

# SOCIAL NETWORKS: ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF ITS USE IN JOB HUNTING

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## ABSTRACT

Portugal is going through an unprecedented unemployment crisis. Highly trained people are emigrating in search of better work conditions within their area of study. The job seekers that stay in Portugal try to find work through a variety of ways: some settle for a job beneath their potential while others search the web using social (and professional) networks. Websites such as Facebook and LinkedIn are often being used as virtual markets, full of opportunities for the unemployed and also with large information databases that help recruiters in their search for candidates. This paper intends to make a comparison between recruiters and candidates' perspectives on job-hunting through social networks. More specifically, it will use online questionnaires and interviews to assess how Facebook and LinkedIn might offer opportunities to job seekers and how recruiters expose those opportunities. The results showed that Facebook is the candidates' preferred tool, while recruiters tend to use LinkedIn more often. Both recruiters and job seekers agreed that curricular information is the key for a successful profile and that, in terms of online social networking, the lack of privacy is a substantial disadvantage and networking is the best advantage.

## KEYWORDS

Recruiters, Candidates, Social Networks, Job-hunting, Facebook and LinkedIn

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Given the Portuguese social and demographic situation it would be interesting to develop a study that could help to improve the current conditions of the Portuguese employability. Thus combining information systems to the rising rates of unemployment and emigration (consequently) the title "Social Networks: advantages and disadvantages of its use in job hunting" arisen. This paper will cover the theme social networks as a database of job candidates. The study will explore how social networks are tools that help recruiters to fill in vacancies. It will focus its analysis in two major social networks, Facebook and LinkedIn. The main aim is to inform candidates of their possibilities using these tools. Nowadays, in Europe and especially in Portugal there is a big phenomenon of population aging. Yet, the small portion of active population is crossing an unprecedented unemployment crisis.

The national unemployment rates reaches values never seen before since Portugal joined the European Union. In 2013, 16.5% of the workforce was unemployed, as it can be seen in figure 1. The EU is also greatly affected by this crisis, particularly the southern countries. A large percentage of unemployed people are young college graduates. The majority of students that complete a college degree have no jobs in Portugal. Thus, the generation "neither nor" appeared: qualified people who have completed their studies but neither study nor work. This situation of widespread unemployment is a direct cause for emigration, which leads to a reduction in the birth rate (women of childbearing age emigrate), the reduction of skilled labor force (the most highly skilled people seek jobs with higher benefits / remuneration abroad) and the increase of population aging.

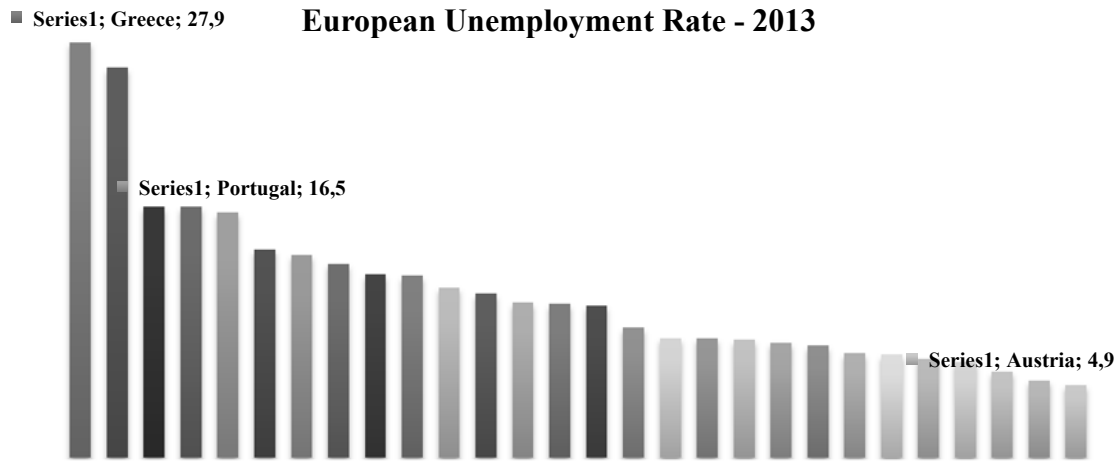


Figure 1. European Unemployment Rates. (adapted from Eurostat (2013))

