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Online Social Networks: Changing the face of business education and career planning**Vladlena Benson, Fragkiskos Filippaios, Stephanie Morgan**Kingston Business School, Kingston University, Kingston Upon Thames, KT2 7LB,
United Kingdomemail: v.benson@kingston.ac.uk; f.filippaios@kingston.ac.uk;
stephanie.morgan@kingston.ac.uk**Abstract**

Online social networks have become increasingly popular in recent years, providing an efficient and user-friendly way to maintain social connections and share information. They have been shown to facilitate business relationships and building of social capital using electronic media. Graduates who are coming into business for the first time are almost expected to be comfortable with interactions using social networks. This brings new challenges to graduates in the way they use social networks and how they enhance their career development and relationships with employers. This study reports the findings of a survey of 272 UK and international business school students on career development and entrepreneurship as a part of a wider study of online social networking. The results of the study reveal key differences between undergraduate, postgraduate and international student population. The paper discusses differences across gender, educational level and nationality that have implications for social networking practices and argues for a pressing need to raise the awareness of graduates in the use of social networks to enhance their career prospects. The conclusions of the study help better understand motivations and barriers to an effective application of social networks in business.

Keywords: business practices, networking, social capital, online social networks.**Introduction**

Research at Oxford Internet Institute (Dulton et al., 2009) reveals that UK individuals primarily use the Internet to reinforce their communication with their families and existing social networks, but also to meet new people. Over the past few years there has been an emergence of a number of online social networking sites, forming the most popular movement in Internet applications. Although to the uninitiated names like Twitter, LinkedIn, Bebo or Hi5 may not make any sense, numbers of social network users have reached hundreds of millions. Social networking services (SNS) are providing an efficient, user-friendly and possibly addictive way to connect and share information with others. In 2009, 38% of Internet users in the UK had met someone on the Internet they did not know before, most commonly on social networking sites (Dulton et al., 2009). This explains the growing popularity of such SNS as Facebook, which counts more than 200 million active users. Over 100 million people made logging into Facebook a daily routine and the amount of content shared through the site weekly reached 1 billion pieces, including web links, stories, blogs posts and photos (Facebook Press Room, 2009).

Research shows that social networks facilitate building social capital (Ellison et al., 2007), i.e. resources accumulated through relationships (Lin, 2001). Social capital has been linked to a range of positive social outcomes including broadening employment and business

opportunities (Helliwell & Putnam, 2004). Recent trends in SNS saw a distinctive shift towards specialisation of online social networks into formal, or business related, and informal, pure social, types. Possibly the most popular online SNS, Facebook, has been originally started by Harvard students and is generally regarded as a means for informal communications between people. On the other hand, LinkedIn has been specifically designated for finding and maintaining business connections. This type of social networks is much more aimed at developing business links, finding employment and consultancy opportunities. As reported in (Dutta & Fraser, 2009) Facebook has recently seen an increase in the registrations of people in their mid careers. It has been suggested that with the downturn in the global economy, people turn to Facebook in search of business contacts and safer employment prospects. According to (Berg et al., 2007) employability enhancement and career management among a diverse range of core university processes can be facilitated through application of social networks. With 98% of current UK students already members of Facebook (Dulton et al., 2009) social networks have the potential to serve as an established platform to connect graduates and future employers. However, very little research attention has been paid to assessing the ways in which social networks can influence individual employability and business networking using electronic media.

Graduates who are coming into business for the first time are almost expected to be comfortable with interactions using social networks. This brings new challenges to graduates in the way they use social networks and how they enhance their career development and relationships with employers. This study reports the findings of a survey of 272 UK and international business school students on career development and entrepreneurship as a part of a wider study of online social networking. This research bridges the gap in literature by evaluating the use of social networks among students, focussing on their reasons to join, expectations from, and actual use of social networking for career development in a Higher Education (HE) setting. The research questions addressed by this study are as follows:

- (a) Are there any significant key differences in how individuals use different SNS between undergraduate, postgraduate and international student population?
- (b) Do such variables as gender, educational level and nationality impact on the motivations to join SNS?
- (c) Are there any implications for employability and career management, and whether there is a need to include business social networking practices in HE curriculum?

