



Predicting Self-Disclosure in Recruitment in the Context of Social Media Screening

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Abstract

Understanding the factors that support the self-disclosure of information by prospective job applicants in recruitment settings provide an important means to understand withdrawal from and completion of applications for job vacancies, particularly in the age of increasing social media screening (also known as cyber-vetting). The general willingness to trust others, the anticipated (mis)use of information (e.g., that may disadvantage applicants), and global privacy concerns may all influence applicant completion and withdrawal behaviors. The purpose of the current study was therefore to examine whether the relationship between perceived vulnerability regarding the use of information and general self-disclosure was mediated by one's willingness to trust, as well as the link to the completion of applications. The authors collected data from an online sample of 222 student participants who were asked to respond to several hypothetical job scenarios suggesting social media screening. The results indicated that willingness to trust was an independent predictor of self-disclosure. However, while no support for mediation was found, a moderation effect transpired. Specifically, self-disclosure was lowest when both vulnerability and global privacy concerns were high. Follow-up analysis showed that self-disclosure predicted intention to continue with the application process. This suggests that prospective applicants' willingness to trust, privacy concerns, and perceived vulnerability associated with the use of information about applicants may be important predictors of self-disclosure involved in information sharing (and thus applications submission/completion rates) during recruitment.

Keywords Applicant behavior · Self-disclosure · Vulnerability · Trust · Recruitment

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Introduction

Self-disclosure describes the tendency of individuals to be more or less willing to share sensitive information about themselves with others (e.g., photos, personal experiences, thoughts, feelings or concerns; see Taddicken 2014). The self-disclosure required as part of the employment recruitment process and the accessibility of information about applicants on social media has generated a number of concerns for job applicants and advocates for diversity. On the one hand, the applicant may not know the person who has access to their data. This may then raise several risks of privacy invasion (see also Joinson et al. 2010). On the other hand, increased use of cyber-vetting during recruitment may further increase fears that information is used to disadvantage applicants on the basis of their gender, age, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, life style, health status, religious and/or political views (e.g., Bennington 2001; Davison et al. 2012; Lau and Stotzer 2011; Schneider et al. 2015). These variables are considered protected data categories under the General Data Protection Regulations (or GDPR 2018). These legal guidelines also apply to the processing of personal data (both automated or not) when the data forms part of a filing system, so data collection as part of recruitment and selection would be subject to GDPR in Europe.

A number of different theories exist, some of which are directly or indirectly relevant to self-disclosure. In this article, the authors specifically focus on theories and models that are immediately pertinent to self-disclosure and variables of relevance to the study described in this paper. One of the first models on self-disclosure was proposed by Derlega and Grzelak's (1979), a model that was further revised by Omarzu (2000) and resulted in the Disclosure Decision model. This model considers the role of goals in predicting disclosure. Omarzu's (2000) model assumes that individual and situational aspects (e.g., the rewards offered) affect, potentially in interaction, an individual's disclosure goals. For example, one's experience during the application process may influence the extent to which an individual proceeds and then submits an application. Applicants will vary in the extent to which they are willing and prepared to share information during these early stages in the employment process.

As many recruitment and application processes have moved online over the last few years, two more models deserve our attention. Bazarova and Choi (2014) developed a Functional Model of Self-Disclosure on social networks. In their model, they propose a mediation mechanism with situational cues activating disclosure goals, which in turn determine disclosure characteristics. In addition, Petronio (2002) introduced Communication Privacy Management (CPM) theory which proposes disclosure as a process of managing dyadic information-sharing and privacy. In the context of application processes, we suggest that it is more likely that applicants will complete application forms when instructions are also presented that consider privacy concerns and explain to the applicant why specific pieces of information are required or when these are optional.

