A CASE STUDY OF LINKEDIN

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
San Francisco State University
In partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree

Master of Arts

In

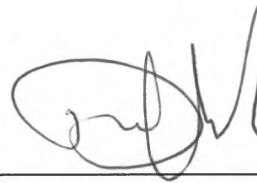Broadcasting and Electronic Communication Arts

by

Martina Dach

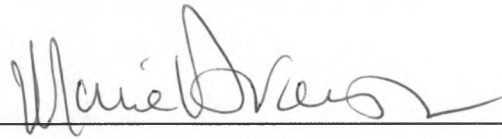San Francisco, California

August 2015

CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

I certify that I have read A case study of LinkedIn: Why are young adults avoiding the professional network? by Martina Dach, and that in my opinion this work meets the criteria for approving a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree Master of Arts in Broadcasting and Electronic Communication Arts at San Francisco State University.
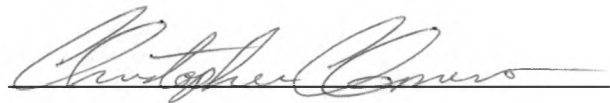
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A CASE STUDY OF LINKEDIN

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LinkedIn, the network for working professionals is, considering the median user age of 35 (Pingdom Royal, 2012), one of the social networks with an older user base. Young adults entering the job market face strong competition and networking can make a difference in the job search. The study explores LinkedIn usage among young adults and investigates strategies the network can employ to increase participation and engagement among the demographic. A cross-sectional survey with 315 participants provided data for this study. The hypothesis that young adults underutilize LinkedIn was not affirmed, since results showed that most respondents had an account. However, participants who did not yet have a LinkedIn account were largely not planning on signing up, since they reported that LinkedIn did not provide sufficient incentive to create an account. The survey provided insight into features participants would like to see on LinkedIn, which form the basis of recommendations for enhancing user interaction.

I certify that the abstract is a correct representation of the content of this thesis

Dina Ibrahim   8/12/2015
Chair, Thesis Committee   Date

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Introduction

We live in an environment in which information and resources flow constantly and social media is a vital part of our everyday life. Social media has long evolved and is not only used for personal purposes anymore. Social media branched out and now gives users the opportunity to represent themselves online in the professional world. Professional networking sites such as LinkedIn are an important resource for jobseekers and provide an opportunity to showcase skills, accomplishments, and brand oneself professionally (McFadden, 2014). Having access to these outlets makes it easier for users to connect to others and expand their own network. Most of the job seekers online are young adults aged 18-29 (Kelkar & Kulkarni, 2013). These young adults, who are about to enter a competitive job market, can benefit from professional social networks tremendously in order to launch a career upon graduating.

LinkedIn, a social network for professionals, launched in 2003, and currently has more than 300 million members worldwide (Novet, 2015). Besides allowing members to browse job listings, LinkedIn offers users access to a wide variety of articles written by business professionals, such as Arianna Huffington or Bill Gates. Regularly, such industry professionals post articles on LinkedIn on diverse topics focusing on professional development or on career insights and advice.

LinkedIn provides a central destination for job seekers and offers many features designed specifically for younger users looking to find their passion. LinkedIn developed University Pages or Decision Boards, which include high school students in their search for the right academic institution. Students can follow certain career paths and see which

university or college fits best with their career goals. Decision boards can be created to give students an overview of their choices and options.

These tools are designed for a younger user base specifically, however, user numbers show that LinkedIn does not appeal to young adults, despite them representing the network's fastest growing demographic (LinkedIn Newsroom 2015). According to a statement on LinkedIn's press site, more than 39 million members worldwide are students (2015). An estimate by the US Department of Education revealed that there are currently 21 million students enrolled in degree-granting institutions in the US (2014). Considering the large student population on LinkedIn and the number of students enrolled in universities, LinkedIn presents an important network for students.

Since social media can be a powerful source for young adults in terms of providing valuable career and networking opportunities, using the resources available online can create a competitive edge in the professional world. Teaching students how to utilize the tools available can help connect the right person with the right position. Being able to find reasons why the service is neglected and what can be done to change that can draw more young adults to the site, giving them access to a site that offers a broad range of services to its users.

This study builds on research by Florenthal (2015), who focused on young adults' uses and gratifications of LinkedIn. The findings of this study show that the majority of survey participants had a LinkedIn account. Results, however, indicated that participants are looking for a more tailored experience to their current needs as students or young professionals just starting out. Students who did not yet have an account did not see the

benefit of signing up. Results show that the services LinkedIn offers for students and young professionals are underutilized. However, if used actively, young adults could potentially benefit from the networking and career-building opportunities LinkedIn provides. Networking can make a difference during the job search, and considering an unemployment rate of 8.5% for recent college graduates, (Davis & Kimball, 2014) utilizing LinkedIn's services can be of great value for young adults who are about to start a career.

This study gives insight into what would encourage young adults to use the site more actively and reveals how LinkedIn can serve young adults better to resonate with the site's mission, connecting professionals to make them more successful.

Literature review

Chao and Gardner (2007) claim that many young adults anticipate a career path that is challenging and rewarding, however, they do not take the necessary steps to actually achieve their goals. Young adults are more likely to move from job to job, in search for their personal identity. The authors made their claims in 2007, and since then, the possibilities to receive career advice, take action on personal development through online-learning tools, and explore a broad job market online have multiplied. In 2015, young adults have a myriad of options to make connections and further their career goals with the tools available to them online.

According to a study conducted by Pew Research Center (2013), only 8% of Internet users were using social networking sites in 2005. In 2013, a follow-up study found that 67% of adults were using social networks (2013). Facebook, as one of the most popular sites, started out as a service only available to Harvard students and served the purposes of searching people at the same school, finding out who attends the same classes, looking up friends of friends, and to see a visualization of one's personal social network. Facebook evolved to a much broader service since its launch in 2004 to 1.35 billion monthly active users (Statista, 2014).

The professional network LinkedIn launched in 2003 aiming to connect working professionals, fostering exchange and networking possibilities. LinkedIn's mission is to help career professionals succeed through networking opportunities, job listings, news, and insights from other professionals in the field. With more than 300 million members in over 200 countries, LinkedIn represents the world's largest professional network,

serving a mostly older audience, as a Pingdom Royal study found (2012). According to the study, 79% of LinkedIn users are 35 or older. LinkedIn also appears to cater to largely a male audience, with 56% male users (Smith, 2014).

For professional development, networking is key and students and young adults are especially encouraged by university career centers to build their networks early to facilitate their job search and build connections.

Sacks and Graves (2012) explain LinkedIn's principle of social distance, and state that people who have close ties with each other, are more likely to help each other out and do favors for each other. On LinkedIn, social distance is visible by the degree to which users are connected to each other. The strongest connections are of first-order and indicate a direct friend connection. This is followed by second-order connections, which are friends-of-friends and lastly, third-order connections, or a friend of a friend of a friend (Sacks & Graves, 2012). With growing social distance, the power of these ties is diminished. However, the principle of social distance allows students to become aware of their second-and-third-order connections, since these can present opportunities when utilized (Sacks & Graves, 2012). Social media has revolutionized the way we are interacting with each other and has affected our professional lives, as much as our personal lives.

The LinkedIn for Students page gives an overview of how LinkedIn can be utilized by students when looking for universities or programs of interest. Students and recent graduates with limited work experience on their resumes might feel intimidated by the amount of experienced and qualified people on LinkedIn (Hall, 2013). They might

not see the benefit of creating a profile and could be unsure about what information to highlight.

Young adults are used to representing themselves on more personal social networks like Facebook and Instagram. This can result in shifting the focus to a professional network could be overwhelming for young adults (Statista, 2015). Research by Pempek, Yermolayeva and Calvert (2009) investigated the activities of students on Facebook and among the highest ranked were looking at other people's profiles, looking at photos, and reading the news feed. The authors note that Facebook gives an opportunity to showcase their own identity and further build a personality by expressing who they are. Their study showed that offering to provide information such as favorite movies, books, and music were important factors for users to represent themselves to their network. Further, the popularity of social networks could present a powerful tool when used for furthering academic pursuits and career development (Pempek et al., 2009). Facebook remains the most important network for young adults and it is likely that this particular age group is still more comfortable with sharing content on Facebook than on LinkedIn. However, with LinkedIn presenting features exclusively for students and young professionals, the network can tap into the potential of young adult users by creating a space for them to connect and share information.

Sharing Personal Data on Social Networks in the U.S. vs. Europe

Young adults aged 18-29, share information online and use social networking sites to connect with friends, share what is important to them, and maintain their social relationships (Lineberry, 2012). A Pew Research Center study (2010) predicted that

Millennials, also referred to as Generation Y, will make sharing content in online networks a lifelong habit. The study further predicts that Generation Y has the potential to lead society into a new world in which personal information will be shared online. According to the study's results, Millennials can be described as digital natives who are very familiar with the practice of sharing online and utilizing social media for various purposes.

Social networking sites like Facebook and LinkedIn are accessible from many different countries and users flock to such networks from everywhere. This study was distributed to young adults in the US and in Europe, where LinkedIn counts more than 93 million users Europe-wide (LinkedIn Newsroom, 2015).

Sigl (2012) found that users in relationships without updated relationship statuses on Facebook are most likely to be living in a European country as opposed to the US. Sigl (2012) examined a million Facebook profiles to research sharing behavior of personal data on Facebook, evaluating European and American habits alike. The study found that American users were more likely to share and publicize personal private data than European users and US Facebook users were more inclined to share sensitive data, such as their hometown, family members, relationship status, and education information. Europeans showed to have a tendency to share their birthday, sexual orientation, and religious beliefs more freely than US users. According to the study's results, 88% of US users publish sensitive data, compared to 76% in Europe (Sigl, 2012).

Van den Beld (2010) adds that Europeans are consumers of social media outlets, meaning that they are mostly not among the creators of content published on social

media. Further, social media in Europe is being used in a practical way, as an opportunity to stay up to date on news, and conduct research. Initially, it might be difficult to encourage European social media users to share, however, if they get involved, they are passionate about their contributions. It appears that Europeans want to see a reason for committing to a certain cause before devoting their time to it (Van den Beld, 2010).

LinkedIn offers specific tools for young adults to utilize during their job search or networking activities, no matter where users are located. Features like University Pages or the ability to explore different career paths are available in many counties outside of the US, allowing users in Europe or Asia to research careers and companies. The following section gives an overview of LinkedIn's resources available to young adults.

LinkedIn's Resources for Young Adults

Adams (2013) points out the importance of LinkedIn's recommendations feature. Recommendations can set profiles apart and give a more rounded impression of the skills the person has. LinkedIn's For Students page gives advice on how to get started with setting up a student profile and offers information on how to use LinkedIn to find a job or internship. Further, the page gives instructions on how to network, and how to tailor the profile to match personal goals. LinkedIn's University Pages include rankings, a university finder, a field of study explorer, and the option to create a decision board to help make an informed choice. This feature can be used by high school students, just beginning to think about college choices, but can also be useful for college students thinking about graduate school. LinkedIn's Decision Boards were created to match

students' strengths and interests to the specific educational environment in which they can develop the skills needed to succeed in their desired industry. The image below shows LinkedIn's decision board, based on field of interest. The tool is completed by university rankings, giving students an idea of which universities offer programs in their field of interest. Allen (2014) describes that the feature ranks schools based on how successful their recent graduates have been working in various industries. Such rankings are the first of their kind, offering insight in career outcomes, and the feature is yet to be expanded by adding more categories and countries.

