

An empirical study of searching for scholarships and jobs through using social networks' features¹

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Abstract

Every day social networks introduce new features; these features can be used in order to achieve professional purposes. Some of these features which promote searching for scholarships and jobs are the ability to search inside the social networks and joining groups. A main objective of this study was to empirically investigate the way online users use their social networks for the purpose of searching for scholarships and jobs. The data were collected to explore users' current usage. The study was conducted by focusing on Erasmus students at Vilnius University, Lithuania. A web questionnaire was shared in Erasmus active Facebook groups. The answer to the web questionnaire of (53) respondents was randomly received. The methodology used the quantitative approach, descriptive statistics using the program SPSS version 19. Findings indicated that although many online users have already joined groups and followed pages concerning scholarships and jobs in their social networks, their usage is very limited for professional purposes namely scholarship and job search.

Keywords: Social Networks; Scholarship and Job Search; Current Usage; Features

1. Introduction

Internet has impacted the way of searching for scholarships and jobs in recent years; interested scholarship and job seekers can get their purposes done by using social networks. These platforms have become increasingly significant for users who look for improving their professional areas. Online users have the chance to use social networks' features in order to get their purposes done, purposes such as contacting friends, growing business and being socialized. Yet, it is a little known about using these features for professional purposes specifically scholarship and job search. In this study, investigating online users' search for scholarships through social networks might be a new aspect. This aspect is really important because it provides educational opportunities, and many scholars look for ways to keep up to date about scholarships. As a result, it is a good idea to use social networks' features in order to follow posts and notifications about scholarships.

Ellison, N. B. & Boyd, D. M. (2013) stated three types of social network features which are integrated to construct network publics. These features are: profiles, connection lists, and traversing. Some of these features which promote searching for scholarships and jobs are the ability to search inside social networks, join groups, share information etc. For instance, the advance search

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feature in LinkedIn is used to narrow the search for people that a user wants to include and share contents with (Schepp, B., & Schepp, D., 2010). Similarly, in Twitter the search feature which allows users to find keywords and follow discussion (Peacock, M. 2009). A very useful feature in many social networks as well is the group feature specially in both LinkedIn and Facebook, in which people share their interests with other members of the groups (Brad and Schepp, D. 2010; Veer, E. 2010). This study concentrates on investigating the Erasmus students' prospective in regard to searching for scholarships and jobs through social networks. The study questions are: 1) what are the online current practices of social networks' features in order to search for scholarships and jobs? 2) To what extent do they use social networks for the purpose of searching for scholarships and jobs? The importance of the study lies in providing answers to these questions from the attitude of social network users. It is also significant to know the percent of online users who use social networks for scholarship and job search purposes.

2. Literature review

It is well known that the majority of social network users, most of whom are at universities, are from the young category. Social networks have become a significant part of the way they live. According to a report released by Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, 65 percent of online users are adults and their top used social networks are Facebook, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Twitter and Instagram (Perrin, A. 2015). There is a growth of creating new accounts on a daily basis, the real question is why this huge number of users join these platforms? Gross, R. & Acquisti, A. (2005) stated that generally interaction and communication with others are main goals of social networking. Social networks play the role of connecting people with each other and make it easier for them to share information (Sharma, M. 2008; Richter, A. & Koch, M. 2008). To contact with people, to be in touch with friends and to be socialized are basically significant purposes of using social networks (Brandtzæg and Heim, J. 2009). Thus, using them means being more socialized and having interaction with other members in the atmosphere of using social networks. Social network applications have become places for many individuals to share interests, events and connect with each other.

Building a network is based on having friends and making connections with them inside the network. It starts with creating a profile which requires basic personal information, a personal photo and professional interests, then joining other members. Actually, the moment users join a social network site, they are prompted to identify others in the system with whom they have a relationship (Boyd, D. 2006). Many social networks are provided with useful features such as search icon that makes it faster for users to search for people by identifying their user names or emails. By using the search icon, it can be easier to add members to network. Crompton, D. & Sautte, E., (2011) stated that creating network friends counts on searching for friends in the network and then contacting them. Social networks are provided with search features which link people and enable them to search for friends and share information (Thilagam, P. S., 2010). For instance, if users are interested in finding jobs, they can get notified about them. The search tool simply helps users to look for information and events where they might meet people with similar interests to their own.

