INFM605
Users and Use Context

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"LinkedIn Job Search Study for UMD Grad Students"

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I. <u>Introduction</u>

As graduate students seeking internships, we extensively use various job-searching platforms, but LinkedIn emerged as the most favored and commonly used platform. Through this study, we aimed to delve deeper into the well-performing areas as well as pain points of LinkedIn through the perspectives of our graduate students. To achieve this objective, we utilized three distinct user research methodologies, which collectively provided valuable insights into our research questions.

Research statements:

Our study aims to identify the challenges that our target audience (UMD Grad students) face while searching for jobs on LinkedIn and explore potential solutions to improve the platform's job search features.

Research goals:

- Determine the level of user satisfaction with LinkedIn's current job search features.
- Understand the reasons why users turn to LinkedIn for job searches and what their expectations are for the platform.
- Collect feedback from a diverse range of students searching for full-time roles or internships to gain a comprehensive understanding of the issues they face.
- Analyze user feedback and trends to identify areas of improvement and inform recommendations for maximizing user engagement and growth on the platform.

II. <u>Research Methodology</u>

A. <u>Ethnographic Interviews</u>

1. Recruitment criteria

   Our recruitment criteria for ethnographic interviews included students actively searching for jobs on LinkedIn, with a complete profile, and a willingness to share their experiences. We utilized personal connections to reach out to potential participants and conducted an initial screening process to confirm eligibility and assess their interest and availability for the study. In the end, we conducted 6 interviews remotely over video conference.

2. Sample questions

   To maintain objectivity and encourage participants to provide detailed, unbiased responses, we used open-ended and non-directed questions. For measuring subjective metrics such as

quality, we used the "deconstruct the construct" approach, where we analyzed the sub-components such as performance, features, reliability, and aesthetics.

We followed an hourglass approach during the interview, beginning with broader and more general questions, then gradually moving into more specific ones, and finally taking a step back to gain a bigger perspective before concluding with a summary and wrap-up. Before asking the questions, we made sure to give the interviewees a clear picture of our objectives and took their consent to record the answers.

Here are some sample questions we asked in our ethnographic interviews.

- How often do you check LinkedIn for job postings? Do you use the app on your phone or a desktop computer?
- Can you walk me through the process of applying for a job on LinkedIn?
- Have you faced any difficulties or challenges while searching for jobs on LinkedIn? Can you describe them in detail?
- How do you typically filter job postings on LinkedIn? Which search criteria do you find most useful?
- Have you ever used LinkedIn Premium? If not, why not? If yes, on a scale of 1-5, how beneficial did you find it?
- Can you describe a time when LinkedIn helped you achieve a personal or professional goal?
- On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate your experience of searching for a job opening using LinkedIn? Can you identify specific aspects of the experience that you love or hate?
- In addition to LinkedIn, what other job search platforms or methods do you use? How do they compare to your experience on LinkedIn?

3. Analysis and synthesis process

The analysis process involved transcribing the interviews and then coding them by identifying the main themes and concepts in the data and assigning them meaningful units. Subsequently, related codes were categorized together into larger themes. The final step involved looking for patterns between the categories and synthesizing our analysis into findings report that highlighted the key areas for LinkedIn to focus on.

B. <u>Usability Testing</u>

1. <u>Recruitment criteria</u>

   Our study recruited participants who use LinkedIn regularly and asked them to perform specific tasks on the platform. We observed their behavior and recorded any difficulties or pain points they experienced.

   Our usability testing provided valuable insights into how users navigate and use LinkedIn. During our assessment, we recognized a few aspects where the user experience could be enhanced. Additionally, we observed that users are currently devising their own solutions to address these issues. The areas for improvement include streamlining the process of locating job postings, addressing any technical difficulties, and improving job alerts. By implementing changes based on our findings, we believe that LinkedIn could become a more user-friendly platform and better meet the needs of its users.

2. <u>Usability Task:</u>

   <u>Observation- User 1:</u>

   When the user started searching for job postings that matched their requirements, we noticed that they entered multiple search terms, including job titles, keywords, and locations, to narrow down their search results. As the user navigated the search results, we observed that they applied several advanced filters such as salary range, job type (full-time, part-time, contract, etc.), and company size to further narrow down their search. Once the user logged out and logged back in, they had to reapply all the filters. We also noticed that the user was able to adjust the filters easily and quickly, which made it easy for them to find   relevant   job   postings   that   matched   their   preferences.

   <u>Analysis:</u>

   Through this study, we could see that it was relatively difficult for the user to find job postings that matched their specific interests and qualifications. The fact that the user had to apply several advanced filters shows that they are using an inefficient workaround to achieve their objective. A workaround refers to a temporary solution or alternative method that users adopt to complete a task when the primary method or system is not functioning as expected or is not available. While filters are a very useful feature of LinkedIn, they can sometimes be cumbersome and time-consuming (especially when they are specific or must be applied repeatedly).