Figure 1: LinkedIn Decision Board
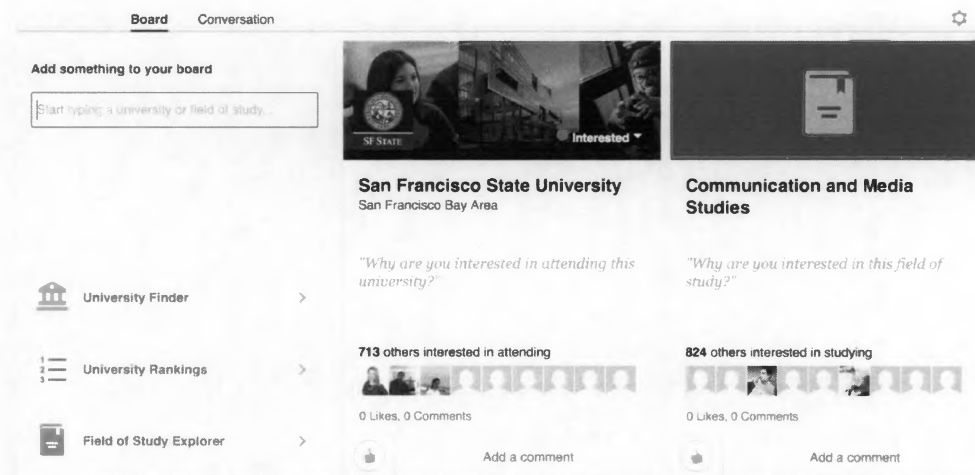
The University Rankings tool is accompanied by the University Finder, which creates a personalized experience for students when imagining their dream careers. Students can choose a certain career and explore the schools, which LinkedIn members working in the desired field attended. This gives a good first impression of which school could be a potential fit.

The below images show the process in creating a career with LinkedIn's University Pages. After choosing a field of study, a list of possible employers appears, followed by the desired area and exact field of interest within the industry one would like to work in. Once the process is completed a list of universities appears, which feature programs in the desired field. The University Finder also lists the number of alumni from the respective schools on LinkedIn, which allows students to reach out and connect.

Figure 2: LinkedIn University Finder
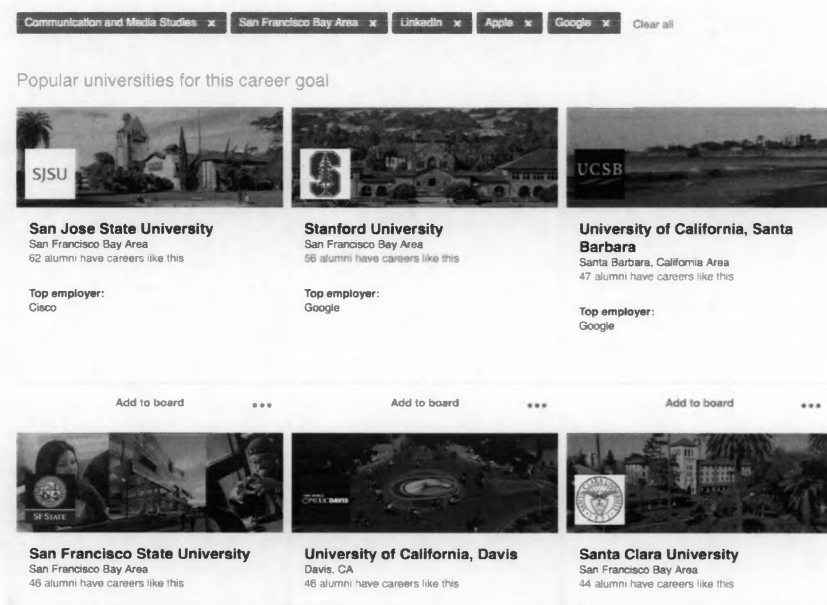
According to LinkedIn's Higher Education team, the University Pages marked the first milestone in the further inclusion of young adults on the site (Lunden, 2013). The tool goes beyond promoting schools and adds networking possibilities for current and future alumni. The University Pages feature is accompanied with rich media, including videos, images, and blog posts to present university aspirants with all information in one

place (Goral, 2013). The feature offers the possibility to connect with alumni and lets students browse based on their field of interest, which lets them explore universities fitting their profile more closely. Students can track which university alumni are successful in their chosen field showing potential work possibilities after graduating. This enhances the college application process, and provides insight for currently enrolled high school and college students. The goal was to create an experience and to add value for students and recent graduates for them to be able to see the benefit of creating a profile, if work experience was scarce. The possibility to add courses taken at university, list test scores, awards, and volunteer work gives young adults with limited professional experience the chance to showcase their personality and skills. Further, a specific job board catered to students and recent graduates offers entry-level positions and internships specifically. In addition to the newly introduced services, LinkedIn offers a variety of instructional videos, explaining how to create a profile successfully, and which keywords play a role when doing so. Since LinkedIn acquired the online-learning platform Lynda.com in April 2015, educational services will be introduced as an additional feature to allow LinkedIn members to learn new skills to make them more successful in the professional market (Owinski, 2015). This feature can also hold a lot of potential for young adults, trying to set themselves apart from competition by acquiring a new skill. LinkedIn's acquisition of Lynda.com presents a further step on the network's side to provide advanced services to its users. LinkedIn not only expands its potential to becoming a leading professional development platform, its value for student users increases as well (Wilkinson, 2015). Wilkinson, who manages LinkedIn for De Montfort

University in Leicester, believes that the acquisition represents a powerful student recruitment tool. University Pages offer the opportunity to showcase higher education efforts better and the changes all together point towards a determination to mobilize the pre-college student demographic. A significant step in LinkedIn's strategy to include younger LinkedIn users was reducing the minimum age to as low as 13 years in certain countries. According to LinkedIn's blog, the minimum age to sign up in countries including the US, Canada, Germany, Spain, Australia and South Korea is 14, whereas in the Netherlands it is 16 and in China 18. All remaining countries are allowed to have users aged 13 to create an account. LinkedIn explains the changes stating that smart and ambitious students still in high school are thinking about careers early on. LinkedIn is encouraging these students to follow their interests and explore their desired fields with the help of its large professional network to make informed decisions about their future careers (Heath, 2013).

It is likely that LinkedIn's services appeal mostly to motivated students, who already have an idea of what professional career path may interest them. Heath (2013) argues that not all students in high school have the capacity to think that far ahead, especially when SATs need to be passed and extracurricular activities keep students busy. The same applies to college students, who enter college undecided. On the other hand, this is exactly where the potential for LinkedIn lies to transform itself in the high school market. LinkedIn presents a public relations platform for universities to drive traffic to university websites. Heath recommends further development of the alumni tools to create potential for post-graduate recruitment. However, LinkedIn's efforts will not be used

efficiently if not enough students and young adults utilize the services available and for universities, undergraduate student recruitment is most important, but this demographic's participation on LinkedIn is relatively low (Wilkinson, 2015).

Lynda.com is an affordable subscription service providing access to many educational videos and courses that focus on career development and learning new skills. With LinkedIn acquiring Lynda.com, the potential of expanding the service and embedding it or connecting it to already existing services on LinkedIn, is tremendous. Wilkinson further (2015) argues that, for instance, British families spend more than six billion pounds per year on tuition, which points toward a great market for educational support. Lynda.com as a function within LinkedIn, could offer study support to students at competitive rates over tutoring, making it more affordable for students who need support with their studies. With appropriate changes making the service more appealing and user friendly to young adults, it could resonate with the needs of LinkedIn's under-18 demographic. Embedding an education portal into their set of services allows LinkedIn to grow as a network and expand its services, since personal development goes far beyond connecting with professionals. This adheres to LinkedIn's mission, to connect the world's professionals and make them more successful, since learning new skills or gaining further education can give job seekers the competitive edge needed to be successful (Wilkinson, 2015).

By creating University Pages, LinkedIn is tackling an area that no longer just includes university students and young professionals, but extends to high school students, involving them from an early age. Additionally, it allows Universities to showcase

themselves for their student recruitment efforts.

Peterson and Dover (2014) note that LinkedIn has become the standard way for building professional virtual networks. LinkedIn provides resources when it comes to networking, in order for users to build capital. The authors stress that during the job search it does not matter what someone knows, it matters who people know. The authors conducted a study on methods that encourage students to improve and build their presence on LinkedIn. Despite the fact that two new members sign up on LinkedIn per second, 70% of undergraduate students and 15% of graduate students participating in their two-semester-long study did not yet have a LinkedIn account. Peterson and Dover's (2014) study included several exercises that students had to participate in: the first one was setting up a profile on LinkedIn. At the end of the study, all 119 students had created a LinkedIn account and data showed that students engaged in making the most of all LinkedIn services well beyond assignment requirements. Further, several students completed the study and had secured job offers. Evaluation of qualitative data showed that students were encouraged and thought of LinkedIn as an asset in connecting to professionals and felt it could have a positive effect on their future and some students did not see the benefit or relevance of the assignment. Overall, however, students understood the purpose of the study and expressed the value of the assignment. The authors conclude that it is essential to teach students how to use LinkedIn to enhance their professional development, and that the possibilities for students are plentiful if they use a free and basic account version (Peterson & Dover, 2014).

Social Media and the Job Search

LinkedIn presents only one destination for young adults to search for jobs. While Twitter and Facebook are primarily known for keeping in touch with friends and family, the social networks can additionally be used during the job hunt.

Stollak, Vandenberg, Felhofer, and Sutherland (2014) conducted a study on how social media has impacted the job search process for graduates. Stollack et al. (2014) argue that handing someone a business card has become unnecessary, since networks like LinkedIn enable the virtual exchange of a traditional business card.

Jobvite, a leading social recruiting system, conducted a nationwide survey with 2,084 adults aged 18 and older to gain insight into their job seeking habits. The report showed that 67% of jobseekers using social media tools rely on Facebook, while 45% utilize Twitter, and 40% include LinkedIn in their online job search. The study further found that, while the three mentioned social media sites are the most commonly used, job seekers are starting to branch out in their job search and turning to Instagram (31%), Pinterest (25%), and even Snapchat (17%) for professional purposes now (Jobvite 2015 Job Seeker Nation, 2015). The below graphic illustrates that lower income jobseekers are least likely to use LinkedIn (10%), while 56% of high-income jobseekers use LinkedIn. It appears that Facebook and Twitter are being used across all income levels.

Figure 3: Social networks for jobs searching by income (Jobvite 2015 Job Seeker Nation, 2015)
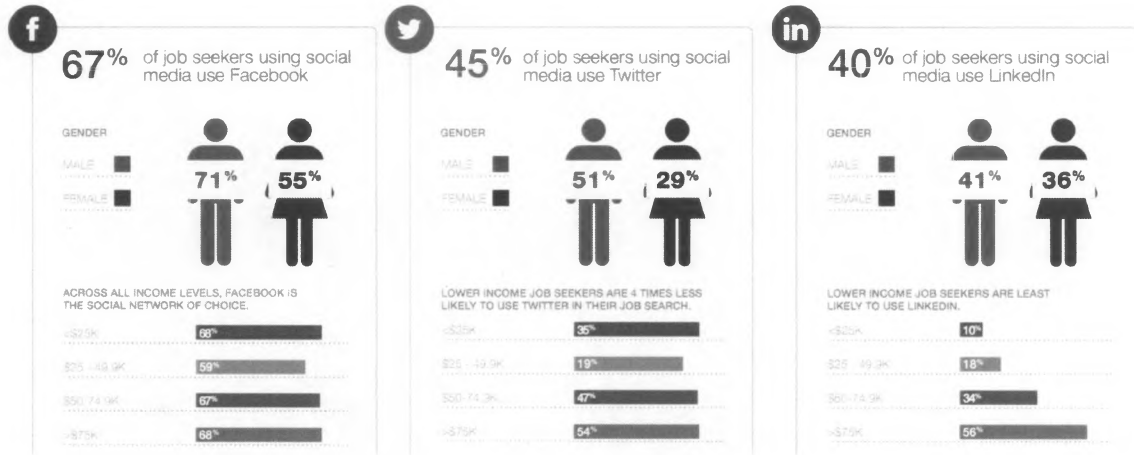
According to the authors, Facebook's Social Jobs App, which was released in 2012, was supposed to leverage the utility of social networking during the process of looking for a job. It connected Facebook's main purpose, social networking, to the opportunity of finding jobs and keeping in mind the ever-growing user numbers of the network, this move could have been beneficial to expand Facebook's services. Kelkar and Kulkarni (2013) however point out that the app merely presented a job search engine, which returned results that were otherwise posted already and searchable using other job searching tools. Potentially, the app presents a threat to LinkedIn's services if developed further.

