Generation Y: Using Social Media for Job Searching?

An exploratory study of how Generation Y job seekers use social media to fulfil their job searching needs

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR

THE DEGREE MASTER OF ARTS IN HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

At

National College of Ireland

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Word Count:

19, 366

Submitted to the National College of Ireland, August 2016

Abstract

The interconnectedness produced from the exponential growth of social media use in everyday life, has revolutionized the way people connect and interact with each other. The purpose of this study is to explore how Generation Y job seekers utilize social media platforms as a medium for creating occupational opportunities. This is done using qualitative data collected and analyzed from 10 in-depth interviews with Generation Y graduate students at the National College of Ireland. The results indicate that Generation Y job seekers are engaging in a plethora of job seeking activities, some of which extend well beyond social media, and interestingly, incorporate traditional approaches, challenging the popular notion of Generation Y users as fundamentally technologically oriented. Further, there appears to be a distinct differentiation between the perceived functionality of social media platforms, with respondents indicating a clear delineation between professional and personal usage. Despite this distinction, users indicated strategically managing all their social media accounts in an effort to manage their online presence. Lastly, and interestingly, students were aware of recruiters and employers conducting background checks on their social media profiles; despite disapproving of this phenomenon, it became apparent that in a similar fashion, they were conducting their own 'reverse background checks' to learn more about a recruiter and/or organization. The implications of this study outline a need for academic institutions to standardize social media education within their curriculums in order to maximize graduate students' abilities to capitalize on this technology. Furthermore, organizations need to re-evaluate how they are connecting with job seekers on social media and maximize their engagement potential by communicating with their target audience on relevant platforms. And lastly, this research suggests that employees have become de facto representatives of the organization, indicating a need for organizations to evaluate how this may affect their employer brand.

Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

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(Thesis/Author Declaration Form)

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Acknowledgments & Dedication

First, I would like to thank my husband, Darren Collins, for supporting my educational journey. Without you, I would not be where I am today. I love you so much and I am eternally grateful for all that you have done for me.

Second, I would like to thank all the respondents who generously donated their time to meet me and discuss this topic. This research would not exist without your contributions, so thank you.

And lastly, this is for my son Thomas. May you learn that education is an essential part of life, not only for professional development but also, personal development. May this motivate you to enrich your life with knowledge and to become the best version of yourself possible.

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Abbreviations

HRM	Human Resource Management
e-HRM	Electronic-Human Resource Management
P-O Fit	Personality-Organizational Fit
e-WOM	Electronic-Word of Mouth

Chapter 1: Introduction

Over the last decade, social media use has exploded across the globe, evolving from a budding trend to a ubiquitous part of the daily modern life. It has redefined how human beings connect with each other by breaking the barriers imposed by time and space. Significantly, it has revolutionized how information is generated, distributed and accessed, allowing people to explore the world and its contents on a scale never before seen. As of 2015, approximately 2 billion internet users are using social network sites and this figure is expected to increase as the accessibility of the internet is rapidly expanding (Statista, 2016). Current figures indicate that Facebook has significantly driven this technological development, leading the social networking market with has over 1.5 billion active monthly users (Statista, 2016). It is estimated that in Ireland, 63 percent of the population have a Facebook account, with 74 percent of those respondents reporting daily use (Ipsos MRBI, 2015), demonstrating the pervasiveness of online content in their everyday lives. These trends support the fact that Generation Y, identified as the individuals born between the years of 1978 - 2000 (Tulgan, 2011), are considered the most connected people in history (Smith and Clark, 2010).

The term social network has generally dominated online discourse and typically refers to sites such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn. For the purpose of this study, it is important to distinguish the difference between social networking and social media, in order to understand how either mechanism can be strategically used by job seekers to explore employment opportunities and how organizations connect with talent. Social media is described by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) as the online spaces that enable users to create or exchange a multiplicity of content, while also maintaining the ability to engage with others online in regards to this content. This definition encompasses the interactive component generally used to describe social networking, but increases the function of online spaces to acknowledge the transmission of user-generated content. This includes a wide range of technologies and online platforms, such as social networking sites, blogs, podcast, wikis and online virtual worlds (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

Increasingly, organizations have identified the significant opportunities presented by social media to expand their business reach and achieve organizational objectives, particularly in the realm of Electronic-Human Resource Management (e-HRM). Bondarouk and Ruel

(2009:507) define e-HRM as “an umbrella term covering all possible integration mechanisms and contents between HRM and Information Technologies aiming at creating value within and across organizations for targeted employees and management.” One of the core e-HRM activities impacted by technological advancements and the proliferation of social media usage is recruitment. According to an Irish Survey that examined the impact of social media on recruitment, 64.9 percent of recruiters hired up to ten people, 26.6 percent hired up to fifty people and 8.5 percent hired over one hundred people using social media (Kilcar, 2012:32). This is further supported by a recent survey conducted by Jobvite (2014:9), which found that 73 percent of recruiters have hired a candidate using social media – with 79 percent indicating they have hired via LinkedIn, 26 percent via Facebook and 14 percent via Twitter. Overall, these recruitment strategies are not well investigated within academic literature (Girard et al., 2014) despite the large body of knowledge surrounding Generation Y behaviours, attitudes and opinions, particularly their reputation as ‘digital natives’ (Prensky, 2001). In order to understand the efficacy of recruitment initiatives via social media and how to improve strategies directed at the Generation Y workforce, more studies must be initiated from the perspective of the job seeker, as this study aims to do.

Chapter 2: Literature Review: Social Media Trends - Recruitment, Generation Y and Job Seeking

2.1 Benefits of Recruitment via Social Media for Employers

The Resource-Based view argues that a firm's internal sources, such as its people, are a source of sustained competitive advantage (Splender et al., 2010). Evidence indicates that effective Human Resource Management (HRM) strategies can significantly contribute to organizational performance and facilitate an organization's capability to achieve and sustain competitive advantage (Becker et al., 2001). Understanding the significance of the human element within organizational performance, HRM recruitment strategies have evolved towards using online initiatives as a method to connect with the best possible talent (Landkin and Buhalis, 2016). Girard et al. (2014) outline that the importance of social media within recruitment strategies appear to be based on two central objectives: (1) to reduce the 'noise' caused by preceding e-recruitment tools; (2) to effectively compete in the 'war for talent' by adjusting to the communication patterns of internet users, such as those exhibited by Generation Y.

2.1.1 Reduce the Noise of Previous Online Recruitment Activities

The previous online recruitment tools such as job boards, careers websites and recruitment software provided organizations the ability to reduce costs and improve the efficiency of their hiring strategies (Girard et al., 2014). But this interconnectedness was not gained without cost, and thus, the concept of the 'noisier' job market was introduced by Fondeur (2006) as 'transparency noise.' Some of the negative outcomes related to increased transparency were identified as decreased professionalism within the application process and increased access by unqualified applicants (Light cited in Madia, 2011; Girard et al., 2014). On the other hand, social media provides for a wider range of interactive behaviours and exchanges between recruiters and applicants (Girard et al., 2014). Both applicants and recruiters can organize and develop their social relationships online by determining access and retrieving only the information they require. This allows them to efficiently reduce their exposure to irrelevant information and access only the appropriate opportunities (Girard and Fallery, 2011). Further, Chamorro-Premuzic and Steinmetz (2013) argue that social media allows recruiters to search and assess criteria such as IQ and personality, which are considered well-known to be predictors of job success, that cannot be ascertained via traditional recruitment methods, such as resume screenings.

Further, social media can provide recruiters the opportunity to dig deep into a candidate's background by allowing them unfettered access to a candidate's personal and professional lives online (assuming privacy settings on social media accounts are disabled) to determine their suitability. This is justified by the fact that literature suggests that Personality-Organization (P-O) fit is an indicator of the employee-organizational relationship and can predict outcomes such as performance, commitment, withdrawal behaviours and intention to quit (Dineen et al., 2002). The annual social media recruitment survey sponsored by CareerBuilder represents this increasing trend - it found that in 2015, 60 percent of employers use social networking sites to research job candidates, which has increased from 52 percent in the previous year, 22 percent in 2008 and 11 percent in 2006 (CareerBuilder, 2016). The rationale that personality is a predictor of job performance was further established by Kluemper et al.'s (2012) study, which successfully demonstrated that personality judgments via social media could be evaluated objectively and consistently, and correlated to job performance. In this particular study, students were asked to complete personality questionnaires and provide researchers access to their social media profiles. The student's social media profiles were assessed by individuals with HRM backgrounds and extensive social media experience; they evaluated the students' profiles in line with the Big Five personality traits and employability. In addition to these evaluations and self-rating questionnaires, researchers acquired job performance ratings from the students' employers to further establish a benchmark for their assessments. The findings demonstrated that the assessors' ratings of students based on the data presented on their social media profile were consistent to the student's self-assessment and significantly, were on par with their current job performance.

2.1.2. Fighting the War for Talent

The first step towards building a firm's human capital is to find the best talent; it is at this stage, where the significant role of the recruitment process is instrumental in capturing the interest and imagination of top talent (Westoff et al., 2013). The shift towards knowledge-based work has increased the skills, knowledge and behaviours employees are required to have, and subsequently, this has strained an already scarce supply of talent; the term 'war for talent' is generally used to describe this phenomena (Gutheridge et al., 2008). Therefore, knowledge-based organizations are actively engaged in a competition to secure their human capital needs and must effectively design strategies that will attract and retain top talent. Westoff et al. (2013) outline that in order to source quality candidates, it is imperative for

firms to invest and communicate through comprehensive recruitment strategies, values that significantly differentiate themselves from their competitors. Organizations that gain competitive advantage through their recruitment efforts, can significantly increase their appeal in the competitive knowledge-based job market (Bhatnagar and Srivastava, 2008).

Of particular interest to firms, are the needs and demands of Generation Y who are attributed with prioritizing non-financial attributes, such working for a company they take pride in, or work-life balance, over financial incentives (Eisner, 2005). Defined as 'digital natives' by Prensky (2001), this generation are particularly concerned with the opportunities presented by new forms of media and are continually engaged and increasingly connected to technological devices. Their strong presence on social media provides a platform for organizations to manage and easily communicate their employer brand in an effort attract desired talent. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004:502) define employer branding as "the process of building an identifiable and unique employer identity…that differentiates it from its competitors." This strategy can be extended to the recruitment process by applying the same branding principles, but instead, the focus is directed on the "package of functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by the employment and identified with the employing company" (Ambler and Barrow, 1996:187). The success of the differentiation process is determined by how effectively an organization is able to sell value to a prospective employee, in the same way it endeavours to sell value to a customer (Sengupta et al., 2015). Despite these advances towards deconstructing the psyche of the prospective employee, it is important to acknowledge the argument presented by Newburry et al. (2006) that an organization's attractiveness is highly relative and can be contingent on demographic factors such as race, class, gender, age and income. The implication of nationality is discussed by Reis and Braga's (2016) study of generational differences in perspective of employer attractiveness amongst Brazilian professionals. Reis and Braga (2016) borrow from Manheim's (1993) theory of social location which argues that for a generation to have common perceptions and values, they would have to have a common history or experiences during their socialization process. They found Generation Y in Brazil prioritize the workplace itself, such as a positive environment, development opportunities and extrinsic rewards. Though the former is in line with prevalent theories surrounding Generation Y, the latter - prioritizing extrinsic rewards, contrasts previous and well-established findings on this cohort (Reis and Braga, 2016; Eisner 2005; Aruna and Anitha, 2015). Given that workplaces are increasingly becoming defined by diversity, these compartmentalized breakdowns and broad

generalizations, may not be sufficient to understand the needs of the younger and increasingly globalized workforce. Research must incorporate intersectionality into their approach in order to provide a deeper understanding of the Generation Y workforce psyche, as a means of providing a richer perspective of their experiences, needs and desires to the organizations that looking to attract them.

The concept of employer branding is a relatively new concept, which is increasingly being identified by organizations as significant within their recruitment strategies. Social media facilitates an organization's ability to develop, monitor and control their branding strategies and reputation. It also provides them a means to engage with desired talent and an opportunity to actively guide the exchange to shape business outcomes (Girard and Fallery, 2011; Madia, 2011). A recent study of third level Engineering students in Norway by Sivertzen et al. (2013) found that utilizing social media as platforms for communicating employer branding strategies can provide significant benefits towards creating and sustaining a positive reputation for organizations actively engaged in a recruitment drive. The researchers measured employer attractiveness using the Employer Attractiveness scale established by Berthon et al. (2005) and based on Ambler and Barrow's (1996) elements for economic, functional and psychological benefits, to determine an organization's appeal to a job candidate. The five dimensions identified and measured were interest value, social value, economic value, development value and application value (Berthon et al., 2005 in Silverton et al., 2013). Sivertzen et al. (2013) assessed how the perception of these five dimensions and an organization's use of social media to communicate these dimensions impact a student's intention to apply for a job with the organization. The researchers found that there was a direct link between a positive corporate reputation via social media and intentions to apply for a job amongst students (Sivertzen et al., 2010). Further, a recent survey by Monster.co.uk of 4,000 job seekers, found that 28 percent of respondents indicated that what they read about a firm online influenced their perceptions of the organization (Daily Mail, 2016). This demonstrates that the external employer brand is significant the recruitment process, and therefore, organizations must consider the message they are communicating across social media platforms or risk losing the 'war of talent.'