Although we will be approaching the two first research questions from an empirical perspective, we will follow a conceptual approach in addressing our third research question. A growing number of publications (e.g. Barnes 2006, Lange 2007, Livingstone 2008, Lewis & West 2009) continuously draw attention to issues of privacy, trust, information security and business policies on social networking use. These points of concern and other issues surfaced through this study are summarised further in this paper. The article argues for a pressing need to raise the awareness of graduates in the use of social networks to enhance their career prospects. The conclusions of the study help better understand motivations and barriers to an effective application of social networks in business. The rest of the paper is organised as follows: next section will discuss the concepts of SNS and e-Social Capital, followed by the evidence on the dichotomy between private and public information whilst the Method section will present the methodology of the paper. Subsequent section will offer the key findings regarding our research questions whilst the paper is concluded the discussion of some implications of our research.

SNS and e-Social Capital: Career Management or Exploitation of Ties

Boyd and Ellison (2007) define social network sites as “web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system”. Features for customising personal profile and privacy settings, peer based rating system and a sense of a secure environment for sharing personal information and content has made SNS increasingly popular for social as well as for business networking. ‘Individuals engage in interactions and networking in order to produce profits’ (Lin, 2001). What profits can users of SNS gain? It appears that social capital, connections and ties with others, helps people achieve a lead in the labour market based on the access to resources facilitated through SNS (Dutta & Fraser, 2009). In case of social connections maintained by means of SNS social capital may be termed e-social capital.

These findings are echoed by the theory of social capital. Stone et al. (2003) suggested that the nature of a person’s social capital is largely influenced by different patterns of their network characteristics. Stone et al. (2003) generalised connections as “family, friendship and neighbourhood ties can be thought of as “bonding” ties; civic linkages and other more distant ties are “bridging”, since these often provide contact with people different from one’s self and with varied opportunities; and institutional connections are “linking” ties”. It is widely accepted that social capital can be divided into three types – bonding, bridging, and linking (Narayan 1999; Woolcock 2000):

Bonding social capital- existent in dense or closed networks, and helps people “get by” in life on a daily basis.

Bridging social capital - makes accessible the resources and opportunities which exist in one network to a member of another. This type of social capital is particularly useful in helping people to “get ahead”.

Linking social capital - entails social relationships with those in authority or positions of power and is useful for gaining resources.

While Facebook has been shown as a means for facilitating existing offline ties (Boyd & Ellison, 2007), LinkedIn has been specifically designed for finding and maintaining business connections. This type of social networks much more aimed at developing business links, finding employment and consultancy opportunities. In the economic downturn, LinkedIn growth reaches 200 percent per year with 35 million members with a large proportion of new registrations coming from the finance and other business sectors (LinkedIn, 2008). Haythornwaite (2005) established that Facebook friendships are articulated on “latent ties” sharing offline connection before meeting online. According to Boyd & Ellison (2007) the most common applications of Facebook were to maintain previous relationships, established at school or university, for example, and to gain information about others.

Dutta and Fraser (2009) suggested that the increasing popularity of online social networking is changing not only the way people manage their careers but social networking itself. Facebook has seen an influx of corporate managers in fears over their employment rushing to join a social network in a bid to build their social capital. The explanation for why individuals turn to SNS to secure career prospects lay in exploitation (vs. building) of e-social capital online. According to Stone et al. (2003) diversity of social network members is argued to enhance the bridging capabilities of capital connections.

Findings of the OxiS Survey 2009 showed that a growing proportion of UK society go online to reinforce the networks of family and existing social networks, but also introducing users to new people. Internet users, particularly those using a wide array of communication facilities were likely to see online social communication as enabling them to be more productive at work, and to have more opportunities online to enhance their personal, financial and economic well-being (Dutton et al., 2009). The phenomenon is increasingly used as a business tool, with practitioners recommending progressively more ways to use social networking to enhance business (e.g. Barnes & Barnes, 2009). On the other hand, the social origin of SNS and their gradual transition into formal business communications created a discord between private information which can be easily accessed on social networks. These points of concern for privacy in public context have surfaced in extant literature and have been coined as private/public dichotomy.

