



# EMERGING TECHNOLOGY AND THE CANDIDATE EXPERIENCE

Are applicants and HR  
on the same page?



**Tom Parker**  
Research Consultant

**Ali Shalfrooshan**  
Head of International Assessment R&D



# Introduction

A critical area of interest for HR professionals and recruiters is the “candidate experience”; defined as the collective result of engagements, assessments and interactions that organisations have with candidates during the hiring process. Research by the Talent Board has identified that improving candidate experience is the top goal for recruiters in 2019. The importance of this issue is not limited to missing out on high potential talent but can impact financial business outcomes, for example Virgin Media estimated that they lost £4.4 million in revenue in 2014 due to poor candidate experience.

In a world where your best candidates are applying to a greater number of job roles and receiving offers from several organisations, the difference between a good candidate experience and a bad one could be the deciding factor in their choice of employer. To add to this, evidence from tracking websites show that candidates are not paying too much attention to the brand content before hitting apply and starting the assessment process (Oleeeo, 2019). This applicant behaviour suggests that the content of the assessments themselves are even more important when considering the candidate experience.

## Therefore, our research centred on two key elements:

- What exactly do candidates want from the assessment process?
- What might improve candidate experiences?

One of the primary areas of discovery was technology; specifically, the level of comfort with it, device preferences, and opinions on social media and artificial intelligence. In addition, we wanted to understand whether these candidate views differ from what HR professionals believe candidates want from their assessment experience.

## This research is based on responses from two groups:

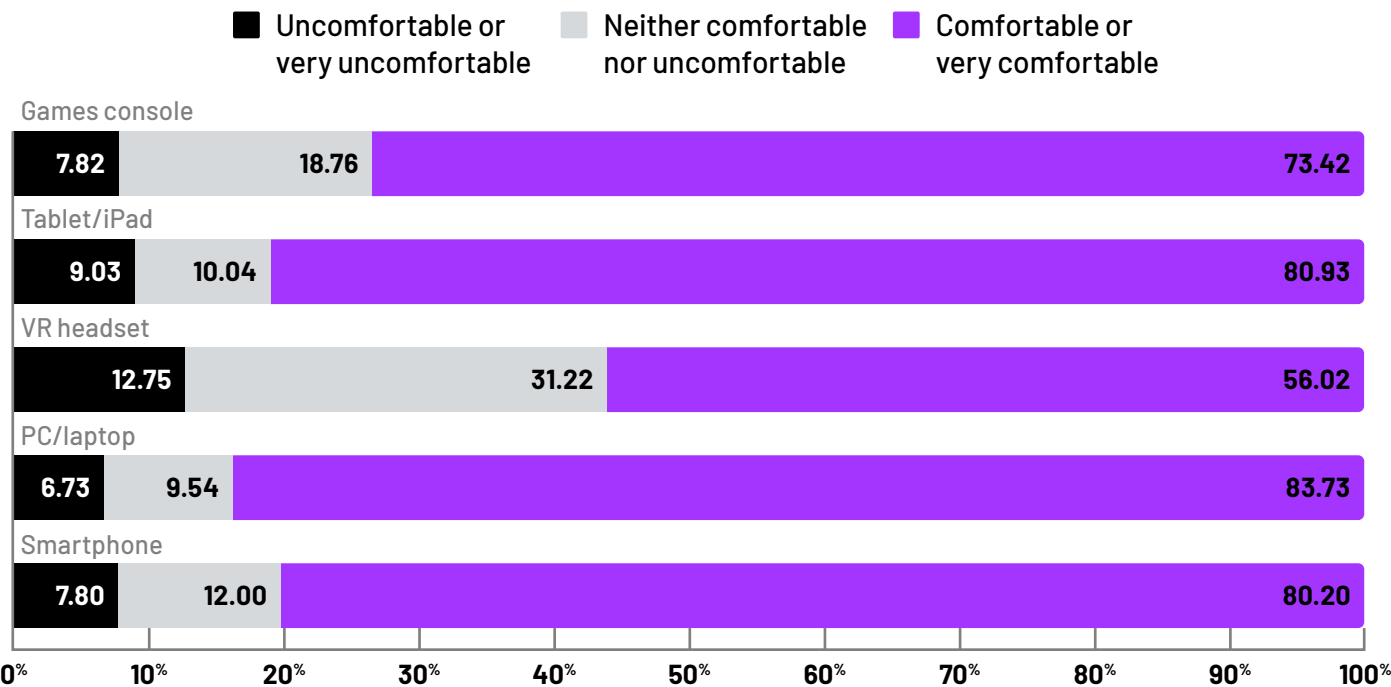
- A group of candidates who had recently gone through an assessment process; 283 respondents who were demographically representative in terms of gender, ethnicity and age.
- The second group was 186 HR professionals who were specifically chosen as they were in the position to make decisions regarding recruitment processes in their organisations. We asked this group to provide information regarding the industries they recruit within and the results were found to be representative of the employment by industry statistics provided by the Office of National Statistics.