2.2 Generation Y, Social Media and Job Searching

At the centre of this conversation are the behaviours, attitudes and opinions of Generation Y job seekers. It is well established that social media usage is defining characteristic of the Generation Y cohort and that much of their time is spent creating, engaging and consuming content via social media websites (Gerard, 2012; Bolton et al., 2013). The pervasiveness of social media engagement is well illustrated in the findings of Miller et al., (2010), who documented that 91 percent of college and university students in the American Midwest admitted to using social media daily to make new friends or connections and upload personal content. Social media users 18 to 34 years old are generally more inclined to prefer social media for interactions with acquaintances, friends and family as opposed to older social media users (Bolton et al., 2013). Further, they are more likely to consider other people's opinions expressed over social media and more likely feel valued when they contribute online feedback regarding brands or products they use (Bolton et al., 2013). The patterns of behaviours, attitudes and opinions expressed on social media are important for organizations to analyze and understand because it impacts their "consumers' identity formation, their expectations regarding service, formation of habits, engagement with brands and firms, participation in value co-creation, brand loyalty, purchase behaviour and lifetime value, and (ultimately) the value of the firm" (Bolton et al., 2013:246). These patterns produce a host of considerations that must be evaluated by organizations, but in particular, it impacts how an organization attracts, recruits and retains employees (Bolton et al., 2013). The Generation Y cohort is of particular interest for recruiters seeking to secure talent because they have recently entered the workforce or preparing to do so, and therefore, organizations need to develop effective strategies that will attract, manage and retain this emerging generation of workers.

Alternative findings surrounding the discussion of Generation Y's social media proclivity are present in Manroop and Richardson's (2014) study, which explored Generation Y's use of social media in the job search process. The findings indicate that despite Generation Y's propensity to use social media in everyday life, they were actually reluctant and/or lacked the skill-set to develop social media usage for professional purposes. Some findings indicate that respondents view social media usage as a tool to connect with family and friends and didn't see the potential of social media within their job searching (Manroop and Richardson, 2014). Further, many respondents were resistant to using, what they considered a personal communication tool, in a professional capacity (Manroop and Richardson, 2014). Others

discussed their skepticism and privacy concerns about sharing personal information on such public forums for fear that their identities may be compromised (Manroop and Richardson, 2014). This study is limited in size and scope and is definitely not demonstrative of Generation Y as a whole, but it certainly raises questions regarding the assumption of Generation Y as 'digital natives,' and carries with it implications for recruiters who are seeking to access this demographic.

An earlier study by Plummer et al. (2011) that evaluated undergraduate job seekers' behavioural intentions to apply for jobs using social media. The researchers developed and tested a pilot theoretical model which posited that job seekers' use of social media for job searching was influenced by four defining factors - perceived justice in the selection process (rules that govern the process will not be violated), performance expectancy (their perceptions of how useful social media is to find a job), privacy concerns (how information is collected and disseminated in relation to the job application), and risk beliefs (the perceived consequences of using social media) (Plummer et al., 2011: 3-4). Plummer et al. (2011) found that privacy concerns and performance expectancy directly influence a job seeker's desire to utilize social media for job seeking purposes, but that justice in the selection process and risk beliefs did not impact job seekers' motives. The implications of these findings suggest that job seekers are most motivated to use social media if they perceive that these platforms can increase their possibility of finding a job. Despite the fact that privacy concerns are significant deterrent to job seekers' decision to use social media, the researchers demonstrated that the usefulness and accessibility provided by social media can mitigate these apprehensions (Plummer et al., 2016).

2.3 The Significance of Personal Branding and e-Professionalism

The concept of personal branding has significantly exploded with the rise of social media usage, as it has provided individuals a boundless and cost-effective opportunity to target their intended audiences. Shepherd (2005: 590) defines 'self-marketing' as consisting "of those varied activities undertaken by individuals to make themselves known in the marketplace, usually (though not exclusively) for the purpose of obtaining gainful employment." This is phenomenon was first evident in Goffman's (1959) influential sociological theory of impression management, which refers to the efforts made by individuals to regulate the information within a social interaction in an effort to manipulate the perceptions of their

image according to their personal goals. Jones and Pitmann (1982) furthered developed the concept of impression management by identifying a range of behaviours associated with this phenomenon. They include self-promotion (sharing achievements to be viewed positively by others), exemplification (exceeding the expectations of others to win their approval), ingratiation (using favours or flattery to win the approval of others), supplication (disseminating personal weakness to generate the feeling the other is needed) and lastly, intimidation (emphasizing one's power to win approval from others). Kleppinger and Cain (2015:1) enhance the definition of personal branding to include the all-encompassing technological element of communication by utilizing the term 'personal digital brand,' which is defined as a "strategic self-marketing effort, crafted via social media platforms, which seeks to exhibit an individual's professional persona." Organizations, such as PwC, have identified the significant benefits of personal branding and are offering graduates an opportunity to develop their own strategies. They market it as a means of enhancing employability by providing them the opportunity to distinguish themselves from other applicants (PwC, 2016). The underlying sentiment is differentiation; the success of the differentiation process, is determined by how effectively an applicant is able to sell value to a recruiter/employer, again, in the same way organizations strive to sell value to a customer (Sengupta et al., 2015).

Burdick (2010) outlines four principles for career development which also emphasize the strategic management that must be incorporated into a self-branding scheme: (1) users must manage their strategies; (2) they must create differentiation; (3) they should avoid commoditization; (4) users must focus on brand distinction. As the business world becomes increasingly reliant on the interconnectedness, accessibility and the real time transmission of social media, mastering the art of digital self-branding will certainly become the most significant skill an individual can possess in order to drive professional success (Greer, 2010). Social media offers users an opportunity to create a favourable image of themselves through self-promotion behaviours and activities that allow them to control and manipulate the content related to their image, thus, influencing the perceptions people develop (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Self-promotion strategies can dramatically differ between users, some manifest via explicit terms of self-disclosure, or they can occur implicitly through the user's choice of discussions, terms and mannerism (Shao, 2009; Goffman, 1959). If used strategically, social media provides users a platform to demonstrate their qualifications, skills, knowledge and experience dynamically, in a way that is not possible via the traditional

resume format (Zide et al., 2014). The underlying narrative being communicated to job seekers and employees is that empowerment can be achieved through the creation and management of their character, experiences and skills as a brand, ultimately, providing them a means of shaping their market outcomes (Vallas and Cummins, 2015).

Significantly, many online users fail to realize that regardless if they have conscientiously developed a personal brand, they already have some form of brand online based on their social media usage, which is easily available through a simple google search. Recruiters and employers are searching for a P-O fit and they often believe that a google search will tell them more than a resume screen (Dineen et al., 2002). Girard et al. (2014:98) outline that according to a French survey, 43 percent of recruiters admitted to 'googling' an applicant and 8 percent had rejected someone based on the results obtained through the search engine. This is significant because a recent study of graduate medical students in New Zealand by MacDonald et al. (2010) interestingly found that half of the participants had photos that displayed unprofessional behaviour, such as alcohol consumption, or offensive actions, such as making obscene gestures, inappropriate language or showing nudity. Another study by Cain et al. (2009) of Pharmacy students in the American Midwest found that a significant portion of participants shared information on social media that they would not want faculty members, future employers, or patients to access. Interestingly, Karl and Peluchette's (2008) study found that there were significant gender differences in the content posted on social media; they found that males were more likely to post self-promoting and suggestive pictures or comments (including those of a sexual nature and of alcohol consumption) on their profile page, while females, were more likely to post romantic or cute photos and/or information. A survey of graduating pharmacy students by Ness et al. (2013) found that 85 percent of respondents said that their online profile reflected who they were personally but only 51 percent believed their profile reflected them as a professional. These findings demonstrate that students are a particularly vulnerable demographic of social media users; reasons may not be clear, but could attributed to immaturity due to young age, lack of professional experience and/or lack of education relating to e-professionalism. Though the findings of Ness et al. (2013) indicate that students were more likely to alter their social media profiles prior to a job fair, demonstrating that as they approach graduation they become more aware of the importance of being professional online.

It might be suggested that an easier approach to mitigate the egregious actions and/or behaviours of third level students online, would be to promote social media abstinence. Unfortunately, though this strategy would seemingly buffer the potential for negative ramifications, it would be subject students to the risks of being invisible online. Du Gay's (1996) theory of 'enterprise culture' demonstrates that organizational power and control are exercised through the institutionalization of social norms and cultural practices that commodify employee identity. Du Gay (1996) argues that the discourse surrounding enterprise culture, instructs individuals to act like entrepreneurs of their own lives, promoting it under neoliberal constructs such as independence, responsibility and competence. Therefore, a significant challenge produced by social media absence, is negative backlash from co-workers, peers, employers and recruiters who would make conjectures as to what the individual is hiding or even view it as a deficiency of their self because they are perceived as not putting forth required effort or expected professional contributions (Kleppinger and Cain, 2015). Therefore, individuals who abstain from social media actually passively cease control of their digital identities and empower others to brand them (Kleppinger and Cain, 2015; Khedher, 2014)). Furthermore, they actively relinquish professional benefits, such as employment opportunities, a trusted and instant platform for communicating their achievements/reputation, building professional networks and knowledge sharing (Kleppinger and Cain, 2015).

It is important to educate users regarding the professional benefits of social media, but particularly, they must understand consequences of improper use. The imperative message that must be conveyed is that in the overwhelming amount of cases, once a photo, video or comment has been shared, a 'digital footprint' has been created and cannot be undone (Greysen et al., 2010). The extensive and instant reach of social media platforms means that blunders are immediately transmitted, shared and recorded by anyone and anywhere in the world, leaving the user vulnerable to long-term professional and/or personal reputational damage. Therefore, training and education in e-professionalism should be a compulsory subject for students and a mandatory requirement within organizational training. Cain and Romanelli (2009) define e-professionalism as the 'traditional' behavioural standards and expectations of professional principles expressed via digital platforms. Kaczmarczyk et al. (2013) argue that true e-professionalism extends beyond how to communicate acceptably, but rather, must include guidance on how to effectively manage personal and professional online identities and how to strategically communicate and promote professional values relative to

their industries. Therefore, it is suggested that educators and employers must engage students, employees and other stakeholders into an open and meaningful dialogue, within their respective industries, in an effort to develop standards or codes for online conduct. Further, they need to educate them about their 'digital footprint' and also, guide them on how to best utilize social media for their professional advancement and how to promote the professional values of their respective industries (Greysen et al., 2010).

2.4 Web 2.0: Social Media, The Three Giants - Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter

Social media consist of internet-based applications which are derived and reflective of the technological and ideological foundations of Web 2.0 that promote openness, participations and exchange. (Kaplan and Hanlein, 2010). Web 2.0 is defined by Hoegg et al. (2006: 13) as "the philosophy of mutually maximizing collective intelligence and added value for each participant by formalized and dynamic information sharing and creation." Social media is reflective of this philosophy because it provides the online spaces that enable users to create and exchange a multiplicity of user-generated content, while, maintaining and facilitating the ability to engage with others online in regards to this content (Kaplan and Hanlein, 2010; Kim et al., 2012). Social media platforms facilitate the user's ability to share their ideas, opinions and experiences, which can be disseminated via text, audio, photos, videos, discussions and insights (Lai and Turban, 2008). This model of information exchange extends the traditional 'one-to-many' media broadcast models and reflects the modern 'many-to-many' communication model, which transforms the role of the user from a passive audience to active participant (Kocak and Oyman, 2012). Remarkably, social media has not only altered how users communicate, but with whom users communicate with, as it provides users an opportunity to share and exchange their content on a global scale through real-time connectivity and worldwide reach (Solis & Breakenridge, 2009). The exponential growth of social media has dramatically transformed people's relationships with themselves and others, their accessibility to information and their communication patterns.

2.4.1 Facebook

Founded in 2004, Facebook strives to enable its users to share content and make the world more connected and open. (Facebook, 2016). The main objective of Facebook's community is to facilitate user's ability to connect with their family and friends, to share and communicate what matters to them, and most importantly, discover the world through the click of a fingertip (Facebook, 2016). As of April 2016, Facebook has approximately 1.59

billion monthly active users; its popularity amongst social media users has established the site as the undisputed market leader of social networking sites (Statista, 2016). According to research, Facebook users predominantly use the site to keep in touch with people they know and to strengthen those relationships through the accessibility and cost-effectiveness in communication; this has significantly conquered the time constraints and geographical distance that are present in many social relationships (Wiese and Farrugia, 2009; Golder et al., 2007). A study carried out among 364 university students found that that Facebook was not a popular tool for meeting new people, but that most students used the site to engage with existing acquaintances, friends and family (Stern and Taylor, 2007). Zhange and Tang's (2009) study of 438 Facebook users in Hong Kong interestingly identified six gratifications for users, which they grouped under two categories: (1) mood management, which consists of two elements - entertainment and surveillance; (2) social compensation, which consists of the following four elements - social networking maintenance, social networking extension, recognition gaining and emotional support. Ultimately, the six gratifications were identified by Zhang and Tang (2009) as active elements in the need for users to be acknowledgment by individuals in their social groups as a means of satisfying their sense of belonging. This is further supported by Cheung and Lee's (2010) study of 389 students, which found that Facebook use was characterized by the importance of social identity, such as belonging and participating in a community, and the pressure to conform to social norms.

On the other hand, there is little academic research on how Facebook is used by organizations to connect with talent. Brown and Vaughn's (2011) breakthrough study has contributed to the foundations of this burgeoning topic through their theoretical analysis of social media usage to screen applicants. They caution that relying on the information provided on social media can cause significant disparity in the level of information available on each candidate, as profiles are not created equal, and also, interpretations of information found on social media sites are subjective and can contribute to prejudice within the hiring process (Brown and Vaughn, 2011). Interestingly, a study of 389 Belgian recruiters found that 44 percent admitted to searching an applicants' Facebook profile as an extra screening tool and that they consider the information collected accurate indicators of the applicants' levels of maturity and extraversion, but not emotional stability and agreeableness (Caers and Castelyns, 2011). The authors warn that the dependence on information collected from social media lead to selection bias in the initial phases of the selection process and hinder the progression of otherwise suitable applicants (Caers and Castelyn 2011).