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Oxford Dictionary defines Social Network as “a dedicated website or other application which enables users to communicate with each other by posting information, comments, messages, images, etc.” This is a very simplify definition of the term “social network” and this study will focus specifically on online social networks that improve the chances of job candidates finding a job vacancy. Other theorists have a different approach on how to define it, for example in *the Study of Social Media Communication: Analysis of Science Communication through Social Networking Sites with special reference to Scientists*: “Social networking is the grouping of individuals into specific groups, like small rural communities or a neighborhood subdivision, if you will. Although social networking is possible in person, especially in the workplace, universities, and high schools, it is most popular online” (Jothi & Neelamalar, 2010). These authors claim that there is a particular situation that makes individuals join over the same interest. Boyd and Ellison (2008) state that “web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site” (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). These authors emphasize the personal connections aspect of networking, not focusing as much as the previews ones on personal interest.

Overall social networks are considered a public platform, in which different individuals are connected by a relationship. These connections are usually generated by a common element, like a friendship in the real world or a mutual interest in a specific field. They might be used for leisure like getting in touch with old friends, playing online games, or finding out about a particular topic. According to *Social Networks Become Social Entertainment* research “consumers believe social networks provide a higher value experience compared with other forms of entertainment” (Edelman’s, 2010). They might also be used with a professional goal like expanding the professional network, finding job opportunities or improving work topics knowledge. The Queensland Government posted an article on its official website saying that there are 5 ways social media can help to improve a business: promote the name of your brand and business; tell customers about your goods and services; find out what customers think of your business; attract new customers and build stronger relationships with existing customers (Queensland Government, 2010).

## 2.1 Facebook and LinkedIn

Facebook enables its users to share pictures, videos and personal notes with their online friends. It also allows them to create pages and groups divided by topics, which may or may not be public. It is possible for any user to give feedback on any post through “likes” or comments on that same post. Facebook tends to be associated with leisure and group interaction, but it is more and more a platform used for work and business related purposes.

A great amount of people use this network to find a job but “Facebook appears to be a highly under-utilized network for recruiting” (Undercover Recruiter, based on 2012 Bullhorn Reach Social Recruiting Activity Report), i.e. recruiters tend to use other tools, like LinkedIn, job posting websites, company sites etc., to fill in job vacancies. One should wonder if this is one of the mistakes candidates are making that leads to lack of success in job-hunting. Once candidates are actively using this tool to find a job but recruiters seem to be focusing their efforts on finding a candidate elsewhere, should candidates rethink the use of Facebook?

There is an average of 584 million daily active users on Facebook (Facebook, 2014). Some of them use it solely as an entertainment tool, others as a work tool (in marketing and social media jobs), others for job-hunting, as mentioned earlier and some for all of the above. These users are risking their security online and offline by exposing information about themselves. “Risks range from identity theft to online and physical stalking; from embarrassment to price discrimination and blackmailing” (Gross, & Acquisti, 2005). Through this study it will be possible to realize that some people do give misleading (or cautionary) information about themselves. 11% of Facebook users do not use their real name and 49% do not have an identifiable profile picture. The health care journalist Akshat Rathi considers that Facebook is misleading and that people do not have enough lucidity to use Facebook. There are two reasons why he makes such statement. The first is that people only post the good parts of their lives and yet they tend to compare their own lives with their virtual friends unrealistic online lives. The second is that people add some posts that are not meant to be seen by everyone and the consequences of this fast and wide spread information might be harmful for posters and viewers.

This does not mean that Facebook is bad tool or that it should not be used. There are also many advantages in using Facebook. Donna Cosmato, a sales management professional, wrote an article in which she considered worldwide connectivity the main advantage of social networking. Other advantages according to her article are commonality of Interest and Real-Time Information Sharing.

