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STRUCTURING THE SOCIAL MEDIA ASSESSMENT DURING THE HIRING PROCESS

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1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In the human resources literature, multiple reviews and empirical studies have shown that structured interviews are preferable to unstructured interviews in the hiring process (e.g., Conway, Jako, & Goodman, 1995; Cronshaw & Weisner, 1989; Huffcutt & Arthur, 1994; McDaniel, Whetzel, Schmidt, & Maurer, 1994). Campion, Palmer, & Campion (1997) proposed fifteen components of structure that are applicable to potential employee selection interviews. Seven of these components were theorized to influence the *content* of the interviews, or the nature of the information elicited: (1) conducting a job analysis, (2) asking the same questions, (3) limiting prompting, (4) asking valid question types, (5) conducting a longer interview, (6) controlling ancillary information, and (7) not allowing questions from applicants. The other eight components influence the *evaluation* of the interview, or the processing and judgment of the information elicited: (8) rating each question, (9) using anchored rating scales, (10) taking detailed notes, (11) using multiple interviewers per applicant, (12) using the same interviewer(s) across candidates, (13) not comparing applicants between interviews, (14) providing interviewer training, and (15) using statistical (versus clinical) prediction.

While the amount of literature on the structure of in-person interviews is vast, there is a lack of studies addressing the structure that should be used when performing social media assessments (SMAs) during employee selection. Interpersonal selection practices such as networking and relationship building are becoming increasingly common in the modern hiring sphere, and social

media platforms are designed to enhance these activities (Dery, 2014). Thus, a modern technological approach to hiring follows, opening the door to unprecedented strategies. Reviews on the topic of SMAs have suggested some similar structural components to those found in interviewing, such as conducting a job analysis or identifying job-relevant criteria (Davison, Maraist, Hamilton, & Bing, 2012; Kluemper, 2013; Ployhart, 2012; Slovensky & Ross, 2012), establishing a policy for using the procedure consistently across candidates (Clark & Roberts, 2010; Davison et al., 2012; Elzweig & Peeples; Madera, 2012; Smith & Kidder, 2010), developing standardized rating forms (Davison et al., 2012; Kluemper, 2013; Ployhart, 2012; Van Iddekinge, Lanivich, Roth, & Junco, 2016), taking detailed notes (Byrnside, 2008; Ployhart, 2012; Slovensky & Ross, 2012), using multiple raters (Brown & Vaughn, 2011; Davison et al., 2012; Kluemper, 2013), using the same raters across candidates (Kluemper, 2013), training raters (Elzweig & Peeples, 2009; Kluemper, 2013; Ployhart, 2012), and statistically combining ratings (Roth et al., in press). One of the major differences between interviews and SMAs is that interviewers interact with applicants with the purpose of eliciting specific information (an *active* assessment), while such interaction and elicitation is not present in SMAs. Rather, the SMA rater is tasked with making inferences from information that is already available (a *passive* assessment) (Hartwell & Campion, in press). Thus, some of the structural components that affect the content of the interview may not be directly applicable in an SMA setting. For example, not allowing questions from the applicant is a component that would not be a consideration in SMAs. However, by altering some components to the SMA context (e.g., replacing the concept of interview questions with that of rating scale items) most of the other components can find application in SMAs, despite the lack of personal interaction with the applicant.

Drawing from Campion et al.'s (1997) components of interview structure, and including additional components specific to gaining acceptability of the passive SMA procedure, we have developed a framework of eight components of SMA structure that should be considered when

conducting SMAs in research. A summary of these components is found in Table 1, and each component is discussed briefly below.

Job-related specificity. The first component of SMA structure focuses on the specificity of information that is measured in the SMA. In the lowest level of structure, the SMA measures only overall impressions of applicants, such as perceptions of overall qualifications (Bohnert & Ross, 2012), hireability (Kluemper, Rosen, & Mossholder, 2012), or suitability/fit (Van Iddekinge et al., 2016). Medium structure includes measurement of general (non-job-specific) knowledge, skills, abilities, and other attributes (KSAOs), including such things as cognitive ability (Kluemper & Rosen, 2009; Van Iddekinge et al., 2016) and personality attributes (Bohnert & Ross, 2010; Kluemper & Ross, 2009; Kluemper et al., 2012). High structure for this component includes measuring job-specific KSAOs based on a job analysis.