In recent years, authors such as Thorsden et al. (2016) have generated models on the basis of existing research to understand self-disclosure in the context of social networks. The authors conducted a review of the Information Systems literature and identified all those variables that potentially influence self-disclosure. The resulting model specified a number of predictors of self-disclosure on social networks, such as privacy concerns, reciprocity (reflecting the idea of dyadic sharing introduced by Petronio 2002), relationship building, self-presentation, personalization, entertainment, security and safety (Thorsden et al., 2016, pg. 397). In addition, two mediators were proposed: trust and social pressure. Many, if not all, of these variables also come into play in the context of online job application scenarios when employers ask

applicants to share information about themselves for the purpose of a job application. This leads us to the current research gap which motivated the current paper.

While much research can be found on different areas of communication and within the last years also on social network sites, not much is known about applicant reactions, perceptions and cognitions that shape self-disclosure in the recruitment process for employment, particularly in the context of social media screening (or cyber-vetting, as it is also known; see also Black et al. 2015). Exceptions include the work by Langford et al. (2013), as well as Schneider et al. (2015). The primary goal of our current paper is to understand self-disclosure and application completions in the context of recruitment among young professionals preparing for job transitions, using several hypothetical job scenarios involving social media screening during recruitment in response to ethical concerns that may arise in actual job situations (as this would involve misleading applicants and have real-world implication for their experience with a prospective employer).

Potential Predictors of Self-Disclosure and Application Completion in Recruitment

As noted in the previous section, several models and theories exist which help us to better understand the predictors of self-disclosure, as well as any mediating or moderating variables. Many of these provide the groundwork to study, interpret and understand specific applicant behaviors such as submission of incomplete applications or withdrawal from the recruitment process (or discontinued application forms). The next section introduces the role and interaction of variables such as global privacy concerns, general willingness to trust, and perceived vulnerability in relation to self-disclosure in the context of social media screening in recruitment processes.

Privacy concerns and willingness to trust others with ones' information are known to influence self-disclosure behaviors. This links to the meta-analysis of online self-disclosure by Bauer and Schiffinger (2016): trust beliefs increase online self-disclosure ($r = .19$); while privacy concerns ($r = -.06$) reduce online self-disclosure. Not surprisingly, privacy concerns and the willingness trust may jointly predict self-disclosure (see Taddei and Contena 2013). Given the rise of organizations using social media screening, however, self-disclosure may not be optional and be distorted by where and when information was posted about an applicant by themselves or others. Not disclosing information that is otherwise available via an Internet search may also backfire. For example, a recent study by John et al. (2016) found that people who choose not to self-disclose information are judged more negatively in comparison to others who reveal such information, even if it is of questionable behavior. This finding confirms earlier work that showed disclosure of a disability may have negative employment consequences (van Schrader et al. 2013).

The review of the literature by Thorsden et al. (2016) identified a number of factors influencing individuals' self-disclosure in social networks. Among these factors are the willingness to trust and social pressure (which Li 2012, called "perceived benefits"), as well as privacy concerns ("risk calculus"). We propose that the relationship between perceived vulnerability (potentially triggered by situational cues such as information requests on application forms), willingness to trust, and self-disclosure may be influenced by the degree to which applicants are generally concerned about their privacy (see also Taddei and Contena 2013). This may also be a concern that stems from the amount of information that employers may have access to, such as information obtained from their social media profiles.

The unintended use of information provided by the applicant on the application forms or via social media sites may also generate perceived vulnerability (particularly in relation to protected data categories under GDPR, 2018). These concerns may also reflect some of the basic premises of the Protection Motivation Theory (PMT; Rogers 1983), which provides insight here. Depending on what applicants know about the employer (or more importantly, what they feel they do not know) and the degree to which they believe the employer to be trustworthy, applicants may respond differently to certain questions during the recruitment process. For example, when the applicants feel that certain information can potentially decrease their realistic or imagined chances of employment, they may be unwilling to share this information.

We propose that this may then have significant implications for applicant behavior. Applicants who feel vulnerable about how information is used (especially if this is rather vaguely defined or the sources are unclear, Black et al. 2015) and rate their privacy highly may also be less willing to trust an employer with information, leading to incomplete application forms (limited self-disclosure of information) or even sudden withdrawal from the recruitment process (e.g., applicants never complete the online application forms).