# Which devices do candidates prefer using?

One of the most important ways to ensure you are delivering a good candidate experience in your online assessments is by ensuring that candidates take assessments on the device they feel most comfortable using. Firstly, it was important to establish a benchmark for comfort by asking the candidate group how comfortable they felt using various devices for non-assessment purposes.

Candidates were asked:

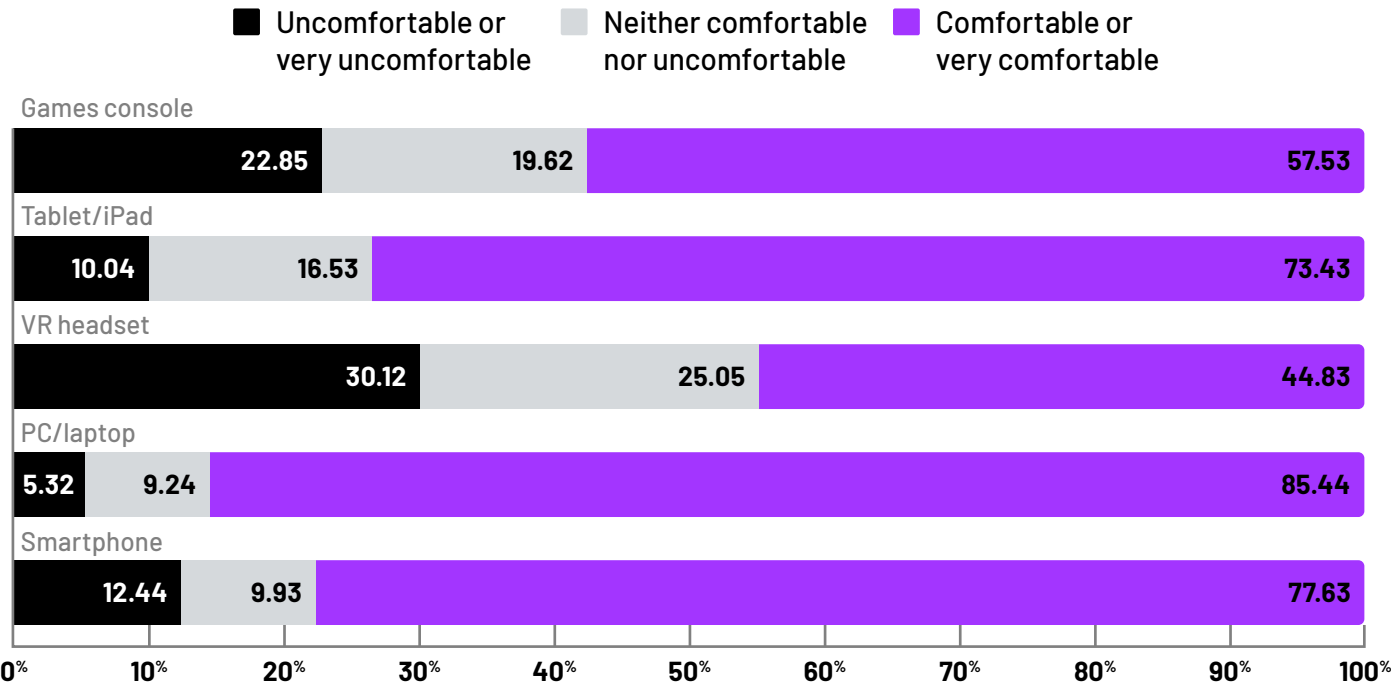
//  
How comfortable are you with using  
each of the following in general? //



