

Sterling urges companies to take social media screening more seriously after BBC debate controversy

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Global leader of background and identity services, Sterling, has called for greater awareness around the importance of social media background checks following widespread criticism faced by the BBC over its vetting process after it emerged that a guest on its leadership debate show had allegedly shared anti-Semitic and sexist tweets.

The guest, Abdullah Patel, has subsequently been sacked after tweets came to light from a previously inactive Twitter profile in the aftermath of Tuesday's debate. In response to the controversy, the BBC commented that: "had we been aware of the views he expressed he would not have been selected."

The selection was made after the BBC asked people to submit questions via email or an online form, with the call-out made via social media and on air across several BBC platforms. The questions were picked by the production team based on subject areas, with those they judged to be the strongest making the final selection. Selectors also aimed for a geographical spread of questions and a variety of ages and backgrounds.

Commenting on the story, Steve Smith, Managing Director EMEA at Sterling, said:

"With 45 million people in the UK using social media, screening these platforms is fast becoming a crucial part of any successful hiring or vetting program, and essential for reducing risk. In fact, statistics show that 43% of hiring managers have uncovered materials online that caused them not to hire someone"

"Of course, while a more robust social media background screening policy would have gone a long way to avoiding this particular scandal, in the media, vetting those lined up for interviews can be tricky – particularly given the urgency with which many of these interviews take place. However, this case clearly demonstrates a need to strengthen the interviewee vetting process across all media channels. However, while these checks can offer a huge amount of insight on applicants, for many, the etiquette and ethics of performing this type of screening is still ambiguous. As long as this continues, this issue is bound to persist"

"Ultimately, companies must be absolutely certain of what checks they can perform, and work to develop a comprehensive and consistent background screening policy. With this type of plan in place, the BBC and other media outlets can better prevent these same errors occurring in the future."

ENDS

For more information contact Vickie Collinge vickie@bluesky-pr.com
01582790700