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Online digital social tools for professional self-promotion. A State of the Art review

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Abstracts

Introduction. The metamorphosis experienced in recent years by the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and the emergence of the web 2.0 have substantially changed the guidelines to look for and obtain jobs, from the perspective of both employers and potential employees. Job hunting is no longer a face-to-face process; job seekers now use a diversity of web-based digital tools –employment websites, social networks and blogs, among others- that allow them to promote their resume and find job offerings that best fit their professional profile. **Method.** This article reviews the most important and recent scientific literature on the use of this type of resources designed to promote people’s professional qualifications. **Results.** The main purpose of this work is to expose the different methodological instruments that have been used to deal with our object of study (online digital tools for professional self-promotion), as well as their conclusions, in order to assess the State of the Art in this subject matter.

Keywords

Employment websites; social networking; blogs; methodology; State of the Art.

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Translation of **CA Martínez Arcos**, Ph.D. (Universidad Autónoma de Tamaulipas)

1. Introduction

It is a fact: the unstoppable evolution of the information and communication technologies (ICT), the access to the Internet and the emergence of the so-called social networks, have changed our way of inhabiting our social contexts, as well as the way in which we code our reality or project -through multiple and converging significant masks- the image that we aspire to build, spread and perpetuate. According to the 2013 Information Society in Spain Report (*Informe Sociedad de la Información en España 2013*), developed by *Fundación Telefónica*, 25 million Spaniards have access to the Internet (700,000 more than in the previous year) and 19 million use it every day. Of the Spanish population, 53.8% makes heavy use of the Internet. This percentage reaches 86% among 16-24 year-olds. The consolidation of the digital life in Spain is also reflected in the increased use of social networks: 64.1% of Internet users in the last three months use general-interest social networks (Facebook, Twitter or Tuenti). This percentage increases to 94.5% among 16-24 year-olds. In addition, according to the *Estudio General de Medios* (General Media Study), from October 2013 to May 2014, Internet has been the only medium whose social penetration has continued to grow since 1997, reaching 58.5% of the population. For its part, the 2014 survey on ICT equipment and usage in households (*Encuesta sobre Equipamiento y Uso de Tecnologías de Información y Comunicación en los Hogares*) indicates that for the first time ever in Spain there are more Internet users (76.2%) than computer users (73.3%). Of the internet users, 77.1% accessed it via mobile phone, while more than half of the population (51.1%) uses social networks.

In the light of these data, it is not surprising that everyday processes such as job hunting no longer correspond, exclusively, with tangible or face-to-face activities. Instead, now Internet users employ numerous online digital tools –job websites, social networks and blogs, among others- to promote their professional resume on the web and find job openings that best fit their profile. According to Adecco's third study on professional intermediation (*III Estudio Adecco Profesional de Intermediación Laboral*), which surveyed 574 companies with a remarkable geographic and sectoral representativeness and applied an online survey to 8,777 job applicants, found that 48.7% of companies use social networking sites as a mechanism to recruit job candidates. In addition, according to this study, Internet continues to be the favourite medium to recruit managers, technicians and employees (68.8%).

However, in the selection of directors the use of recruitment agencies is still dominant (89%). The info-communications sector is where the Internet has achieved greater penetration as a dissemination medium, reaching over 90% of the surveyed companies. In second place, but far behind, is the industry (69.11%), construction (68.73%) and services (67.06%) sectors. The main source of job opportunities for candidates is personal contacts (97.2%), followed by job websites (76.42%) and companies' corporate websites (73.15%). Finally, the most common sources used by people to search for jobs abroad are national job websites (43.2%), online search engines (38%), foreign job websites (36.1%) and corporate websites (32%).

The clear protagonist role of online social tools in job searching and recruitment has also been clearly strengthened by the global economic crisis that has increased unemployment figures in southern European countries. Without going any further, the Spanish Active Population Survey (*Encuesta de Población Activa*) points out that in the third quarter of 2014, the unemployment rate

stood at 23.67%, i.e. about a quarter of the Spanish population was unemployed. In fact, based on the 5th annual study on social networks (*V Estudio Anual de Redes Sociales*), corresponding to April 2014 and produced by the Interactive Advertising Bureau, the professional networking site LinkedIn is the sixth most used network in Spain, being used by 22% of respondents (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Most popular social networks in Spain (April, 2014).

