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Social Media and Student Lifecycle: Impact on Career Success



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Background

Over the past few years online social networks have become one of the most popular applications on the Internet. Naturally, social media is attracting a significant attention from researchers probing its educational applicability. Online social networking services (SNS) offer a straightforward way to connect people and support information sharing and communication. University students are often ahead of the rest in the adoption of new technologies, and according to (Quan-Haase, 2007) their communication networks tend to be dense and multilayered. Extant literature abounds with evidence of business opportunities (e.g. Aldrich & Kim, 2007) and educational use (e.g. Mastrodicasa, 2008) of social networks. However, very little research attention has been paid towards a systematic adoption of SNS throughout the complete student lifecycle. With the aim of achieving higher levels of success in learning as well as improving their career prospects.

This study investigates use of social media by business students. KU business students and students from four international HE institutions in Europe, including Russia and Greece, have participated in the study. Social media has the potential of providing an easy-to use platform to connect students throughout their entire lifecycle (fig. 1) from aspiration rising, enrolment, learning and teaching leading on to employment, alumni communication and life-long learning. This is especially important as the stages of employability management and life-long learning take a centre stage in managing student expectations and influencing their decision of taking up places at which university.

Discussion

Treating social media use only in learning and teaching, for instance, ignores the importance of social capital in the rest of the phases in the student lifecycle. What is the relationship between the on course support and social capital formation, or between attaining higher employability and integrating networking skills into HE curriculum? Should digital footprint awareness be developed as a theme in ICT education? What is the development of students' networks over time which maximises the use of bridging social capital and help them "go ahead" in their careers and lifelong learning? Online social networks, embed resources exploitable by their participants, and social capital is just one of them. Social capital is a metaphor about advantage expressed by (Burt, 2001) as "better connected people enjoy higher returns". Considerable evidence has been collected by organisational researchers that demonstrates that social capital is one of the determinants of career success (e.g. Dreher & Ash, 1990). Popular advice for career success emphasises the importance of networking for the achievement of career goals (Bolles, 1992).

Graduates who are coming into business for the first time are almost expected to be comfortable with interactions using social networks. This brings new challenges to graduates in the way they use social networks and how they enhance their career development and relationships with employers. Unlike footprints in the sand washed away by the tide, digital footprint stays behind longer and is far more difficult to wash away than to create. A growing number of publications continuously draw attention to issues of privacy of individual information available as a result of social networking use. Informally chatting with friends or sharing personal multimedia on Facebook has become a part of a daily routine for many users. However, the prospect of personal content becoming available to the outsiders of an informal social circle is more than probable. It is time to raise awareness and caution over how digital footprint remaining on social media can affect current and future employment prospects of its users.

Implications and Impact

The conclusions of the study help better understand motivations and barriers to an effective application of social networks in business. Findings reveal significant differences in how the benefits of online social networking for career management are understood by students. Undergraduate UK students have no or little expectations from social media in terms of forming business connections, while postgraduate students and international graduates reveal a higher level of exploitation of social capital. The study provokes a discussion into issues of career development in connection with a digital footprint which online users leave as a result of social networking activity.

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Publications

The following publications are linked to the project, and available through the Kingston University research repository:

- Benson, Vladlena, Filippaios, Fragkiskos and Morgan, Stephanie (2009) Evaluating student expectations: social networks in career development. In: *Society for Research into Higher Education (SRHE) Annual Conference 2009: Challenging Higher Education: knowledge, policy and practice*; 8-10 Dec 2009, Newport, U.K.
- Benson, Vladlena, Filippaios, Fragkiskos and Morgan, Stephanie (2010) Online Social Networks: Changing the face of business education and career development. *International Journal of e-Business Management*. Vol. 4(1) (in press)
- Benson, Vladlena and Filippaios, Fragkiskos (2010) Effects of digital footprint on career management: evidence from social media in business education. In: *Technology in Education Conference, 15-16 May 2010, Athens, Greece*. (With an extended version of the paper to be included in the *International Journal of Learning Technology (IJLT)*).
- Benson, Vladlena, Filippaios, Fragkiskos and Morgan, Stephanie (2010) Exploring Applications of Social Networking in Student's Lifecycle, in *Cutting-edge Social media Approaches to Business: Business Education*, edited by Wankel, C.; *Research in Management Education and Development*: New York.



Figure 1. Students Lifecycle.