With studies showing that LinkedIn is underutilized by young adults, Facebook appears to be the most popular network. In a study on young adults' social media usage, Ezumah (2013) finds that with more than 500 million users worldwide, Facebook represents the most widely used social network. Invented by college students, who were initially the largest user group, Facebook was able to succeed because it tapped into

students' interests. Ezumah (2013) focused on the responses of 289 students aging 18 to 29 years and found LinkedIn to be the least popular social network with 32% of participants stating that they had never heard of it or used it.

A 2014 report by Jobvite found that 30% of 18-29 year olds use social media to search for jobs, and Kibbe (2009) adds that a crucial part during the job search is to meet people in person and through online social networks to increase chances of securing a job. Given that social media is popular among young adults, it is remarkable that LinkedIn is not more of a popular site for them to turn to for networking and job opportunities.

LinkedIn's competitors

With more than 300 million members in more than 200 countries, LinkedIn is undoubtedly the world's largest professional network but it is not the only one. The US represents LinkedIn's largest market with more than 115 million users (LinkedIn Newsroom). The following analysis of competitors provides insight into services and tools offered by other international and American professional networks. In the German speaking market, the professional network Xing is the most popular. The platform counts more than 14 million users in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, and brings together professionals from various fields to find jobs, colleagues, new assignments, cooperation partners, experts, and generate business ideas (Xing, 2015). The network was founded at the same time as LinkedIn in 2003 and has been the most used professional network in the area.

LinkedIn appears to target younger users more effectively than Xing, as the below graphic points out (tobesocial, 2011). The graphic, however, also shows that Xing is more popular with the second largest user group of 35-44 year olds.

Figure 4: Comparison of age of LinkedIn and Xing users
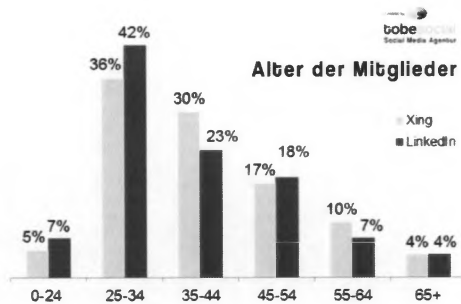
When looking at the Xing website, which is available in German and English, there are no specific features designed for students, which makes Xing's primary audience adults. In addition to job sections categorized by fields of interest, Xing provides pages for internships or student jobs. The site itself does, however, not feature a specific career-building feature for students and young professionals and has a far simpler structure than LinkedIn. LinkedIn and Xing are not necessarily the most popular professional social platforms for international users.

French network Viadeo launched in 2004 and currently has 65 million members worldwide (Viadeo, 2014). Viadeo claims to be a key player in the world of professional social networking and is especially successful in Francophone nations and emerging markets, such as Russia, Africa, and China. The network is especially successful in the Chinese market, with more than 25 million members, whereas LinkedIn's members in China mark only four million. The network is very successful in India, with more than 24

million members. Viadeo's mission is, according to their website, to connect

professionals of all industries, no matter where they are based and provide them with a

large range of opportunities "from finding former colleagues and classmates, connecting

with future managers, or recruiting new team members, to interacting with people in your

niche, developing your skills, or raising your profile" (Viadeo, 2014).

A new feature, Viadeo Campus, was developed to provide education professionals

with resources to help students improve their online visibility, connect with professionals

in the job market, and smoothly transition into the workforce. Viadeo Campus suggests

that students should make the most of their connections while in college, utilizing staff in

charge of coordinating relations between the campus and corporate life to let students

form a link between both worlds. Viadeo Campus was developed specifically for students

guiding them to the right job opportunities, offering a resource for students to explore

available internships and entry-level positions. The service also features educational

tools, a how-to-guide to help students get in touch with recruiters and a premium

membership to optimize job-searching strategies. Additionally, Viadeo offers to come to

college campuses to give presentations on the benefits of joining a professional network.

On their corporate profile the company states that despite students' interest in the

business world, they are struggling to make connections to the professional world.

Viadeo's mission appears to present a well-rounded program to guide students through

the process of making connections to the professional world by showing them how to use

the network to create future careers.

Figure 5: LinkedIn, Xing, and Viadeo usage worldwide
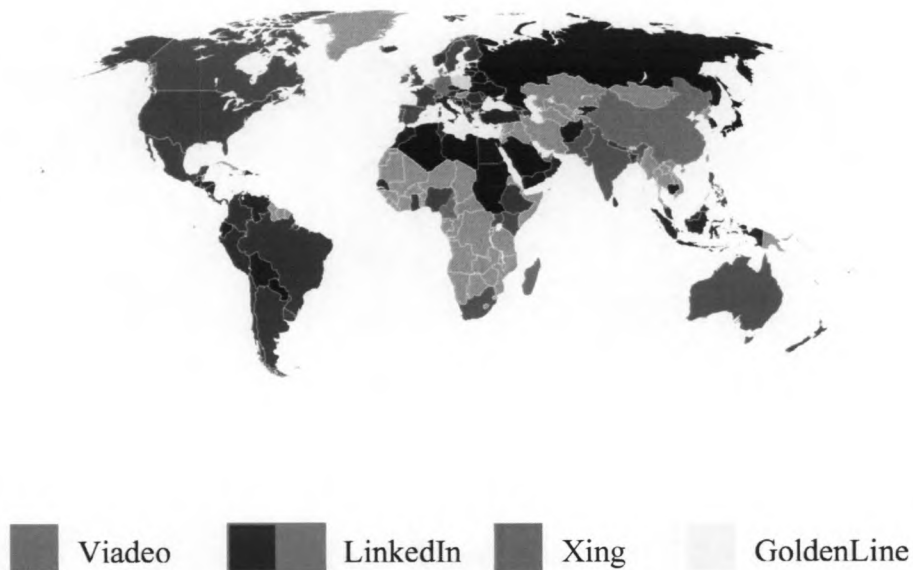
The graphic shows the usage of LinkedIn, Xing, and Viadeo in 127 countries based on their Alexa data, which provides analytical insights into website traffic. LinkedIn is represented by blue. Countries highlighted in a darker blue indicate LinkedIn as one of the overall top 10 sites used in the respective country. Xing is shown in green, while Viadeo represents the orange-colored countries of China, Madagascar, and Cameroon. Poland is represented in yellow, standing for the county's own professional network GoldenLine (Del Moral, 2014).

Another career portal based in the US, The Muse, is especially millennial-friendly (Konrad, 2015). The site was launched in 2011 and developed to represent a career destination for millennials and has three million monthly users, combining job-searching features with extensive content on how to successfully launch a career. Weinstein and Berry (2013) state that the business was built to help people find out what they want to do

with their lives. Founder Kathryn Minshew created The Muse to guide jobseekers to the right position by letting them look inside companies to explore their culture by accessing videos, photos, and employee testimonials. Behind The Muse is an algorithm that is engineered to help users find relevant jobs that match their profile. The Muse is expected to launch a mobile app to complement their online presence in the near future. The Muse bridges the gaps other professional networks do not yet fill. After creating an account, jobs can be browsed by level of experience, area, and location. The interface is designed very clearly and intuitively, making the process of searching easy and quick. The Muse sends out email notifications with career advice and introduces rising companies that job seekers can incorporate into their search.

There are, however, numerous other sites that allow a job applicant to explore a company's culture, among them Glassdoor, Indeed, and LinkedIn. Glassdoor's approach is different from The Muse, since the platform does not offer company reviews or salary listings for different positions. The Muse differentiates its concept from Glassdoor's, while taking a professional approach to featuring companies on their site to show the office space and give the jobseeker a good idea of what working for the desired company would be like. It can be argued however, that since there is no option on The Muse to verify the information presented by anonymous reviews, the company can choose how it wants to be represented and how it wants the corporate culture to be conveyed. Konrad (2015) notes that the mix of features the Muse offers are designed to attract young professionals in a way that resume-heavy LinkedIn cannot, and presents a strong competitor in the battle for a stronger presence of young adults on professional social

networks. The Muse profiles the cultural aspects of specific companies, feeding into the need for job seekers to make their search more specific and applying to companies they care about and see themselves working at. The Muse appears to fit in the gap of online job boards like Monster.com and LinkedIn by guiding job seekers, who are uncertain about their career down the right path (Desai, 2013). The Muse claims to offer exciting job opportunities, expert advice, and behind the scenes access to companies and career paths, claiming they have everything needed to take charge of one's career. The Muse seems to fill the gap LinkedIn has yet to fill, with an average user age of 29 and a strong focus on attracting female users (Cutler, 2015).

Conspire, a tool developed specifically for building connections, determines the strength of personal connections by being plugged into the user's Gmail account. According to the company website, Conspire knows exactly how to be introduced the best possible way, no matter who the user is seeking to meet. By analyzing email data, Conspire scores relationships in order to recognize the difference between closer and casual ties. Using this technology, the company claims to be able to find stronger connections in one's extended network. For privacy concerns, Conspire opts to only access message headers, the To, From, CC, subject and Date fields of the emails being granted access to (Conspire, 2015). LinkedIn's introduction feature competes with the general idea, however, it leaves out information on how well people know each other, which should be taken into account when thinking about asking for an introduction. Here, the idea Conspire brings forth can change the way people connect to others. Bringing all three professional networks together, it appears that LinkedIn is a multitasking talent,

offering the largest amount of career advice and opportunities for young adults, from high school students to young working professionals, on their platform. The site continues to create features that help students with their personal career-building efforts early on and serves more than 39 million students (LinkedIn Newsroom, 2015).

Aftercollege, a service that aims "to help every college student and recent graduate discover their career path", has been operating for 15 years and claims to be the largest career network for college students and recent graduates. The service connects students to more than 400,000 entry-level positions and internships from over 25,000 employers. Their patented job-matching algorithm is supposed to match job seekers with opportunities fitting their degree, school, skills, and interests. Aftercollege allows the creation of a full-rounded profile, specific to job interests and offers similar features as LinkedIn, for instance a recommendations option, a way to link to work samples, and the option to showcase accomplishments. The site launched in 1999 as a simple job board and kept adding features with the vision of becoming a LinkedIn for college students and recent grads, despite LinkedIn's efforts to cover this demographic (Empson, 2012). Considering the number of other services available for young adults entering the job market, LinkedIn's services for the 18-29 demographic are more diverse and have the potential to reach a larger audience, considering the amount of students who already have a profile. With experienced and well-known business professionals from all industries sharing thoughts and wisdom with the LinkedIn community, the network offers additional benefits to users seeking career advice.

Germany's most commonly used network Xing has no specific student page available for young professionals just starting out, instead, students can gather in groups to discuss topics of shared interest. Xing does not provide information on universities or career paths available for students. The site's growth potential lies in widening its user base to more students and young working professionals, since the German market offers specific academic research collaborations between universities and companies. That includes companies offering thesis subjects to students. This enables students to gain the experience needed and desired close to graduation and gives companies the opportunity to outsource research to students.