Social Network	Percentage of users
Facebook	94%
YouTube	68%
Twitter	49%
Google +	41%
Tuenti	22%
LinkedIn	22%

Source: *V Estudio Anual de Redes Sociales* (Interactive Advertising Bureau).

In addition, according to the 2nd report on social networks and job market in Spain, developed by Infoempleo and Adecco (*II Informe Infoempleo y Adecco sobre Redes Sociales y Mercado de Trabajo en España*), corresponding to the year 2013, 64% of human resources professionals consider that candidate who are active in social networks have more job opportunities. Moreover, users themselves value LinkedIn as the most suitable social network to search for jobs, followed by Facebook and Twitter. Finally, when looking for employment, job websites are the favourite source (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Sources always consulted to find employment (2013).

Sources	Percentage of users
Job websites	78%
Contacts	24%
Recruitment agencies	25%
Social networks	19%
Press ads	18%
Other	9%

Source: *II Informe Infoempleo y Adecco sobre Redes Sociales y Mercado de Trabajo en España*.

In a context where the strength of online social media is obvious in professional self-promotion and job hunting, it is necessary to define the ways and perspectives used to analyse the emergence of this phenomenon that is reversing the guidelines which, until just over a decade ago, defined the management of human resources in Spain and in the world. This research constitutes a review of the most important and recent scientific contributions regarding people's use of this type of resources to develop their professional career. The main purpose of this work is to expose the different

methodological instruments used to examine our object of study –online digital tools for professional self-promotion–, as well as their conclusions, in order to establish the state of the art in this subject matter. To this end, this article first addresses the concept and interdisciplinary evolution of the notion of *Social Network* and then examines the so-called *e-recruitment*, that is, the use of online social tools to recruit new employees.

2. Method

In their article titled “Social networks on the Internet”, Musiał and Kazienko (2013: 31-72) argue that J. A. Barnes (1954) coined the term *Social Network*. However, the person responsible for the modern paradigm of Social network is Stanley Milgram (1967 and 1969), whose line of research focused on describing the problems of a small universe through indirect links or relationships. Even if two people X and Y do not know each other directly, they can share common links, such as a third person who knows them both. Milgram conducted two experiments –the Kansas Study and the Nebraska Study– in which he asked several people from a city to prepare a package to be delivered to people who lived in a far-away city and from whom they only knew their first name, occupation and approximate location. Participants were also asked to deliver the package to a person they knew and might have more chances to know the recipient they were randomly assigned. The selected acquaintance should do the same and so on, until they managed to deliver the package to the final recipient. After analysing the missives, Milgram concluded that people living in the United States is part of a social network, in which all people are connected by “six degrees of separation” since each single shipment needed an average of five to seven intermediaries. Milgram’s use of the concept of *Social Network* was adopted and approached by different disciplines. In fact, many authors have developed this notion to propose their own definitions (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Definitions of *Social Network*.

Author	Definition
Wasserman and Faust	The finite set or sets of actors and one or more relations defined on them. Friendship among children in a classroom; all nations in the world and the formal diplomatic connections between them.
Hanneman and Riddle	A set of actors that may have relationships with one another. Family; co-workers in a company; the network of neighbours friendship among students in a classroom

Garton, Haythorntwaite, and Wellman

A set of social entities connected by a set of social relationships. Friendship among people; co-workers in a company; people who communicate with one another via computer.

Hatala

A set of actors with some patterns of interaction or “ties” between them; represented by graphs or diagrams illustrating the dynamics of the various connections and relationships within the group. Co-workers within a company.

Liben-Nowell and Kleinberg

Structures whose nodes represent entities embedded in the social context, and whose edges represent interaction, collaboration, or influence between entities.

Yang, Dia, Cheng, and Lin

An undirected, unweighted graph. Co-authors of the scientific papers in a particular discipline; project groups in a large company; business leaders who have served together on a corporate board of directors

Source: Musiał and Kazienko (2013: 34).

