

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE SELF-DISCLOSURE FOR JOB SEEKERS

USING SOCIAL NETWORKING: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

by

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A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Capella University

December 2013

UMI Number: 3614940

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Abstract

This study investigated factors that influence the extent and type of information job seekers reveal about themselves when using social networking to search for employment opportunities and advance their careers. It examined how user concerns regarding privacy influence the level of content they provide and their interactions with fellow community members. Using social exchange theory as its theoretical framework, this study employed exploratory qualitative inquiry to examine the how and why of people's experiences, as they interacted with professionally orientated websites and communities in their search for employment. Following the tenants of this methodology, the researcher utilized purposeful sampling to enlist a relatively small number of participants. To collect data, the researcher conducted personal interviews with 14 participants who had at least six months of experience using social media in their job search and shared information with at least one online community. The participants were either unemployed (seeking employment) or currently employed (seeking to further their career). Findings from this research showed that those using online social networking for career advancement understand that protecting their privacy is problematic. Even so, they realize that information must be shared to attract potential employers. As such, they mitigate privacy risk by (a) connecting with those whom they have a relationship, or have been referred to by their associates, and (b) establishing boundaries regarding the information they disclose. Additionally, the research suggested that the level of one's self-disclosure is based upon their trust in those with whom they share information to keep their confidence and use the material appropriately, and in the applicable website's management to protect their privacy, both from technological and policy perspectives. The results of this study

have implications for future research in the following areas: the influence of current events upon privacy concerns and practices, introduction of a quantitative methodology to measure the influence of each factor, and modification of the methodological approach from case study to grounded theory. This research contributes to the body of literature, as it examined concepts regarding social exchange theory, privacy, and self-disclosure in the context of online professional networking.

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my wife, Tyvise. No one knows better the challenges and sacrifices this journey demanded than my best friend and love of my life. In times of despair, her unwavering support and encouragement provided the impetus that kept me moving forward along my doctoral adventure.

Acknowledgments

I would like to bestow my sincere appreciation and gratitude to those who have helped me along this journey.

I wish to give special thanks to my mentor and committee chair, Dr. Richard Livingood. Thank you for your advice, constructive criticism, guidance, assistance, and inspiration and especially for the honor of agreeing to be my mentor.

I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. John Grillo and Dr. Virginia Hinrichs for providing their support and expertise.

I would also like to thank all those who participated in my research. Without your willingness to give your time and share your experiences, stories, feelings, and insights, this dissertation would not have been possible.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Problem

The Internet has significantly altered the manner in which business is conducted in today's global marketplace. In addition to affecting corporate strategy, marketing, logistics, and operations, the Internet's rising tide of evolutionary technology is also impacting the manner in which individuals interact with organizations as they seek employment. In their efforts to effectively compete for employment opportunities within the global marketplace, these job seekers are turning to the Internet, as conventional methods of career development are being replaced with ubiquitous, digital communications between employers and candidates (Schawbel, 2010). This modernistic relationship between employee and employer is heralded by Libby Sartain, Chief People Office at Yahoo:

I think social media will ultimately change how HR recruits, and it is changing the entire talent marketplace. You are there to be found by your entire network, conceivably for the rest of your lives. That is a profound change. I believe the effect will be less applying for jobs, more of employers finding you. (as cited in Schawbel, 2010, p. 61)

As a thoroughfare for information, the Internet provides an effective medium for connecting job seekers with opportunities. The appearance of large-scale, employment-oriented job-boards has made searching local, national, and even international job markets relatively easy. Monster.com, Careerbuilder.com, and HotJobs.com represent only a few of the mega-job boards currently available. Their success has spawned a multitude of copiers, as more than 50,000 employment related boards, including small,

nice, local, and diversity boards now compete for attention from both job seekers and corporations (Adam, 2009).

By lowering the barrier of entry to the job market, these career-focused websites have also created a new classification of candidate, the “passive” job seeker, or one, who while currently employed, is still open to new opportunities. These job boards enable passive seekers to easily and casually gauge the current state of the marketplace in terms of employer desired skills, salaries, and openings (Joos, 2008). However, one trait shared by these traditionally structured sites is their affiliation with Web 1.0 technology (Adam, 2009). The introduction of Web 2.0 changed the playing field, as it heralded the age of social media.

