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Information from social networking sites: Context collapse and ambiguity in the hiring process

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Abstract

Forming impressions of job candidates is a challenging process, one characterized by ambiguity brought about by the uncertainty associated with making decisions and judgments. To reduce ambiguity, hiring professionals have established policies and procedures to facilitate the sourcing and use of information about a candidate. However, recently, a public source of information is increasingly being used—information from social networking sites (SNSs). While conventional wisdom says more information is better and can help make decisions less ambiguous, this relationship may not be as straightforward as expected when facing assessments of candidates. This paper examines two such aspects, information-task quality and context collapse, and their collective impact on ambiguity when making an assessment of a job candidate. Using data from an online survey-based experiment, the findings suggest information from SNSs can be useful, yet can create ambiguity for decision makers because of context collapse made possible by SNS technologies.

KEYWORDS

ambiguity, hiring, impression formation, self-presentation, social media, social networking

1 | INTRODUCTION

For organizations, the capability to continually acquire new talent is essential to long-term sustainability (Williamson & Cable, 2003). Poor hiring decisions can have dramatic, adverse impacts on a company (French, 1974). For example, the financial impact alone of poor hires has been estimated to range from 25% to 500% of an employee's salary, because of time spent to recruit, hire, and train a replacement, lost productivity, and disruptions to the organization (eg, Ballinger, Craig, Cross, & Gray, 2011; Morrison, 2006). As such, the ability to make accurate determinations as to whether an applicant is a match to a particular position constitutes one of the most crucial decisions rendered within organizations (Chruden & Sherman, 1976). Quality decisions hinge upon hiring professionals' ability to form impressions of candidates and evaluate those against the requirements of a position (Motowidlo, 1986) to determine the degree to which the candidates are well matched to the target position (eg, Cable & Judge, 1996). However, this is a difficult task as hiring professionals face a complex information problem (Barron, Bishop, & Dunkelberg, 1985),

one where a successful resolution is predicated on obtaining useful and accurate information about candidates (Chruden & Sherman, 1984).

An innate factor in the hiring process is it relies on the assessment of information (Barron et al., 1985). However, it is nearly impossible to discover the true ability of a candidate prior to employment as the knowledge and abilities of a candidate are hard to observe and difficult to measure (Williamson & Cable, 2003). As a result, forming impressions of a candidate is a process filled with ambiguity (Berger & Douglas, 1981; Hendricks, DeBrock, & Koenker, 2003), or the subjective experience (Frisch & Baron, 1988) created by missing information that is relevant and could be known (Camerer & Weber, 1992). Ambiguity is characterized as uncertainty that often exists in decision making and judgement situations (Curley, Yates, & Abrams, 1986). Ambiguity can adversely influence management decisions (Ho, Keller, & Keltyka, 2005), particularly in situations with uncertain outcomes or indeterminate and/or incomplete information that elevates ambiguity (eg, Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). While hiring decisions are common in organizations, these complex information problems are epitomized by ever-present ambiguity (Berger & Douglas, 1981). Reducing ambiguity in these decisions is essential, but doing so is predicated on obtaining quality information about the candidate and perceived to be useful to the task (Chruden & Sherman, 1984).

To combat ambiguity and facilitate more confident impressions of candidates (Snow, 2010), hiring professionals have developed practices, policies, and procedures to facilitate the identification and use of quality sources of information (Massaro & Friedman, 1990). For hiring professionals tasked with forming impressions of candidates (Cable & Judge, 1996) with limited information, a seemingly quick and easy source of publicly accessible information (Brandenburg, 2007; Doherty, 2010) has emerged—social networking sites (SNSs). Social networking sites, the socially connected, web-platformed, open information systems, have arguably provided more opportunities to access information about others than any prior form of information system. More than 1 billion people[1] actively share information about themselves on SNSs such as Facebook (1.4+ billion), LinkedIn (236+ million), Twitter (300+ million), and Instagram (300+ million). Half of all US adults (65% of Internet users) have shared information on an SNS (Madden & Zickuhr, 2011).

The success of these platforms can be partially attributed to the design of these systems. SNSs are socio-technical systems that afford users the ability to engage in many forms of communication by sharing and sourcing information. The use of SNSs by, and within, organizations not only has enabled new ways of interacting around work but in doing so also has changed established processes regarding how work is done within organizations (Moser, Ganley, & Groenewegen, 2013). However, the varied manners in which users use the system and the identification of all situations, applications, and outcomes that will emerge as users use such socio-technical systems is challenging (Galimberti, Ignazi, Vercesi, & Riva, 2001). This complication increases when systems are appropriated for uses that were not considered during the design of the systems (Swanson & Ramiller, 1997). In the case of SNSs, the design features, which facilitate ease of sharing with and sourcing from countless others in the public space of an SNS, present an interesting challenge for users of SNS-sourced information. For example, SNSs were primarily designed to facilitate the sharing and sourcing of information to support social connectivity (Acquisti & Gross, 2006). However, the technical characteristics of these systems that afford this capability, specifically the persistence and searchability of information shared, allow information to be sourced by a variety of audiences (Boyd, 2008b), audiences for who the information may not have been originally intended, but to whom the information is accessible (Ellison, Vitak, Steinfield, Gray, & Lampe, 2011). Because of being designed to not limit the potential audience of shared information, the features of such a system facilitate context collapse, or the perception that multiple audience groups (eg, friends, family, and professional) are present simultaneously in a single context (Marder, Joinson, Shankar, & Thirlaway, 2016), and relatedly, information intended for them within an SNS (Marwick & Boyd, 2011; Postmes, Spears, & Lea, 1998; Vitak & Ellison, 2012; Vitak, Lampe, Gray, & Ellison, 2012). Context collapse is not a technologically deterministic outcome of the systems features, rather context collapse is made possible by the features of these social systems and their use by both sharers and sources of information.

[1]http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_virtual_communities_with_more_than_100_million_active_users

The belief that ambiguity can be reduced is one of the reasons why SNSs are increasingly being used by hiring professionals[2] in the hiring process, serving as a key source of information when making hiring decisions (eg, Brown & Vaughn, 2011; Clark & Roberts, 2010; Du, 2007; Grasz, 2009; Peacock, 2009). Yet even while using information from these systems, perceptions of context collapse can cause hiring professionals to question the quality of the source of the information, expressing concerns that the information might not be of the right quality for the task (eg, irrelevant, inaccurate, ill suited, or incomplete) of assessing a candidate (Pike, Bateman, & Butler, 2013). As such, SNSs that enable context collapse create a paradox for hiring professionals. While the information sourced from SNSs has the potential to reduce ambiguity (Berger & Douglas, 1981) and could facilitate more confident decision making (Snow, 2010), aspects of the source of information can potentially have a contrary effect of increasing the ambiguity surrounding the formation of impressions of a candidate's suitability for a job. Given the potential for increased uncertainty and subsequent negative implications when making hiring decisions, this study seeks to better understand this paradox. Towards this goal, this study examines the following: what is the impact of information-task quality of SNS-sourced information and context collapse on hiring professionals' ambiguity when making an assessment of a candidate?

To examine this question, this paper discusses these two aspects of SNSs and reviews the literature on ambiguity in decision making, with a focus on hiring processes. A model is then theorized and draws upon existing literature regarding the nature of context collapse in SNSs and the role of information in hiring processes, with a focus on ambiguity. This model is then tested using data from a survey-based experiment, and it is followed by an analysis and discussion of the results and implications.

2 | THEORETRICAL BACKGROUND AND DEVELOPMENT

Ambiguity, in the context of judgement and decision making, has received substantial attention from researchers (eg, Curley et al., 1986; Einhorn & Hogarth, 1985; Frisch & Baron, 1988). In most situations, individuals desire unambiguous decisions (Einhorn & Hogarth, 1985; Ellsberg, 1961). When facing decisions in which there is ambiguity, individuals can experience a state of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) and, as a result, tend to be averse (Gonzalez-Vallejo, Bonazzi, & Shapiro, 1996), unwilling to act (Curley et al., 1986), or make poor choices with respect to the decision at hand. Ambiguity is often treated as a "red flag" that can negatively impact their assessments of a candidate (Knouse, Giacalone, & Pollard, 1988).

The literature on ambiguity contains several explanations as to why ambiguity is created when one is faced with a decision. Underlying most of these explanations, and in particular in the context of assessing if a candidate is a fit for a job, is a relationship between ambiguity and the quality of information. When information available is seen as limited, or from an unreliable source, ambiguity will be increased. This occurs as a decision maker can imagine gaining more information or information from a more reliable source (Einhorn & Hogarth, 1985; Frisch & Baron, 1988). While each bit of information available to a decision maker plays a role in the formation of an impression, it represents only a sample of all the positive and negative bits of information from a population of all possible information on a candidate (Motowidlo, 1986). This is especially true given the challenges of assessing competency attributes of a candidate prior to employment (Williamson & Cable, 2003). Ambiguity has been found to be further exacerbated in instances where a decision maker holds the belief that other parties have an advantage, as they possess more information, or that a decision maker desires to avoid blame (rightly or wrongly) for making a decision with incomplete information (Frisch & Baron, 1988). Finally, increased ambiguity can occur when one believes a decision could be negatively evaluated by others (Curley et al., 1986; Frisch & Baron, 1988), as is not uncommon in the case of a "bad hire." This is attributed to the tendency that when additional information becomes available after a decision has been made, a decision maker

[2]While acknowledging there are differences in day-to-day responsibilities, in this paper, "hiring professionals" is used as an all-encompassing term to capture the various titles, roles, and responsibilities of those, both internal and external to an organization, tasked with the responsibility of identifying and selecting organisational talent.

is often evaluated as if the information should have been known, even if it was not available, at the time of the decision (Baron & Hershey, 1988).