Hypotheses

Using the conceptual models proposed by Thorsden et al. (2016) and Bazarova and Choi (2014) regarding the direct and indirect predictors of self-disclosure, we examined the relationship between perceived vulnerability, trust, and self-disclosure. In other words, privacy concern is not the initial predictor of the mediation but rather vulnerability, while privacy concern is tested as a moderator in the relationship of both vulnerability to information abuse and trust in relation to self-disclosure. By testing the relationships observed and considering an additional moderator, we therefore aimed to expand on the existing model by Thorsden et al. (2016). Specifically, we examined moderated mediation effects. By doing so, we add to the literature on the determinants of applicant behavior, as explaining self-disclosure may be the first step to understanding non-completion of job applications, applicant withdrawal, and drop-out of otherwise qualified and desirable applicants during the recruitment processes.

We proposed (see Fig. 1) that the relationship between vulnerability and self-disclosure is mediated by the willingness to trust. Vulnerability may reflect a lack of control over information (as assessed in Taddei and Contena 2013), particularly how the information is then interpreted by an employer. In this respect, we are testing a mediation effect of trust similar to Taddei and Contena's (2013) study. Additionally, we proposed that global privacy concern operates as a moderator in the relationship between (a) perceived vulnerability in the context of

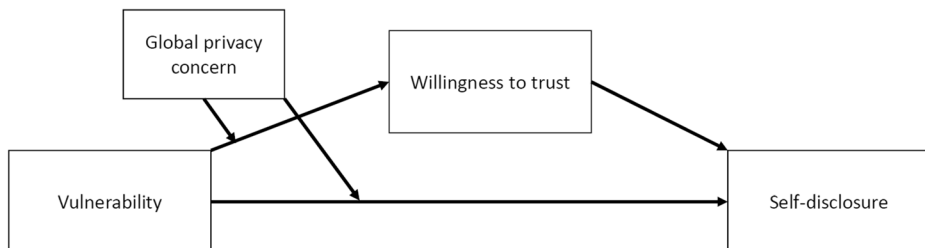


Fig. 1 Proposed relationship of variables

social media screening and general willingness to trust; and (b) perceived vulnerability and self-disclosure.

H1: The relationship between perceived vulnerability and self-disclosure is partially mediated by one's willingness to trust.

H2: The relationship between perceived vulnerability and willingness to trust is moderated by global privacy concern.

H3: The relationship between perceived vulnerability and self-disclosure is moderated by global privacy concern.

Method

Participants

In total, 222 student participants were recruited from a UK university. The majority of the participants were women ($n = 176$, 79.3%), while men only made up a fifth of the sample ($n = 44$, 19.8%; two missing values). The participants were all aged 18 to 48 years ($M = 20.20$, $SD = 3.13$), with most study participants being aged 18 to 21 years old (85.8%). In terms of work experience, half the student sample was employed at the time of the study ($n = 105$), while the other half was not working or employed ($n = 111$; six missing values).

Procedure

Participants were invited via email and a link was listed online via the departmental research platform. The study first listed an information sheet, followed by the consent form. No incentive was provided but students were awarded research points for completing the study. The first section of the questionnaire presented participants with brief vignettes for five jobs (involving sales, property management, a government think-tank, childcare, and social services). Each vignette indicated that applicants for this role may be subject to social media screening (the same vignettes were also used as part of another study, see Jeske and Shultz, 2019). An example vignette outlines an example of the type of vignette that were presented to the participants: Imagine you were applying for a position at a property management company to manage apartments" (Jeske and Shultz, 2019, pg. 5). This was then followed by the following instructions implying screening: "As you are filling out the application you notice that they require you to disclose your username and password social media account(s) (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, etc.) you currently use. During the interview they will log into and thoroughly look over your accounts" (Jeske and Shultz, 2019, pg. 5). The second section asked participants about their social media content sharing practices, followed by the main measures: perceived vulnerability, global privacy concern about employers having access to information on social media, general willingness to trust, and general willingness to self-disclose information. The fourth section requested demographic information. The questionnaire concluded with a debrief form.