Overall there should be caution when using Facebook to find a job. But there are positive aspects as well as negative ones. *The little red suit* summarizes it clearly: “College students and young professionals who are using Facebook for professional networking need to be aware of the amount and type of information they are sharing. That said, many young professionals I know prefer using it for professional networking namely because it showcases you as a whole person” (Monhollan, 2008).

LinkedIn is the largest platform dedicated solely to professional networking. With over 115 million registered users in over 200 countries as of July 2011, LinkedIn represents an exemplar for those scholars seeking to understand the interplay of employment and social networking” (LinkedIn, 2014). It enables its users to “interact with other professionals in their fields, locate potential employers through company pages and employees, and participate in forums relevant to their professions” (Fawley 2013, p.31).

Kasia Mikoluk describes it as “a particularly valuable business tool; over 200 million people are members, including hiring managers from many top companies.” (Mikoluk, 2013) - which means that there are opportunities to contact and connect with this recruiters and possibility find a job - “Your profile is designed to function as an online resume, detailing your education, career history (with recommendations from your colleagues), and creative portfolio.” (Mikoluk, 2013)– this enables a dissemination of curricular data in way that could be done before professional social networks appeared. Stephanie Rosendahl considers that LinkedIn builds credibility, since “referrals gained through a professional network such as LinkedIn are more qualified and LinkedIn offers a more efficient way to build your referral base” (Rosendahl, 2013) . Another beneficial aspect of LinkedIn, from her point of view, is the possibility to follow companies and its employees.

Jessica Key, from the Indianapolis Recorder, believes that there are also negative aspects to LinkedIn. According to her “LinkedIn certainly has made networking easier, but experts say that professionals will always appreciate personal interactions such as handshakes, written thank-you notes and professional

conversation” (Key, 2012). A professional network such as LinkedIn will never replace a real life contact or interview. Even though it might help get one (interview).

Another disadvantage of LinkedIn is the security decrease. Debra L. Bruce wrote an article in which she refers that “to reap full advantage of LinkedIn, however, the user typically must disclose information such as current and past employers, as well as current contact information” (Bruce, 2010). All this information is meant to be protected but it is online and there is always the possibility of a cyber-attack so “the user assumes considerably more risk of identity theft in the event of a breach in LinkedIn’s security” (Bruce, 2010).

## 2.2 The Recruitment Process

The recruitment process includes a variety of stakeholders. Candidates are job seekers. There are two kinds of people who search for a job: “Active job candidates are those currently unemployed, who represent 10 percent or less of the total workforce at any given time. Passive job candidates are those who are currently employed and not putting a lot of energy into seeking a new position, but who would consider making a job change if the conditions were right.” (Joos, 2008) In this study both of them will be analyzed. Most of unemployed people in Portugal are young and recently graduated. But there are also candidates of a different age range (older) and lower level of education/training (INE, 2012).

Recruiters are professional specialized in filling job vacancies. They search for the most suited profile to fit a job opening. According to *Maringá Management* recruitment as a part of human resources management has benefited tremendously with the development of the information technologies (Mitter and Orlandini, 2005). Recruiters might work in the human resources department of a firm or work in an outsourcing firm of human resources. In this last case usually their main function is to select the most appropriate candidate to fill in a job vacancy.

One of the candidates’ methods to look for jobs is the usage of recruitment firms. Recruitment firms are organizations that have job vacancies for various professional activities. Each of these firms has its own database of contacts, which contains client companies, job seekers and vacancies available. In addition to its internal database, in order to find workers to fill their vacancies, its employees (recruiters) use also social networks. There are several recruitment firms in Portugal, most of which are multinational companies. They differ in the type of profile they search. Some look for more educated and high hierarchical level profiles, others look for more simple profiles, simply demanding skills for a blue-collar job.

According to Columbia University’s career opportunities department, Social Media is a great tool to find a job. Many websites and blogs consider Facebook and LinkedIn the most useful online instruments in job hunting. The Bullhorn Reach report states that in 2012 98% of recruiters used LinkedIn and 33% used Facebook. It also brings to the public knowledge that 48% of recruiters use LinkedIn exclusively.

