers beyond the scope of the questions. Your name will not be used in any write-ups or presentations unless you explicitly give permission. All responses will be confidential and no specifics about a particular person or organization will be shared with anyone. I appreciate your willingness to help!

Is it ok if we record this discussion? <If not, turn off the recorder>

Contact Background

To start I'd like to confirm my information about you:

Name:	<Subject Name>
E-mail:	<Subject's E-mail Address>
Title:	<Subject's Title>

Organization Background

What is your role within the organization?

What are your daily or weekly responsibilities?

When interviewing and hiring job candidates, what is your role/what are your roles?

Approximately how many individuals are hired each year by your organization? What is the total number of employees?

Pre-Interview Processes
Now I will ask questions about activities that take place before a job candidate is interviewed.

How do you recruit or find job candidates for a position? Do you manage a constant pool or acquire candidates as needed? What type of hiring do you do?
[Express interest in professional employees only]

How do you use the Internet to find candidates for a position?

When you are considering interview a candidate for a position,

- **What type of information do you gather?**

- **Do you create a packet of information for each candidate?**

- **Is the packet different for each candidate? Do you attempt to gather the same information about each candidate?**

What else do you do before the candidate arrives for the interview?

Have you ever used technologies such as Facebook.com, LinkedIn.com, or MySpace.com to obtain information about job candidates? In what stage of the interviewing process did you do this?

What did you think of the information obtained from such sites? [Useful? Informative? Worthless? Irrelevant?]

Have you ever referred to personal websites to obtain information about job candidates? In what stage of the interviewing process did you do this?

Some individuals put links to personal websites on their resumes. Do you access one if it is available?

What did you think of the information obtained from such sites? [Useful? Informative? Worthless? Irrelevant?]

Of the last 5 candidates you interviewed, for how many did you conduct a search for online information about him or her? How?

When you find information, do you usually stop at one source or do you consult multiple sources of information?

If you find a professionally-oriented website, would you look at it? Print it?
If you find a socially-oriented website, would you look at it? Print it?
[Provide examples if needed.]

Do you find the setting in which the information was presented to be relevant or is all information the same no matter where it is presented?

Would information you found online influence your decision to interview an individual?

Interview Processes
Now I will ask questions about activities that take place during the interview with a job candidate.

If you obtained information from an Internet source about a job candidate, would you ask the candidate about the information? Mention the information during the interview? Why or why not? Does it depend on the source?

During the interview, would you find yourself comparing the information found online to information provided by the job candidate verbally?

Post-Interview Processes
Now I will ask questions about activities that take place after the interview with a job candidate.

Would you ever conduct an Internet search of a job candidate after an interview? Why or why not? What would lead you to do this?

Would you use technologies such as Facebook.com, LinkedIn.com, or MySpace.com to find information about a candidate after an interview? Why or why not?

After the interview, what information do you consider when making the decision to hire someone?

Completeness Check

That is the last of our particular questions.

Is there anything else that we should ask to understand the role of the Internet in interviewing and hiring processes?

Would it be ok if we contact you later either to follow-up on this discussion?

Yes		No:	

Conclusion

As I mentioned at the beginning of the session, the goal of this study is to better understand how online presentations by the job candidates affect interviewing and hiring processes. Over the next several months I will be interviewing others and collecting quantitative data. The results will be used to prepare a variety of presentations and papers which I will make available online.

If there is anything I can do to help you, please let me know.

Thank you for your time.

8.0   APPENDIX C. STUDY ONE THEMES

The following is the full set of themes identifies in study one's interviews.

- Boundary blurring as a reason why SNS should not be used
- Boundary blurring as a reason to use one SNS over another
- Search for potential job candidates via SNS
- Collection of resumes via website
- Complete candidate synopsis using SNSs
- Influence of information found online is low
- Information gathering via SNS to establish common ground
- Information gathering via SNS is not conducted
- Keyword search to search for candidates in SNSs
- SNSs use to find passive candidates
- No negative perception of SNS use held by job candidates
- The contents of profiles is analyzed, such as education and work history
- Photos in profiles are seen, but not of influence
- Photos in profiles can be useful
- Referrals in profiles are not considered credible
- Resumes trumps SNS profile
- SNS profiles can create uncertainty about a candidate
- Use of internet changes over time
- Personal websites are rarely accessed, simply too much information to process
- Search engines utilized to gather information about candidates
- SNSs are used for follow-up purposes
- SNS for self-presentation
- Membership in groups on SNS is influential
- SNSs are not used because if candidate wanted to share information, he or she would
- SNSs are used to post jobs
- There is no defined method on how to use SNSs in our organization
- SNS networks are used to make connections
- SNSs are useful

EARN A $5 JAZZMAN'S GIFT CERTIFICATE

Researchers at the University of Pittsburgh are trying to better understand how people use social networking websites during the hiring process. We are conducting a brief survey which takes no more than 15 minutes to complete. For completing the survey, you will receive a $5 Jazzman's gift certificate. Jazzman's is located in the basement of Mervis Hall. We are surveying business professionals and reaching out to them via business courses.

