



USE OF INTERNET SEARCHES IN RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION PROCESSES

Understanding cybervetting in the context of
recruitment agencies in Croatia

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Abstract

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Purpose: The general objective of this study is to unfold the practice behind the use of cybervetting in the selection and recruitment processes and to discuss this in relation to reliability, ethics and different recruitment approaches.

Theory: This study examines cybervetting practices from the point of person-environment (P-E) fit theory and competence based recruitment.

Method: Qualitative methods; individual structured interviews and participant observations

Result: Cybervetting has been used in recruitment agencies in Croatia on an irregular basis. Even though the practice is conducted irregularly, the empirical findings suggest that recruiters are mostly not aware of the fact that they often do engage in cybervetting. Cybervetting practices further differ depending on the recruitment approach used.

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1. Introduction

With the growth of technology and development of the Internet, human resource (HR) managers are facing new trends and methods used in selection and recruitment processes.

In essence, recruitment means identifying and attracting individuals with right competencies for the job, while selection relates to the assessment and whether there's are going to be a match for a specific position (Collings & Wood, 2009). Recruitment and selection have been redefined on multiple occasions but always regarded as one of the essential activities that will certainly determine successfulness of one's performance, either effective or ineffective.

With technological improvements, recruitment has been shifted from passive to a more active form of the process (Searle, 2006). Instead of using paper-based methods with brochures, adverts and in a form of attending fairs, traditional recruitment has transformed and became easier to handle- via the Internet. Unlike the traditional methods, new form of recruitment, in literature often regarded as e-recruitment (Alden & Harris, 2013), seems to be cost-effective and time efficient for organizations. A study conducted in the UK has shown that 90% of global companies shifted to Internet as their primary source for recruitment (Snell, 2002). Given this fast growing popularity of e-recruitment, HR professionals also report that technology had an impact on their personnel selection methods and is commonly exemplified by the use of the Internet (Lievens, van Dam, Anderson, 2002). The Internet has been used to gather information about candidates in order to make improved final decisions. Therefore, this method adds to various recruitment approaches used by recruiters (i.e. competence based recruitment or person-environment (P-E) fit theory). However, plain information seeking for the purposes of selection of applicants eventually transitioned into new term, often regarded as cybervetting. Cybervetting has typically been described as a practice in which employers tend to perform Internet searches, in form of background checks, on potential candidates including their social media pages (Berger, 2015).

Cybervetting is therefore used as one of the selection tools in the recruitment process. The recruiters' aim is to verify existing information and in some cases, find additional information that could complement the overall picture about the candidate (Brown & Vaugh, 2011). One of the most common reasons why recruiters tend to cybervett is suspicion (Berkelaar, 2010). Getting additional information helps recruiters eliminate suspicion and avoid negligent hiring while being cost and time efficient. Because information found online is diverse and plentiful, number of employers who are using cybervetting is steadily growing (Berkelaar, 2014). For recruiters working at recruitment agencies, a vital part of their job is making sure that the client (i.e. the employer) has all information necessary to make a good hiring decision. These recruiters could thus be especially anxious to find

any compromising information and to act upon suspicion. Having recruitment and selection as their main job task, it is also reasonable to assume that these recruiters have more experience and thoughts of cybervetting and how it can be used in the recruitment process.

However, as the information about what is searched for during cybervetting and how it is being assessed in relations to competence-based recruitment is yet blurry, this trend might have an impact on both, jobseekers and employers. Competence-based recruitment relies on the fact that candidates need to be matched with jobs according to their competencies. Person-environment fit, on the other side, argues in favour of matching candidates on the basis of their compatibility with job characteristics as well as organizational environment. With that difference in mind, practices of cybervetting may vary depending on the approach recruiters tend to follow.

As the use of Internet for the purpose of sourcing and screening candidates grows in its popularity every day (Melanthio, Pavlou & Constantinou, 2015), it yet opposes many doubts for researchers, field practitioners and job seekers per se. Understanding that practices of cybervetting may vary among recruiters, researchers were mostly puzzled by the validity and reliability of such method as the information might not be accurate and could serve as a ground for biases and subjective decision making (Berkelaar, 2010). Often criticized as unfair and invasive, this practice sparks extensive discussions (Berkelaar, 2010) and highlights that crucial area of concerns, as mentioned above, shape individual and organizational productivity in addition to social norms for privacy, career and identity (Berkelaar, 2010). It is, therefore, of general interest to understand the following matters; what information is gathered, how is it interpreted, and what are decisions that occur as an outcome. Considering the data from Brown & Vaughn's study (2011) where 30% of employers decided not to hire someone solely based on information provided from the social media sites, it is perhaps necessary to indicate that future research should contribute to the understanding of the validity of these methods, that intrinsically predict candidates' performance, and the underlying process of assessment beyond it. With that in mind, it is interesting to examine recruitment procedures from employers' perspective. This study aims at understanding how cybervetting is used from the perspective of recruitment agencies, as they are the ones constantly involved in and handling large number of recruitment and selection processes. While these themes have triggered little research in the field, it seems as new understandings of the related areas could contribute in alleviating some of the doubt researchers in the field had. The general interest is to understand how recruitment agencies use cybervetting and how does that align with P-E fit theory and competence based recruitment. Understanding these procedures could contribute overall HR field in assuring that processes are objective and measurable while avoiding subjective prejudice and discrimination traps.

1.1. Position and research objectives

This study contributes to the existing human resource management (HRM) literature for three reasons. First, with no clear definition and no current laws or regulations that guide employers on how to use cybervetting in relations to recruitment and selection processes, it is important to understand how recruiters use cybervetting. By being able to understand the difference between recruitment approaches (i.e. competence based recruitment and person- environment fit) and what each approach focuses on, evaluations that result from cybervetting could follow more objective methods of assessments ultimately mitigating risk for bias. Even though many researches have touched upon this in a form of criticism, no concrete research has been put in place to understand these processes (Ostroff & Judge, 2012).

Secondly, a clear vision of how cybervetting is conducted (i.e. what is the information recruiters are searching for and how do they interpret that information) could help addressing questions about ethical concerns. Additionally, it could reveal whether recruiters consider cybervetting as a source of relevant information or they are more likely to stick with the objective measurement tools such as testing and interviews, thereby protecting social interests of individuals such as privacy and identity.

Third, as the process is often non-standardized and it is done irregularly, many recruiters might not always be aware how frequent they do make decisions based on information found online, which is ultimately serving ground for subjective decisions. By triggering this topic, contribution to HR field would be to make professionals and scholars aware of this unconscious habit by illustrating how the practice influences final decisions and by controversial mismatching the concept of competence based recruitment and environment-fit theory. Understanding this context contributes to job seekers' knowledge, HRM professionals' insights and HRM scientific field findings.

1. 2. Purpose and research questions

The general objective of this study is to unfold the practice behind the use of cybervetting in the selection and recruitment processes and to discuss this in relation to reliability, ethics and different selection approaches. More specifically the aim is to study this practice within Croatian recruitment agencies, a focus motivated by lack of previous studies within this national context.

To fulfil this aim principal investigator will respond to the following research question:

1) How could we understand how cybervetting is used by recruitment agencies?

and

2) To what extent does this practice corresponds with P-E fit theory and competence based recruitment?

2. Previous research and theory

2.1. Recruitment and selection

Recruitment and selection has been defined by many researchers in the field. While some researchers argue that recruitment relates to attracting external candidates for the jobs and selection constitutes of dealing with internal candidates only (Searle, 2003), others claim that recruitment simply consists of attracting potential applicants while selection deals with assessing and matching them against a certain position (Collings & Wood, 2009). Recruitment and selection has also been defined as a process in which recruiters make predictions about future behaviours, however solely based on probabilities and on the ground of systematic assessments (Newell, 2005).

