ME OR MY FRIENDS? EXAMINING SNS FRIEND ACTIVITY'S IMPACT ON APPLICANT PERCEPTIONS

by

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ABSTRACT

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Cybervetting continues to be adopted by an increasing number of organizations each year, with approximately 43% of employers using social networking websites (SNSs) to screen job applicants (SHRM, 2016). Yet little attention has been given to how a profilee's SNS friends influence cybervetter perceptions. As such, the current study examined how friend SNS content impacts perceptions of an applicant, thereby adding to the understanding of judgment mechanisms in cybervetting-based assessment. It was hypothesized that negatively perceived friend content would reduce perceptions of applicant suitability, whereas positively perceived friend content would increase perceptions of applicant suitability. Further, it was expected that by redacting SNS friend content or instructing raters to ignore SNS friend content, there would be higher cross-method agreement between cybervetting-based evaluations and self-reported or test scores of key attributes (i.e., personality, integrity, and cognitive ability). Results indicated that negative friend content coincided with reduced perceptions of applicant suitability when there were no instructions to ignore, but the influence of positive friend content did not differ from neutral friend content or instructions to ignore. Additionally, redacting friend content did

not lead suitability perceptions to significantly differ from any other condition. Further, cross-method disagreement existed between cybervetting-based evaluations and traditional scores of the key attributes. However, findings were not so straightforward.

Keywords: cybervetting, social networking sites, Facebook, decision making, selection

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Social networking sites (SNSs) have been around for more than two decades, becoming intertwined with everyday life, ranging from social aspects (e.g., friendships and hobbies) to professional attributes (e.g., job experience and related skills; Bodroža & Jovanović, 2016; Thomas, Rothschild, & Donegan, 2015). SNSs have become so rooted in this generation's culture that 95% of students attending college have at least one SNS profile (Stefanone, Lackaff, & Rosen, 2011). SNSs are used primarily for keeping in touch with existing friends (Ellison, Steinfeld, & Lampe, 2007), while also being a resource for expanding one's social network. Yet, SNS behavior may also influence how a person is perceived in an employee selection context.

The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM, 2016) recently reported that 43% of employers use SNSs to gather information on potential employees through a process referred to as cybervetting (i.e., online information screening; Berkelaar, 2014), and research has demonstrated that information collected through this practice can impact interview offers, as well as starting salary (Bohnert & Ross, 2010). Because of the relative novelty of this practice, research on cybervetting is limited. One notable gap in this literature is the consideration of the potential implications of friend activity on cybervetting evaluations. More specifically, as SNS profiles contain both profilee and friend activity, cybervetters' judgments of job applicants may be influenced by an applicant's SNS friend behaviors, thereby introducing a threat to measurement validity. As other commonly used selection assessments typically do not contain information about an applicant's personal relationships (e.g., cognitive ability tests, interviews), this issue is somewhat unique to cybervetting. As such, this study focused on this issue by examining the impact of SNS friend activity on rater perceptions.

1.1 Cybervetting-based Assessments

Although some research has indicated that cybervetting-based ratings of cognitive ability and personality do not demonstrate criterion-related validity in predicting performance or turnover beyond that of traditional assessments (e.g., cognitive ability tests and personality surveys; Van Iddekinge, Lanivich, Roth, & Junco, 2016), other researchers have found that cybervetters are capable of assessing personality traits, cognitive ability, and integrity (Feldman, Lian, Kosinski, & Stillwell, 2017; Kluemper & Rosen, 2009; Kluemper, Rosen, & Mossholder, 2012; Park et al., 2015). Nevertheless, despite mixed validity evidence, many organizations engage in cybervetting as a part of their selection process (SHRM, 2016). Therefore, it is important to develop an understanding of how rater perceptions are formed from the content found on SNSs.

Whereas Manago et al.'s (2008) idealized virtual-identity hypothesis suggested that social media users present an idealized version of themselves when online, others (e.g., Back et al., 2010; Wee & Lee, 2017) have found that individuals are likely to express themselves online as they would in real life. Yet, Schroeder and Cavanaugh (2018) highlighted that users are capable of engaging in faking behaviors on SNSs to impact others' impressions. Several predictors frequently included in the pre-employment screening process that have been meta-analytically demonstrated to predict work behavior are the Big Five personality traits (i.e., openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism), cognitive ability, and integrity (see e.g., Gonzalez-Mulé et al., 2014; Ones et al., 2007; Van Iddekinge et al., 2012). As such, this study focused on how perceptions of these key constructs are formed in a cybervetting context and how they compare to scores from more traditional methods.

Numerous SNS profilee features could aid in cybervetter impression formation. For example, intentions to post uncivil comments have been negatively related to openness to experience (Koban et al., 2018), whereas number of events attended, groups, status updates, likes by self, friends, and pictures with others have been linked to greater openness to experience (Bachrach et al., 2012; Chen et al., 2015; Marcus et al., 2006; Saef et al., 2018). Likewise, the likelihood of posting negative work-related comments (Peluchette et al., 2015) and sharing embarrassing pictures (Branley & Covey, 2018), number of swear words (Golbeck et al., 2011), number of likes by the self (Bachrach et al., 2012), number of groups (Bachrach et al., 2012), and number of friends (Caci et al., 2014) have all been inversely associated with conscientiousness, whereas number of pictures (Bachrach et al., 2012) and online venue check-ins (Chorley et al., 2015) have been positively related to conscientiousness.

In addition, number of exclamation marks (Shen et al., 2015), number of photos with others (Gosling et al., 2011; Marcus et al., 2006), references to drugs (Stoughton et al., 2013), number of posts (Gosling et al., 2011; Saef et al., 2018; Shen et al., 2015), number of likes by the self (Bachrach et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2014; Saef et al., 2018), number of comments by the self (Gosling et al., 2011; Lee et al, 2014), number of friends (Caci et al., 2014; Gosling et al., 2011; Lee et al., 2014), number of pictures (Gosling et al., 2011; Lee et al., 2014), and number of groups (Gosling et al., 2011; Saef et al., 2018) have been positively correlated with extraversion, whereas number of comments received from others has been inversely related to extraversion (Shen et al., 2015). Also, intentions and frequency of posting uncivil comments have both been related to lower agreeableness (Koban et al., 2018; Stoughton et al., 2013), whereas number of comments by the self (Choi et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2012), comments from others (Eftekhar et al., 2014), posts by the self (Moore & McElroy, 2012), posts from others (Ivcevic & Ambady,

2013), and number of friends (Shen et al., 2015) have been positively related to agreeableness. Further, likelihood of posting inappropriate content (Karl et al., 2010), number of posts by the self (Wang et al., 2012), number of likes by self (Kleanthous et al., 2011), number of comments from others (Shen et al., 2015), and number of pictures (Eftekhar et al., 2014) have been demonstrated to be positively related to neuroticism, whereas number of friends and attending events had a negative relationship with neuroticism (Kleanthous et al., 2011).

Whereas less work has looked at cognitive ability in an SNS context, SNS posts containing poor sentence structure and spelling errors were perceived to be indicative of someone with lower intelligence (Scott et al., 2014). Relatedly, basic writing skills (Cormier et al., 2016; Floyd et al., 2008) and sentence composition (i.e., forming sentences with specific words and combining sentences without losing original meaning; Caemmerer et al., 2018) have been linked to cognitive ability in other contexts. As for integrity, research found those who had higher honesty and integrity disclosed less inappropriate content on their profile (Newness et al., 2012). Relatedly, research has found cybervetter perceptions of profilee integrity to be positively linked to the number of endorsing comments on the profile and negatively linked to number of posts containing profanity (Schroeder, Medeiros, & Whitaker, 2018). Additionally, Becton et al. (2019) found that raters would expect applicants with unprofessional SNS content to engage in counterproductive work behaviors, such as production deviance (i.e., intentionally doing job tasks wrong), abuse against others (i.e., physically assaulting others or causing distress via insults or ignoring them), and withdrawal from their work (i.e., being late, leaving early, and/or taking extended breaks). Furthermore, research outside of social media platforms has found a relationship between integrity and profanity (Feldman et al., 2017), verbal aggression (Harris, 1997), disparaging attitudes (Schlenker et al., 2008), and endorsing attitudes (Schlenker et al.,

2008). With an abundance of content available on SNSs from which to draw conclusions, this study focused on perceptions of personality, cognitive ability, and integrity, as negative rater perceptions related to any of these constructs could lead to the applicant being screened out in a selection setting.