Measures

Several of the measures were reduced to fewer items to reduce cognitive load for the participants (as the five vignettes added to the length of the survey overall).

Perceived Vulnerability (Regarding the Use of Information) This was assessed with five, slightly amended items from the perceived vulnerability subscale by Dinev and Hart (2004). The original scale included eight items, of which the first five of the original scale were retained (see Dinev and Hart 2004, pg. 418). An example item is: “Personal information from my social media account(s) could be inappropriately used.” The scale captured the fear of personal information being used for other purposes and unintended audiences. The answering options ranged from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*); ($\alpha = .75$, $M = 3.80$, $SD = 0.63$).

Willingness to Trust This was measured using four slightly amended items from the International Personality Item Pool (IPIP 2016). The items included four statements: (1) “I believe that people have good intentions for the most part.” (2) “I trust the things that people tell me.” (3) “I believe that people generally don’t have hidden motives.” And (4) “I believe in human goodness in the majority of contexts.” The answering options ranged from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*); ($\alpha = .83$, $M = 3.25$, $SD = 0.63$).

General Self-Disclosure Tendency This measure consisted of four items based on items from Wheelless (1978) and the International Personality Item Pool (IPIP 2016). The four statements were the following: (1) “I share and express my private thoughts with others.” (2) “I share and express my concerns with others.” (3) “I share and express my personal views with others.” And (4) “I don’t mind sharing my personal information with others.” The answering options ranged from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*); ($\alpha = .77$, $M = 3.09$, $SD = 0.65$).

Global Privacy Concerns This was assessed with four items from the privacy subscale by Smith et al. 1996; copied and slightly amended (word deletions) from Malhotra, Kim, and Agarwal (2004). The items included the following four statements: (1) “I am concerned about threats to my personal privacy.” (2) “To me, it is the most important thing to keep my privacy intact from [online] companies.” (3) “Compared with other subjects on my mind, personal privacy is very important.” And (4) “I am concerned about threats to my personal privacy”. The scale had seven Likert type response options ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*); ($\alpha = .80$, $M = 4.91$, $SD = 0.95$).

Intention to Continue Application Process Following the presentation of the five job outlines and the indication of screening, we asked participants each time if “I would participate in the application process” based on an amended item by Macan and Dipboye (1994). We added the responses to all five questions presented under each job scenario and created a mean-centered score to indicate intention to continue with the application process ($M = 3.27$, $SD = 1.53$).

Social Media-Related Concerns We used an amended item from Dinev and Hart (2004) which was “I am concerned that the information in my social media account(s) could be misused by a prospective employer.” Response options 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*); ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 1.53$).

Socio-Demographics This included information about gender, age, ethnicity, and children. The large majority did not have children nor had care responsibility for vulnerable others ($n = 209$). Only seven participants reported that they did, while three participants preferred not to say.

Results

Self-disclosure correlated with willingness to trust and intention to continue with an application (Table 1). However, global privacy and vulnerability correlated with each other significantly ($r = .38, p < .01$). In addition, intention to continue with application correlated weakly and positively with self-disclosure ($r = .14, p = .041$) but negatively with vulnerability ($r = -.20, p = .004$), while social media concerns also correlated positively with perceived vulnerability ($r = .52, p < .001$).

