

Effects of Social Network Profiles on (E-)Recruitment: An International Study

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Abstract: The exponential growth of Social Networks offers us manifold opportunities by being part of a large network. We are able to have immediate updates of (international) events and share information. The advantage is paired with risks about potential influences on our (social) life. With everyone being able to submit information, it is likely to be presented in an inappropriate way in public. And this can happen without even noticing, e.g. if a connected friend is publishing the information. In this paper, we present an international study where we asked many students about the awareness of their profiles in Social Networks and if they believe that this could influence their job applications. The study is matched with a survey of human resource manager if and to what extent they use information being visible in Social Networks. The poster visualizes the results for countries like Germany, U.S., Afghanistan, and China, and demonstrates how different the perception of Social Networks still is.

1 Introduction

Facebook has close to 600.000.000 members being interconnected and is probably the largest social network ever; see Conzensa (2010) and Facebook (2011). Being worth over 50\$ Billion (Parr 2011, O'Dell 2011) and larger than the European Union, it is one of the biggest global player; i.e. in socializing and sharing information. Whilst the current events in North Africa demonstrate the power to inform and connect distance groups, we are more interested how job candidates use Social Networks for their recruiting and how human resource managers cross-check résumés to get a first impression via profile pages and photo albums. The advantage of being in a Social Network is paired with risks about potential influences on our (social) life. With everyone being able to submit information (e.g., images, personal data), it is likely to be presented in an inappropriate way in public. This can be everything from participating in events, belonging to a group, or being visible on photographs on parties or in private moments. And this can happen without even noticing, e.g. if a connected friend is publishing the information. In addition, Social Networks collect further (social) data by features as the “like it”-button, where each individual is annotated with information to specify their interest.

The awareness of profiles, and how others *frame* this information in a new context, is subject of our research. Supervising students at the end of their university life (i.e., writing diploma and master thesis) confronted us with discussions about job applications; i.e. what qualifications are important and where should I apply. In a preliminary project, we investigate Social Network profiles of companies and wondered if the human resource manager ever looked through the eyes of students searching for a job. And if so, are they also crawling through student profiles to find the next expert? Or information to decline an applicant who submitted a perfect CV but is otherwise more or less occupied being on parties drinking alcohol? And with no limitations on national borders, is there a difference in the countries with respect of including Social Network in the recruitment process?

Over the last years, the recruiting changed to a more or less electronic process. Not only the job offer is published on platforms in the Internet, but also the applicant portfolio is submitted by e-mail or web-based forms asking about the work experiences and motivation to apply for the position. The e-recruitment has several advantages (see Compton (2009), Taylor (2004), Beardwell and Holden (2001): 1) 24 hour availability; 2) effective range of search is broadened (national and international); 3) filtering of applicants can be supported by cross-checking online resources; 4) simplified process due to standardization by web forms. The importance of improving the selection process (Torrington et al. (2005)) and unrevealing factors for the selection practice across countries (Wilkinson et al. (2009)) is one subject of our research and to some extent later discussed with respect of including Social Networks

for e-recruitment.

In this paper, we outline our motivation and interest in this subject, the method we used for a first survey and expert interviews (Section 2) as well as an overview of the results (Section 3), and a concluding discussion of the outcome and how we will proceed in the future (Section 4). Here, we only describe the main findings (and present only aggregated data due to page limitations), but will publish all results over the next months. In case of interest do not hesitate to contact the authors for more information.

2 Method

The aim of the research was about the importance of Social Networks for job applicants and companies during (e-) recruitment within an international context. The reason to broaden the research from just one country to basically the world lies in the nature of the Internet and the Social Networks, where borders exist but often *overlooked* in case of friendships or job consideration. Especially companies have to look world-wide for applicants to get the best experts and stay ahead of competitors in markets being highly competitive and geographically open.