1.2 The Influence of Friends on Perceptions of Individuals

Although most cybervetting research to date has focused on user-generated content, there are three sources of information available on SNS profiles that can impact cybervetter perceptions of job applicants (i.e., profilee activity, system-generated information, and friend activity; Utz, 2010). Regarding friend activity, Hightower et al. (2019) found that several SNS profile features generated by the profilee's peers (e.g., wall posts and comments) influenced perceptions of the applicant and their perceived suitability. Namely, excessive punctuation from friends was related to higher perceptions of profilee extraversion and cognitive ability, and inappropriate content from friends was related to lower perceptions of profilee integrity. Additionally, Walther et al. (2008) identified a positive link between SNS friend physical attractiveness and perceptions of profilee physical attractiveness. Thus, as suggested by Dickter and Jockin (2018), information posted by an applicant's friends on a social media page has the potential to influence the applicant's chances of employment.

Furthermore, research has demonstrated that raters typically rely more heavily on friend content than they do profilee content when forming their impressions of a profilee's social attractiveness (i.e., one's willingness to develop a social relationship with the profilee; Rosenthal-Stott et al., 2015). Therefore, comments from friends such as "you're the smartest person I know" could be more influential to rater perceptions than similar posts made by the profilee themselves, such as claiming "I am the smartest person I know" (Scott & Ravenscroft,

2017). Additionally, Scott and Ravenscroft (2017) found that positively framed friend content directed toward the profilee (e.g., “You have been far too good to me! You are the best and I can’t thank you enough”) positively influenced ratings of modesty, social attractiveness, and popularity more than general statements made by friends (e.g., “I am having a good night at the beach with a hot chocolate, marshmallows and a fire lit”) or posts made by the profilee themselves.

Further, just as positive friend content can positively influence perceptions of the profilee, it is likely that negative friend content adversely influences perceptions of the profilee. Relatedly, negative language on SNSs about a product has been found to generate a negative halo effect (i.e., negative comments or characteristics for one product lead to negative beliefs about other related products) for similar products from other companies (Borah & Tellis, 2016). Applying this to cybervetting, if a rater observes negative behaviors in an applicant’s friend group, they may attribute these same negative perceptions to the applicant. Research has also found support for a spreading attitude effect in which one’s association with a favorable or unfavorable individual can influence perceptions of the ratee (e.g., an association with someone perceived negatively by a rater could decrease the ratee’s perceived likeability; Walther, 2002).

One method in which the influence of friend content can be eliminated could be to redact or remove content not generated by the profilee. Traditional redacting techniques require the individual to manually cover or remove the sensitive information. As this would expose the individual to the friend content, the organization would need to have one person redact the friend content from a profile and have another person evaluate the profile to ensure there was no impact of friend content on cybervetting-based ratings. However, automatic redacting techniques that use artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning to cover or remove sensitive information

from documents are beginning to emerge (see e.g., Sánchez & Batet, 2017). Thus, as AI and machine learning continue to develop, automatic redaction techniques may become a valuable tool in eliminating friend content from cybervetting-based evaluations.

This leads to the first hypothesis of this study:

> *Hypothesis 1 (H1):* The presence of (a) positively perceived SNS friend activity on a profilee's Facebook profile will increase perceptions of applicant suitability, and (b) negatively perceived SNS friend activity on a profilee's Facebook profile will reduce perceptions of applicant suitability, as compared to a profile with neutral or redacted friend content.

Additionally, it is possible that negativity bias (i.e., the tendency for negative information to impact decisions more than positive or neutral information; Hamilton & Huffman, 1971; Ito, Larsen, Smith, & Cacioppo, 1998) triggered by unprofessional or disparaging friend content may occur. For example, Kätsyri et al. (2016) found that negative SNS content received more attention and was viewed longer than positive content. Relatedly, Becton et al. (2019) found that unprofessional information on social media had a negative association with perceptions of the applicant, whereas professional information had no relation to rater impressions. Furthermore, Hornik et al. (2015) found that people were much more interested in sharing negative information found online than they were positive information. As such, due to negativity bias, negative friend content is likely to receive more attention and carry more weight in cybervetter judgements than positive friend content. Therefore:

> *Hypothesis 2 (H2):* Negative SNS friend content will have a greater impact on overall perceptions of applicant suitability than will positive SNS friend content.

1.3 The Complication of Friend Content in Impression Formation

As friend content could potentially have profound effects on how the profilee is perceived, it is important to consider the complications this may bring for cybervetting practices. As gathering information from a third party is nothing new in a selection context (e.g., reference checks, referrals, etc.), a discussion of third-party data collection methods is provided below. As suggested by Chamorro-Premuzic et al. (2016), using friend content in cybervetting is similar to the practice of evaluating applicants based on a letter of recommendation (LOR) in the sense that perceptions are being formed based on limited information from a third party. More specifically, unlike with a reference check (i.e., contacting individuals from the applicant's personal network who would vouch for their work ethic), LORs and SNS content are both limited to what has already been provided; the interviewer cannot probe for more information with follow-up questions during the assessment. This is important because interviewers can get answers to more specific questions with a reference check than what might be disclosed in LORs or on SNSs. For example, if an employee received praise for an accomplishment in a LOR or on social media, the interviewer may not be aware of the significance of the achievement and would be unable to seek more information about the accomplishment. Conversely, with a reference check the interviewer could probe for additional information by calling the applicant's references. Likewise, online content can often be viewed more negatively than intended if taken out of context (e.g., the profilee may share an article from the Onion as a joke, but the cybervetter may not realize that the Onion is a satirical journal), and cybervetters would not be able to ask follow-up questions to clarify the context of the post.

Further, it has been suggested that LORs are unduly positive due to the applicant having the ability to choose references they know will provide a favorable letter (Aamodt et al., 1993;

Grote et al., 2001). Additionally, Aamodt et al. (1993) found low agreement between letter writers and acknowledged that this is a common issue with LORs. Research has also found agreement to be higher between recommendations written by the same person for different applicants than for different people writing letters for the same applicant (Baxter et al., 1981). This suggests that LORs may be more reflective of characteristics of the writer than the applicant.

Just as applicants have a choice in who provides their letters of recommendation, they also have a choice of who they are friends with on their SNSs. Studies have provided support for the social compensation hypothesis (i.e., using the internet to overcome deficiencies in social skills; Valkenburg et al., 2005), whereby SNS users with low self-esteem were more likely to compensate for a lack of offline friends by increasing the number of friends they had online (Lee et al., 2012). Relatedly, social attractiveness has been found to facilitate online relationships, as profilees are more likely to unfriend users whose posts make them look bad (Peña & Brody, 2014). Sibona and Walczak (2011) also found that users commonly unfriend other users whose posts are inappropriate (e.g., posting something unflattering, racist, or sexist) or polarizing (e.g., posting about politics or religion). Given that SNS users may engage in selective SNS network development by friending others who will post positive comments about them and removing friends who make negative comments, SNS friend content may suffer from some of the same limitations as LORs. Namely, the introduction of error due to unrealistic representation from the applicant's personal network and inconsistencies between friend-generated content may be a concern (e.g., one friend may post overly positive content concerning the profilee, whereas another friend may post excessively negative content about the profilee, or profiles may vary in the amount of friend content on which to base judgments).

Despite having the ability to unfriend and hide contacts who are disparaging, Schroeder and Cavanaugh (2018) found that individuals differ in their ability to manage others' impressions based on SNS content. In addition, other research has suggested that friend posts have higher warranting value than profilee posts (i.e., they should be viewed as being more accurate) due to the profilee's inability to manipulate friend-generated content to facilitate self-presentation (Rosenthal-Stott et al., 2015; Utz, 2010; Walther & Parks, 2002). Relatedly, Byrne's (1971) similarity-attraction hypothesis states that friendships and social attraction are predicted by similarity between personality traits rather than specific main effects of personality (e.g., similarity in agreeableness between two people would better predict friendship than whether each person is high or low in agreeableness). The concept of homophily has been observed in numerous networks, ranging from simple friendships to more intricate relationships such as marriages (McPherson et al., 2001). Youyou et al. (2017) demonstrated similar (albeit relatively small) effects in a social media context, such that similarity in page likes and language used were demonstrated within a profilee's network. However, because similarity studies typically look at close personal relationships, the similarity-attraction hypothesis may be less relevant in a cybervetting-based assessment due to approximately 15% of one's Facebook network consisting of friends that have never met in person (Stefanone, Lackaff, & Rosen, 2011). Thus, one's SNS network may demonstrate lower homophily than is the case in other social contexts, and cybervetting-based judgments based on SNS friend activity may result in inaccurate perceptions of job applicants. Perhaps rater consideration of SNS friend content helps explain recent findings suggesting that cybervetting-based scores of personality, cognitive ability, written communication skills, and professionalism differ from test scores and self-reported ratings of these constructs (Schroeder, Odd, & Whitaker, in press).