Key to resolving ambiguity (Berger, 1979), and the state of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) it creates, is quality information relevant to the task (Lee, Strong, Kahn, & Wang, 2002). With this objective in mind, hiring professionals have developed various techniques to facilitate sourcing information seen to be of quality to the decision task of assessing a candidate's fit for a job (Massaro & Friedman, 1990). The most commonly used techniques are active and interactive sourced information (Forsythe, 1990; Rosenfeld, 1997). These include resumes (Dipboye & Jackson, 1999), formal interviews, reference calls or letters, and evaluations of the job candidate performed by hiring managers (Baron, 1986; Forsythe, 1990; Rosenfeld, 1997). Resumes and interviews are forms of interactive observation because they are direct exchanges between the target (eg, the candidate) and the observer (ie, the hiring professional). Reference calls, letters, and other evaluations contributed by a third party are forms of active observation because they are an indirect exchange of information about the candidate. The combination of these bits of information available to a hiring professional plays an important role in reducing ambiguity and forming an impression of a candidate (Motowidlo, 1986).

While commonly used to source information, active and interactive techniques used in hiring processes have shortcomings because the candidate is aware of the observation. This presents an opportunity for those being evaluated to strategically influence perceptions for an anticipated audience (eg, Fandt & Ferris, 1990; Gilmore & Ferris, 1989). Such techniques not only occur in decision contexts characterized by high ambiguity but also tend to be effective in those situations as well (Ferris, Russ, & Fandt, 1989). As such techniques can influence perceptions of a candidate (Curley et al., 1986), awareness of this influence by the decision maker can fuel feelings of ambiguity as they question if information they are basing their decisions on has been overly refined, or even exaggerated (Berger & Douglas, 1981). To combat the limitations of active and interactive techniques, a third form of information sourcing, passive observation, is used. Passive observation is generally considered to be a quality source of information, as a candidate does not have the opportunity to craft information as they are neither aware of the observation or its focus (Berger & Douglas, 1981). While passive observation can be a source of quality information, it has not typically been used to gather information in the hiring process as it can be time-consuming, expensive, or even impossible to conduct (Dipboye & Jackson, 1999).

2.1 | Information in social networking sites

Alternative sources of information can help reduce, or eliminate, ambiguity (Frisch & Baron, 1988) and at the same time can increase the likelihood of making an accurate selection decision (Glueck, 1978). This is likely one of the reasons that the use of information sourced from SNSs in the hiring process has received increased attention from both practitioners (eg, Kerr, 2013) and researchers alike (eg, Oleniczak, Pike, Mishra, & Mishra, 2010). SNSs are publicly accessible systems where people can gather through mediating technologies (Boyd, 2007). These systems are differentiated from other types of online systems because of the presence of three key features: (1) the user profile, (2) connections with other users, and (3) the ability to view connections of, and between, other users (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). The primary feature of most SNSs is the information-heavy profile (Boyd, 2004). When users create profiles they unequivocally share information about themselves, information that can be sourced by others, including information such as: an individual's first and last name, gender, date of birth, preferred language, interests, hobbies, relationship status, sexual preferences, specific location (eg, zip code, city, and country), education history, and employment history (Boyd, 2007; Ellison, Lampe, & Steinfield, 2009; George, 2006). While termed differently depending on the SNS—"friends" (eg, Facebook), "connections" (LinkedIn), or "followers" (eg, Twitter and Instagram)—a second defining feature of SNSs is the capability to designate users with whom one has a connection or social tie (Donath & Boyd, 2004). Finally, SNSs not only support the recording of an individual's social network but also make the network of connections visible to a larger public of others (Boyd, 2007). This network visibility provides an additional source of information that can be used to both identify commonalities between connections as well as ascertain an individual's

position in a larger social context (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). These features of SNSs have been designed to support social interaction (Joinson, 2008) and enrich existing offline relationships (eg, Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2006), and they rely on one factor to realize success—the sharing of various forms of information (eg, profile information and identification of connections) in a space where it can be sourced by others (Boyd, 2007).

As information within SNSs is persistent, searchable, and recordable (Boyd & Ellison, 2007), these collections of publicly accessible information represent a bountiful source of information available for assessing the fit of a candidate (eg, Cable & Judge, 1996; Judge & Bretz, 1994). While SNSs potentially represent an abundant source of information, the information available through these systems is not submitted by candidates through a formal established application process. However, it is this very aspect that can provide value in reducing ambiguity. Information viewed from SNSs represents a form of passive observation, one that is relatively inexpensive compared with other methods of passive observation, which is largely considered to be more accurate than active or interactive forms of observation (Berger & Douglas, 1981). One potential explanation for the increased value given to passive observation within SNSs is that individuals express themselves more freely because of the perception that the self-presentations are less public than they are (Bateman, Pike, & Butler, 2011) or a belief that others cannot or would not want to access their self-presented information (Boyd, 2007). Further, leading individuals to express themselves more freely is the perception of a short-term audience (Boyd, 2004), as opposed to the future audience. Because of these factors, for hiring professionals tasked with forming impressions of candidates (Cable & Judge, 1996), SNSs would seemingly represent a new, quick, and easy source of publicly available information (Brandenburg, 2007; Doherty, 2010) that could reduce ambiguity in their decision making.

It is not uncommon for hiring professionals to have a limited amount of information on which to base their evaluations of a candidate's fit with a job (Kristof-Brown, 2000). Despite the potential preponderance of information available to be sourced in SNSs to facilitate hiring decisions (Weathington & Bechtel, 2012), quality of information is an important consideration (O'Reilly, 1982), as information is only useful in reducing ambiguity if it is perceived to be of quality. A widely adopted view in assessing information quality is fitness for use (Juran & Gryna, 1980), which emphasizes the importance of taking information users' viewpoints of quality, as ultimately it is the user of information who will judge whether or not information is fit for use (Arnold, 1992). Information-task quality reflects the perception that information suits a specific problem being addressed. When relevant to the task, information is seen as being favorable, as it reduces ambiguity associated with the hiring decision, and ultimately increases the likelihood of a positive hiring decision (Cole, Rubin, Field, & Giles, 2007). While there is debate in the literature, one perspective on the relevance of information to the task of hiring is its ability to facilitate the assessment of a candidate's abilities/skill set with respect to filling a particular position (Anderson & Ostroff, 1997; Werbel & Gilliland, 1999). Prior research has found that hiring professionals use information such as type of degree, extracurricular activities, prior work experiences, and prior employers to make inferences about an applicant (Bohnert & Ross, 2010). Further, hiring professionals are able to make accurate assessments of an applicant's motivation, conscientiousness, abilities, and interpersonal skills (Cole, Field, & Giles, 2003) based on information that suggests an applicant's level of accomplishments (eg, years of work experience) and/or quality of accomplishments (eg, grade point average in college). Further, hiring professionals are also able to make reasonably valid personality inferences based solely on sourced materials created by a job candidate (Cole, Field, & Stafford, 2005). This information is ultimately used to decide if a candidate should be hired (or not) for a particular position (Brown & Campion, 1994).

Decision opportunities, such as hiring decisions, are fundamentally ambiguous stimuli (Cohen, March, & Olsen, 1972). A fundamental principle consistently underlying research on decision making is that decision making is particularly challenging and ambiguity will rise in situations where there are uncertain outcomes and when a decision maker is uncertain about an aspect of information quality (eg, Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). Further, ambiguity will be high when decision makers have few clues to direct their behaviour (Gilmore & Ferris, 1989) or when information can be interpreted in multiple ways (Daft & Macintosh, 1981). However, prior research examining information obtained from traditional sources of information (eg, resumes and interviews) suggest that in the context of a hiring decision, when sourced information is seen to be relevant to the decision task and clearly facilitating an assessment of

candidate task fit, such as suggesting job success, ambiguity around the decision will decrease (Dipboye, Fontenelle, & Garner, 1984).

> **Hypothesis 1.** *Information-task quality is negatively associated with a hiring professional's ambiguity regarding assessment of a candidate. The higher the information-task quality, the less ambiguity experienced by a hiring professional.*

2.2 | Context collapse in social networking sites

To better understand the implications of information used for decision making, it is important not only to understand the context from which information is sourced but also to know why the information was created. Inarguably, SNSs contain large amounts of data that have been shared and, in turn, can be used by hiring professionals. For many users, the primary purpose of using SNSs is the ability to publically share information, and information they know will be sourced by others (Ellison et al., 2011; Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2011). The design features of these social systems afford users the ability to easily do so through the posting of information (eg, posts, tweets, and updates) about what they are doing, thinking, and viewing (eg, pictures or videos) through their profiles and create links between their profiles and others'. By facilitating the sharing and collection of information through publicly accessible mediating technologies (Boyd, 2007), the design features of these systems have helped users evolve from simply consumers to providers of information online (eg, Tapscott & Williams, 2008).