2.1.1. Competence-based recruitment

Systematic assessments that indicate future behaviours could also be based on competencies. Field researchers note that the idea of candidates being selected on the basis of their knowledge, skills and abilities for a certain job first appeared in the of F.W. Taylor (Roberts, 1997). The competence based recruitment developed during 1960's as organisations reported an increasing demand to recruit more effectively ensuring performance and accountability of candidates (Fletcher, 2000). Therefore, the primary goal of selection was not to match a person with the job but to define a person's specification in accordance to job roles (Roberts, 1997). By developing set of competencies needed for certain jobs (i.e. skills, knowledge, education), hiring people who would possess relevant competencies seemed of crucial importance for the overall performance and productivity (Newell, 2005). This importance unravelled in the negative consequences which poor recruitment could cause (i.e. loss of clients, increases in costs or general lower productivity) (Smith & Graves, 2002).

2.1.2. Person-environment fit

The term "person-environment fit" (P-E fit) theory was first introduced when describing the process of matching people and their personal attributes and abilities to the requirements of the job (Kaplan, 1950). Recent literature further confirms that person-environment fit signifies an alignment between organizational environment or job characteristics and an individual candidate and the respective personality traits when it comes to recruitment (Ostroff & Judge, 2012). When P (personal attributes and characteristics) aligns with E (environment of the organization culture and job requirements), the level of this correspondence is greater, highly influencing employees' overall performance and satisfaction (Ostroff & Schulte, 2007). However, it is important to acknowledge the difference between an objective and perceived fit. Perceived, also referred to as subjective fit, is usually what has been established during one of the recruitment and selection processes, while objective fit only

happens after multiple selection tools have been used (Ostroff & Judge, 2012). Sets of these tools, for instance, may include psychological personality tests, behavioural interviews or other methods of assessments that are considered as a source of objective measurement. Subjective fit, on the other hand, is more likely to occur in situations where an organization has limited amount of information about the candidate who, if employed, may face detrimental outcomes (Saks & Ashforth, 2000). Therefore, cybervetting would be categorized as one of the methods triggering perceived fit. It could serve as ground for secondary analysis where tools would apply in order to achieve objective measure, but could never stand behind an objective fit independently. The first step in P-E recruitment is to analyse behaviours and personal attributes of the individual needed for the specific job. Secondly, recruiters need to gather all information necessary about applicants and then compare that information, which define P attributes (personal) to the E attributes (environment/job related) (Rynes & Gerhart, 1990). The commonly used method is a combination of structured interviews (Cable & Yu, 2007) and test and ground assessments (Lieven & Thomson, 2005). When the selection process identifies appropriate candidates with knowledge, skills and abilities that are fit for the job, a P-E fit is accomplished (Ostroff & Judge, 2012). Some recruiters distinguish a person-job different from a person-organization fit. They explain that the perceptions of these two fits are somewhat different and could mean that one individual might be a fit for the company and not for the job, while the other one might be perfect fit for the job but will not align with company's goals and values (Kristof- Brown, 2000). These two different concepts, for instance, are then used in the perceived fit analysis as a ground for decision-making processes. Ideally, the right candidate should embrace both of these characteristics at the objective fit stage in order to be hired. While person-job fit could be assessed through the structured form of the selection process (i.e. behavioural interviews, skill check etc.), person-organization fit is often assessed through alternative means of information gathering (i.e. cybervetting).

To fulfil to goal of the P-E fit theory and tackle the challenge of the two different notions, recruiters therefore tend to engage in cybervetting practices. While cybervetting could be a source of loads of personal information, there is also the possibility that some of the information found will not be true or relevant to the job (Slovensky & Ross, 2012). When performing such search, recruiters have to constantly be aware of the risk for biases, faulty information and misinterpretations (Berkelaar, 2010). This invasion of privacy could often mislead recruiters to draw wrong conclusions and miss out on potential candidates (Berkelaar, 2014).

3. Traditional vs. E-recruitment

Recruitment and selection drastically changed over the past twenty years, primarily transforming its role from a passive to a more of an active form of the process (Searle, 2006). Sources for external recruitment are diverse and could still include newspaper ads, public or private employment agencies, Internet job portals, corporate websites, job fairs and employee referrals (Ployhart, 2006). Traditional forms of recruitment typically refer to all sources of paper-based systems where jobs would be advertised through brochures, in journals and newspapers and recruiters would need to attend job fairs and meetings (Searle, 2006). However, with the development of the Internet, recruitment process has completely changed (Andreson, 2003). Primarily, using the Internet for recruitment and selection (further referred as e-recruitment) seemed as a cost-effective solution to organisations. Harris & De War (2001), therefore, use one example to illustrate the difference in cost from using traditional job advertising methods compared to online based systems, with the result that the traditional method is \$2981 more expensive than the web-based one. This ultimately indicates why the growth of online job boards has been rising in the recent years (Searle, 2006). Monster.com is as an example of global job boards, while Mojposao.hr and Posao.hr could be used as an example for Croatian market. In 2002, survey conducted in UK indicated that 90% of all global companies operate using online-based recruitment (Snell, 2002). This trend has also impacted the ways on how selection of applicants is being processed thus researchers further argue that using Internet to pre-screen candidates is not a matter of doubt anymore, rather a reality (Lievens, van Dam, Anderson, 2002). This form of pre-screening and finding additional information on candidates in the purpose of selection is also known under the term *cybervetting*. *Cybervetting* could include any form of Internet search using any channels such as Google or social networking sites (Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram etc.) (Roberts & Roach, 2009).

3.1. Cybervetting as a selection tool

3.1.1. Cybervetting in recruitment is getting more common

With technological improvements, recruiters are constantly exposed to loads of new information in which Internet plays a key role by being a provider and distributor of such information (Slovensky & Ross, 2011). As the information that could be found online is diverse, the popularity of this method as a selection tool grows as well (Berkelaar, 2014). According to Acquisti & Fong (2015), Internet searches and social media included, serve as a new source of finding information for employers. This trend enriches the human resource field by providing additional methods through which recruiters and

hiring managers get to assess candidates in order to improve their decision-making. A steadily increasing number of hiring managers takes advantage of these platforms to screen their candidates (Bohnert & Ross, 2010) and so the latest reports suggest that 81% of Inc. 5000 companies use LinkedIn for recruitment purposes (Barnes & Lescault, 2012). The popularity of the Internet usage in recruitment and selection grows further highlighting that at least 50% of employers who attend college career events and market toward graduate and entry level positions, use online channels in their screening practices including search engine browsers and social media networks (Shea & Wesley, 2006). Yet, researches argued that recruitment via social media platforms does present challenges for organizations (Fisher, McPhail, You & Ash, 2014). It is, therefore, safe to assume that data found on the Internet and the employers' perception of this information play a crucial role in determining outcome of candidates' selection process (Caers & Castelyns, 2011).

3.1.2. Reasons for cybervetting

The most common reasoning behind employers' cybervetting practices is *suspicion* (Berkelaar, 2010). The Internet as a tool in the selection processes entails many benefits to the organizations, such as getting access to large amount of information about candidates and tackling the issue of negligent hiring (Slovensky & Ross, 2011). Since information about candidates is usually being provided in the subjective form presented either by the candidate or referred from contacts again provided by the candidate, reaching objective and truthful information about candidates becomes more challenging (Berkelaar, 2014). For that reason, many recruiters turn to Internet with the hope to gain access large amount of information at a faster pace (Singh & Finn, 2003). In addition to that, HR managers claim that this tool enables their departments to lower costs of advertising (Zall, 2000) and overall administrative communication, which might have been incurred with other traditional methods (Lin & Stasinskaya, 2002). Recruiters tend to believe that the Internet often consists of information that usually hasn't been published with the aim of career progress, and thus grants *access to information about who the candidate really is* (Berger & Douglas, 1981). Furthermore, social media platforms (i.e. Facebook, LinkedIn) are often used by employers to *verify information* that has been provided by candidates (Madera, 2012), to gain access to *additional information* about applicants in order to complement other information found on resume or during interviews (Brown & Vaugh, 2011), and *cutting operational costs and simplifying processes* (Jacobs, 2009). Recruiters tend to spend less time and effort into trying to obtain information that is now more conveniently accessible, and it is usually cost free. In addition, human resource (HR) managers usually perform such Internet searches with the aim to address and *avoid legal consequences* triggered by negligent hiring (Slovensky & Ross, 2012). This process, in which employers engage into practice of researching for candidates' online presence

and all information related from other, non-formal and unconfirmed second sources via Internet, is also referred to as "*cybervetting*" (Berkelaar, Scacco & Birdsell, 2015).