Linton C. Freeman (2012) identifies different stages in the study of social networks. On the one hand, the prehistory of this type of study is linked to the theory of social interconnection and systematic observation. In a second stage are the studies of Psychiatrist Jacob Levy Moreno, who along with his wife Ellen Jennings, developed a new approach he first termed ‘psychological geography’ (1933) and then ‘sociometry’, included in his classic work titled *Who Shall Survive?* (1934) and grounded in group therapy. At the end of the 1930s, following the historiography of Freeman’s networks research (2012), the Graduate School of Harvard University brings together William Lloy Warner, George Elton Mayo, Fritz Roethlisberger, North Whitehead and Lawrence J. Henderson to study the importance and impact of social structures. In addition, the German Jew Kurt Lewin arrives to the United States and, after working at the universities of Cornell and Iowa, founded in the 1940s, at MIT, the Research Centre for Group Dynamics. At Columbia University, Paul Lazarsfeld, incorporates Robert King Merton to his mass communication research

team for the development of a study on the effects of a radio programme. In 1977, in Toronto, Barry Welman proposes the creation of the INSNA, the International Network for Social Network Analysis. Freeman and Welman implemented also in 1977 an electronic system of information exchange (EIES), the first trial of a virtual community and a scientific digital network. In 1981, the INSNA organised, in Tampa, Florida, the first International Conference of social networks, attended by John Barnes, the anthropologist recognised as the first to use the concept of social network. Along with the organisation of the conferences in different parts of the world, the INSNA also encouraged the edition of several scientific journals: *Connections*, *Journal of Social Structure*, *Social Networks* and *Redes*, the latter published in Spain.

With the emergence of the Internet, the concept of social network acquired new meanings. For Castells (2009: 45-47), a network is a set of interconnected and articulated nodes that form the backbone of societies. They are sets of social actors linked together through social relationships, which can be represented -from the mathematical theory of graphs- through points or nodes, which are the actors, and lines that reflect the links that connect them. The main differences between the traditional social network and the social network in the Internet age are:

- “1. Lack of physical, in person contact – only by distance, sometimes very large distances.
2. Usually the lack of unambiguous and reliable correlation between member’s identity in the virtual community – internet identity and their identity in the real world.
3. The possibility of multimodal communication, simultaneously with many members; also the possibility of easy switches between different communication channels, especially online and offline, e.g. online VoIP and offline text communication.
4. The simplicity of a break up and suspension of contacts or relationships.
5. The relatively high ease of gathering data about communication or common activities and its further processing.
6. Potential lower reliability of the data about users available on the Internet. Users of internet services relatively frequently provide fake personal data due to privacy concerns” (Musiał and Kazienko, 2013: 35).

American writer and Internet surfer Jorn Barger is cited as the first creator of a personal website called web-blog (*Robot Wisdom*) in December 1997 while Dave Winer is recognised as the pioneer of content syndication (Nafria, 2007: 235). The first version of MySpace was born in 1999 and survived until 2001 as a file exchange system, to be later recovered as a social network by Tim Anderson and Chris DeWolfe in 2003. In the transition from the 20th to the 21st centuries the dot.com bubble grows and explodes financially on New York Stock Exchange (Nasdaq, March 2000), but it does not stop the technological and economic entrepreneurship and innovation because there are new

tools and business models (Benkler, 2006). As Caldevilla Domínguez (2010: 48) points out, as a result of the dot-com crisis of 2003 and the closing of many companies, three north Americans create “companies for Internet users to talk each other and get to know each other better”: they are Marc Pincus, Reid Hoffman and Jonathan Abrams who launch, respectively, Tribe.net, LinkedIn and Friendster, the first three online social networks. In Spain it was three Catalans, Toni Salvatella, Albert Armengol and Horaci Cuevas, who in December 2003 created eConozco, the first Spanish-language social network, with the surplus resources of their company Galenicom.