In summary, the possibilities the networks provide to jobseekers complement each other and provide different aspects that are valuable during the job search. For young adult users specifically, however, LinkedIn appears to offer a broader range of information on career building, where other networks can still expand. The networks that cater specifically to young adults, like The Muse or Aftercollege, present areas in which LinkedIn on the other hand can still expand, such as the amount of entry-level positions offered for young adults.

Uses and Gratifications of using LinkedIn

Uses and gratifications theory has been studied for more than 60 years and was introduced by Blumler and Katz (1974). Larose, Mastro and Eastin (2001) describe the uses and gratifications approach as the dominant paradigm for explaining media exposure within communication studies. Blumler and Katz (1974) believed that media consumers have specific reasons why they select media and choose the messages they receive

intentionally in order to most effectively match their personal needs (Blumer & Katz, 1974).

The theory focuses on: "(1) the social and psychological origins of (2) needs, which generate (3) expectations of (4) the mass media or other sources, which lead to (5) differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in (6) need gratifications and (7) other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended ones" (Katz et al., 1974, p. 510). According to Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1973), the principal objectives of uses and gratifications are to explain how the media is used by people to gratify their needs, to clarify motives for media behavior, and to outline functions or consequences that come with needs, motives, and behaviors.

Uses and gratifications theory evaluates what an active audience does with the media, for what reason, and with what effect (Lasswell, 1948). Severin and Tankard (1997) state: "the Uses and Gratifications approach involves a shift of focus from the purposes of the communicator to the purposes of the receiver" (p. 329). The theory evolved since its creation to fit new technological advancements and has passed through several developmental stages.

Lineberry (2012) conducted a study on college students' use of social networking sites. The author researched LinkedIn usage of college students and found that with students' social development comes an increase in LinkedIn usage. That means, as their demand for social professional relationships rises, they appear to be more willing to generate user-created content on LinkedIn (Lineberry, 2012).

Florenthal (2015) studied the gratifications associated with college students'
LinkedIn usage. The study found that participants were interested in finding information
on industries and companies, as well as reading articles posted on LinkedIn, and viewing
profiles of other professionals. Further, students acknowledged LinkedIn as a destination
for career advancement, which motivated them to use the site more frequently.
Florenthal's (2015) study found that nonusers were aware of LinkedIn but did not see the
benefit in creating an account before beginning their job search.

Wetsch (2012) stresses the importance of building a professional network before
graduating, since the development of a professional online presence takes time and
benefits may not be experienced immediately. Florenthal (2015) found that light users
and nonusers of LinkedIn appeared to have the same misconceptions about the network
not being beneficial for them. The study showed that both groups did not see the benefit
of using LinkedIn regularly.

A study by Basak and Calisir (2014) aimed to explore the uses and gratifications
of LinkedIn of users in Turkey. The authors derived 33 items based on the results of the
open-ended questions and the items were listed based on their frequency of occurrence.
Among the highest ranked items were: building a network, seeing who has viewed my
profile, searching for jobs, and following the career progression of my contacts. This
resonates with Ezumah's findings (2013) on the importance of staying in touch with
peers. LinkedIn makes it easy to follow the career path of friends and acquaintances.
Finding that social networking sites are also used to make new connections, opens
possibilities for professional networks. Ezumah (2013) found that staying in touch with

peers marks one of the most important factors for using social media. Professional social networks, however, can build on the opportunity to expand user networks by taking out the awkwardness of approaching someone you do not know directly.

Katz (1987) identified several limitations of uses and gratifications theory, despite its strengths. Katz (1987) argued that research "had leaned too heavily on self-reports, was unsophisticated about the social origin of the needs that audiences bring to the media, too uncritical of the possible dysfunctions both for self and society of certain kinds of audience satisfaction, and too captivated by the inventive diversity of audience uses to pay much attention to the constraints of the text" (p. 37-38). Ruggiero (2000) adds that by focusing on audience consumption, uses and gratifications research often makes it difficult to make predictions beyond the people studied, making the theory an individualistic one. The scholar further notes that societal implications are not considered by the theoretical approach. Despite the limitations of uses and gratifications research, Ruggiero (2000) argues that uses and gratifications theory provides a benchmark base of data for other studies to further research media usage. Uses and gratifications theory is a powerful communication theory "that directly places power in the hands of the audience" (Ballard, 2011, p.10). Uses and gratifications theory assumes that media messages have direct effects on media consumers and adds that uses and gratifications theory suggests that media users' decisions are intentional about the messages they expose themselves to based on their personal desires and needs (Ballard, 2011).

Hypothesis and Research Questions

Facebook was invented by college students and research shows that it remains the most popular social network. Facebook is adept at understanding young adult users, which is why the following hypothesis was formed:

H1: Young adults underutilize LinkedIn because they do not know how to use it for their benefit.

The research presented indicated that young adults do not use LinkedIn to its full potential. Florenthal (2015) found that both light-and nonusers of LinkedIn had misconceptions about using the site. According to Florenthal (2015), light users are students who created a LinkedIn account but rarely or never accessed it. Based on the assumption that LinkedIn's young adult users are underutilizing the network, the following research question was formed:

RQ1: What are reasons for young adults to underutilize LinkedIn for professional purposes and networking?

LinkedIn is increasing its efforts to include young adults and the network extended its reach to high school students, trying to make the platform more appealing to them. The launch of LinkedIn's University pages should attract young users still in high school, who are starting to think about applying to college. With the help of Decision Boards and other features, LinkedIn aims to help students map their goals to make better decisions. Despite the tools available for students and young adults to use, this study aims to investigate why user numbers among 18-29 year olds remain relatively low.

RQ2: How can LinkedIn expand to attract, include and serve young adults?

Van Dijck (2013) states that social media is often used for self-representation and self-promotion. According to Van Dijck (2013), Facebook presents an outlet to present oneself in a personalized way, while LinkedIn specializes in giving users an opportunity to present themselves professionally. Van Dijck (2013) further argues that both social platforms use similar interface principles to construct a narrative and give the user a way to personalize the experience. Van Dijck (2013) states that with Facebook's introduction of the Timeline feature, a new way for users to create a more personalized interface was created and LinkedIn tried to follow suit to offer its users the same benefit. Even though LinkedIn and Facebook offer similar principles of connectivity, the experience the user has on each site is different.

Since LinkedIn's launch in 2003, the site changed its user interface regularly to improve its usability. In order to create more social networking functions, LinkedIn added new features like a newsfeed comparable to Facebook. Profile picture updates can be liked and you can congratulate others on a new job and a special feature named the "keep in touch box", was designed to give updates of birthdays and profile changes or work anniversaries. Hall (2013) justifies LinkedIn's low user numbers among young adults by stating that students are not thinking about the importance of networking until after they graduate. Many young adults on LinkedIn do not have significant work experience to showcase, which might make students feel like they are being overlooked in a network filled with professionals who display years of experience.

When looking for a job, students mainly focus on the employer's website (70%), followed by speaking with someone working for the company they wish to apply at

(65%), getting information at their school's career fair (61%), various online job listing sites (58%) and the smallest number recognized social networking sites including LinkedIn (26%) (Millenial Branding, 2013). The statistics show that professional networks are not an important part in students' job search and they do not use the opportunities to brand and market themselves to potential employers or recruiters online.

The research presented shows that LinkedIn is headed in the right direction to further include its younger audience better. A 2014 Pew Research Center study showed a significant change in LinkedIn usage among the 18-29 demographic, which rose to 23% within one year (2015). The 8% increase was due to features created in 2013 to serve younger audiences, like University Pages. LinkedIn continued to create features catered to students in an attempt to keep up with other professional networks, like The Muse. Other professional networks, such as The Muse, offer career advice and a job-seeking tool, offer young adults an opportunity to present themselves in professional online social networks to stand out in times of fierce competition. The significant 8% increase in LinkedIn users within one year shows that their efforts are paying off and young adults are willing to use the platform for their benefit, given the opportunity for them to showcase themselves appropriately.

Method

Sample

Data collection for the study was conducted by an online cross-sectional survey. The sample consisted of 315 undergraduate and graduate students ($n = 185$) at private and public universities, as well as young working professionals ($n = 130$). The survey was distributed to international and American students with varied educational backgrounds to give insight into their using habits of LinkedIn. Further, the survey was distributed to the author's personal social network, as well as international Fulbright scholars attending universities across the United States and the world. The most participants recorded are located within the US with 181 respondents, followed by Europe with 58 and Eastern Europe/Asia with 23. The location of the remaining 53 participants could not be identified. It is likely that they filled out the questionnaire on their mobile devices, or location services on their computers were disabled.

The first four survey questions were designed to gain insight into the age, academic status, university and field of study of the participants. Depending on if participants were still in enrolled in university, participants were required to list their university and their field of study. The below graphic shows the different fields participants are focusing on in their studies or their professional careers. Working professionals specified their employment field. Most participants are currently enrolled at San Francisco State University, which the below graphic shows in detail.

Figure 6: Participant's universities
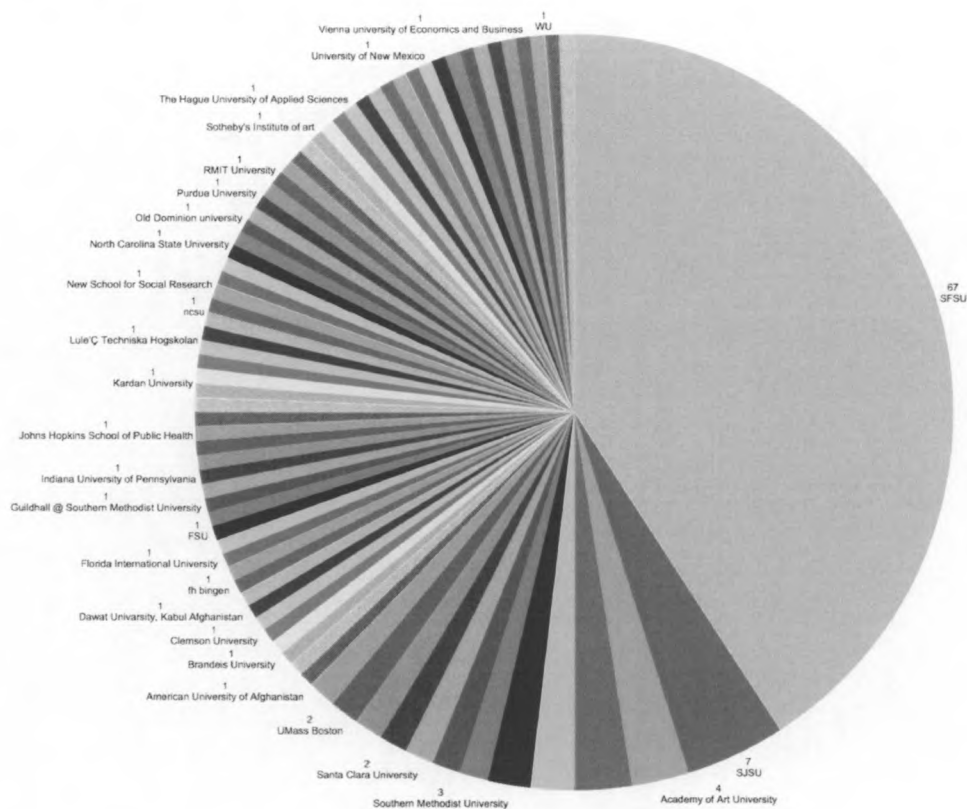
Survey participants come from a diverse academic background. 29.1% (N=87) of survey

participants are enrolled in Communications/Media programs. Listings under "other",

with 21.1% (N=63) included Kinesiology, Training and Employee success, Education,

Economics and Genetics, Human Resources, Game Design, Law, User Experience

Research, Healthcare, Aviation, Higher Education, Travel/Hospitality, Forensics,

Diplomacy and TESOL (Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages). 17.7%

(N=53) were enrolled in engineering programs, followed by 16.1% (N=48) enrolled in

business. The survey was taken by 10.7% (N=32) of social sciences students and 5%

(N=15) were enrolled in programs focusing on design. The following graphic shows the fields of study in detail.

