

University students creating a digital identity for career paths using LinkedIn

Daniela Salkova, Olga Regnerova

Department of Trade and Finance

Faculty of Economics and Management

Czech University of Life Sciences Prague

salkova@pef.czu.cz; regnerova@pef.czu.cz

Abstract: Professional digital identity is currently one of the main elements for a prosperous employment rate. Professional identity must be built gradually during the studies occurring at university. For a successful creation of a professional digital identity, social and professional networks are an essential key since they are a useful tool. One of the most used professional social networks in the world is LinkedIn. The aim of the article is to portray the extent to which students of FEM CZU in Prague work with professional social networks. Based on the results of the survey, it can be determined that university students who work with professional networks, establish the best results of securing professional contacts as well as the possibility of obtaining employment through a profile on a social network.

Introduction

The identity of individuals can be formed not only in the offline environment, but now the online identity is becoming increasingly important. The internet has become a standard part of most people's lives (Bonebrake, 2002: 551). Today's society is characterized by the growing impact of online communication tools (Rosales, Guajardo and Medrano, 2021). The development of social media has completely changed the way we access information (O'Regan, Smithson, and Spain, 2018: 112). Social networks in various forms have become an integral part of life as well as a popular communication and interaction environment (Bozkurt and Tu, 2016: 153). However, it is necessary to distinguish between personal identity and professional identity, which may differ from each other. The importance of professional social networks has grown significantly in recent years, especially in creating an individual's professional identity. For this reason, the article is therefore focused on the field of professional identity in the sense of professional social networks. In this context, we can talk about the so-called digital professional identity, which is formed through online social networks. Digital professional identity can be defined as "a professional identity that develops through online social interactions using online platforms and communication tools" (Jawed, Mahboob and Yasmeen, 2019: 33). LinkedIn is one of the most widely used professional social networks worldwide. Personal social networks focus mainly on facilitating personal self-presentation, while professional social networks mainly satisfy the need for professional self-promotion (van Dijck, 2013: 199). It is a well-recognized fact that the success of graduates depends significantly on their opportunities to develop academic and professional identity during their studies (Jensen and Jetten, 2015). The goal of education is, in the broadest sense, to transform itself into new ways of thinking and relationships. For successful application in the professional field, it is necessary to build a professional identity from the beginning and even better in advance during the study, ie ways of working and building relationships in professional contexts (Goldie, 2012: 641).

The aim of the article is to convey the extent to which students of FEM CZU in Prague work with professional social networks, whether they are aware of the importance of this method of communication and presentation for their professional life during their studies at university as an important tool for creating a digital professional identity.

Materials and methods

The theoretical background of this paper has been based on an analysis of secondary sources gained from scholarly papers, specialized literature and official web portals. Primary data have been obtained through an own conducted survey.

The objectives of the analysis were as follows:

- mapping the employment rate of FEM students during their studies and, in this context, also the employment rate in the intended field of employment after graduation,
- mapping the use of social networks in general and, in this context, explicitly professional social networks,
- mapping the awareness of FEM students about the existence and possibilities of professional social networks, and in the context of the extent to which they actively use, namely, professional social networks,
- mapping the perception of the benefits of professional social networks in the context of digital professional identity.

Data collection for research took place from February 2018 to December 2020. Students of the 3rd year of bachelor's programs and the 2nd year of master's programs in Operations and Economics and Business and Administration were asked to participate in the survey. A total of 1963 students took part in the research in the period under review. According to the student structure on the faculty, 575 men and 1387 women were asked to fill in an online questionnaire (table 1). The most frequent age group (83 %), in agreement with the structure of FEM students, was the 21-25 age group (1624 respondents). Most of the interviewed students were in full-time study (79.72 %), part in the combined form of study (20.28 %).