Observation- User 2:

The user refreshed the page and tried again when she encountered a broken link or slow loading time. If the issue persisted, she would wait for a few minutes and then try again later. Additionally, the user reported the technical issues to LinkedIn's customer support team.

Analysis:

By observing this, we noticed that the user faced some technical glitches. Specifically, the user experienced slow loading times and broken links while navigating through the platform. We also noted that the user was patient and persistent in dealing with these technical glitches. They did not let the issues deter her from the job search and continued to use LinkedIn to search for relevant job opportunities.

Observation- User 3:

We noticed that the user was taking several steps to try and find people of a specific domain or industry on LinkedIn. The user started by using the platform's search functionality to enter keywords related to the desired domain or industry, including job titles, skills, or company names. However, the search results were often too broad or didn't yield the desired outcome. The user then tried to narrow down the search results by applying filters such as location, industry, or job function. Despite these efforts, the user struggled to find individuals with the desired expertise. To overcome this challenge, we observed that the user started exploring LinkedIn groups related to the desired domain or industry. By joining relevant groups, the user could connect with like-minded professionals and potentially identify individuals with the desired expertise.

Analysis:

We noted that the user tried a combination of different approaches to find people with specific skills or industry expertise on LinkedIn. However, the lack of targeted search results and the broad scope of the platform's network made it a challenging task.

B. **Surveys**

1. Recruitment criteria and process

   ● We approached the entire graduate student population of UMD because this population is very active on LinkedIn searching for internship/full-time opportunities post-

graduating this Summer. Their feedback would give us a view on well-performing areas or pain points in using LinkedIn.

- We designed 12 unique questions in our survey which could effectively capture user satisfaction, well-performing areas, and pain points of LinkedIn.
- We used WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Discord (MIM Discord channel to reach out to our classmates) and word-of-mouth to get responses to our questions the below Survey form -
  [LinkedIn User Research Experience Survey](#)
- We kept on spreading the form, welcoming more & more responses for a period of 04/01/2023 till 04/20/2023. In the end, we got 20 responses.

2. <u>Usability tasks</u>

For the survey, we created the following set of attitudinal (outline how someone behaves) and behavioral (inquiring into what people want and believe) questions:

1. **Which UMD student category do you belong to?**
   We wanted to keep this as a filter for our data to ensure that we only look at responses from graduate students once we start analyzing the responses from the survey.

2. **Which of the following sites have you used for applying for jobs?**
   Wanted to see what all job platforms are used by the users including LinkedIn to see what other platforms are used by students a lot compared to LinkedIn.

3. **How many hours do you spend on LinkedIn in a day?**
   We wanted to look into how much of their time the users spend on LinkedIn on a daily basis to ensure are the graduate students spending substantial time to actually come up with well-performing/pain point areas.

4. **What activities do you perform on LinkedIn apart from job hunting?**
   We wanted to see what other activities users engage themselves in while using the platform apart from the typical job search to understand what are the other stand-out features of LinkedIn.

5. **On a scale of 1-10, how satisfied are you with LinkedIn as a job-hunting platform?**
   Since the main functionality of LinkedIn is to help people get jobs, we wanted to see how effective the platform is and if most customers are satisfied with LinkedIn or not.

6. **How do you apply for jobs on LinkedIn?**

There are different ways of applying for jobs on LinkedIn like applying through the platform, reaching out to recruiters etc. This would help us know which of the methods is most effective in engaging the users and where they should stress the most while making developments.

7. **Do you use LinkedIn Premium?**
This question is supposed to let us know if most college students prefer using LinkedIn Premium and if that is something LinkedIn should promote strongly keeping student-customers in mind.

8. **If you don't use LinkedIn Premium, why so?**
Since the LinkedIn premium is supposed to be better for job search, we wanted to observe why the users didn't prefer opting for it. This can be seen as points where LinkedIn can make improvements and attract more users.

9. **What features of LinkedIn Premium do you use?**
We wanted to see among all the features included in the LinkedIn premium, which features are used most by the LinkedIn premium users, this would mean LinkedIn can put more stress in marketing those features of LinkedIn Premium.

10. **Any additional features you use LinkedIn Premium for?**
We wanted to see what all other premium features apart from the most common ones are used by the users. Any uncommon but useful feature(s) could also be spread amongst potential users and existing to increase its usage.

11. **On a scale of 1-10, how likely will you recommend LinkedIn to other people?**
We wanted to see the satisfaction level of users with the platforms. This metric is very important for the platform to determine whether overall it is performing well or not.

