How social media is influencing the job search process

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ABSTRACT

Over the past eight years, social networking has continuously grown into what has become a major aspect of everyday life, especially among college students. Social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter are used as major means of communication with others. However, online interaction has lead to disciplinary action, lost jobs, and an ever thinning line between work and private life. As a result, many organizations have adopted social networking policies in an attempt to protect themselves and their employees. These policies have been extremely controversial as many argue that they infringe on employee rights. Two years ago, a study was done to examine the impact that social networking has on the workforce and the employers (Stollak, et al., 2012). With the rapid advancement of technology and it's capabilities, two years has brought forth a lot of change in social media. This study performs a follow up to test how social media has impacted the job search process of graduating seniors.

Given the issues involving social media tools, we are interested in examining the impact of how these tools are impacting the recruitment and selection of new employees. How do social media policies influence first-time job seekers? Are college seniors more likely to look askew at companies that have adopted a social media policy? Does the restrictiveness of the policy play a role?

Keywords: social media, job search, technology, social networking policies, Facebook, Twitter

INTRODUCTION

Issues regarding social media and social media policies have been around for years, and social media doesn't look to be a trend that is likely to disappear. The question of whether or not businesses and corporations should implement a social media policy for their employees is a main concern. Particularly focusing upon the millennial generation and the employers relationship within the work environment, it is important to notice how the continual development of technology affects the professional link between employers and employees. The value of developing technology has a major impact on the research and job improvement of the younger generations. However this tends to create a gap between the varied generations that work for corporations around the globe. Many job seekers are increasingly worried about social media access and flexibility as opposed to a higher salary.

This study focuses on how college seniors views on job search and social media has changed, if any, over the past several years. The research provided below portrays the trend of social media regarding the attitudes of graduating seniors about to enter the work environment.

BACKGROUND

"Social media has made a dramatic impact on the workplace. With more than one billion users each month, Facebook is likely accessed by every organization's employees at and outside of work." (Kaplan, 2013) Social media and the internet have been an invention that has revolutionized our means of communication into the unthinkable. For example, instead of handing someone a business card, a customary act today is to add someone on LinkedIn. These forms of communication have basically eliminated face to face communication. "

"Two out of five Gen Y (Millennials) workers rate social media access above receiving a higher salary (Tolan, 2013)." According to a study done by The University of North Carolina's MBA program, "64% of millennials ask about a company's social media policy during a job interview and millennials switch their attention between media platforms like laptops, smartphones, tablets, and televisions 27 times per hour on average (Kratz, 2013)." Facebook is the modern day smoke break. This may not be the perfect comparison, but let's think of someone who smokes multiple times a day. If he or she was told by a potential employer that they won't allow them to smoke at all, this could potentially cause a disruption in the work environment. For a generation with an ever increasing obsession with social media, it makes sense why these statistics continue to grow. Although some of these facts may be startling, some information shows that social media has positive effects in the work place.

In a recent study, PayScale found statistics that the use of social media sites can actually increase productivity in the workplace. "70% of people who use the internet at work engage in workplace internet leisure browsing (WILB). Those who engage in WILB (within a limit of less than 20% of their total office time) are 9% more productive than those who don't (Brassfield, 2012)." Dr. Brent Coker (University of Melbourne) states, "Short and unobtrusive breaks, such as a quick surf of the internet, enables the mind to rest itself, leading to a higher total net concentration for a days' work, and as a result, increased productivity (Brassfield, 2012)." Despite the data that supports the positive impact of social media, many still tend to focus on the negative effects social media can have on employees and businesses.

Even though there are a lot of advantages to social media, there are also risks. One classic example occurred back in 2009, when two Domino's Pizza employees posted a video of

themselves on YouTube doing disgusting things to food that was to be served to customers. It took only a matter of hours before the world witnessed this event, resulting in a complete dive on Domino's reputation. Many businesses believe that it is imperative to have a social media policy in place to protect the businesses reputation and the employees who work for them. "In the last two years, however, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), in a series of reports and enforcement actions, has moved dramatically to restrict management's regulation of employee use of social media (Kaplan, 2013)." With all these new pressures on top of an already risky situation, it is even harder for companies to prevent the misuse of social networking by its employees.