As computer-based redaction software may be a potentially unnecessary expense for organizations, and manual redaction can be time consuming and prone to human error, an alternative strategy may be to simply instruct raters to ignore the friend content. Instructing raters to ignore friend content may be easier and more cost effective for organizations, as it would require no additional software development or purchases. However, the only way for a rater to differentiate friend content from profilee content is by examining the profilee name or picture. Therefore, if raters review a profile quickly, they could easily mistake friend content for profilee content and fail to ignore the friend content. Relatedly, research has found that first impressions are formed based on available information within the first 39 milliseconds of meeting someone (Bar et al., 2006). With judgments being formed so quickly, if a cybervetter mistakenly attributes friend content as being profilee-generated, friend content may have an unduly strong influence on the initial impression of the profilee even if the rater had the intention of ignoring friend content.

Moreover, previous research has suggested that warning people to ignore certain information may not be an effective strategy unless a reminder is given during observations (Schul, 1992). Further, in a legal context, Schul and Goren (1997) found that raters tended to over-adjust their ratings when asked to ignore a strong source of information. Thus, when raters are instructed to ignore SNS friend content, and friend content is particularly positive or negative, raters may over-adjust their perceptions in an attempt to discount this information. Therefore, it is likely that instructing raters to ignore friend content may actually increase the impact of friend content on the perceptions of applicant characteristics. As friend content is expected to influence rater perceptions, it may be appropriate to remove the extraneous source of information from the profile to get a baseline score for the profilee.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): When SNS friend content is positive, instructing raters to ignore SNS friend content will result in lower suitability ratings, as compared to suitability ratings for the same profile with (a) redacted friend content or (b) no rating restrictions.

Hypothesis 4 (H4): When SNS friend content is negative, instructing raters to ignore SNS friend content will result in higher suitability ratings, as compared to suitability ratings for the same profile with (a) redacted friend content or (b) no rating restrictions.

As mentioned previously, an additional complication of friend content is that it is a somewhat unique concern for cybervetting, as only a select few traditional assessments consider information from a third party (e.g., reference checks and LORs). As traditional assessments are commonly self-reported measures or tests, and information gathered from SNS friends is neither test-based nor self-reported by the profilee, the presence of friend content may make cybervetting incomparable to more traditional measures. Equivalency in measures is important if cybervetting is to be used as an alternative to more traditional assessments because in the absence of equivalency, one measure may affect the selection pool differently than another assessment. For example, if a multiple hurdle approach is used in which an applicant must score above a minimum threshold to move forward in the selection process, choice of assessment method could impact which applicants are eliminated (see e.g., Roth et al., 2016; Sackett & Roth, 1996). Thus, it is important to investigate factors that may increase cross-method agreement between cybervetting-based rating and more traditional assessment approaches.

Consistent with Vazire's (2010) Self-Other Knowledge Asymmetry (SOKA) model, which states that external perceptions of an individual can differ from self-perceptions, Schroeder, Odd, and Whitaker (in press) found low cross-method agreement between cybervetting-based perceptions and scores on traditional measures of applicant traits and

abilities. As friend content may not be an accurate representation of the applicant, ratings influenced by friend content may perhaps partially contribute to this low cross-method agreement. Further, information overload (i.e., having too much information) has been linked to lower quality decision making by increasing confusion and leading to the selection of objectively worse options (i.e., options that have fewer positive or desirable attributes; Jacoby et al., 1974; Lee & Lee, 2004). Applying this to cybervetting, it is possible that the inclusion of friend content could have a negative impact on rating quality. Therefore, reducing the amount of information provided by removing SNS friend content from a profile during cybervetting may help improve cross-method agreement across traditional and cybervetting-based assessments of applicant characteristics. This leads into the final hypothesis:

> *Hypothesis 5 (H5):* Cross-method agreement between cybervetting and non-cybervetting assessments will differ by assessment format, such that the greatest cross-method agreement will be for the method in which friend content is redacted.

CHAPTER 2: METHOD

2.1 Pilot Study

The purpose of the pilot study was to identify one Facebook profile with 25 suitable posts and comments to serve as profilee content and 25 posts and comments to be included as SNS friend content. In order to maintain a high degree of authenticity, 100 posts and comments made by real people in archived Facebook profiles were vetted as potential SNS friend content. The content varied in grammatical errors, drug references, outstanding achievements, endorsing comments, and other subjective attributes. All content was presented in a randomly generated order and perceptions of each individual post and comment was assessed with a five-point semantic differential scale (1 = very negative to 5 = very positive) for the single item "A hiring manager would perceive this content to be…". A total of 16 psychology undergraduate research assistants (RAs) and graduate students assessed each of the 100 posts and comments. Thirteen posts and comments with means greater than 3.94 were selected to represent positive friend content, 26 posts and comments with means ranging from 2.75 to 3.25 were picked to represent neutral friend content, and 13 posts and comments with means less than 2.00 were picked to represent negative friend content. The standard deviation for all selected posts ranged between 0.00 and 0.78. Means and standard deviations for each post can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1.

Means and standard deviations for piloted friend content

Negative Content	***M***	***SD***	**Neutral Content**	***M***	***SD***	**Positive Content**	***M***	***SD***
1*	1.44	0.629	1	2.75	0.447	1	4.50	0.632
2	1.44	0.629	2	2.81	0.403	2	4.50	0.730
3	1.63	0.719	3	2.81	0.544	3	4.38	0.719
4	1.63	0.619	4	2.88	0.500	4	4.25	0.775
5	1.63	0.619	5	2.88	0.342	5	4.25	0.577
6	1.75	0.577	6	2.88	0.342	6	4.13	0.719
7	1.75	0.775	7	2.88	0.500	7	4.13	0.619
8	1.75	0.683	8	2.94	0.443	8	4.13	0.619
9	1.81	0.750	9	2.94	0.250	9	4.06	0.574
10	1.94	0.772	10	2.94	0.443	10	4.06	0.680
11	1.94	0.772	11	2.94	0.250	11	4.00	0.632
12	1.94	0.574	12	2.94	0.250	12	4.00	0.730
13	2.00	0.632	13	3.00	0.000	13*	3.94	0.574
			14	3.00	0.365			
			15	3.00	0.365			
			16	3.06	0.443			
			17	3.13	0.342			
			18	3.13	0.342			
			19	3.13	0.342			
			20	3.19	0.403			
			21	3.19	0.403			
			22	3.19	0.403			
			23	3.19	0.403			
			24	3.25	0.577			
			25	3.25	0.447			
			26*	3.25	0.577			

* indicates that the post was used only as a manipulation check.

Additionally, authentic SNS profilee content from four archived profiles was pilot tested to ensure the absence of ceiling and floor effects for the constructs of interest. For example, if based on only profilee content, the applicant was perceived to be very high in conscientiousness, then this ceiling effect may prevent highly conscientious friend content from being able to positively impact this perception. Therefore, the same 16 participants completed an evaluation of the profilee content in which they provided ratings for each of the eight constructs (i.e., openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism, cognitive ability, integrity, and suitability) using the same measures outlined in the participant profile evaluation section below (i.e., the NEO-FFI for personality, the RAVEN APM test and self-reported GPA for cognitive ability, the moral identity scale for applicant integrity, and the recommendation to hire scale to assess applicant suitability). One profile that did not display extreme scores for any of the constructs (i.e., an average rating more than one point from a scale endpoint) was selected for use in the experimental study. This profile received generally average scores for perceived neuroticism (M = 3.07, SD = 0.34), extraversion (M = 3.04, SD = 0.40), openness (M = 3.27, SD = 0.27), agreeableness (M = 3.04, SD = 0.53), conscientiousness (M = 2.97, SD = 0.58), integrity (M = 3.39, SD = 0.55), cognitive ability (based on estimates of two different assessment scores; i.e., GPA [M = 3.18, SD = 0.31] and RAVEN test scores [M = 7.04, SD = 1.20]), and overall applicant suitability (M = 3.25, SD = 0.71). To maintain confidentiality of archival data, piloted profiles and posts were not included in this document.