According to Joos (2008), social media includes such areas as podcasting, blogging, and text messaging, all of which enable the sharing of information in real time across the globe. Aside from its technical aspects, the importance of social media lies in its facilitation of social networking through the establishment of virtual communities within cyberspace. Popular socially orientated websites, such as Facebook and Yahoo! Groups, attract millions of subscribers who form likeminded groups, exchange profiles, and collect friends.

These virtual gathering places have not gone unnoticed by corporations, who view them as a source of both potential customers and perhaps even employees. By incorporating social networking into their recruiting strategy, employers have yet another venue from which to locate talent. The increasing presence of corporations or their representatives within social and professional networking sites has not gone overlooked by those seeking job opportunities. Professionals are increasingly utilizing social media

as the bridge across corporate human resource departments and traditional job boards, such as Monster.com and Careerbuilder.com, to advertise their personal brand and interact directly with hiring authorities. With the advent of Web 2.0, job seekers are employing sites such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Google+, and Twitter as tools for establishing credentials, enlarging their professional networks, and investigating employment opportunities (Schawbel, 2010).

While utilizing social media as a foundation for personal branding and career advancement may have its benefits, its use for facilitating these online interactions requires job seekers to voluntarily reveal personal information, usually in the form of profiles and updates before the advantages of site membership may be fully realized. Therefore, those seeking career opportunities via social networking must determine the extent of self-disclosure (SD) to which they feel comfortable. While SD behavior is usually considered advantageous with respect to the development of interpersonal communication and relationships, it also presents challenges regarding the protection of one's privacy. Thus, the costs and benefits of disclosing personal information must be carefully considered.

Social exchange theory was a framework used as Lowry, Cao, and Everard (2011) to investigate the cognitive processes that individuals undergo before revealing information. One of the themes discussed within the literature of SD involves the trade-off between the desire for connection and necessity for protection during interpersonal communications and relationship building. While individuals wish to experience a sense of intimacy and comfort that arise from the sharing of personal information, they do not want to later regret their decision to share such information. Within the context of social

exchange theory, one expects a reduction in the level of SD when predicted costs are greater than predicted benefits and an increase when benefits are perceived to be greater than costs.

Lowry et al. (2011) postulated “that positive attitudes toward self-disclosure technology use will be formed primarily by the degree to which a person desires protection and connection during self-disclosure” (p. 168). The authors defined protection in terms of one’s concern for information privacy. However, many users of both social and professional networking sites may be unaware of the potential risks and/or consequences associated with their disclosure of personal information. Due to their lack of situational awareness regarding the potential value of high quality, personally identifiable information, job seekers who divulge too much information may find themselves susceptible to social phishing, identity theft, cyber aggression, and a general erosion of personal privacy as they attempt to advance their careers (Gross, Acquisti, & Heinz, 2005).

Given the possibility that one’s personal information may be compromised, subscribers to social networking sites should consider two fundamental questions before deciding upon the level of information to disclose: to whom is the information made available and how could such information be used? Initially, one’s information is available to the hosting site that may use and extend it in manners that may be known or unknown to the subscriber. Additionally, the information is available to the network infrastructure itself in terms of data durability and membership extension, properties that subscribers may not fully appreciate with respect to their privacy. Finally, their information may be available to third parties (hackers, government agencies, etc.) without

the subscribers' knowledge or consent. The manner in which the information may be used is dependent upon what is provided. Normally, the risks may include identity theft, discrimination, job loss, and blackmailing (Gross et al., 2005).

