

Chapter 1

A Comprehensive Review of Professional Network Impact on Education and Career

Calin Constantinov

University of Craiova, Romania

Mihai L. Mocanu

University of Craiova, Romania

ABSTRACT

In their very beginnings, when social networks were solely used for leisure purposes, any action performed online had minimal effect on the real world lives of their members. This has very much changed in our modern world, where becoming an influencer on Instagram can substantially raise one's income, politics is done on Twitter, and an inappropriate video posted on YouTube can get one fired. Similarly, professional networks have changed the approach universities take to prepare their students, the mechanisms behind companies seeking expertise, and the way in which professionals land matching jobs. In the context of discussing the benefits and pitfalls of using such platforms, several points relating to data privacy are highlighted. Additionally, for a complete view of all analytics possibilities, a survey was conducted by looking over 24 research papers, summarising their findings, detailing the six generic research areas which were identified and speculating on what the future might hold.

INTRODUCTION

During the last decade, the emergence of Web 2.0 standards, aimed at electronically connecting people and easing their collaboration, has greatly facilitated the implementation and maintenance of various social networks, making them an integral part of our online presence (Dasgupta & Dasgupta, 2009). Along with the exponential growth of content being produced using these novel platforms, new endeavours, aiming to uncover the underlying aspects within massive amounts of interconnected information,

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have also emerged. In turn, big data engineering, mining and analysis can now be distinguished as very prolific research areas.

In the context of these people-centric Web 2.0 techniques, many social platforms have rapidly become household names. They cover diverse specialised topics, such as LinkedIn helping professionals expose resumes, share knowledge or seek jobs or talent, or ResearchGate enabling academics to disseminate their work and collaborate. Of course, there is also the more generic effort of simply (re)connecting people, such as Facebook facilitates users keeping contact with friends and family. By eliminating various time and location barriers, social networks make it easier for people to engage. Some of these platforms are open for everybody, while others are closed-circle networks, as per the aforementioned ResearchGate, which only allows academics to enrol. The success of a social network greatly depends on how its members are motivated to contribute (Constantinov, Mocanu, Bărbulescu, Popescu, & Mocanu, 2017), meaning that only a number of them have achieved success, gathering a strong community of users that generate data.

In order to conduct relevant analytical studies, large amounts of information are required, reason for which only the most popular social networks are usually targeted by the scientific community. Typical academic research includes the effort of identifying patterns within the data which can then be used to predict social or economic behaviours. However, interest in the topic started to exponentially grow when the business angle of performing this analysis became obvious: Data insights can be leveraged by companies to better target their products to potential customers, by identifying those individuals which are more likely to have an interest in them.

Having Soryani and Minaei's (2011) research as a starting point, where these authors detailed the types of analytics that can be conducted over social platforms, this chapter gets more specific by looking over how data from a professional social network can be put to use. For supporting claims, this chapter references an arguably decent number of highly relevant papers. Discussions are first centred around topics such as the issues faced by universities when trying to assess and improve the degree to which their alumni are prepared for the job market. Similarly, it is debated that it is not sufficient for graduates to obtain an initial job for a university programme to be deemed successful, but they should further show a clear and thriving evolution. It is also argued that social networks have made job transitions happen easier, by enabling users to almost effortlessly find and even be found by companies having suitable job openings, facilitating their career progress. Lastly, it is evaluated how companies can leverage social network information for making sure that the right employees are given access to the right training programmes and courses, helping them reach their full potential and placing them in the right positions.

Throughout the discussion, the authors will highlight the fact that these are problems which can be more easily addressed by employing novel technologies, presenting concrete evidence regarding the ways in which social data analysis can help.

BACKGROUND

As the services LinkedIn provides have diversified over the years, seeing it as simply a tool people use when changing jobs is becoming an outdated perception. Nowadays, LinkedIn can be viewed as a complex platform that enables individuals to learn and grow, making companies to even encourage their employees to use it. This section will detail on what are the risks and benefits of using professional social networks, with a focus on LinkedIn. A brief introduction on the interest that the platform now holds for researchers also follows.

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