2.4.2 LinkedIn

Recently acquired in 2016 by Microsoft for a whopping all-cash transaction valued at $26.2 billion, LinkedIn has established its dominance in the social media market with over 433 million users (Microsoft News Centre, 2016). LinkedIn's mission states that it strives to connect professionals worldwide and increase their career success and productivity by facilitating and enabling their access to people, jobs, news, updates and insights that overcome the barriers of physical distance (LinkedIn, 2016). LinkedIn significantly differs from other social media sites, such as Facebook or Twitter, because user profiles share professional information that display their most relevant experience, education and skills, formatted quite similarly to the tradition resume (van Dijck, 2013). Another distinguishing factor is that LinkedIn encourages its members to use site as a platform to explore employment opportunities through its extensive job database, and further, it facilitates its member's ability to expand their professional networks by connecting them with others in their industries (Bradley, 2011). For recruiters and employers, it provides a cost-effective solution for their recruitment needs by facilitating their opportunity to connect and engage directly with candidates, and significantly, it provides a credible platform for them to screen candidate's information (Bonson and Bednarova, 2013; Caers and Castelyns, 2011). Further, Davison et al. (2011a, b) found that another significant contribution for recruiters was that the information extracted from the site allowed them to evaluates a candidate's P-O fit because their profiles are perceived to be reflective of their values and personality.

How individuals represent themselves on LinkedIn is a critical factor in the response they receive from community members. A study by Edward et al. (2015) evaluated how LinkedIn members responded another user's profile picture or lack thereof because this feature is distinctly contrast to the traditional resume format. The researchers found that there were significant differences between social presence (picture/no picture) conditions and social attraction and evaluation by others (Edwards et al., 2015). Results demonstrated that users who upload a profile picture to their LinkedIn account are evaluated more favourably than users who refrain from doing so (Edwards et al., 2015). This demonstrates a need for members to strategically manage their online professional identities and use it as a tool for impression management (Zide et al., 2014). Zide et al. (2014) argue that LinkedIn has restructured the relationship between candidate and prospective employer by transferring the marketing responsibility onto the candidate; those that invest in providing a thorough

background of their skills and expertise receive more recognition than those who don't, significantly advancing their employment opportunities. Davison et al. (2011a, b) hypothesize that LinkedIn is the most effective source for gathering information on a candidate because peers and co-workers can validate a member's entry, strengthening the reliability of the information collated.

2.4.3 Twitter

With 310 million active monthly users, Twitter's mission is to "to give everyone the power to create and share ideas and information instantly, without barriers" (Twitter, 2016). Though LinkedIn is the preferred site for recruitment activities, Twitter is regularly used to announce jobs because the use of hashtags can effectively target specific groups (Ladkin and Buhalis, 2016). This potential has been recognized by various recruitment organizations and is particularly reflected in the efforts of Monster Worldwide Inc., who launched their next generation social recruiting solution on Twitter (Marketing Weekly News, 20014). By integrating into Twitter's Ads and building on their platform to deliver distinctive marketing tools for recruiters, the Monster Twitter Cards and Social Ads capabilities allow organizations to connect with the highest caliber candidate (Marketing Weekly News, 2014). Further, similar strategies have been undertaken by other organizations such as HCL, who kicked off their #coolestinterviewever campaign, as a means to engage with Generation Y users, the target segment for this campaign. The outcome for the organization was that the campaign received worldwide coverage, it trended for two days in India, and significantly, it attracted 250,000 participants from more than 60 countries (Vivek and Srivastava, 2016). This demonstrates that despite the fact that Twitter's primary aim is not to recruit, it has a remarkable capacity for branding. This phenomenon is captured in term Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM), which is described by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004: 39) as a "statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet."

A study by Jansen et al. (2009) studied the effects of microblogging (tweeting) and e-WOM and discovered that 20 percent of tweets were related to a brand or a product, demonstrating the pervasiveness of individuals to share their experiences, ideas and opinions with others. The tweets demonstrated various sentiments - half of them were positive, while approximately 30 percent of the tweets, related to a negative experience (Jansen et al., 2009). It is clear that social media provides platform for individuals to engage with organizations in

a myriad of ways, providing significant opportunities for companies to build relationships with individuals who may likely be the target of future recruitment drives.

Chapter 3: Research Question and Objectives

This objective of this study is to contribute meaningful insights towards the academic discussion of social media usage by Generation Y job seekers. The purpose of this research is to test the emerging theories and research that currently exist and to further explore this relatively new area of study. Building on the assumption that Generation Y are 'digital natives' and that social media use is a defining characteristic (Eisern, 2005; Gerard, 2012), this study aims to explore how and in what ways Generation Y job seekers utilize social media as a tool to enhance their employment opportunities. The specific research objectives of this study are outlined below.

Research Objectives: Question and Sub-questions:

How do Generation Y job seekers utilize social media as a platform for creating and exploring occupational opportunities?

- What kind of behaviours and activities are Generation Y job seekers engaging within on social media platforms? And particularly, across which sites?

- Is there a link between creating an online social media profile and developing a self-promotion strategy to explore and create occupational opportunities?

- What perceptions do Generation Y job seekers hold of recruitment activities that occur across social media?

- Does the accessibility and flexibility provided by social media platforms for job seeking renegotiate the linear structure of previous recruitment processes? As a result, are Generation Y job seekers more engaged in the recruitment process?

The next chapter will discuss the chosen research methodology, providing a description and justification of methods, such as why certain strategies were selected and considered more appropriate than others.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Research Philosophy

Epistemology is a branch of philosophy principally concerned with knowledge and how it is produced (Quinlan, 2011). It attempts to deconstruct how knowledge is generated, learned and transferred, invariably questioning 'what it is to know' (Scotland, 2012). Existing within this philosophy are three dominant paradigms that attempt to understand the nature of reality – positivism, social constructivism and interpretivism (Quinlan, 2011). This study will focus on the interpretive paradigm, which holds that "social reality is a subjective construction based on interpretation and interaction" (Quinlan, 2011:96), because it seeks to understand knowledge on the individual level, using the participant's perspective as the foundation of generating knowledge. Interpretivism is related to social constructivism, which understands the world as socially constructed and that "people and groups create, in part, their own realities" (Quinlan, 2011:96), but differs in that it focuses more on individual interpretation and interaction. Further, the positivist approach would not be compatible with the aims of this study because it is based on the assumption that social reality is singular and objective and separate from consciousness (Collis and Hussey, 2009; Quinlan, 2011). As evidenced in the literature review, social media use is multi-faceted, subjective, and built on a variety of interactions and interpretations, rather than singular and objective, as proposed in the positivist's linear understanding of the world. Therefore, rather than adopt the narrow ideologies of positivism, which treats social facts as existing separately from participants and researchers, this study will use the interpretivist's approach which understands that social behavior is changing, unpredictable, and unique to each and every social encounter (Carter and Fuller, 2015).

Delbridge and Kirkpatrick (1994: 37) discuss the importance of "immersion (by the researcher) in the research setting, with the objective of sharing peoples' lives while attempting to learn their symbolic world." The reference to the 'symbolic world' is a significant element in the interprevist paradigm because deeply rooted within this philosophy is the micro-level theoretical perspective that argues society is created and maintained out of social interaction (Blumer, 1969). Symbolic interactionists are more concerned with subjective meaning than with objective structure - they seek to understand how interactions amongst people come to define society (Carter and Fuller, 2015). The three basic tenents of the Chicago School's symbolic interactionism variant are as follows: (1) people's actions are

based on the meaning objects have for them; (2) the meaning of things are constructed from the social interactions between individuals; (3) meanings are not static, instead, they are continuously being reformulated through an interpretive process (Blumer, 1969; Carter and Fuller, 2015). In this model, behaviors and actions are an individual's distinct way of reacting to a situation based on their interpretation of context. Therefore, it is impossible to generalize how people will act because each individual, situation and object in question are different, and thus, produce unique results. This understanding is closely aligned with some of prevailing theories of social media use, where motivation derived from ascribed meanings of perceived need, communication and interaction influence (Plummer et al., 2011; Manroop and Richardson, 2014; Ness et al., 2013). In order to understand the dynamics of need, interaction and communication, it is imperative for the researcher to enter the research world and to understand the phenomenon from the research subject's point of view (Saunders et al., 2009).

4.2 Research Design

The main objective of qualitative research is to analyze a social phenomenon in a natural environment, as opposed to a rigid experimental design of quantitative research. A critical distinction between the two methods, is that qualitative research tends to collect data in the form of words, and is generally derived from observations and interviews, rather than numbers and figures, which is fundamental to the quantitative research design (McCuster and Gunaydin, 2014). The flexibility provided by qualitative research within interview process and open-ended questioning format, can provide answers beyond just 'yes' or 'no' and can produce 'thick descriptions' based on intense and contextually relevant accounts (Geertz cited in Miles et al., 2013). This provides the researcher an increased opportunity to explore the experiences, attitudes, and views of the participants and extract a variety of perspectives that may not be adequately captured through a quantified question and answer process of quantitative analysis (Miles et al., 2013). Further, qualitative data provides a platform for phenomenological research by studying the lived experience and first person point of view (Quinlan, 2011), allowing the researcher to analyze the meaning people place on events, processes and structures and to understand their relationship to the social world around them (Miles et al., 2013). Overall, a qualitative research design is more compatible with the interpretive philosophy because the "researcher needs to make sense of the subjective and socially constructed meanings expressed about the phenomenon being studied" (Saunders et

al., 2009). Using the inductive approach, which is defined as "a study in which theory is developed from the observation of empirical reality; thus, general inferences are induced from particular instances" (Collis and Hussey, 2009: 8), the researcher collected information based on the behaviours, perceptions and activities of the respondents in this study, and then through a thorough analysis of data, determined if there exists any relationship between the findings and prevailing theories (this is discussed in more detail later in the chapter).

4.2.1 The Case Study Approach

This study will utilize a case study approach to explore the social phenomenon, which is defined by Yin (1984:23) "as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used." This is supported by Quinlan (2011:182) who states that a case study is more useful when "the research is located within a bounded entity in a specific space or place, in a particular incident" (2011:182). Yin (2003) elaborates by stating that a case study should be used when (1) the study is to answer "why" and "how" questions; (2) when the behaviours of those involved cannot be altered; (3) when the context is relevant to the phenomenon the research aspires to investigate; (4) the boundaries between context and phenomenon are not clear. The exploratory case study model, rather than explanatory or descriptive, has been selected by the researcher to investigate this social phenomenon because it explores situations or interventions which have no definitive or single sets of outcomes (Yin, 2003). Exploratory research studies are mainly used to develop a hypothesis and propositions for further inquiry (Yin, 2003). Therefore, exploratory case studies are often used as a preliminary step for developing an explanatory case study approach due to its general focus (Streb, 2010). The exploratory strategy is deemed most appropriate for the study because explanatory studies deal with cause and effect relationships that need to be traced over time, as opposed to incidences or frequencies (Yin, 2003). Further, the descriptive studies, which are described by Yin (2003) as describing a phenomenon in its context, was considered by the researcher, but instead, the exploratory strategy was chosen as a means to provide more flexibility in the research process. The flexible research design was implemented, as opposed to closed, despite the consternation of Yin (2009), who contends this procedure may diminish the rigour of the study. Stake (1995) counters this assertion by arguing that a flexible design provides the researcher the opportunity to make changes to the study that address any problems which may emerge, are clarified or become redefined during the investigation, strengthening the

studies outcome. Therefore, a pilot study was conducted to evaluate the line of questioning and interview procedure and follow-up interviews were used to address emerging themes (this is discussed later).

It is important to address the fact that case study methodology has been scrutinized by researchers and viewed as a less desirable form of investigating a phenomenon. Yin (2009) outlines that critics have suggested the methodology lacks rigour, the studies provide little basis for scientific generalization, they are time consuming/produce too much data and lastly, they cannot establish a causal relationship as found in outcomes of 'true experiments.' Yin (2009) argues that (1) lack of rigour is found in every method, especially since there many methodological texts that present varying procedures to follow; (2) case studies are not generalizable to populations, but instead, to theoretical propositions – supporting the objective of the researcher is to expand and generalize theory; (3) certainly, there are research methods that require a significant amount of time and/or data collection, such as ethnographies, but valid and high quality case studies can be easily done simply using the internet or telephone (albeit topic depending); (4) Despite the preference of establishing casual relationships, case studies can provide significant contributions and actually complement experiments, rather than, being competing methodologies.

This exploratory case study will utilize a single-case study design (holistic) based on the rationale that it is or may be a representative or typical case that can provide information regarding the experiences of average person (Yin, 2009). Therefore, the unit of analysis in this study will be the decisions making processes of Generation Y graduates enrolled in the HRM, Master of Arts programme at the National College of Ireland, who are or recently have been, engaging in job seeking activities via social media. Even though 'decisions' as a unit of analysis is a considered less concrete unit of analysis by Yin (2009), the researcher would like to investigate how graduates make their decisions and what factors influence their online activities.