The mediation and moderation effects as outlined in Hypotheses 1 to 3 were tested simultaneously using moderated mediation. The analysis involved computing the moderated mediation using the bootstrap procedure with 1000 samples (Model 8 of the PROCESS macro in SPSS; see Hayes 2013). Willingness to trust was the mediator between vulnerability and self-disclosure. The results of this analysis did not lend support to the mediation hypothesis. Indeed, vulnerability was not a significant direct predictor of willingness to trust ($a = .08, p = .809$), although willingness to trust was a significant predictor of self-disclosure ($\beta = .32, p < .001$). In contrast to Hypothesis 1, willingness to trust did not mediate the relationship between vulnerability and self-disclosure (indirect effect $c' = -.01$; $SE = .03$, 95% C.I. = $[-0.07; 0.04]$). The normal theory test for indirect effects (excluding the moderator) was also not significant ($\beta = -.006, z = -.27, p = .787$). In summary, the relationship between vulnerability and willingness to trust was not significantly (neither fully nor partially) mediated. In addition, we saw no evidence that the relationship between vulnerability and willingness to trust was moderated by global privacy concerns ($\beta = .09, p = .712$). In other words, both Hypotheses 1 and 2 were not supported.

However, we observed some support for moderated effects as suggested by Hypothesis 3. Specifically, the interaction term between global privacy and vulnerability also predicted self-disclosure ($\beta = -.13, p = .046$), which suggests a significant moderation effect via global privacy concern between vulnerability and self-disclosure. Using regression and entering each variable sequentially, we found that vulnerability, willingness to trust, the moderator global privacy concern, and the interaction term explained 11.2% of variance in self-disclosure ($R^2 = .34, R^2_{adj} = .11, F(4, 210) = 6.72, p < .001$). This amount of explained variance is similar to other studies on self-disclosure (e.g., El Ouiridi et al. 2015, with 11–22%).

Hierarchical regression was conducted to explore the interaction effect between global privacy and vulnerability in relation to self-disclosure in more detail. We also considered potential covariates such as age, gender, and current employment status and work experience. Only employment status was a significant predictor of self-disclosure ($p < .05, R^2 = .026$).

Table 1 Correlations between main constructs

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
(1) Willingness to trust	1						
(2) Self-disclosure	.31**	1					
(3) Global privacy	.02	-.03	1				
(4) Vulnerability	-.02	-.03	.38**	1			
(5) Social media concern	-.01	-.08	.38**	.52**	1		
(6) Continue application	.03	.14*	-.11	-.20**	.14*	1	
(7) Age	-.10	-.02	.03	.09	.04	-.20**	1

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$. Continue to application (intention measure)

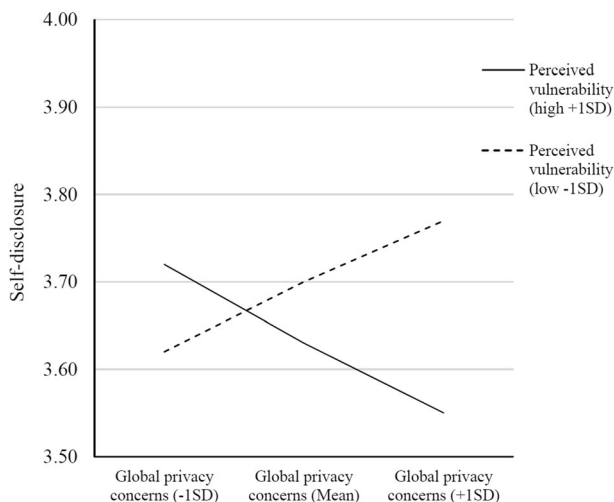


Fig. 2 Interaction between global privacy concern and vulnerability in relation to self-disclosure

Global privacy and vulnerability had no significant main effects ($p > .05$; $R^2\Delta = .001$, $p = .870$). However, a significant amount of variance was explained by the interaction between both variables ($R^2\Delta = .019$, $\beta = -.13$, $p = .042$). We computed the slopes to visualize our findings (Fig. 2, response options on a range from 1 to 5).

As can be seen in Fig. 2, self-disclosure is greatest when perceived vulnerability is low - even in the presence of greater privacy concern. Self-disclosure is lowest when both vulnerability and global privacy concern are high. This suggests that high privacy concern on its own does not necessarily reduce self-disclosure unless it coincides with greater perceived vulnerability.