Procedural consistency. This component entails the uniformity of the SMA procedures across all applicants. Higher structure is obtained the more that all applicants are treated in the same manner. Low structure is signified by process inconsistency, such as only some of the applicants being subjected to the SMA. Medium structure includes all applicants going through a similar process, with some inconsistencies remaining. An example of this might be assessing Facebook (FB) profiles of all candidates, but searching farther into the past with some applicants than with others. High structure consists of using the exact same procedures for all applicants, such as reviewing the past twelve months of FB information for all applicants after they have completed their job interview.

Measurements used. This component examines the level of measurement detail present in the SMA, with structure increasing as the level of detail increases. Low structure consists of not using any sort of rating scales for measurement, but relying on overall impressions (e.g., “This person seems like a good candidate”). Medium structure entails using a single rating scale to rate

each trait measured. High structure includes using multiple items for each rating scale for improved accuracy of measurement.

Documentation. Documentation refers to the notes taken during the SMA; the more specific the documentation, the higher the structure. Low structure includes no records being kept regarding the SMA. Medium structure includes general SMA notes being kept (e.g., “removed from consideration based on lack of relevant job experience listed on LI”). High structure includes detailed notes being kept regarding information found during the SMA that influenced specific ratings and/or decision-making.

Assessor training. This refers to how well those conducting SMAs are trained on how to do it in a reliable and valid manner. Structure increases as the breadth and depth of SMA training increases. Low structure includes no training for SMA assessors. With medium structure, the assessor is given basic instructions regarding what the SMA entails (e.g., “look for red flags” or “try to see if the applicant would be a good fit with our company”). High structure includes comprehensive training on how to effectively conduct SMAs. This could include frame-of-reference training, how to avoid common rating errors (e.g., leniency, contrast, halo), legal considerations (e.g., avoiding discrimination), how to interpret common information found on SM, conducting practice ratings, etc.

Separate rater(s) than decision-maker(s). While providing assessor training and otherwise structuring the SMA will likely reduce assessor bias, it is good practice to get multiple people involved in the process. Multiple raters will likely increase the accuracy of ratings, and having a separate person (or separate people) making the ultimate hiring decision means that the decision-maker(s) will more likely make hiring decisions based on the job-related ratings provided by the rater, not on non-job-related information and/or protected class information (e.g., race, age, religion, sexual preference, political affiliation) that the rater may have come across when conducting the SMA (Fisher, 2011; Sprague, 2007a). The lowest level of structure is that the

SMA rater and the decision-maker are the same person (only one person is involved). For medium structure, the SMA raters and the decision-makers are the same people, but multiple people are involved. The highest level of structure includes separating the SMA rater(s) and the ultimate decision-maker(s).

Informed consent. The final two components listed move away from the Campion et al. (1997) structure framework to include elements of structure that affect the acceptability of the SMA (both in a legal sense and by the applicant). These components are more specific to passive selection processes that do not require direct interaction with the applicant (such as SMAs, background screens, credit checks, and reference checks). The first component, informed consent, refers to the applicant being notified and agreeing to the SMA. Low structure entails no informed consent being given by the applicant. Medium structure includes getting the applicant's consent to conduct a general background screen, with the SMA being considered part of such a background screen. High structure requires applicant consent to specifically conduct the SMA.

Notification of results. While informed consent is concerned with notifying the candidate and obtaining consent *prior to* the SMA, notification of results is concerned with the information provided to the applicant *after* the SMA has been completed, particularly when SMA information influences the hiring decision. Low structure entails not notifying applicants regarding SMA results. Medium structure includes notifying applicants when the SMA influences the hiring decision, but not allowing the applicant an option to appeal the SMA results. High structure requires notifying the applicant *and* allowing the applicant to appeal the findings of the SMA.

2. THE CURRENT STUDY

It is often assumed that SMAs are not consistently used and that there is little structure inherent in the process (Ross & Slovinsky, 2012; Van Iddekinge et al., 2016), yet there has been no scientific inquiry to verify this assumption. An initial study of SMA structure used in the

academic research sphere is relevant and will provide important understanding with regard to current practices. In this study, we perform a content analysis that rates published academic studies in terms of the SMA structural components, which have been adapted from Campion et al.'s (1997) interviewing components. As a basic research question, we inquire as to how structured academic research studies that incorporate SMAs are, and further propose that the current level of structure on each of the structural components is low.