Generally, candidates indicated that they were less comfortable with using VR headsets compared to the other device options. However, candidates did not provide responses that were more strongly negative, instead opting for more neutral responses. Other than that, candidates reported being mostly comfortable or very comfortable with all the other devices listed. This information is useful as a benchmark for the following set of data, which explores candidates' comfort levels with the same devices for online assessment.

Candidates were asked:

//  
How comfortable would you be  
using each of the following to take  
an online assessment?  
//



When taking online assessments, candidates indicated relatively high discomfort with using both VR headsets and game consoles. These were notable for producing a far more negative set of responses than was indicated for using the devices more generally. Participants indicated the most comfort with using a PC or Laptop, though tablets and smartphones were not far behind. This could indicate that despite many providers developing assessments using cutting edge technology such as VR headsets, candidates are still wary about their role in this process and this can't necessarily be directly attributed to a lack of comfort with the device itself.

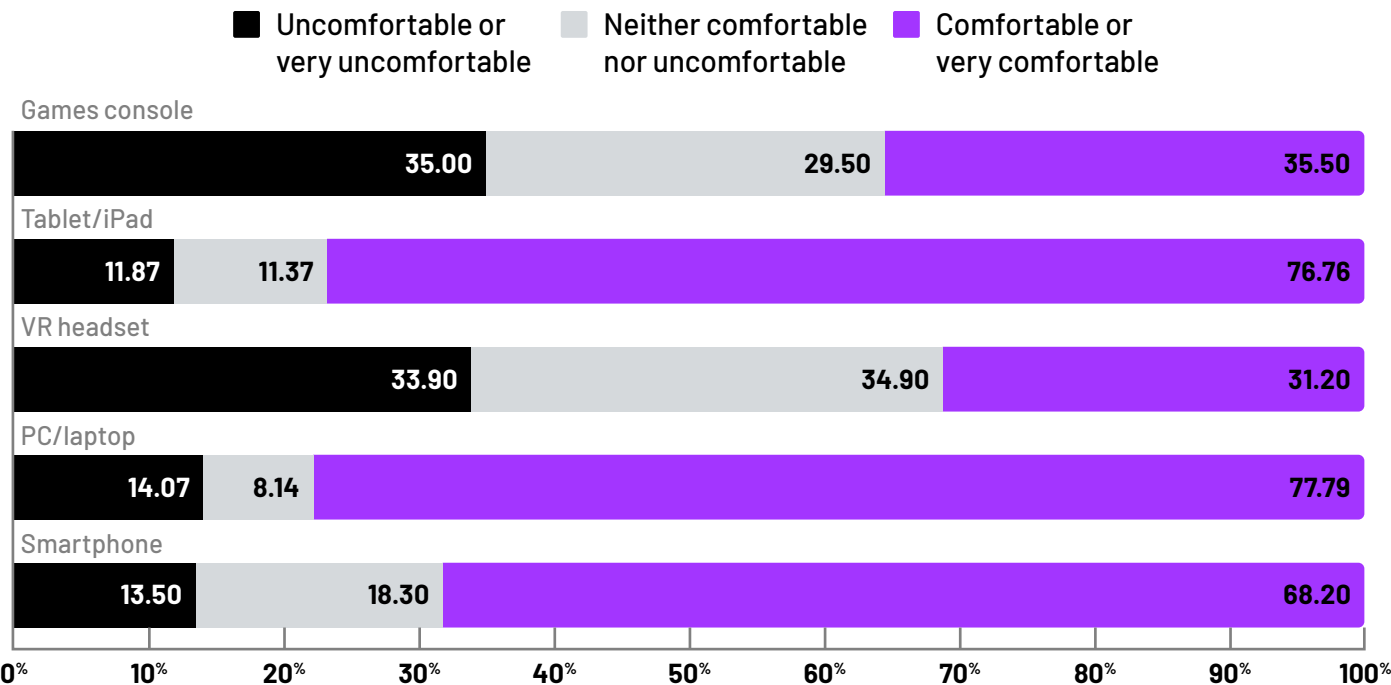
Next, we explored whether HR professionals had an accurate view of candidates’ reactions to technology for online assessments, so we asked the HR professionals group how they thought candidates would respond.

