

Literature Review

Founded on December 28, 2002, and launched on May 5, 2003, LinkedIn is used for professional networking. “LinkedIn is the world's largest professional network on the internet” (LinkedIn, 2020). A person can use LinkedIn to find a job or internship, create a professional relationship, and learn the needed skills to succeed in a career. On LinkedIn, users can share their professional backgrounds such as past work experience, education, skills, and receive recommendations. A member can also write articles, post pictures, and videos. Like other social networking sites, people look at a profile to see who the user is. Users can share their resumes, accomplishments, articles they are interested in or wrote themselves, and more.

“LinkedIn is a platform for anyone looking to navigate their professional life” (LinkedIn, 2020). Anyone is allowed to create a LinkedIn account, from small-town business owners to students. “LinkedIn members can harness the power of LinkedIn to tap into a network of professionals, companies, and groups in their industry and beyond” (LinkedIn, 2020). “It is a platform where a businessman can interact with others for B2B marketing, partnership, presenting business quality, and many more. It helps in brand awareness also” (Garg, 2017.)

According to LinkedIn, over 704 million users worldwide are on LinkedIn, with 189 million being from North America. More than 46 million students and recent graduates on LinkedIn (Brett, 2018.) 90 million LinkedIn users are senior-level influencers, and 63 million are in decision-making positions (LinkedIn, 2020.) “Even if you are not actively searching for employment, you can use LinkedIn to connect with current and former colleagues and link to people you meet at networking events, conferences, and so on” (Doyel, 2019.)

LinkedIn has five main pages: Home, My Network, Jobs, Messaging, and Me.

- Like other social sites, the Home Page allows users to see their network's posts and choose to like, share, or comment on them.
- My Network is where users can make connections. People can add each other as connections, but both parties must approve the request before making that connection.
- Jobs is where users can search and apply for jobs. They can search for jobs based on location or other keywords. A user can choose to get notifications when new jobs are posted.
- On Messaging, users can chat with people in their network or outside of their network if they allow it.
- Me is the user's profile. It closely resembles his or her resume. Users can summarize themselves and show their past and current work history, accomplishments, volunteering history, education, where they live, and more. Users can decide what they choose to share, but they are encouraged to keep it professional.

To create a LinkedIn account, all one needs to do is create an online profile that summarizes their professional experience. The more detailed the page, the more a potential employer or recruiter can understand the user. "Your profile represents your professional life and milestones, where people can find you and stay updated on your professional activity" (LinkedIn, 2020). Once the profile is created, users can build their network. They can search for people, add them to their network, and see what they share on their page. They can also search and follow major companies, athletes, and celebrities such as Microsoft and even LeBron James. Users can easily interact in conversations throughout LinkedIn.

Users can also find a job on LinkedIn. They can search for companies and begin interacting with them and seeing if they have any job openings. On the “Jobs” page, users can search for jobs based on location or keywords. If a user chooses to apply, it can be as simple as clicking a button and attaching his or her resume. “Many people use the site to grow their contacts and find career opportunities, and the Jobs section of the site is a powerful tool for finding and applying for jobs. There are settings on LinkedIn that let you alert recruiters that you are actively job searching as well” (Johnson, 2019).

It is now common for employers to use Google to search for job candidates. Many people turn to social media to show their professional skills, network, and share their personal life experiences. Those candidates need to keep their public profiles up to date and looking professional, as well as people who are already set in careers. There have been many different social media platforms that public relations professionals have used to advance their careers. The most common include Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Using social media helps individuals establish who they are, have done and currently do, and what they want to do.

An individual can use Instagram to showcase their photography skills. Facebook and Twitter allow you to share content related to what you currently do or what you want to do in your job and create a professional network. These social media platforms also help show an individual’s self, helping them connect with a possible employer.

Established in 2004, Facebook has become more than a way for people to connect with family and friends and post about their everyday lives through text and pictures. People can now use Facebook to advance their careers, share articles, post job listings, and much more. Business Insider says that using Facebook is a great way to do targeted marketing and an easy way to

connect with clients, co-workers, and employers. Some users may be worried about communicating with these people in fear that they may share something too personal.

Business Insider says to “Get out of that mentality. People do business with those they know, like, and trust.” Facebook is an easy way to “target market” these individuals and show them who you are, as well as for you to see who they are. Using Facebook can also help an individual share what they have been doing in their current career. Facebook allows you to create events, post informative articles, and engage with your “friends.”