2.2 Experimental Study

Participants. Data were collected from 451 participants who met the following criteria: (a) was at least 18 years of age, and (b) reported English as a primary language due to all posts, comments, and instructions being in English and some SNS content may have contained

informal language that only a proficient speaker would understand. Participants were recruited through a psychology undergraduate subject pool. A benefit of using an undergraduate subject pool is that participants could be considered SNS subject matter experts (SMEs), as 95% of college students are active on at least one SNS (Stefanone, Lackaff, & Rosen, 2011).

Of the 451 participants, two were removed due to age data entry errors (i.e., one participant indicated they were one year old, the other indicated they were 2001 years old). This study refrained from making inferences regarding participant age due to the concern of the legal age of consent (i.e., it would be better to lose two participants who might have been older than 18 than to risk including minors with invalid consent). This resulted in a sample size of 449, which was reduced to a final sample size of 338 after quality control (screened out 59 participants) and manipulation check screening (screened out 52 participants).

This sample consisted of 246 (72.8%) females and 89 (26.3%) males. The majority of participants were Hispanic (36.4%), followed by White/Caucasian (35.2%), Black/African American (18.3%), and Asian (16.9%). Ages ranged from 18 to 47 (M = 19.94, SD = 3.56). Work history ranged from 0 to 32 years (M = 3.07, SD = 3.49), with up to 25 years (M = 0.64, SD = 2.13) of experience in a supervisory role. Of this sample, 42.6% indicated that they had at least some experience evaluating job applicants; 8.9% of the sample reported having extensive or somewhat extensive experience evaluating job applicants in general, and 3% had extensive or somewhat extensive experience evaluating job applicants via social media.

Materials. Participants completed a demographic survey through an online survey system (i.e., Qualtrics) and they completed an evaluation of an SNS profile. Study materials are described below.

Rater demographics survey. Participants completed a rater demographic survey which assessed attributes such as age, ethnicity, gender, years of work experience, general job applicant evaluation experience (on a five-point Likert scale; 1 = no experience to 5 = extensive experience), and job applicant cybervetting experience (on a five-point Likert scale; 1 = no experience to 5 = extensive experience). See Appendix A.

SNS profile conditions. Based on pilot study results, one archived Facebook profile of an undergraduate student from a large Southwestern university was presented. The profile reflected what was on Facebook at the time the profile was captured, but was manipulated to contain various levels of friend activity, thereby creating four versions of the Facebook profile. The profilee content was stable across all versions. Profiles A and B contained 50% profilee content and 50% friend content, with a total of 50 profile posts. For the purpose of this study, posts refer to both wall posts and comments. Roughly half (i.e., 48 percent) of the friend content (i.e., 12 posts) was negatively perceived activity for Profile A and positively perceived activity for Profile B. The remaining 52% of the friend content (i.e., 13 posts) was neutral so that each profile seemed authentic. Serving as a control, Profile C consisted of 25 neutral friend posts and 25 profilee posts. Additionally, Profile D had friend content redacted to maintain a consistent profile length. This profile had only the 25 profilee posts.

Profile evaluation. Each rater (i.e., participant) was given one version of the profile and rated the applicant on personality traits, cognitive ability, integrity, and overall suitability. Raters judged the profilee's personality (i.e., openness to experiences, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism) using an adapted version of the 60-item Neuroticism-Extraversion-Openness Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI), with a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) for items such as "the profilee does not like to waste

his/her time daydreaming" (Costa & McCrae, 1992). The measure was adapted from first person to third person pronouns, as participants used the measure to assess the personality of the profilee rather than conducting a self-assessment. The present study obtained the following internal consistency reliability coefficients: neuroticism α = .72, extraversion α = .78, openness α = .55, agreeableness α = .80, conscientiousness α = .84. Due to the test publisher's policy, the full measure will not be published in the appendix.

Cognitive ability was evaluated by using the following two items: an estimate of the profilee's grade point average (i.e., GPA) and a prediction of the profilee's score on the 12-item RAVEN Advanced Progressive Matrices Short Form (APM; Bors & Stokes, 1998; Raven, Court, & Raven, 1988). The RAVEN APM is a spatial reasoning cognitive ability test in which participants are prompted to complete a series of incomplete patterns. Raters were provided with the average RAVEN APM score for college students as a frame of reference. Estimates of GPA ranged from 2.00 to 4.00 (M = 3.19, SD = 0.14) and estimates of the RAVEN ranged from 1 to 12 (M = 7.13, SD = 1.42). The cognitive ability assessment can be found in Appendix B.

The ten-item moral identity scale (Aquino & Reed, 2002) was adapted to compare the profilee to an imagined person with a list of moral characteristics. This measure used a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) to assess perceptions of the profilee's integrity, as measures of moral identity have been used in previous studies to assess integrity (see e.g., Black & Reynolds, 2016). An example item from this scale is "A big part of the profilee's emotional well-being is tied-up in having these characteristics (i.e., caring, compassionate, fair, friendly, generous, hardworking, helpful, honest, kind)". The current study found a Cronbach's α of .83. This can be found in Appendix C.

Applicant suitability was assessed with the three-item recommendation to hire scale developed by Cable and Judge (1997) and adapted by Schroeder and Cavanaugh (2018) so that all items were rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = very unlikely to 5 = very likely). This measure had a Cronbach's α of .89, and can be seen in Appendix D.

Profilee assessments. Archival profilee personality, cognitive ability, and integrity data were collected in a previous study using the same measures being used by raters in the current study (i.e., the NEO-FFI for personality, the RAVEN APM test and self-reported GPA for cognitive ability, and the moral identity scale for applicant integrity). Because the profilee did not provide a self-assessment of applicant suitability, applicant suitability was not examined for cross-method agreement.

Quality control. As a measure of quality control, time spent evaluating the Facebook profile was recorded. Because there were no participants who finished the study more than three standard distributions faster than average (M = 45.31 minutes, SD = 4.09 hours), no participants were eliminated based on time. Participants were also asked to rate on a five-point Likert scale (1 = very low effort to 5 = very high effort) the amount of effort they put into the survey. Participants who reported putting in low or very low effort were screened out. Additionally, two attention checks were included throughout the survey which instructed the rater to select a specific answer (e.g., "please select the response *strongly agree*"). If participants missed both attention checks, they were eliminated from analyses. These quality control procedures reduced the sample size from 449 to 390.

Manipulation checks. As a manipulation check, raters answered either yes or no to the question "regardless of whether you paid attention to the content, were there any posts or comments made by users other than the profilee?" This determined whether raters accurately

identified friend content on the profile. Those who answered this question incorrectly were screened out. This resulted in the removal of eight participants each from conditions 1, 5, and 6, five from condition 2, two each from conditions 3 and 4, and 19 from condition 7. Thus, the sample size was reduced from 390 participants to 338.

Additionally, raters completed the same five-point semantic differential scale that was used in the pilot study for a randomly assigned subset of 10 friend posts that were included across profile conditions, such that all friend content was rated across participants. Participants may have been exposed to posts that were not on their assigned profile condition (e.g., participants who viewed Profile A may have been asked to rate posts from Profile B). This manipulation check ensured that friend content was perceived as intended and that participants were able to distinguish between positive ($M_{weighted}$ = 4.54, SD = 0.58), neutral ($M_{weighted}$ = 3.31, SD = 0.46), and negative ($M_{weighted}$ = 1.55, SD = 0.46) friend content.