Another unique feature of social networks is the ability join groups and connect them with various people (Johnson, T. J., Zhang, W., Bichard, S. L. & Seltzer, T. 2011); the purpose of connection is to increase the level of interaction among individuals and develop strong relation among members (Falkowski, T., 2009). A good feature to find friends in Myspace, for example,

is to join groups (Weber, S. 2007); similarly, LinkedIn and Facebook offer the feature of joining groups in which individuals share news, jobs, and their interests (Salpeter, M. 2011). Also, on Flickr the right step to increase the awareness of your image is by searching for groups and joining interested topics of your area (Reed, J 2012). Ellison, N. B. & Boyd, D. M. (2013) pointed out that social network users have the chance of interacting with each other, that is by joining different groups which is like communities inside the network. Of course, it is a natural habit that people like to come together. Having the appropriate members and connecting to the right groups in social networks are the key success of individuals to reach to their purposes. The process of gathering individuals through social network sites has invited and attracted members to join groups and then developed mutual relations over the time. Professional organizations are good examples of supporting individuals attain their aims through using social network sites. Groups are characterized by allowing people to share their interests and get benefited from each other. For example, joining a group on Facebook or LinkedIn about scholarship programs help members of that group know about scholarships and get a chance to ask people about their experiences. Joining groups enhances your network connection with experts and achieve many different individual purposes. Therefore, groups are good ways to connect people with similar interests and get them involved in participation (Kelsey, T. 2010).

Richter A. & Koch, M. (2008) stated that a major aim of having a social network account is to contact with others and share information. Undoubtedly, social networks have brought benefits in sharing information. Individuals who use social networks stay better informed in topics related to their fields and interests. They can create pages and join groups that reflect their professional and social interests. Sharing information can be done easily through Facebook pages, for example. A Facebook page has a wall and regular Facebook profile in which people can follow a particular topic; it is a way of sharing information with fans and get them updated by adding content like links, pictures and videos. What distinguished Twitter from other social networks is the service of allowing users to post short content which is very effective in sharing information and connecting to others. Also, it allows users to follow other members without any permission (Ellison, N. B., Lampe, C., Steinfield, C. & Vitak, J. 2010; Yamaguchi, Y., Amagasa T. & Kitagawa, H. 2011).

In brief, an important feature to get the individual purposes achieved via social network sites and specifically searching for jobs and scholarships is to better use its features. Social networks in general offer users the opportunities to search inside them, to join groups and to share information automatically with a large number of people about various fields. People share information with other individuals in order to enhance and support their professional purposes. By using social networks' features, online users can find posts about jobs, scholarships and so on.

3. Methodology

The population of this study was undergraduate and graduate Erasmus students who were enrolled in Vilnius University for the autumn semester 2014-2015, Vilnius, Lithuania. The number of Erasmus students is estimated to be 350 undergraduate students and 200 graduate students. In total, there are 550 male and female students for non-degree and degree programs (Vieniažindienė, R. personal communication, 22 January, 2015, International Office: Vilnius University). The methodology used the quantitative approach, the following software applications were used in analyzing and forming the data: MS Excel, SPSS 19 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences),

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and the online tool of Pollmill application used to administer the questionnaire. Through a web questionnaire, this study investigated the respondents' attitudes about their current practices of social networks' features and to what extent they use them in order to search for scholarships and jobs. According to Kreuter, F., Presser, S. & Tourangeau, R. (2008), web administrations might increase the level of reporting accuracy and sensitivity. The web questionnaire included both simple and multiple choice questions. It was designed by an online application (Pollmill) and was shared in active Erasmus Facebook groups. 53 answers were randomly received between January 22nd and February 3rd of 2015, and the data was analyzed by the SPSS program.

