The impact of social media policies on the staffing and socialization process

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ABSTRACT

Over the past five years, social networking has continuously grown into what has become a major aspect of everyday life, especially among college students and recent graduates. Social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter are used as a means of communication with others. This online interaction has lead to disciplinary action, lost jobs, and an ever thinning line between work and private life. Many institutions have begun adopting and implementing social networking policies in an attempt to protect themselves and their employees. These new policies are extremely controversial as many argue that they infringe on employee rights. The purpose of this study is to examine the impact that social networking has on the workforce and the employers. The parties of focus are employers that have implemented social networking policies, employers that have not, and the employees of both.

Given the issues involved social media tools, we are interested in examining the impact of how these tools are impacting the recruitment, selection and socialization of new employees. How do social media policies influence first-time job seekers? Are college seniors more likely to look askew at companies that have adopted a social media policy? Are those currently in their first jobs less likely to stay if a social media policy comes into being? Does the restrictiveness of the policy play a role?

Key words: social media, social media policies, socialization, and employment

INTRODUCTION

Issues regarding social media and social media policies have recently been all over the news. The question of whether or not businesses and corporations should implement a social media policy for their employees seems to be the main concern. Many individuals looking for jobs are concerned about these policies because in today's world no one can go five minutes without checking their Facebook or following someone on Twitter.

This study focuses on the effect of these social media policies on employers that have implemented these policies, the employers who haven't, and the employees of both.

BACKGROUND

"We shape our tools, and afterwards, our tools shape us" (Bautista, 2011). That quote spoken by Marshall McLuhan speaks so many truths about the world we live in. Social media and the internet have taken over and transformed our means of communication into the unthinkable. Facebook, the internet, texting, Twitter, LinkedIn, the list goes on and on; all these forms of communication have basically eliminated face to face communication.

Cisco revealed that "one in three college students and young professionals consider the Internet to be as important as air, water, food, and shelter "(Cisco, 2011). They also point out that from the study they learned that "more than two of five people would accept a lower-paying job that had more flexibility with regard to device choice, social media access, and mobility than a higher-paying job with less flexibility "(Cisco, 2011). A major point of interest that this study done by Cisco revealed was that "over half of college students globally (56%) said that if they were offered a job at a company that banned access to social media, they would either turn it down, or ignore it" (Cisco, 2011). Although all these facts are startling, some information shows that social media has positive effects in the work place.

In a recent study done by an assistant professor of information systems, Nicole Haggerty, found that using Facebook and other social networking sites may increase the rate at which employees develop stronger communication and technological skills. This study also found that "those with more experience on social networks reported higher job satisfaction and displayed better job performance" (BizEd Magazine, 2009). These assumptions about social media having a postive effect on employees during office hours may be correct, but we have all heard of how social media can have a negative effect on employees and businesses.

Obviously there are many advantages to social media, but there are also many, many dangers. One specific negative effect of social media is what happened with Domino's Pizza. "It took Domino's 50 years to establish their credibility but barely five hours to have it trashed worldwide when two Domino's employees posted a video of themselves on YouTube doing unhygenic things to food that was to be served to waiting customers" (Gupta, 2010). Many businesses think that it is imperative to have a social media policy in place to protect the businesses reputation and the employees who work for them. Of course companies cannot ban employees from going home and bashing them on their home computers, but they can try to prevent it.

Whether a company implements a social media policy or not, the company needs to realize that social media is not going anywhere soon. Social media is no longer a luxury, it is a necessity that almost every human being cannot live without. New advancements with social media come out every single day, the iPad, iPhone 4s, Facebook modifications, Wifi, and the list

goes on and on. If a company chooses to ban all types of social media access, they could lose the chance to potentially hire the best employees for their company. "Whether companies like it or not, social media is here for keeps. Irrespective of company policies, employees will use it" (Gupta, 2010).

METHODOLOGY

A cover letter with a link to an online survey was sent out by e-mail to 3 separate groups in 2011.

