



The Relativism of Ethical Dilemma Decision Making

The Use of Social Media for Pre-employment Background Check

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Abstract. The research involves 120 business students answering ethical dilemmas in business. The case was about a company using social media as a pre-employment background check and considering it part of the hiring process. The students must answer from both the candidate's and the employer's perspectives. Initially, the students stated their opinion from the perspective of the candidate. Later, they stated the point of view of the employer. It tested whether they modify their ethical judgment as they have a different position. Chi-square and McNemar's tests were used to prove the results. The research contributes to the fact that ethical judgment is associated with ethical intention; therefore, when a person judges that an act is ethical, they will tend to do it if they are in the same position. Secondly, it provides evidence of ethical relativism. Based on McNemar's test, it is proven that there is different ethical judgment in the candidate's perspective and the perspective of the business owner HRD. 49% of the respondents change their ethical judgment when they are in a different position.

Keywords: Ethical relativism · social media · Employee selection · Background check · Ethical judgment

1 Introduction

The use of social networking information during the pre-employment background check is getting popular. A company may select employees based on social media information. Social media has self-representation and self-disclosure aspects which can benefit the company by digging into the candidate's information. Self-representation shows the desire to impress others. Self-disclosure showing personal information and interest, including thoughts, feeling, likes, and dislike) [1, 2]. Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter are social media having high self-presentation and self-disclosure [1].

Social media is an online resume revealing unwritten things on a CV. Based on surveys, companies avoid candidates who have uploaded inappropriate photos, content about drinking, and sharing confidential information or bad-mouthing about the previous employer [2]. Candidates had lousy communication skills and lying about qualifications was also a red flag. On the contrary, candidates with positive personalities and good communication skills are likely to be hired [2]. Social media, such as Facebook, Twitter,

and Instagram, can give input that a CV cannot provide, including personality, attitude, relationship with friends and family, and social influence [2]. Besides, social media are vast and cost-free information, so it is getting popular among human resources as a tool for recruitment and selection [3]. The company must consider several issues regarding employment selection using social media, such as privacy, validity, and reliability [2]. The company that uses social media information for employee selection, called cyber vetting, is susceptible to ethical dilemmas such as discrimination, infringement of privacy, freedom, and human rights [4].

Even though information posted on social media can be concluded as public information, it can be inaccurate and misleading if taken out of context. The reliability of social media information is questionable. If the company accesses a candidate's social media without confirmation and consent, the company might lead to wrong information. They might find a fake account created by the candidate's competitor or rival. The candidate is tagged in a misleading photo, caption, or information posted by other users without the candidate's approval and permission.

Criterion-related validity or predictive validity emphasizes the validity of the test and the relevant outcome [5]. In employee selection, the selection test is job-related, and the outcome is the employee's performance. If the company uses social media to screen candidates, can social media information weed out which candidate has lower job performance? Can the posted picture or a published comment reflect the skill or job performance of the employee? On the contrary, the other selection processes, such as interviews, cognitive tests, and personality tests, have been provided by criterion-related validity.

In addition, social media can be a sanctuary for some people to express their thought, opinions, feelings, likes, and dislikes. Moreover, sometimes, those expressions are not related to job performance. The candidate may work professionally and separate their personal life and work. What is posted on social media cannot reflect or measure the candidate's job performance. Regarding the ethical issue of using social media for a pre-employment background check, the research aims to discover the opinion of the business student on whether the usage of social media information is ethical for employee selection. Second, the study examines whether ethical decision-making is relative or different if the student puts it into two perspectives: the candidate and the employer (business owner or HRD).

1.1 Ethical Judgment and Ethical Intention

Ethical judgment can be captured by considering whether the decision-maker should do that act. If we were the decision-maker in a particular scenario, the ethical intention could be defined would we make the same decision [6, 7]. In other words, ethical judgment is how individuals perceive whether the act is ethical or unethical. Moreover, the ethical intention is validation that if the individual were in that position, the individual would do the same. When a person judges the act as ethical, the person will tend to follow the action if the person is in the same position.

H1: There is an association between ethical judgment and ethical intention

1.2 Ethical Relativism

Idealism and relativism are two dimensions that affect ethical judgment [8, 9]. Individuals' moral philosophy ranges from having a strong belief in universal moral rules to relative decisions depending on the situation [8]. Moral idealism affects negatively, and moral relatives positively affect three stages of ethical decision-making. The stages are ethical recognition, ethical judgment, and ethical intention [7]. That research found that professional accountants with high idealism tend to show strict ethical decision-making than relativistic orientation.