We decided on a mixed approach with two questionnaires, one for collecting information about students and their behavior in and expectations about Social Networks, the other for companies (and if possible human resource managers) to illustrate their activities in Social Networks and how they look into profiles of applicants. Later on, we conducted several expert interviews from recruiting companies and Social Networks like Xing. The survey was done 1) online using SurveyShare (Research Tools, Inc 2011) and 2) in several cases by (Internet) VoIP or phone reading the questions to the participants (i.e. countries with minor Internet connectivity like Afghanistan). The invitation was done either by e-mail (preferred) or distributed on paper (by university staff) in case that e-mail was not possible. To achieve a significant sample size, the intended number of replies was set to approx. 1200 students and 400 companies, with at least 20-50 in countries of major interest for the research; see Figure 1 for the selected countries.¹ The invitation was distributed with the help of AIESEC (2011); an organization to connect students and companies for practical training. The questionnaires will be given on the presented poster.

Based on preliminary (smaller) surveys and examination of references, we draw different hypotheses for the analysis, among which we are the following: Main Hypothesis) *in terms of communication on the job market, students and companies underestimate the impact of each others' Social Network profiles*; H1) *students underestimate the impact of their activities within Social Network upon employers' selection decision*; H2) *the assessments of hiring criteria differs between companies and students*; H3) *companies misjudge the impact of their profile in Social Networks on the decision by students to apply for a job*; and H4) *the country of the student or the (branch of the) company has an impact during the application or recruitment process, respectively*.

3 Results

Here, we present only parts of the results; see Dost and Monteiro (2010) for all details. The questionnaire was fully completed by 1497 students from 68 different countries; most of them (88.38%) are active in Social Networks. The distribution of students is similar for the chosen countries (5-6%) but Germany (25%)¹; whereas all other countries are around 27%. 57.49% are female and 59.35% in the lower 20ies. Not surprisingly to us, that the Asian countries (China and India) have a larger participation in Social Networks, while Turkey shows with only 64% a very low figure; we assume – from our own experiences – that access restrictions to Social Networks (Turkey) and affinity to incorporate technology in the daily life (Asia) are the cause for the findings. The average of participating in Social Networks is approx. 95% for all other countries. The most popular Social Network is Facebook with 83.77% having an account, followed by YouTube (here given as an option to select; with 41.68%), Twitter (34.37%), and LinkedIn

¹ The countries and reason for choosing them are: BRIC-countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China) due to the very high growth in their GDP, size (40% of the world population), and biggest emerging markets; Afghanistan (poor economy and being a developing country); France (strong economy, highly developed); Poland (fast growing economy, Eastern Europe, near Germany; see below); Turkey (country with tighter censorship, Asian and European part, anticipation to join the European Union); USA (origin of the largest Social Network, strong influence in the world, strong economy); and Germany as the home country of the authors and, therefore, best access to participants (and similar to France for comparison).

(27.66%). Orkut is dominant in Brazil (77.59% and with 87.25% strong in India where Facebook has 98.04%). The student were asked what they believe is of interest on their profile for a company. Here, 88.64% believe it is job experiences followed by languages (71.34%), marks at university (65.33%), and experience abroad (60.72%). Nevertheless, most believe that only friends, friends of friends, or colleagues look at the profiles; job related views are seldom or never. The students were asked what the companies look for on their profile. Interestingly, the answer matched the results from the same questions for the companies: most important is appropriate qualification and work experience (with >4 on a 1-5 scale). During the interviews, experts mentioned that they are also interested (with a weight of 25%) in other aspects than work as it helps to find out something about the character (hobbies, appearance, pictures). A survey by CareerBuilder.com revealed that in 35% findings in Social Networks resulted in losing the interest in the candidate (e.g., inadequate pictures, alcohol consumption, talking about former employee). The countries show differences which are not further specified here; see Figure 1 for some selected numbers. A positive result of the survey was that most students are aware that their profile can affect the application (approx. 77%); even though this does not imply that they consider changing their profile in a positive way for the application. We asked the students to evaluate several statements as completely false (1) or right (5). They consider security as most important (like being asked before personal information is published (5.25); full control about personal data (5.07) and are scared about misuse (4.10). Students are also worried about their privacy (3.86). A low score got faking profile information; it is mainly the birthday or some hobbies (to be more interesting). Dangers, that student see in Social Networks, are Spam, stalking, data misuse, and seriousness (besides other minor risks). Finally, the students notice that Social Networks gain more importance with increasing problems about privacy as the amount of data as well as connectivity grows exponentially.