4. Findings and discussion

The main objective of this study was to empirically investigate the way online users (Erasmus students at Vilnius University, Lithuania, autumn semester 2014-2015) use their social networks for the purpose of searching for scholarships and jobs. From the data obtained through the web questionnaire and analysis, one table of 12 items and four charts were designed:

Table 1. Current practices of scholarships and jobs in social networks

Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
I search for scholarships by using social networks	53	3.13	1.127
I follow jobs posts and pages in my social networks	53	3.11	1.086
I regularly use social network sites to find scholarships	53	2.96	1.160
I regularly use social network sites to find jobs	53	2.92	1.035
I have joined scholarship groups in my social networks	53	3.60	1.098
I share information about scholarships with network friends	53	3.15	1.063
I post news about jobs in my social networks	53	2.53	1.250
On my social network sites, I exchange information about jobs	53	2.58	1.184
I ask my network friends about posting jobs	53	2.57	1.185
I read posts about scholarships in my social networks	53	3.51	.933
I follow professional associations or institutions in social networks	53	3.49	1.103
I use social networks in personal matters more than professional matters	53	4.04	.999
Over average	53	3.13	1.101

In the table above, 12 items were asked in order to explore the users' current usage of social networks for the purpose of searching for scholarships and jobs. The over average is (M: 3.13, SD: 1.101) which indicates lack of using social networks' features for the same purpose. It also shows that the highest rated point is "I use social networks in personal matters more than professional matters" with (M: 4.04, SD = .999), and the lowest rated point is "I post news about jobs in my social network sites" with (M: 2.53, SD = 1.250). The results show that although many of users have already joined groups and followed pages concerning scholarships and jobs in their social networks, their usage is very limited for professional purposes namely scholarship and job search.

Figure 1. Social networks used by users

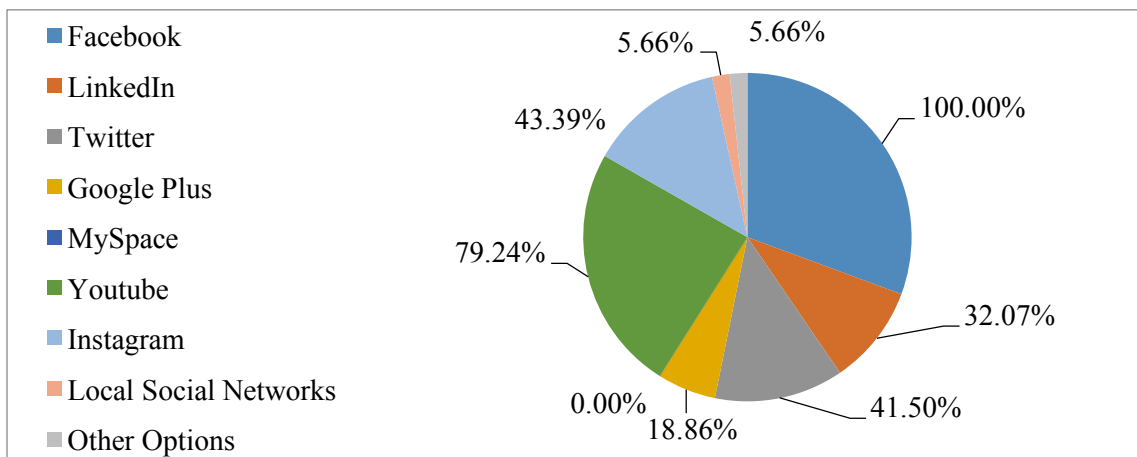
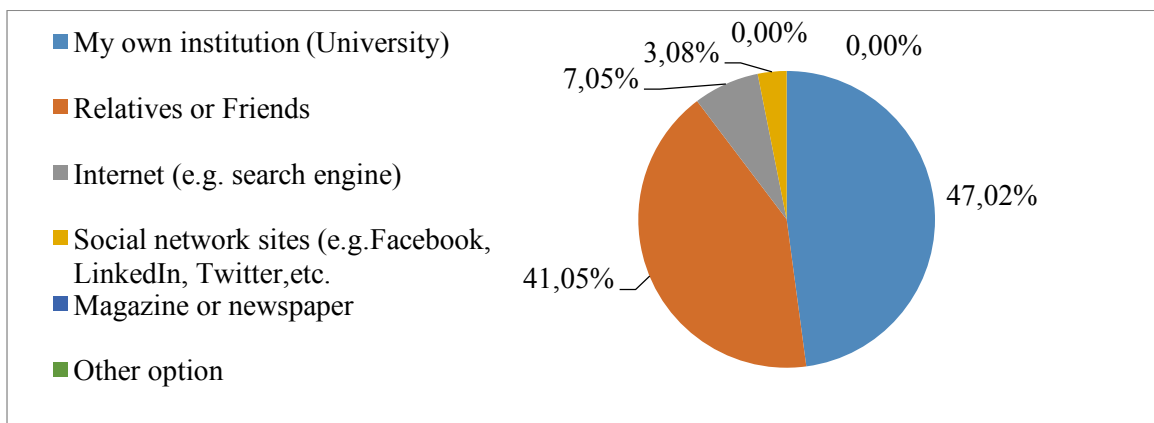