Figure 7: Fields of study
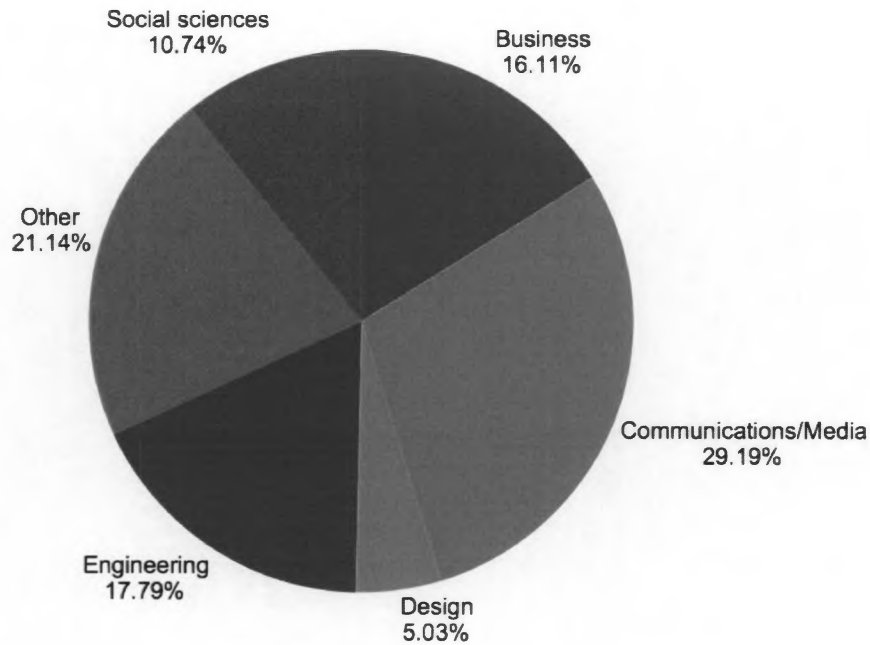
The below map shows the locations of survey participants by country: The most participants recorded were located within the US with 181 respondents, followed by Europe with 58 and Eastern Europe/Asia with 23. To indicate where participants were from, the software program Tableau was used. Judging from the information about latitude and longitude, the program was able to generate where the individual respondents were located.

Figure 8: Location of survey participants

The purpose of surveying American, international university students, and working professionals lies in the variety of professional networks that exist outside of the US, which could potentially be of interest to LinkedIn in order to learn from and build new features. In order to generate richer data, some quantitative questions included a follow up qualitative question. Most of the participants with 34.3% were between the ages 22-25 and 26-29 (N=109), followed by participants aged 30 years and over with 22.2% (N=70) and 9.2% (N=29) were aged 18-21. The International Review Board (IRB) requires special permissions from participants younger than 18, which is why the survey only sought participants who were 18 or older.

Measures

In order to measure why young adults are underutilizing LinkedIn, a cross-sectional survey was designed using Qualtrics. The questionnaire received approval from

the International Review Board (IRB) on human subjects. Data collection took place over two months and participants answered 14 questions, which revealed demographic information, such as age, major, academic institution and academic status (See Appendix A for questionnaire). Original measures were developed to reveal reasons for the underutilization of LinkedIn's services and to fit the specific sample that was reached with the questionnaire.

The survey included multiple choice and open-ended questions to give insight into why young adults are not as active on LinkedIn as other age groups. The questionnaire first asked for the participant's age, followed by the academic status. Here, participants could choose between first year/freshman, second year/sophomore, third year/junior, fourth year/senior, graduate student, or working professional. If respondents were still enrolled in university, they were asked to list their academic institution, followed by their field of study or the field they are working in.

The next question asked respondents if they had a LinkedIn account, followed by how they heard about LinkedIn. Participants could select friends, teachers, co-workers, online, classmates, and family. For this question, respondents had the option to select all that apply, and an additional text field allowed to enter text manually. If respondents answered they did not yet have a LinkedIn account, they were directed to the question asking if they were planning to create an account in the future or not. If answered with no, participants were asked to list reasons for not planning on signing up in the future. Participants could choose all that apply: I don't have time, I don't know how to use it/its confusing, I have a job already/not looking for a job, I don't see the benefit of it, I use

other professional networks, and an additional text field allowed for manually entered data. If participants used other professional networks, a text box asked to name the respective network.

The next question asked about how respondents search for jobs and internships. All answers that applied could be selected and manually entered text allowed for additional data collection. The answer choices included: online portals, the usage of personal connections, university internship board, internship class taken at university, other social networks, I am not currently searching for a job/internship.

The following question asked about the frequency of participants' LinkedIn usage. Participants could choose between daily, weekly, monthly, hardly ever, and never. For each answer choice, respondents were asked to give reasons for their frequency in LinkedIn usage. The next question asked about what participants use LinkedIn for. All answer options that applied could be selected and respondents chose between connecting with friends, connecting with professionals, looking up companies, looking for jobs/internships, as an online resume, and an added text box allowed for other text entry.

The following question asked students to indicate with yes or no, if they had learned about LinkedIn in any of their classes. The following question asked participants about which features would enhance their LinkedIn experience. The choices, of which participants could select all that applied, were: chat window, creating team groups for project collaborations, an opportunity to showcase creative visual work, and an additional text field to enter their answer manually. The last question was an open-ended one,

asking participants for additional attributes that would make LinkedIn more appealing to them (see Appendix A for full survey).

Results

It was hypothesized that young adults underutilize LinkedIn because they do not know how to use it for their benefit. The hypothesis did not find full support, since 80.7% of participants had a LinkedIn account. Having a profile does not mean that participants were using the site actively, however, the frequency of their usage indicated higher utilization. Results suggested that respondents who did not yet have a LinkedIn profile expressed no desire to sign up in the future and noted that they are confused by the site and do not see the benefit of using the network.

Basak and Calisir (2014) researched the uses and gratifications of Turkish LinkedIn users and listed the highest ranked items of users by importance, which included building a network, seeing who has viewed my profile, searching for jobs, and following the career progression of my contacts. The author's findings resonate with the findings of this study, since participants indicated connecting with professionals and looking for jobs/internships as most important.

The first research question asked about reasons for young adults to underutilize LinkedIn for professional purposes and networking. Results indicate that nonusers of LinkedIn do not see the benefit of joining the network (26.4%) and did not know how to use the site or found it confusing (20.59%). Further, results showed that LinkedIn was not regarded a destination for their job search, since other social networks, such as Twitter and Facebook, were preferred (14.71%).

Research question two asked about how LinkedIn can expand to attract, include and serve young adults. Among others, participants suggested a simpler interface and

better opportunities to showcase creative work.

When asked if participants had a LinkedIn account, 80.7% (N=241) answered yes and 19.26% (N=57) answered no. Participants who had an account heard about LinkedIn mostly through friends, which 30.4% (N=103) stated or were introduced to LinkedIn online, which 22.4% (N=76) said. 14.2% (N=49) of participants heard about LinkedIn from classmates and 11.8% (N=40) named teachers as a source, 11.5% (N=39) listed co-workers and 6.2% (N=21) family. 3.2% (N=11) noted that they received an invitation to join online or did not remember how they heard about LinkedIn.

Figure 9: How did participants hear about LinkedIn?
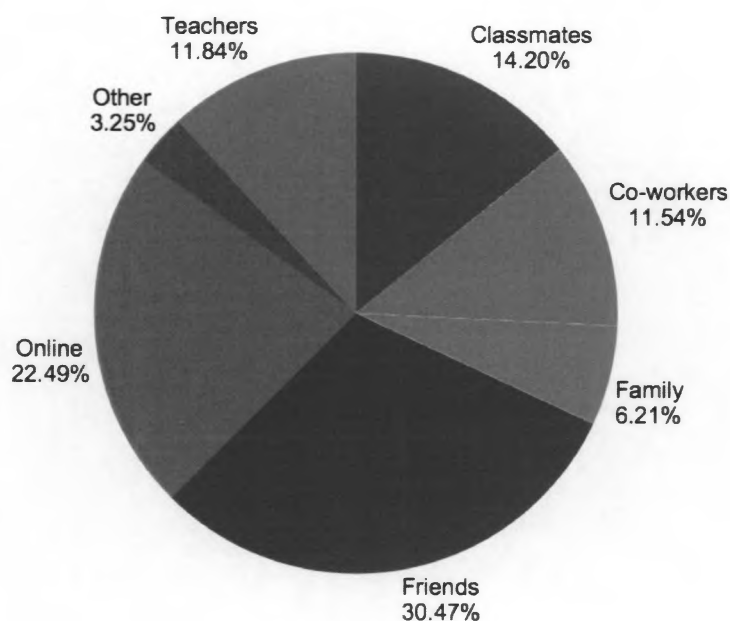
Participants that did not yet have a LinkedIn account were asked if they were planning on creating a profile in the future, of which 37.2% (N=22) answered yes and 62.7% (N=37) answered no.

Figure 10: Are participants planning on signing up for LinkedIn?
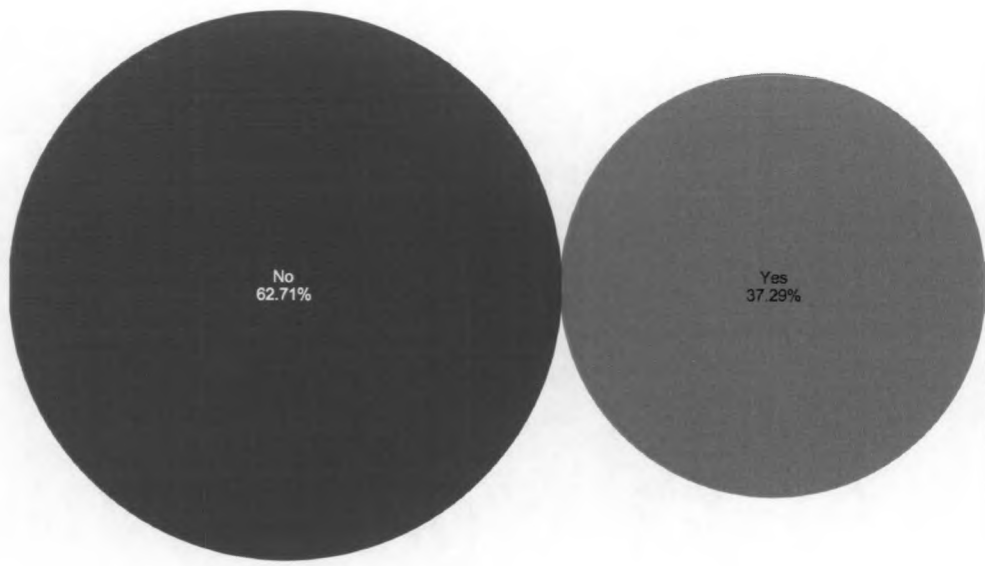
When asked why participants are not planning on creating an account, 26.4% (N=9), stated that they do not see the benefit of it, followed by 20.5% (N=7) stating I don't know how to use it/its confusing. 20.5% said they have a job already or are not looking for a job (N=7), and 14.7% (N=5) said they use other professional or personal networks. 14.7% (N=5) mentioned other reasons for not planning on creating an account: I don't know what to use it for, I might start using it in the future, LinkedIn is not useable for teachers, privacy concerns over personal information, and not wanting to show off one's resume online. 2.9% (N=1) said they don't have time.