From the candidate’s point of view, social networks are advantageous in terms of dissemination of personal data (Jothi & Neelamar, 2010), professional networking (Queensland Government, 2014), dissemination of curricular data (Monhollan, 2008), entertainment (Edelman Digital, 2010) and social networking (Cosmato, 2013). In contrast, the disadvantages include lack of privacy (Rathi, 2013), decreased safety (Gross, & Acquisti, 2005) and lack of confidentiality (Bruce, 2010). When examining the benefits of social networking from the recruiters point of view it is possible to highlight the dissemination of curricular data (Monhollan, 2008), the dissemination of personal data (Jothi & Neelamar, 2010) and finding Profiles (Mikoluk, 2013). In terms of disadvantages, these include misleading Information (Rathi, 2013) and the lack of personal contact (Key, 2012).

## 3. METHODOLOGY

This exploratory study used two data collection methods. The first was an online survey lodged in *Qualtrics* platform and divulged by Facebook pages and groups related to unemployment and job search. The sample was composed by unemployed individuals. The goal was to determine the importance of social networks in job search and compare it with the perspective of recruiters. The snowball sampling method (Isaiás, Pifano & Miranda, 2012) was chosen because it was the fastest way to reach a considerable amount of people in the circumstances of the study (looking for a job opportunity).

The second method of data collection was an interview conducted with professional recruiters of two different companies (one from a recruitment firm and another recruiter from an information technology company), via e-mail, in order to perceive what matters to them in the search process. These interviews were conducted with recruiters, (that is expanding the number of employees) in order to perceive their experiences with social networks and what they feel to be the strengths and weaknesses of its use.

#### 4. RESULTS

The survey was posted on Facebook groups and pages regarding unemployment (usually accessed by job seekers). In order to represent the unemployed population a sample of 165 individuals was enquired. Through the survey answers it was possible to acknowledge that social networks are the tool of choice to find a job. 70% of the candidates consider this a good tool to reach a recruiter.

It is also possible to confirm that, in fact, Facebook and LinkedIn are the most commonly used social networks, in job search, by candidates. 63% of the respondents use Facebook to search for a job, 43% use LinkedIn and only 17% use other social network. The respondents opinion towards the question of how important are social networks in order for a recruiter to decide between two candidates is torn, 45% feel that it does influence the recruiters opinion and 55% feel that it does not. There is a lot of different data divulged on social networks. One might assume that while job hunting candidates would post solely curricular information, yet that is not accurate. 85% of people post curricular information but they also post photographs, contact information, events in which they have participated, pictures or texts of their interest. And even their hobbies.

Over half of the respondents consider that social and professional networking is a great advantage of social networks. 48% of them consider it a great tool to disseminate curricular data and only 16% thinks of this instrument as a way to propagate personal data. On the other hand, 54% of candidates feel like misleading information is the worst disadvantage of social networks. Privacy decrease is the second most pointed disadvantage. Safety decrease, confidentiality decrease and lack of personal contact have the same percentage (39%).

The two recruiters' interviews were held via e-mail in order to understand what recruiters look for when they search for online profiles. Both companies chose to stay anonymous, therefore interviewees' names will not be revealed. The first recruiter works for a high profile international recruitment company in the technology department (HR recruiter). The second recruiter is the co-owner of the I.T. Company. He works in and the seven years as a HR manager of the company are the only experience he has had as a recruiter (IT recruiter). He recruits different hierarchical level candidates to integrate into his firm.

Recruiters do use social networks to find information about a candidate. Their favourite tool is LinkedIn since it is "the most useful tool to understand the candidate's career path and purpose" never the less Facebook allows recruiters to understand people's profile through their posts. The most relevant information in a social network profile are the professional accomplishments although comments and photos published might show a side of the candidate that makes the recruiter choose someone else.