4.3 Reliability, Construct Validity, Internal Validity and External Validity

Yin (2009) identifies four tests to judge the quality of the social research - reliability, construct validity, internal validity and external validity. The goal of reliability is to determine if another researcher conducted the same study all over again, would they arrive at the same findings (Yin, 2009). This study is considered to have high-reliability as all

procedures have been documented meticulously by making steps as operational as possible; therefore, if another researcher were to perform this exact same study again (using the same methods, procedures, units of analysis, questions etc.), the same results would emerge. It is important to note that the reliability factor is of lesser significance within the interpretivist paradigm, as opposed to that under the positivist paradigm (Silverman, 2009). Despite this position, Kirk and Miller (in Silverman, 2009) argue that reliability can be increased within qualitative research through the investigator's ability to document their procedure rigorously and to demonstrate categories have been used consistently.

Construct validity as outlined by Yin (2009) is the test that determines if the operational definition of a variable is reflective of the theoretical conceptualization. In this case, the researcher's aspiration is to determine if being a member of generation Y, who are defined as 'digital natives,' correlates specifically with job seeking activities via social media. Yin (2009) states that to meet the test of construct validity, the researcher must (1) define 'digital natives' and Generation Y concepts and relate them to the original objectives of the study; (2) identify operational measures that support the concepts by referring to published studies. The researcher has fulfilled both criteria through a thorough literature review that uses published work to define concepts and operational measures, and therefore, the construct validity is considered high.

The third test is internal validity, which is defined by Yin (2009) as how well a study is carried out and whether the researcher incorrectly concludes there is a causal relationship. Yin (2009) states that this is only a concern for explanatory case studies, and does not pertain to descriptive or exploratory studies, and therefore, does not apply to this study.

The last test, external validity, aims to determine whether the findings are generalizable beyond the study itself (Yin, 2009). Yin (2009) state that critics often argue that single-case studies are not generalizable because they superimpose the intended outcome of s survey research, where the sample is intended to be reflective of the larger universe, to produce generalizations using data that was collated using a precise set of measures. Yin (2009) argues that case studies are in fact not meant to be statistically generalizable, but instead, are intended to produce analytical generalizations, which contribute and expand existing theory. This study is considered to have a high external validity because the results of this study can be discussed beyond the parameters explored in this study (Collis and Hussey, 2009). This is

evidenced in the parallels drawn between the researcher's findings and theories and/or outcomes of other studies discussed in the literature review. Due to the interpretive nature of the approach and limited sample size (this will be further discussed), the objective of the researcher is to provide an in-depth perspective into the beliefs, behaviours and attitudes of a narrowly defined segment population with the intention to contribute to the current and developing dialogue regarding job seeking activities that occur across social media platforms. Although the interpretive paradigm has been critiqued as producing knowledge that is highly fragmented in nature and limited in transferability (Scotland, 2012:12), the purpose of this research is not to position outcomes as definitive truths, but rather, to explore an already existing trend that has not been well-documented in order to contribute to further research.

4.4 Sample Selection/Population

The population of a study is comprised of all the "individuals, items or units relevant to the study" (Quinlan, 2011:206). Qualitative research generally uses non-probability samples for selecting the participants for a study because the sample must represent the features of the phenomena the researcher wishes to explore (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003:78). Rather than focus on statistical representations, as evidenced in the quantitative approach, the characteristics of the population are more significant and must relate to research objectives (Richie and Lewis, 2003). For the purpose of this study, the researcher followed the structure of a recent study undertaken by Manroop and Richardson (2013), which investigated the degree to which Generation Y graduate students utilize social media to boost their job search experience. This study was conducted with 29 recent graduates who were actively looking for a job, with the specific objective of understanding how Generation Y job seekers use social media as a job search tool and how they assess the role of social media use in their ability to find a job (Manroop and Richardson, 2013:172). The purpose of this study was to capture 'thick descriptions' by delving deep into the individual thought process and experiential knowledge Generation Y job seekers have regarding the employment opportunities available across social media platforms (Geertz cited in Miles et al., 2013).

Therefore, the researcher utilized a purposeful sampling technique with the objective that participants will represent a "location or type in relation to key criterion" (Lewis and Ritchie, 2003:79). The researcher identified graduates from the National College of Ireland who are nearing completion of the HRM, Master of Arts programme, as the study's intended target. It was the researcher's belief that this population would be most aware of recruitment activities

online or actively engaged in job search/recently hired because they are nearing completion of their degree. Further, this study is focused on the Generation Y cohort, defined by Tulgan (2011:77) as the individuals born between 1978-2000, because research suggests that social media usage is a dominant characteristic amongst this cohort (Gerard, 2012). The sample size of this study was limited to 10 participants because a social phenomenon only requires a single emergence to be placed on an analytical map and there are no necessary statements regarding statistical incidents or prevalence (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). Lastly, there is a plethora of information to extract from respondents as it is and size must be contained in order to increase the feasibility of the study.

4.5 Research Ethics and Negotiating Access

4.5.1 Informed Consent

The researcher correctly informed all the participants prior to the interview process by providing each one with an informed consent sheet (see Appendix 1). The informed consent sheet appropriately instructed the participants regarding the "nature of the research, the nature and extent of their participation, and any possible consequences for them that might arise from their participation" (Quinlan, 2011:79). The researcher was committed to respecting the participants' decision regarding their desire to consent or deny involvement within the proposed research throughout all stages of the study. Individuals that agreed to participate, proceeded to the interview stage of the study. The researcher ensured that the informed consent sheet was signed and returned prior to any involvement and each copy was appropriately filed to document the fact that all participants fully consented and comprehended their role within the study.

4.5.2 Anonymity and Confidentiality

Confidentiality and privacy has been maintained throughout the course of the research with no personal or identifiable information being logged or published in this study. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and no names were identified during any stage of the research process. It was extremely important to maintain anonymity and confidentiality throughout the study because the researcher believed this was the key element to building a rapport with the participants that would allow them to engage in honest and open dialogue. This commitment facilitated the researcher's attempt to gather accurate information regarding the phenomenon. It was the researcher's belief that if participants doubted the privacy of their

information, it may impact the reliability of their responses, thus, skewing the quality of data collected, and ultimately, jeopardize the entire study's outcome.

4.5.3 Protecting Participants from Harm

The proposed research study presented no harm to the participants or society at large. The participants were guaranteed the right to refuse participation at any time, to decline any line of questioning, terminate the interview prior to completion and withdraw their data during the course of the study. Despite no potentially harmful indicators, the researcher remained vigilant and continuously evaluated and monitored the study and the participants to ensure there were no harmful effects produced from participation.

4.5.4 Negotiating Access

Quinlan (2011) outlines that candidates should be provided with as much information regarding the study objectives and that the researcher should always consider that they can refuse to participate at any point in the research process. Interview candidates were contacted via Facebook to participate in this study and sent a message detailing the study objectives, the length of the interview, and a commitment by the researcher to maintain confidentiality was communicated. All ten candidates contacted expressed sincere interest in the research and willingly agreed to participate in the study.

4.6 Data Collection

This study utilized the in-depth interview process because the researcher identified key respondents in relation to the social phenomena of interest and wanted to engage with this particular population in order to extract the appropriate information (Quinlan, 2011). The one-to-one interviews process was the chosen method for interviewing the participants because it allowed the researcher to develop an open and comfortable dialogue with the interviewees (Quinlan, 2011). The researcher strived to maintain the participants' privacy during the interview process because it was the researcher's belief that interviewees were more likely to freely express their individual perspectives on the subject matter under investigation, which the researcher believed was not possible in the public nature of focus groups. (Di Cicco and Crabtree, 2006). This method allowed the researcher greater flexibility in collecting data because it provided opportunity for the researcher to probe in areas of interest that naturally arose or to observe other emerging themes related to the social

phenomenon in question (Quinlan, 2011). The interview format was semi-structured and disseminated via 18 pre-determined open-ended questions. The interviews lasted on average 20 minutes per respondent; this was deliberate on the researcher's part, as it was believed that in order to sustain the attention, interest and maximum engagement of the participants throughout the session, the interview should not surpass the 30-minute mark. Interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of the participants for the sole purpose providing the researcher an exact account of the participant's responses, ensuring that high quality data was collected. Anonymity was and remains guaranteed for all participants throughout the entire process and the write to withdraw from the study at any time or terminate the interview was explicitly communicated verbally and within the informed consent sheet. Using standard protocol, interviews were scheduled to suit the participant's availability and were carried out in a quiet room (Executive 2) at the National College of Ireland for convenience sake, as all participants were regularly studying at the campus library over the summer term (Wisker, 2008; Yin, 2009).

4.6.1 Screening Candidates

The purpose of the screening process is to ensure that cases are properly identified prior to data collection in an effort to avoid collecting data that is irrelevant or not applicable to the research study's goals (Yin, 2009). The researcher identified criteria that was imperative to fulfilling research goals - identifying as a graduate, as a Generation Y member, and lastly, actively seeking employment or recently employed. When students were initially contacted regarding the case study, they were asked the following questions: (1) the year of their birth to determine if they were considered generation Y; (2) If they were graduating in 2016; and (3) they were asked if they were seeking employment or recently employed to assess their potential job seeking activity levels. It was the researcher's assumption that if graduates were actively searching for work or recently hired, they would be exposing themselves to recruiters/employers in an effort to seek opportunities.

4.6.2 Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted in order to help the researcher test the data collection plans in regards to the content of data and the procedures followed (Yin, 2009; Quinlan, 2011). This was conducted with the first candidate that agreed to be interviewed and took place on

Monday July 4, 2016 at 5:30 PM GMT + 1 at the National College of Ireland, Executive 2 classroom and was twenty-four minutes in length.

Upon completing the pilot study, two issues surfaced: (1) some of the wording was overly academic and this was a considerable concern because eight out of ten respondents were international students and English was their second language; (2) A couple questions, though they appeared functional on paper, were repetitive and generated the same responses. Therefore, terminology such as 'trends' was modified to 'patterns,' 'professional capacity' was shortened to 'professionally' and a conscious attempt to enunciate each question was made to avoid repetition. Further, the line of questioning was reduced nineteen to seventeen questions to avoid duplicating queries and responses. It is important to note that mid-way through the interviewing process, an interesting theme emerged, and therefore, one questions was added bringing the total of questions up to eighteen (following the flexible design model of case study research). The researcher attempted to follow-up with all participants; it was possible to question all participants except for one. Overall, the alterations made to the original line of questioning were minor and did not significantly impact the original line of questioning.

4.7 Data Analysis

As opposed to quantitative analysis, there are no definitive set of rules that govern qualitative analysis and various approaches can be utilized. The selected approach is dependent on the basic epistemological assumption regarding the nature of the qualitative study and the status of the researcher's account (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). Yin (2009) suggest that there are five analytical strategies for analyzing data. He states that the strongest and most empirical strategy is relying on theoretical propositions (Yin, 2009) but as this study is exploratory and the social phenomenon is less-documented, the researcher has decided to follow another strategy, qualitative content analysis.

Qualitative content analysis was chosen over other analytical approaches because it allows the researcher to focus on the context or contextual connotation of the text and emphasizes the importance of characteristics of language (Tesch, 1990). The main objective of content analysis is "to provide knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon under study" (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992: 314) by coding and identifying patterns or themes through a

systematic classification process. Though this analysis technique has been suggested by other researcher's to be overly simplistic, Weber (1990) contends that regardless of method, it is possible to attain simplistic results, as research outcomes are a product of skill, not methodology. There are three forms of content analysis - directed, convention and summative (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). All three approaches are used to extract and understand meaning from the context of data, but significant differences exist between each approach: (1) conventional content analysis extracts coding categories from the text data itself; (2) summative content analysis counts and compares keywords or content and then strives interprets the latent meaning; (3) the directed approach uses theory as a starting point and uses it to guide the preliminary coding process (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The researcher has decided to follow the conventional content analysis approach due to the exploratory nature of the research project. It is the researcher belief's that the data collected captures the entirety of social phenomenon directly from study participants without imposing any previous findings, categorizations or theoretical perspectives onto the data during analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

The researcher transcribed a total of four hours of audio from ten participants which took approximately 15 hours in total to complete. Each interview was transcribed within 24 hours in an effort to allow the researcher to continuously analyze the collected data and contemplate on interview outcomes. It was the researcher's belief that reviewing the data from the initial collection stage would allow the researcher more time to reflect over the findings, question the data and provide more opportunity and insight into developing emergent themes (Marshall and Rossman, 2006). The researcher read the data repeatedly, and only once the researcher gained a good comprehension of the emerging themes extracted from the key experiences under investigation, did the data analysis process progress to the next stage (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Data was read word for word in an effort to identify themes and create codes, which are tags or labels (Miles et al., 2013), to help the researcher review and analyze the data and record key concepts, while "preserving the context in which these concepts occur" (Bradley et al., 2007:1761). Throughout this process, the researcher made notes regarding their thoughts, ideas and impressions of the initial data. As the process continued, labels for codes became apparent, which were representative of more than a single expression or thought. This facilitated the process of sorting codes into categories based on how various codes were linked and related to one another (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Using these categories to organize codes into meaningful clusters (Patton, 2002), the researcher

identified 12 clusters. This is in line with the recommended number of cluster, which is 10-15, to keep categories wide enough to sort codes effectively (Morse & Field, 1995). Identifying the links between subcategories, data was filtered into smaller categories to create more meaningful relationships. After this stage, the researcher began to prepare for reporting by developing definitions for each category, subcategory, and code, and then, examples were extracted from data to support definitions. Further, during the discussion the researcher will extend findings and discuss them in comparison to other research findings to elaborate on any converging themes or relationships.

Chapter 5: Findings and Discussion

5.1 Not All Social Media Platforms Are Created Equally - A Clear Distinction Between Professional and Personal Usage

All ten respondents indicated a clear delineation between their activities on various social media platforms. A definitive distinction was made between their 'professional' and 'personal' activities online, with all respondents indicating this separation was significant and incorporated within their social media activities. The distinction between 'professional' and 'personal' produced vastly different behaviours from users depending on the social media site being used. Facebook was overwhelming associated with the 'personal' sphere and identified as a social media platform with the main functionality of entertaining and socializing with friends and family. LinkedIn on the other hand, was identified as a 'professional' platform where behaviours and activities were professionally oriented and subject to considerable scrutiny by network connections, including potential employers.