Background of the Study

Given the omnipresent nature of information gathering technology and the significant growth of social networking as a tool for mass communication, an understanding regarding the nature of privacy becomes essential. As described by Westin (1967), privacy is “the claim of individuals, groups, or institutions to determine for themselves when, how, and to what extent information about them is communicated to others” (p. 7) and is achieved by “the voluntary and temporary withdrawal of a person from general society through physical or psychological means, either in a state of solitude or small group intimacy or, when among large groups, in a condition of anonymity or reserve” (p. 7). Altman (1975) defined privacy as “the selective control of access to the self” (p. 24) and postulated that regulating one's social interaction controls privacy. These examples serve as only two of the many attempts to define privacy, an exercise that has to yet create a synthesis as to what privacy actually entails (Houghton & Joinson, 2010). As such, some scholars have focused on the various dimensions of privacy. For example, Burgoon, Parrott, le Poire, and Kelley (1989) considered privacy to encapsulate four dimensions and described it as “the ability to control and limit *physical*, *interactional*, *psychological* and *informational* access to the self or one's group” (p. 132). As communications technology continues to evolve and assume even greater roles in our lives, the examination of privacy related issues becomes even more important. As Schatz Byford (1996) stated, “At no time have privacy issues taken on greater

significance than in recent years, as technological developments have led to the emergence of an ‘information society’ capable of gathering, storing and disseminating increasing amounts of data about individuals’’ (p. 1).

Even though core ideas regarding privacy may not be new, privacy concerns have grown and evolved as a result of technological advancements. Today’s information communication technologies (ICTs) have the capability to effectively collect, aggregate, store, and redistribute data on an individual basis. ICTs have changed the very nature of data, from being sparse to massive, from transient to permanent, and from detached to associated with specific entities. As such, the ubiquitous nature of data collection poses significant threats to one’s privacy and autonomy over the long term. With access to the requisite data repositories, individuals about whom one may not even be aware may gather enough personal information to use it for any objective (proper or improper) without the original owner’s knowledge (Spärck Jones, 2003).

Generally, online privacy issues have been associated with activities involving e-commerce, specifically credit card fraud and the unauthorized use of customer information (Miyazaki & Fernandez, 2000). However, as individuals are increasingly posting personal information online, these concerns are no longer confined to issues regarding commerce. With respect to the utilization of social networking sites, Houghton and Joinson (2010) suggested that privacy might be viewed as a matter of control. The authors argued that the central issue to maintaining privacy rests in one’s ability to retain control over personal information regarding decisions as to what data should be revealed and to whom it should be shared. Houghton and Joinson recommended that one possible

solution for achieving control involves the establishment of “personal, dyadic, and group boundaries” (p. 77).

Given its virtual nature, online social networking adds new layers of complexity regarding privacy and control, as it raises the issue of how one manages people whom they have never physically meet. Handy (1995) suggested that technology in itself is not sufficient for managing relationships and as such, the concept of control should be replaced with that of trust. The author emphatically stated that virtual relationships require trust to be successfully managed. Handy shared several principles regarding trust that those seeking to establish relationships in cyberspace should be aware: trusting those with whom one has not observed their conduct over a period of time is unwise; as bestowing an unlimited level of trust with someone is unrealistic, establishing boundaries is mandatory; learning and flexibility are required to respond to changing situations; after discovering that one’s trust has been misplaced, dissolving the relationship is compulsory; and, sharing goals allows for the requisite bonding between individuals.

Within a social environment, the quantity and sensitivity of personal information one releases is dependent upon the type of relationship one seeks; information is the tie that binds. To achieve a high degree of intimacy, detailed facets of oneself are revealed, while less is given as the level of desired intimacy decreases. Additionally, the degree of the shared information’s sensitivity is also dependent upon the anticipated level of privacy. For example, if personal information that was shared with another were dissimulated to third parties not in the source’s immediate social circle, they may easily view such transgression as an invasion of privacy (Strahilivetz, 2004). As a result, they could be less likely to reveal intimate details of their life in the future, thereby negatively

affecting their ability to develop deep relationships. Both control and trust appear to play a role in maintaining one's privacy during encounters within social networking communities.

During the early stages of social networking, sites provided relatively few options for controlling access to one's personal information. Usually, the choice was limited to whether or not to "friend" someone, a term which implies a number of possible relationships. Advances in personal security control now permit users to define permissions at a slightly more granular level, such as using circles in Google+. Unfortunately, given the lack of verbal, nonverbal, and physical communication pathways available in cyberspace, the decision as to which group one should be assigned may prove problematic when relationships are established solely online. Also, the options for controlling privacy are still rather limited and features for controlling it are inconsistent and site specific. Furthermore, users may not be aware of the necessity to customize their privacy settings, a lack of knowledge that could lead to the unknowing dissemination of personal information (Houghton & Joinson, 2010).