Private/Public Dichotomy

A growing number of publications (e.g. Barnes 2006, Lange 2007, Livingstone 2008, Lewis & West 2009) continuously draw attention to issues of privacy of individual information available as a result of social networking use. Informally chatting with friends or sharing personal multimedia on Facebook has become a part of a daily routine for many users. However, the prospect of personal content becoming available to the outsiders of an informal social circle is more than probable. Many users maintain separation of their private informal profile and a public business profile (Lynne 2009), using an informal SNS, e.g. Facebook, for the former and a business-centred one, e.g. LinkedIn, for the latter. Lange (2007) provides a useful lens on the technological impact on what is considered private vs. public information and shared content. According to Lange, context determines whether certain content shared through SNS is viewed as private or public. For example, photos or videos taken at home are private when contrasted with media related to a town or a neighbourhood. At the same time, public and private content may exist within the same piece of media in a broader context. Gal (2002) argues that "public" and "private" are relative terms and shift according to individual perspectives. Lange (2007) uses the term "fractal distinction" to represent private/public dichotomy.

Some researchers (e.g. Weintraub & Kumar, 1997) argue that technology may be significantly changing boundaries between 'publicity' and 'privacy'. SNS increase the amount of private information shared online and possibly present a hazard to those users who overlook adjusting their SNS privacy settings. The old saying 'Choose your friends wisely' cannot be more relevant as in the context of online social networking. Increasingly, there are warnings that individuals should be careful of their use of networks generally as employers are more and more using information gleaned from social networks to assess future employees (Peluchette & Karl, 2010). However there is also an increasing level of concern from the businesses themselves, regarding legal challenges and the risks involved in using social networks for building business, leading to policy developments (Wilson, 2009).

Method

As a part of a wider study of online social networking in HE, a two phase approach to data collection was adopted, with two focus groups informing the development of a survey. The sample for the focus group was drawn ad-hoc from the student population at a post-92 University in the UK. Each focus group discussion was structured around nine open ended questions and lasted for approximately an hour. The discussions were digitally recorded and

transcribed. Grounded theory was used for processing of the focus group transcripts and categories were derived to form the themes for the survey questions. Focus group transcripts were initially analysed using open coding to divide the data into concepts. These concepts were processed using the constant comparative method. Phrases from the focus group participants' responses were analysed for concepts which were further compared for similarities and contrasts and then grouped into categories.

The analysis of the focus group transcripts provided the starting point for developing a range of questions covering various aspects and concerns of social networking use. In the second stage of data collection a draft survey was piloted on twenty individual students at the research site. Based on the feedback from the pilot the questionnaire was amended and formatted into its final version. The questionnaire in paper format was distributed to a random sample of undergraduate and postgraduate students including UK and European universities. The sample was drawn entirely from students studying on business courses. The total number of respondents comprised of 272 individuals, which gives a representative sample. The demographic data collected included information on age, nationality, number of years of work experience, first language, year and type of degree. Further questions covered a range of expectations and motivation for persistent use of various networks. The questions worded ('Why did you join this social network ' with answer options including ' Find a job', 'Make business contacts' as well as 'To find contacts at the University' and 'To be generally sociable', etc.) were provided for each network type. A Likert scale was used (1- Strongly Agree to 5- Strongly Disagree). Average age of respondents for Masters was 29 years, for Undergraduates – 22 years. By gender the sample comprised of 48% female respondents and 47% of males, 5% did not provide their answers. Dominant nationalities were as follows: British – 33%, Cypriot – 7%, Russian – 6,5%, Indian – 6%.

Findings

Out of the 272 respondents the vast majority indicated Facebook as their primary social network with 214 registrations, followed by MySpace with 42 and LinkedIn with 27. The average number of registrations per individual was on 1.4 social networks. Undergraduate students indicated no registration for LinkedIn. An opposite trend for postgraduate students revealed no registrations on MySpace which could explain the orientation towards networks that provide career opportunities as compared to leisure.

Use of Social Network Sites

With regards to our first research question on the differences between undergraduate and postgraduate students and the use of social networks an interesting pattern emerges. Students were asked to compare their current use of SNS with the one when they first joined for two key activities, i.e. Social and Business. Four different options were given ranging from not at all which indicates that the respondent never used SNS for a social or business activity, about the same which indicates an equal time commitment and two further options one more and one less. Comparison of the data analysis results (see tables 1 and 2) for Masters and Undergraduate students revealed that the latter category uses online networking mainly for social activity. The results of the chi-square test show statistical significance at 5% for the association of change of use and level of studies for the social activity and 10% for the business activity. The result was generally anticipated as undergraduate students were expected to be more sociable and use communication technology freely to enable social interactions.