References

- Rosales, F.L., Guajardo, J.R.B. and Medrano, J.L.J. (2021) 'Addictive Behavior to Social Networks and Five Personality Traits in Young People', *Psychological Studies*, DOI: 10.1007/s12646-020-00591-7
- O'Regan, A., Smithson, W.H. and Spain, E. (2018) 'Social media and professional identity: Pitfalls and potential', *Medical Teacher*, vol 40, no 2, pp 112-116, DOI: 10.1080/0142159X.2017.1396308
- Bozkurt, A. and Tu, C.H. (2016) 'Digital identity formation: socially being real and present on digital networks', *Educational Media International*, vol 53, no 3, pp: 153-166, DOI: 10.1080/09523987.2016.1236885
- Jawed, S., Mahboob, U. and Yasmeen, R. (2019) 'Digital Professional Identity: Dear Internet', *Education for Health*, vol 32, no 1, pp: 33-35, DOI: 10.4103/efh.EfH_232_17
- van Dijck, J. (2013) 'You have one identity': performing the self on FB and LinkedIn', *Media Culture & Society*, vol 35, no 2, pp: 199-215, DOI: 10.1177/0163443712468605

Results

Based on the results of the survey, it can be determined that the vast majority of FEM students are employed in some form while studying at university.

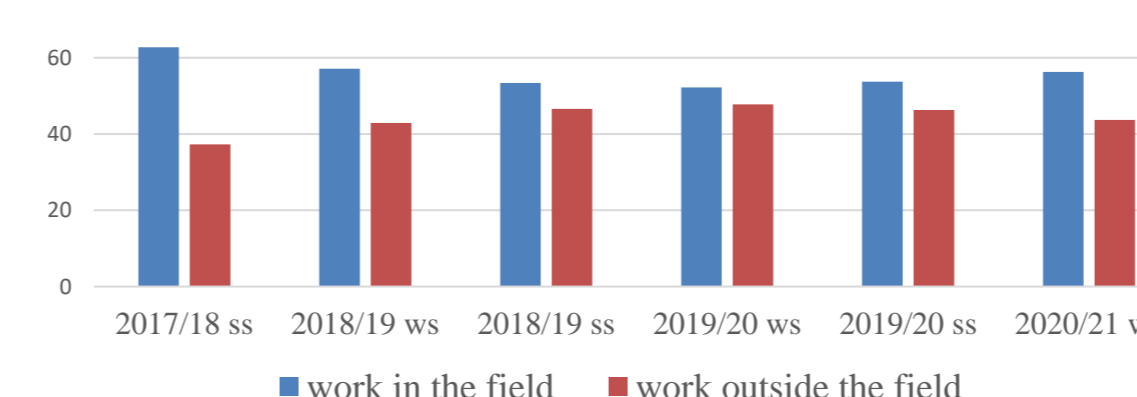
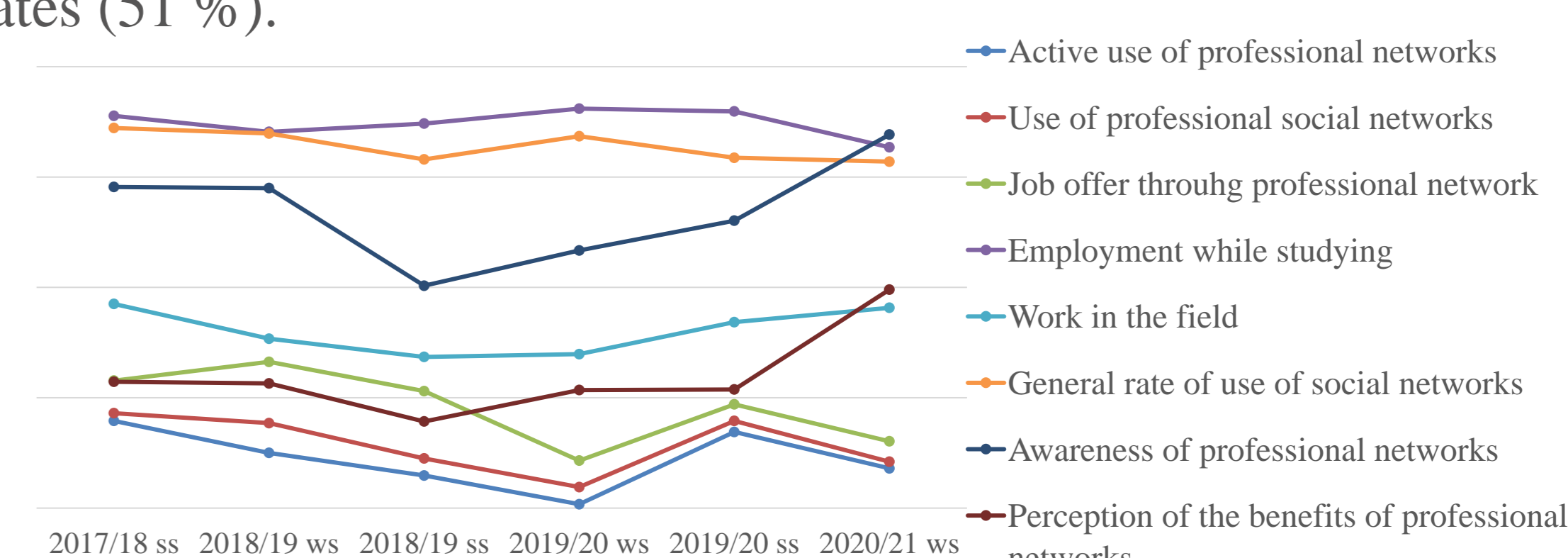