Figure 11: Reasons for not planning on creating a LinkedIn profile
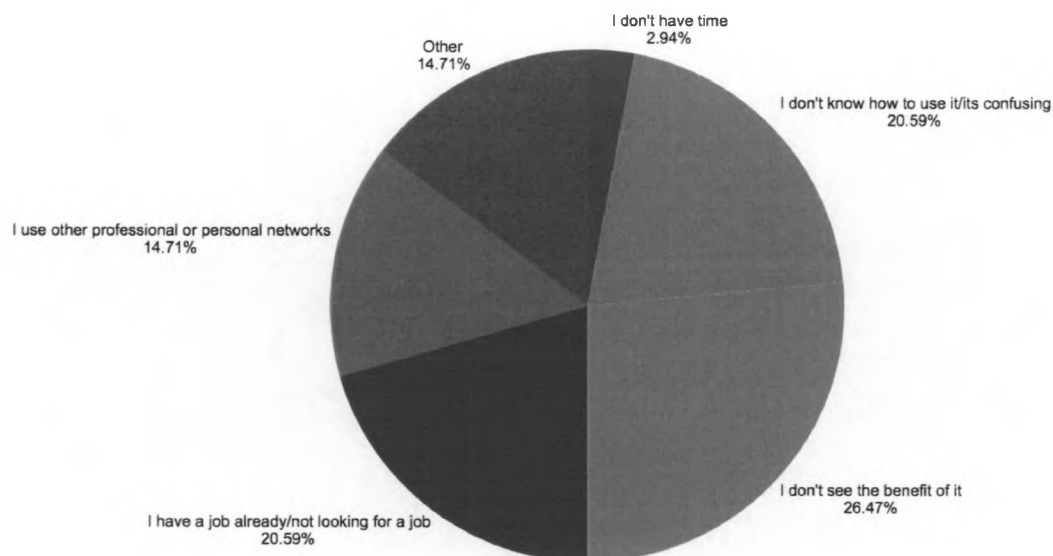
When asked how they search for internships/jobs, 32.2% (N=174) said they utilized online portals in their job search, followed by using personal connections with 27.8% (N=150). 15.2% (N=82) did not currently look for a job, and 12.2% (N=66) relied on their university internship board. 6.3% (N=34) utilized other social networks. Here, one participant mentioned academicjobs.com, another responded using Twitter. Two participants listed acbar.org, and four respondents listed Xing. Viadeo, Indeed, core77, and The Muse were each mentioned by one person. Under other, 3.3% (N=18) several participants listed craigslist, and searching directly on company websites. Followed by one participant listing jobs.af, websites of organizations, the American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA), governmental websites, and the Association internationale des étudiants en sciences économiques et commerciales (AIESEC). One respondent noted

headhunters, Google, and local businesses. 2.7% (N= 15) start their job search with an

internship class offered as part of the class schedule at their university.

Figure 12: How do participants search for jobs?
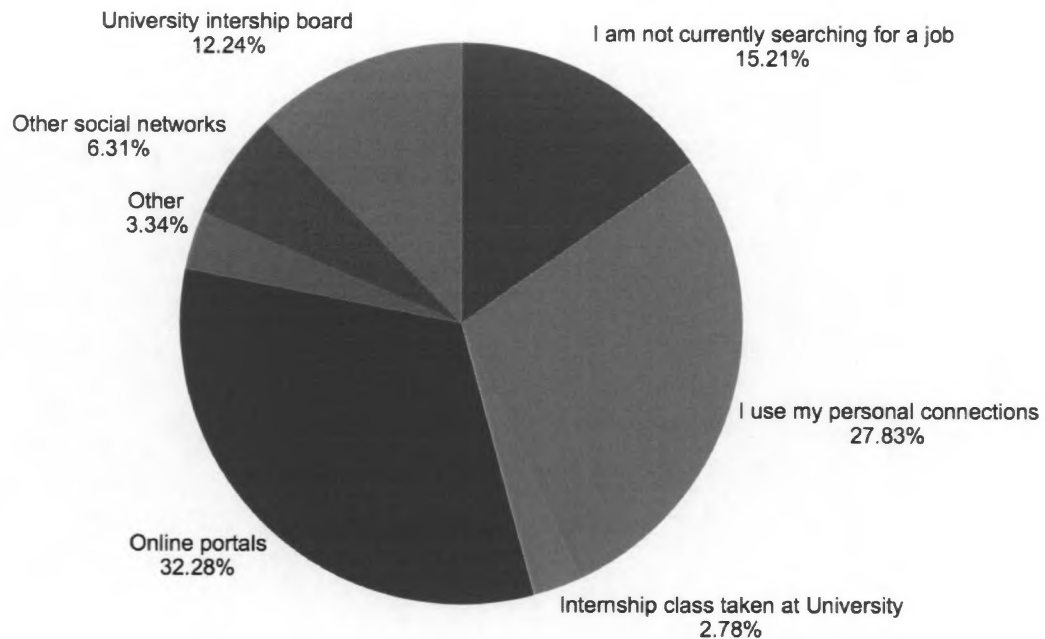
The following question concentrated on the frequency of which survey

respondents use LinkedIn. 41.9% of survey participants said they use LinkedIn on a

weekly basis, followed by monthly with 19.65%. 14.4% use LinkedIn on a daily basis.

16.5% of respondents answered they hardly use LinkedIn and 7.4% said they never use

the site.

Figure 13: How frequently do participants use LinkedIn?
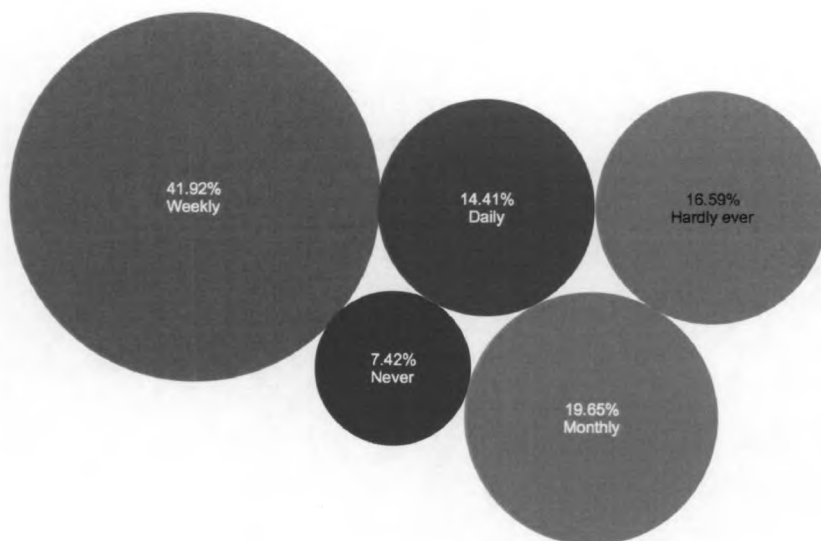
An additional text box gave participants the opportunity to indicate reasons for their frequency in LinkedIn usage. When used weekly, most respondents noted their reason for logging into LinkedIn on a weekly basis is to check updates made by friends and people in their network, to keep in touch with co-workers, as well as to check messages and requests to connect. Participants checking in daily said they try to keep their profile up-to-date, add information, and to search for new jobs posted, connect with friends or old classmates, and read updates. A user checking in daily said the articles posted by network connections are valuable and relate to the work the respondent is doing. Participants who answered they hardly ever or never use LinkedIn said they do not see the benefit of checking in or find it not helpful, the site is too complicated or not user-friendly enough to use, or are not currently looking for a job or internship. Based on the

data, respondents from outside the US noted that LinkedIn is not widely used in their

countries, which does not present them with enough incentives to use the service. The

graphic below shows responses to the question of what respondents use LinkedIn for.

25% (N=10) of survey participants use LinkedIn to connect with professionals and to

look for job openings. 20% (N=8) noted that they find LinkedIn useful to look up

companies and information about companies of interest, as well as looking up employees

working for them. 12.5% (N=5) said they use LinkedIn to connect with friends and peers,

followed by the option to use it as an online resume, which 10% (N=4) of participants

said. 7.5% (N=3) of participants indicated other reasons, such as looking up contact

details of connections.

Figure 14: What do participants use LinkedIn for?
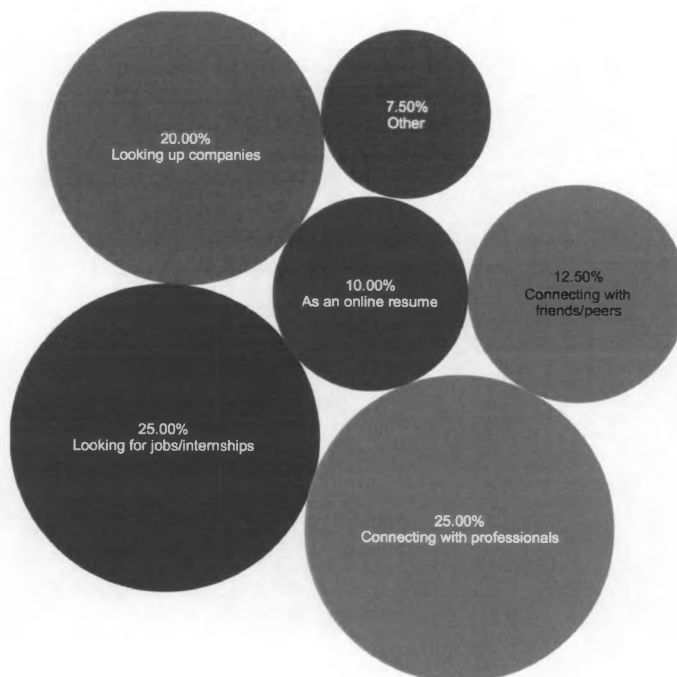
The following question asked respondents to indicate if they heard about LinkedIn and its services in any of their classes at university. Most participants, with 87.7% (N=243) answered with no, while 12.2% (N=34) had heard about LinkedIn in one of their classes.

Figure 15: Did participants hear about LinkedIn in any of their classes?
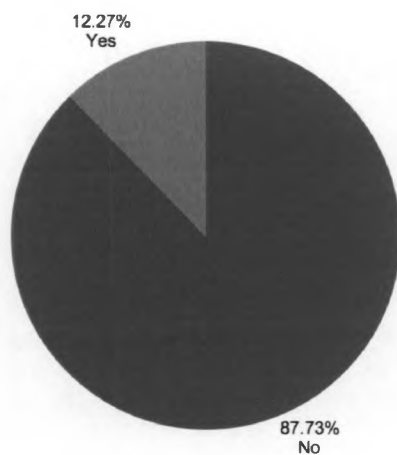
When asked which features would enhance participant's LinkedIn experience, 37.1% (N=141) noted an opportunity to showcase creative work. 31.5% (N=120) mentioned that creating team groups for project collaborations would be useful. This was followed by 18.4% (N=70) stating they would appreciate a chat window similar to Facebook. 12.8% (N=49) listed other features. Participants named privacy features, a better job search engine, a completely free subscription service, a way to showcase creative audio work, and a way to define the core group of close connections. Certain comments were not usable, since some participants commented "not applicable" or "I have no suggestion".

Figure 16: Which features would enhance user's LinkedIn experience?