There is a common understanding that LinkedIn is a much more restricted and professional network then other sites. Recruiters expect to find the profiles they are looking for there. Social networks should not be considered a fighting arena. Recruiters look for candidates that fit the job needs but they do not decide which one will get the opening until there is an interview. Never the less a profile with negative information might exclude the candidate from the possibility's list.

Recruiters feel that there is too much information online, which makes talent hunting harder, especially because there is no filter to what people might post, "not everything is true" – I.T. recruiter. They also alert for the permanent character of online posts, which may "ruin their (candidates) chances of getting an interview" – H.R. recruiter. Candidates consider that misleading information online is a very negative feature of social media. Both of them see lack of privacy as a big disadvantage.

Even though job offers published on social networks have a greater response when it comes to the recruiters' tool of choice to find an applicant for a job the opinions are not unanimous. One prefers LinkedIn, because it "gives you more information about a candidate's professional path" – H.R. recruiter. The other prefers job's posting sites, since they restrict the curricular features necessary to enter the interview competition.

Regarding confidentiality, privacy and security offered by social networks both recruiters agree that “people should be careful about their sensitive data”- I.T. recruiter. The human resources consultant says “you shouldn’t divulge information that endangers your security or that could be used against you”. This might be the reason why most candidates do not post as much superfluous information like hobbies, events or pictures as curricular and contact information.

## 5. DISCUSSION

From the study analysis it is possible to conclude that social networks are a powerful tool for recruiters, since it helps them fill in a vacancy and it is the tool of choice to find a job, 70% of the candidates consider this a good tool to reach a recruiter. Talent-hunters search for candidates on social networks. LinkedIn is the tool of choice but they also use Facebook. These two are the most popular social networks for both respondents (candidates and recruiters). Recruiters try to find a professional profile that can fulfil the job requirements and, at the same time, they search for possible indicators that the personal profile is not the most adequate (through posts, comments, pictures posted or endorsed/“liked” by a candidate). Candidates tend to post mainly curricular information on social networks so it is reasonable to assume that this is a point in which they are on the same page.

Most candidates are aware that recruiters do not decide between two candidates solely based on their online profiles comparison. Even though it might influence the decision of which candidates will go to a personal interview. Both interviewed company representatives consider networking as the best advantage of social networks, since there are so many people browsing through them everyday. Even though candidates find social networking more advantageous than professional networking. Dissemination of curricular data is one of the best advantages according to 48% of the questionnaire’s respondents. According to recruiters, Facebook enables the candidate to show a more personal and less professional/serious side of their personality since candidates post not only curricular information but also texts, pictures, groups and events of their interest. LinkedIn “gives a picture of a candidate’s professional journey” – H.R. recruiter. Another advantage of social networks is that “the candidates can benefit from a closer contact with the company they are applying for, as well as more and faster information about the company’s goals, culture and values” - H.R. recruiter.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

If someone is looking for a job the best bet is to create a LinkedIn profile even though Facebook might be also viewed and considered by recruiters. While professional accomplishments will contribute to positive view of one’s profile, inappropriate comments or pictures will have the opposite effect; therefore candidates should work on a comprehensive online resume and reduce their personal data to the minimum. It is very important to stress that pictures and comments should be appropriate to be seen by a future employer. A beautiful and meaningful picture will not have much influence on a recruiter’s choice but a rude or inappropriate image might ruin a candidate’s chance of getting an interview.

Nonetheless, a LinkedIn profile will not get anyone a job it is just a path to get an interview so it should be seen as a step in the search for employment. Once a candidate finds a company that he/she is eager to join there are many possibilities online to come into closer contact with the company and its employers (recruiters, bosses, etc.), such as joining the company’s page or group in social networks. This study considered only few variables to determine the conclusions. Many other variables were set aside for different reasons such as the thesis dimension. It is restricted in the matter that both recruiters work in the I.T. area, other recruiters might feel differently regarding to the questions asked. It is geographically limited since survey and interview respondents were Portuguese, which means that these conclusions should only be considered for the Portuguese society. Another limitation is the fact that judgmental and non-probability sampling technique cannot be considered a true representation of the population.

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