This focus on the sharing of, and providing persistent access to, information has propelled SNSs into a forum for public communication, allowing individuals to use the "communication media to make information and their points of view visible and available to others" (Slevin, 2000, p. 182). The profile and connections are the fundamental mechanisms for sharing information. The user profile serves as the node to which connections can be made, and users are able to connect with others without regard to the context in which the relationship is being formed (or was previously formed). Typically, the more information provided in a profile, the more probable the profile will be located and connected to (Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfield, 2007). In addition to this motivation, technical aspects of SNSs can subtlety inculcate information sharing behaviour, making further information available to source. For example, individuals share considerably more information about themselves as the online interactions are perceived to occur in less public spaces, leading individuals to express themselves more freely (Bateman et al., 2011). Further, individuals tend to share information for short-term audiences (Boyd, 2004), often without understanding or accounting for the larger consequences of their actions (Leary, Tchividjian, & Kraxberger, 1994).

The online nature of these sites make the audience invisible, or at best ill defined, which distorts the true size and nature of the potential audience (Boyd, 2008b) that has access to information shared by a user (Ellison et al., 2011). However, individuals tend to live segmented lives, sharing different pieces of information depending on the context (Goffman, 1959; Schlenker, 2003; Walther, 2007). For example, one might decide to share information that projects a formal, polished image for one's boss and colleagues, or information that reflects a casual, care-free image for one's friends. Maintaining multiple presentations is only possible as long as the audiences are separate and little opportunity for interaction among the audiences exists (Goffman, 1959). Through sharing information in publically accessible SNSs, users give up their anonymity (Gross & Acquisti, 2005; Taraszow, Aristodemou, Shitta, Laouris, & Arsoy, 2010), allowing others to source information from SNSs to make decisions in a variety of contexts. This aspect of SNS use is one that most SNS users recognize—the public nature of these spaces allows other users of the system to discover the individual's identity from the information that has been provided (Lenhart, 2009; West, Lewis, & Currie, 2009). While users' (ie, providers' and sourcers') perspectives may be that SNSs information is only available to a confined audience, this is not the case. In some SNSs this is possible, but the reality is that the potential audiences are largely unrestricted. Although some sites offer features that allow users to restrict who can access their profiles, prior research has shown that most users underuse or struggle to manage access control features (Boyd, 2008a; Lipford, Besmer, & Watson, 2008; Vitak et al., 2012). When information can be sourced by audiences from multiple

contexts, whether an intended audience or not (Gross & Acquisti, 2005), traditional boundaries between a user's typically public work life and private personal life are eroded (Hewitt & Forte, 2006). This causes the tendency for SNSs to be characterized as merging existing perceived boundaries between audiences, particularly the personal and professional (Smith & Kidder, 2010). As a result, the features (eg, accessibility of information) afforded by SNSs make possible a phenomena known as context collapse,[3] or the perception that multiple audience groups (eg, friends, family, and professional) are present simultaneously in a single context (Marder et al., 2016), and relatedly, information intended for said audiences within an SNS (Marwick & Boyd, 2011; Postmes et al., 1998; Vitak & Ellison, 2012; Vitak et al., 2012).

The technology may make context collapse possible, but context collapse is a result of perceptions and practices enacted by the users (both sharers and sourcers of information). An SNS that exhibits context collapse (eg, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) can be difficult to navigate as the information disclosed can be seen by individuals from different contexts, as the technical features of SNSs disguise temporal, spatial, and social boundaries that enable individuals to maintain audience separation (Boyd, 2008a). In addition, SNSs may project certain boundaries and an association with a particular type of information. For example, LinkedIn may be perceived as a place for the sharing of professional information, while Facebook for personal information. However, these restrictive boundaries do not physically exist and are only perceptual, as the information contained in these publicly accessible sites can be reached by any audience—including hiring professionals during the hiring process.

From the perspective of a sourcer of information, much can be learned about individuals by observing the information one has chosen to share with others (Triandis & Fishbein, 1963). Prior work on decision making and judgement formation has found the context from which information is obtained can affect judgments, as information is implicitly compared to its surrounding (Motowidlo, 1986). This leads hiring professionals to be sensitive to the context from which information is obtained. Given that individuals typically share information depending upon the specific audience they intend to communicate, the context collapse afforded by SNSs has the potential to create a complex information sourcing situation for hiring professionals. In particular, research has found a sensitivity to different SNSs as an information source due to tension between perceptions of information being professional (eg, LinkedIn) or social (eg, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) (Pike et al., 2013). For example, an SNS focused on professional/career activity and information, or one exhibiting low context collapse, will likely contain information similar to traditional sources, such as a resume or discussion during an interview. Conversely, an SNS focused on personal/social information, or those exhibiting high context collapse, is better known to contain different types of information, such as vacation photos or posts on extracurricular activities, as the disclosure of this information was not targeted for a professional context. Because SNSs that exhibit high context collapse can be accessed by a merged audience, or an audience with individuals from a professional and social context, this audience will have access to information that may not have been specifically targeted to them. From the perspective of the sourcer, information from an SNS with high context collapse can create different expectations of the information to be found, and thus cause it to be viewed differently than if the information was sourced from an SNS with low context collapse. Because of expectations held by a sourcer that certain SNSs may contain information not intended for them, incongruencies can arise. These incongruencies could not only work against resolving ambiguity, for which the information is being sourced, but could actually increase ambiguity because of differences in expectations and the actual information sourced.

Further, one's SNS information is likely to be one of the first results for anyone who "Googles" a candidate to find out about professional qualifications and experience (Samuel, 2013). However, because of information being shared for different audiences, information from high context collapse SNSs may suggest to the sourcer that there is much more information available about the candidate. This can fuel ambiguity due to a perception that there is missing information that is relevant and could be known (Camerer & Weber, 1992). As a result, because of the incongruence

[3]Previous literature has adopted a variety of terms to describe the phenomena of multiple audience groups possibly being present simultaneously in a single context, including the following: online multiple audience problem (Marder et al., 2016); problem of conflicting social spheres(Binder, Howes, & Sutcliffe, 2009); group copresence(Lampinen, Tamminen, & Oulasvirta, 2009); and bridging of multiple, heterogeneous social communities.(DiMicco & Millen, 2007)

of such information, as well as the perception of additional information might be able to be found, hiring professionals can experience increased ambiguity in regard to a candidate in a situation where information is obtained from SNSs exhibiting strong context collapse. While SNSs have the opportunity to offer different, and potentially more accurate, information about a candidate through passive observation, this additional information can actually increase ambiguity surrounding the impression due to the perception of the context the information was obtained.

> **Hypothesis 2.** *Context collapse in the SNS is positively associated with a hiring professional's ambiguity regarding assessment of a candidate. The greater the context collapse in the SNS, the more ambiguity experienced by a hiring professional.*

2.3 | Interaction effect of context collapse

As discussed, the quality of the information must be considered in respect to a particular task, such as using information to assess a candidate. Further, the context of the source of the information can also influence ambiguity. However, the impact of information on a decision is not simply a function of the information quality relevance to a task nor the context of the source in isolation; rather, an interplay between these aspects exists and impacts decision making (Lee et al., 2002). Considering this, the interactive nature of these constructs should be considered. Prior research examining hiring professionals' perspectives on the use of SNS-sourced information found that contradictions, or tensions, surround the relevance (or information-task quality) and the context from which the information was sourced (Pike et al., 2013). Such contradictions are core to the interpretations of information, an aspect are not inherently harmful (Baxter, 1990). Contradictions are, at their essence, competing perspectives, but not simple alternatives or even necessarily mutually exclusive, but rather open to simultaneous interpretations. As such, the presence of such contradictions can create the cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) associated with ambiguity.

With respect to the contextual nature of SNSs as information sources, prior work has identified tensions between perceptions that created poles of pertinent and unsuitable (Pike et al., 2013). On one hand, hiring professionals argued that SNSs as an information source can provide information that can be relevant to the task of forming a clear understanding of candidates, as the information can be informative, valuable, and useful. On the other hand, the source can be seen as containing information deemed to be irrelevant, unimportant, incomplete, of little consequence, and not useful, resulting in an unclear impression of a candidate. However, even hiring professionals who believe SNSs contain task-relevant information, the potential for nontask relevant information to appear within some sites may influence the impact of the contextual quality of the SNS information.

Considering these tensions, it is likely that the relevance of information-task quality on reducing ambiguity will be influenced by the source from which the information is being viewed and the expectations of information quality of the sources. For example, SNSs with low context collapse (eg, LinkedIn) are expected to have information intended for hiring professionals. Thus, when encountering high-quality, task-relevant information from a source that is expected to contain such information, the impact on reducing ambiguity is amplified. Said another way, the impact of high-quality information on ambiguity is hampered when sourced from a high context collapse SNS due to consistencies between quality and expectations. SNSs with high context collapse (eg, Facebook) are expected to have information intended for a broader audience and not only for hiring professionals. Thus, when encountering low-quality, task-irrelevant information from a source where hiring professionals may not be the intended audience. This instance's consistency between the quality and expectations actually reduces ambiguity. Conversely, the impact of low-quality information sourced from an SNS expected to have information targeted to hiring professionals increases ambiguity due to inconsistencies between quality and expectations.