12. **What features do you think should be improved or added to LinkedIn?**
Among all the features, what issues do users face while using them and what features can hence be added or improved upon so that existing users are happy and more potential users are attracted to LinkedIn.

3. Analysis of data

We used counting and comparing techniques to analyze the responses. Counting is a simple process that can be used to quantify the numeric responses in our data. For e.g., we calculated the mean satisfaction rating, mean recommendation-likelihood rating, their modes etc.

Comparing, on the other hand, involves examining the differences or similarities between two or more variables or groups. This method is useful for identifying patterns and relationships between different factors. For e.g., we compared the satisfaction ratings of users who used LinkedIn premium vs those who did not, and with those who use multiple job search platforms vs those who only used LinkedIn.

III. <u>Findings</u>

The study found that LinkedIn's long-standing reputation as an industry standard for both recruiters and job seekers was a primary reason why users preferred it over other apps. Participants also appreciated the platform's intuitive user interface and easy-apply feature. Interestingly, users who primarily used LinkedIn to apply for jobs rather than as a social media platform preferred using it on their PC rather than their mobile device, which suggests that the job searching, and application feature may not be entirely mobile-friendly.

The notification system on LinkedIn was generally appreciated, but some participants reported that unnecessary notifications were spamming their feed. The effectiveness of LinkedIn Learning was met with mixed reviews, as some users praised its free availability for students, while others criticized its lack of depth. Several users stated that after applying for a job, LinkedIn provided no easy option to track their applications. Participants also suggested that the organization of networking events on LinkedIn could be improved.

We also got some findings from the data that we collected during the survey. Most students spend 1-3 hours on LinkedIn per day mainly for the purpose of networking, building connections, and reading articles. The 'Jobs' section and reaching out to recruiters and hiring managers were the common practices by students during Job hunting. When we measured the overall satisfaction of these students with LinkedIn as a job-hunting platform, the average rating is 6.8 out of 10. However, in terms of likelihood to recommend LinkedIn scores resulted in an average of 8.4 out of 10. This might indicate that while users might not be perfectly satisfied with LinkedIn, they still think it is better than the alternatives and would prefer to use LinkedIn over them. Also, most students don't use LinkedIn Premium because of it being expensive.

IV. <u>Recommendations</u>

1. Ethnographic Interviews

   - Adding an initial match-test feature on LinkedIn based on a candidate's resume and job description can benefit both job seekers and employers. It enables job seekers to focus their

time and effort on applying for jobs they have a higher chance of getting, while employers can efficiently identify candidates that are a good match for the role.

- LinkedIn can collaborate with learning platforms such as Udemy and Coursera and use their certified courses to enhance LinkedIn learning.
- One of the users recommended implementing open challenges and having a leaderboard, like platforms like LeetCode and HackerRank. This could enable recruiters to identify and hire individuals who have demonstrated a strong aptitude for their work. It would also be a way for participants to compare their performance with others in the challenge and assess the requirements of the job market.
- LinkedIn could do a better job at integrating with the talent acquisition platforms of the recruiters (like Workday, ICMS etc.) so that job seekers can better track applications and be notified about their status.

2. <u>Usability Testing</u>

- It could add a feature that allows users to save their filters so that they don't have to search and reapply every time.
- It could use machine learning algorithms to suggest filters based on a user's search history and job preferences, reducing the need for users to manually apply filters.
- In general, it can improve its search algorithm (both for job search and searching for individuals to network) as most of the issues we found centered around users not being able to find the specific thing they were looking for.

3. <u>Surveys</u>

Suggestions for improving LinkedIn's job-hunting features include better filters with mandatory fields for job search, reducing spamming of sponsored ads, and making job descriptions clear.

V. **Conclusion**

Our research shed light on the challenges faced by UMD graduate students when utilizing LinkedIn for job searching. The findings revealed that while LinkedIn is highly regarded among UMD graduate students as a professional networking platform, there were, however, notable areas for improvement.

Participants encountered several difficulties like finding job postings that aligned with their specific interests and qualifications, excessive notifications, inefficient filtering options for jobs, expensiveness of LinkedIn Premium, lack of depth in LinkedIn Learning, spamming of sponsored

ads etc. Despite these challenges, participants appreciated LinkedIn's intuitive user interface and their easy-apply feature.

To address these findings, several recommendations were made to improve the LinkedIn job search experience for UMD graduate students. These included implementing an initial match-test feature, collaborating with learning platforms to enhance LinkedIn Learning, integrating with talent acquisition platforms for better application tracking, reducing the number of sponsored ads overwhelming the user inbox, increasing the efficiency of their filtering system for job-search, and improving the search algorithm to optimize search accuracy and efficiency. By implementing these recommendations, LinkedIn can enhance user engagement and satisfaction, further solidifying its position as a premier platform for professional networking and job searching.

VI. <u>References</u>

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