Fig. 2: Share of FEM students employed during their studies in a later intended field of employment % (ss – summer semester, ws – winter semester) (source: own calculation)

A positive finding is also that more than half of the students from the addressed sample (57.2 %) were employed in the field in which it is expected to continue and apply after graduation from university (Fig. 2). In the structure of a specific form of employment a regular or occasional job predominates (51 %).

Fig. 3: Characteristics of employment and use of social networks by FEM students % (PS professions networks, SS social networks) (source: own calculation)



Around 90 % of students state (89.2 in 2018 and 90.8 in 2020) that the predominant reason for employment is the economic aspect. Work activities are a common source of income and this also applies to students. It is very important that students also perceive the importance of employment as a space where they can gain valuable work experience that will help them in their further professional employment (2020 69.9 %). An interesting finding is the large increase in the perception of employment in the context of establishing working contacts. This aspect increased significantly in 2020 to 84 % from 28 % in 2018. The gradual creation of a network of contacts is very crucial for professional life. Professional social networks can in this case play a major role. In terms of the gradual creation of a professional digital identity, social networks can generally be a very useful tool. This is especially evident for professional social networks. In the observed period, the level of perception of the benefits of this professional type of social networks is growing. It is thus confirmed that students are increasingly aware of the importance of professional networks and the possibilities of their contribution to the further development of later professional employment.



Fig. 4: Reasons for using professional social networks by students (source: own calculation)

Students who work with professional networks cite the establishment of professional contacts as the most common reason (2020 61 %) (Fig. 4). The possibility of contacting a human resources manager and gaining a job through a profile on a social network (2020 56 %) is closely linked. This is a very common and widespread way of making use of a professional social network. A very important role in the utilization of networks is also played by one's own personal presentation in terms of professional knowledge and work experience (2020 48 %). This shows great potential in the context of professional digital identity. The biggest shift in the period under review is the acquisition of professional information, where this share increased from 31 % in 2018 to 45 % in 2020. Ways and possibilities of draw on professional networks are gradually evolving in this context towards the creation of space and sharing of professional articles, seminars and new trends.

Conclusion

Social networks, both personal and professional, make a significant contribution to the formation of an individual's digital identity. Namely, professional social networks have become an important part of shaping the professional profile and professional ties, including communication between network participants. A person's online identity allows to develop professional contacts and relationships. In the case of university students, professional social networks provide an opportunity to advertise their skills and experience. As social networks become more important in creating a personal professional profile, it is important that this digital professional identity is created during university studies. Which allows graduates a better position in the current labor market. At the same time, it is also important to emphasize that the digital identity should be consistent for all social networks. This should provide a single, inconsistent view of the person in terms of personal and a professional personality.