HR professionals were asked:

//

How comfortable do you think candidates would be using each of the following to take an online assessment?

//



Statistical analysis revealed that candidates and HR professionals’ views of candidates had significantly different opinions towards comfort levels using all device types other than Tablet/ iPad. In all cases, HR professionals responded more negatively than candidates. This difference was largest for responses to the Games Console and PC/ Laptop related questions. Despite the significant differences here, HR professionals were able to accurately reflect that VR headsets and games consoles were the devices that would produce more negativity, while tablets, PCs, laptops and smartphones would be more positively viewed. This means that they would still be most likely to be chosen as the target device for assessments. However, given that responses across all devices were more negatively skewed, there is a risk that HR professionals think that candidates are generally uncomfortable with using technology when being assessed for a job role.

# Which devices would candidates actually choose to complete assessments?

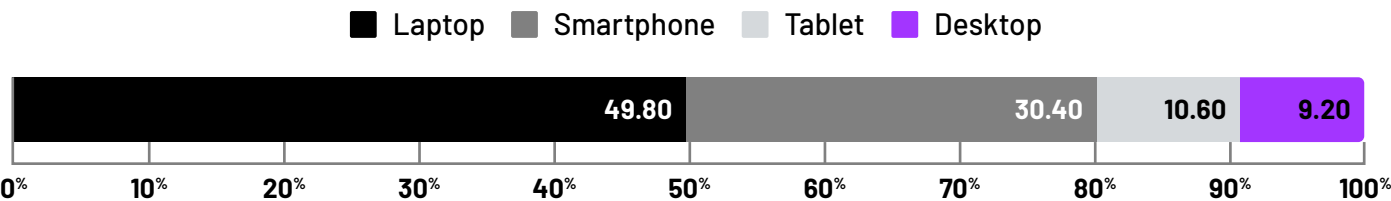
Having understood how comfortable (or uncomfortable) candidates are using each of the above devices, we set out to understand exactly which device candidates would pick, given a free choice.

Candidates were asked:

//

When you are completing online assessments, which of the following are you most likely to use to complete them?

//



From this, we can see there is a great need to design assessments that are accessible and equivalent on smartphones given that 30% of candidates have indicated that this would be their chosen device. Laptop and desktop combined make up around 60% of the candidate responses, so these two platforms should be the focus for assessment design.

Research from Select International (Lawrence & Kinney, 2017) indicated that in 2015 around 15% of candidates were completing assessments on smartphones, and around 5% of candidates were completing assessments on tablet. Now, these numbers have roughly doubled across both devices. Lawrence & Kinney noted that in the period from 2012-2015 the completion rate on smartphone and tablets had nearly tripled from 7% overall to 20%, which may indicate that the rate of growth is slightly slowing. Despite that, there is a clear indication that completion on mobile devices is on the up.

This is particularly relevant given that data from the Pew Research Centre (2019) which indicates that younger (22%), non-white (23%) people are more likely to have a smartphone as their only means of accessing the internet. Previous research from Illingworth et al (2014) indicated that black and female candidates make up a large portion of the candidates most likely to complete assessments on mobile devices, so this may be particularly important for organisations with diversity goals.

However, our research didn't find statistically significant differences between these groups when indicating which device they would be most likely to use, so it is possible there has been a shift in device ownership in the past 5 years.