3.1.3. Consequences for jobseekers and employees

Being one of the reasons behind the use of cybervetting (Berkelaar, 2010), suspicion often drives hiring managers to look for negative information first, having one primary factor influencing it; that is to avoid legal responsibility behind negligent hiring (Sprague, 2007). While those explanations seem justified, the issue rather lies with positive-negative asymmetry effect which explains the phenomena of negative information always weighing more in the decision making processes than the positive one (Finkenauer & Vohs, 2001). Similarly, Grasz (2009) observes that 35% of recruiters reported that negative information found on the Internet have caused them to discard candidates while only 18% reported hiring candidates because of a positive information found online. Backman's and Hedenus' (2014) findings report that employers who trace such information often either discard their candidates or discuss the found information with them directly. With the "new transparency imperative" which entails proactive disclosure, recruiters are also expected to make all information available and accessible within the recruitment and selection processes (Berkelaar, 2014). However, hiring managers are currently still not required to report what information from the Internet searches impacted screening processes they' are conducting (Brown & Vaugh, 2011), leaving a gap for discrimination and imposing a number of questions in relations to validity and reliability of this method. Moreover, since tis method entails legal considerations in addition to issues regarding privacy, accuracy and perceived fairness, scholars argue this information should not be used at all (Slovensky & Ross, 2011). Should, at any stage of the process, the applicant sense that his/her privacy has been invaded; employers are often left with legal claims posing many risks to the organization (Stoughton, Thompson & Maede, 2013). On the flip side, these methods have an impact on the jobseeker as well. One of the most popular outcomes of such assessments is explained by Berkelaar (2014), in the form of digital social contract. Research scholars describe cybervetting as a process as a complex in-depth process of extracting information about candidates that is otherwise difficult or impossible to find (Berkelaar, 2010). As this access usually entails information found on blogs and other informal channels of Internet (Berkelaar, 2010), participants might not be fully aware or in direct control of this data, thus the data is more of an objective nature to the employer. While both, candidates and employers strive for transparency, candidates still believe these kind of assessments conducted online are misleading and insufficient but they believe is still unavoidable (Berkelaar, 2014). Despite recruiters' tendency to look for information online, diverse information they extract

from different role contexts can have an impact in their decision whether the candidates is suitable (Putnam & Jablin, 2001). A hypothetical study done with students revealed that "family-oriented" and "professional" posts on social media are more likely to grant an interview to a job-seeker than, for example, alcohol drinking behaviour would (Bohnert & Ross, 2010).

3.1.4. What we don't know

While hiring managers report that searching for additional information on candidates improves their hiring and decision-making processes (Kleuemper & Rosen, 2009), it is unclear what information do recruiters look for and how do they assess information in relations to selection processes and decision-making purposes (Brown & Vaughn, 2011). Access to public information such as social media profiles, photos, posts and other similar data often proposes an assumption for subjective judgment (Brown & Vaughn, 2011). With a formal policy in place, investigation of candidates' social networking accounts for example, would be restricted and thus would have little impact in the screening decisions (Chang & Madera, 2012). However, no research has been done on the accuracy or validity of information obtained online about candidates for the purposes of selection process which indeed proves lack of this method's trustworthiness (Ostroff & Judge, 2012). Another argument to support the doubt of validity and reliability of such practices is further highlighted by Kluemper et al (2012), reminding that non-systematic processes might have an affect in recruitment selection and thus recruiters rather have to be cautious with the use of such tools and procedures. Furthermore, it is not yet familiar how information obtained from Internet impacts hiring decisions and how much weigh does it entail in the recruitment processes in general (Berkelaar, 2014).

3.2. Evaluation of practice: reliability, validity and discrimination risks

With the evident trend of social media taking a leading role in recruitment processes, there's still a question whether cybervetting could serve as a valid method since little information is known about how do recruiters assess the information they find (with no clear standards), leaving a massive gap for self-interpretation and subjective biases (Brown & Vaughn, 2011). Cybervetting, including all other Internet searches (i.e. Google search) serve as an additional source of verification, in particular ensuring validity of candidates' knowledge and skills (Berkelaar, 2010). Opposed to traditional methods, this form of information gathering allows gaining access to referral contacts that have not been imposed by the candidate, while in addition recruiters are able to directly observe personality and behaviour via the Internet (Berkelaar, 2010). Another set of positive aspects of this method is that employers are well aware of its speed, reduced administrative obligations and possibilities of limitless

information (French & Rumbles, 2010). Recruiters generally find the Internet an advantageous tool for information gathering, as candidates have less control over information published (except for social media) and has less subjective connotation to it (Berkelaar & Buzzanell, 2015). On the flip side, this method can propose an ethical and problematic consequence as well. One of the key disadvantages of information gathering via the Internet are all legal considerations associated with privacy (Kisselburgh, 2008), information accuracy and inaccurate evaluations based on misleading or irrelevant information (Berkelaar, 2010). Candidates, themselves, tend to categorise this practice as privacy invasion, depending on whether the information in question was publicly available or privately managed (Solove, 2011). Cybervetting further leads to findings about other information such as hobbies and personal interests (Bohn & Short, 2009), about incomplete (Solove, 2006) and in case of negative information, unverified information (Putnam & Jablin, 2001), all culminating with possible discrimination. As negative information is rarely confirmed and verified (Hedenus & Backman, 2016), it could often mislead recruiters in their assessments. While there is little research on how this screening is being conducted, Roberts (1997) summarizes findings that indicate the process is usually inconsistent and subjective. In addition, Roberts (1997) further argues that behaviours seen from the current state don't necessarily indicate valid predictions for future behaviours, as they might be influenced by other external factors recruiters typically undermine. No studies have been done on the context of information seeking via the Internet in Croatia, except the student paper outlining general figures of employers' preferences of social media over other traditional methods in recruitment and selection.

4. Recruitment agencies and their role

The focus of this study will be to understand the use of cybervetting in the processes of external recruitment. Organisations nowadays have a choice to conduct recruitment and selection processes in-house or hire external agencies to perform those processes on their behalf. Typically, organisations either choose external recruitment agencies take over all of their recruitment and selection department functions, or contract those agencies for specific assignments (Roberts, 1997). The role of a recruitment agency, commonly also referred as employment agency, is therefore to undergo all activities related to attracting candidates and assessing them on the basis of jobs descriptions and specifications provided from the client.

One of the primary reasons why the use of employment agencies for the purpose of recruitment and selection is getting more and more common, is perhaps due to the fact that costs to hire someone through external methods and via Internet are undeniably lower than using traditional internal recruitment and selection methods (Capelli, 2001). As internal HR professionals have one crucial aim, that is to attract adequate people to the organization and match them with the requirements of the job that ensure the organization is well equipped and runs smoothly (Compton, 2009), research shows that some employers report the need for recruitment agencies, especially when there's a need for specialist position categories that is rather difficult to find (Compton, 2009). Another reasoning behind the popularity of recruitment agencies in this fulfilling this task is that employers tend to believe recruitment agencies have easier time dealing with confidentiality and could make the process simpler for them (Compton, 2009). Lastly, employment agencies are also being seen as a tool to fight against unemployment by helping people getting jobs and offering opportunities for better employment (Perajica, 2016).

4.1. Recruitment agencies in Croatia

Recruitment agencies in Croatia are on the rise and current national data reports there are 92 recruitment agencies up to date (active and passive) counting in the temporary employment agencies and regular recruitment agencies all together (Ministarstvo rada i mirovinskoga sustava, 2015). On this date, 46 agencies seem to be active and operating on Croatian market (Perajica, 2016). With these numbers in mind, majority of the related agencies that are currently active and operating are international companies with local branches in Croatia and are taking a significant proportion of the market, thus replacing the need for traditional HR departments within companies. To illustrate its growth curve, it is perhaps important to mention that revenue of employment placement agencies in

Croatia has risen from \$9.43 million in 2010 to \$11 million in 2016 (Statista, 2016) and the market is currently valued at around 500 million of HRK (Perajica, 2016). It has also been estimated that Croatia monthly has around 6,000 people employed by recruitment agencies (Perajica, 2016).

