SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE AMONG COLLEGE UNDERGRADUATES: IS JOB SEARCHING A PRIORITY?

Steven Chen and Han Tran, California State University, Fullerton

Abstract

At present, social media sites outweigh traditional methods in providing significant benefits for human interaction and socialization. In fact, an individual user can easily create an online profile within an interconnected system to start connecting with others and building relationships (Boyd, 2008). Geographic location or physical immobility no longer hinders human communication due to the development of social media. The concept of "Social Networking Sites" is especially popular among college students who are millennials. They have been surrounded by digital technology throughout their lives (Obal & Kunz, 2013). Many researches reveal that the millennials actively engage in social media activities, such as: posting updates, sharing videos and photos, maintaining their profiles, or sending messages. The high volume of data exchange via social media sites becomes valuable source for many B2B functions including job recruitment. Many employers consider social media network an inexpensive way to post job openings and look for prospective candidates. According to Jobvite (2015), 92% of recruiters used social media in hiring process. Another survey revealed that 69% out of 300 recruiters have rejected candidates based on what they found on social media profiles. Due to the traceable linkage and cohesiveness of social networking sites, the recruiter can easily acquire information about a potential job candidate from the virtual network for screening purpose. Therefore, the appropriate use of social media channels can help distinguish a college student from his or her competitors during the job application process (Pfledderer, 2014).

Social media-based recruiting also brings with it more opportunities for college students to connect with professionals. Universities have responded to this trend by educating college undergraduates who are future job seekers to leverage the use of social media for job-searching purposes. In fact, many educational initiatives and reforms were implemented to familiarize college students with professional site such as "LinkedIn", engage them with online networking activities, and offer them tips to reach out to the recruiters (Peterson & Dover, 2014, Ouirdi et al., 2015, & Russ, 2015). To our knowledge, beyond external influences and financial incentives, the role of career motivation and social media preference in inducing career-focused behaviors at student level has received little attention. In previous studies, researchers have examined college undergraduate's online engagement activities with conclusion of post content, post frequency, media channels, and purpose of utilization (Potkany et al., 2015, Miller et al., 2009, & Perez-Carballo and Blasczynski, 2011). However, no studies have attempted to investigate further whether there is self-driven effort to capitalize social media usage for career development and professional growth.

The purpose of the research is to re-evaluate college students' awareness of social media application for career exploration and job search effectiveness. Another objective for the study is to detect any discrepancy between social media usage and career development among three pivotal moderators. Depending on the findings, several implications of this research will inform best practices in academic settings and educational initiatives.

Methodology

The research aims to fill the gap in the literature in two main areas. First, the paper examines whether there are differences in social media preference, level of career engagement, and career-oriented online presentation based on three controlled variables. They are: ethnicity, gender, and class level. Second, the study constructs a hypothesis suggesting that college students with high social media affinity and high level of career engagement would express more career-oriented traits through their social media networking sites. In addition, the research provides practical insights into college students' current behaviors and attitudes toward using social media to search for future jobs and professional openings.

Study participants are currently undergraduate students from numerous universities in the United States. The chosen colleges for sampling process have implemented career workshops exposing their students to

LinkedIn and various other career strategies. At least one workshop is conducted per semester. As results, the participants are expected to possess broad knowledge and be conscious of social media-based recruiting.

The research utilizes Qualtrics, an online survey program, for distribution and data collection. The invitation to the online survey was emailed to 874 college undergraduates at California State University, Fullerton with 105 compete responses (12.01%) at present. The survey link was also posted on student Facebook groups of 23 distinctive colleges across the nation.

The survey questionnaire includes four reliable scales:

1. *Social Media Affinity Scale* (Gerlich, Browning, & Westermann, 2010) was used with acceptable reliability (alpha = 0.77). The scale included nine positive items (e.g. "Social networks are a great way for people to stay in touch with one another.") and four negative items (e.g. "Social network sites are a waste of time.") loading on three primary factors. The scale assessed the respondents' preference and pinpointed their reasons for various interactions on the virtual world.

2. *Career Engagement Scale* (Hirschi & Hermann, 2014) with nine items represented multiple career-oriented aspects, such as: career planning, career exploration, networking, self-efficacy believes, etc. The respondents indicated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (almost never) to 5 (very often), how actively they were in taking actions to pursue a profession.

3. *Self-Monitoring Image Control* (Gogolinski, 2010) was a four-item subscale with an acceptable reliability (alpha =0.85) addressing individual concern of online presentation leading to asserting control and performing intentional actions. Originally, the scale focused on how respondents particularly portrayed themselves on Facebook pages. However, for the purpose of the study in respect to social media manifestation, the scope expanded to all referred social media platforms.

4. *Self-Promotion Tactics Scale* (Hart et al., 2017) measured self-presentation and impression management via social networks with an assertive index (alpha = 0.93, M =4.3, SD =1.1). The original scale had 38 items formulating from a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strong disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Due to the study objectives, a subscale of seven items was chosen to assess individual initiatives in posting favorable content and promoting oneself.

Reference Available Upon Request