Table 1. Use of Networks for Social Activity

Use	Masters	Undergraduate	Total
About the same	14.89%	26.24%	41.13%
Less	14.18%	11.35%	25.53%
More	9.93%	20.57%	30.50%
Not at all	0.00%	2.84%	2.84%
Total	39.01%	60.99%	100.00%
Chi-Square = 7.64**			

* Statistically significant at 10%, ** Statistically significant at 5%, *** Statistically significant at 1%

Table 2. Use of Networks for Business Activity

Use	Masters	Undergraduate	Total
About the same	12.98%	15.27%	28.24%
Less	9.92%	16.03%	25.95%
More	8.40%	5.34%	13.74%
Not at all	9.16%	22.90%	32.06%
Total	40.46%	59.54%	100.00%
Chi-Square = 6.18*			

* Statistically significant at 10%, ** Statistically significant at 5%, *** Statistically significant at 1%

To further explore our first research question motivations for registering with a certain social network were further examined in a cross network analysis. The results of the t-tests are shown in table 3. As expected, MySpace followed by Facebook, have surfaced as the networks used for general socialising. On the other hand, students were more motivated to join LinkedIn in search of a job or business opportunities. MySpace was not seen as a business venue. Curiosity and keeping in touch with friends dominated as the main reasons for registering on MySpace. This network also had a weak association with making contact with people from University, possibly as appealing to a different age group.

Table 3. Total - Network Comparison

Values	Facebook	LinkedIn	ttest	Facebook	MySpace	ttest	Total
To be generally sociable	2.27	3.00	-1.41	2.27	1.67	0.93	2.29
Peer pressure (old friends)	3.15	3.00	0.26	3.15	3.50	0.26	3.15
Peer pressure (new friends)	3.29	2.83	0.81	3.29	2.50	0.82	3.27
Find a job	4.26	3.00	2.70***	4.26	5.00	-0.96	4.22
Find business	4.20	3.00	2.44**	4.20	4.50	-0.36	4.16
Curiosity	2.86	2.50	0.75	2.86	1.50	1.45	2.83
Keeping in touch with friends	1.82	2.67	-1.84**	1.82	1.50	0.41	1.85

Making new friends	3.18	2.33	1.60	3.18	2.33	1.14	3.13
Making contact with people from University	2.48	2.50	-0.04	2.48	4.00	-1.61*	2.49

* Statistically significant at 10%, ** Statistically significant at 5%, *** Statistically significant at 1%

For postgraduate students reasons for joining Facebook and LinkedIn were compared. As seen from the results in table 4, master students see more possibilities for general socialising on Facebook. If we explore the dimension of level of studies, however, a slightly different picture emerges on the employability expectations. LinkedIn is seen by postgraduate students as an avenue for finding a job or a new business connection at (3). This group also views LinkedIn as a venue for making new friends, most likely in future business setting.

Table 4. Postgraduate Level Comparison: Facebook vs. LinkedIn

Masters	Facebook	LinkedIn	ttest	Total
To be generally sociable	2.30	3.00	-1.63*	2.37
Peer pressure (old friends)	2.74	3.00	-0.46	2.77
Peer pressure (new friends)	2.94	2.83	0.18	2.93
Find a job	4.33	3.00	3.31***	4.19
Find business	4.29	3.00	3.02***	4.16
Curiosity	2.74	2.50	0.56	2.71
Keeping in touch with friends	1.67	2.67	-2.43**	1.77
Making new friends	3.30	2.33	1.92*	3.20
Making contact with people from University	2.37	2.50	-0.25	2.38

* Statistically significant at 10%, ** Statistically significant at 5%, *** Statistically significant at 1%

For undergraduate students (see table 5) social activities are among the main reasons for using Facebook with “Keeping in touch with friends”, “To be generally sociable” and “Making contacts with people from University” being the top three.

Table 5. Undergraduate Students

Undergraduate	Facebook	MySpace	ttest	Total
To be generally sociable	2.19	2.00	0.21	2.19
Peer pressure (old friends)	3.28	3.50	-0.21	3.29
Peer pressure (new friends)	3.50	2.50	1.09	3.48
Find a job	4.18	5.00	-0.93	4.20
Find business	4.17	4.50	-0.36	4.18
Curiosity	2.82	1.50	1.69*	2.79
Keeping in touch with friends	1.87	1.50	0.43	1.86
Making new friends	3.05	3.00	0.06	3.05
Making contact with people from University	2.44	4.00	-1.60*	2.47

* Statistically significant at 10%, ** Statistically significant at 5%, *** Statistically significant at 1%

Making contact with people from the University is an important factor for both undergraduate and postgraduate students with Facebook scoring (2.44) and (2.37) respectively. LinkedIn's importance for making contact at the University (2.5) is higher than finding a job (3) for postgraduate students.