This ignorance regarding the existence or use of privacy controls is collaborated by Bonneau and Preibusch (2009) who investigated 45 social networking sites and discovered that in general privacy policies, controls, and instructions were complicated and did not meet expected standards. The authors also discovered another complication in that even when privacy management tools were available, the sites rarely advertised their existence. Bonneau and Preibusch conjectured these sites do not publicize their privacy enhancing features because the alteration of user profiles based upon their existence

could lead to a reduction in information sharing between community members, thus lessening site content and thereby reducing its attractiveness.

Concerns regarding privacy with respect to the use of social networking sites are common and will continue to grow. Research indicates that many users are unaware of the potential harm resulting from such practices as a site's ubiquitous data collection/storage or the users' assignment of online acquaintances to the umbrella "friends" category (Houghton & Joinson, 2010). Ignoring these issues while establishing residence within any of the numerous social networking sites within cyberspace may lead to dire consequences (Acquisti & Gross, 2009). While one may consider that issues regarding online privacy would have a significant impact on the use of social networking sites, research is thus far inconclusive as to whether the concerns and practices of users align with the ever-present threats (Houghton & Joinson, 2010).

Statement of the Problem

Social networking sites may be defined as,

Web-based services that allow individuals to [a] construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, [b] articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and [c] view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, "Social Network Sites: A Definition," para. 1)

These sites have become increasingly popular as they provide users with the ability to customize their personal profile and privacy settings, establish peer-based connections, and share personal information within a secure environment, or what is thought to be a secure site. Additionally, sites orientated towards career development and job placement provide an advantage to their users by facilitating access to resources

unavailable to nonusers, thus providing a competitive advantage within the global job marketplace (Benson, Filippaios, & Morgan, 2010).

As the popularity of social networking continues to rise, researchers are turning their attention to concerns regarding individual privacy. While informal chat sessions and postings of personal information are becoming the norm of one's daily Internet experience, these practices increase the possibility of personal content becoming available to those outside the user's social circle (Benson et al., 2010). An unintentional disclosure of personal information to outsiders could result in serious repercussions, to include the release of embarrassing personal material to employers, blackmail, heightened exposure to social scams, phishing attacks, and identity theft (Bonneau & Preibusch, 2009). Even if the disclosure were intentional, the ensuing consequences from revealing such material may result in ex parte, inappropriate discussions among "friends" regarding one's personal information, access to photographs identifying other users, revelation of one's demographic data, and exposure of information about friends posted on the user's own pages (Houghton & Joinson, 2010).

Given the almost unlimited ability to disclose personal information, the question becomes how much and to whom should it be revealed. Previous research conducted by authors such as Dwyer, Hiltz, and Passerini (2007), Houghton and Joinson (2010), and, Lowry et al. (2011) regarding the sharing of personal information for the purpose of developing online relationships usually involved a social context in which community members search for new friends. Dwyer et al. (2007) investigated how issues regarding privacy and trust influenced the degree to which users of Facebook and MySpace are willing to share information. Using a sample of Facebook users, Houghton and Joinson

(2010) examined privacy issues and personal information management. Using social exchange theory as the foundation for their study, Lowry et al. (2007) explored the influences of culture upon one's attitude towards privacy and their intention to utilize SD technologies, such as the instant messaging capability offered by Facebook. With respect to using social networking for professional development, authors such as Benson et al. (2010) investigated how it may be utilized as a tool for career development. These authors explored those factors influencing the manner in which recent undergraduates, postgraduates, and international students incorporate social networking, such as LinkedIn and Twitter, into their career planning.