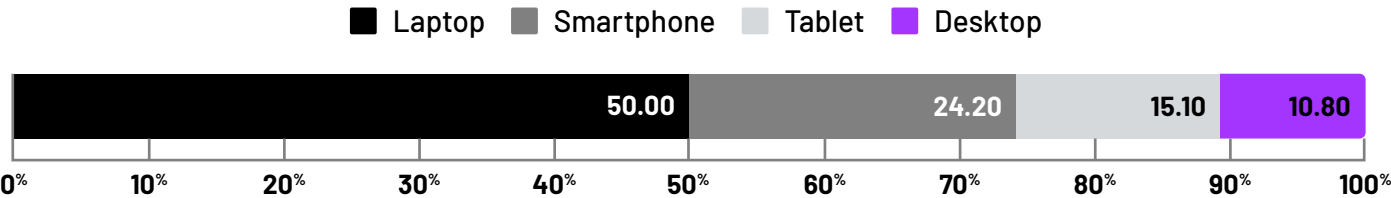
To follow up, we looked at the HR professional sample's understanding of candidates' views on which device they would be most likely to use to determine whether they were able to accurately take it into account when deciding which devices to use.

HR professionals were asked:

//

When candidates are completing online assessments, which of the following do you think they are most likely to use to complete them?

//



HR professionals very accurately reflected the device use of candidates for completing online assessments, though they very slightly overestimated the number of candidates completing assessments on tablets and very slightly underestimated the number completing on smartphones.

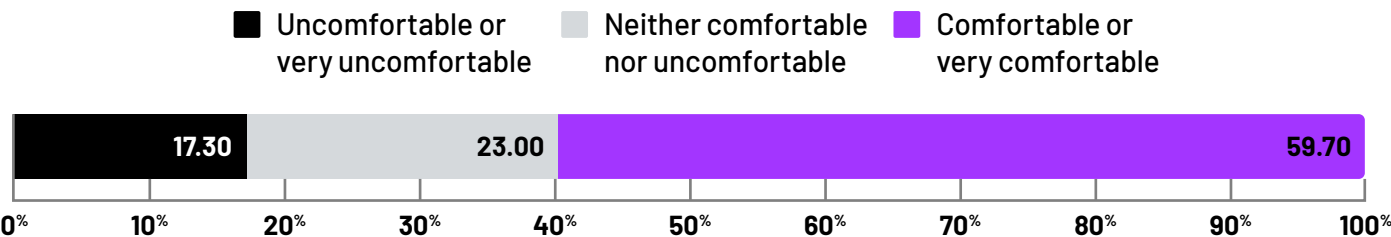
This gives a positive indication that HR professionals possess the right information to select assessments which can be accessed by the majority of their candidate pool.

# Candidates vs HR views: the role of artificial intelligence in candidate screening?

Alongside more established and currently used technologies, we also wanted to understand candidate reactions to the use of the emerging technology artificial intelligence in the assessment process given its current and future prevalence within the space.

## Candidates were asked:

//  
How comfortable would you be if you knew that artificial intelligence was taking a role in your initial screening process?  
//



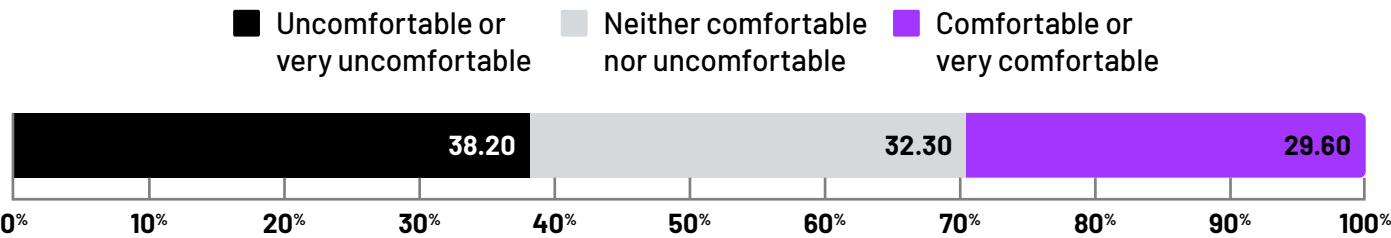
Generally, candidates were comfortable with artificial intelligence taking a role in their assessment process. From this, it may be interesting to look forward at the specific use cases for artificial intelligence within the assessment process to determine whether there are elements that candidates would be more comfortable with than others.