Motivations to Join Social Network Sites

In accordance with our second research question it was of interest to establish the reasons for joining various types of social networks. Therefore for each type of SNS registration a list of nine values were provided, ranging from "I joined this network in order to be generally sociable" to "Making contact with people from University". An open ended option "Other" was included also.

Table 6 shows comparison of non-British and British students' views on their motivation to join Facebook. The results show that non-British students place a lesser emphasis on Facebook as a means of general social communication. They also see Facebook as a means of making new friends, as compared to British students. British students have less expectations that connections on Facebook can lead to finding a new job or leading to new business, while non-British students are more proactive in their business objectives on Facebook. The main emphasis of the survey was to uncover business prospects and career opportunities opening through participation in social networks. Interestingly enough, Facebook for the British students is not seen as providing opportunities to make business connections (4.62 out of a maximum of 5, higher score being Strongly Disagree) and even less so for MySpace at (5). This group also does not place expectations on finding a job at LinkedIn (4). A different trend emerges from non-British respondents who see LinkedIn as an opportunity to find a job at (2.5).

Table 6. Motivation to join and Nationality: Facebook Comparison

Facebook	Nationality		
	Non-British	British	t-test
To be generally sociable	2.41	2.06	1.70**
Peer pressure (old friends)	3.02	3.34	-1.36
Peer pressure (new friends)	3.27	3.32	-0.21
Find a job	4.00	4.62	-3.52***
Find business	3.88	4.66	-4.17***
Curiosity	2.91	2.73	1.50
Keeping in touch with friends	1.92	1.69	1.22
Making new friends	3.01	3.44	-2.08**
Making contact with people from University	2.47	2.52	-0.31

* Statistically significant at 10%, ** Statistically significant at 5%, *** Statistically significant at 1%

Comparison of the results reflecting reasons for joining LinkedIn, as a business network, between UK and international students are summarised in table 7. In this case views of British and non-British students coincided regarding the motivation for joining LinkedIn to find business, because of curiosity and to make contact with people from University. It was also interesting to note that non-British students indicated peer pressure as one of the major reasons for joining this network. Finally, it became evident that British students place less expectation on LinkedIn to help them in searching for a job. A similar pattern was observed when students were asked whether they joined LinkedIn in order to make new friends. British students indicated that they did not see this network as a means of meeting new people.

Table 7. Motivation to join and Nationality: LinkedIn Comparison

LinkedIn	Nationality		
	Non-British	British	t-test
To be generally sociable	2.67	3.50	-0.70
Peer pressure (old friends)	2.50	4.00	-0.96
Peer pressure (new friends)	2.75	3.00	-0.15
Find a job	2.50	4.00	-0.96
Find business	3.00	3.00	0.00
Curiosity	2.50	2.50	0.00
Keeping in touch with friends	3.00	2.00	0.73
Making new friends	1.75	3.50	-1.50
Making contact with people from University	2.50	2.50	0.00

* Statistically significant at 10%, ** Statistically significant at 5%, *** Statistically significant at 1%

There are no substantial differences regarding the motivation to join a network and the gender of the respondent, as results in table 8 show, when the network of comparison is Facebook. The only motivation that is statistically different between male and female respondents is the peer pressure from new friends where male participants consider it a more important motivation than our female participants. The remaining factors do not show any substantial differentiation between different genders.

Table 8. Motivation to join and Gender: Facebook Comparison

Facebook	Gender		
	Male	Female	t-test
To be generally sociable	2.36	2.16	1.01
Peer pressure (old friends)	3.03	3.30	-1.22
Peer pressure (new friends)	3.07	3.53	-2.07**
Find a job	4.34	4.22	0.72
Find business	4.27	4.21	0.35
Curiosity	2.90	2.81	1.03
Keeping in touch with friends	1.93	1.71	1.26
Making new friends	2.41	2.53	-0.95
Making contact with people from University	3.08	3.28	-0.58

* Statistically significant at 10%, ** Statistically significant at 5%, *** Statistically significant at 1%

When the analysis of motivations is performed on the total sample then the picture on the driving factors behind joining a social network differ substantially by gender. Female participants joined a social network in order to be generally sociable and keeping in touch with friends, whilst male participants joined the network based on peer pressure from new friends and in order to make new friends. These key differences focus on the social functions of social networks whilst the business functions show no substantial differences between male and female participants.