***Research Question 1:** How structured (low, medium, or high) are SMAs as operationalized in academic research with regard to the eight structural components?*

3. RESEARCH METHOD AND RESULTS

To test our research question, a content analysis was performed, using two of Harari et al.'s (2020) recommendations to identify relevant studies (database search and forward search). Primarily, we completed a database keyword search of *Business Source Premier* and *PsycINFO* using the terms 'Social Media Assessment', 'SMA', 'Social Media', 'Recruitment', and 'Hiring.' Additionally, we performed a forward search of references found within articles we had already identified. Doing so allowed for the discovery and examination of the most relevant publications. Nine studies were found, and the two authors separately rated each on a scale of High, Medium, or Low structure with regard to the structural components (See Table 1). A significant initial agreement was made, with 76% of the ratings being consistent between the two authors. After further review of the source material, discrepancies were resolved and a consensus was achieved on the remaining ratings.

The rating levels were assigned corresponding numerical classifications as follows: Low (1); Low/Medium (2); Medium (3); Medium/High (4); High (5). To score each component, the nine studies were tallied according to the scale and divided by the number of coded studies (nine) to

obtain an average across studies. Lower numerical scores (1 or 2) correspond to lower levels of structure while higher numerical scores (3 or 4) correspond to higher levels of structure. Using these metrics, we can see specifically how structured each of the given components are, and how components rank against each other in terms of level of structure.

4. RESULTS

Findings in this study shed light on our initial research question of how structured SMAs are as currently practiced in academic research studies. Our discoveries indicate that SMAs are generally performed at a medium level of structure on each of the SMA structural components (See Table 2). Across all nine studies, procedural consistency proved to have the highest level of structure across studies ($M = 4.78$). Measurements used resulted in a fairly high structure with a mean of 4.22. Assessor training ($M = 3.11$) and job-related specificity ($M = 2.44$) were both discovered to be moderate in structure. Lastly, documentation emerged as the component with the lowest level of structure, yielding a mean of 1.11. Overall, our analysis proves that while some of the SMA structural components are generally high in structure (procedural consistency and measurements used), there is significant room for improvement regarding the components that are medium and low in structure (assessor training, job-related specificity, and especially documentation).

Using standard deviation (SD) as a variance measure, results in Table 2 demonstrate that some of the structure components were more consistent across studies than others. For example, each of the nine studies contained some degree of high structure (4 or 5) with regard to the procedural consistency component, resulting in a low SD of .42. Similarly, all studies contained some degree of low structure (1 or 2) with regard to the documentation component ($SD = .31$). In contrast, the assessor training component included a mixture of low, medium, and high structures (from 1 to 5) across the nine studies ($SD = 1.59$). Therefore, in addition to a moderate lack of structure when performing SMAs in academic research, there is also a lack of uniformity in some

structural components from study to study.

5. DISCUSSION

As evidenced by the results of our content analysis, there is a need for improvement in SMA structure that is used in academic research studies. The high structure found in the procedural consistency and measurements used components suggest that those performing the SMAs generally used the same process for each applicant and likewise used the same measurements. However, the medium structure found in the assessor training and job-related specificity components as well as the low structure found in the documentation component indicate that SMAs are not currently used in a consistent way.

Given the high-quality nature of academic studies, it is likely that the eight components of SMA structure are observed significantly less in practice. This is confirmed by reports that suggest that there is little to no structure in SMAs as they are currently practiced in organizations (e.g., Roth et al., 2016). Potential employees who are subjected to ill-structured SMAs are at risk for a biased, unethical employment decision. However, if potential employees perceive the SMA practice as being fair and consistent, they will develop a deeper sense of trust and allegiance to the organization they are applying to. Therefore, increasing the level of structure used in SMAs, both in the academic sphere as well as in industry practice, will minimize inequitable effects and prove to be a useful hiring tool.

6. FURTHER RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

To further develop our research, a second field study will be paired with these initial findings, strengthening our recommendation to improve the structure of the SMA process in hiring. As the two studies are compared, a full-length manuscript will be developed, including further direction for academics and hiring managers who wish to perform SMAs.

Additional directions of research could include how organizations practically incorporate structured SMAs into their hiring process, how the structure of SMAs varies by industry, and potential employees' reaction to unstructured and structured SMAs.