Figure 1: Countries we focused on for the survey. Note that individual results for the countries are not yet visualized but be part of the poster

405 respondents by companies could be used for the analysis, of which 91.43% use Social Networks. Compared to the students, the focus is here on Facebook (65.30%) but also on LinkedIn (58.8%), and Xing (48.43%). As mentioned before, companies look at job experiences (78.78%) and marks at university (66.91%) to check the applicants; which is done by 42.08% of the companies. The reason for companies to be in Social Networks is, e.g., expanding the network (56.78%), advertising (46.75%) and know-how exchange (43.47%). Currently, Social Networks are just discovered for recruitment actions, only 11.62% use them more than 30% for their recruitment.

Note that the results presented in this section are on average over all respondents and are not set in relation to the country. Thus, the number might be different for individual countries; i.e. regarding the differences in GDP, educational system, access to Internet, political system, and so on. The poster will visualize the differences in more

details (see also Figure 1); a complete overview is given in Dost and Monteiro (2010) and in future publications to be announced. Nevertheless, the results given show tendencies about the results we received through our questionnaires.

4 Discussion and Conclusion

The excerpt of the collected data shows that Social Networks have a major influence in addition to the job application portfolio and CV. For human resource manager, Social Networks are an ideal resource to verify information (i.e. as profiles in Social Networks are often accurate due to the network effects about inconsistencies) or receive further insight (i.e. in the social life beyond work). Here, we restrict the discussion to answering the question if the hypotheses are accepted or rejected; again not considering the differences in countries; all data can be found in Dost and Monteiro (2010).

1. Hypothesis H1 is confirmed; students as well as companies underestimate the impact of their activities in Social Networks upon companies' selection decision
2. Hypothesis H2 is confirmed; the assessment of hiring criteria differs between companies and students. Even though it is not radically but significant.
3. Hypothesis H3 is rejected; it is not visible from the data that companies misjudge the impact of specific items on the students applications
4. Hypothesis H4 is confirmed; the country of origin or branch office is significantly influencing the divergence between students' and companies' answers

Furthermore, the main hypothesis could also be confirmed (*in terms of communication on the job market, students and companies underestimate the impact of each others' Social Network profiles*).

The technical and social development of the Internet changed the lives of students and companies in many ways; i.e. with respect to the growing importance of Social Networks. Both have the risk to be revealed in public, leaving no privacy, but also the advantage of using the technology to achieve more than ever. Never before was it easier to gather (social and private) information in such details and to use this in the recruitment process. Our survey showed that the potential of Social Networks (and its impact) is underestimated and that the differences on the international level are still significant. Here, further research is required to develop methods to support both sides to improve their presentation as well as experience to take advantage of the Social Network information; and to balance the differences over the next years.

The risks need to be put in the right context. Social Networks are still a new phenomenon, and many students don't have much experience using them on a professional level; thus we consider the Social Networks as not yet "mature". Social Network users and providers need to learn continuously to find a compromise between sharing personal information freely and protecting sensitive information safely at the same time. But looking back in history, every new mean of communication (e.g. telephone, e-mail, and many more) faced criticism and skepticism in the beginning of its development – Social Networks still need to prove whether the risks can be brought under control or not.

Social Networks offer a brand new opportunity for a close interaction between students and companies, even before the recruitment really starts. We interviewed several top experts of (professional) Social Networks; for example from the Deutsche Telekom; who were pioneers in the communication with students via Social Networks. They were one of the first companies worldwide to post updates on Twitter, react to student's questions and needs. The company uses Social Networks for recruitment and employer branding. They demonstrate a possible solution how communication on the job-market can look like in the future.

The senior manager of Xing foresees that (professional) Social Networks have still not reached their peak. He mentioned that many new tools and features will be launched regarding *people management*. Not only the networking and recruitment by companies will be affected, but also areas like project management and knowledge management. He states that Social Networks will become a self-evident part of our day-to-day work. The results of the interrogation, the sources used, and the opinions of all interviewed experts tell the same story: Social Networks will become more natural and more important for the communication on the job market. But given the pace of Social Networks development in the recent years, any detailed prediction of future developments will be outdated in very short time.

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