We then looked at the HR professional sample’s reflections of candidates’ views on artificial intelligence as part of the assessment process.

HR professionals were asked:

//

How comfortable do you think  
candidates would be if they knew that  
artificial intelligence was taking a role  
in their initial screening process? //



The HR professional sample’s view of candidates’ comfort towards artificial intelligence was a lot more negative, and statistical analysis confirmed this difference to be significant. Again, it would be interesting to explore the exact uses of artificial intelligence that each of the groups were taking into consideration when responding to this question. This shows that HR professionals may be electing not to include artificial intelligence methods in their assessment processes or obscuring their use in order to make candidates more comfortable, when the reality is that candidates are quite comfortable with their use. Our research data could help lead to more open and transparent use of artificial intelligence within the assessment process.



# Social media snooping: the reality?

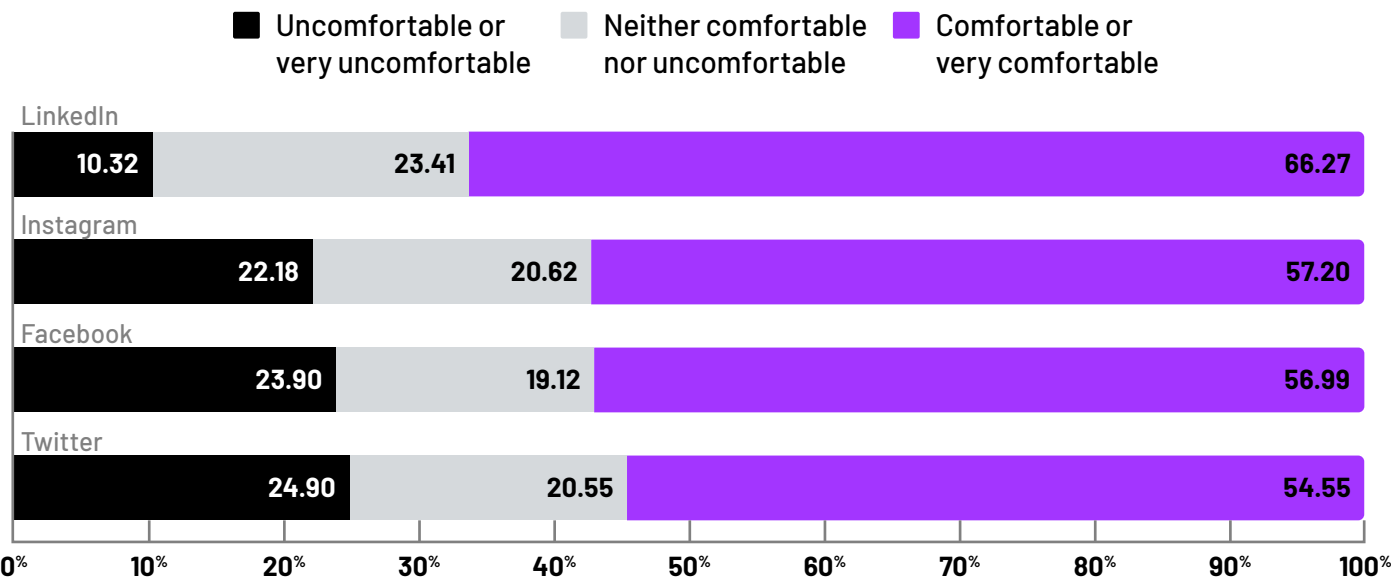
Finally, it is important to understand how technology is being used non-formally within the assessment process. Social media is reported as being commonly checked by recruiters during the assessment process (Career Builder, 2018), and we were interested in exploring how candidates viewed this process, and how frequently it was occurring.