However, a gap in the literature exists regarding the examination of privacy issues with respect to the use of social networking in the professional context of career advancement. Given the potential risks of revealing personal information on the Internet, job seekers must resolve the problem of determining how much and what type of information are sufficient to gain the interest of organizations, while maintaining an appropriate degree of privacy. This problem could negatively impact job seekers as providing too little information may result in organizations passing over the candidate, while providing too much may attract those with malicious intent. An investigation regarding the decision-making process utilized by job seekers for divulging personal information could be used to develop an optimal strategy for self-disclosure. This study used an exploratory qualitative inquiry design to examine those factors that influence the degree and type of personal information revealed by job seekers as they search for employment opportunities. As such, this research transferred the investigation of privacy and trust issues from a social context to one of professional development.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this exploratory qualitative inquiry was to explore those factors that influence the degree and type of personal information revealed in social networking sites by people who have shared their information while job searching. This study built on previous research regarding hedonic information technologies and addressed issues regarding personal privacy in the context of social exchange theory (Dwyer et al., 2007; Gross et al., 2005; Lowry et al., 2011).

This research investigated issues involving privacy and trust and how user concerns regarding these issues may influence the level of content they provide and their interactions with fellow community members. As such, this study examined the thought process by which users determine how much personal information they reveal in their online profiles, text messages, and other interactive exchanges.

The findings from this research may provide insight into the decision making process regarding the amount of personal information one reveals while using Internet sites for professional networking. Owners of sites focusing on career development may use these findings as a factor when designing their privacy controls. Additionally, these results may provide information as to how comfortable users are in revealing personal information in a public forum. As such, site owners may use this research as an instrument for adjusting their site's design to promote increased levels of user safety and willingness to share personal information. If users feel safe, they may tend to contribute more. The willingness of a site's users to share information is a fundamental factor leading to its growth, as it promotes increased content, keeping the interest of current members and attracting new ones.

Rationale

This research explored a gap in the literature with respect to those factors influencing the disclosure of personal information in online communities, as individuals seek to advance their career. As this realm of investigation is relatively new, a methodology should be utilized which allows for the emergence of significant issues and either the development of new or the modification of existing theory. Regarding the selection of a suitable approach, Jones (2009) advised that,

Selecting the appropriate methodology for a research problem is therefore much like selecting the right tool out of your toolbox; you might be able to get the job done with a screwdriver, but it will not be as effective or efficient if you really needed a hammer all along. (p. 24)

The nature of the research problem, an investigation regarding the how and why privacy decisions are made, suggested that a qualitative methodology would be most suitable.

From the various qualitative methodologies available, exploratory qualitative inquiry was selected as the optimum choice, as it provides an inductive process for gathering data and developing concepts when the lack of theory hinders the explanation of a phenomenon. Using this methodology, the researcher develops an understanding regarding the how and why of peoples' experiences while gathering data firsthand. By collecting data via personal interaction with the participants, the researcher acquires information that provides great depth, openness, and detail. This richness of information provides the researcher with an opportunity to gain an in-depth understanding regarding the nature of the phenomenon being studied (Merriam, 2002).

Research Questions

The research question investigated the theoretical construct of personal privacy and was framed to incorporate the properties of recognizability and robustness. To achieve recognizability, the construct focused on decisions regarding personal privacy made by those seeking career advancement through online social networking. To ensure robustness, the research question was stated in a manner that allowed for complex results (Foss & Waters, 2007). Therefore, research question one (ResQ1) stated “What factors influence the level of detail and type of personal information job seekers divulge when seeking employment opportunities via online social networking?”

Significance of the Study

The audience for this research was the community interested in social network theory, specifically issues regarding trust and intimacy in online communities. This study contributed to an increased understanding of the theoretical construct of personal privacy by examining the decision making process job seekers undergo as they determine the level of information they reveal in the hope of enhancing employment opportunities against potential risks, such as having their information misused. By examining those factors that influence the degree of personal information one divulges while pursuing activities related to career advancement, this dissertation may contribute to the understanding of patterns regarding the revelation of personal information and its privacy implications when social media is utilized for self-promotion.

Definition of Terms

Information privacy. “The claim of individuals, groups, or institutions to determine for themselves when, how, and to what extent information about them is communicated to others” (Westin, 1967, p. 7).