As a user of social networking websites, your insight and experience are important. This survey has the potential to provide useful information for the classroom and for business professionals like yourself. Please note that you must be 18 years or older to participate in this survey, and participation is voluntary and confidential. You may also withdraw from the survey at any time, including following your completion by emailing jpike@katz.pitt.edu. There are no foreseeable risks associated with your participation, and it will not affect your grade in any course or progress in your program of study. No one will have access to the information you provide except for the researcher working on the project. Also, there is no right answer - we would like to know your personal opinion and thoughts.

To take the survey, visit http://katz.qualtrics.com/SE?SID=SV_0kQXlkQtSM3spcE . Please note that the survey will only be available until August 30, 2010 at 11:59pm. You will be asked to enter your email address at the conclusion of the survey so that the Jazzman's gift certificates can be distributed.

Thanks in advance for your time and insight. We truly appreciate you considering taking this survey. If you have any questions, please contact me at jpike@katz.pitt.edu.

Thanks,
Jacqueline Pike
Information Systems PhD Candidate and Instructor

Survey Link: http://katz.qualtrics.com/SE?SID=SV_0kQXlkQtSM3spcE

10.0   APPENDIX E. TREATMENT IMAGES

Treatment 1

Treatment 2

Treatment 3

Linked in   Home   Profile   Contacts   Groups   Jobs   Inbox (2)   More...   People ▾   🔍 Advanced

People

Robert Linton

Business Analyst at THC Corporation
Greater Pittsburgh Area | Business Services

Current	• Business Analyst at THC Corporation
Past	• Systems Analyst, Deloitte Consulting
	• Intern, Progressive Inc.
Education	• Ohio University
	• Springboro High School
Connections	79 connections
Websites	• My Company
Public Profile	http://www.linkedin.com/pub/robert-linton/23/232/8a

Summary

Robert is currently a Business Analyst for THC Corporation. His speciality is requirements definition, and he has been a critical part of numerous teams at THC. He especially enjoys working with clients to help them determine what their needs are and converting those needs into usable documentation for the team's system designers and developers.

Specialties

Requirements definition, data flow modeling, process map development, experience in many types of development environments, user stories, developing consensus

Experience

Business Analyst
THC Corporation
August 2007 to present

Gathers business requirements and documents them in the form of process maps, designs and executes test conditions for system testing, and communicates with team in house and client about project progress.

Systems Analyst
Deloitte Consulting
May 2002 to August 2007

Worked on teams to serve clients in the healthcare, manufacturing, and entertainment industries focusing on the requirements definition and quality assurnace/testing phases of projects.

Intern
Progressive Inc.
January 2001 to August 2001

Performed quality assurance testing for in-house accounting system and worked with internal clients to document bugs and errors.

Education

Ohio University
College of Business
Management Information Systems Major

Springboro High School

Contact Settings

Interested In
- career opportunities
- business deals
- getting back in touch
- expertise requests
- reference requests

▼ Contact Information

Email & Phone:
robert.linton@gmail.com   primary

Tags:
Edit tags ▾

Notes:

View/Edit Contact Info | See all contacts »

Robert's Connections (79)

Catherine Jones

William Spicalli

Cheryl Ann Hubbard

Jennifer Rubeski

Valerie Crosby

Andrew Steinbach

See all Connections »

Customer Service | About | Blog | Careers | Advertising | Recruiting Solutions | Tools | Developers | Language | **Upgrade Your Account**

LinkedIn Corporation © 2010 | User Agreement | Privacy Policy | Copyright Policy | **Help improve LinkedIn.**

Treatment 4

11.0 APPENDIX F. JOB DESCRIPTION

Business Analyst

Description:

The Business Analyst is a crucial role in creating and maintaining the strategic partnership between business needs and technology delivery in an agile development environment. The Business Analyst will be responsible for developing business requirements and related business rules based on the needs of specific business units.

The Analyst will work closely with the business partners and business subject matter experts in the definition, testing, training, implementation, and support of functional system requirements.

The Analyst will identify requirements via industry standard analysis techniques such as data flow modeling, workflow analysis, and functional decomposition analysis. The Analyst will solicit requirements through interviews, workshops, and/or existing systems documentation or procedures.

In general, the role will include the creation/revision of the following analysis artifacts and deliverables:
- Process Maps
- Business Requirements
- Business Rules
- User Stories
- User Flows
- Acceptance Tests

The Analyst will participate in daily stand-up meetings with both technology and business partners to facilitate the understanding, clarification, and implementation of requirements in an agile development environment.

Requirements:
- BA/BS Degree, in a technology related field or other degree preferred
- 4-6 years experience in building and specifying mission critical business applications, at least 1 of which is in a client/server environment
- Strong verbal and written communication skills. Must be able to communicate effectively and confidently with users, team members and management
- Must be flexible and willing to undertake a wide variety of challenging tasks
- Strong facilitation skills. Must be able to elicit requirements from various personalities across organizational and geographical boundaries
- Proven experience at driving consensus across multiple stakeholders

- Process driven analysis skills and a background in various requirements elicitation methods
- Proficiency with Agile SDLC processes

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