Whether a company implements a social media policy or not, the company must realize that social media is not going to disappear anytime soon. It's not just a leisure activity because job seekers are demanding companies to allow them to use social media on a daily basis. With new advancements in technology everyday, and new regulations that make it difficult for employers to restrict employees use of social media, this may just be the tip of the iceberg for this potentially threatening and disputable issue. If companies are too strict with their rules, they may lose out on top talent, and as shown above, reduce productivity in the workplace. "Whether companies like it or not, social media is here for keeps. Irrespective of company policies, employees will use it (Bajaj, 2010)."

METHODOLOGY

A cover letter with a link to an online survey was sent out by e-mail to two separate groups in 2011, and one group in the fall of 2013.

The April 2011 survey was sent to 483 graduating seniors with 92 responding, for a 19.05% response rate. The lower response rate may, in part, be explained by sending the survey during the end of the semester when student demands, such completing projects and preparing for finals, may be higher. 35.6% of the respondents were male and 64.4% were female; this is slightly higher gender disparity than the overall college rate of 57% female and 43% male. 39.6% of students had a grade point average (GPA) above 3.5, and 82.4% had a GPA above 3.0 (on a 4.0 scale). A significant majority (70.3%) were Social Science majors (Economics, Accounting and Business, Teacher Education), 19.8% were from Humanities and Fine Arts (Art, Music, English, History, Languages), and 9.8% were from the Natural Sciences (Mathematics, Biology, Chemistry, Physics). This survey oversampled Social Science majors (53.5%) and undersampled Humanities and Fine Arts (28.5%) and Natural Sciences (13.6%) majors (4.4% consider themselves interdisciplinary).

The September 2011 survey targeted the Class of 2012 who were beginning their final year in college. 485 students were contacted with a 85 responding (a 17.5% response rate). 23.2% were male. 44.9% had a GPA above 3.50, and 82.6% had a GPA above 3.0. 52.9% majored in a discipline in the Social Sciences, 32.9% in Humanities and Fine Arts, and 14.3% in the Natural Sciences.

The October 2013 survey targeted the Class of 2014 who were beginning their final year in college. 586 seniors were contacted with 203 responding (a 34.6% response rate). 28.0% were male. 50.6% held a GPA above 3.5, and 85.9% had a GPA above 3.0. 49.1% majored in a discipline in Social Sciences, 19.5% in the Natural Sciences, and 31.4% in Humanities and Fine Arts.

ANALYSIS

The three groups of seniors were compared using chi-square tests of independence. The first area of interest involved the methods the groups used in their job search. Respondents were asked the extent to which they used a variety of sources in their job search, and were asked to answer "Not at all," "to some extent," or "to a great extent." Table 1 highlights the chi-square analysis (Appendix).

Significant differences across the groups were first found with on-campus career services. Even with declining unemployment, the current seniors in 2013 were more likely to use on-campus career services (83.33|%) than the graduating seniors in the spring of 2011 (68.5%) or the senior class in the fall of 2011 (58.8%). There was also a decline in the use of newspaper ads as current seniors only used those ads 12.3% of the time compared to their counterparts in the spring of 2011 (17.6%) and fall of 2011 (38.9%). In terms of social media tools, LinkedIn saw the senior class in the fall of 2011 (72.2%) and fall of 2013 (54.5%) were more likely to engage with others than those seniors in the spring of 2011 (26.1%).

Students and alumni were also asked to take into account a number of factors they took into account when deciding where to work, and were asked to answer on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Very unimportant," to "Very important." Table 2 highlights the results from the chi-square analysis (Appendix).

Several factors were significant. Challenging work, career advancement, flexibility, benefits and company image/reputation were all more valued by the graduating seniors in the spring of 2011 than those in the fall of 2011 or 2013. This, perhaps, map be a function of the timing of the survey. Those who are closer to graduating may set their priorities more clearly than those who have several months to go before reality sets in. Similarly, the ability to use social networking tools was much more important to those in the fall of 2011 (39.4%) and fall of 2013 (27.3%) than those graduating in the spring of 2011 (22.8%)

Current use of social networking tools was next explored. The three groups were asked not only whether they used a variety of common social networking tools, but how often they used them. Chi-square tests were run to see if use was dependent on group status. First, the respondents were asked simply to check whether they used a variety of social networking tools. Table 3 highlights differences in use (Appendix).