> **Hypothesis 3.** *The negative effect of information-task quality on ambiguity is moderated by context collapse such that the negative effect is stronger when context collapse is higher.*

The hypothesized relationships are illustrated in the research model below (Figure 1).

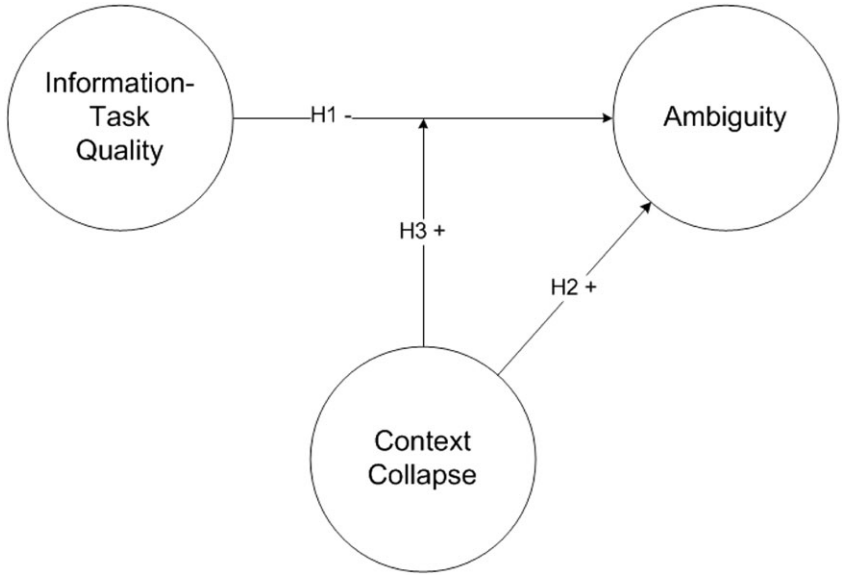

FIGURE 1 Research model

3 | METHODOLOGY

To test the research model, an online survey-based experiment was conducted. A 2 (mediocre vs. high—information-task quality) × 2 (low/LinkedIn vs. high/Facebook—context collapse) between subjects, randomized experimental design was used. Consistent with the research question, the experiment's context was forming an impression of a job candidate for a particular job given its description and candidate information available through an SNS. The experimental treatments and procedure, described below, were developed to simulate a hiring professional viewing an SNS profile while considering candidates for an open position, a description of which was provided.

3.1 | Treatments and measures

Following pretesting,[4] four treatments were finalized for the experiment by the researchers. These treatments were designed to align with the two manipulated variables—context collapse and information-task quality. For context collapse, two SNSs were simulated for the treatments, one exhibiting low context collapse (LinkedIn) and one exhibiting high context collapse (Facebook), which were selected on the basis of previous studies (Pike et al., 2013). To simulate a user profile for each of these SNSs, a template was developed that allowed different pieces of information to be integrated within it. For information-task quality, profile information describing a mediocre candidate for the job description and SNS profile information describing a strong candidate for the job description were developed, similar to previous studies (eg, Bohnert & Ross, 2010). Each was of equal length and reading level. Each template was then paired with each set of profile information to form the four treatments (for visualization, see Figure 2). Each treatment was static, and participants were not able to click on links within the simulated profile. The job description provided was for a business analyst, and the same job description was used for all treatments. The treatments are shown in Appendix A, and the job description used for all treatments is shown in Appendix B.

[4]Pretesting of the items and treatments was performed to determine if the effect of the manipulations was strong enough and the items exhibited good psychometric properties.

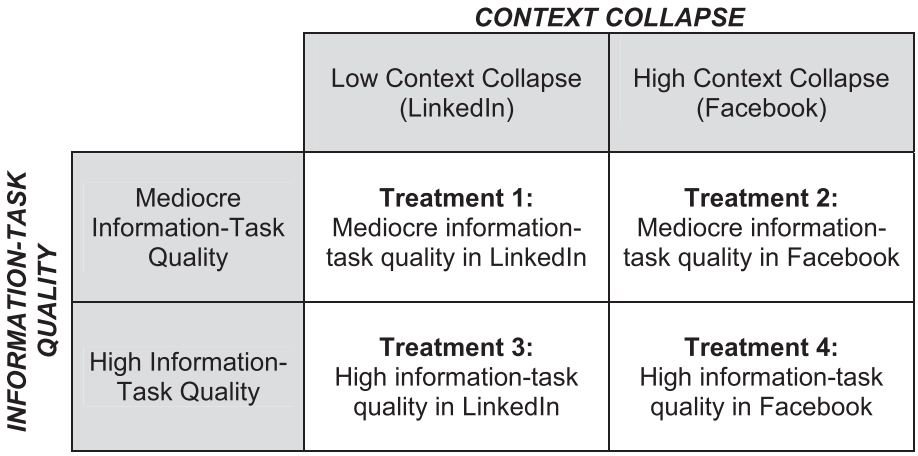

FIGURE 2 Treatments

After reading the job description and randomly assigned treatment, participants completed a survey that contained measures of ambiguity, information-task quality, and context collapse. The items are shown in Appendix C. Further, adapted items and treatments used were first vetted, then refined and tested for good psychometric properties following a pretest. All items were measured using a 7-point Likert scale anchored with "strongly disagree" and "strongly agree." Items measuring ambiguity were adapted from prior studies on ambiguity and equivocality (Daft & Macintosh, 1981; Dennis & Kinney, 1998). Control measures were also included for gender, age, highest level of education, SNS use, resumes reviewed in the prior year, involvement in hiring in the prior year, and years of business experience.

3.2 | Participants and procedure

For this survey-based experiment, participants were recruited from a pool of professionals pursuing a graduate business degree part-time from a large public university in the eastern United States. Professionals enrolled in a professional degree program have been used in prior similar studies (eg, Knouse et al., 1988). Potential participants received an email from the researchers inviting them to participate in the study. The email described the study briefly and specified a small incentive for participation. At the end of the invitation email, a link to a website housing the experiment was provided. The email indicated that to participate in the study one should click the link and follow the instructions. After clicking the link, participants were provided with brief instructions and an online consent form. After reading these and consenting, the website then presented participants with the job description and one of the four treatments, which was randomly selected by the website for each participant. After the participants reviewed the job description and treatment, they were asked to answer questions regarding the study's constructs, along with control and manipulation check items.

Initially, 646 individuals were invited to participate in the study. Of the 646 individuals invited, 212 clicked on the invitation's link to begin the experiment. Of the 212 who began the experiment, 141 completed it for a response rate of 21.8%. Excluding 12 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 to 28 years. All of the respondents were college graduates and had an average age of 29.2 years. Of the participants, 60.3% were male, 43.3% of the participants indicated that they had reviewed resumes in the last year in their current position, and 34.0% of the participants indicated that they had been involved with filling an open position within the last year.

4 | ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Data were used in a simultaneous test of structural and measurement models using Partial Least Squares, SmartPLS 3.2.4 (Ringle, Wende, & J.-M, B., 2015). PLS is an appropriate analysis technique for this study because it places minimal restrictions on sample size (Chin, 1998; Pavlou, Liang, & Xue, 2007). Also, the sample size of the study exceeds the required sample size for medium effect size at statistical power = 0.8 and α = 0.05 (Cohen, 1992). Thus, the sample size is adequate.

The adequacy of the measurement model was assessed using three common tests of convergent validity (Chin, 1998). Items loaded on their intended constructs greater than 0.7 (see Appendix D), indicating that there was more shared variance between a construct and measure than error variance (Carmines & Zeller, 1979). Second, the internal consistency of each construct was assessed using composite reliability (see Table 1; Werts, Linn, & Jöreskog, 1974). Third, the average variance extracted (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) was calculated for each scale (see Table 1). 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 interconstruct correlations, providing further evidence of discriminant validity. To assess discriminant validity, the correlations of items with their intended constructs was examined, and all items correlated most strongly with their intended construct (see Table 1). To verify that the SNS information and context collapse treatments were effective, manipulation checks were performed; for details see Appendix E.

To test for common method bias, the Harman single factor test was used. The results showed that more than one factor existed and no single factor accounted for a majority of the variance. Further, on the basis of the work of Vance, Elie-Dit-Cosaque, and Straub (2008) we examined the construct correlations (Table 1) and found them all to fall below the cut-off of 0.9. In addition to the testing, procedures were incorporated into the methodology to address common method bias. These included guaranteeing respondent anonymity and conducting a pretest to refine the measurement items (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). The testing combined with the procedural decisions suggest that the data are not hindered by common method bias.

The research model was tested by examining the size and significance[5] of structural paths in the PLS analysis, shown in Figure 3. No controls were found to be significant.

The results of the model supported H1 (ß = −0.175, $P < .05$), suggesting that higher information-task quality decreases ambiguity. The model showed support for H2 (ß = 0.180, $P < .05$), suggesting that SNSs that exhibit high context collapse will increase the hiring professional's level of ambiguity surrounding the hiring decision. However, H3 was not supported (ß = 0.029, ns), suggesting that that context collapse does not have a moderating influence on the relationship between information-task quality and ambiguity. None of the control variables (years of business experience, Facebook use, LinkedIn use, resumes reviewed in the last year, involvement in hiring in the last year, gender, and highest level of education or age) were significant predictors of ambiguity.