Respondent 2: *"Facebook is more of a personal account, where I would maybe post pictures of when I go out with my friends, which I wouldn't do on LinkedIn. LinkedIn is more about my job experience - displaying what I am doing right now, what my recent achievements are in my workplace, what are the projects I have completed, what volunteer experience I have done. Of course I can put my volunteer experience on Facebook as well, but I don't see a point, like maybe it is a recruitment site, maybe it isn't, I just don't know."*

Respondent 7: "*My activities on Facebook would most likely be anything that I find funny, something that I want to share with somebody like my family or my brother, we get along very well. We keep tagging each other in stuff that makes no sense half the time. Stuff like this may affect my professional career because some people may not like or find certain types of activities professional and may think that a person who indulges in such kind of activities may not be good for the company and on that basis, I may not get an interview or accepted for a job. This is why I prefer keeping LinkedIn to strictly professional stuff, I mean like sharing articles related to HRM, as compared to Facebook, which is for pure entertainment"*

The findings presented demonstrate that social media use for job seeking purposes is not a linear process, but in fact, there are a multiplicity of factors that determine how Generation Y users utilize social media as a job seeking tool. Throughout the research process, it became

readily apparent that there are significant distinctions made by respondents regarding the functionality of various social media platforms. A clear delineation was made between 'professional' and 'personal' usage which produced distinctly different behaviours from users. Therefore, it can be suggested that social media platforms differ fundamentally in their perceived purposes by users in this study. The distinction in the functionality of social media platforms is supported by Stern and Taylor's (2007) study which found that Facebook was a popular tool for socializing with existing acquaintances, friends and family. Moreover, these findings are supported by Wiese and Farrugia's (2009) study, which indicate Facebook users predominantly use the site to keep in touch with people they know and to strengthen those relationships, as the accessibility and cost-effectiveness in communication overcomes the time constraints and geographical distance that exist in many social relationships. This distinction is further established by van Dijck's (2013) study which demonstrates that LinkedIn differs from other social media sites, like Facebook or Twitter, because user profiles are formatted similarly to a resume by displaying their most recent experience, education, qualifications and skills. Also, Bradley (2011) identifies other factors that differentiate LinkedIn from other social media sites: (1) it encourages its members to explore employment opportunities through its extensive job database and (2) it facilitates their member's ability to expand their professional networks by connecting with them others in their industries. These factors must be considered by organizations who are using social media to disseminate their recruitment campaigns; they must listen to their target audience and communicate with them on appropriate platforms or else they risk failing to appropriately engage with them.

5.2 The Skilled and Unskilled Job Searching Divide on Social Media or Skill-Set Deficit?

An interesting phenomenon that was captured by a minority of respondents was the distinction between using Twitter and Facebook to search for unskilled work, whereas, LinkedIn was associated as a platform to explore skilled opportunities. The experiences that were occurring on Facebook or Twitter described more informal and passive approaches to seeking job opportunities, such as information sharing between acquaintances, friends and family, rather than a strategic recruitment campaign on behalf of an employer. This is not to suggest organizations do not engage in strategic recruitment campaigns over these social media platforms, because they do as evidenced in the literature review with the example of

the company HCL's Twitter campaign, but perhaps, it is not the conventional approach taken by most knowledge-based organizations. Only three out of ten respondents indicated that they had used Facebook (only one mentioned Twitter) for job seeking in any capacity. All other respondents, seem perplexed by the use of Facebook or Twitter for job seeking purposes, indicating a major gap in knowledge regarding how various social media platforms could help them enhance the success of their professional lives.

Respondent 3: *I have used Facebook to look for jobs, like waiting positions. When I first arrived in Dublin, I searched for jobs in groups like 'Jobs in Dublin,' 'Italians living in Dublin,' or 'Spanish living in Dublin.' I think Facebook is useful for finding unskilled jobs through word of mouth, like referrals from other people in the industry, but I think the professional jobs, at least the jobs I am looking for now, are only found on LinkedIn"*

Respondent 4: *Like some people I am friends with on Facebook or follow on Twitter might share a link to a job they know about and depending on my interest, I might send in a CV through there. The last job ad I saw was on Facebook was a friend sharing a Jobs.ie link on his page regarding a hotel job. I think more professional jobs are on LinkedIn and I think part time jobs for students can be found on Facebook or Twitter through friends.*

This divide between skilled and unskilled job seeking platforms was not evident in the literature review and was reported by a minority of respondents, who interestingly happened to have all worked in the hospitality industry. The majority of respondents did not view Facebook or Twitter as a functional job searching tool, as discussed above in the 'personal' and 'professional' divide above, not even through informally occurring instances, as described in these few experiences. The literature demonstrates that, though LinkedIn is the preferred site for recruitment activities, Twitter is regularly used to announce jobs because the use of hashtags can effectively target specific groups (Ladkin and Buhalis, 2016). This potential has been recognized by various recruitment organizations and is particularly reflected in the efforts of Monster Worldwide Inc., who launched their next generation social recruiting solution on Twitter (Marketing Weekly News, 20014). Further, similar strategies have been undertaken by other organizations such as HCL, who kicked off their #coolestinterviewever campaign, as a means to engage and resonate with the Generation Y, the target segment for this campaign. The outcome for the organization was that the campaign received worldwide coverage, it trended for two days in India, and

significantly, it attracted 250,000 participants from more than 60 countries (Vivek and Srivastava, 2016). Further, a recent survey conducted by Jobvite (2014:9) found that 73 percent of recruiters have hired a candidate using social media – with 79 percent indicating they have hired via LinkedIn, 26 percent via Facebook and 14 percent via Twitter. Though LinkedIn is predominately used, a significant amount of activity still occurs across the Facebook and Twitter platforms.

Since this study focuses on HRM graduates, it would be interesting for future studies to research what type of jobs are being advertized across social media platforms and to identify the intended demographics in an effort to recognize the gaps in experience amongst Generation Y job seekers. Overall, this finding is more reflective of Manroop and Richardson's (2014) study which highlighted that many Generation Y respondents were unaware of the potential for job searching across social media platforms, indicating a skill-set deficit, rather than an issue with the functionality of the site. Though this study is limited in size and scope and is definitely not demonstrative of Generation Y as a whole, it certainly raises questions regarding the assumption of Generation Y as 'digital natives' who capitalize on all technological capabilities (Prensky, 2001) and carries with it implications for recruiters who are seeking to access this demographic via social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter.

5.3 The Conscientious Use of LinkedIn to Strategically Manage Professional Image and Outcomes

A majority of respondents indicated that they managed their online profiles strategically, particularly LinkedIn, because they believe that it allows them to create and manage their professional identity. None of the respondents directly or explicitly referred to this a conscious branding strategy, but based on their descriptions, it can be inferred that by actively developing, controlling and monitoring their own professional image, they are shaping and guiding their own professional outcomes by conscientiously branding themselves.

Respondent 2: *"I use LinkedIn daily and I try and keep myself in the top most viewed list. When you are at the top viewing list of your contacts, people are more likely to look at your profile - I get notifications that people are viewing my profile and I get people sending me*

messages or emails. As for sharing information, I would be displaying my job experience, like what I have done previously and what I am doing at present, what kind of openings I am looking for and what volunteer experience I have done. I share any information that I believe will increase my profile strength and generate more interest in me"

Respondent 3: *I know organizations are on LinkedIn and I know they can find me there, it's a kind of personal advert, you are sponsoring yourself. I think LinkedIn is the best way to represent yourself in a job environment. On LinkedIn, I share information related to my education, I always update it, even for like small courses. Also, I always make sure my most updated job experience is displayed. I am very specific about the activities that I do, so even if the employer checks the activities, it's easier to see if I am suitable for the position or not."*

The conscientious use of LinkedIn platforms by most respondents to strategically manage their professional image indicates that users are aware of the significant professional opportunities that can be explored via social media. This form of impression management was first identified by Goffman (1959) as a method for individuals to actively manipulate their social interactions in an effort to achieve their goals. In line with the findings of Kaplan and Hanlein (2010), these experiences reflect the fact that social media offers users an opportunity to create a favourable image of themselves by controlling the content related to their image and to strategically align it to their audience's (recruiters or employers) perceived expectations and preferences (Goffman, 1959). Specifically, this form of professional branding was coined by Kleppinger and Cain (2015:1) as 'personal digital branding,' which is defined as a "strategic self-marketing effort, crafted via social media platforms, which seeks to exhibit an individual's professional persona." The importance of adhering to professional social media norms, which were reflected in the self-promotion strategies of all respondents, supports the findings of Edward et al.'s (2015) study which evaluated how LinkedIn members responded to another user's profile picture or lack thereof. The results demonstrate that users who upload a profile picture to their LinkedIn account are evaluated more favourably than users who refrain from doing so (Edwards et al., 2015), indicating a need for users to maximize their engagement by adhering to the professional norms on social media, in order to reap the full benefits. Further, as evidenced in the findings above and supported by the work of Shao (2009), self-representation strategies can dramatically differ between users, some manifest via explicit terms of self-disclosure, or they can occur implicitly through the user's choice of discussions, terms and mannerism. One user indicated

that she purposefully kept updating her profile to keep to keep it in the top views, while others discussed more passive approaches, such as updating information when necessary or responding to notifications, rather than, generating leads. It is evident from the respondent's experiences that sites such as LinkedIn, provide users a platform to demonstrate their qualifications, skills, knowledge and experience dynamically, in a way that is not possible via the traditional resume format, which is an assertion supported by the work of Zide et al. (2014). This ability to manage professional content online has significantly renegotiated the power dynamic within the recruitment process by allowing job seekers to shape and guide their employment outcomes, in a way that is not possible through traditional job seeking methods.

5.4 Cognitive Dissonance - Reluctance Using Social Media for Professional Purposes

Despite a majority of respondents strategically managing their online presence, a minority of respondents indicated that they were aware of the benefits of using social media for professional purposes, but just never bothered to maintain or update their profiles. This demonstrated a major cognitive dissonance in the job seeking process because all the respondents emphatically discussed the perceived benefits of managing their professional identity on social media, but failed to do so even though they were actively looking for work. In particular, one respondent vehemently believed she was overlooked for a position because her LinkedIn was outdated. Despite strongly believing that this was the case, the respondent indicated that she still has not updated her profile, noting that she was worried about openly sharing what she perceived to be private information on a public platform.

Respondent 10: *Like the example I gave you of that PA job I applied for, I didn't even think to update my LinkedIn account when I should have, I was an idiot. They would have seen that I made zero effort to incorporate any of my skills, qualifications to the job. So they would have been like why is a chef applying for an executive assistant role, there was just a major disconnect there. I think that having a LinkedIn can help you increase your network by making business contacts and joining HR groups, getting invites to conferences or information new regarding courses but I still haven't updated my profile, I guess I should, right... But then too be honest, I wouldn't be keen on just anyone accessing my CV online because it has personal things, I don't know if there is a lock on it.*"

Another respondent was representative of the same phenomenon, despite applying for Human Resource jobs and being asked to share her LinkedIn profile, she still has not developed her profile. When probed by the interviewer as to why she has not updated her profile, even though she was looking for a 'professional' job, she could not provide an explanation, but insisted she would eventually do it.

Respondent 4: *"I forgot to say I have a LinkedIn account but I don't really use it but I know it's good. I have had a LinkedIn for a while, I guess I didn't bother using it because I wasn't really looking for a professional job and now I am. Everyone I have come across regarding job interviews have asked if I have a LinkedIn account and I realize that it's really important"*

It was apparent that there exists a cognitive dissonance amongst a few Generation Y users who resisted using social media for their job search. It is important to point out that all respondents were active on other social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, but were inexplicably reluctant to maintain their professional profile, despite acknowledging the benefits. These respondents could easily be divided into two groups of users - the first group would be those users that know about the effectiveness and power of social media in facilitating their job search, but inexplicably refrain from using it. These passive job seekers tend to prefer using websites, such as Grad Ireland or the NCI job board, to submit CVs. The second group that emerged from this phenomenon are the users that fear their privacy may be compromised and/or view social media primarily as a socializing tool. These findings are in line with Manroop and Richardson's (2014) study which found that, despite Generation Y's propensity to use social media in everyday life, some members of this demographic are actually reluctant and/or lack the skill-set to develop social media usage for professional purposes Further, Plummer et al. (2011) found that privacy concerns and performance expectancy (how effective the tool is perceived to be) directly influence a job seeker's desire to utilize social media. Though these concerns can be mitigated by other factors, it demonstrates that social media usage is not unequivocally the main method of job seeking for all Generation Y job searchers. Significantly, and in line with Kleppinger and Cain's (2015) study, these experiences demonstrate that by failing to maintain or develop a digital identity, job seekers actually relinquish their self-branding powers to others, who ultimately decide their value.

5.5 Self-imposed Censorship and the Potential for Background Checks

All respondents indicated that they were aware that their social media activity, even if occurring on 'personal' platforms, could be subject to scrutiny by potential employers. They were conscious of the fact that any information collected via their social media pages may be used to make personality inferences or judgments regarding their professional capabilities. Their behaviours indicated a strategic attempt to manage their online reputation by refraining in activities that are considered negative and inappropriate and/or concealing any incriminating information from the past, in order to mitigate professional outcomes.