Online interpersonal awareness. “The awareness of the presence, connections, and activities of others in a shared interaction experience via a mediated online technology” (Lowry et al., 2011, p. 169).

Personal information. Unless specifically mentioned in context with professional information, refers to both an individual’s personal and professional information.

Privacy. An individual’s “ability to maintain personal space by limiting others’ physical access to them or information about them” (Lowry et al., 2011, p. 168).

Self-disclosure. “Occurs during interpersonal communication and refers to the personal information individuals intentionally and voluntarily reveal about themselves to others in an interpersonal relationship” (Lowry et al., 2011, p. 166).

Social exchange theory. A framework for investigating the cognitive processes involving the trade-off between the desire for connection and necessity for protection during interpersonal communications and relationship building (Lowry et al., 2011).

Trust. “The willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party” (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995, p. 712).

Assumptions and Limitations

This research had two assumptions. First, the participants utilize specific social networking sites primarily as tools for furthering their career, not for establishing social relationships. Second, participants are aware of the sites' privacy protection capabilities in which they are members.

This research approach also had several intimations. First, the relatively small size of the sample may not accurately reflect the state of social networking with respect to the desire of community members to protect their privacy and personal information. Also, given the sample size, findings from this research may not be transferable to a larger population. Furthermore, as the sample primarily represents a western perspective, the inclusion of other cultures could have generated different results. Second, relevant follow-on questions may not have been asked during the interview. The lack of appropriate follow-up may have resulted in the inability to discover additional themes. Third, given the dynamic nature of online social networking and the Internet in general, the durability of the data was suspect. Given the continual evolution of Internet related technology, emergence of new social media applications, and usage trends, the perspectives and habits of social media users may change at any time. Finally, the use of purposive sampling may have decreased the generalizability of this study's findings.

Nature of the Study

This research utilized a qualitative methodological approach with an exploratory qualitative inquiry design. This design allowed the researcher to focus on the characteristics of the phenomena being investigated by examining the respondent's experiences, feelings, and motivations (Ashill, Meadows, & Stewart, 2001). With its

foundation based upon in-depth, qualitative interviews, this study should provide insight into those factors considered by respondents as they determine the level of information to divulge in their search for employment.

Given the relatively sparse research and the lack of an established theoretical framework regarding this problem, exploratory qualitative inquiry was an appropriate methodological choice, as it involved the systematic collection, organization, and interpretation of documented material resulting from personal conversation. This research methodology utilized exploration as its primary method for investigating the meaning behind a specific social phenomenon, as the participants themselves experienced it. As the objective of this study was to investigate those factors involving the self-disclosure of personal information as job seekers interact with online communities, exploratory inquiry allowed for a rich examination of an individual's personal experience, as they interacted with these virtual, social environments (Malterud, 2001). Conducting this research through the use of in-depth interviews, a traditional qualitative approach for gathering data, should not only provide a thorough understanding regarding those factors that influence the degree of personal information one divulges while pursuing activities related to career advancement, but also lay a foundation for future examination and theory development regarding issues of personal privacy within online communities.

As proposed by Neuman (2003), validity with respect to qualitative research is characterized by truthfulness that comes from one's firsthand experience. Adhering to Neuman's principle, this study utilized open-ended, semi-structured interviews as the foundation of its data gathering process. Utilizing this approach, the researcher prepares a list of questions relevant to the issue under investigation, thus providing a clear agenda

for the interviews. It also provides flexibility with respect to the questions' structure, phrasing, and order. Additionally, this process allows the researcher to freely probe responses, as required, to gain additional insight (Draper & Swift, 2011). According to Jones (2009), this approach is especially appropriate, as it focuses on the "how's" and "what's" in the subjects' lives, the two areas that are of primary interest to the researcher.