5 | DISCUSSION

In a little over a decade, SNSs have evolved from emerging technologies to establish information systems that support sharing information with a large network of users (Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfield, 2008). While not originally created, implemented, or designed for their use, the information in many SNSs is relevant to traditional organizations and, as a result, presents a growing context of study to which theory, method, and practice must be extended (Germonprez & Hovorka, 2013). One such organizational context is the use of information sourced from SNSs by hiring professionals. However, sans a few exceptions (eg, Pike et al., 2013), prior work has tended to focus on the effects on job candidates brought about by the information they choose to share on SNSs (eg, Lampe et al., 2008). By focusing

[5]PLS produces standardized regression coefficients for structural paths. Bootstrapping techniques, a nonparametric approach for estimating the precision of paths, were used to test for significance using 500 resamples.

TABLE 1 Convergent and discriminant validity

		Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE	1	2	3
1	Ambiguity	5	0.899	0.924	0.710	*0.843*		
2	Context collapse	5	0.899	0.922	0.703	0.222**	*0.838*	
3	Information-task quality	5	0.943	0.955	0.809	−0.181*	−0.093	*0.899*

Diagonal elements are the square root of average variance extracted. Off-diagonal elements are the correlations among constructs.

**$p < 0.01$, *$p < 0.05$.

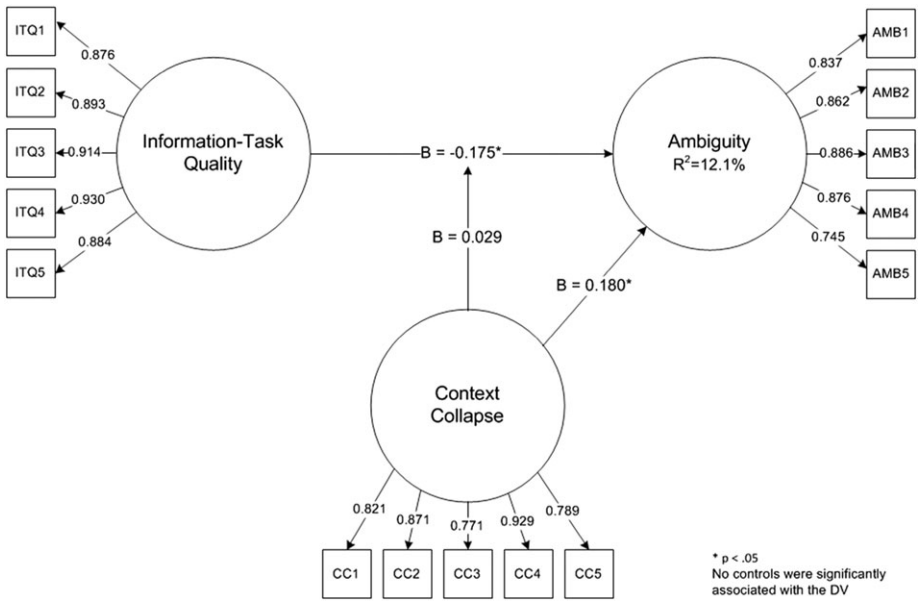

FIGURE 3 Measurement model and results

on hiring professionals' use of information from these open systems, as opposed to individuals' sharing, and ambiguity held by the sourcer, this study reveals a more complex dynamic surrounding the use of information sourced from SNSs.

Inarguably, SNSs afford decision makers the opportunity to access information on candidates, and as a result, hiring professionals are increasingly turning to the internet to find candidate information to facilitate their decisions (Brandenburg, 2007; Doherty, 2010; George, 2006). This study supports the premise that this information can be a valuable source for hiring professionals seeking to reduce ambiguity. This extends prior research that found information sourced from traditional, offline contexts is critical for job candidates seeking to demonstrate that they are well qualified and well suited to work in recruiting organizations (Baron, 1986; Knouse, 1994; Leary et al., 1994) into the SNS era. However, this contribution is not simply an extension to an online context; rather, it provides a more nuanced explanation.

Although they may reduce ambiguity, hiring professionals must be cautious when using information from these social systems as the findings reveal that the context from which the information was sourced matters. Specifically, the same information that has the potential to reduce ambiguity can actually increase ambiguity if obtained from SNSs

exhibiting high context collapse. One potential explanation for this is that unlike information traditionally obtained through established organization provided information systems or policies that facilitate efficient, effective, and law compliant searches for information (Becker, Huselid, Pickus, & Spratt, 1997), information sourced from SNSs does not go through such rigid processes. It is therefore incumbent upon the hiring professional to determine relevance and interpret the information. The possibility of irregular, unmediated information (eg, outdated, incomplete, or even fraudulent) increases the need for information users to make judgments about its quality (Arazy & Kopak, 2011; Lankes, 2003). Obtaining information from an SNS where context collapse is high can further add to the challenge, as information users are now tasked with trying to decipher the meaning and relevance of information that was likely intended for a different audience. For example, a hiring professional may view certain information via a low context collapse SNS (eg, LinkedIn) and completely different information in a high context collapse SNS (eg, Facebook). However, these different pieces of information may not be intended for the same audience (ie, the hiring professional). As a result, information from SNSs that has the potential to provide additional insight and reduce ambiguity can have the contrary impact. This is especially true given that SNS information has been found to be perceived by some hiring professionals to be unsuitable, irrelevant, and incomplete (Pike et al., 2013).

Finally, the interaction effect was not significant. One explanation for this is context collapse indeed does not moderate the relationship between information-task quality and ambiguity, but that each has their own unique impact. However, this would seem to run counter to prior work on information quality that considers the nature of the source and its influence on perceptions of quality. An alternative explanation could be that the effect of the moderation is very weak, and our sample size was not large enough to detect it. Also, it is possible that the choice in the design of the study to have a mediocre vs high treatment, to reflect a "real-world" scenario (opposed to typical low vs. high scenario), for information-task quality did not create enough variability for the effect to be identified.

5.1 | Implications

The findings of this paper suggest implications for professionals, including IT administrators, hiring professionals, job candidates, and theory. For IT managers, tasked with managing organization information systems that provide quality information to end users in support of effective performance of their organizational duties, SNSs represent a new class of systems. SNSs are open information systems, not owned, operated, or controlled by the organization, yet their users are using these resources in the performance of their job duties. IT administrators should be cognizant that trying to figure out how a new technology can be integrated in specific organizational undertakings alone can create ambiguity (Henfridsson, 2000). As such, IT administrators are faced with a choice. They could either put in place mechanisms that forbid the use and access of information from SNSs, which would reduce all the negatives, but also remove the possibility of benefitting from their use. However, this approach (see Pike et al., 2013) is unlikely due to the desire of hiring professionals to access additional information from SNSs. Alternatively, IT managers should consider putting in place practices, quality checks, and training to help end users feel less ambiguity when using information from these systems. Future research could examine users' perceptions of system and information quality, as it relates to the open systems information, as well as trying to better understand how users might view information from SNSs differently than information from organization-owned systems.

For hiring professionals, they should realize that SNS can be a useful source of information, with SNSs with low context collapse serving as a preferred source for passive observation of candidates; however, SNSs with high context collapse could serve as a valuable secondary source of information to verify other (eg, active and interactive) observations. In addition to being aware of the complex relationship between the use of SNS information and ambiguity, hiring professionals must also be aware of the negative relationship between context collapse and ambiguity that could lead to significant concerns for aspects of the hiring process—bias and discrimination. Prior research has found that discrimination against minorities (eg, female) can arise when there is ambiguity around information and assessment of fit with job requirements (Rosen & Jerdee, 1974), even with highly competent candidates (eg, Dipboye, Arvey, & Terpstra, 1977; Zikmund, Hitt, & Pickens, 1978). Not only does context collapse increase ambiguity, but in doing so

can introduce the potential for bias, even discrimination. This potential is exacerbated by SNSs exhibiting high context collapse, as content shared within those networks may not be intended for the potential audience, but the accessibility of SNSs results in hiring professionals potentially having access to information related to an applicant's protected class status, which creates the risk of violating equal opportunity employment laws. Concerns about SNS accessibility leading to potentially biasing, or worse discriminatory, information also extends to other forms of information that are commonly present in SNS profiles. Hiring professionals (and their organizations) need to consider implementing guidelines, policies, and procedures to set standards for effective use of these information sources that also protect their organizations and candidates. For example, SNS information from low context collapse SNSs could be encouraged as a primary source for passive observation, particularly when an applicant has made contact through the site. For information from SNSs with high context collapse, procedures could be put in place to reduce the impact of the source on the user of the information. For example, information could be collected and scrubbed from these sites by a party not directly involved in assessment of a candidate, passing along only relevant information. Similarly, all information from SNSs could be pulled in a manner that removes the original source, similar to the way background checks are conducted, as the findings suggest it is the nature of the source, not the information itself that seems to create the ambiguity associated with context collapse. Future research could examine whether the sourcing of information from an SNS exhibiting context collapse consistently impacts the level of ambiguity across candidates with different demographic profiles and across different contexts not considered here (eg, SNS information presented in an organization-owned system).

