

Chapter 9

From Universities to Private Companies: A Measurable Route of LinkedIn Users

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ABSTRACT

In publishing their education background together with the professional experience, users make LinkedIn a privileged web source for understanding “University-Industry” connections. Precisely, the main goal of this study is to test LinkedIn as a valid source for analyses oriented to the quantification of the university-industry interactions. To this end, the authors propose two different procedures (method A: direct through the URL mentions between LinkedIn profiles; and Method B: indirect through the information from LinkedIn University Pages), comparing them against the direct procedure based on URL mentions between official websites (Method C). To do this, the authors have selected the whole Spanish academic system. The results show that method A is unusable yet due to the low web connectivity between LinkedIn profiles, while method B provides reliable though too volatile data that complements method C, which reveal in turn relations of different nature.

INTRODUCTION

LinkedIn is a professional social network launched in May 2003 which has over 400 million users (October 2015) from more than 200 countries.¹ More than 80% of its users are aged between 36 and 45 years, although the average is decreasing over time (Archambault & Grudin, 2012).

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-0917-2.ch009

This platform focuses on the professional information, encouraging users to build an abbreviated curriculum and establishing connections with other people or entities. People can apply and recommend to other members as well as to control the amount of information to share either to the general public or their professional connections.

LinkedIn also offers a section with the most influential people, indicating the number of followers they have. Finally, since job or any personal information may change, LinkedIn provides an address book updated automatically (Skeels & Grundin, 2009).

In the business environment, the degree of LinkedIn usage is associated with the size of the company and the industry in which this firm operates. In this sense, the companies belonging to the quaternary sector are noteworthy and, particularly, those related to Technology, Telecommunications and Financials (Bonsón & Bednárová, 2013; Kim, Kim & Nam, 2014).

Showing social and professional skills, LinkedIn users not only increase their professional value in the labour market but can also improve the image of the corresponding company (Van Dijck, 2013), improving thereby the interest and participation of employees in the social network, which reaches in the case of Microsoft up to 80% of the staff (Archambault & Grudin, 2012).

Since the information displayed on LinkedIn profile pages is characterized by a high level of integrity and accuracy (Brouer et al., 2015), where curricula have been demonstrated to be less misleading than traditional one (Guillory & Hancock, 2012), this social net is used as a recruiting tool because the company is capable to reach both active and passive job seekers, as users describe and share their educational background (Bonsón & Bednárová, 2013).

Despite being more popular outside than inside the academic environment, LinkedIn is also used by researchers to publish information related to their professional activities, including details about research publications and related activities (Mas-Bleda & Aguillo, 2015), although its value as a source for Altmetrics is limited to date (Thelwall *et al.*, 2013).

In any case, LinkedIn offers an enormous amount of valuable data about education and careers of its members, which can be explored to find success profiles, to identify specific professional groups, to detect education trends and itemize professional careers, or even to predict a user's degree of professional success (Dai et al., 2015). In short, LinkedIn allows access to information from users about universities and companies not available from another source (Unkelos-Shpigel, Sherman & Hadar, 2015). In publishing their education background together with the professional experience and skills, professional users make LinkedIn a privileged web source for understanding "University- Company" connections.

Otherwise, the vast amount of information (primarily professional) makes LinkedIn profiles (both personal and institutional) new information sources of quality, that can be visited as well as linked to by external websites, aspect that is favoured by the fact that LinkedIn has a great web authority in Google general search engine (Kelly & Delasalle, 2012). Since LinkedIn profiles are accessible online via URLs, this also converts these personal profiles into units suitable for link analysis (Thelwall, 2004; Orduna-Malea & Aguillo, 2015).

Thereupon, LinkedIn appears as a cybermetric feasible web source to analyse university-company interactions under two different approaches:

1. Directly through the URL mentions between the institutional LinkedIn profiles of universities and companies; and
2. Indirectly through the information contained in the personal LinkedIn profiles of particular users.

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