

Chapter 13

The Diverging Effects of Social Network Sites on Receiving Job Information for Students and Professionals

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ABSTRACT

An increasing number of students, professionals, and job-recruiters are using Social Network Sites (SNSs) for sharing information. There has been limited research assessing the role of individuals seeking a job and receiving information about job openings in SNSs. In this regard, do students, non-managers, and managers benefit from job offers when they are a member of SNSs such as Facebook or LinkedIn? How can differences in receiving information about job openings be explained by the strength-of-weak-ties and structural holes theorems? Results of an online survey among 386 respondents indicate that users of SNSs with more contacts are more likely to receive information about job openings than others. Most information about job openings was transmitted via LinkedIn to professionals. Regression analyses indicate that LinkedIn professionals with more links are more likely to receive information about a job opening. In contrast, the structural holes theory is not supported in this setting. The authors argue that Higher education should actively encourage and train students to use LinkedIn to enhance their employability. Finally, new generation graduates' use of technology for different tasks and with different people than professionals is considered.

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INTRODUCTION

The Internet revolution has changed many aspects of our lives, including the way we search for information (Jones, Johnson-Yale, Millermaier, & Pérez, 2008), communicate with relatives and friends (Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008; Ross et al., 2009; Walther, Van Der Heide, Kim, Westerman, & Tong, 2008), and find new jobs (DeKay, 2009; Eckhardt, Von Stetten, & Laumer, 2009; Joos, 2008; Kluemper & Rosen, 2009). The introduction of Social Network Sites (SNSs) such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Myspace have attracted millions of users who have integrated SNSs into their daily practices (Joos, 2008; Ross et al., 2009; Techcrunch.com, 2009; Walther et al., 2008). Boyd and Ellison (2008, p. 211) define social network sites as “web-based services that allow individuals to 1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, 2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and 3) view and transfer their list of connections and those made by others within the system”.

The majority of SNSs primarily serve social purposes or tasks and aim to connect with friends, relatives and acquaintances. Within *private* SNSs such as Facebook users share substantial amounts of private information (e.g. pictures), communicate and collaborate with each other on a regular basis (Lewis, Kaufman, & Christakis, 2008; Subrahmanyam, Reich, Waechter, & Espinoza, 2008) and use game/utility applications. In contrast, *professional* SNSs such as LinkedIn are primarily used for business purposes and aim to: 1) connect experts; 2) share information about, and collaborate on, business cases and work fields; and 3) exchange job and function related information (DeKay, 2009; Valkenburg, 2008). With the availability of new technology as SNSs, the social environment of people has changed, which is in line with Mumford's (2000) view that technology can be considered as both an artefact and a process. In other words, both private and

professional SNSs have significantly influenced the sociotechnical systems (STS) of organisations and humans.

An increasing number of students, graduates and professionals are becoming aware of the role of their public profile in SNSs in their everyday life (Kluemper & Rosen, 2009; Lewis, Kaufman, & Christakis, 2008; Ross et al., 2009). For example, organisations are actively looking for profiles in SNSs in order to check and verify a job applicant (Kluemper & Rosen, 2009; Valkenburg, 2008). In addition, organisations are actively recruiting new staff based upon public profiles of students and graduates in LinkedIn (DeKay, 2009; Kluemper & Rosen, 2009). In a similar way, research has highlighted that virtual world applications might be a vital source to recruit IT-professionals in times of talent shortage (Weitzel, Eckhardt, & Laumer, 2009). However, in times of *jobs* shortage and given the current difficulties that graduate students have in finding a job (Woolcock, 2009), the competition and the need to differentiate is increasing among graduates and job seekers. As a result, an increasing number of students, non-managers and managers are actively constructing public profiles in SNSs in order to increase their attractiveness and visibility for organisations; it becomes a part of their job search strategy.

Though there are more Web 2.0 services and SNSs available that may be used for sharing information about job openings, we will focus our attention on two currently widely used SNSs, namely Facebook and LinkedIn. In particular, Fountain (2005) argues that the use of personal contacts in an online setting could be useful to obtain information about a job opening. Although we acknowledge the importance of recruiters and (online) recruitment (e.g., Lee, 2007; Parry & Tyson, 2008; Weitzel et al., 2009; Yakubovich & Lup, 2006), our purpose of this study is to focus mainly on users in SNSs. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the following questions: 1) How does the design of professional SNSs and

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