Figure (1) shows that respondents use more than one social networks. According to the analysis, the two most used social networks are Facebook (100%) and YouTube (79.24%). LinkedIn is considered to be a significant professional social network, but there was a limited number of users who use it. A survey was conducted in 2014 among graduate students by the National Association of College and Employers (NACE). It stated that 74% of 43,864 respondents indicated LinkedIn as a successful resource concerning finding jobs (NACE, 2014). Here, online users are using Facebook and YouTube more which is a good indication but also they are encouraged to use LinkedIn and Twitter as well so that they would get exposed to news about scholarships and jobs.

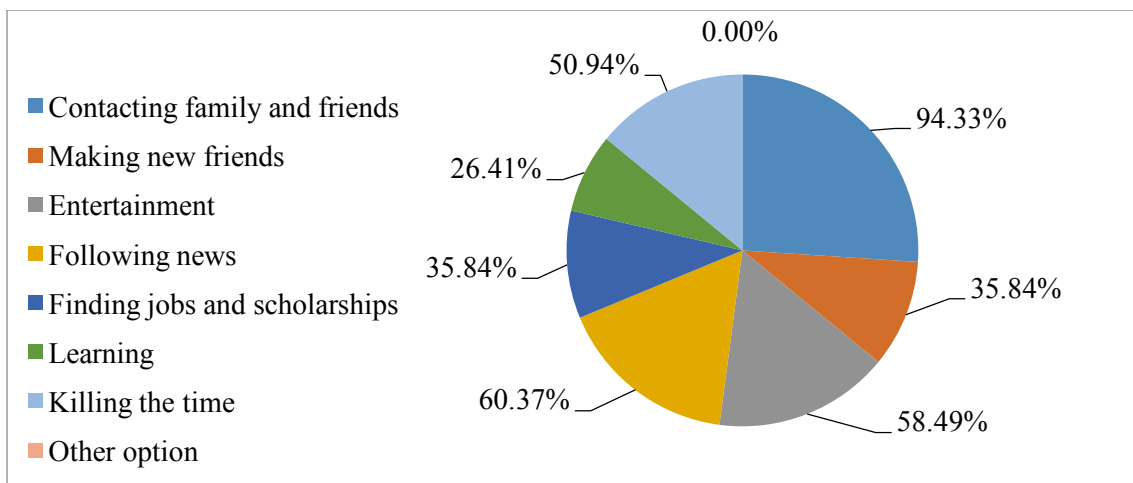
Figure 2. percent of users who hear about Erasmus scholarship by social networks



The main goal of figure (2) data is to know the exact percentage of users who hear about the scholarship by social networks. The result indicates that only 3.08% got to know about the Erasmus scholarship through social networks which shows a high weakness in using social networks for scholarships search. Online users instead, use different ways to get informed about their scholarships such as through their own institution, relatives and friends.