Memory assessment. On an exploratory basis, three negative posts (i.e., two that were presented in Profile A and one that was not), three positive posts (i.e., two that were presented in Profile B and one that was not), three neutral posts (i.e., two that were only presented in Profile C and one that was not presented in any condition), and two posts from the profilee (so that even profile D participants were presented with previously viewed content) were presented one at a time in a random order. Thus, participants who viewed profiles A, B, and C were exposed to four posts that were on the profile they viewed (e.g., participants who saw Profile A would see two negative posts and two profilee posts that were on profile A) and seven posts that were not on the profile, whereas profile D participants saw only two posts that were on their profile and nine that were not. Participants were asked if they remembered seeing each post. Names and profile pictures were removed from these posts so that participants were not influenced by demand

characteristics (e.g., participants in the "ignore friend content" conditions may be hesitant to report that they remember seeing specific friend content, even if they did recall seeing the post).

This memory assessment was included because some content could have been misremembered more than other content (e.g., negative friend posts could have been more memorable than positive friend posts). Additionally, there was the potential of halo and horn effects (i.e., misremembering content as being present or absent simply based on its valence). Further, participants could have remembered seeing profilee posts more than friend posts, especially in the ignore conditions. Thus, this tested to see if there were any patterns of participant memory errors.

Scores had the potential to range from 0.00 (i.e., no correct responses) to 1.00 (i.e., all correct responses). Overall, this assessment illustrated that participant memory was relatively accurate (M = .87, SD = 0.13); however, there were notable discrepancies across conditions on a per item basis (see Table 2 for the percentage of incorrect responses per item across conditions). Specifically, 33.9% of participants who were instructed to ignore negative friend content (i.e., condition 2) incorrectly identified a negative friend post as not being on the profile when it was. Only 8.3% of participants made this error when they were not instructed to ignore negative friend content (i.e., condition 1). Perhaps participants who were instructed to ignore negative friend content missed this item because they noticed the post was made by a friend and chose to ignore it as they were instructed. Participants who viewed the profile with positive (i.e., conditions 3 and 4) or neutral (i.e., conditions 5 and 6) friend content showed evidence of forgetting friend posts. This could indicate that positive and neutral content may lack salience (which is also evidenced by accuracy errors regarding profilee posts, as these posts had a neutral

valence). Additionally, it appears that, overall, participants were more susceptible to forgetting posts that were present than they were to misremembering posts that were not present.

Table 2.

Percentage of incorrect responses for each memory assessment item across study conditions

Condition	- (a)	- (b)	- (c)	+ (a)	+ (b)	+ (c)	/ (a)	/ (b)	/ (c)	ProPost (a)	ProPost (b)
1	8.3	6.3	12.5	20.8	2.1	8.3	14.6	8.3	2.1	18.8	6.3
2	33.9	1.8	8.9	14.3	7.1	10.7	7.1	3.6	0.0	28.6	16.1
3	5.7	9.4	0.0	18.9	35.8	11.3	26.4	5.7	5.7	18.9	11.3
4	15.4	7.7	0.0	38.5	46.2	9.6	21.2	5.8	5.8	26.9	13.5
5	16.7	6.3	0.0	14.6	8.3	14.6	64.6	22.9	2.1	25.0	16.7
6	14.0	10.0	4.0	16.0	14.0	10.0	64.0	34.0	2.0	18.0	6.0
7	3.2	6.5	0.0	6.5	3.2	3.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	9.7	0.0

Note. Shaded box indicates that the corresponding post was on the profile (e.g., participants in condition 1 had two of the three negative posts on the profile version they viewed). - = negative valence friend post. + = positive valence friend post. / = neutral valence friend post. ProPost = post made by the profilee. Letters (a) and (b) denote posts that were present in at least one version of the profile. Letter (c) denotes posts that were not included in any version of the profile

2.3 Procedure

This study used a three (assessment method: no instruction vs. ignore friend content vs. friend content removed) x three (SNS friend content valence: positive friend content vs. negative friend content vs. neutral friend content) partially-crossed between-subjects experimental design. This study was not fully crossed because friend content valence was not applicable when friend content was removed (see Table 3 for condition descriptions). A between-subjects design was the preferred method for this study because with a within-subjects design, raters may have suffered order effects (i.e., the participant's rating of one profile may be influenced by a previous profile) or been impacted by demand characteristics (i.e., if the participant saw multiple profiles, they would likely notice that only the friend content on the profile was being manipulated, which might prime them to give more attention to friend content than what they would have under normal conditions). Therefore, each rater only saw one profile.

Table 3.

Experimental conditions grouped by assessment method

Assessment Method		
No restrictions	**Ignore friend content**	**Friend content redacted**
• Condition 1 – Negative friend content • Condition 3 – Positive friend content • Condition 5 – Neutral friend content	• Condition 2 – Negative friend content • Condition 4 – Positive friend content • Condition 6 – Neutral friend content	• Condition 7 – No friend content

Participants completed a rater demographics survey and were randomly assigned to one of seven conditions (i.e., condition 1 evaluated Profile A with no restrictions regarding friend

content, condition 2 evaluated Profile A with instructions to ignore friend content, condition 3 evaluated Profile B with no restrictions regarding friend content, condition 4 evaluated Profile B with instructions to ignore friend content, condition 5 evaluated Profile C with no restrictions regarding friend content, condition 6 evaluated Profile C with instructions to ignore friend content, and condition 7 evaluated Profile D with no restrictions; see Table 3). Raters completed a cybervetting evaluation of applicant characteristics and overall suitability. There were between 31 and 56 participants in each of the seven conditions.

CHAPTER 3: RESULTS

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to assess *H1*, *H3*, and *H4*, with condition serving as the independent variable (IV) and perceived applicant suitability as the dependent variable (DV). To test *H2*, mean differences between (a) profiles with positive versus neutral and redacted friend content compared to (b) profiles with negative versus neutral and redacted friend content was conducted by examining the 95% confidence interval (CI) around each of the mean differences. Due to unequal observations across conditions and heterogeneity of variance as indicated by a significant Levene's test, $F(6, 331) = 2.26$, $p = .04$, a Brown-Forsythe test was conducted to adjust for unequal group variances, which indicated that perceptions differed by condition, $F(6, 268.21) = 4.56$, $p < .001$, $\omega^2 = .06$. Thus, a Bonferroni *post-hoc* test was conducted to examine differences across conditions. Condition means, standard errors, and 95% confidence intervals are provided in Table 4.

Table 4.

Suitability perception means, standard errors, and 95% confidence intervals for the seven conditions

Condition	Mean	Standard Error	95% Confidence Interval
1	3.21	0.15	[2.91, 3.50]
2	3.65	0.11	[3.42, 3.89]
3	4.05	0.10	[3.85, 4.25]
4	3.83	0.10	[3.62, 4.04]
5	3.83	0.11	[3.60, 4.06]
6	3.77	0.14	[3.49, 4.04]
7	3.46	0.19	[3.08, 3.85]

H1a was not supported, as the profile with positive friend content (i.e., condition 3) did not yield significantly different suitability ratings than the profile with no friend content (i.e., condition 7; $p = .07$) or the profile with neutral friend content (i.e., condition 5; $p = 1.00$). *H1b* was partially supported, as the profile with negative friend content (i.e., condition 1) yielded significantly lower suitability ratings than the profile with neutral content (condition 5; Δ mean = -.62, $p = .01$), but did not differ from the profile with redacted friend content (i.e., condition 7; $p = 1.00$).

Support for *H2* was mixed, as negative friend content (i.e., condition 1) produced significantly lower applicant suitability perceptions than neutral friend content (i.e., condition 5; 95% CI [-1.17, -0.07]), whereas suitability perceptions in the positive friend content condition (i.e., condition 3) did not significantly differ from the neutral friend content condition (i.e., condition 5; $p = 1.00$, 95% CI [-0.31, 0.76]). However, redacting friend content (i.e., condition 7) did not result in a significant difference from positive (i.e., condition 3; $p = .07$, 95% CI [-1.20, 0.02]) or negative (i.e., condition 1; $p = 1.00$, 95% CI [-0.37, 0.87]) friend content.

H3 garnered no support, as instructing raters to ignore positive friend content (i.e., condition 4) did not result in significantly different ratings of applicant suitability as compared to when no instructions were given (i.e., condition 3; $p = 1.00$) or when friend content was removed (i.e., condition 7; $p = 1.00$). Similarly, *H4* also failed to garner statistical support. Instructions to ignore negative friend content (i.e., condition 2) did not show significantly different ratings of applicant suitability as compared to the redacted condition (i.e., condition 7; $p = 1.00$) or when no instructions were given regarding the negative friend content (i.e., condition 1; $p = .22$).