Croatian market for employment agencies is divided to private and public employment agencies and the main difference between the two is the sample of clients they interact with (Perajica, 2016). Public employment agency in Croatia is also known under the name "Zavod za Zaposljavanje HZZO" which is state owned and obtains responsibilities of mediated hiring, statistical reports (unemployment rates) and offers financial support to unemployed people according to the Croatian law (Perajica, 2016).

While these offer interesting insights, the focus of this study will be on private recruitment agencies as they reinforce much broader recruitment and selection procedures for wider spectrum of clients.

Private employment agencies in Croatia focus on actively attracting candidates for specific jobs either by offering employment opportunities to unemployed or offering better employment to those who are already employed. These recruitment agencies perform one, few or a set of activities including; recruitment, selection, headhunting, mystery shopping and other forms of market research for their clients. In all cases, clients have the right to stay anonymous until the selection and recruitment has been finalized (Perajica, 2016). While the business model varies depending on a given recruitment agency and their global company policies, most agencies tend to charge their services on the basis of percentages either to clients, employed candidate or both (Perajica, 2016).

Croatian labor law entails clauses against racial, ethnical, religious, politics, social, gender, sexual orientation and all other forms of personal or diversity and inability related discrimination (Narodne novine, br. 85/08; 112/12), including law enforcing gender equality (Narodne novine, br. 116/08; 82/08). Even though limited numbers of studies have been done on the topic of understanding how Internet searches are used in recruitment and selection processes in Croatia, findings report that recruiters are inclined toward using social media to find new talent than other traditional channels (Vrdoljak, 2016). Croatian employers believe recruitment and selection via Internet makes communication easier and quicker while at the same time offers competitive advantage (Vrdoljak, 2016). User activity is counting 1.67 million of active users in 2015 and projecting 1.99 million of users by 2020 on Facebook platform solely (Statista, 2016). Understanding the given data, it is presumably challenging for employers, and recruitment agencies in Croatia, not to seek for additional information on candidates in order to improve their hiring recommendations.

5. Summarizing

Cybervetting is a method used by employers who engage in information searches via the Internet with the aim to find additional information on their candidates, typically involving searches performed on social networking platforms (i.e. LinkedIn, Facebook). Following the previous research, cybervetting seems to play an important role in today's recruitment and selection processes for two reasons; 1) Cybervetting presents an opportunity to easily and quickly gain new information, and on the other side, 2) Cybervetting may include risks associated with interpretation of the information found (i.e. misinterpretations, biases). For those reasons, use of cybervetting may seem as a double edge sword to HR professionals, which has ultimately triggered a lot of discussion in the field. Cybervetting has often been criticized for providing grounds for subjective judgement, biases, misleading and faulty information. Yet, little research has been done on the actual effects of this method in the recruitment and selection processes in terms of its validity and reliability. New developments in the field of recruitment have also stressed the difference between approaches recruiters may use in their assignments. One of popular approaches is competence based recruitment in which employers aim to find a candidate based on his/her competencies for the particular job. Another popular approach would be person-environment fit theory through which employers aim to find candidates based on hi/her qualifications for the job as well as qualifications for the organizational environment. Considering that nowadays recruiters could follow one of those recruitment approaches (i.e. competence based recruitment, person-environment fit), it is interesting to understand how cybervetting collaborates with or contradicts previous findings as well to what extent practice of cybervetting aligns with these recruitment approaches.

Based on the literature findings, principal investigator expects to find that cybervetting in recruitment agencies plays a part of the unsystematic process, highly involving subjective judgement and partially based on a mixture of both, competence based recruitment and person-environment fit theory.

6. Method

Principal investigator used qualitative methods with the aim to ensure thorough collection of data that allow detailed explanation of HR practices in relations to Internet use and interpretive decision-making processes (Burgess, 1983). While the choice of the qualitative method allowed in-depth understanding of the key study areas through individual semi-structured interviews (Lowe & Zemliansky, 2013), observations helped gaining broader insight into how the participants experience, interpret and structure their key concepts (Burgess, 1983). Short questionnaire was incorporated as an introductory part of the interview, which served as an additional opportunity to facilitate the focus of the interview, yet provided some descriptive information about the participants and their practice. It is important to note that people tend to be inherently biased about how they perceive the study areas and thus report their actions in a more favourable way than what the reality is (Steiner et al, 2011), thus, in addition to the first hand data, observations were conducted. To ensure data collected is equally relevant for the purpose of this study and include both, detailed explanations and explain how the key study areas as structured from the participants' point of views, principal investigator used qualitative methods (Burgess, 1983). While the choice of interviews with observations seems as most comprehensive and allows researchers to broaden their scope and analysis, there are some disadvantages to it. To address the main limitation of this choice it is important to note that while observations and interviews allow more detailed information gathering, the method also sparks a doubt whether participants will feel reluctant to voice out their truthful opinions despite the anonymity guarantee. Being aware of the fact that participants are recruiters reflecting on positive and negative aspects of people's online presence, they might be more concerned about their own statements, and perhaps provide less sincere or "filtered" information than they would do in the case of anonymized survey. Some other possible limitations to using observations would include likelihood that some elements might have been observed by the principal investigator, but not recorder, or some information might have been missed as unheard or unseen (Le Compte & Schensul, 1999). Despite its limitations, this method allows to gather information that will help describe and explain practices of the use of Internet searches within recruitment and selection at the target population. Achieving such thorough analysis would otherwise be more challenging and less probable if the principal investigator relied on quantitative methods that limit explanations and descriptions. With the choice of observations, this study is also ethnographic in its nature as observations serve to support data collection from the interviews and ensure information provided through the interview is followed up on and either confirms or opposed previous findings (Lowe & Zemliansky, 2013). While interviews provided significant insights into procedures and daily practices of recruiters, observations served as a support to understand the answers that were given during individual interviews, as well as the

controversy behind them.

6.1. Participants

Use of the Internet is inevitable and ever growing trend that is experiencing highest peaks each new year with social media being a leading activity for Internet users in Croatia (Statista, 2016). As Croatian employers believe online recruitment and selection makes communication easier while at the same time enables them to achieve competitive advantage by embracing new trends and performing cybervetting (Vrdoljak, 2016), a total sample was created aiming to capture HR professionals in Croatia who conduct a large number of recruitment processes and is thus more likely to have used cybervetting compared to HR professionals who conduct recruitment just few times per year. While this data incentivizes the interest to look at the recruitment agencies in Croatia as the target population of this study, principal investigator is aware that excluding personnel from other kinds of organizations also limits the span of the data captured. An example of such data could be to find out whether employers actually pay attention to Internet searches in their recruitment processes, how relevant the information is to them and to what degree they use the information found online in regards to making final hiring decisions. All recruitment agencies, with information publicly available at the national files (Ministarstvo rada i mirovinskoga sustava, 2015/2017), and with offices based in entire Republic of Croatia were invited to participate in the study (92). Principal investigator sent e-mails and contacted recruitment agencies via telephone to inquire about possibility of their participation.