While not the focus of the study, its findings can offer several recommendations of job candidates and their use of SNSs. Anecdotal evidence, and early research into the phenomenon (eg, Boyd, 2006), has highlighted the potential negative aspects brought about by individuals sharing information within SNSs due to employers' reactions to this information. For job candidates, the findings of this paper underscore the phenomena of context collapse. Prior research suggested that there is an inherent socio-technical gap between the social requirements of collaborative technologies, such as SNSs, and what the technology is able to support, and investigating this gap in the vein of reducing it is a challenge for researchers (Ackerman, 2000). The socio-technical gap exists because the systems do not allow sufficient nuance or distinction, are not socially flexible, and do not allow individuals to be ambiguous or less explicit (Ackerman, 2000). Adopting this perspective, the social requirement that is not fulfilled by SNSs is the ability to create different self-presentations for separate and distinct audiences. The SNSs' features force users to be less ambiguous and explicitly present to an audience, which then leads to the information to be accessible to an unintended audience. SNSs exhibiting context collapse demonstrate that this social requirement is not instantiated in the technology, and this work suggests that the existence of this socio-technical gap culminates in additional ambiguity during the hiring process. While it may be assumed that additional is better (eg, additional information and additional viewers of the information), this was found not to be the case as, generally stated, information from SNSs exhibiting context collapse, and thus being accessible to a merged audience, was found to increase ambiguity for the viewer. While not using SNSs with high context collapse would be a solution, it is likely not a tenable one for many users. As such, job candidates should be aware that information provided on SNSs can, and very likely will, be accessed in hiring processes and be conscious of context collapse as they engage SNSs.

This study also contributes to the developing literature on context collapse and information quality. The existing literature on context collapse has primarily focused on context collapse as it relates to the information sharer, such as challenges experienced by sharers in the workplace (Robertson & Kee, 2017), navigating public versus private information and the potential for multiple audiences (Vitak, 2012), actively self-monitoring (Peluchette & Karl, 2008), and seeking strategies for how to best manage context collapse (Vitak, 2012). In these works context collapse has been viewed from the perspective of the information sharer, with the collapsing of audiences seen as a problem salient for the self-presenter (Marder et al., 2016). However, to our knowledge, there has not been any research that has examined the impact of context collapse from the audience's perspective, specifically the sourcer/consumer of information. This is somewhat unusual for a phenomena rooted in communication. Our study finds that context collapse does indeed have implications for the audience as users of information as well, and this study specifically focused on ambiguity experienced by the audience.

The results of the study also have implications for the traditional information systems research. With respect to information quality, information quality is typically viewed in terms of completeness (Lee et al., 2002), yet this study underscores that context of the source matters when making decisions, which goes against many common trends seen in information system design and information science. For example, organizational systems (eg, ERP, business intelligence, and ERP) that are designed to span an organization's functional boundaries actually strip the information of its context, which could potentially be reducing its quality. Looking across both constructs, this study suggests that context collapse has the potential to create greater variation in the alignment of information quality and the decision/task at hand. When the systems are designed for a decision/task, then the information should be collected/presented/organized in the same context as the decision/task. However, because of context collapse the situation is more likely to arise where the information context and task/decision are not aligned. As such, future studies on information quality should consider alignment of information and task/decision and alignment of information context and task/decision.

6 | LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

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, information from SNSs, is frequently diluted by the other information available during the hiring process, such as resumes and interviews. Given the long standing tradition of examining resumes and interviewing job candidates, information from SNSs are currently, at best, considered third in terms of significance. While this may be the case, passive information is considered more reliable than active and interactive (eg, resume and interview; Berger & Douglas, 1981), so the study may be examining the phenomenon at a time when a shift in hiring and recruiting is occurring as individuals are still using resumes in place of accessing SNSs, which is another limitation of the study. Hiring and its relationship with SNSs is a phenomenon that is still in development and changing rapidly. SNSs, such as Facebook and LinkedIn, are constantly releasing new policies and changing different aspects of their environments. No major changes took place during or immediately before or after any of the data collection periods for the study. 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. Finally, it could be argued that the focus on the relationship of a small number of constructs is a limitation, as other constructs such as privacy, use of public information, and ethical concerns about use of digital information in corporate environments are potentially relevant to understanding SNSs in the hiring context. However, we do not see this as a limitation, but rather a specific design choice that sought to develop a parsimonious model to provide theoretical insight into an established construct in a changing context. This approach has been proposed by researchers (Davis, Eisenhardt, & Bingham, 2007; Gregor, 2006; Plouffe, Hulland, & Vandenbosch, 2001), as the parsimony afforded by a simple theory, or one that provides focus and precision valuable to theorizing, can serve as a strong foundation for understanding the phenomena of interest.

A potential limitation of this study is also associated with the lower *R*-squared value (*R*-squared = 12.3). It is not uncommon in the social sciences to use the percent of variance explained (ie, *R*-squared) to measure the importance of the effect of X on Y to evaluate a study. Lower *R*-squared values typically lead some researchers to conclude that effects accounting for small percentages of variance are unimportant or not worth further study, which can be a flawed conclusion (Rosenthal & Rubin, 1979). One should not necessarily be dismissive of smaller values for percentage of variance explained, as the process through which variables operate in the real world are important. In particular, the attitude towards explained variance should be conditional on the degree to which the effects of the explanatory factor cumulate in practice. In some circumstances, such as the "persuasive effects of advertising, and repeated decisions by ideologically similar policy makers" (Rosenthal & Rubin, 1979, p. 395), it is quite possible that small variance contributions of independent variables in single-shot studies understate the variance contribution in the long run. We suggest hiring decisions represent an instance of such repeated decisions. While lower *R*-squared values are not atypical in behavioural research, the lower *R*-squared value indicates that other variables may be involved in predicting ambiguity. This is not unexpected, as the study was designed, as is typical with experiments, to isolate and focus

on the influence of a limited set of factors to gain a better understanding of the phenomena. The results support, as many researchers and commentators have suggested, that the use of information from SNSs can create negative issues for both suppliers and consumers of this information in hiring processes, and thus, the practical significance should be considered in evaluating a study with lower *R*-squared (Kirk, 1996). At the same time, the lower *R*-squared raises the possibility that the factors identified in this study might not be the most important drivers, which is not surprising given the amount of existing research and theory identifying various factors that influence ambiguity in hiring processes. The implications of this suggest that those involved in hiring processes (hiring professionals and candidates) must not only be aware but also begin to think about how these negative issues can be managed, yet taking draconian steps (eg, avoiding SNSs, or information in them, completely) to address these issues might be unwise (without additional research). Finally, while this study controlled for factors that have been found to influence the core variables of the study (eg, years business experience, resumes reviewed in the last year, and involvement in hiring in the last year, experience reviewing resumes, gender, age, highest level of education, and SNS use), this limitation could be improved by including additional theoretical perspectives. As such, future research is needed to identify additional factors as well as subtle relationships among the variables.

Finally, the use of information from SNSs by hiring professionals is often used in conjunction with forms of passively observed information (eg, resume and interview). However, this study was designed to focus only on the use of SNS information, without any other sources/types of information. This choice was purposeful to facilitate an isolated understanding of the impact of SNS information on ambiguity. Using only SNS information when forming an impression of a candidate is not uncommon, particularly depending upon the phase of the hiring process (eg, search, evaluation, selection; Brown & Vaughn, 2011). For example, SNSs may be the only source of information on which a hiring professional bases a decision, such as in the applicant search phase when assessing passive candidates (ie, those not actively seeking a job). While there are benefits associated with choosing to isolate the impacts of factors, such as to understand the existence and nuances of a subset of factors, future work could examine the impact of information-task quality, and particularly context collapse, when other sources of information are available to the hiring professional and/or the phase in the decision-making process.

7 | CONCLUSION

SNSs, such as Facebook and LinkedIn, have emerged as a new source of information on job candidates. However, this information may not have been intended for hiring professionals as an audience, as individuals tend to live segmented lives and often select what information depending upon the audience. These aspects of SNS information can create opportunities and challenges for hiring professionals. In particular, this study finds that candidate information in SNSs can reduce ambiguity, providing a clearer image of a candidate, yet at the same time, if obtained from an SNS exhibiting high context collapse, can also increase ambiguity. As such, hiring professionals should consider these nuanced impacts when engaging SNSs during candidate searches.