Table 9. Motivation to join and Gender: Total Comparison

Total Values	Gender		t-test
	Male	Female	
To be generally sociable	2.51	2.20	1.79*
Peer pressure (old friends)	3.01	3.28	-1.38
Peer pressure (new friends)	3.08	3.49	-2.11**
Find a job	4.16	4.12	0.18
Find business	4.10	4.17	-0.40
Curiosity	2.80	2.73	0.91
Keeping in touch with friends	2.17	1.77	2.46**
Making new friends	3.04	3.33	-1.62*
Making contact with people from University	2.61	2.55	0.30

* Statistically significant at 10%, ** Statistically significant at 5%, *** Statistically significant at 1%

Discussion

SNS have attracted a significant attention from researchers. Such issues as trust and privacy, topologies of social connections, educational use of SNS have been addressed in recent literature (Acquisti & Gross 2006, Barnes 2006). There is substantial evidence that younger people are more familiar with online networking (Dutton et al, 2009) than other age groups and therefore organisations may expect that they will make more effective use of this medium in e-business. However, little research has been carried out to clarify how well younger people understand the use of social networking in business.

The study put forth the following research questions:

Are there any significant key differences in how individuals use different SNS between undergraduate, postgraduate and international student population?

The number of postgraduates using Linked-In to develop business contacts in our study suggests that these more mature students are taking a broader view of the concept of 'friend'. Undergraduates, on the other hand, still seem to be focusing on the social aspects of these networks, and could possibly benefit from awareness training on the safe and effective use of online networks for developing business contacts.

Do such variables as gender, educational level and nationality impact on the motivations to join SNS?

Earlier research (e.g. Hargittai 2007, Ellison et al., 2007) argues that despite the visible accessibility of SNS networks and groups often use sites in ways which manifest

segmentation by nationality, age, educational level, or other stratification axes common in society. The results of this study established that non-UK sub-sample of respondents are using online social networking to build, maintain and exploit online social capital to reinforce their bridging ties and consequently career prospects. On the other hand, British individuals, especially at the undergraduate level have not fully realised the future potential of establishing and maintain connections on SNS for career enhancement. Females report using SNS to be generally sociable, keep in touch with friends and as a result of peer pressure, whilst using less to make new friends. This fits in with gender differences in socialising (e.g. Eagly & Wood, 1991) suggesting that variations in SNS use by gender remain.

Are there any implications for employability and career management, and whether there is a need to include business social networking practices in HE curriculum?

The growing popularity of online social networking is altering the nature of business networking with significant consequences for career management. It is interesting to note that many people maintain a presence on both Facebook and LinkedIn, keeping their private informal profile on the former and maintaining a public, business profile on the latter. This paper discussed the implications of the shift in the way graduates are supported in their career development and making use of online social capital building to enhance their employability. However, the surging popularity of SNS seems to be erasing the line between business and social networking, and is threatening to affect behavioural norms and values of face-to-face communication.

Conclusions

What drives business use of social networks? What profits can users of SNS gain? Extant literature (Dutta & Fraser, 2009) argues that individuals achieve a lead in the labour market, among other benefits through strong social ties. SNS help maintain connections and exploit resources accumulated through relationships, termed here as e-social capital. Implications of social networking practices for employability and career management in HE together with differences in how individuals use different SNS have been addressed in this study. Significant differences in expectations between undergraduate and postgraduate students from social networks have been revealed. While postgraduate students well understood the significance of business networking and increasing their social capital by means of social networks, undergraduates are far from realising the career benefits and business prospects enabled through networking with current students, alumni and employers. Also, international students across all levels have realised and are taking advantage of social connections closely relating them to career development. Universities may wish to take a more active role in developing British undergraduate students' abilities to use social networks for career progression. Organisations employing graduates should not assume that new graduates are able to use online networking for business purposes in an effective way and may need to include this as part of their staff development.

Whilst this is an initial study it does focus on business students and uses an international sample to assess differences between level of education and also nationality. The implication that undergraduate students in particular may not be as adept as many might assume in using online networks for business necessitates further research attention.

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