Participation was entirely voluntary. Principal investigator approached 92 agencies via email and telephone and asked a set of two preliminary questions to filter out the relevant sample for this study. Preliminary questions were set of the following; 1) Has the agency done Internet search on their candidates in the past 12 months?, and 2) Have any of the recruiters done Internet search on at least five applicants during that period? First criterion for the target group was that the agency should have done Internet search on their candidates within the past year while the second criterion aims to filter in the respondents who have done Internet searches on at least five applicants. These preliminary questions are importance as they allow principal investigator to gain relevant sample that is able to provide enough and again relevant information that is significant for the study. In conclusion, forty-six (46) agencies responded they're being active on the market during that period. A total of twenty agencies (20) fulfilled the criterion out of which thirteen recruiters and HR consultants (13) agreed to be interviewed. Additional four cases (4) were provided for an observation during the month of February at one of the agencies from the sample. A case represented one task an HR professional had (usually a specific vacant position given by the client) with the aim to find suitable candidate, and

observations covered entire protocol from the application screening to the stage of hiring recommendation. While a portion of these recruiters individually responded to the principal investigator's e-mails and volunteered to participate in the study (3), others mediated contact through their manager (8) who was in contact with the principal investigator via e-mail. Remaining participants also responded to PI's e-mails by volunteering to participate in the study as key representatives of their agency (2), claiming that it is sufficient to interview only one person as their procedures within recruitment and selection are standardized and thus all team members work in a unified way. Initial interest was to interview more than one person per agency in order to gain better insight and collect more thorough data. However, as only one agency agreed to provide more than one participant for this study, the remaining agencies were represented by one key person, leaving a potential limitation to the study as the information shared could again be of subjective nature and thus not being looked from different perspectives. Having few participants from the same agency could give a broader insight into how standardized or non-standardized their processes really are.

With a total of 13 interviewees participating in the study, the sample represents six recruitment agencies (6) respondents where part of, out of which majority specialized for recruitment across entire Croatia (5). Remaining portion of agencies from the sample (1) recruit for Croatia and abroad, within the South Eastern Europe region. All participants from the sample recruit for a mixture of large and small, international and domestic firms, and are divided into recruitment for temporary placement (3) and permanent placement (3). Permanent placement is further divided into recruitment for middle management positions (4) and senior/executive management positions, also known as headhunting (2). On average, participants were representatives of the same age group (late twenties- 20 to early forties- 40) all possessing higher education degree and three to ten (3-10) years of experience in recruitment. Gender distribution shows majority of participants were female with (12) and male (1).

6.2. Procedure

Principal investigator conducted thirteen individual semi-structured interviews with recruiters and HR consultants from six recruitment agencies across Croatia. While majority of the interviews took place at agencies' premises in Zagreb, additional interviews with participants who are permanently located in other parts of Croatia were conducted via Skype. While in-person interviews enable clear communication and weren't interrupted, Skype interviews differ based on the quality of the conversation that is dependent on the technology and Internet and sometimes were interrupted, potentially causing participant to lost the thoughts they were discussing about. Generally, outcome

was not affected as all interviews provided significant and detailed explanations of the key study areas. Each subject was asked to devote 60 minutes of their time, and depending on the participant interview duration ranged from 30-60 minutes. Additionally, principal investigator observed four specific cases within one agency from the sample, which took place at agencies' premises in Zagreb. Before the beginning of the interview, participants were asked to fill up a short questionnaire consisted of five (5) close-ended questions inquiring about purpose of the use of Internet searches in recruitment and selection, how often they search for potential candidates and for information on potential candidates on the Internet, and how often they perform background checks through search browsers and social media (Figure 1). Interview guide was composed of fourteen (14) open-ended questions aimed to understand at what stage recruiters decide to look for online information, what exactly they are searching for and how they record the information they find (Appendix 2.). All interviews were audiotaped with the participants' permission, transcribed and translated into English. Possible limitations to presentation and interpretation of the results could be that due to language discrepancies, some results might not be interpreted the exact way as they would in the original language. Moreover, some parts of the interview data needed additional language alterations to match in order to fit in with the native English. Lastly, interviews conducted in local language presented a challenge as participants tended to use locally known cases to draw examples and discuss local behavioural patterns that are not necessarily applicable to other societies, requiring additional adjustments. Observations that were conducted were recorded in the form of field notes, using a pen and paper method. All insights and procedures observed during that time were recorded in the field notes booklet as a form of bullet points and explanations. Principal investigator observed the actions of recruiters during their regular recruitment and selection tasks in the office, particularly paying attention to when the recruiters browsed Internet. The primary focus was to understand at what stage would recruiters turn to Internet, what was the information they would browse for and how would they determine if it's relevant or not. Potential limitation to this could be that recruiters were aware of principal investigator's presence and thus could have minimized or maximized their practice of Internet in order to fit in the study objectives. All recorded notes were organized into section stories that follow up on interview results by either directly contradicting or confirming given data from the interview.

6.3. Coding and analysis

Responses to fourteen open-ended interview questions were categorized by themes, its repetitiveness and relationships with theory. First cycle coding was conducted using relationships between codes,

code frequencies and essence codes (Saldana, 2013), ultimately allowing to present meanings, complexities and contradictions within the collected data in the evaluation (Graham, 2008). All of the codes were sorted and synthesized with the previous literature and theoretical framework in order to draw conclusions. As responses were grouped by themes that followed research questions, analysis was conducted by comparing participants' responses to research questions and literature findings. Observations recorded in the form of field notes were eventually added in the coding analysis drawing parallel meanings that corresponded to categories and themes that emerged from the findings. Short questionnaire consisting of one multiple-choice question (1) and four scaled questions (4) served as a tool to structure interviews and its results are not demonstrating a statistical picture, but rather present a starting point for the interviews. Data collected through questionnaire was used throughout the interview process to better craft questions and to form directions for observations.

6.4. Ethics and confidentiality

All interested participants, prior to the interview, were given a consent form outlining confidentiality and were provided with information about the purpose of the study, procedure, risks and benefits associated with participation in the study, as well as principal investigator's personal interest disclosure and right to refuse participation and withdraw from the study. The data collected from the individual participants was presented as a group result without identifying any information, therefore protecting the anonymity of participants. While the individual quotes were used in the analysis of the results, the identity of participants was masked by using a pseudonym. No additional information beyond that pertaining to the purposes of this study was asked during interviews.

7. Analysis and Results

7.1. How is cybervetting used:

Before the interview, participants were asked to answer a short questionnaire with a set of four close-end questions and one multiple choice question that served as a support tool to structure interviews and aimed at providing principal investigator with brief guidelines on facilitating the focus of the interview. Participants were first asked to explain for what reasons they perform Internet searches in general. Twelve out of thirteen participants reported they are using Internet searches to find candidates' contact information, in addition to getting and verifying information about candidates' prior employment and education, while background checks were reported by only two respondents. This finding served as a point of departure for the interviews (Figure 1.)*.

Information on how often participants use social media sites when performing Internet searches (cybervetting) presented another starting point for the interview. Six participants reported they cybervett sometimes while four participants stated they do it rarely. Since responses from these participants could indicate that recruiters do not pay a lot of attention to background checks in a form of cybervetting, it was interesting to hear contrainuitive responses from the same participants during the interview. One of the respondents who stated that he/she rarely or never engages into cybervetting for purposes other than finding contact information and verifying information about candidates' prior employment and education further explains:

"I like to go on Instagram and Facebook and see how this person lives in their private life, what does that person write on those platforms, who is that person friends with, is the person completely crazy, does the person put some photos of the funeral...I am interested in those things and usually I get answer to those questions when I check those social media platforms that people usually tend to forget about it. And I get answers there to anything, *laughs. That is very convenient, so I often use that."

Another participant previously claiming that he/she rarely engages in cybervetting firstly states:

"Use of Facebook account for background checks is rare, but it's always my personal account through which I am doing it"

Afterwards, he/she gives a contradictive example of how much time he/she invests in cybervetting:

"I dig definitely more. I don't go so far as to the page 10 on Google but if we're talking about some other platforms then it is really a long list of pages that I check. On Google, I already know how it works, so on the 10th page there are no relevant results. But if we're talking about LinkedIn, Facebook, then I'll definitely check

large number of pages."

These contradictory responses could indicate that recruiters are either not aware of their often use of cybervetting and thus unconsciously engage with social media platforms when browsing for information about their candidates, or purposely experiencing denial. As previous studies report, cybervetting has been criticised for subjective bias, subjective biases and issues with overall validity and reliability (Brown & Vaughn, 2011), which could be the reason why recruiters purposely deny their cybervetting practices. Another explanation could depart from the fact that people tend to be inherently biased about how they perceive the areas of topic and thus reported their answers on paper in a more favorable way than what the reality was (Steiner et al, 2011). On that note, recruiters who seemed aware of effects of cybervetting could have been reluctant to provide realistic answers in the questionnaire but felt overwhelmed during the interview and more confident in providing few examples.