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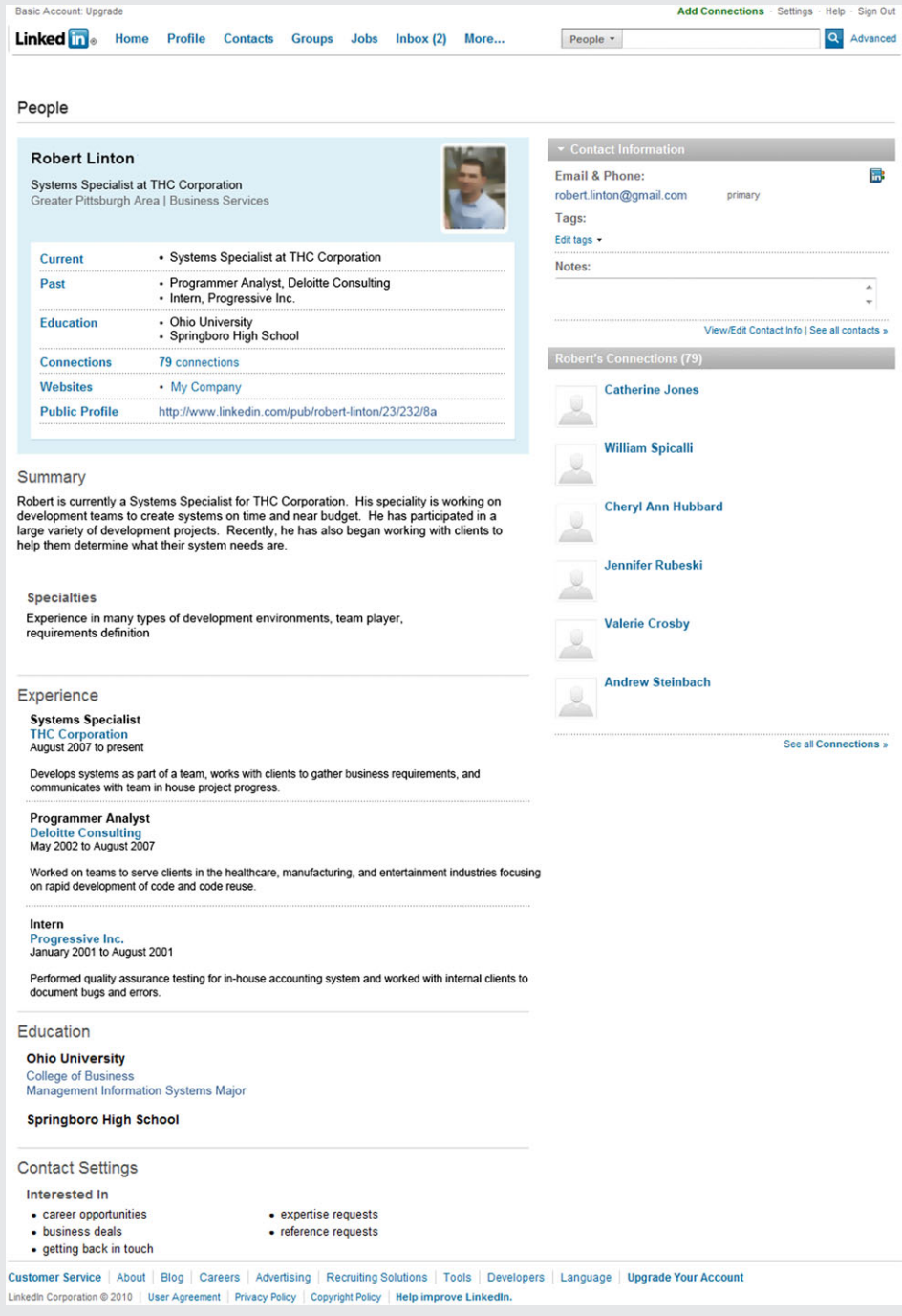
APPENDIX A. EXPERIMENT TREATMENT IMAGES

Treatment 1



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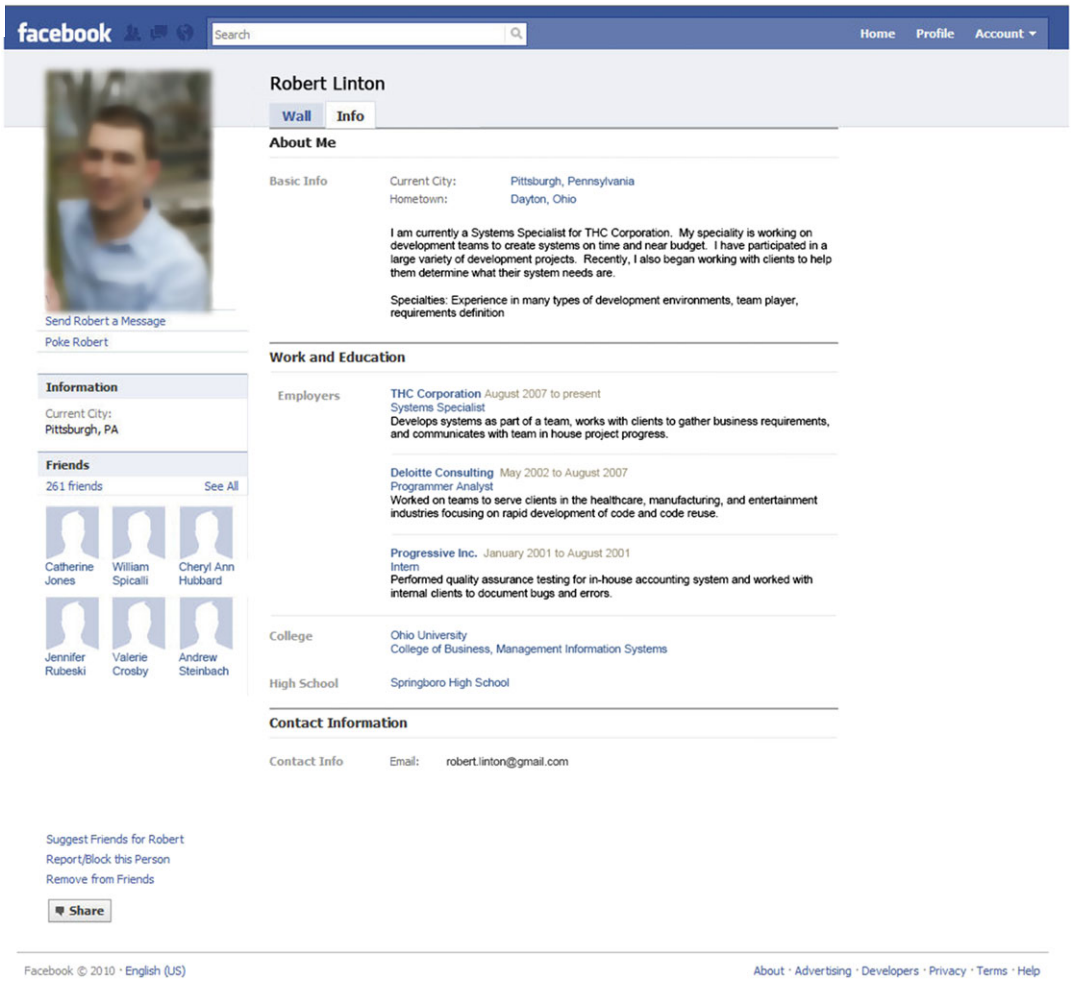
Treatment 2



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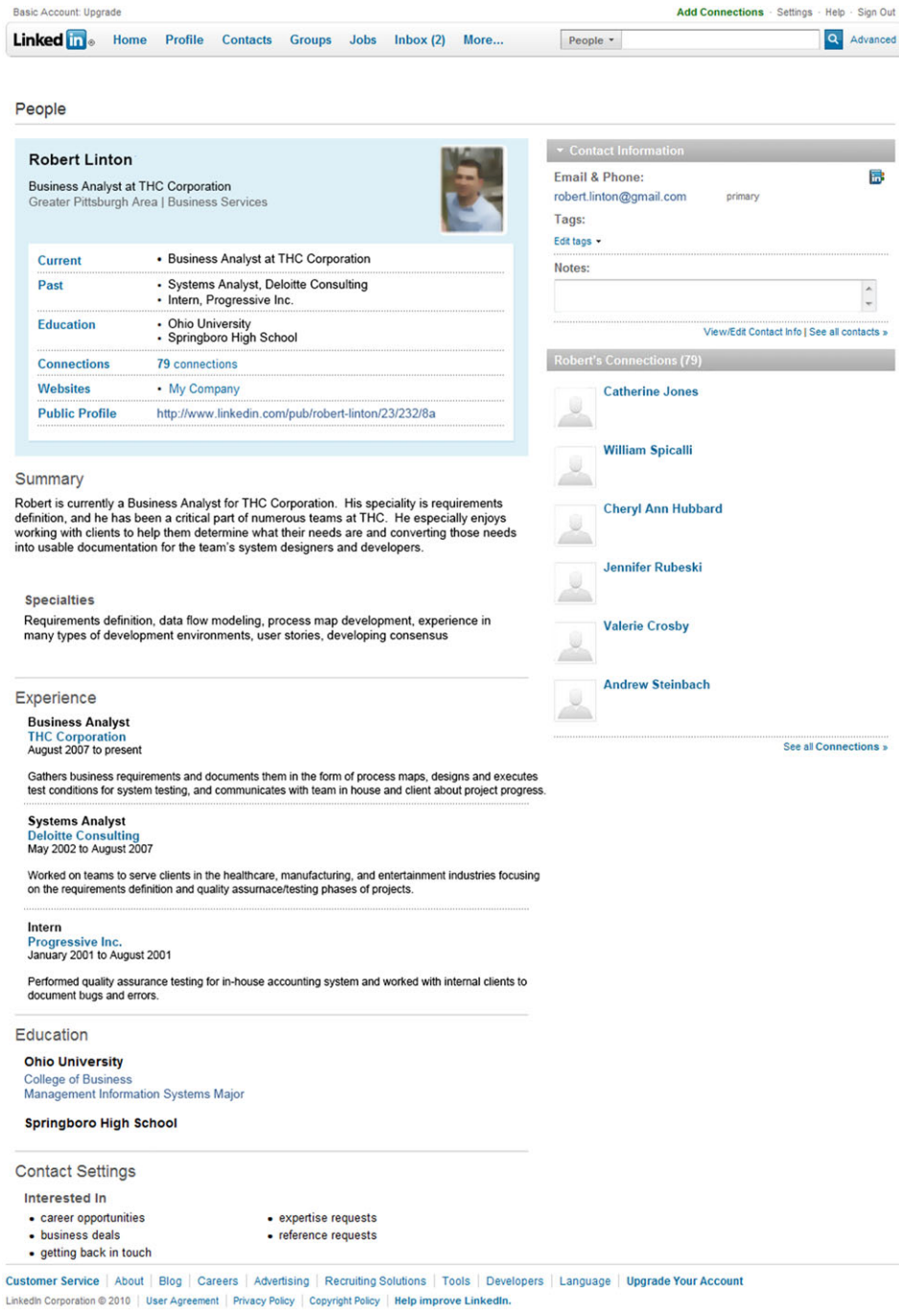
Treatment 3