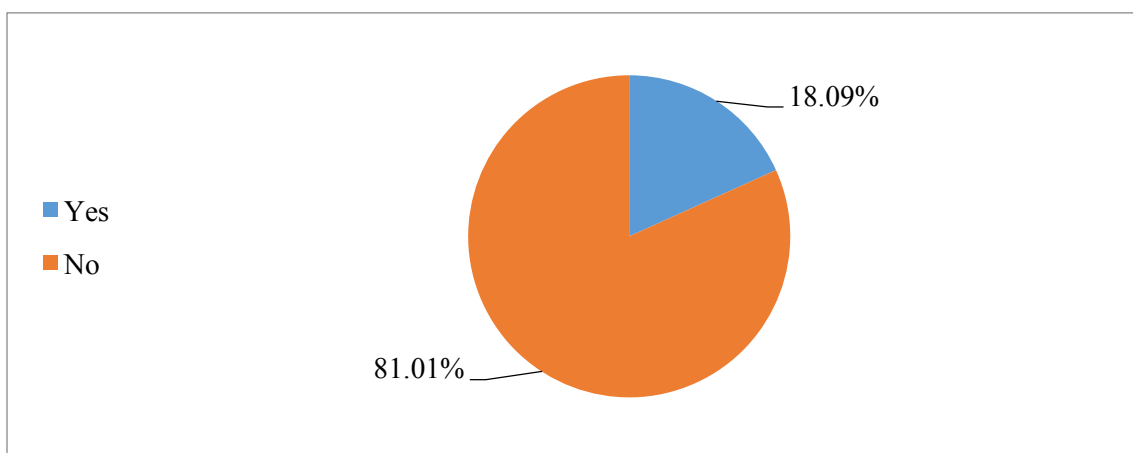
Figure 3. Percent of users who search for scholarships and jobs on social networks

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The main purpose of the data provided in figure (3) is to know exactly how much percent of online users use social networks to find scholarships and jobs. The result shows only 35.84% search for jobs and scholarships which means limited number of users follow news about jobs and scholarships.

Figure 4. Percentage of Users who got jobs as a result of social networks Use



As shown in figure (4) in order to determine the extent to which online users got jobs through social networks, they were requested to answer the question of “Have you ever got a job by contacting professional institutions through social network sites?” The over majority indicates that they haven’t got jobs by contacting professional institutions through social network sites.

Internet is a rich place to find scholarships (Gen and K. Tanabe, K. 2009, p. 22), and social networks are fastened together to Internet usage. Through the use of social networks’ features, users can have the chance to share information, join groups and follow news about scholarships. However, it is not a common trend that people search for scholarships or jobs through social networks. This study is an attempt to see how online users use social network features for the purpose of finding scholarships and jobs.

Online users use social networks for many different purposes such as contacting family and friends, following news etc. and only 35.84% of them use social networks for finding scholarships and jobs. It is about 11.00% who got to know about their Erasmus scholarship by internet in general and only about 4.00% who knew about the scholarship by social networks. Using social

networks such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Friedster, Myspace and others to search for job is not common in Malaysia, only 18.04% used social networks for job search (Suki, N. M., Ramayah, T., Ming, M. K. P., & Suki, N. M. 2011, p. 43). This study shows a similar percent (18.09%) of those who has already got hired as a result of using social networks. Another study about consumer attitudes towards social networks advertisements indicated only 14.09% uses Facebook for the sake of job search (Kodjamanis, A. & Angelopoulos, S. 2013). Thus, it indicates their lack of using social networks' features for the purpose of scholarship and job search. About half of online users are exposed to notifications about jobs and scholarships but very less of them share information and posts in this regard.

5. Conclusion

Millions of internet users especially young adults among whom are university students, use social networks on a daily basis. Social networks have become a locus where they can share information about any field of interest, and social network features have made it easier for them to search, join groups and create pages / lists. Actually, many users have already joined groups and professional associations concerning scholarships and jobs, but some of them search for scholarships and jobs and little of them exchange information through using social networks. It can be concluded that the current mindset of social network users is restricted towards searching for scholarships and jobs and much more focused on accomplishing personal purposes. This study shows the limited usage of social networks by users (Erasmus students at Vilnius University, Lithuania for the autumn semester, 2014-2015) for the sake of searching for scholarships and jobs.

It is suggested that in order to achieve purposes such as finding scholarships and jobs, online users are advised to join professional networks. They also need to appropriately use the features provided by social networks in order to get their professional purposes done. To find jobs and scholarships on social networks, online users can use various features such as searching inside social networks. Almost all social networks offer the same tools which help individuals get better and faster results. In order to find better results about scholarships and jobs, online users are recommended to create accounts in different social networks which enable them to search for scholarships and jobs easily. They would better be members on LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube because these platforms provide useful features such as groups, pages, lists, subscribes and following professional associations' updates. By getting notifications about scholarship and job posts, they might have the opportunity to get jobs or win scholarships.

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