The April 2011 survey was sent to 483 graduating seniors with 92 responding, for a 19.05% response rate (the term "graduating seniors" will be used to designate the group for the rest of the paper). The lower response rate may, in part, be explained by sending the survey during the end of the semester when student demands, such completing projects and preparing for finals, may be higher. 35.6% of the respondents were male and 64.4% were female; this is slightly higher gender disparity than the overall college rate of 57% female and 43% male. 39.6% of students had a grade point average (GPA) above 3.5, and 82.4% had a GPA above 3.0 (on a 4.0 scale). A significant majority (70.3%) were Social Science majors (Economics, Accounting and Business, Teacher Education), 19.8% were from Humanities and Fine Arts (Art, Music, English, History, Languages), and 9.8% were from the Natural Sciences (Mathematics, Biology, Chemistry, Physics). This survey oversampled Social Science majors (53.5%) and undersampled Humanities and Fine Arts (28.5%) and Natural Sciences (13.6%) majors (4.4% consider themselves interdisciplinary).

The June 2011 survey was sent to 414 Young Alumni who had attended the College within the last 5 years, with 40 responding (9.7%) (the term "alumni" will be used to designate the group for the rest of the paper). As with the previous group, a third of the survey respondents were male (33.3%). 48.7% had a GPA above 3.5 and 89.7% had a GPA above 3.0. 51.3% majored in a discipline in the Social Sciences, 35.9% in Humanities and Fine Arts, and 12.8% in the Natural Sciences.

The September 2011 survey targeted the Class of 2012 who were beginning their final year in college (the term "current seniors" will be used to designate the group for the rest of the paper). 485 students were contacted with a 85 responding (17.5%). 23.2% were male. 44.9% had a GPA above 3.50, and 82.6% had a GPA above 3.0. 52.9% majored in a discipline in the Social Sciences, 32.9% in Humanities and Fine Arts, and 14.3% in the Natural Sciences.

ANALYSIS

Students and alumni were compared using chi-square tests of independence. The first area of interest involved the methods the groups used in their job search. Respondents were asked the extent to which they used a variety of sources in their job search, and were asked to answer "Not at all," "to some extent," or "to a great extent." Table 1 highlights the ch-square analysis:

Table 1
To what extent did you use the following in your job search?

Method	p-value
Direct contact with a company	0.2001
On-campus career services	0.0116**
Newspaper ad	0.2123
Facebook	0.0879*
LinkedIn	0.0041**
Twitter	0.1399

Significant differences across the groups were first found with on-campus career services. Not surprisingly, graduating seniors (68.5%) and current seniors (58.8%) were more likely to take advantage of the opportunity provided by the presence of the available career services than alumni (51.2%). There was also a significant difference in the use of Facebook by the respondents. Current seniors (33.3%) and alumni (17.9%) were more likely to connect with current employers than graduating seniors (10.9%). Finally, the professional networking site, LinkedIn, saw significant differences in their use by the respondents. As with Facebook, current seniors (72.2%) and alumni (38.5%) were more likely to engage with others than graduating seniors (26.1%).

Students and alumni were also asked to take into account a number of factors they took into account when deciding to work, and were asked to answer on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Very unimportant," to "Very important." Table 2 highlights the results from the chi-square analysis:

Table 2
When making a decision about where to work, how important are each of the following to you?