Participants were further asked at what stage they typically engage in cybervetting and the analysis showed there were recruiters who *cybervet only once (beginning stage)* and recruiters who *cybervet twice (beginning and final stage)* during recruitment and selection process per candidate. Recruiters from the "cybervet only once" category explain that the only importance would be to look at the information before the candidate has been recommended to the client. On the other hand, participants from the "cybervet twice" category openly state:

"I do it always in the beginning but also in the final stage when I want to find additional information on particular candidate, in addition to everything else, just to see the candidate is clear and double-check"

Similarly, another participant explained:

"So in practice for 99% of all cases, we use Internet at the beginning stage. And then in the final stage, we check once again before we recommend someone we then check Internet and social media."

These findings were validated in the observations as well and could therefore indicate that recruiters definitely engage into cybervetting at the beginning of the process. The reason why recruiters insist on cybervetting at the very beginning could potentially be to ensure the right candidate enters the process and time invested in him/her is used efficiently. Explanation to why recruiters prefer to cybervet twice could therefore be to avoid negligent hiring and ensure right candidate has been recommended. As previous research indicates, one of the primary reasons why recruiters cybervet is suspicion and therefore, it could be assumed that these recruiters tend to cybervet at the beginning due to suspicion as well. Moreover, why recruiters cybervet twice in the process could be explained from the perspective of P-E fit theory. According to P-E fit theory, candidates are expected to encompass not

only job characteristics but certain personal attributes that would align with organizational characteristics. That means recruiters need to make sure their assessment has been as thorough as possible. Given the empirical findings, it could be assumed that recruiters cybervet twice to address both, ensure negligent hiring has been avoided and find additional information that could complement in the P-E fit evaluations.

Participants were further asked to explain which channels they use to perform information searches on the Internet. Some respondents said they don't use social media at all and elaborated:

"I use Google yes, but Facebook and things like that no. Because I think Facebook is private and it is not for work and it should stay like that. I don't know. I don't, I don't check Facebook and that's it."

However, the same participant started exemplifying his/her habits at a later stage in the interview clearly point out the contradictions:

"When I search on Facebook my goal is not to see anything alarming. Such as...some alarming photos, or ...I don't know. I don't know what I am trying to find...To me it is more important that the information I find fits in with the profile."

On the flip side, some participants do openly state they have been performing cybervetting by using social media channels as well as Google search. In contrast to previous research, these participants seemed generally aware of limitations such as subjectivity and bias, which this method opposes. To exemplify this, participant Y stated:

"Yes, we use Google search and social media. Nothing more than that. I am telling you all the time that is not an objective measure because when you type in, let's say, my first and last name, you get 6 persons who are not me. So, I'm not present on Facebook but there are many females who have the same name and are present on Facebook. So, what kind of decision you can make? You have my resume and search through Facebook...you now open this profile and think "okay, this might not be her she's too young" and then you see another profile and you think "hmm..." So it's either not matching and now you're trying to use that information and force them into a profile that you might find on Facebook. So, that's why I say that is not an objective measure. With the fact that is not valid and reliable, based on that we cannot make decisions using that."

These responses could indicate that some recruiters are fully aware of limitations and all other implications cybervetting could bear. In accordance with previous research findings, some recruiters, however, seem to be unaware of the fact that they do perform cybervetting and potentially base their opinions on unconscious practices. Data collected and observed could thus be categorized to two themes: 1) *Recruiters in denial*, and 2) *Recruiters fully aware*. Alternatively, principal investigator

could assume that *recruiters in denial* consciously engage with cybervetting but restrain from openly admitting it.

7.2. Recording and standardized processes?

At the time when access for the purpose of this study was in negotiation, some managers principal investigator was communicating with claimed the entire practice was completely standardized, and thus argued there was no need to interview more than one person per agency. During the interview, however, participants from this study were asked to define whether the practice of conducting information searches was standardized and guaranteed to the clients or something that is being conducted irregularly. Having standardized processes could leave less space for subjective decision-making and provide more fairness in the overall comparison of candidates. Responses provided by the participants were equally represented among the two categories; 1) *Process is standardized* and 2) *Recruitment is standardized- Additional information searches are non-standardized*, while the third category, 3) *Process is not standardized*, was represented by a higher portion of the sample. Interestingly enough, respondents from the third category were recruiters whose managers claimed their processes were standardized.

During the interview, one of the participants who was a part of the group were there was no prior negotiation over participation (and their mediator has not argued that the processes were standardized) actually categorized the process as "*Recruitment is standardized- Additional information searches are non-standardized*". The respondent explained:

"Recruitment is guaranteed and standardized while additional information searches are not standardized and are done irregularly".

Participants were then asked to explain how do they record information they find. The analysis showed that the same participant, who previously reported that he/she doesn't record information found during cybervetting, states:

"It's just for myself, a bigger picture and my own perception of the person and I don't go deeper into that"

while actually practicing the opposite:

"I had a candidate who, during the interview, was giving slight signals that personality might not be right. It wasn't very concrete but it was just a gut feeling. Based on that I did an additional search on the candidate and we found that he had some racist opinions shared on his Facebook profile and in that moment he was eliminated

from the further process. He didn't even come to the stage where he could be presented to the client and **that's what always happens.**"

Aligned with previous research findings, it could be easily concluded that recruiters who seemed unaware of the fact how often they end up performing cybervetting and using different social media platforms, seem to experience that as the processes are not standardized are inconsistent (Roberts, 1977). Unlike systematic processes, the irregularity in these processes could cause recruiters to biasedly look at the information from a given state, which doesn't necessarily have to indicate valid predictions of future behaviour as it might have been influenced by external, or temporary factors recruiters usually undermine (Roberts, 1997). Given this, principal investigator could assume that the validity of the method still remains questionable.

Similarly, as additional evidence, cybervetting is not something that has been conducted regularly participant X explained:

"I do Google check and **sometimes** Facebook by typing their names and seeing what pops out, I check only search on Google and **if Facebook is open** I check entire Facebook."

Facebook, as well as other social media platforms, all include options to set profile to a private mode. As recruiters are aware of this, they either check candidates' accounts when they know they are open, showing irregularity of the practice, or they entirely give up on checking those platforms as they're aware of the limitations pertained by it. During observations, however, it was brought to PI's attention that Facebook, for instance, has been used in the selection and recruitment. However, Facebook was accessed through recruiter's personal account in order to be able to search for candidates and information about them. If recruiters would cybervetting candidates' Facebook account without logging into his/her private account, most of the Facebook content would be protected. Therefore, the recruiter who claims that he/she checks Facebook only if it is open does not really support that argument enough to conclude that he/she aims at protecting social interest of the individual (privacy and identity). Another respondent reflected on the same matter:

"We can't access candidates' information on Facebook through company's corporate Facebook account. We only use it for job postings and other job related issues. The access is entirely managed through my own personal account and if I want to check someone I do it like that."

This being said, it could be explained that because of suspicion and risk of negligent hiring, recruiters tend to feel anxious about what information may exist on the candidate and thus

engage more heavily into getting access to their social media profiles. Since only small number of recruiters openly admit that, one can infer that majority of the recruiters from this study feel a sense of responsibility or burden for cybervetting and thus deny the use of this method more often than admitting it.