Unrelated to the study's hypotheses, the condition with no instructions regarding negative friend content resulted in significantly lower suitability ratings than the condition with no

instructions regarding positive friend content (i.e., condition 3; Δ mean = -.84, $p < .001$), as well as the conditions in which raters were instructed to ignore positive (i.e., condition 4; Δ mean = -.63, $p = .01$) and neutral (i.e., condition 6; Δ mean = -.56, $p = .04$) friend content. There were no other significant differences between conditions.

Traditional inter-rater reliability assessments (e.g., intraclass correlations) could not be conducted throughout this study due to each rater only evaluating one profile, and because there was only one score for each of the traditional metrics as there was only one applicant. However, an examination of the standard deviations across each condition regarding profilee suitability was relatively low ($SD = 0.86 – 1.05$). This is an indicator that raters agreed with each other's suitability rating for the most part within each condition.

On an exploratory basis, rater cybervetting experience was assessed as a potential moderator for the relationship between suitability ratings and rater condition. An ANCOVA revealed there was no significant interaction for cybervetting experience and condition, $F(6, 324) = 0.45$, $p = .85$. Thus, cybervetting experience did not appear to moderate the relationship between condition and suitability ratings. However, exploring cybervetting experience as a moderator would violate the ANCOVA assumption regarding independence of the covariate and treatment effect, as the covariate (i.e., cybervetting experience) was found to significantly differ across analysis groups (i.e., conditions), $F(6, 331) = 3.40$, $p = .003$. Thus, the results of the ANCOVAs reported in this study should be interpreted with caution.

To assess whether cross-method disagreement occurred, seven one-sample *t*-tests were performed to determine if cybervetting-assessed scores differed from traditional scores for openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism, integrity, and cognitive ability (see Table 5). Cybervetting-assessed scores were significantly lower than

traditional scores (i.e., the participant's self-reported score) for neuroticism, agreeableness, conscientiousness, integrity, and GPA. Conversely, the cybervetting-assessed scores were significantly higher than the traditional scores for extraversion and the RAVEN. However, scores did not significantly differ for openness to experience.

Table 5.

Cross-method disagreement between cybervetting assessed scores and traditional scores

Factor	***t*-Statistic**	***df***	***p***	**Traditional Score**	**CV *M* Score**	**CV *SD***
Neuroticism	-43.73	336	< .001	4.00	2.85	0.48
Extraversion	2.36	336	.02	3.40	3.47	0.54
Openness	0.004	336	1.00	3.30	3.30	0.39
Agreeableness	-15.66	336	< .001	3.80	3.32	0.56
Conscientiousness	-18.99	336	< .001	3.70	3.13	0.55
Integrity	-21.56	337	< .001	4.50	3.82	0.58
RAVEN	53.43	336	< .001	3.00	7.13	1.42
GPA	-43.79	332	< .001	4.00	3.19	0.34

Note. CV *M* Score = cybervetting-assessed mean score; CV *SD* = cybervetting-assessed standard deviation.

Following these *t*-tests, *H5* was tested with a one-way ANOVA to assess whether there were significant differences in the degree of cross-method agreement across conditions, with the difference score between the traditional ratings and cybervetting-based ratings serving as the

variable of interest. For example, if the profilee had a score of 3 on the RAVEN APM test, and a cybervetter estimated that the profilee's RAVEN test score was 7.04, the difference score for the RAVEN would be 4.04. As this hypothesis is concerned with the difference between traditional scores and cybervetting-assessed scores, the following statistics should be interpreted as their absolute value. Thus, cybervetting-assessed scores closer to zero should be interpreted as having less of a difference from traditional scores.

Due to uneven sample sizes and Levene's test indicating heterogeneity of variance for the ANOVAs regarding openness to experience, $F(6, 330) = 2.90$, $p = .01$, and integrity, $F(6, 331) = 2.53$, $p = .02$, a Brown-Forsythe test was conducted for these factors. All other factors had homogeneity of variance as indicated by the Levene's test. The one-way ANOVAs for neuroticism, agreeableness, conscientiousness, integrity, and the RAVEN were significant, whereas extraversion, openness to experience, and GPA were not significant (see Table 6). Low standard deviations were observed for all factors across all conditions (neuroticism $SD = 0.39 – 0.53$; extraversion $SD = 0.30 – 0.37$; openness to experience $SD = 0.17 – 0.30$; agreeableness $SD = 0.37 – 0.48$; conscientiousness $SD = 0.38 – 0.52$; integrity $SD = 0.37 – 0.69$; RAVEN $SD = 1.02 – 1.56$; GPA $SD = 0.31 – 0.37$). Thus, it can be argued that there was a degree of interrater agreement across factors and study conditions.

Table 6.

Summary of One-way ANOVAs assessing cross-method disagreement across conditions

Factor	***F*-Statistic**	$df_{between}$	df_{within}	***p***	ω^2
Neuroticism	2.68	6	330	.02	.03
Extraversion	1.77	6	330	.10	.01
*Openness	0.94	6	302.46	.46	-.002
Agreeableness	3.03	6	330	.01	.03
Conscientiousness	3.59	6	330	.002	.04
*Integrity	3.95	6	272.81	.001	.05
RAVEN	3.58	6	330	.002	.04
GPA	2.12	6	326	.05	.02

Note. * = Brown-Forsythe test was reported due to heterogeneity of variance.

A Bonferroni *post-hoc* test was conducted to determine differences between conditions for the factors that had a significant ANOVA. Means, standard errors, and 95% confidence intervals for the significant factors are provided in Table 7.

Table 7.

Summary of difference scores for neuroticism, agreeableness, conscientiousness, integrity, and the RAVEN

Factor	Condition	Mean	Standard Error	95% Confidence Interval
Neuroticism	1	1.06	0.07	[0.93, 1.19]
	2	1.18	0.06	[1.05, 1.30]
	3	1.34	0.06	[1.21, 1.46]
	4	1.17	0.06	[1.05, 1.30]
	5	1.12	0.07	[0.99, 1.25]
	6	1.14	0.07	[1.01, 1.27]
	7	0.96	0.08	[0.79, 1.12]
Agreeableness	1	0.71	0.06	[0.59, 0.83]
	2	0.69	0.06	[0.57, 0.80]
	3	0.45	0.06	[0.33, 0.56]
	4	0.50	0.06	[0.39, 0.62]
	5	0.56	0.06	[0.44, 0.68]
	6	0.59	0.06	[0.47, 0.71]
	7	0.73	0.08	[0.53, 0.89]
Conscientiousness	1	0.69	0.06	[0.57, 0.82]
	2	0.66	0.06	[0.54, 0.77]
	3	0.48	0.06	[0.36, 0.60]
	4	0.58	0.06	[0.46, 0.70]
	5	0.67	0.06	[0.55, 0.80]
	6	0.65	0.06	[0.52, 0.77]
	7	0.92	0.08	[0.77, 1.08]
Integrity	1	0.97	0.10	[0.77, 1.17]
	2	0.67	0.07	[0.53, 0.81]
	3	0.53	0.05	[0.43, 0.64]
	4	0.74	0.08	[0.59, 0.89]
	5	0.69	0.06	[0.58, 0.81]
	6	0.66	0.07	[0.51, 0.81]
	7	0.91	0.10	[0.71, 1.10]

Table 7 cont.