Significant differences were found for all social media tools. Twitter, Facebook, and blogging sites grew, while the use of YouTube declined. For Twitter, 53.8% of seniors in the fall of 2013 use it, compared to only 32.6% of seniors in the spring of 2011 and 36.0% of seniors in the fall of 2011. Virtually all seniors in 2013 (98.2%) checked their Facebook compared to 94.5% of seniors in the spring of 2011 and 76.7% of seniors in the fall of 2011. For blogging, usage trended upward with 28.0% of 2013 seniors embracing this tool compared to 16.3% in the fall of 2011 and 9.8% in the spring of 2011. Finally, seniors in the spring of 2011 (94.6%) were much more likely to use YouTube than those in the fall of 2011 (50%) and fall of 2013 (60.9%).

The amount of time the respondents spent on these sites was also explored. Respondents were asked "how many hours during the week do you actually spend" on one of these sites, and possible answers included "0 hours," "1-3 hours," "4-10 hours", "11-20 hours," or "21+ hours." Table 4 highlights differences in use (Appendix).

While a large percentage of respondents (63.8%) spent less than an hour a week on Twitter, 18.6% of seniors were likely to spend 4 or more hours a week on Twitter compared to 7.3% of seniors in the fall of 2011 and 3.3% of seniors in the spring of 2011. Similarly, text

messaging has continued to grow with only 40.7% of seniors in the spring of 2011 spending 4 or more hours a week texting, compared to 58.6% in the fall of 2011, and 64.0% in the fall of 2013.

Finally, some additional issues related to technology in the workplace were explored. First, respondents from each group were asked "should employees be allowed to access social networking sites as work" with a response of "yes" or "no." The chi-square analysis was not significant below the .10 confidence level (p=.2687). Second, respondents were asked "would you take a job that did not allow you to access social media sites," and, once again, were asked to answer "yes" or "no." Chi-square analysis revealed a significant difference below the .10 confidence level (p=.0639). Seniors in the fall of 2013 (97.1%) would still take the job compared to seniors in the spring of 2011 (94.6%%) and fall of 2011 (89.7%). Perhaps, given the tough economic climate, that employment and earning a living takes a priority to being able to check one's Facebook status on company time. Or, could it be the access to smartphones that tempers the inability to access social media at work? The groups were asked whether they had a smartphone capable of accessing social media networking sites. The chi-square analysis was significant below the .01 level (p=.0000). 75.0% of seniors in the fall of 2013 had smartphones compared to only 43.5% of seniors in the fall of 2011 and 40.7% of seniors in the spring of 2011. As a result, strict social media policies could easily be overcome with the use of a personal smartphone.

CONCLUSION

While significant differences were found amongst the three groups of respondents on a variety of issues related to social networking and its impact on staffing and workplace behavior, one should use some caution generalizing the results given the smaller sample sizes. Certainly, a more exhaustive sample might provide even more clarity regarding these issues. However, the results provide some small insight about how social media is affecting organizations.

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APPENDIX

Table 1
To what extent did you use the following in your job search?

Method	p-value
Direct contact with a company	0.5979
On-campus career services	0.0137**
Newspaper ad	0.0835*
Facebook	0.0955*
LinkedIn	0.0000**
Twitter	0.1845

Table 2
When making a decision about where to work, how important are each of the following to you?

Factor	p-value
Ability to use social networking tools at work	0.0972*
Salary	0.2484
Challenging work	0.0123**
Career advancement	0.0006**
Company location	0.3728
Flexibility	0.0007**
Benefits	0.0002**
Company image/reputation	0.0269**
Training and mentorship	0.2135
Company culture	0.3614
Manager	0.1388
Vacation time	0.5303
Employee recognition	0.6121

Table 3
Do you use any of the following social networking tools?

Social Media Tool	p-value
Twitter	0.0010**
Facebook	.0000**
Tumblr/Wordpress/Blogger	.0013**
YouTube	0.0000**

Table 4
How many hours during the week do you actually spend using the following technologies?

Social Media Tool	p-value
Blogging	0.1136
Twitter	.0002**
Facebook	0.5878
Text messaging	0.0172**
Instant messaging	0.9876
YouTube	0.6839
E-Mail	0.1937