Respondent 4: *"When I was younger I didn't manage my profile well because I didn't have that much knowledge about recruitment processes. Like when I was working in past jobs, I might have written statuses like "I don't want to go to work today" or "I hate me job," like that's going back to when I was 17 or 18. Now that I know how incriminating some of those statements may be, I have deleted nearly all of them. You know that memory thing that comes up every day on Facebook, I just hit delete and delete when I see it because that is not me anymore"*

Respondent 6: *"Oh my god I am very mindful of what I post online. When I was younger I would update my status all the time, but now I don't and I am so mindful of the kind of pictures I post, and even when I do upload photos, I am so mindful of the captions. I really don't share things anymore period, like even say harmless things like competition pages, I don't bother sharing anything on Facebook...I am very careful of who I add or what friend requests I accept. I don't use Facebook like I used to before, I am very conscious of what I post."*

Respondent 7: "*Being very careful of what your post or where you post it, how you say things, how you present yourself online, how you portray yourself online that is through pictures or people that you are associated with – like what they say or what kind of picture they post. All these things do matter when you are online, especially since when you apply for a job, employers do check your LinkedIn and these things do show up. In terms of Facebook, you don't know who is checking your profile like LinkedIn, and you they do background checks on employees they intend to hire or call for an interview, so that's why it does make a difference."*

In line with Goffman's (1959) impression management, all respondents indicated self-imposed censoring their activities across social media platforms in an effort to maintain an online identity that adheres to the perceived needs and expectations of employers. Many discussed altering their current behaviours and concealing past behaviours online by editing or deleting previous content. This is phenomenon is supported by research that indicates when students are younger, they are more likely to share inappropriate content on social media, corroborating the experiences of the respondents. A study of medical students in New Zealand by MacDonald et al. (2010) interestingly found that half of the participants had photos that displayed unprofessional behaviours, such as alcohol consumption, or offensive actions, such as making obscene gestures, inappropriate language or showing nudity. The findings of Ness et al. (2013) demonstrate that students were more likely to alter their social media profiles prior to a job fair, indicating that as they approach graduation they become more aware of the importance of being professional online, mitigating the effects of their previous online usage. This was demonstrated by many respondents who said they consciously made an effort to alter the way they used social media in an attempt to be more professional and to delete any traces of negative content they might have shared prior to graduation and in line with their job seeking efforts.

Further, half of respondents indicated that despite the distinction between private and professional social media platforms, the onus to manage profile information across all platforms was on themselves. It was suggested that there was an element of responsibility in information sharing, indicating a strategic need to conform to professional norms online.

Respondent 8: *"If you don't want people to see certain information then you shouldn't post it. Once you have shared it online it's available for anyone to assess. Whatever information they can extract from your profile, whether good or bad, is your fault and the blame is all yours."*

Respondent 10: "*Yes, absolutely, but people should also use their common sense and just not post inappropriate stuff where it is available for people to see, including your boss."*

Du Gay's (1996) theory of 'enterprise culture' discusses how organizational power and control are exercised through the institutionalization of social norms and cultural practices that commodify employee identity, as evident in these experiences. The normalization of this

discourse is evident in some of respondent's replies, which highlight the need to act as entrepreneurs of their own lives, defending it under neoliberal constructs such as responsibility and competence (du Gay, 1996). Research indicates that the respondent's perceptions of these recruitment practices are legitimate, as they are readily becoming an integral part of the recruitment process and justified as a method of determining an applicant's P-O fit (Dineen et al., 2002). Girard et al. (2014:98) outline that according to a French survey, 43 percent of recruiters admitted to 'googling' an applicant and 8 percent had rejected someone based on the results obtained through the search engine. Further, the annual social media recruitment survey sponsored by CareerBuilder also supports this increasing trend - it found that in 2015, 60 percent of employers use social networking sites to research job candidates, which has increased from 52 percent in the previous year, 22 percent in 2008 and 11 percent in 2006 (CareerBuilder, 2016). Subsequent research on recruitment practices indicate that recruiters are relying on the information extracted from social media sites to make hiring judgments. A study of 389 Belgian recruiters found that 44 percent admitted to searching an applicant's Facebook profile as an extra screening tool and that they consider the information collected accurate indicators of the applicant's levels of maturity and extraversion (Caers and Castelyns, 2011). The rationale that personality is a predictor of job performance was further supported by Kluemper et al.'s (2012) study, which successfully demonstrated through scientific method, that personality judgments via social media could be evaluated objectively and consistently, and correlated to job performance.

The increasing reliance on social media for background checking is an unsettling trend for all parties involved – (1) for the employer, basing hiring decisions on subjective criteria can lead to prejudice in the hiring process, as outlined by Brown and Vaughn, 2011, and presents a significant liability to the organization's integrity, reputation and can even bear legal consequences; (2) for the applicant, it indicates that the private and personal are not actually two separate spheres, but rather, are indistinct from one another, violating the fundamental human right to privacy and demonstrating the pervasiveness of Orwellian culture. Overall, these findings indicate that students must be formally educated in e-professionalism from a young age and taught how to effectively manage personal and professional online identities. Kaczmarczyk et al. (2013) outline that learning how to strategically communicate and promote the professional values, can help individuals develop their professional careers.

5.6 The Discomfort and Disapproval of Unauthorized Background Checks

Most respondents expressed a deep discomfort with the increasing trend of background checking across social media platforms. Issues raised included the subjectivity of perception and lack of scientific rigour, the fundamental right to privacy, and the lack of trust in the recruitment process. Therefore, though all respondents voluntarily conformed to the trend of self-censorship, it became evident that this was done out of an obligation to comply with recruitment practices in order to maximize their job searching potential, rather than, an inherent approval of this trend.

Respondent 3: *"I don't think you can see the personality of the person on Facebook. I know that employers do this but I totally disagree because there are better tools to explore the personality of the person, like assessments, personality tests but searching people on Facebook just isn't professional. It's not even scientific, you can get information but then you have to interpret this information, which is subjective. I personally believe you can't objectively evaluate a person through Facebook. I might write fuck this on Facebook, it could be that I am just angry that day and not a bad person"*

Respondent 5: *"To be honest, I feel like it's a leakage of privacy but I mean that's their way and sometimes we just have to follow their ways and respect the rules. But I mean personally, I don't think it's a good way because it makes people feel like the employer doesn't trust you and that they want to see another side of you and find out what kind of person you really are, rather than, what it says on your CV."*

Respondent 7: *"I don't completely like it for the fact, like I said earlier, it could give a wrong perception or a wrong notion of me which wouldn't actually be me because what I do in my personal life is technically none of their business. To do an internet check or background check is fine to a certain extent but basing your decision on that, I wouldn't completely agree with that because that means you are expected to be a certain way all the time just to please somebody else or to make yourself more approachable to somebody else in terms of corporate life or in terms of a job and the fact that you may not be able to live your life the way you want just because you may not get a job is something that shouldn't be happening."*

All respondents who expressed disapproval towards background checking, conceded to this recruitment trend, despite being deeply uncomfortable with it. They accepted it as a standard

procedure in the recruitment process and tried to mitigate the information extracted from their profiles by limiting the content they shared or just simply using better judgment when sharing content on social media. The previous section discusses the proliferation of background checking on social media by recruiters, but there are no studies that explore how this affects the candidates behaviours. Worryingly, research indicates that this trend is becoming increasingly normalized and some studies have even successfully justified the practice through scientific method, such as Kluemper et al.'s (2012) study that demonstrated that personality judgments made on Facebook could be evaluated objectively and correlated to job performance. Therefore, it is important to investigate the phenomenon from all perspectives to understand how this trend is affecting the information shared by job seekers across social media platforms. The accuracy of information collected must be re-evaluated, if in fact, users are engaging in censorship strategies, as it may not be reflective of 'who they really are.'

5.7 Reverse Background Checks

An interesting phenomenon emerged during the research process - as discussed above, many respondents felt deeply uncomfortable with the fact that recruiters or prospective employers were examining their profiles across social media platforms but interestingly, nearly every respondent admitted to using search engines on Google, Facebook or LinkedIn to learn more about a recruiter or interviewer. Many reasons were identified, mainly it was described as an attempt learn more about the person in an attempt to build a rapport during the interview, such as identifying their interests, education and work experience. Further, some respondents indicated that they searched beyond LinkedIn and used Facebook to learn 'who the person really was,' in a similar fashion to which recruiters justified using Facebook or other 'personal' social media platforms to investigate applicants.

Respondent 2: *"Well it's nothing personal but like I would seek information regarding how long the person has been in the company, what they post on LinkedIn, what they are actually doing or their interests. If it's on Facebook, I might go on and see if there are social nights or colleague parties, I get to know a bit of the company profile. Well I wouldn't go through all their pictures and be like oh she looks fat or something, but I might have a bit of a snoop to learn more about the person."*

Respondent 4: *"...Like the person that interviewed me, I searched him on Facebook after our interview because I wanted to get to know what sort of person he was. I was actually quite surprised because the pictures that I found were of a different person. He was competent in the interview but when I saw his photos it wasn't what I had expected...he was like modelling for photo shoots, I was taken back because this is a businessman and I never imagined he would be modelling for photo shoots on the weekend. I was surprised in a good way because now I think he is more normal, but ya it just didn't match what I thought I had seen in the interview."*

Respondent 7: *"I search people on LinkedIn to know who exactly the person is what their interests are, where they have worked, what's their position. So when I go to the interview I am prepared in advance for anything they may ask me or to be able to make conversation and make an impression in terms of knowing what they like or what their interests are, so talking about something like that may make something of an impact."*

This phenomenon of 'reverse background checking' was remarkably absent from academic literature. Despite most respondents conveying their disapproval for social media background checks, interestingly, they all engaged in it themselves. It is important to distinguish that this was occurring in varying capacities - some kept it professional and stuck to LinkedIn, but some went as far as to search a recruiter or interviewer on Facebook or Google. The use of LinkedIn to learn more about a recruiter or employer falls in line with the sites perceived functionality. Bradley (2011) outline that one of the fundamental functions of LinkedIn is to facilitates their member's ability to expand their professional networks by connecting with them others in their industries. Further, the use of Facebook to dig deeper into someone's background, is line with its use as an investigative tool, as outlined in Zhange and Tang's (2009) study, which identified surveillance as one of the sites main gratifications. There is no academic literature that explores the impact of job applicants researching recruiters or interviewers, but this certainly demonstrates that the power dynamic within the recruitment process is no longer linear, and has been renegotiated by the power provided by social media. A recent survey of 4,000 job seekers by Monster.co.uk found that 28 percent of respondents indicated that information found online relating to an organization affected their opinion of the firm. This demonstrates that the external employer brand of a business plays a significant role in attracting talent, therefore, recruiters/hiring managers must also consider their online image, as they have become de facto representatives of the organization. This is evident in

the experience of one respondent who believed that a recruiter or hiring manager's Facebook profile could be provide information on the organization's culture and social events. Findings such as these should lead to further research about how the social media profiles of employees can affects a candidate's impression of the organization, and thus, employer brand.

5.8 Skepticism Regarding the Effectiveness of Social Media in Job Search and Alternate Approaches to Job Searching

Many respondents indicated that their experiences using social media as a job seeking tool was ineffective, and thus, this caused them to utilize a multiplicity of job searching techniques. They acknowledged the benefits of having a LinkedIn account to present to a recruiter or hiring manager at the second stage of the recruitment process, but this function seemed peripheral, not the central technique for obtaining interviews or generating interest from a company. Respondents discussed using a plethora of job searching techniques, some of which were more traditional, for gaining traction. Examples include using websites, graduate fairs, direct phone calls, recommendations and using the College's career services.

Respondent 6: *"I mainly use websites, like Jobs.ie or Indeed, I don't use LinkedIn very much to be honest. I just don't find it very effective at this point for getting a job, no one ever replies, and the level of experience required, I just don't have...You can call people, I barely send emails myself, I prefer to call people because no one responds to emails. I hate sending emails because they don't look at them, so I just call instead."*

Respondent 9: *"I don't think LinkedIn is very effective, even though the Career's department really try and push it on you. For me personally, I really like to use websites like Glassdoor, Grad Ireland, and Irish Jobs, but I think the best way to get a job is through recommendations."*

Respondent 10: *"Referrals are huge part of getting a job, this is Ireland, it's not what you know, it's who you know...I think LinkedIn may be good to have but I don't think it gets you a job. I am a bit old fashioned to be honest, I still look up jobs in the good old Sligo Champion, I go onto to Bord Bia's website as well and I use websites such as Irish Jobs and Jobs.ie"*

Many respondents indicated that social media sites have been ineffective for their job search and not one respondent indicated finding a job through LinkedIn. This appears to have dissuaded some respondents from using social media and pushed them to utilize other techniques, some of which are quite traditional, such as phone calls, print newspapers, or recommendations, in an effort to maximize their job searching potential. This finding is in line with the outcome of a study published Plummer et al. (2011) that evaluated undergraduate job seekers' behavioural intentions to apply for jobs using social media. It found that performance expectancy (how effective it is perceived to be) directly influences a job seeker's desire to utilize social media for job seeking purposes (though this can be mitigated by various factors). The implications of these findings suggest that job seekers are most motivated to use social media if they perceive that these platforms can increase their possibility of finding a job. Further, the respondent's experiences indicated that their social media activity converged over two sites – Facebook (personal) and LinkedIn (professional). A minority of respondents indicated they were active on Twitter or Instagram, but this was discussed peripherally to their Facebook and LinkedIn profiles, and defined through occasional use. The lack of engagement across social media platforms challenges Gerard's (2012) assertion that social media usage is a defining characteristic of Generation Y because it demonstrates a gap in their ability to effectively utilize and explore professional opportunities across a variety of social media platforms, ultimately, limiting their outcomes.

