

Abstract Submission Form

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Submission Details

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| Title of Abstract | Job search information behaviours: an ego-net study of networking and social media use amongst young jobseekers |
| Type of Submission (please select ONE): | Full Paper | ✔ |
| Short Paper |  |
| Round Table Discussion |  |
| Themes (please select all that apply): | Information Literacies | ✔ |
| Information Behaviour  | ✔ |
| Impact | ✔ |
| Information as agent of change | ✔ |
| Methodological Paper  |  |
| Abstract (Please check Call for Papers for requirements): | **Introduction**This paper presents interview findings from a study of young jobseekers based in Scotland, and the means by which they engage in networking behaviours to accrue job search information. In addition, it investigates the role of social media platforms as tools for job search networking. The research addresses calls from the field of job search theory to provide an understanding of the role of social networks in helping individuals to source employment, and the specific sources which are used to achieve this end (Van Hoye, Klehe & van Hooft, 2013, p.15; Wanberg, 2012, p.389). The paper is derived from a larger project sponsored by Economic and Social Research Council (grant no. ES/J500136/1) and Skills Development Scotland. Its findings are intended to contribute towards future careers guidance policy in Scotland with respect to the effective use of social networks and social media by jobseekers.**Literature review**The use of network contacts as a prominent source of job information is one which has been well documented in previous research (see, for example: Granovetter, 1995; Saks, 2005). However, the few studies which address job search networking explicitly approach it from a quantitative perspective (Lambert et al, 2006; Van Hoye et al, 2009; Wanberg et al, 2000). As such, they are empirically driven, and lack sufficient theoretical grounding. Additionally, these studies do not factor in the potential impact of social media on the networking process. In Information Science research, networking has emerged as a key information seeking behaviour in various qualitative studies (Foster & Ford, 2003; Huvila, 2011; Meho & Tibbo, 2003; Wellstead, 2011). Despite this, the concept of networking as an information behaviour has yet to be considered in isolation. Thus, by adopting an information behaviour perspective, this study provides two theoretical contributions: an exploration of the concept of networking in both offline and online environments, and the informational role of network entities during the job search process. **Methods**In early 2016, qualitative data were collected from semi-structured interviews with seven young jobseekers aged between 16 and 24. The participants were targeted to account for a broad range of networking experiences across a variety of demographics. To achieve this, jobseekers were sourced from:* + - * + **Employability groups** which cater a range of services for young people experiencing multiple barriers to the labour market.
				+ **Careers services**, for people of all ages who are seeking to improve their career management skills.
				+ **Further Education institutions**, for people studying towards qualifications such as Higher National Certificate and Higher National Diploma.
				+ **Higher Education institutions**, for people studying towards qualifications ranging from Bachelor’s Degrees to Doctorates.

The interview schedules were informed by theory derived from Tom Wilson’s general model of information behaviour (1997). To this end, questions were asked which related to the context of the jobseekers, the means by which they gained information through networking behaviours (i.e. information seeking), and the various barriers they faced to networking and the use of social media platforms. This facilitated a holistic understanding of job search networking from the individual’s perspective, as influenced by various situational and social conditions.In addition to the above, an egocentric network approach – the name generator - was incorporated into the interview schedule to gather data specifically in relation to the act of mobilising network contacts (Robins, 2015, pp.51-52). Using this method the names of the various network entities from whom the jobseekers had acquired job search information were identified, and their relational ties with these contacts were probed for further details. This approach was critical to elucidate the phenomena which aggregate to create the concept of networking. It also facilitated the quantification of qualitative data in the analysis phase, which was then used to create visual ego-nets of each jobseeker’s information network.**Results**The interview results show that the participants engage in multilevel networking behaviours during job search, in both formal and informal environments. The ego-net visuals indicate that the nature and extent of these behaviours varies substantially amongst the sample, and that often the informational potential of networks are under-utilised. They also show that there is a clear distinction between active and passive information acquisition from network contacts, and that these are closely linked to the context of the jobseekers. The interviews also show that the jobseekers attain five types of job search information from network contacts, which relate to:1. Personal development
2. Industry and job roles
3. Practical skills (e.g. CV advice)
4. Contacts and leads
5. Job opportunities.

These information exchanges occur through a number of communication channels. However, in cases where they are appropriated for job search purposes, the informational role of social media platforms is profound. For example, they facilitate access to a broad pool of weak network contacts in niche industries, who can provide information that would be difficult to obtain through traditional communication channels, or via existing networks. Their functionality also present unique opportunities for passive information acquisition whilst the jobseeker is engaged in other recreational activities.The jobseekers also face a number of barriers to networking and using social media for job search purposes. These are ***situational,*** such as a lack of access to privately owned devices with an internet connection. They are also ***social***, in instances where informal network contacts (e.g. family members) are not in possession of relevant information, or are absent altogether. Quite often linked to situational and social factors, the barriers are also ***intrapersonal.*** For example, some relay a general disinclination to ask people for help.In relation to the use of social media platforms, others lack sufficient awareness that they can be appropriated for job search. **Conclusion**The findings summarised above provide a unique insight into the concept of networking as an information behaviour during job search. The evidence indicates that although networking is an integral job search behaviour, young jobseekers do not necessarily maximise the informational potential of their networks. It also shows how such behaviours can be inhibited by a variety of individual and environmental factors, which, in turn, could be ameliorated by appropriate careers guidance interventions. For example, such interventions could emphasise the use of digital platforms for networking. As the results show, social media can have a profound informational impact on job search. They provide networking platforms where jobseekers can forge contacts they would have otherwise found difficult to attain. Additionally, such functional undertakings can coincide with recreational activities, making them useful environments to engage young people.The findings from this paper have also been used in a second data collection exercise for this study. They informed a survey questionnaire completed by 911 young jobseekers based in Scotland between August and December 2016.ReferencesFoster, A., & Ford, N. (2003). Serendipity and information seeking: an empirical study. *Journal of Documentation*, *59*(3), 321-340.Granovetter, M. (1995). *Getting a job: A study of contacts and careers*. University of Chicago Press.Huvila, I. (2011). [" I asked my Mum, but..." and other cases of unsuccessful information seeking by asking](http://www.webcitation.org/6jyjlUaeG). *Information Research*, *16*(1), paper 460. 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| Additional Information: | This is a co-authored paper by J. Mowbray, H. Hall, R. Raeside, and P. Robertson of Edinburgh Napier University. The paper itself will be presented at the conference by J. Mowbray. |

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