## Candidates were asked:

//

How comfortable would you feel  
about a recruiter viewing the  
following social media profiles  
during your application process?

//



Candidates were typically comfortable with HR professionals accessing their social media profiles as part of an assessment process, though LinkedIn was associated with a fair amount less discomfort than the other networks, very likely because of its status as a work-related network rather than a personal network. It may be that this high comfort across all networks is reflective of candidates either being very aware that their social media profiles will be accessed, and having tailored content accordingly, or being more aware of needing stricter privacy settings on their accounts.

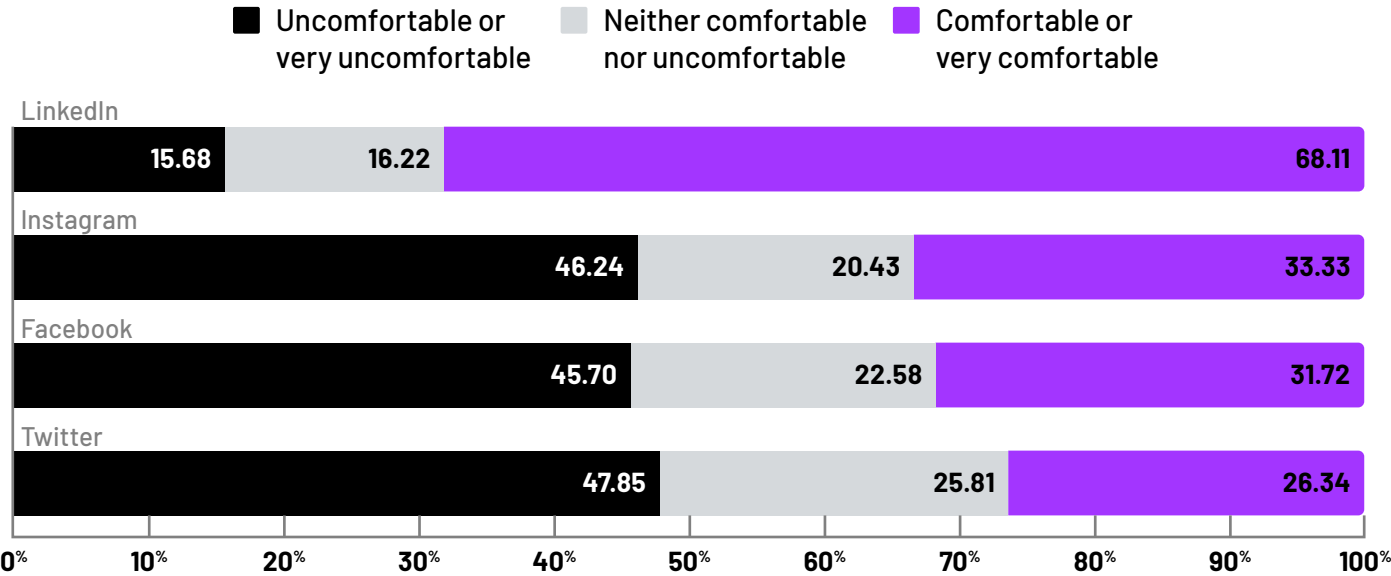
We then looked at whether HR professionals reported an accurate reflection of these views.

HR professionals were asked:

//

How comfortable do you think candidates would be with a HR professional viewing the following social media profiles during their application process?

//

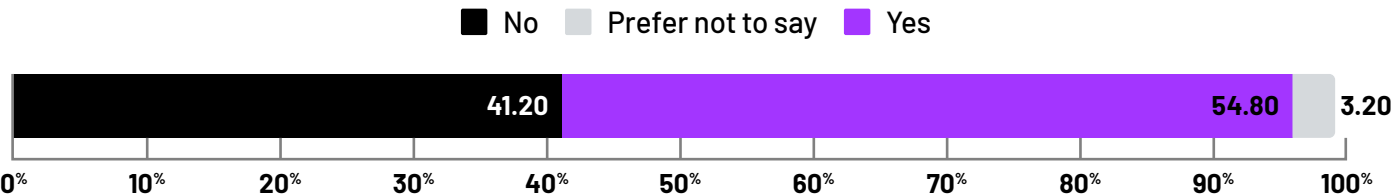


HR professionals had a very accurate reflection of candidates' views on them accessing a LinkedIn profile, with that being the only profile where a significant difference between groups was not found. For all other social media sites, the HR professional group assumed much more negative reactions than the candidate group themselves reported, with each of these showing a significant difference when statistical analyses were conducted.