Boyd and Ellison (2007) describe Social Networking Sites as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) build a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) generate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) see and browse their list of connections and those established by other members of the system. When we refer to the concept of *Social Media* we mean a way “of electronic communication that allows user-generated interaction between the media’s creator and the user” (Hudson and Roberts 2012: 769).

According to Smith (2012: 1), *Social Media* “is a term used to describe social interactions using technology (such as the Internet and cell phones) with any combination of words, pictures, video, or audio”. Therefore, this is not a type of passive communication since “visitors can communicate and socialize, sharing emails, documents, pictures, video, audio files, and do each in a number of different ways” (Smith, 2012: 1).

Venezia (2012: 24) defines Social Media as “any online service or site that focuses on building social networks or relations among people who share interests. Generally, these sites consist of a representation of each user (usually a profile), his/her links, and a variety of additional services depending upon the individual site. Most of these services are web-based and provide means to interact over the Internet, like Facebook does. Social media sites allow users to share ideas, activities, events, photos, videos, and many other things to whoever may be interested”. Gelms (2012: 265) adds that “social media allows users to connect with previously established friends and also build new relationships based on common interests, thereby providing an alternative technological platform for standard social communication and interaction”.

According to Campos Freire (2014), between 2007 and 2013, 73 works on social networking sites were published in the ten journals of communication with the highest impact factor in the 2011 Journal Citation Reports (JCR) of the Institute of Scientific Information (ISI). These works corresponding to authors from 20 countries and 50 universities. In the same period, from 2007 to 2013, a total of 153 articles on social networking sites were published in the 20 most important Spanish journals of communication: 118 by authors from Spanish universities and 22 by authors from other countries. The main themes, objectives, treatments and methods of those and these works confirm that the majority of them addresses the study of online social networks more as a new medium of communication and/or cyber-communication than as a techno-social system through which important types of relationships are articulated and developed.

3. Results

In their article titled “Critical Success Factors of the E-Recruitment System”, Ghazzawi and Accoumeh (2014: 164) updated the concept of e-recruitment: “E-recruitment is a part of electronic Human Resource Management (e-HRM). It is known as one of the most popular e-HRM applications used by organizations. E-recruitment could be defined as the use of the internet to attract potential employees to an organization and hire them”. For his part, Sills (2014: 12) says that “E-recruitment can only be described as the process of any personnel advertising or attracting, selection and application processing via the Internet, for external candidates, or Intranet, for internal candidates”.

The thesis of Maureen Sills, defended at the Helsinki Metropolia University of Applied Sciences under the title *E-recruitment: A comparison with traditional recruitment and the influences of social media. A qualitative and quantitative review*, is one of the most up-to-date works about the concept of e-Recruitment and its state of the art. When addressing the different recent analyses of online recruitment, or in other words, the digital ability to apply for a job or to select new candidates, from the perspective of the employer, it is essential to analyse the task performed by the Centre of Human Resources Information Systems (CHRIS), which since 2002, and in collaboration with the private job search engine Monster.de, has been publishing annual reports on the employability patterns of the 1000 most important companies in Germany.

The report published in 2014, with data from 2013, concludes that 64.8% of respondents valued as positive the use of social media as way to get a job. In fact, this tendency is on the rise since, in 2012, only 50% made this positive assessment. Facebook stands as the favourite social network, followed by Xing. 63% of the respondents admitted having a profile on at least one professional networking site. The study also shows that more than half of the German companies prefer candidates to apply through online forms, followed by e-mail applications and, finally, a very small percentage prefers printed applications. On a similar line, and still within Germany, we must highlight the studies carried out by Sonja Salmen and Bernd Rath, the authors of *Recruiting im Social Web* (2012), which provides a detailed definition and evolution of the processes linked to *e-recruitment*.

For its part, Denmark is also an important centre with regards to research on online recruitment processes, standing out one researcher: Anna Holm from Aarhus University, the author of *E-recruitment: Towards an Ubiquitous Recruitment Process and Candidate Relationship Management* (2012). However, in the Anglo-Saxon context, the entity specialised in the study of *e-recruitment* is the California-based application called Jobvite, which involves all the staff of a company in recruitment tasks, inviting them to publish or discuss the job offers in their social networks and among their acquaintances. So in this case it is the employees who recommend candidates, which reduces recruitment costs.