Given the results obtained in the previous analyses, we also followed up with another mediation using the bootstrap procedure with 1000 samples (Model 4 of the PROCESS macro in SPSS; see Hayes 2013). This time we stipulated that self-disclosure mediated the relationship between trust and intention to continue with the application process. As expected, trust positively predicted self-disclosure ($\beta = .32$, $p < .001$), and self-disclosure predicted intention to continue with the application process ($\beta = .33$, $p = .045$). However, the indirect effect was only marginally significant ($\beta = .11$, $z = 1.83$, $p = .068$). This suggests a full mediation effect of self-disclosure between trust and intention to continue with the application process (Fig. 3). Controlling for global privacy concern and vulnerability did not change the results significantly.

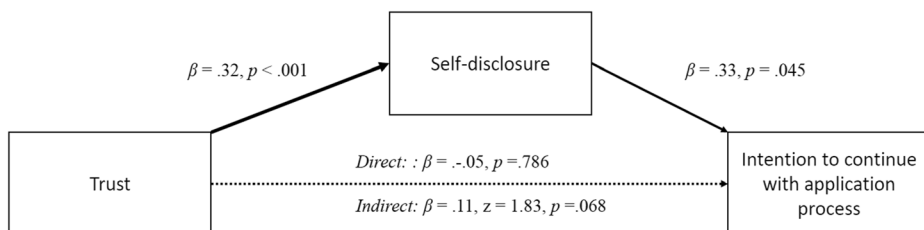


Fig. 3 Mediation including intention to continue with the application process as the outcome variable

Discussion

The primary goal of our study was to analyze the predictors of self-disclosure in the employment recruitment process in order to more fully understand applicant behavior such as submission of incomplete applications and withdrawal from the recruitment process. Based on the literature review and amended model by Thorsden et al. (2016), we tested a moderated mediation model. Findings only partially support the hypotheses and expected relationships.

First, the relationship between perceived vulnerability and self-disclosure was predicted to be partially mediated by the willingness to trust (H1). However, this hypothesis was not supported. Willingness to trust was not a significant mediator between perceived vulnerability and self-disclosure, as perceived vulnerability (our predictor) did not predict willingness to trust (our mediator). In addition, the relationship between vulnerability and willingness to trust was not significant (neither fully nor partially) mediated. This means we did not find empirical support for the amended mediation based on Thorsden et al.'s (2016) model. These findings may be due to the kind of measures we used. Our measure of perceived vulnerability was contextualized in the context of social media screening, while general self-disclosure was measured as a tendency overall, the items did not specifically reference recruitment or social media screening. This may have reduced the potential context validity.

However, we did find that willingness to trust was an independent and significant predictor of self-disclosure of information, in line with the relationship observed between trust and self-disclosure in previous work (Frye and Dornisch 2010; Taddei and Contena 2013). This suggests that trust does influence how much applicants are willing to share. Applicants may differ in terms of how much they expect their application chances dwindle (e.g., due to adverse impact and discrimination; Fine and Schupp 2002), but lower trust in the employer or selection procedure may reduce the chances of applicants being willing to disclose information voluntarily.

In addition, two moderation hypotheses had been suggested. We obtained no evidence that the relationship between vulnerability and willingness to trust was moderated by global privacy concerns (H2). This means we did not find an interaction between trust and privacy on self-disclosure, in contrast to Taddei and Contena (2013). However, results suggest that the relationship between perceived vulnerability and self-disclosure was indeed moderated by global privacy concern (H3). Follow-up analysis involving the interaction terms provided more insight. Specifically, self-disclosure was less likely when both vulnerability and global privacy concern were high in our sample. That is, individuals who felt more vulnerable and less willing to trust an organization also reported lower self-disclosure, in line with findings of the role of trust beliefs on self-disclosure in Bauer and Schiffinger (2015). The link between self-disclosure and intention to continue with the application process further indicates that self-disclosure is an important precursor to applications being submitted.