Factor	p-value
Ability to use social networking tools at work	0.3564
Salary	.0547*
Challenging work	0.1326
Career advancement	0.1509
Company location	0.9351
Flexibility	.0002**
Benefits	.0012**
Company image/reputation	.0294**
Training and mentorship	0.1379
Company culture	0.2435
Manager	0.1621
Vacation time	.0802*
Employee recognition	0.463

Several factors were significant. Salary was much more "important" or "very important" to graduating seniors (84.8%) and alumni (89.7%) than to current seniors (76.1%). Similar

results were found for benefits. Striking out on one's own made graduating seniors (89.1%) and alumni (87.2%) place greater emphasis on benefits than current seniors (84.5%). Graduating seniors (85.9%) and alumni (79.5%) also emphasized company image and reputation much more importantly than current seniors (74.6%) who may not be concerned with this issue this early in their job search. On the other hand, flexibility was more "important" or "very important" to current seniors than to graduating seniors (75.0%) and alumni (76.9%). Finally, alumni felt vacation time was much more critical (69.2%) than either graduating (53.3%) or current seniors (49.3%). No significant difference was found between the groups in terms of the ability to use social networking tools at work.

Current use of social networking tools was next explored. The three groups were asked not only whether they used a variety of common social networking tools, but how often they used them. Chi-square tests were run to see if use was dependent on group status. First, the respondents were asked simply to check whether they used a variety of social networking tools. Table 3 highlights differences in use:

Table 3
Do you use any of the following social networking tools?

Social Media Tool	p-value
Twitter	0.336
Facebook	.0005**
Tumblr/Wordpress/Blogger	.0649*
YouTube	0.0000

While no significant difference was found in use of Twitter, significant differences were found for the other major social networking tools. For Facebook, significantly more graduating seniors (94.5%) and alumni (94.9%) used it than current seniors (76.7%). For blogging, alumni (25.6%) were more likely to engage in this form of social networking than current seniors (16.3%) or graduating seniors (9.8%). Finally, as with Facebook, graduating seniors (94.5%) and alumni (87.2%) were more likely to use YouTube than current seniors (50%).

The amount of time the respondents spent on these sites was also explored. Respondents were asked "how many hours during the week do you actually spend" on one of these sites, and possible answers included "0 hours," "1-3 hours," "4-10 hours", "11-20 hours," or "21+ hours." Table 4 highlights differences in use:

Table 4
How many hours during the week do you actually spend using the following technologies?

Social Media Tool	p-value
Blogging	.0749*
Twitter	.0060**
Text messaging	0.1993
Instant messaging	0.5190
YouTube	0.6852
E-Mail	.0007**

While 85.2% of respondents spent less than 1 hour a week blogging, current seniors were more likely to spend time blogging than alumni or graduating seniors. Similarly, a large percentage of respondents (73.7%) spent less than an hour a week on Twitter, 23.1% of alumni were likely to spend 4 or more hours a week on Twitter compared to 5.9% of current seniors and

3.3% of graduating seniors. E-mail usage of 4 or more hours a week was more likely to be found among alumni (74.4%) and current seniors (69.6%) than graduating seniors (59.3%).

Finally, some additional issues related to technology in the workplace were explored. First, respondents from each group were asked "should employees be allowed to access social networking sites as work" with a response of "yes" or "no." The chi-square analysis was significant below the .10 confidence level (p=.0919). Alumni (59.0%) and current seniors (52.9%) were more accepting than graduating seniors (40.2%). Second, respondents were asked "would you take a job that did not allow you to access social media sites," and, once again, were asked to answer "yes" or "no." Chi-square analysis revealed a significant difference below the .05 confidence level (p=.0318). Graduating seniors (94.6%) would still take the job compared to current seniors (89.7%) and alumni (79.5%). Perhaps, given the tough economic climate, that employment and earning a living takes a priority to being able to check one's Facebook status on company time.   Or, could it be the use of smartphones that tempers the inability to access social media at work? The groups were asked whether they had a smartphone capable of accessing social media networking sites. The chi-square analysis was significant below the .01 level (p=.0084). 69.2% of alumni had smartphones compared to only 43.5% of current seniors and 40.7% of graduating seniors.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

While significant differences were found amongst the three groups of respondents on a variety of issues related to social networking and its impact on staffing and workplace behavior, one should use some caution generalizing the results given the smaller sample sizes.   Certainly, a more exhaustive sample might provide even more clarity regarding these issues. However, the results provide some small insight about how social media is affecting organizations.

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