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Table 1.
Framework of SMA Structural Components

Structural Component	Definition	Corresponding Interview Components ^a	Levels of Structure
Job-related specificity	Depth of detail measured from the SMA	Job analysis Valid question types	High: The SMA measures job-specific KSAOs. Med: The SMA measures general KSAOs. Low: The SMA measures overall impressions.
Procedural consistency	The uniformity of the SMA procedures across applicants	Same questions Limiting prompting No discussion	High: The exact same set of procedures are followed for all applicants. Med: The general process is roughly similar for all applicants. Low: The same set of procedures are not followed for all applicants.
Measurements used	The level of measurement detail in the SMA	Rating each question Anchored rating scales Statistical prediction	High: Each trait is measured using multiple rating scale items. Med: Each trait is measured with a single rating scale item. Low: No rating scales are used.
Documentation	The notes taken and records kept in the SMA	Taking detailed notes	High: Detailed records are kept regarding information found during SMA. Med: General notes are made during the SMA. Low: No records are kept regarding the SMA.
Assessor training	Level of training provided to SMA assessors	Interviewer training	High: Those conducting SMAs are provided with comprehensive training on how to do so effectively. Med: Those conducting SMAs are provided with basic instructions. Low: Those conducting SMAs are not trained.
Separate rater(s) than decision maker(s)	Having rater(s) other than the decision-makers conduct the SMA	Ancillary information Multiple interviewers Same interviewer(s)	High: The SMA rater(s) and decision-maker(s) are separate people. Med: The SMA rater(s) and decision-makers are the same, but multiple people are involved. Low: The SMA rater and decision-maker are the same individual.
Informed Consent	Level of applicant consent gathered in relation to the SMA	None (new component specific to the SMA)	High: Applicants gives informed consent specifically for the SMA. Med: Applicants consents to general background screen, part of which is the SMA. Low: No informed consent is given by the applicants.
Notification of results	The information given to applicant after the SMA	None (new component specific to the SMA)	High: Applicant notified when SMA influences hiring decision, with chance to appeal. Med: Applicant notified when SMA influences hiring decision, without chance to appeal. Low: Applicants are not notified regarding SMA results.

Note. SMA = social media assessment; KSAOs = knowledge, skills, attributes, and other individual characteristics.

^a Components of interview structure from Campion et al. (1997)

Table 2.
Content Analysis and Hypothesized Use in Practice of SMA Structural Components

Structural Component	Kluemper & Rosen (2009)	Kluemper et al. (2012) - STUDY 1	Kluemper et al. (2012) - STUDY 2	Bohnert & Ross (2010)	Van Iddekinge et al. (2016)
Job-related specificity	3	3	3	1	3
Procedural consistency	5	5	5	5	5
Measurements used	4	5	5	5	5
Documentation	1	1	1	1	1
Assessor training	5	5	5	1	2
Separate rater(s) than decision-maker(s)	N/A (non-hiring situation)	N/A (non-hiring situation)	N/A (non-hiring situation)	N/A (non-hiring situation)	N/A (non-hiring situation)
Informed consent	N/A (non-hiring situation)	N/A (non-hiring situation)	N/A (non-hiring situation)	N/A (non-hiring situation)	N/A (non-hiring situation)
Notification of results	N/A (non-hiring situation)	N/A (non-hiring situation)	N/A (non-hiring situation)	N/A (non-hiring situation)	N/A (non-hiring situation)

Table 2. (cont.)
Content Analysis and Hypothesized Use in Practice of SMA Structural Components

Structural Component	Roulin & Levashina (2018) – STUDY 1	Roulin & Levashina (2018) – STUDY 2	Becton et al. (2019b)	Becton et al. (2019a)	Overall Mean (SD)
Job-related specificity	3	2	1	3	2.44(.83)
Procedural consistency	4	4	5	5	4.78(.42)
Measurements used	3	3	3	5	4.22(.92)
Documentation	1	1	2	1	1.11(.31)
Assessor training	4	3	1	2	3.11(1.59)
Separate rater(s) than decision-maker(s)	N/A (non-hiring situation)	N/A (non-hiring situation)	N/A (non-hiring situation)	N/A (non-hiring situation)	N/A (non-hiring situation)
Informed consent	N/A (non-hiring situation)	N/A (non-hiring situation)	N/A (non-hiring situation)	N/A (non-hiring situation)	N/A (non-hiring situation)
Notification of results	N/A (non-hiring situation)	N/A (non-hiring situation)	N/A (non-hiring situation)	N/A (non-hiring situation)	N/A (non-hiring situation)