These results suggest that individuals who feel more vulnerable and concerned about their privacy may also be less likely to share information, in line with Li's (2012) "risk calculus" for sharing information. Black et al. (2015) also propose that applicants fearing stigmatization may value control over their information, particularly in the context of social media screening and recruitment. When privacy concerns are heightened, perceived vulnerability may also be a key element shaping self-disclosure and continuance behaviors in recruitment sections involving social media screening, in line with the idea that threat appraisals shape motivation (Rippetoe and Rogers 1987). These findings may also explain incomplete submissions and withdrawal behaviors, particularly in certain groups more likely to experience discrimination and adverse

impact (e.g., older applicants, applicants with visible or physical disabilities, see also Fisher et al. 2017; Styers and Shultz 2009; Wheat et al., 2010). This suggests that high global privacy concern on its own does not necessarily reduce general self-disclosure unless it coincides with greater perceived vulnerability in the context of social media screening found in recruitment. These circumstances may therefore be more likely to arise for a significant minority of job applicants, many of whom will be sought after by employers to meet organizational targets of equality and diversity in the workplace.

The contribution of the current study can also be interpreted in relation to what existing insight and theories on self-disclosure propose. The findings of the current study validate previous findings regarding the link between the individual's perception and the situation: Individual and situational aspects affect disclosure goals, reflecting such relationships proposed in the models by Derlega and Grzelak (1979) and Omarzu (2000). In addition, we found further evidence for the proposed Functional Model of Self-Disclosure on SNSs by Bazarova and Choi (2014) in terms of a mediation mechanism of trust with situational cues. Disclosure is dependent on the assessment of one's environment and hence one's perceived vulnerability within this particular environment. Our results also mesh with the role of trust outlined in the CPM theory (Petronio 2002). In the context of Thorsden et al.'s work (2016), we therefore find support for the role of privacy and trust in relation to self-disclosure. This suggests that our research findings capture and reflect many proposed relationships in existing models, which means many of these effects are likely to be robust and occurring in everyday practice as well.

Practical Implications

While it is understandable that employers engage in uncertainty reduction strategies (Carr and Walther 2014) in the context of recruitment and selection by using all resources available to them, such as engaging in social media screening, we suggest that it is important to take a step back and consider the adverse effects of asking for more information than is deemed necessary for the job or for legal reasons – particularly when doing so will have a detrimental effect on the overall number of application submission and completion rates. Employers need to clarify how they use social media and evaluate the effectiveness of their social media screening processes over time and the potential of adverse impact (Jeske and Shultz 2016). Employers need to anticipate and clarify upfront any potential concerns about where the data lands and how non-disclosure will affect the process. If this remains unclear, many employers are set to lose out on many otherwise highly qualified candidates who are hesitant to share information – good and bad – during the recruitment process.

Applicants may have a number of reasons why they do not wish to self-disclose certain details of their life or circumstances to an employer. These can range from fear of age discrimination (e.g., Fisher et al. 2017; Angwin et al. 2017), to careful self-presentation to avoid racism (e.g., Kang et al. 2016), but also to fears over stigma and discrimination due to previous convictions (e.g., LeBel 2011; see also work by Loafman and Little 2014). Evidence from previous research shows that concerns about discrimination and adverse impact during recruitment and selection are not unfounded (e.g., Angwin et al. 2017; Fisher et al. 2017; Nelson 2009). This may be particularly the case when the individuals have something they do not wish to share with their employer – including their age, visible or invisible disabilities – information that may fuel applicants' perceived vulnerability when sharing information

(specifically, information on social media), leading them to assume that they are likely to be excluded from the recruitment process, thereby raising concerns about trust and privacy.