Created in 2006, Twitter is a social media platform that allows users to post and interact with messages known as "tweets." Twitter is different from Facebook because it only allows a limited character amount per post, while Facebook has an unlimited character count. While that can be complicated, it is easier for users to find and connect with other users.

Professionals use Twitter to research and keep up with companies, public figures, and current events. Like Facebook, users can share articles, pictures, and videos. Twitter is more personalized than Facebook and encourages its users to share their thoughts and opinions. Twitter can also reach many people quickly and follow and build relationships with professionals in your work field.

Unlike Facebook and Twitter, Instagram is a social media platform where you can only post pictures and videos with a short caption. It is an easy way to share your professional work as well as your lifestyle. Users can post photos and videos on their page or post on their “stories,” which will last 24 hours. Users can use Instagram to research and keep up with companies and public figures, and friends and family.

One profession that revolves around social media is public relations. “Public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between

organizations and their publics” (Public Relations Society of America, 2020.) Public relations focuses on engaging, influencing, and building relationships with the public to help an organization’s image. Being a public relations professional includes a lot of research, planning, evaluating, and communicating. It also includes “overseeing the creation of content to drive customer engagement and generate leads” (Public Relations Society of America, 2020.)

“Findings show those who practice public relations continue to agree strongly that social and other emerging media are changing the way public relations is practiced.” (Wright & Drifka Hinson, 2015.) The public goes to social media to talk and connect with their favorite brands. It is up to the public relations professionals to find what the public is engaging with and create content to communicate. Other public relations duties include crisis communication, media relations, content creation, speechwriting, and social media.

While there has not been much investigation into how public relations professionals use LinkedIn for personal advancement, there has been quite a bit done on how public relations professionals use social media in their jobs. A ten-year longitudinal analysis, done by Donald K. Wright, Ph.D., APR, and Michelle Drifka Hinson, M.A., studied how social and other emerging technologies are being used in public relations practice. Wright and Hinson found that while Twitter usage slightly exceeded Facebook usage in 2014, Facebook was used somewhat more for public relations professionals in 2015. LinkedIn and Youtube were also used more frequently in 2015. “Our 2015 results also suggest the percentage of time public relations practitioners spend with blogs, social and other emerging media during their workdays is leveling off” (Wright & Drifka Hinson, 2015.)

“In addition to web pages and e-mail communication, social media sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and others all have pages organized by organizations such as the Institute

for Public Relations (IPR), the International Public Relations Association (IPRA), the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA).” (Wright & Drifka Hinson, 2015.)

The Public Relations Society of America, known as PRSA, is the “nation’s leading professional organization serving the communications community” (PRSA, 2020.) It has more than 30,000 members of professionals and students and has 110 chapters in the United States (PRSA, 2020.) It has its code of ethics and a student organization called the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA). One does not have to be a public relations professional to join PRSA. Other practice areas include community relations, public affairs, public relations teaching and counseling, and research. PRSA helps public relations professionals with professional development and accreditation in public relations (APR), allowing them to excel in their careers and be promoted to higher positions.

According to Talent Works, a website with data-driven tips to accelerate a job search, being in a senior-level position means you have a minimum of eight or more years of experience. “Earning an executive-level job often requires significant networking and proven skills in your industry.” (Indeed, 2019.) A mid-level position means you have a minimum of five or more years of experience. “Mid-level employees usually hold managerial roles within their company and ensure the organization’s day-to-day operations are running smoothly. They often report to higher or executive-level managers who may not personally oversee the specific objectives of each department.” (Indeed, 2019.)

Heather Carmack and Sarah Heiss did a study titled “Using the Theory of Planned Behavior to Predict College Students' Intent to Use LinkedIn for Job Searches and Professional Networking.” They said, “college students and recent graduates are the fastest-growing users demographic on LinkedIn with an estimated 40 million profiles for these groups.” Carmack and

Heiss had 107 college students complete an online survey to determine how they used LinkedIn. They looked at the user's attitudes, perceived control, social influences, networking, and job searching. In the end, Carmack and Heiss found that students are "infrequent and passive users" on LinkedIn.