There is a universal rule that not being truthful is always wrong. On the contrary, other ethical behavior depends on the situation and outcome [10]. Idealism person believes that ethical judgment is based on the ethical principle which brings expected results. On the other hand, relativist individuals reject absolute moral rules and decide to behave regarding the event. They believe that morality is a subjective issue that is different from the individual's viewpoint [9]. A relativistic individual will support personal interest or expediency of the occasion. They reject the absolute rules to guide their behavior and consider unethical conduct based on different circumstances. They might support the activities that yield the most benefit [9]. A relativist person would rationalize the management's goal as ethically acceptable [10]. In the context of an employer using social media information for a pre-employment background check, the respondent will tend to agree about this act. Meaningfully if previously, as a candidate, the respondent opposed the act, the student will switch the ethical judgment to agree with the act.

When individuals with high ethical relativism solve an ethical dilemma, they will focus on the case rather than using ethical principles. On the other hand, the less relativist individual will focus on universal moral rules. The higher the ethical relativism, the higher the probability of switching intention when switching the role or perspectives.

H2: there is different ethical judgment when the students become the candidate and become the employer

2 Research Methodology

The students taking the "law and ethics in business" course were given a case and question that measured their ethical judgment, ethical intention, and ethical relativism. The case was about a company using social media as a pre-employment background check and considering it part of hiring. Ethical judgment was measured by whether the students thought the act was ethical. The ethical intention was observed by asking whether they would do the same act in that position. Yes-No questions were given to measure the ethical judgment and ethical intention, and students must answer from both perspectives, the candidate and the employer. Following those questions, the students were given space to elaborate on their judgment and decision narratively.

The Chi-square test was exercised to verify whether the ethical judgment is associated with ethical intention. Next, McNemar's test was used to prove the existence of ethical relativism regarding the case based on two perspectives, the candidate and the employer.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Respondents

The research involved 120 business students from accounting (92.5%), economics, and management major taking the “law and ethics in business” course. Table 1 shows that female respondents were 78 students (65%), and male respondents were 42 students (35%). They were 2nd-semester students (97.5%). Respondents with GPA 3.7–4.0 (out of 4.0) were 71 students (59.2%).

3.2 Ethical Judgment and Ethical Intention

3.2.1 Perspective of Candidates

From the candidate’s perspective, the students must answer, “if you were the candidate, do you mind if the employer scrolled through your social media and considered what you have posted as part of the assessment in the recruitment process?” If the company does that, do you think the company does an ethical act?”.

Table 2 shows that regarding the ethical intention, the results are as follows 56 students (47%) answered, “I do not mind”, where 48 of them perceived it as an ethical

Table 1. Profile of the Respondents

		N	%
Gender	Female	78	65.0%
	Male	42	35.0%
Major	Accounting	111	92.5%
	Economics	1	0.8%
	Management	8	6.7%
Semester	2 nd	117	97.5%
	Others	3	2.5%
GPA	0.0–3.2	17	14.2%
	3.3–3.6	32	26.7%
	3.7–4.0	71	59.2%

Table 2. Candidate’s Ethical Judgement

	ethical	not ethical	total	%
I don’t mind	48	8	56	47%
I object	2	62	64	53%
total	50	70	120	
%	42%	58%		100%

act, and 8 perceived it as unethical. In contrast, 64 students (53%) answered “I object”, where 2 of them perceived it as an ethical act and 62 perceived it as an unethical act. Regarding ethical judgment, 50 students (42%) considered it ethical, and 70 students (58%) as unethical.

Based on the chi-square test (Table 4), with a significance of 0.000, ethical judgment is associated with ethical intention. It can clarify that when a student judges the company’s act doing the pre-employment background check through social as ethical conduct, the student will allow the company to see the social media. Vice versa, if the students perceive it as unethical, the student will object to the company observing the social media.

3.2.2 The Perspective of the Employer (Business Owner or HRD)

From the perspective of the employer, HRD, or business owner, the students must answer following questions. First question is “would you consider the candidate’s social media as one of the criteria for hiring an employee?”. Second question is “If the company does so, do you think the company does an ethical act?”.