The most recent report, titled *Job seeker nation study: an authoritative survey of the social, mobile job seeker* (2014), concludes that 76% of the *Social Job Seekers* have obtained a job through the social networking site Facebook. However, this study points out that personal contacts continue to be the first channel of employment, followed in second place by social networks. In addition, about half of job seekers that use online social tools have changed their privacy in the networks they use because they are aware that recruiters consider them potential candidates for their companies.

According to Galindo Huertas (2013: 14), when we refer to *e-recruitment*, we are aiming towards the automation of the recruitment processes, which involves reducing costs and time, as well as an optimisation of data treatment since *e-recruitment* favours the provision of a huge amount of information whose transfer was previously impossible. In this sense, the author discerns between two beams supporting the online employability processes: jobsites and social networks. The former are websites that host job offers as part of their content but also contain news, information about companies, links of interest, advice and, ultimately, anything that the site's policy or the creativity of the webmaster deems appropriate. Their main objective is to bring employers and candidates together. They may be generalist –that is, not specialised in any professional sector– or specialised –focusing on a specific profession. Social networks, on the other hand, are “real-time interactive spaces for a person and its virtual environment, composed in turn by other people who interact with each other and with third parties through the same medium, sharing contents. This is an open, virtual and constantly evolving system” (Galindo Huertas, 2013: 21). According to the taxonomy proposed by this author and depending on whether they revolve or not around a specific thematic axis, social networks can be horizontal (Facebook and Twitter) or vertical, such as LinkedIn, Viadeo, and Xing.

The emergence of social networks and especially their influence on the processes of recruitment and professional self-promotion generates the emergence of all kinds of new research from interdisciplinary and innovative perspectives. Barzilay and Urquhart (2014: 1613 - 1628), in their article “Understanding reuse of software examples: A case study of prejudice in a community of practice”, offer a qualitative analysis of the perceptions shared by software developers through the social network LinkedIn. For their part, Middleton, Bragin and Parker (2014: 291-302) offer a comparison of the recruitment processes in traditional media, social media and through direct invitation in “Finding people who will tell you their thoughts on genomics-recruitment strategies for social sciences research”. Kim, Kim and Nam (2014: 2605-2614), in “How does industry use social networking sites? An analysis of corporate dialogic uses of Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn by industry type”, address the industry's uses of corporate dialogue with the public in these four social networks. Ben Ahmed, Nabli y Gargouri (2014: 29-47) in “Group extraction from professional social network using a new semi-supervised hierarchical clustering”, address the issue of extraction groups from professional social network and enrich the representation of the user profile and its related groups through building a social network warehousing. The analysis of social networks has also moved to very specific professional sectors –such is the case of Loeb, Bayne, Frey *et al.* (2004: 993-998) in “Use of social media in urology: data from the American Urological Association (AUA)” and “The impact of social media on a major international emergency medicine conference” (Neill, Cronin, Brannigan *et al.*, 2014: 401-404) – and specific geographic spaces -see the research carried out in Greece by Nikolaou (2014: 179-189): “Social Networking Web Sites in Job Search and Employee Recruitment”.

4. Conclusions

In a context in which the consumption of online social media is in full swing -in the Spanish case, for example, Internet has become the only medium whose penetration continues growing since more than half of the population use it intensively, while almost half of the companies employ social

networks to recruit potential candidates- research on this communicative field revolves around three basic areas:

1. Generic theoretical studies dedicated to reconstruct the historical concept of the *e-Recruitment*, as well as to infer possible taxonomies within online social media to foster professional self-promotion.
2. Sectoral studies which deal with the influence of *Social Media* on very specific occupational areas.
3. Geographical studies which address the influence of Social Media within the framework of certain boundaries and, consequently, within a specific cultural context.

Within these three areas, qualitative and/or qualitative content analyses are combined with reception studies that address users' consumption patterns in terms of favourite social networks or type of uses. In any case, the concept of *e-recruitment* is in its origins, as well as the questions that arise around its nature.

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