7.3. Effects on evaluations

Since cybervetting was categorized in a form of non-standardized process, it is crucial to understand that this practice could rather oppose some challenges to recruiters. One of such challenges could be represented through the issue of how truthfully candidates really present themselves online. Because recruiters cybervett irregularly, they don't usually follow any specific guidelines and their judgment is solely based on subjectively created opinions. Some candidates, on the other hand, use Internet to present themselves in different roles and lights that might not always be necessarily real, truthful and of relevance (Berkelaar, 2010). Thus, when recruiters do engage in cybervetting and find such data they should be aware of this form of data double (candidates' false representation). Despite this, one of the participants explains:

"I'm looking at everything! So, any kind of information is additional puzzle. So...yes...everything from photos, posts, some candidate's posts and activities, what events she attended, what she liked, everything is important to me. Because, like I said, the puzzle comes together in that way. Sometimes you don't know what you're looking for, but that is not important because you just want to get a clear picture of that particular person. I'm going to check what kind of person she is, what is her personality. Facebook tells a lot about someone's personality."

While self-reported data on how often cybervetting has an influence on the final decisions does not generally align with what was observed, it is interesting to note that out of four observed cases, candidates were searched on Facebook (and their profile content was compared on the basis of how appropriate posts were) in all four cases. Even though cybervetting played a important role in whether a particular candidate will be invited for the interview, it turned out that none of them had inappropriate content, which helped them go through the next stage in the process.

During data analysis, it became clear that majority of the recruiters were actually not aware of the fact that information found online may not be accurate, truthful or verified and how that could have a large impact on their final decisions. Similarly, another participant explains how their custom is not to interfere with private life but instead, search for information mostly related to skills and education. Even though it seemed that this person understood the relevance of this matter, the participant openly admits he/she checks Facebook (previously referred as a personal and private channel):

"So, how would I say it...We don't even like to interfere with some sort of private life too much...For example, information that we can search for are mostly related to skills, and something that is not stated in the CV, additional education...let's say if the candidate didn't state it...In general, it's most common that people state last 3-4 work experiences, and then for example we can find all of his work experience via LinkedIn. Or some other...I don't know, maybe see who's he connected with. Maybe on social media, concretely on Facebook check some information that would go along with that and perhaps see how does this person present herself on social media. If that's something that's inappropriate or like that, yeah."

This exemplifies how the practice, that is considered occasional, could be contradictory that even recruiters themselves are not aware of it. Their lack of awareness could easily be associated to the fact that the nonsystematic processes cause inconsistencies in both validity and reliability.

Analysis of responses on the question 'what recruiters look for when evaluating candidates' suggested three emerging categories; 1) *Recruiters look for negative information*, 2) *Recruiters look for confirmation that information matches*, 3) *Recruiters look for additional information about the candidate*.

On that note, one of the respondents further elaborates:

"Well we're looking for any kind of sort of behavior or pattern of behavior on the Internet that could show that the person might not be adequate for our client, that could in any way harm the reputation of our company or the client. So, if the person shows through their Internet profile, which would in most cases refer to any form of social media platform, particular behavior that is not aligned with some of our goals related to perfect candidate match. So our focus here would definitely be any kind of behavior that is not aligned with that. That could be some sort of public statements that are not considered okay, any kind of behavior that couldn't be classified with our own internal rules."

While the above clearly illustrates that recruiters indeed tend to look for negative information, it is safe to assume that finding negative information is a measure through which recruiters do address negligent hiring.

On the contrast, few recruiters who only seek to find that the information is matching explained:

"We are just looking to see whether the information we have on a paper or what the candidate presented about himself will be the same as the information we find on the Internet."

"I am looking to find that information offline matches the information online. Also, if the candidate gave reference contacts, we'd like to check if the candidate is anyhow connected to these people or that's not the case."

These responses could indicate that recruiters do not pay too much attention to finding new information about the candidates, but rather focus on reassuring existing information matches. As additional information is not needed, for this group of recruiters principal investigator could assume they focus more on competencies and thus don't spend much time cybervetting for additional information.

Further findings indicate that there may be evident relationship between recruitment approaches and how cybervetting has been performed. It seems that recruiters who employ person-environment fit theory (2/3 of the given sample) are more likely to actively engage in cybervetting as their attention to candidates' personal attributes and values is of more importance. This could be exemplified by one of the respondents who stated:

"Concretely on Facebook I check some information that would go along with that and perhaps see how does this person present herself on social media. If that's something that's inappropriate or like that."

As person-environment fit theory would assume a candidate shares values closely related to organizational characteristics and environment, it could be understood that recruiters who use this approach tend to cybervett more (as new and additional information helps them determine whether the candidate fits the organizational characteristics and environment) than recruiters who use competence based recruitment (as these recruiters tend to focus more on the competencies (i.e. skills and knowledge) than additional information such as personal attributes or values). One of the respondents closely elaborates on that:

"I think it's negative if they don't have LinkedIn profile. Let's say for a candidate that is on a position that you would expect him/her to have a profile, it's negative if I see that they don't have it. For example, if a car mechanic doesn't have LinkedIn profile that's fine but if a person that is HR Partner doesn't have it, it's definitely negative."

7.4. Effects on hiring decisions

Information found during cybervetting might not always be as relevant for the selection process but still have an impact on the final outcome of whether this particular candidate will be recommended or not. Therefore, it was of interest to understand how often findings affect final decisions. Participants were, consequently, asked to define how often does the information found online lead to discarding a candidate. One of the respondents states:

"Very rarely. I had one case where the candidate said he has worked as a cover for maternity leave, and in the end it turned out it wasn't true and that he actually got fired from all of those workplaces. So, that wasn't even odd because he had different profiles on LinkedIn and on the portal where I initially found him. All sources where he had his CV on had different information and once I started digging I realized he actually lied. He was never recommended then."

While some of the participants from the sample do not openly admit that found information may have an impact, the majority of recruiters explained at least one case where they had discarded a candidate solely based on information found online. Similarly to the example above, this respondent argues:

"Well that's not too often but sometimes it is visible online and on LinkedIn that the person has some kind of psychological disorder. I had a case when the candidate who sent an online application also sent a picture of an ax. Then I had a case where the person wrote 10 pages in her online profile and most of those pages were about her private life, family related. Then you can just realize that the person is not very stable and immediately discard that person from the further selection."

Interestingly enough, participants who claimed during the interview that they do not allow social media channels influencing their final decisions showed different behavior during observations. One of the respondents further explains:

"It is difficult for me to say that I would make my final decision based on what I find in there. It can confirm some doubts or it can trigger some doubts, but I would never make my final decision based on that. I don't record anything, it's just for myself, a bigger picture and my own perception of the person and I don't go deeper into that".

Despite the arguments, observations still showed this participant made a final decision that the candidate would not be invited for an interview, based on the content found on Facebook profile. As the participant claimed online findings have no effect in final decisions, these results point out the gap between information that was self-reported and information which was obtained during observations.

Finally, this becomes another point which proves recruiters are not fully aware of their own practices and how they do craft their final decisions.

The last finding relates to differences between recruitment approaches, as they could be an explanation behind why some recruiters tend to pay more attention to cybervetting and some less. As an example, following respondents pay less attention to cybervetting explaining:

"Most often we compare among their competencies that are relevant and important for this position that they're in the selection for. So if the person has perfect knowledge of Italian then it is of course in better position than the person who doesn't know Italian that well."

"It's never based on that, when there are fine differences, let's call it like that...small differences between candidate and their competencies."

While this participant elaborates his/her practice in a completely different light stating:

"We're basically doing it on few levels. One thing is experience and how relevant are companies to the job description. The second thing is industry and the third is years of being at those positions, and lastly if they have more information about that period. It's not very structured, we only see the profile of the candidate and we use our judgment in seeing who would be the best fit."

The aspect in which the first two respondents differed from the third could thus be explained by the choice of the recruitment approaches. While the first two respondents focus on competence based recruitment, third respondent aimed at gaining more additional information about the candidate indicating the use of person-environment fit theory.

While person-environment approach seems to require more cybervetting as the information about personal attributes and values seem more valuable in determining person-environment fit, it still opposes one crucial question- whether evaluations made during cybervetting are objective and valid. As seen from the responses, it could be understood that this approach is subjective in nature as recruiters are expected to draw conclusions of whether the person would fit to the organizational environment (perceived fit).