It must be noted that all respondents were seeking an entry level positions in their field (or recently hired), without any previous experience, and they all indicated that job searching was arduous regardless of the medium used. Many expressed a deep sense of appreciation for any feedback, which was something that seemed to be scarcely provided by employers or recruiters on social media. This highlights a need for organizations to improve communication within the recruitment process on social media in order to increase the perceived effectiveness of this job searching tool, and thus, encourage user engagement.

Chapter 6: Recommendations

1. **Standardize the education of e-professionalism and social media usage by incorporating it into third level curriculum**

Justification: Employability courses that educate students on topics such as social media usage and e-professionalism should be integrated into academic curriculums. Educating students to exploit this technology and how to manage their online identities will increase their job searching potential, and thus, maximize their employment outcomes. Further, social media education can reduce the misconceptions associated with it and strengthen user confidence, and thus, increase user engagement. For example, one respondent worried about sharing her CV on LinkedIn, this concern can be easily resolved by teaching students how to activate and manage privacy settings.

Implementation/Considerations: This will not require academic institutions to invest extra human or financial resources because these programs generally already exist and operate on a voluntary basis. It would require that existing programs are restructured in order to maximize its reach and the benefits of participation communicated more effectively. Instead of making these programs voluntary, attendance marks should be assigned in an effort to encourage students to participate. Further, it is imperative that the instruction process not be linear, but instead, interactive. It must be compulsory for all students to develop and implement their own social media strategy and present it to their peers as a way of engaging and exploring a variety of perspectives, and ultimately, enhancing their own strategies.

2. **Organizations need to communicate their recruitment campaigns with job seekers more effectively**

Justification: The findings indicate that Generation Y job seekers are principally using LinkedIn to search for employment opportunities. The literature indicates that organizations are utilizing a plethora of social media sites to communicate their hiring initiatives with target audiences. Therefore, there appears to be a disconnect between organizational hiring strategies and the perceived functionality of various social media sites with Generation Y job seekers in this study.

Implementation/Considerations: Organizations will have to re-evaluate their marketing strategies in order to increase the effectiveness of their social media recruitment campaigns. This will not require extra human or financial resources but instead will require organizations prioritize their social media communication strategy. They need to evaluate 3 fundamental components: (1) Are they using the right platform? (2) Are they engaging their intended audience? (3) Do they understand their audience's needs? In this case, organizations can make use of their presence at graduate fairs and college/university recruitment open houses to communicate their recruitment strategies and educate students about the benefits of social media in their job search in order to increase social media engagement.

3. **Organizations must refrain from conducting background checks on private social media platforms and using the collected information to make hiring judgement.**

Justification: The findings indicate that job seekers are deeply uncomfortable with background checks and that they are actively censoring themselves online, reducing the accuracy of this 'investigative' tool. Further, information collected on 'personal' social media platforms should not be used to make hiring decisions; it is subjective, and consequently, could expose the organization to reputational damage or litigation.

Implementation/Consideration: Organizations will have to standardize their recruitment process by introducing policies that specifically outline how applicants are evaluated. This will not incur financial costs, but will require senior management, most likely the Talent Acquisition Manager, to develop hiring policies that explicitly outlines the company's accepted procedures in line with employment legislation in Ireland. Objectivity is key, and therefore, social media background checks (other than LinkedIn) must be eliminated from the recruitment process and this message explicitly communicated in order to create a fairer and more equitable hiring process.

4. **Organizations must develop and implement a social media policy for all employees that reflect organizational vision, values and goals.**

Justification: The findings indicate that job seekers are searching recruiters and/or hiring managers across platforms as a way to learn more about an organization. As de facto representatives of the organization, employee behaviours and activities online reflect the organizational brand. It is possible that negative or irresponsible behaviours of employees on social media sites can affect an applicant's desire to work with an organization. In order to maximize their employer branding strategies, organizations must be conscious of this trend and work towards mitigating any negative effects by developing social media policies that are aligned with their visions, values and goals.

Implementation/Considerations: This will require that senior management, most likely the Human Resource and/or Marketing Executive, to develop social media policies that reflects the values, visions and goals of the organization. During the implementation phase, senior management must achieve the buy-in of all employees by emphasizing their responsibility in maintaining the integrity of the organization and demonstrating their significance in the process. It will induce a cultural change that renegotiates the employee's relationship with the organization, and thus, their role and responsibilities within that dynamic. Overall, this initiative will not incur financial costs but will require that the time and effort of executives to create and communicate clear-cut and precise policies and to achieve the buy-in of employees to ensure its success.

5. **Organizations must provide applicants feedback in order to improve their hiring experience via social media platforms.**

Justification: A common element in the respondent's experiences was that they received little to no feedback from organizations when applying for jobs through LinkedIn. This caused them to perceive LinkedIn as ineffective for job searching and to redirect their efforts and use other methods, such as websites, grad fairs, career departments and/or recommendations. If organizations want to increase the efficacy of their engagement with applicants, they must provide feedback on job applications. Many respondents indicated that, even if they were rejected for a position, they were grateful for feedback because it provided them a point of reference for their next strategy.

Implementation/Considerations: This recommendation is actually quite simple to implement and requires little effort on part of the organization. If the Human Resource

department is using an applicant tracking system, all they have to do is create a rejection template that can be sent to automatically to unsuitable candidates. If the organization has yet to introduce an applicant tracking system, they should immediately consider this option because it provides them an opportunity to automate their Human Resource processes and reduce their administration work, and thus, economizing their human and financial resources. Further, by decreasing the bureaucracy of the process they actually improve the candidate's hiring experience by efficiently managing their progress and notifying them instantly of any updates, ultimately, strengthening their employer brand. Software, such as Candidate Manager, can be purchased for as little as €50/ per user per month, making it financially feasible for organizations of all sizes.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The exploratory nature and the qualitative approach of this research aims to provide an in-depth understanding of Generation Y job searching behaviours and activities that occur across social media platforms. The research highlighted that the demographic outlined in this study are using a plethora of job searching mediums, that extend well beyond social media, and even incorporate more traditional approaches, challenging the notion of Generation Y as 'digital natives' (Prensky, 2001). A minority of respondents indicated a reluctance to use social media despite acknowledging the perceived benefits it may provide, demonstrating a cognitive dissonance in the job searching process. Further, a distinct differentiation between the functionality of social media sites emerged, indicating a clear delineation between professional and personal usage, which overwhelmingly identified the convergence of professional activities on LinkedIn. Despite this distinction, users indicated strategically managing all their social media accounts in varying capacities, to manage their online identities. On Facebook, this mainly occurred via self-imposed censorship, while on LinkedIn, this was disseminated by constructing an image of themselves that matched their audience's (recruiters or employers) perceived expectations and preferences (Goffman, 1959), ultimately, renegotiating the linear power dynamic present in previous recruitment processes. Most interestingly, students were aware of recruiters and employers background checking their social media profiles, despite disapproving of this phenomenon, it became apparent that in a similar fashion, they were conducting their own 'reverse background checks' to learn more about a person and/or the company. Overall, the effectiveness of social media for job searching was questioned significantly by respondents, as many indicated their efforts generated few leads. A significant issue presented by respondents, was that recruiters and organizations failed to provide responses regarding the status of their applications, even simple standardized rejection emails, decreasing their engagement levels within the recruitment process occurring across social media platforms.

The implications of this study outline a need for academic institutions need to standardize e-professionalism and social media education within their curriculums in order to maximize their students' job searching potential by increasing their digital capabilities. Furthermore, organizations need to re-evaluate how they are connecting with job seekers on social media and to communicate from a business perspective, how various platforms can be utilized to facilitate their job searching experience. This will help organizations increase their engagement levels with their target audiences, and also, facilitate the efforts of Generation Y

job seekers to develop more effective strategies. Further, more emphasis needs to be placed on responding adequately to the applications of job seekers on social media; this will increase their perception of the technology's utility and strengthen their confidence in its ability to enhance their job seeking opportunities. And lastly, research suggests that employees have become de facto representatives of the organization and are being subject to 'reverse background checks' by candidates, indicating a need for organizations to develop social media policies for their employees that reflect the values, visions and goals of the organization in order to mitigate any negative effects on their employer brand.

Overall, this relatively unexplored topic presents an exciting research opportunity for other academics interested in investigating the relationship between social media and Generation Y job seeking. The results of this study are non-generalizable and are representative of a social phenomenon occurring within a narrowly defined segment of the population. Therefore, the next plausible step would be to design a wider study that could focus on forming new clusters of users that could be separated by distinct criteria, such as technological capabilities and the social media platforms actually used. Future studies could extend this research by further examining the behaviours, activities and experiences of other demographic groups, expanding well beyond the experience of Generation Y HRM graduates, to determine what career level, job types and/or industry is social recruiting optimized at. And lastly, more studies need to be initiated from the perspective of the job seeker to understand how the recruitment process via social media platforms affects their perception of an organization's employer brand. Understanding the implications of 'reverse background checks' or how the lack of feedback affects online engagement levels can help organizations develop more effective social media recruitment strategies, and thus, attract top talent.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Information Letter and Consent Form

Information Letter to Participants

Please read the following instructions carefully:

Dear participant,

First and foremost, thank you very much for taking the time to participate in my research today.

Study Description

The purpose of my research project is to investigate in what capacity Generation Y graduate students at the National College of Ireland utilize social media as a mechanism for job seeking. The interview will aim to explore how you, the participant, use social media in a professional capacity in order to identify any emerging job seeking trends.

Your involvement within the research project will be in form of interview participation, which will consist of a series of open ended questions. The duration of the interview is estimated to be 20 minutes. Please respond to all questions using the best of your ability.

Further, you will be asked to connect with the researcher on social media, particularly focusing on the following sites: LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter.

Confidentiality

All responses will be recorded using an audio recording device which will be stored securely. The responses provided and information collected will remain strictly confidential throughout all research stages - data collection, analysis and publication, and will not be used in any other research or heard by anyone other than the sole researcher on this project.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw

The decision to participate in this research project is entirely up to you. You may refuse to take part in the study at any given time, without implicating any of your relationships at the National College of Ireland. Further, throughout the interview process you may choose not to answer any question/s posed if you feel uncomfortable. Your decision/s will not result in any loss or benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Risks & Benefits

This study does not involve any type of physical, psychological or emotional risk to you or any other participant. As a participant, you will be asked to answer questions about your activities across social media platforms, particularly focusing on your professional behaviours, ideas and experiences. Although this study is not designed to help you in particular, the information you provide will contribute to a larger body of knowledge

surrounding graduate job seeking trends/patterns via social media platforms. Hopefully, this study and similar others, can contribute to the production of information on how to better inform the strategies graduate students utilize when seeking career opportunities.

As a researcher, I am not here to pass judgments on any of your responses, therefore, please feel free to share your ideas, thoughts and experiences to make this as much of an interesting and enriching experience as possible. If you have any questions, now or throughout the interview process, please do not hesitate to ask.

If you are satisfied with the following information and would still like to participate, please complete the consent form provided by the researcher.

Kind regards,

Tatiana Titus

Student Researcher at the National College of Ireland

Consent Form

I, the participant, agree with all of the following statements:

I confirm that I have been informed about the nature of the study and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the research.

I understand that the responses provided in the interview will be recorded using an audio device. All collected data will be stored securely and will not be used in any other research or heard by anyone else except by the researcher conducting this study.

I understand that the responses recorded will remain strictly confidential and anonymity guaranteed throughout data collection, analysis and publication.

I agree to the use of anonymized quotes in the final publication.

I agree to connect with the researcher on social media (websites of particular focus: LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter) and to allow the researcher to review and discuss any publicly published information for the purpose this research only (your identity will never be disclosed at any point during this research project).

I understand that as a participant, I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without giving any reasons and without negative consequences.

I understand that this study poses no physical, psychological or emotional harm to myself or others and that the purpose of this research is to contribute to a wider body of knowledge regarding graduate job seeking trends/patterns via social media.

_____	_____	_____
Participant's Name	Signature	Date
_____	_____	_____
Researcher's Name	Signature	Date

Appendix 2: Interview Questions

Interview Questions

1. What social media platforms do you regularly use? Please list all live accounts.
2. Do you use any of these social media platforms professionally? Why or why not?
3. What social media platforms do you believe are best for job seeking and why?
4. Do you have a LinkedIn account? (Or, you said you have a LinkedIn account) If so, please describe how frequently you use it and what kind of information you share with your 'connections.' If you don't have a LinkedIn, please explain why not.
5. If you have a LinkedIn account, discuss if and how your activities (likes, shares, comments, uploads) on differ from other social media accounts (ex. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram).
6. Do you believe there is a professional way to act online? If so, please describe the professional attributes associated with this understanding.
7. Do you incorporate these attributes on within your own social media activity? Please explain the differences across platforms, if there exists one.
8. What do you believe are the benefits of professionally representing yourself via social media platforms?
9. Do you believe that there needs to be a clear separation between your professional self and your personal self on social media platforms? Please explain.
10. How do you feel about recruiters/employers searching your details across various social media platforms?
11. Have you ever searched a recruiter/employer on social media prior to an interview? Please explain.
12. How much of the recruitment process (searching, screening, contacting) do you believe occurs via social media platforms?
13. What methods for recruiting new staff do you think the organization uses most often? Have they changed in the past few years? If so, how and why?
14. What recruitment patterns have you noticed on social media platforms based on your user experience?
15. If you find a job interest on social media, what information about the employer and position do you seek?
16. Have you distributed your personal details via a social media platform in relation to a job interest? Please discuss why or why not.
17. Have you ever engaged with a prospective employer via a social media platform? If so, please describe the situation. If not, please discuss how come.
18. Do you believe that there are other avenues of engaging with prospective employers for job seeking purposes other than via social media platforms? Please explain in what other ways you have searched job vacancies, applied for a job, contacted prospective employers, sought career advice/coaching.