Chat window
18.42%

Showcase creative work
37.11%

Creating team groups
31.58%

Other
12.89%
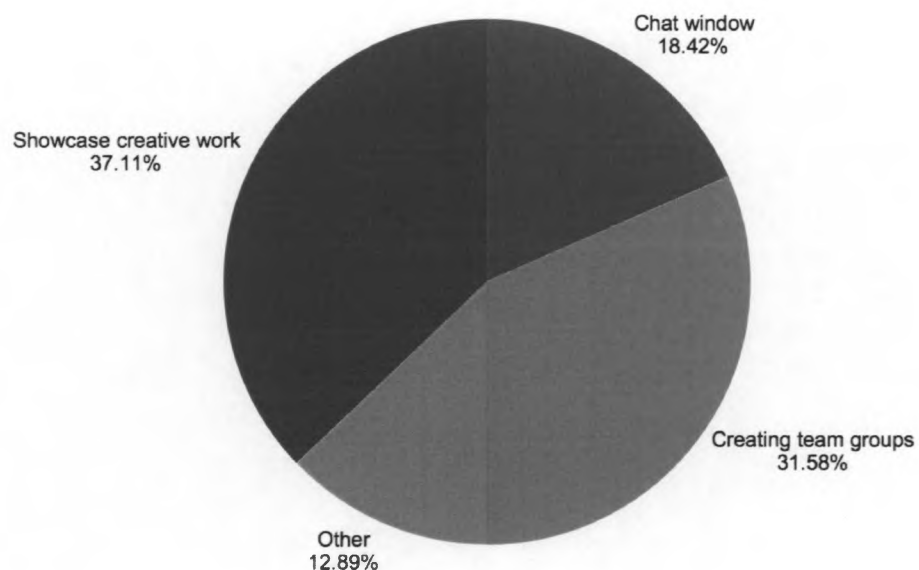
Figure 17: What would make LinkedIn more appealing to users?

Personal development for students
More variety in job search
Too many features Student discount
Better job search results Focus on students
Too clutteredBetter User Interface
Academia.edu Sharing less information
More campus tours
More internship focused   Privacy
Showcase creative work

Based on the data collected, the above word cloud indicates common themes

retrieved from the last survey question asking for recommendations on how to make

LinkedIn more attractive for young adult users. Among the most commonly mentioned

themes were: a better user interface that appears less cluttered and overflowing with information, privacy concerns, and better search results specifically for students. Participants noted that the site is too unorganized and suggested: "A more intuitive interface that flows is more structured". Another participant noted "It would be good if LinkedIn was easier to use, since sometimes I think it is only efficient if you spend a lot of time on it". Participants from Europe raised concerns about having their profile too publicly accessible and the many options to complete the profile reveal too much information some participants were not inclined to provide: "I don't think everyone needs to see what I have done, except the people or companies I choose". This goes back to the different cultures of sharing information online and privacy restrictions based on different countries' rules and regulations. Several participants added that a service similar to the platform Academia.edu or a partnership with them would initiate greater LinkedIn usage.

Participants expressed their interest in wanting to learn about how to use LinkedIn: "More education on how to use and how to use LinkedIn for students' advantage would be helpful". Additionally, one participant noted: "It would be good to have a feature that helps explain how to network and set up a great profile. That would be so helpful". Respondents appeared to be unaware of LinkedIn's features for young adults, since some participants noted a lack of instructions on how to network and connect with others on LinkedIn.

Discussion

It was hypothesized that young adults underutilize LinkedIn because they do not know how to use it for their benefit. Results showed, however, that most survey participants had a LinkedIn account and were using it mostly on a weekly basis. Nonusers of LinkedIn noted that they are not using the network due to lacking incentive to sign up.

The first research question asked about reasons for young adults to underutilize LinkedIn for professional purposes and networking. Nonusers expressed that they do not see the benefit of having a LinkedIn account, find the site confusing and did not know how to use it. These findings resonate with Florenthal (2015), who found that nonusers of LinkedIn had misconceptions about using the site and did not believe it can be useful to them. The study found that nonusers were aware of LinkedIn but did not see the benefit in creating an account before beginning their job search.

Research question two asked about how LinkedIn can expand to attract, include and serve young adults. Here, participants suggested that LinkedIn still does not offer enough features for students, which demonstrates a lack of familiarity with the network and the previously mentioned features for students. LinkedIn reached out to high school students by allowing them to explore university profiles and career paths, but participants who are enrolled in degree programs expressed that there are not enough job opportunities for students available to browse. Overall, participants mentioned the need for a greater focus on internship opportunities and entry-level positions. Students in creative programs noted that portfolios cannot be embedded in their profile well enough

except for allowing to link to external sites.

The following sections discuss the implications for LinkedIn and for its young adult users based on this study's results.

Implications for LinkedIn

Participants mentioned the difficulty for younger users to generate high-level professional content to share on LinkedIn, as opposed to working professionals with experience. It would be more appealing if content would better fit their profile, with a focus on students who are still enrolled in university. Here, suggestions for conferences nearby or opportunities for personal development in the area would demonstrate relevant information for them. Resonating comments included setting up training sessions on how to use LinkedIn at more college campuses. Respondents overall seemed interested in learning how to use LinkedIn effectively and noted that being taught how to use it would change their user habits.

In addition, participants noted that LinkedIn's user interface and the homepage design should be made simpler. A clearer, better organization of the site would increase their LinkedIn usage. Respondents said LinkedIn's design is overwhelming and too much information can be accessed at once, making it complicated to use. For some participants the site is too unstructured and lacks focus. There is an overload of information on the landing page, as a user is presented with new jobs that are supposed to match their previous searches and at the same time, the user can read posts published by their own network, follow more people, congratulate connections on new jobs or anniversaries. In addition, users have the chance to view who has seen their profile, improve that profile,

share and update, upload a photo, or publish a post. While it is certainly useful to present users with the options they have to best utilize the site, some survey participants were deterred by the many possibilities presented all at once, asking for a simpler user interface. Additionally, participants were not pleased with the results that LinkedIn turned up for their job search, and with the job suggestions presented on their homepage. Participants said that the job-searching tool would not return satisfying enough results that matched their searches. Also, some said that, based on their search preferences, the job suggestions offered by LinkedIn often do not match their previous searches, for instance suggesting senior positions, when they were looking for entry-level roles. Some argued that overall, the majority of jobs listed on LinkedIn appear to be senior positions, while there seem to fewer entry-level positions listed. While LinkedIn does have a job board for internships and entry-level jobs, after conducting the survey, it appears that participants are not aware that this feature exists. This is an opportunity for LinkedIn to increase its efforts to cater to their young adult users, perhaps restructuring student profiles, leading them directly to the designated job board pages after they sign up, educating them about the features available specifically to them. Participants noted that LinkedIn does not offer a satisfying way for users to present creative work appropriately. Offering to link to external pages showcasing their online creative portfolio does not have the same effect as embedding an opportunity to highlight creative work on their LinkedIn profile directly. Participants with a background in design related fields noted that this addition to the profile would make a difference in their LinkedIn user habits, being able to display their work, making it visible instantly instead of

requiring visiting an external page. That way, a lasting impression on profile visitors can be made immediately. Overall, survey participants conveyed that they are looking for a better way to present their work, if that includes blog posts or other writing samples, design work, or coding challenges in which they might have participated. Considering the amount of professionals on LinkedIn, young adults need to have leverage matching their experience and background. LinkedIn urges users to highlight student work on their profiles, however, this needs to be done in a way that satisfies users and helps them to make their work directly visible to create a lasting impression.

When asked if participants who did not have a LinkedIn profile planned on creating one in the future, 62% of participants answered no. When asked for reasons not to create an account, most participants said they did not see the benefit of using LinkedIn, followed by they do not know how to use it, or they are not currently looking for a job. The results show that survey participants are looking for an experience that is more tailored to fit their background and overall, where they are in life at the moment. One participant noted that LinkedIn is not useable for teachers, which could present another area for the network to further expand on the high school level. Participants mentioned that having an opportunity to organize class projects or collaborations among students for school would be useful for them on LinkedIn. This could mean the inclusion of teachers to supervise or give advice on projects and assignments.

Further, participants were asked if they learned about LinkedIn in any of their college classes. 87.7% said they did not, which presents an opportunity for LinkedIn to expand by, for instance, sending college ambassadors to universities across the country to

educate students about LinkedIn's services. Guiding students' face-to-face awareness

opportunities can create a better understanding of how the network can be useful to them

and provides LinkedIn with the chance to build better relationships with this

demographic.

Moreover, survey participants were concerned about privacy and the disclosure of

information on LinkedIn. One international participant mentioned he prefers not to share

too much information about work history. Therefore, the compliance with US-EU and

US-Swiss Safe Harbor Frameworks, which regard the collection, use, and retention of

personal data from European Union member countries and Switzerland (LinkedIn

Privacy Policy, 2015) is important to European users. Results show that European survey

participants are cautious with their private data and what they share publicly on social

networks. One participant noted that he does not feel comfortable sharing certain

information about employment history with others over privacy concerns.

Madden and Smith (2010) in a study asked 18-29 year olds how much they trust

social networking sites like LinkedIn and Facebook. 28% of social network users

answered never. With the vast variety of social networks to join, Claybaugh and

Haseman (2013) investigated the impact trust has on the strength of association between

LinkedIn members and how professionals form relationships on LinkedIn. Findings

showed that some survey participants were concerned about sharing too much

information online by building a LinkedIn profile. The study found that participants were

hesitant using LinkedIn over privacy concerns, which were reflected in an overall

relatively low usage of the network. By adding a person on LinkedIn as a direct

connection, people put themselves at risk of disclosing personal information to third parties.

Adams (2014), however, highlights the importance of networking and adds that it is something done specifically on LinkedIn, with the purpose of showing immediately who the jobseeker is connected to and to what degree. Certainly, professional networks encourage finding connections and expanding one's connections, which brings with it exposure within the professional network. However, Claybaugh and Haseman (2013) posited that "if an individual feels the reward associated with posting his or her resume online [it] outweighs the potential risks that it creates" (p.98). LinkedIn needs to provide an environment that makes it easier for members to trust others when making connections.

Hoofnagle, King, Li, and Turow (2010) claim that young adults do not care about information privacy, especially in an online environment. Hoofnagle et al. (2010) mention young adults adoption of blogs, social networking sites, the posting of photos, and generally their tendency to overshare aspects of their private lives online with no regard to privacy. It appears that adolescents are more willing to take privacy risks than young adults, and the benefits of oversharing online outweigh the negative consequences it might bring with it. Further, Hoofnagle et al. (2010) note that social networking sites increasingly encourage members to share more information with their peers, or to take necessary steps to complete one's profile. Encouraging members and directly asking them to disclose more information, makes members think less about privacy and about the consequences of revealing more information. Social networking services are aware

that their members need to feel safe using their sites. Privacy policies are essential, since it is important to address user concerns. Having a privacy policy reassures social network users and makes them more comfortable (Claybaugh & Haseman, 2013).

As mentioned previously, professional networks encourage providing information to position oneself in the professional sphere. According to Morgan (2014), 70% of jobs are found through networking and most jobs are either filled internally by companies or through employee referrals. While young adults are actively using social networks such as Facebook and Twitter, a study carried out by Statista, one of the world's largest portals for statistics, showed the percentage of US LinkedIn users as of September 2013 by age group. The data revealed that the largest age group present on LinkedIn were 30-49 year-olds, while only 15% of users on LinkedIn were between 18-29. A more recent study from 2014, however, showed a significant change in LinkedIn usage among the 18-29 demographic, which rose to 23% within one year (2015). The 8% increase was due to features created in 2013 to serve younger audiences, like University Pages. LinkedIn continued to create features catered to students in an attempt to keep up with other professional networks, like The Muse. Further, the features address the needs of younger LinkedIn users, who are just about to begin their college career and are not thinking about jobs and a professional career yet. The University Pages feature allows students to explore universities worldwide and contact alumni. The Decision Board allows potential students to compare university options based on their career choices and interests. A next step for LinkedIn during the process was to lower the sign-up age to join the network, which now made it possible for high school students to create a LinkedIn profile (Allen,

2013). Additional education features, such as the ability to list courses taken at university or highlighting projects, are likely to continue creating a more satisfying experience for young adult users, while increasing LinkedIn's potential for further development and expansion.