Factor	Condition	Mean	Standard Error	95% Confidence Interval
RAVEN	1	3.71	0.19	[3.33, 4.09]
	2	4.29	0.18	[3.94, 4.64]
	3	4.50	0.18	[4.14, 4.86]
	4	4.49	0.18	[4.13, 4.85]
	5	4.36	0.19	[3.99, 4.74]
	6	3.80	0.19	[3.42, 4.17]
	7	3.68	0.24	[3.21, 4.15]

The Bonferroni *post-hoc* test for neuroticism revealed that the redacted friend content condition (i.e., condition 7) resulted in a significantly lower difference score than the condition without ignore instructions regarding positive friend content (i.e., condition 3; $p = .01$). Conversely, the redacted content condition (i.e., condition 7) demonstrated a significantly higher difference score for conscientiousness than the conditions (a) without ignore instructions regarding positive friend content (i.e., condition 3; $p < .001$) and (b) with ignore instructions regarding positive friend content (i.e., condition 4; $p = .01$). The condition with no ignore instructions regarding positive friend content (i.e., condition 3) had a significantly lower difference score than the condition with no ignore instructions regarding negative friend content (i.e., condition 1; $p = .049$) for agreeableness. Further, the condition without ignore instructions regarding positive friend content (i.e., condition 3) also demonstrated a significantly lower difference score for integrity than the conditions (a) without ignore instructions regarding negative friend content (i.e., condition 1; $p = .001$) and (b) with content redacted (i.e., condition 7; $p = .03$). There were no other significant differences observed between conditions across this study's factors. As such, support for *H5* was negligible. It was expected that the redacted content

condition (i.e., condition 7) would have the highest cross-method agreement with traditional scores. The redacted content condition (i.e., condition 7) only resulted in better cross-method agreement than one other condition for one factor. Thus, there is not strong statistical evidence to support the notion that redacting friend content could lead to ratings that more accurately represent traditional assessment scores.

A series of ANCOVAs were conducted to explore cybervetting experience as a moderator between difference scores and condition. An ANCOVA revealed a significant interaction between condition and cybervetting experience for difference scores regarding neuroticism, $F(6, 323) = 2.30$, $p = .03$, $\omega^2 = .02$. Cybervetting experience had a positive effect on the difference scores regarding neuroticism for the condition with no ignore instructions regarding positive friend content (i.e., condition 3), $\beta(53) = .28$, $p = .04$, and a negative effect in the condition with ignore instructions regarding positive friend content (i.e., condition 4), $\beta(52) = -.35$, $p = .01$. No other simple effects were significant for this factor.

Additionally, an ANCOVA revealed a significant interaction between condition and cybervetting experience for difference scores regarding openness to experience, $F(6, 323) = 2.73$, $p = .01$, $\omega^2 = .03$. Cybervetting experience had a negative effect on the difference scores regarding openness to experience for the condition in which raters were instructed to ignore neutral friend content (i.e., condition 6), $\beta(49) = -.35$, $p = .01$. There were no other significant simple effects for this factor. Further, no evidence of moderation was garnered for any other factor in this study (i.e., difference scores regarding extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, integrity, RAVEN, and GPA).

CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of SNS friend content on rater perceptions regarding an applicant. Study findings indicated that when compared to a profile with positive or neutral friend content, a profile with negative friend content demonstrated lower suitability ratings. There were no other significant differences between conditions. These findings illustrate that negative friend content can lower perceptions of the applicant, which is consistent with the negativity bias. This also mirrors extant literature, as negative friend content used in this study consisted of unprofessional elements (e.g., use of profanity), and Becton et al. (2019) found that unprofessional SNS content hurt the applicant whereas professional SNS content had no impact.

As conditions in which raters were instructed to ignore friend content did not significantly differ from the neutral or redacted conditions, there is evidence to suggest that raters were generally capable of ignoring the influence of friend content when instructed to do so. This is good news for organizations, as instructing raters to ignore friend content would be simpler and more cost-effective than paying for software to redact the friend content from applicant profiles. However, counter to expectations, redacting and ignoring negative friend content did not significantly differ from giving no instructions regarding negative friend content. The lack of a significant difference between giving no instructions regarding negative friend content and the redacted condition could be due to the disproportionate sample size of these two groups. As for why instructions to ignore negative friend content did not significantly differ from the condition with no instructions (or any other condition), it is possible that a lack of power did

not allow for mean differences to be statistically significant. Thus, the best practice for dealing with negative friend content is not currently clear.

As for comparing cybervetting-assessed scores to traditional measures of individual characteristics, cybervetters provided lower profilee scores for neuroticism, agreeableness, conscientiousness, integrity, and GPA, whereas ratings for cognitive ability and extraversion were significantly higher than scores on traditional measures. Openness to experience scores did not significantly differ between self-reported and cybervetted scores. This difference between traditional measures and cybervetting-assessed scores presents a practical problem for organizations that use cut-off scores to reduce the size of an applicant pool. Inconsistencies between cybervetting-assessed scores and traditional measures could disproportionately impact which candidates receive interview offers in such situations. For example, if an organization automatically screened out anyone who scored lower than a five on a conscientiousness measure, then using the cybervetting-assessed score of 4.9 instead of the self-reported traditional assessment of 5.1 would illustrate the practical significance associated with the cross-method disagreement of these assessments. Thus, the findings of this study hold practical value for organizations that engage in cybervetting.

Related to previous research, Schroeder et al. (in press) also found evidence for cross-method disagreement between traditional measures and cybervetting-assessed scores and suggested that raters may have erroneously accredited behavioral cues on the applicant's profile as indicative of the applicant's non-virtual characteristics. However, Schroeder et al. (in press) found that in only 25% of cases were cybervetting-assessed scores lower than traditional scores. As the current study found cybervetting-assessed scores (with the exception of cognitive ability, extraversion, and openness to experience) to be lower than traditional scores across varying

levels of friend content, this could be evidence that there is a more influential variable than friend content that is responsible for the variability in Schroeder et al.'s (in press) cross-method agreement.

Further, the differences in cross-method disagreement across conditions in the current study appeared to be somewhat random as there were only differences across neuroticism (i.e., the redacted condition resulted in better cross-method agreement than the condition with positive friend content and no instructions to ignore), agreeableness (i.e., positive friend content with no instructions to ignore had better cross-method agreement than the condition with negative friend content and no instructions to ignore), conscientiousness (i.e., the redacted condition resulted in worse cross-method agreement than both the conditions with positive friend content), and integrity (i.e., positive friend content with no instructions to ignore had better cross-method agreement than the redacted condition and the condition with negative friend content and no instructions to ignore). As Schroeder et al. (in press) argued, evidence of cross-method disagreement may indicate that cybervetting-assessed scores should not be used in place of traditional measures because cybervetters may be susceptible to forming inaccurate perceptions of applicants based on trivial SNS behavioral cues. However, it may also be possible that some of the disagreement comes from response biases on the self-reported traditional measures collected from the profilee. For example, the profilee may have exaggerated their GPA to appear highly intelligent, when in reality the profilee may have had only moderate cognitive ability. If this were the case, then moderate cybervetting-assessed judgments of cognitive ability may have been a better predictor than self-reported GPA. Thus, it is recommended that organizations use measures that have been well-validated to avoid potential misjudgments in selection procedures.

Due to the amount of information on SNSs, it might be difficult for raters to clearly remember relevant information when completing the applicant evaluation survey. Thus, this study included an assessment to check for memory effects. Overall, it appeared that raters were more likely to forget seeing a post that was on the profile than they were to falsely remember a post that was not actually on the profile. However, participants were relatively accurate at recalling which posts were present and which were absent on the profile they viewed. Thus, memory effects did not appear to be a large concern in this study.

4.1 Limitations

This study was not without limitations. A notable concern is that the redacted friend content condition (i.e., condition 7) consisted of only 31 participants, whereas the other 6 conditions had 48 to 56 participants. Not only was there a notable imbalance of raters in each condition, but because the redacted condition had so few raters, there may have also been an impact on statistical power. Notably, the redacted condition had fewer raters because 19 of the raters in that condition were screened out for incorrectly indicating that they saw friend content on the profile. Raters removed from the other conditions for incorrectly indicating there was no friend content ranged from two to eight. A potential explanation for this disparity is that SNSs typically have a combination of profilee and friend content, so the default logic of a rater would be that friend content was likely on the profile despite whether they noticed it. Thus, this manipulation check may have acted more as a check for rater attention.

An additional limitation is that Facebook updates its layout frequently. Thus, although this study used real screenshots from a Facebook profile, raters viewed an outdated layout and may not have been as familiar with the specific layout of this study's profile. This could potentially confound future attempts of replicating this study's findings, as future layouts may

change the focus of the rater's attention (e.g., the layout of this study's profile did not differentiate profilee and friend posts, but a future layout could potentially differentiate friend posts, such as with a different text color or shaded box).

Relatedly, this study relied on undergraduate students to cybervet the suitability of a profilee. The problem here is that college students are unlikely to be cybervetting experts or hiring managers, so they may not have a clear idea of what a suitable applicant would look like. However, as mentioned earlier, college students may be considered SMEs due to 95% of students being active on at least one SNS (Stefanone, Lackaff, & Rosen, 2011). Additionally, there are often not standardized cybervetting procedures for organizations to follow. Thus, it may be the case that even professional cybervetters could be misjudging the information available on SNSs, making them no better at cybervetting than student raters.