Appendix 3: Pilot Study with Respondent 1

Friday July 1, 2016 @ 5:00 pm – Interview length 24:00 minutes

So thank you for taking the time to meet me I really appreciate it. You read the information leaflet, so you have an idea of what we will talk about. I have a series of questions that will explore how you use social media to explore employment opportunities online.

Tatiana: What social media platforms do you regularly use?

Respondent 1: LinkedIn, I am using this to look for opportunities in Ireland and I also, use websites in China.

Tatiana: Sticking to social media, what other accounts do you have?

Respondent 1: Facebook, WhatsApp

Tatiana: Do you use any of these social media platforms in a professional capacity?

Respondent 1: Sorry I don't understand the question.

Tatiana: Like do you use Facebook, LinkedIn or WhatsApp professionally, in any way?

Respondent 1: I don't use Facebook to connect with employers, I have never searched an employer on Facebook. I only use LinkedIn in that way because that's its purpose. I have joined some groups on LinkedIn and also, I follow companies I am interested in. I hope it can provide some opportunities, but it hasn't happened it.

Tatiana: What kind of groups are you joining on LinkedIn?

Respondent 1: Human Resource groups, how to find a job, how to correct your CV, stuff like this.

Tatiana: *What social media platforms do you believe are the best for job seeking?*

Respondent 1: LinkedIn because you can see all the professionals on the network and connect with them, that's much more functional than Facebook or Twitter. See I hear about Twitter newsfeeds but I don't know too much about it, its blocked in China.

Tatiana: Really, what about LinkedIn?

Respondent 1: No, that's okay, so that's why I stick to LinkedIn. Facebook and Twitter are blocked in China so I cannot use it to find a job there.

Tatiana: You said you have a LinkedIn account, please describe how frequently you use it and what kind of activities you engage in or information you share with your connections?

Respondent 1: I share my CV, the areas of interest I have, so that potential employers can see what I am about and connect with me.

Tatiana: What other things do you do?

Respondent 1: I send out invitations to build my own network, regularly review my CV, you can edit things on it to make your profile to make it more appealing.

Tatiana: You said you have a Facebook account, what kind things do you use it for then?

Respondent 1: If I have some news or knowledge about HR I would share it on LinkedIn, but if I see a funny picture or some horrible news, I would share it on Facebook. Its like the difference between your professional life and your private life, so that's the difference, I don't want to mix my work and my personal life together.

Tatiana: Even though Facebook is considered your private social media, do you still limit yourself in what kind of content you share?

Respondent 1 On Facebook, if you like this person of course you want to share everything with them, so I don't hold back, but I suppose but I don't share anything inappropriate anyways.

Tatiana: Do you believe there is a professional way to act online? What are the attributes?

LinkedIn: Yes, I think if your employer looks at your Facebook it would help them know who you really are, what you can be, what you are like out of the office, what are your interests, hobbies, but I don't think I would add my boss on my Facebook.

Tatiana: In terms of being professional online, what do you think makes someone professional?

Respondent 1: If you are professional you share things related to your job, for example if you are working in HR, you may share something recruitment related or about performance appraisals. You wouldn't share improper images or news or sharing your personal failings on LinkedIn – like writing "I am not happy today because of the rain," or like people who have sexy profile pictures on LinkedIn, like I don't have a problem with it myself, but its not professional, you know what I mean. If you want to show you are serious, these kinds of photos are not professional.

Tatiana: Do you incorporate any of these attributes into your social media activity?

Respondent 1: I try and act professional on LinkedIn

Tatiana: Like let's say figuratively, if your boss saw your Facebook, would there be anything unprofessional?

Respondent 1: Uh no because I only share photos of trees or grass, like scenic stuff. I share news, if you want to share something with your friends, it wouldn't be improper, like I'd try and share things that are interesting, funny, or something maybe like critical news. So, it would be okay if my boss saw my Facebook profile but Id prefer to keep it personal. I may

post something like I am happy today because the sun is out, so I don't mind if my boss sees that.

Tatiana: What do you believe are the benefits of professionally representing yourself on social media?

Respondent 1: I think it will be helpful for job searching, maybe even once you have a job it could help you get a promotion if you act professional and share things related to your job on LinkedIn because it shows that you are concerned about your field, I think these are the benefits.

Tatiana: You said you believe there needs a clear distinction between your personal and professional self on social media, so is there any reason why?

Respondent 1: I believe everyone needs personal space, this is my personal belief.

Tatiana: How do you feel about employers checking your social media accounts, like Facebook then, doing like background checks?

Respondent 1: I don't mind if they look at my profile, I get that they are trying to know as much as they can about a person, so they may track you on Facebook. I don't mind because I don't have anything inappropriate, but its personal.

Tatiana How much of the recruitment process do you believe occurs on social media?

Respondent 1: I search for jobs online - Indeed, Gum tree, Jobs.ie, those are mainly the sites I use myself. Though having a LinkedIn profile is important because an employer will check that as well, so it's important even if they don't contact me directly through it.

Tatiana: What methods for recruiting new staff do you think organizations are using most often?

Respondent 1: LinkedIn, maybe some companies like to use Facebook or Twitter. You may not remember the employability classes we had in college but they invited some companies to give lectures and one company, I can't remember the name, said they use Facebook. The lady said they like to see the Facebook profile of the candidate to learn more about him or her. Of course they check the LinkedIn profile, but they like to use Facebook.

Tatiana: Do you think this has changed in the past few years?

Respondent 1: For me, I think it's okay, it's just using different websites. I would have previously used websites, but now I use LinkedIn as well. I still use websites like Jobs.ie, or indeed, I think it depends on where you want to work. If I want to work in China, I will focus on using websites because social media is very controlled. Also, I guess the good thing is companies can't check your Facebook because its blocked, so they rely on your CV for information and call people for interviews. I know I said you could use LinkedIn in China, but it's not that popular, there are so many websites, big recruitment websites that people mainly use. Maybe it will gain popularity.

Tatiana: What kind of recruitment trends do you think are occurring online based on your user experience?

Respondent 1: Sorry could you repeat.

Tatiana: What things or patterns have you noticed emerging within the online recruitment world?

Respondent 1: I think the recruitment process is becoming more personalized, they give you timely feedback, they let you know how the process is going, if anyone checked your CV or your references, I think they are trying to make the service more specific, its useful for the companies and the applicants.

Tatiana: If you find a job interest on social media what information about the employer or the position do you seek?

Respondent 1: First I look for the salary, its always the first thing you want to know, maybe the career progression, I want to know if there is space to develop, let you know there is a future in the company. If I track down an employer on LinkedIn, I check the information about the company to prepare for the interview, you need to research something to talk about and show you are interested.

Tatiana:: Have you ever distributed your details on social media?

Respondent 1: Yes, I have on LinkedIn. I am a very boring person.

Tatiana: Have you ever engaged with a prospective employer on social media, has anyone ever contacted?

Respondent 1: Not, not yet.

Tatiana: Do you think there are other avenues of engaging with employers, other than social media?

Respondent 1: I know some people use newspapers, but I have never tried it. I have searched jobs online like indeed, gum tree, Jobs.ie, those are mainly the sites I use myself. I have received more responses from the websites than I have received from LinkedIn. Two people have contacted me, but I am still jobless.

Tatiana: You talked about this employability class, have you participated?

Respondent 1: Yes I have because I am an international student, we have issues with our visas and our work permits, to ensure we can work here legally, they teach us about the restrictions. I also went to a forum at UCD that provides information on how to stay in Ireland legally and longer. It wasn't helpful, because they said the easiest way was to marry a local person. They want to attract investments in Ireland, most of the people were Chinese students and entrepreneurs, so they said you need have € 200 000 to invest in a small

business. Of course if you are richer, you can invest in big business. And the condition is you have to provide 10 jobs to the Irish people, that's how you can get a green card.

Tatiana: Have you sought advice from the career department?

Respondent 1: Yes they helped me fix my CV to suit the Irish context, I mean the CV here is different from China, I think that's good. They also helped me update my LinkedIn profile, they really push you to do that. But I think there are disadvantages to be an international student because you know we have had companies come and visit, like Musgrave's grad program requires to have a car or driver's license. So for international students, we don't generally have cars, I do have a license, but my car is not here.

Tatiana: Tell me more about the employability classes

Respondent 1: It was good they gave you advice about how to dress professionally to interviews, how many shirts you need, the colours to wear. It was interesting. I think they said Lidl checks your Facebook, I think some companies culture are more relaxed and friendly and they might want to check your profile to learn more about your hobbies and see if you are a good cultural fit.

<u>Follow up question:</u>

Tatiana: Have you ever searched a recruiter or hiring manager on social media prior to an interview?

Respondent 1: Yes of course, I just did yesterday because I had an interview. I think you need to know who is going to interview you, knowing about his or her experience will help you learn what the company is like and make your interview more successful.

Tatiana: Where did you get the information?

Respondent 1: From LinkedIn, I didn't search them on Facebook because LinkedIn is more professional, you can see useful information like their qualifications, experience, skills. It just helps you overall learn more about the company.

Appendix 4: Personal Learning Statement

This project was an interesting journey that provided me an exciting opportunity to engage with other graduates to learn, explore and evaluate their job searching experiences via social media. Though this research was focused on discussing their experiences, on a personal level, I found myself analyzing my own job searching techniques and questioning the efficacy of my online strategies. This was a significant process for me because I had been unemployed for over a year and found it very difficult to enter the employment market after having a baby. Comparing my experiences with the success and failures of others, really highlighted gaps in my previous job searching techniques and provided me the opportunity to learn and develop new social media strategies. When I refer to some of the respondent's experiences as failures, I simply refer to the fact they remain unemployed, and honestly, I don't consider it their fault. It became evident that there are many factors that hinder an individual's job search, regardless of what platform they use, that they simply have no control over. A significant issue that came across was the working visa stipulations for Non-EU students. It was evident that the twenty-hour a week work restriction reduced the appeal of international student's application, particularly during term time when the restriction was in fully enforced. Further, cultural differences in the job searching process emerged during the interview stage; two Nigerian respondents discussed how they were frustrated with Irish organizations' reliance on online recruitment because in Nigeria, if you are interested in a job you can walk into the organization's building and directly present yourself as an applicant, maximizing your potential for a response through a personable engagement process. Further, one Chinese Respondent discussed how social media, for the most part, is banned in China, and though LinkedIn isn't, it's just not very popular. She discussed how the job searching process is quite different and the need to utilize two distinctly separate strategies to try and gain traction in employment markets of Ireland and China. Significantly, many non-EU respondents communicated that the job market in Ireland operated on the principle of "It is not what you know, but who you know," indicating the difficulties of developing and establishing themselves in foreign professional networks from scratch. These experiences highlight that visa restrictions, differences in cultural practices and not having an established professional network create significant disadvantages for international students who are job searching. Since many of the programs at the National College of Ireland are highly composed of this demographic, the College must address their particular needs by establishing specialized job

seeking initiatives, such as developing partnerships with organizations that encourage them to hire this demographic.

This research project could have been undertaken more effectively in various aspects - for example, I felt a tension undertaking this project with 8 out of 10 non-Irish respondents. At times, I considered changing the research focus to something along the lines of 'how international Generation Y job seeking use social media,' but refrained because I realized the study's unit of analysis could be constructed using various identity markers and the possibilities were endless. To illustrate this point, 8 out of 10 respondents were women, does this signify that the results represent a gendered generational perspective. Overall, I found establishing the case study's unit of analysis difficult and confusing, and therefore, I decided to simply follow a more general strategy and focus on decision making processes. Further, if I had more time, I would have preferred to use grounded theory as a systematic methodology because I agree more with the construction of theory through data analysis, rather than, data analysis through existing theoretical frameworks. I think it would have allowed me to explore the respondent's experiences more effectively by not constraining the analysis to existing theory.

Personally, despite the arduous nature of this project, I am glad I participated in the process and most importantly, finished it! Academically, I think this significantly improved my time management skills, research skills and analytical ability. Further, from a process of business research perspective, I think I learned that no study can establish definitive results, even if the scope and reach is wide. I think I learned from the interviews and literature reviews that people and organizations vastly differ and that their practices and processes are affected by a multiplicity of factors. As researchers, we can only establish trends, but never truths because people, technologies and ideas are constantly evolving, and therefore, the information collected today may not be relevant to the social phenomenon tomorrow.

Appendix 5: Submission of Thesis to Norma Smurfit Library, National College of Ireland

Student name: Tatiana Titus Student number: x14117550

School: School of Business Course: Thesis

Degree to be awarded: Master of Arts, Human Resource Management

Title of Thesis:

Generation Y: Using social media for job searching?

An exploratory study of how Generation Y job seekers use social media to fulfil their job searching needs

One hard bound copy of your thesis will be lodged in the Norma Smurfit Library and will be available for consultation. The electronic copy will be accessible in TRAP (http://trap.ncirl.ie/), the National College of Ireland's Institutional Repository. In accordance with normal academic library practice all theses lodged in the National College of Ireland Institutional Repository (TRAP) are made available on open access.

I agree to a hard bound copy of my thesis being available for consultation in the library. I also agree to an electronic copy of my thesis being made publicly available on the National College of Ireland's Institutional Repository TRAP.

Signature of Candidate:

For completion by the School:

The aforementioned thesis was received by_____

Date: _____

This signed form must be appended to all hard bound and electronic copies of your thesis submitted to your school.