Shierholz, Davis and Kimball (2014) reported an unemployment rate of 8.5% for young college graduates. In 2007, the unemployment rate for college graduates was 5.5% (2014). A study conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics concluded that by fall 2014, 21 million students were expected to attend American colleges and universities, which represents an increase of 5.7 million since the fall semester of 2000 (2014). This statistic shows the scope of this age group and makes clear how large a market they create. Given the 8% increase in LinkedIn users aging 18-29 from 2013 to 2014, the interest in LinkedIn by this age group rose and LinkedIn needs to continue to include and serve this group to attract more users in the 18-29 demographic.

This study showed that nonusers of LinkedIn did not know how to use the site for their benefit. LinkedIn offers students detailed information on how to set up a student profile and gives tips on how to brand oneself.

Implications for Young Adult's LinkedIn Usage

The job search on LinkedIn begins with the creation of a profile. Here, the importance of adding skills and using relevant key words is mentioned. This can result in being found by recruiters and can make a big difference in successfully using LinkedIn as a job-searching tool. Connecting strategically, reaching out to people in the immediate environment, adding friends and family first, followed by former and current co-workers.

Columbia University's Center for Career Education suggests not to use the standard connection request offered by LinkedIn, but to customize the message to provide context for the people. Further, recommendations can be requested and given by a range of people, who can give insight into a specific task or highlight certain skills that the jobseeker wants to highlight. Further, joining groups can be a next step in meeting people with similar interests. Groups should be joined after careful consideration to make sure they can be utilized successfully and are active enough in terms of content posted.

There are crucial steps in the process of creating an impressive online presence. The first step is the task of finding the personal brand, which includes efforts in marketing the name, personality, expertise, and style of a candidate. This process is an ongoing initiative to keep building one's brand online, based on experience and career goals. Students need to have an understanding of what their career goals are and where their strengths and weaknesses lie, what they are passionate about and what their personal niche in the job market may be. Students should think about what makes them unique and sets them apart from others. The personal brand can then be applied to the job search directly, guiding the process as an evaluation tool to understand other's needs and how the specific skills of the jobseeker can fit those needs. Personal branding is about conveying internal characteristics to satisfy external needs. When utilizing social media for the purpose of finding a job, the search can be made more specific and can broaden its scope. Social media allows for the creation of a personal brand that highlights special skills and professionalism. Online branding efforts need to create a cohesive ad campaign highlighting the benefits of the candidate and explain why he or she is the ideal match

(Columbia University Center for Career Education).

There are many ways in which students can showcase their work online, which signifies their commitment and level of professionalism. LinkedIn is a tool for students' self-promotion, allowing them to publish their personal profile. Social networking on LinkedIn can help students identify and get in touch with other students, faculty, alumni, and professionals in their field of study or their desired career area. Further, LinkedIn supports students in gaining career knowledge while browsing for jobs (McCorkle & McCorkle, 2012).

Harris and Rae (2011) acknowledge that ongoing time and effort are needed to create and maintain the online presence. Users may not see results immediately, however, investing time into building one's online brand will pay off. Authenticity is an important factor in the creation of an online presence. Being authentic means to include a track record of achievements that are honest and promise "the ongoing delivery of value" (p. 20). Traditional documents such as the resume need to be updated regularly in order to reflect professional growth and experience. Online resumes and traditional paper versions complement each other highlighting experience on the one side and personality traits on the other. Online resumes, as on LinkedIn, can be built out to give a well-rounded impression of the person. Here, Adams (2014) suggests regarding LinkedIn as a destination for an online resume only. LinkedIn does not offer an opportunity to highlight aspects that are not directly relevant to the job history, which can be added on Facebook, for instance, instead.

Career coach Marie McIntyre suggests working knowledge of LinkedIn is a must and advises newcomers to the site to dive in and work through the process of creating a profile. Further, McIntyre notes that LinkedIn presents students the opportunity to target contacts more precisely. This can be done better on LinkedIn as opposed to social functions or business meetings, since persons of interest can be searched for and found on LinkedIn easily (Conklin, 2015). The possibilities for young adults to participate on LinkedIn are plentiful, however, they need to be utilized to their full potential to lead to success.

As mentioned previously, LinkedIn offers detailed information for young adults on how to set up an account and begin the job search. The site's features are highlighted and one can get an idea of what kinds of jobs can be searched for. The majority of jobs published on LinkedIn, however, are jobs that do not include blue-collar positions, despite the size of the workforce. Pofeldt (2015) reports that over 40% of the US workforce consists of independent contractors. This presents great potential for LinkedIn when including that demographic. Schwartz (2013) argues that LinkedIn is a valuable resource for jobseekers, as long as they are searching for certain kinds of positions. The author points to her own professional network on LinkedIn, stating that companies featured, or jobs presented to her solely include white collar positions. Familiar names appear in searches on LinkedIn, such as Microsoft, Genentech, or Apple. Schwartz adds that the job positions offered lack blue-collar roles, which is why welding or electrical jobs at such companies are hard to find.

The network WorkHands, a job network specifically for blue-collar workers offers jobseekers opportunities in skilled labor industries such as construction, plumbing, welding, and landscaping. The profile set-up is similar to LinkedIn, but WorkHands users are required to showcase their work including pictures of their welding or electrical work. The profile allows for a listing of skills, just like on LinkedIn, only focused on tools and machinery the users are familiar with. Once the profile is set up and complete, it can also be printed out in paper resume form.

According to Schwartz, more than 500 workers have tested the beta version of WorkHands in partnership with a college in Oakland, California. As a result, students at the college found jobs through WorkHands, which led the platform to expand its collaborations with other companies. The founders of WorkHands aim to better serve the blue-collar job market, which is not as widely represented by LinkedIn (Schwartz, 2013). LinkedIn, however, is seeking to include this particular demographic better. According to LinkedIn Co-founder Allen Blue, the network is aiming to eliminate the reputation of being an exclusive network for knowledge workers (Jacobs, 2015). With the acquisition of Bright, a US-based job site that uses a scoring mechanism to connect jobseekers with employers, a number of blue-collar jobs were able to be brought to LinkedIn as a first step to better include this demographic. LinkedIn wants to compete with alternative niche-professional networks by eventually delivering value to millions of blue-collar workers.

Only time will tell if LinkedIn will be successful in better serving blue-collar workers or if alternative niche-professional networks will prove successful.

Suggestions for further study

Participants who did not have a LinkedIn account noted that they do not see the benefit of using LinkedIn and find the site confusing. They expressed that their inhibitions keep them from creating an account. Therefore, further research possibilities are plentiful. Research could be conducted to shed light onto the benefits of using LinkedIn and the suggested tools early on. This can be done for different groups of people: high school students utilizing the University Pages or Decision Board features or for college students, who are starting to build a professional network. This would give insight into the success of LinkedIn's features for students.

A study could be conducted on the way profiles are constructed in different countries and regions. As mentioned previously, the American culture varies distinctively from European culture and this might be visible in the way profiles are presented. Depending on the country's culture, LinkedIn users might differ in the way they present themselves online and in terms of disclosing information. A study researching European and American profiles for example, could be helpful in pointing out where LinkedIn needs to focus on in addressing cultural differences when promoting and expanding the networks' services. Research should be conducted studying cultural implications for LinkedIn users across the globe. This could reveal how openly users in other countries share information.

Since most participants said they did not learn about LinkedIn in any of their classes in college, this leaves room for LinkedIn to improve. Numerous universities are on LinkedIn with their school's profile and are searchable for students already. It seems a

reasonable suggestion to have LinkedIn partner with universities on educating students further about the services LinkedIn offers, in order to take away the impression that mostly older users benefit from LinkedIn.

Limitations and conclusion

This study has several limitations. After evaluating the data, it became clear that certain questions might have been answered more clearly if stated differently. Offering open-ended questions was necessary in order to generate more individual answers. However, conducting in-person interviews might have generated higher quality responses. For in-person interviews, a number lower than 300 participants would have to be chosen. Future research could include a series of focus groups to gain further qualitative insight on LinkedIn user habits.

From the answers recorded it was noticeable that some participant's familiarity with LinkedIn was limited, making it difficult for them to provide constructive criticism. By removing participants who do not use LinkedIn from the sum would create less biased results. For instance, the questions could have been formulated focusing more on LinkedIn's features for young adults, asking participants about their awareness of these features. This would have made clear if participants knew about features like the Decision Board or University Pages.

Further, the majority of participants belong to the author's personal and extended social networks, which may have resulted in a biased sample. Future research should be conducted by randomly selecting participants, in order to receive unbiased results and reach a more diverse audience.

Results indicate that, in order for young adults to increase their LinkedIn usage, the site should feature a clearer user interface, which is less overflowing with information and more clear. Users noted wanting better search results specifically for students, since most positions offered appear to target experienced jobseekers. Here, LinkedIn needs to improve its algorithm to cover more use cases and to return more refined search results. Additionally, efforts need to be increased to educate young adults on the features, such as University Pages or Decision Boards. Therefor, LinkedIn should send more company ambassadors to universities across the country to hold sessions about how to effectively use LinkedIn. These sessions could be accommodated by workshops on how to create a profile that will stand out. Professional photos could be taken during such workshops, which could be used for the student profiles. These initiatives would strengthen the relationship between LinkedIn and students and can change their misconceptions about the network. Several participants added that a service similar to the platform Academia.edu or a partnership with them would initiate greater LinkedIn usage.

In conclusion, young adults need a network that appeals to their needs, no matter if they are still in university, a recent graduate, or if they already have professional work experience. Each group has different needs depending on their status. When still enrolled in university, students need a network with internship opportunities. Recent graduates and young professionals with some work experience need to be able to browse entry-level positions that match their experience level.

Having a Higher Education function within the company ensures that LinkedIn is on the right track to further including younger users and setting them up for success.

Features that appeal to younger users will continue to increase the value of LinkedIn for a younger user base and will work towards connecting professionals to make them more successful.

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APPENDIX A

LinkedIn questionnaire

1. How old are you?

    a. 18-21

    b. 22-25

    c. 26-29

    d. 30 and over

2. What is your academic status?

    a. First year/Freshman

    b. Second year/Sophomore

    c. Third year/Junior

    d. Fourth year/Senior

    e. Graduate student

    f. Working professional

3. Which University/College are you currently attending?

4. What is your field of study/the field you are working in?

5. Do you have a LinkedIn account?

6. How did you hear about LinkedIn?

7. Do you plan to create an account in the future?

8. Please state why you are not planning on creating a LinkedIn account in the future.

LinkedIn questionnaire continued

9. How do you search for internships/jobs? (Choose all that apply).

    a. Online portals (Internmatch/indeed/monster etc.)

    b. I use my personal connections

    c. University internship board

    d. Internship class taken at university

    e. Other social networks (please list which)

    f. Other

    g. I am not currently searching for a job/internship

10. If you have a LinkedIn account, how frequently do you use it?

    a. Daily, please state why below

    b. Weekly, please state why below

    c. Monthly, please state why below

    d. Hardly ever, please state why below

    e. Never, please state why below

11. What do you use LinkedIn for? (Choose all that apply).

    a. Connecting with friends and peers

    b. Connecting with professionals

    c. Looking up companies (company profiles, employees)

    d. Looking for jobs/internships

    e. As an online resume

LinkedIn questionnaire continued

    f. Other

12. If you are studying, did you learn about how to use LinkedIn in any of your classes?

    a. Yes

    b. No

13. Which of the following features do you think would enhance your LinkedIn experience? (Choose all that apply).

    a. Chat window (similar to Facebook)

    b. Creating team groups for project collaboration (instead of Facebook group)

    c. An opportunity to showcase creative visual work

    d. Other

14. What would make LinkedIn more appealing to you?