In a journal article titled "Next-Gen Résumés: A Case Study of Using Transmedia Storytelling to Create Personal Branding on LinkedIn," Lynn McCool examined how professions "may be adapting the once-stable résumé genre to a next-generation (next-gen) iteration of this genre by using multiple media to create and sustain personal branding" (McCool, 2019). In the study, she examined public user profiles and how users were promoting themselves. She found that young professionals are not using traditional resources anymore to promote themselves in a professional environment. "Instead, they are turning to a networked, social world and using multiple media and transmedia storytelling techniques to attract followers, connect to other professionals, and network with potential employers" (McCool, 2019).

Even though there are millions of users on LinkedIn, there is no research on how Central Arkansas public relations professionals use LinkedIn, or any social media platform, to advance their careers. This project attempts to answer the following question: How do public relations professionals use LinkedIn in Central Arkansas?

This study differs from others because it focuses on public relations professionals in Central Arkansas. Public relations jobs vary depending on where they live and work due to different publics and social media habits. There is no research on how professionals need to market themselves and use LinkedIn to their advantage in the Arkansas area.

Key publics that can benefit from this research project include recent college graduates, professionals looking to advance their careers to mid-level or senior-level, and people looking to enter the public relations profession at an entry-level position in Central Arkansas.

Methodology

Participants

Study candidates consisted of twenty five people who have jobs in the public relations field and are senior-level or mid-level. All of the participants have a LinkedIn account. The group's makeup is non-probability convenience sampling and used by people who have jobs in public relations or the media field. The participants are all in different stages of their careers, from tenured college professors to content creators for news channels. Recruitment was done through professional public relations chapters in Central Arkansas (International Association of Business Communicators and the Public Relations Society of America) through faculty and alumni of the UALR School of Mass Communication.

Measures

This study used qualitative research techniques. An interview enabled public relations professionals to understand the questions and projects carefully and then explained their reasoning for their answers. Participants received an email with an invitation to do the interview and the informed consent language. Participants had the option to interview over the phone or via email. Once they agreed to participate, they were asked to pick a date for the interview and how they would like to do it.

The interview focused on candidates' uses of their LinkedIn accounts. It had questions regarding the motivation for creating a LinkedIn account, their usage of their account, and how often they use it.

Procedure

Professionals were recruited via email. I sent out an email to fifty professionals in the public relations field. My goal was to have a third of these professionals agree to participate in the study. These emails explained to the professionals what the research project is, what they would be doing, and how I planned to use these results to help other professionals in the field. All informed consent language was included in this form. The professionals were asked if they are interested in participating in the project.

I also told the candidates to reach out if they have any questions. I asked the candidates to respond and chose an interview date and time. Interviews were handled over the phone or via email and did not last longer than one hour. Once the interview was completed, I compiled the received information.

I sent emails to professionals for three weeks. After receiving my responses, I gathered my data, organized answers, and began a rough draft of the results. I did have to send out more emails past the initial three weeks to reach my goal of 25 participants. I continued to include the answers in the results. I began on the blog posts once I received all responses and organized data.

I showed my results from the research project through a blog titled "Advancing your Public Relations Career." The blog was created using WordPress. These blog pages include Home, About the Project, The Researcher, Findings, and Contact Information. The home page shows the project's title with a tagline, a menu bar, the latest blog posts, and pictures. It also gives viewers a chance to share the page on their social media accounts. Viewers have easy

access to finding these blog posts and are able to share the blog posts on their social media accounts. They are able to leave comments under each post. I will check for new comments daily to respond to any questions they may have quickly.

I drove people to my blog page through social media. I advertised the blog through my social media and encouraged the interviewees to do the same. Again, I allow easy access to viewers to share the blog and posts on their social media. I used hashtags on the blog and in social media posts to spread the post. I was consistent with my publishing each week and responded to comments and questions to build a relationship with the readers.

Once I received all responses, I created blog posts showing how professionals in public relations are using LinkedIn. These blog posts include a welcoming overview of the project that will give light background information, a quick overview of the participants, the respondents' purposes of creating accounts, what the respondents do on LinkedIn, how they use LinkedIn versus other social media accounts, and how they have used LinkedIn to secure a job.

The identities of the respondents remain anonymous. Identification is only their professional level (mid-level or senior-level position) and their field of public relations work (agency, corporate communication office, nonprofit public relations, etc.)