We also queried with HR professionals whether this was something they have previously done during the assessment process of a candidate in order to see how common this approach is.

HR professionals were asked:

//  
Have you ever accessed any social media profiles of a candidate?  
//



From this we can see that there is a split between HR professionals who have accessed social media profiles of candidates and those who have not. It would be interesting moving forward to look at which social media platforms they are accessing profiles from; for example, whether HR professionals that are accessing platforms are accessing just LinkedIn, given that it is a work-related social media platform, or other, non-work-related platforms.

This shows that despite the prevalence of validated, objective measures of performance being easily accessible, over half of the HR professionals surveyed felt that taking a subjective look at a candidate’s social media profile would be a worthwhile activity as part of the assessment process.

# Candidates and HR: the connects, the disconnects, and what this means for organisations

Ultimately, HR professionals were able to accurately reflect their candidates' views on technology where it is most commonly used. This was particularly in relation to their understanding of candidates' likelihood to use devices that have been established for use in assessment for several years such as laptops and smartphones.

However, we commonly saw a disconnect between candidate and HR reactions to newer, less established technology such as VR, games consoles and the use of artificial intelligence, as well as specifically how comfortable they felt about using all types of devices. Interestingly, this disconnect was also apparent when looking at views on established social media platforms, though the underlying reasons for this can only be speculated upon.

This report helps provide a basis for understanding trends within the industry, but HR professionals should be constantly reviewing their processes and speaking to their candidates, both successful and unsuccessful, to understand exactly what can be improved upon when using technology within the assessment experience. And, organisations may need to play catch up with digital savvy candidates to get top marks for tech-led assessment experiences.

## References

1. Career Builder (2018) More Than Half of Employers Have Found Content on Social Media That Caused Them NOT to Hire a Candidate, According to Recent CareerBuilder Survey. Retrieved from <http://press.careerbuilder.com/2018-08-09-More-Than-Half-of-Employers-Have-Found-Content-on-Social-Media-That-Caused-Them-NOT-to-Hire-a-Candidate-According-to-Recent-CareerBuilder-Survey>
2. Keenan Steiner (March, 2017) Bad Candidate Experience Cost Virgin Media \$5M Annually – Here is How They Turned That Around. Retrieved from <https://www.researchonline.org.uk/sds/search/download.do;jsessionid=6ACAF547CA814FC73301EA4E9251D3E9?ref=B29751>
3. Lawrence, A. D., & Kinney, T. B. (2017). Mobile Devices and Selection. SIOP White Paper Series. Visibility Committee Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, Bowling Green OH.
4. Morelli, N. A., Mahan, R. P., & Illingworth, A. J. (2014). Establishing the measurement equivalence of online selection assessments delivered on mobile versus nonmobile devices. *International Journal of Selection and Assessment*, 22(2), 124-138.
5. Office for National Statistics (May, 2019) EMP13: Employment by industry. Retrieved from <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/datasets/employmentbyindustryemp13>
6. Oleo (2019) Thrive in the New World of Hiring – 8 Key Considerations. Retrieved from <https://info.oleo.com/thrive-in-the-new-age-of-hiring>
7. Pew Research Center (2019) Mobile Fact Sheet. Retrieved from <https://www.pewinternet.org/fact-sheet/mobile/>
8. The Talent Board (2019) Talent Board Candidate Experience Benchmark Research Report. Retrieved from <https://www.thetalentboard.org/candidate-awards/candidate-research-reports/>