Furthermore, the participants were also asked to define what would be the information they would not like to find. While a smaller portion of recruiters mentioned court processes, illegal actions and hate speeches of any kind, a majority of respondents focused on other

aspects of candidates' online presence. One of the participants explained:

"Well, I wouldn't like to find weird photos. For example, photos that appear in Google search and they're from Facebook. Because that shows me how mature the person is and in fact how well the person uses Internet in general."

While the other noted:

"I am trying to be non-judgmental in that part. Everyone has his or her own life. What I really don't like to see is something really wild. When we talk about girls that would be nude photos, photos of them in the swimming suit and similar because I think...this gives me a broader picture about the person and then further how this person may behave when she is relaxed- which doesn't really make much sense for me. When it comes to guys, the same...Any kind of photos that are in any way disgusting and non-related."

While first participant exemplifies how cybervetting could include information searches that are job related, stating that candidates' poor privacy settings on social media could indicate that how savvy the candidate is in using the Internet (competence). Second respondent, on the other hand clearly states his/her own preferences in evaluations are determinant (and may not be as job related) by stating *"doesn't really make much sense for me"* it could be assumed that cybervetting does present an opportunity for both, subjective judgement and bias evaluations of the candidates.

8. Concluding discussion

Recruitment agencies in Croatia use cybervetting to verify existing information and find new information on their candidates. As only few participants report using cybervetting for the purposes of background checks, constraintuitive finding from the interviews was further analyzed suggesting that recruiters tend to use cybervetting more often than they reported in the introductory questionnaire. Considering the fact that people tend to be inherently biased about how they perceive the study areas and thus report their actions in a different way than the real practice is (Steiner et al, 2011), it could be assumed recruiters are aware of the limitations and do not consider cybervetting reliable, valid or objective method. However, as recruiters have typically been guided by suspicion (Berkelaar, 2010), they end up spending more time cybervetting in order to find as much information as possible.

There are some evident discrepancies between what recruiters report and what they actually do in practice, constituted from both interviews and observations, which allows to assume the practice is both, inconsistent and subjective in nature. Furthermore, principal investigator could understand that because cybervetting is performed either once or twice (at the beginning and before the recommendation has been given on a candidate), recruiters address their suspicion (Berkelaar, 2014), and ensure the person would fit the organizational characteristics encompassing the theory of P-E fit (Ostroff & Judge, 2012).

Because of suspicion and risk of negligent hiring, recruiters tend to feel anxious about what information may exist on the candidate and thus engage more heavily into getting access to their social media profiles. While empirical findings clearly illustrate that recruiters indeed tend to look for negative information, it is safe to assume that finding negative information is a measure through which recruiters do address negligent hiring.

As person-environment fit theory would advocate that the candidate should encompass values closely related to organizational characteristics and environment, it could be understood that recruiters who use this approach tend to cybervet more than recruiters who use competence based recruitment.

Furthermore, discrepancies between what was observed and what was reported during interviews seemed reoccurring in the study. One such discrepancy tackles upon the issue that recruiters' findings have no effect in final decisions when it turns out they actually do. This builds further to the point which indicates recruiters are not fully aware of their own practices and how these evaluations subjectively craft their hiring decisions. The phenomena of reoccurring discrepancies among what was reported in the interview, what was observed and what was reported in the questionnaire could point

to the conclusion that recruiters may not feel confident about reliability of their practice and thus try to filter out information resulting in puzzled responses.

Whether recruiters are actually not aware or expressing denial, it is important to mention that empirical findings also report cybervetting has less effect on competence based recruitment than P-E fit. Generally, it could also be assumed recruiters who use competence based approach invest less subjective thought into evaluations compared to those using P-E fit. However, contradictory to previous research findings, competence based approach doesn't necessarily exclude cybervetting. Empirical findings could indicate that some subjectivity occur during evaluations that have impact on the hiring decisions. Finally, the study proves previous research by confirming all of the reliability and validity implications cybervetting has been discussed for.

9. Implications and recommendations

This study has several weaknesses that will be addressed further. As the study has been performed on a rather small sample, which may not have offered as varied and broad insight into cybervetting practices of recruitment agencies as a large sample could have. Given the fact that recruiters come from small teams and their participation was mediated through their supervisors, some recruiters could have been anxious about sharing all information with principal investigator. By asking questions related to standardization of the processes and cybervetting practices, there was a certain engagement in triggering awareness for biased decisions. This could have more or less confronted recruiters with positive and negative consequences of cybervetting and have caused achieving more considerate responses of handling of cybervetting. Understanding that cybervetting is something performed irregularly opposed many new questions, one of which is validity and reliability of the method. For HR professionals and professionals from other respective fields, this study could contribute in understanding the difference between subjective and objective measurement in recruitment and selection evaluations and how cybervetting could have a significant impact in those evaluations. Jobseekers should further be aware of how they online presence may impact their hiring opportunities. For future researchers, principal investigator would advise looking at the phenomenon of discrepancies that have been reoccurring within the study. Understanding why these discrepancies occur could help identifying whether recruiters feel adequately equipped with knowledge and feel confident when it comes to understanding of what objective measures encompass. In that sense, it would also be interesting to look at the same topic with a focus on social validity of selection situation.

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11. Appendices

Appendix 1.

Questionnaire:

Internet searches could mean anything from browsing for potential candidates using online channels (recruitment) to searching for online information such as to find contact information, verify information or get additional information on candidates (screening and background checks) using search platforms (Google, Yahoo, etc.) and/or social media channels (LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc.). Short questionnaire aims to help understanding what Internet search means to recruitment agencies and how often they engage in performing it on their candidates.

1. For what reasons do you conduct Internet searches as part of the recruitment process? (multiple choice question)

- a) To find potential candidates
- b) To find contact information
- c) To get or verify information about candidate's prior employments or education
- d) To get additional information about candidates
- e) To conduct background checks on candidates (screening)
- f) Other (please specify)

2. How often do you search for potential candidates online, such as recruitment via LinkedIn?

- a) Always
- b) Very Often
- c) Sometimes
- d) Rarely
- e) Never

3. How often do you search for information on named candidates via LinkedIn?

- a) Always

b) Very Often

c) Sometimes

d) Rarely

e) Never

4. How often do you perform background checks by using the Google, Yahoo or other web search tool?

a) Always

b) Very Often

c) Sometimes

d) Rarely

e) Never

5. How often do you perform background checks by examining candidates' social media profiles such as Facebook, Twitter or Instagram?

a) Always

b) Very Often

c) Sometimes

d) Rarely

e) Never

Appendix 2.

Interview Guide

The goal with this study is to understand at what stage recruiters decide to look for online information and what exactly they are searching for, how they record the information they find, and how they make sure the process is standardized among all candidates. Additionally, the aim is to understand the process between the agency and the client, and between the agency and the candidate, in terms of communication.

1. Is it part of a standardized process to conduct information searches as part of the recruitment or is it conducted irregularly, that is: is this a service that is guaranteed to the client?

2. How often would you say that the clients specifically ask for this service? What kind of information are they asking for?

Specify what form of Internet searches (depending on Q1 from Questionnaire)

3. You mentioned that you're _____ conducting Internet searches to look for information about candidates/ find potential candidates could you please tell me at what stage you decide to seek for information online?

3.1. What is the information you're looking to find? What would be the kind of information you wouldn't like to find?

4. Could you please tell me how your typical Internet search on a candidate looks like? You can use an example.

4.1. How do you record the information you find?

4.2. How do you compare the information you found on multiple candidates against each other?

4.3. What do you do when there's lack of information on the candidate online? How do you treat that finding?

5. What kind of online information on candidates do you communicate towards the client?

5.1. Could you please describe to me a situation in which you've decided not to reveal the found information to the client?

6. On average, what would be the kind of information that clients (employers) wouldn't like to hear about the candidate once the hiring recommendation has been given on him/her?

7. How often do information found online lead to a discarding of a potential candidate? (Before and after presenting the candidate(s) for the client)

Additional questions (if time permits):

8. In your experience, were candidates ever aware that they're being searched on via Internet?

8.1. How do you communicate this practice to your candidates?

Figure 1. * The purpose of this figure is not to demonstrate statistical picture but to identify starting point for the interviews.