Additionally, average cybervetting scores tended to be in the middle of the response scale for all measures. This could indicate a lack of available information or confidence, thus discouraging raters from extreme responses (i.e., selecting one or five on the 5-point response scales). However, the profile used for this study was selected because the profilee had relatively average scores on the traditional methods, so it would make sense that raters did not have extreme views regarding the profilee if they were uninfluenced by friend content.

In relation to the traditional ratings, the profilee reported that she had a perfect 4.0 GPA. However, she was a freshman at the time of reporting her GPA, so that GPA may not be entirely reliable. This would explain the inconsistency in her cognitive ability scores, as a person with a high GPA would typically be expected to also perform highly on a cognitive ability test. However, the profilee scored a 3 on the RAVEN whereas the average college student scores a

7.01 (Bors & Stokes, 1998). This discrepancy could partially explain the cross-method disagreement in GPA between cybervetting-assessed scores and the self-reported score.

Further, the reliability of the cybervetting-assessed score for openness to experience was relatively low. This might partially explain why scores for openness to experience did not significantly differ between cybervetted scores and the traditional assessment score. Perhaps a future study could develop a measure specifically for evaluating a profilee's characteristics rather than having raters guess how the profilee would respond on traditional measures based on the content on their profile.

4.2 Future Directions

Although developing cybervetting-specific measures for gauging applicant characteristics would be an exciting contribution to the field, there are several future directions available for expanding the literature. Directly related to this study, a future study could evaluate the interaction between profilee content and posts made by their friends. The present study only examined a profile with neutrally perceived profilee content, but it would be interesting to manipulate the valence of both the profilee and friend content to observe potential interaction effects (e.g., perhaps a profile with negative profilee content and positive friend content would be perceived less favorably than a profile with the inverse characteristics).

Future research may also consider the variability in the types of posts and the content of the posts that are present on SNSs. For example, if the presence of emojis was associated with higher extraversion scores, it would be interesting to observe how many emojis are needed for the perception of profilee extraversion to emerge. This could aid follow-up studies by identifying which cues on a profile would be most advantageous for influencing a rater's perception.

Additionally, it would be interesting to observe the effectiveness of cybervetting as the first hurdle versus the last hurdle in a selection battery. For example, participants (i.e., raters) in group A would be blind to traditional scores until they selected their top ten applicants based solely on the SNS profiles of the applicants, then raters would use traditional scores to narrow their list to their top three candidates. Participants in group B would not see the SNS profiles until after they selected their top ten applicants based on their traditional scores, then the raters would use the SNS profiles to narrow the list to their top three candidates. Group C would serve as a control group and would allow raters simultaneous access to both the traditional scores and the SNS profiles. As Schroeder and Cavanaugh (2018) found that applicants can engage in faking behaviors on SNSs to improve how they are perceived, it is possible that applicants with a high degree of impression management may make it through being cybervetted even if they are not qualified whereas qualified individuals who do not maintain their online image could be erroneously screened out. Thus, this future study could illustrate how cybervetting as a first hurdle could screen out stellar applicants who had questionable SNS content in favor of less impressive applicants who engage in faking behaviors to benefit their online image.

A final future direction that would be novel to the literature would be observing the act of cybervetting from the applicant's point of view. So far the cybervetting literature has focused on the organization's perspective of selecting or screening candidates based on their online presence, but applicants often search the web to gain additional information about the organizations to which they apply. As many organizations have developed and maintained their online image through SNSs, it is likely that applicants may engage in their own cybervetting by tapping into these profiles and searching the web for additional information to form opinions about the organization. For example, an applicant might view an organization as too playful if

the organization consistently insults their competitors on Twitter. Or perhaps the applicant saw a post on Facebook about a charity event hosted by the organization, so the applicant applied because the good deed resonated with their core beliefs. Conducting such research could be insightful for organizations, as they could potentially tailor their online image to attract applicants that would be suitable for their organizational climate.

4.3 Conclusion

Although this study's hypotheses were not fully supported, there were several important takeaways revealed by the results. Most importantly, there was evidence that friend content can have an influence on perceptions of an applicant's suitability. Therefore, it is important for organizations to consider the influence of friend content when cybervetting applicants. Specifically, organizations should be wary of the detrimental influence of negative friend content on applicant suitability ratings. Additionally, this study demonstrated that cybervetting-assessed scores may differ from scores obtained via traditional methods. As traditional methods have more comprehensive evidence supporting their usefulness in a hiring context,and as Van Iddekinge et al. (2016) found that cybervetting-assessed scores did not contribute incremental validity beyond traditional measures in predicting job performance, organizations may be better off sticking to traditional methods until more research is conducted to defend cybervetting-based approaches. Finally, because the cybervetting literature is still early in its development, it is increasingly important for research to establish the usefulness of such methods in a pre-employment setting.

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Appendix A

Rater Demographic Questions

1 Please report your age in years.
   Text response: _____
2 Please select which best describes you:
   Male or Female
3 Select all the following that apply to you:
   White/Caucasian
   African American
   Hispanic Origin
   Asian American
   Native American
   Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
   Other (please specify): _____
4 Is English your first language?
   Yes or No
5 Please report your years of work experience:
   Text response: _____
6 Please report how many years of experience you have in a supervisory position:
   Text response: _____
7 How much experience do you have in evaluating job applicants in general?
   1 = *no experience* to 5 = *extensive experience*
8 How much experience do you have in evaluating job applicants via social media?
   1 = *no experience* to 5 = *extensive experience*

Appendix B

Cognitive Ability Assessment

Instructions: The following two items concern your perceptions of the profilee's cognitive ability. Please provide your estimates below.

1. What would you estimate the profilee's current GPA to be (on a 4.0 scale)? ____

2. What would you estimate the profilee's score on the RAVEN test to be? ___
   **The RAVEN test of cognitive ability is a measure of spatial reasoning in which the participant completes a missing segment of a pattern. Scores range from 0-12. The average score for college students is 7.01, with approximately two-thirds of students scoring between 4.45 and 9.57.*

Appendix C

Integrity Measure

Moral identity (Aquino & Reed, 2002)

Instructions: Listed below are some characteristics that may describe a person.
Caring
Compassionate
Fair
Friendly
Generous
Hardworking
Helpful
Honest
Kind

For a moment, visualize in your mind the kind of person who has these characteristics. Imagine how that person would think, feel, and act. When you have a clear image of what this person would be like, indicate the degree to which you believe the owner of the Facebook profile aligns with the person you imagined with these specific characteristics.

	Strongly Disagree				**Strongly Agree**
1. It would make the profilee feel good to be a person who had these characteristics.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Being someone who has these characteristics is an important part of the profilee's identity.	1	2	3	4	5
3. The profilee would be ashamed to be a person who has these characteristics.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Having these characteristics is not really important to the profilee.	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix C (continued)

	Strongly Disagree				**Strongly Agree**
5. The profilee strongly desires to have these characteristics.	1	2	3	4	5
6. The profilee often wears clothes that identify him/her as having these characteristics.	1	2	3	4	5
7. The types of things the profilee does in his/her spare time (e.g., hobbies) clearly identify him/her as having these characteristics.	1	2	3	4	5
8. The kinds of books and magazines that the profilee reads identify him/her as having these characteristics.	1	2	3	4	5
9. The fact that the profilee has these characteristics is communicated to others by his/her membership in certain organizations.	1	2	3	4	5
10. The profilee is actively involved in activities that communicate to others that he/she has these characteristics.	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix D

Profilee Suitability Measure

Recommendation to Hire Scale (Schroeder & Cavanaugh, 2018; adapted from Cable & Judge, 1997)

Instructions: Please indicate your perceptions of the participant from the profile you have just viewed. Please respond to the following questions using the response scale below, circle the number which best represents your perception as a hiring manager of the participant.

	Very Unlikely				**Very Likely**
1. What is the likelihood that you would offer this applicant a job interview?	1	2	3	4	5
2. What is the likelihood that this applicant be hired?	1	2	3	4	5

	Very Negative				**Very Positive**
3. Please give your overall evaluation of this candidate.	1	2	3	4	5