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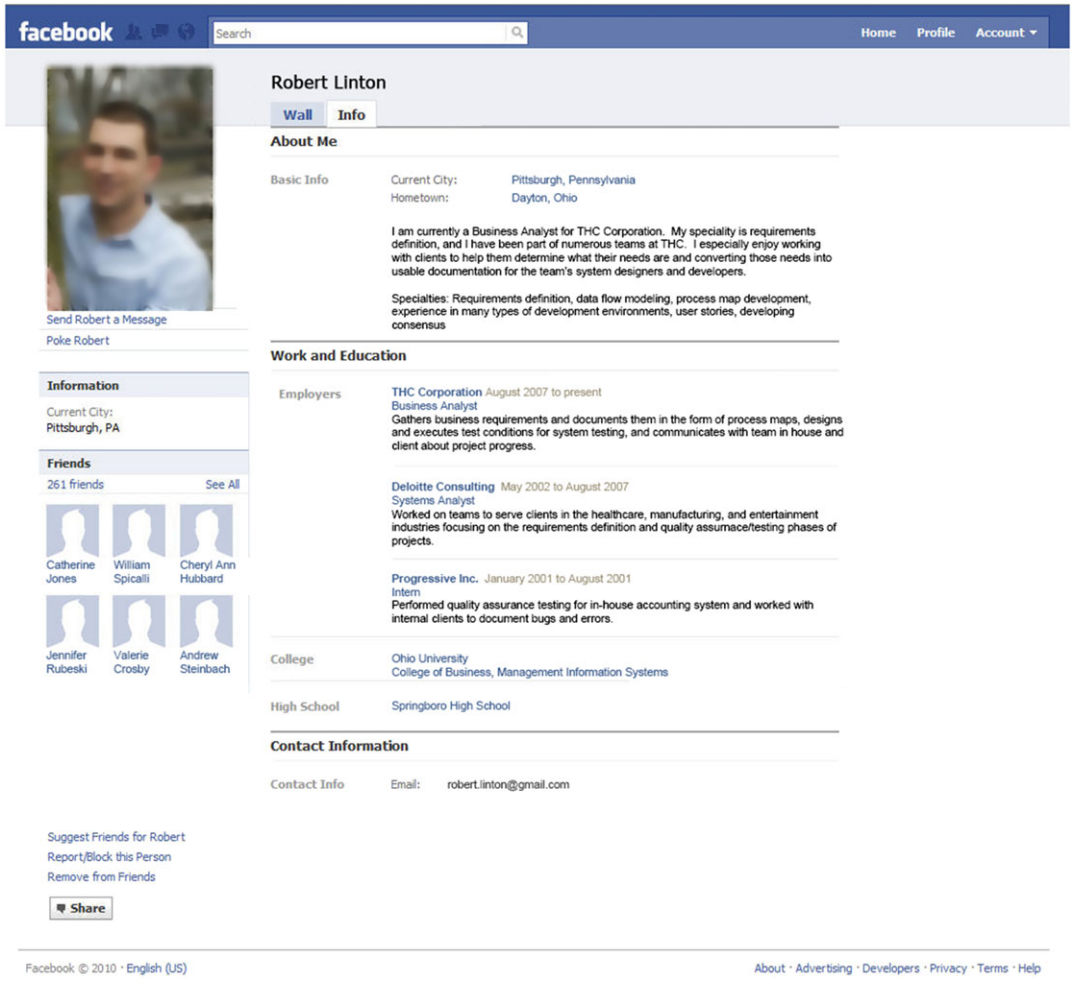
Treatment 4



APPENDIX B. JOB DESCRIPTION

B.1 | 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 modelling, 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 artefacts 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
- Have 4- to 6-year experience in building and specifying mission critical business applications, at least 1 year 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

APPENDIX C. MEASUREMENT ITEMS

Construct	Items	Mean	Standard Deviation	Factor Loading
Ambiguity (AMB) (strongly disagree/strongly agree) (1-7 scale) Composite reliability = 0.92 Cronbach's alpha = 0.90 Adapted from Daft and Macintosh (1981) and Dennis and Kinney (1998)				
AMB1	Different people could form different opinions about this candidate.	5.35	1.24	0.84
AMB2	The information needed to form an impression of this candidate can be interpreted differently by different people.	5.48	1.21	0.86
AMB3	More than one reasonable impression could be formed about this job candidate.	5.43	1.15	0.89
AMB4	The information can be interpreted in several ways and can lead to different impressions of the candidate.	5.26	1.22	0.88
AMB5	The information used in forming an impression of the candidate means different things to different people.	5.52	1.00	0.75
Context collapse (CC) (strongly disagree/strongly agree) (1-7 scale) Composite reliability = 0.92 Cronbach's alpha = 0.90				
CC1	The site shown, [insert treatment context], is a site for professional networking. [reversed]	3.33	2.43	0.82
CC2	The site shown, [insert treatment context], is a site for social networking.	4.88	2.08	0.87
CC3	The site shown, [insert treatment context], is a site for finding and contacting business acquaintances. [reversed]	3.43	2.08	0.77
CC4	The site shown, [insert treatment context], is a site for finding personal contacts, such as those from one's hometown.	4.52	2.04	0.93
CC5	The site shown, [insert treatment context], is a site for finding personal contacts, such as those from one's alma mater.	5.27	1.46	0.79
Information-task quality (ITQ) (strongly disagree/strongly agree, 1-7 scale) Composite reliability = 0.96 Cronbach's alpha = 0.94				
ITQ1	I would interview this candidate for the business analyst position described.	5.62	1.28	0.88
ITQ2	I feel confident that the candidate would be a good business analyst.	4.84	1.20	0.89
ITQ3	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.	5.08	1.33	0.91
ITQ4	The candidate is suitable for the business analyst position described.	4.91	1.25	0.93
ITQ5	The candidate's qualifications fit well with the described business analyst position.	5.03	1.37	0.88

APPENDIX D. MEASUREMENT ITEM LOADINGS

Construct	Item #	Ambiguity	Context Collapse	Information-Task Quality
Ambiguity	1	0.837	0.230	−0.240
	2	0.862	0.224	−0.119
	3	0.886	0.197	−0.161
	4	0.876	0.162	−0.160
	5	0.745	0.072	−0.019
Context collapse	1 (r)	0.100	0.821	−0.075
	2	0.227	0.871	−0.110
	3 (r)	0.117	0.771	−0.153
	4	0.171	0.929	−0.093
	5	0.232	0.789	0.001
Information-task quality	1	−0.114	−0.085	0.876
	2	−0.221	−0.171	0.893
	3	−0.111	−0.040	0.914
	4	−0.184	−0.028	0.930
	5	−0.114	−0.047	0.884

APPENDIX E. MANIPULATION CHECK ANALYSIS

Composite measures were created for the two manipulated variables by averaging the items shown in Appendix C. These measures were found to be suitable in terms of reliability (Cronbach's alpha of 0.94 for SNS information and 0.90 for context collapse). The means for these two composite measures were examined, and the variables moved in the expected direction across the treatment cells (see Figure 3), indicating that the manipulations were effective (Smith, Keil, & Depledge, 2001). A 2 × 2 multiple analysis of variance was also performed, and the main effect of each manipulated variable was significantly associated with its respective dependent variable but did not have a significant association with the other dependent variable (see Table E1). On the basis of these two analyses, it can be concluded that the manipulations produced the intended effect (Smith et al., 2001).

		Context Collapse	
		Low Context Collapse (LinkedIn)	High Context Collapse (Facebook)
Information-task quality	Mediocre information-task quality	N = 36 *Mean* Info-task quality = 4.54 CC = 3.26	N = 34 *Mean* Info-task quality = 4.50 CC = 5.58
	High information-task quality	N = 44 *Mean* Info-task quality = 5.66 CC = 3.19	N = 27 *Mean* Info-task quality = 5.65 CC = 5.78

Note that group sizes are slightly unequal due to (1) participants being randomly assigned to a group by the survey software and/or (2) participants then not fully completing the required task.

FIGURE E1 Manipulation check [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

TABLE E1 Results of 2 × 2 multiple analysis of variance

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable: Info-Task Quality (Perceived)		Dependent Variable: Context Collapse (Perceived)	
	Sum of Squares	*F*-Value (Sig.)	Sum of Squares	F-Value (Sig.)
Main effect: information-task quality manipulation	44.10	42.30 (0.00)	0.16	0.10 (0.75)
Main effect: context collapse manipulation	0.03	0.02 (0.87)	206.75	138.13 (0.00)
Interaction effect: information-task quality manipulation x context collapse manipulation	0.01	0.01 (0.93)	0.65	0.43 (0.51)