Table 3 shows that suppose they were the business owner or HRD, 98 students (82%) considered social media for a pre-employment assessment, where 97 of them considered it ethical, and 1 considered it unethical. In contrast, 22 students (18%) ignored social media, where 8 of them perceived it as an ethical act, and 14 perceived it as an unethical act.

Regarding ethical judgment, 105 students (88%) considered it ethical, and 15 students (13%) considered it unethical.

Table 3. Employer’s Ethical Judgement

	ethical	not ethical	total	%
consider the social media	97	1	98	82%
ignore the social media	8	14	22	18%
total	105	15	120	
%	88%	13%		100%

Table 4. Pearson Chi-Square test

	candidate	employer
Value	83.816	64.405
Df	1	1
Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	0.000	0.000

Based on the chi-square test (Table 4), with a significance of 0.000, ethical judgment is associated with ethical intention. It can clarify that when a student judges the company's act doing the pre-employment background check through social as ethical conduct (the ethical judgment), the student will do the same if they were the business owner or HRD (ethical intention). Vice versa, if the students comprehend it as unethical, they will not consider the social media if they were the business owner or HRD.

Based on the chi-square test from the perspective of the candidate and employer (Table 4), it can be concluded that ethical judgment plays an essential role for a person in an ethical decision-making dilemma as ethical judgment is associated with ethical intention.

In other words, when a person judges that an act is ethical, that person will tend to do it if they were in the same position.

3.3 Ethical Relativism

As the student was given two different perspectives, the candidate and the business owner or HRD, some may switch their decision. Figures 1 and 2 show that students who considered the act ethical shifted from 50 (42%) to 105 students (87%).

Tables 5 and 6 show that 61 students (51%) consistently made ethical judgments toward the case, where 48 students saw it as ethical if they were in both positions and 13 students considered it unethical.

In contrast, 59 students (49%) altered their ethical judgment if they were in another position. They consisted of 2 students who perceived it as ethical if they were a candidate but unethical if they were the business owner or HRD; however, 57 judged it as unethical when they were a candidate but ethical when they were the business owner or HRD.

McNemar's test (Table 7), with a significance of 0.000 (49.424 chi-squares), shows different ethical judgments from two perspectives. As they change their position, their ethical judgment might also change. They made ethical decision-making not based on universal rules. The decision was made based on observation per case and circumstance. The goal of the act should also be considered.

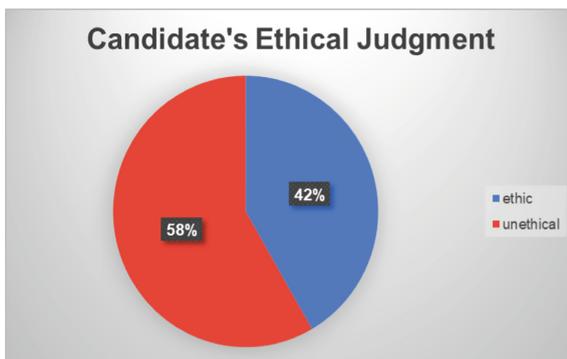


Fig. 1. Candidate's Ethical Judgment



Fig. 2. Employer’s Ethical Judgment

Table 5. Switching the ethical judgment

	N	%
Not change ethical judgement	61	51%
Change ethical judgment	59	49%
Total	120	100%

Table 6. Ethical Judgement switching detail

		candidate		total
		ethical	not ethical	
Employer	ethical	48	57	105
	not ethical	2	13	15
	total	50	70	120

Table 7. McNemar’s test

N	120
Chi-Square	49.424
Asymp. Sig.	0.000

4 Conclusion

There are several social media with a designated purpose, such as Facebook for recreational purposes, LinkedIn for work-oriented purposes, and Twitter for posting a statement [3]. If the human resource wants to use social media for recruitment and selection

purposes, LinkedIn will be more ethically acceptable. LinkedIn provides job-related information, including previous employer, skills, and connections. Lastly, ensure the account is valid and reliable by confirming with the candidate.

Ethical judgment drives ethical intention. Individuals tend to validate the act if the individuals judge the act as ethical. Even though there are universal ethics rules, people tend to judge the event accordingly. People might alter their ethical judgment based on the goals.

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