Disabilities may be another prominent concern for employers for a number of reasons, including performance management (e.g., De Lorenzo 2013). Past research demonstrates that self-disclosure of visible and nonvisible disabilities can have a negative effect on the perceived employability of candidates (Styers and Shultz 2009; van Schrader et al. 2013). Applicants have frequently been rated as less suitable when they self-disclosed disabilities (see work by Guskin 1982; Ren et al. 2008). A good example pertains to mental illness in the workplace and the question as to whether applicants or employees will, in this position of potential vulnerability, be inclined to share information with the employer. The fact is that many safeguards at a legal level are still unsatisfactory (Wheat et al. 2010), thus leading many individuals to conceal their mental illness or other issues from employers. In addition, the transparency of many social media profiles ensures that it is difficult to effectively conceal such circumstances from employers who may use cyber-vetting practices.

Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that regulations are unlikely to change employer practices. More intra-organizational research on application statistics, interviews with potential applications, and discussion of information gathering practices may be needed to reduce applicant drop-out and reduce the chances of a more negative application experience. Applicants are currently left to their own devices to make informed decisions. Thankfully, a number of resources are available online for readers and employers interested in learning more about managing privacy and trust of applicants in the selection process (e.g., Ababneh and Al-Waqfi 2016; Botes 2015; Park 2017; Carter 2015; McCarthy et al. 2017; Stoughton et al. 2015).

Limitations and Future Research

The present study has several limitations. Some of these apply to our sample selection and the use of hypothetical job vignettes. However, implementing this in real life may not be feasible, particularly given the ethical repercussions that may result from intentionally misleading applicants hoping for employment, the adverse impact we may generate for the employers, and the involuntary or forced self-disclosure element which raise both legal and ethical questions for research.

Other limitations are a reflection of our design decisions. The model by Thorsden et al. (2016) reflects the large number of variables that have been examined in relation to self-disclosure. We relied on self-report from healthy participants who are users of social media themselves, but only at the beginning of their careers. As a result, the present results may not generalize in the same form to other populations. We suspect, however, that the results may be even more pronounced when participants fear potential discrimination due to personal data categories. The correlation between perceived vulnerability and intention to continue with the application process at least suggests that this would be the case. Further research may increase our understanding of these dynamics.

Methodological limitations should also be noted here in addition to what was mentioned above. We did not control for contextual variables. A number of variables were not considered in our study but may deserve attention in future work. For example, factors such as gender roles and cultural values were not tested in the current study. And the use of a behavioral measure for self-disclosure in future research may be more promising. Further, in the future, longitudinal and experimental study designs should test the validity of the findings. Whether individuals

develop over time a guarded (low permeable) or uninhibited (high permeable) privacy orientation should also be investigated in future research with longitudinal research designs.

Despite these concerns, we believe that research on vulnerability, trust, and self-disclosure is deserving of more attention in order to better understand applicant engagement with employer requests. While privacy concerns and vulnerability may reduce willingness to trust, it is possible that unmeasured variables such as job or organizational attractiveness may cancel out the negative effects of privacy concern and vulnerability. A number of studies have also considered propensity to trust rather than willingness to trust, so the nature of measurement constructs may need further investigation. Future researchers may wish to consider these possibilities.

Conclusion

While GDPR (2018) is an important framework to consider in European settings, the Disability Inclusion Act (2014) in New South Wales in Australia, the Offender Rehabilitation Act of 2014 in the UK, and the various disability rights laws (see ADA 2009) such as the Rehabilitation Act 1973 in the USA (US Department of Labor 2018) provide important guidance for recruitment (e.g., affirmative action as well as voluntary disclosure), particularly in the age of social media screening. Educating prospective applicants and managers about adverse impact, the role of recruitment process in encouraging or discouraging organizational diversity goals may hopefully generate ethically and legally accountable recruitment practices. Adopting these practices may then increase voluntary self-disclosure and increase submissions of applications from underrepresented groups in the labor market (e.g., people with disabilities) and make a positive contribution towards diversity and equality in the workplace.

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Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of Interest None of the three authors received any research grants for this study. All three authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Informed Consent Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study. We gratefully acknowledge the support of the Department of Psychology at Northumbria University.

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