This research utilized purposeful sampling, a process that requires the deliberate selection of participants whose experiences directly relate to the problem being investigated (Draper & Swift, 2011). Participants were chosen who utilized social networking as a tool for their career advancement. The sample contained men and women of legal age who were either unemployed (seeking employment) or currently employed (seeking to further their career) and who shared their information while job searching. Specifically, participants had an account with one or more of the following Internet sites: LinkedIn, Facebook, Google+, and/or Twitter. Their accounts were primarily used for career development/management and not for initiating social relationships. Additionally, they had actively utilized social media in their employment search for at least six months. Perspective participants were selected from social and professional networking sites on the Internet. Data were gathered by conducting in-depth interviews. Transcripts were prepared from digitally recorded responses and notes were kept to record observations, feelings, and ideas generated during these interviews. The data were analyzed by utilizing open coding techniques that looked for words and sentences within the transcripts and notes that had meaning and provided explanatory concepts. During the analysis phase, relationships and constructs were identified which offered explanations as to the problem under study (Draper & Swift, 2011).

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the proposed research topic. Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature examining advances in Internet technologies that led to Web 2.0, the evolution of online networking, issues of personal privacy and trust within the context of online communities, and social exchange theory. Chapter 3 examines the study's methodological approach and research design, sources of information, the data collection plan, techniques for data analysis, limitations of the methodology and associated risk mitigation plan, and the precautions taken to protect participants. Chapter 4 provides the data results and analysis. This material is presented at a level of detail that allows the reader to completely understand the results and subsequent analysis. Chapter 5 includes an evaluation of the research, a discussion of the results, conclusions, and recommendations for additional research.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The research question presented for this study intersects four primary areas of academic scholarship: social exchange theory, information privacy, online interpersonal awareness, and reciprocity and boundary management. The considerable amount of scholarly material available for each construct prohibits a complete review of the literature. As such, this review provides a synopsis of the literature for each area that is most relevant to this study. This literature review begins by examining those technological advancements that lead to the emergence of online communities and continues with discussions of the aforementioned areas within the context of self-disclosure.

The Emergence of Online Communities Through Technical Evolution

Developed in 1972 by ARPAnet, e-mail represents the most commonly used communication tool on the Internet. However in its early stage, e-mail systems only offered point-to-point communications, one person sending a note to another. So, while the capability for instantaneous, networked communication between individual users was possible, e-mail lacked the ability to simultaneously disseminate information to multiple parties. This constraint was alleviated in 1975 by the introduction of list servers, a technology that allowed a one to many distribution of information via subscription requests for items such as messages, newsletters, and various other postings. List servers allowed two options for message delivery: trickle through and digest. Trickle through

allowed for the distribution of messages as they were received. Digests provided a list of messages, usually presented in chronological order (Preece, Maloney-Krichmar, & Abras, 2003). List servers allowed the one-way distribution of information to multiple recipients, allowing users to keep abreast with their topics of interest.

During the 1980s, bulletin boards appeared, allowing users to post messages to a cyber-representation of a physical bulletin board. While messages could be posted in various formats, the most common was “threaded”, in which those with the same topic were grouped together. Using this format, the first message marked the beginning of a specific thread and related responses were placed under it, thereby forming a parent-child relationship. Similar to a bulletin board, Usenet News also provided public venues for discourse using the same hierarchical message structure (Preece et al., 2003). With these technologies in place, information provided by users could now be grouped and archived, leaving a historical record of cyber conversations regarding specific areas of interest.

Together, e-mail, list servers, bulletin boards, and Usenet News provided users with a suite of asynchronous communication technologies that eliminated the necessity for senders and recipients of message traffic to be present at the same time. Messages could be stored for later retrieval hours, weeks, or even months after their transmission (Preece et al., 2003).

In 1991, the CERN (European Organization for Nuclear Research) released the World-Wide Web (WWW), a global communications infrastructure developed by Tim Berners-Lee. The advent of the WWW and its associated communications software facilitated the development of websites and online communities (Preece et al., 2003).

Eventually, technical advancements resulted in the development of a wide array of technologies (e.g. blogs, wikis, podcasts, tags, and social networks), collectively referred to as Web 2.0. Within this suite of applications, online social networking (OSN) emerged as one of the principal activities using Web 2.0 technologies. Online social networking provides an environment that allows people to publish personal information and meet others with whom they share similar interests and is envisioned to play a critical role in the facilitation of commercial and personal online interactions (Kasavana, Nusair, & Teodosic, 2010).

As a means to distribute information, OSN sites (OSNs) are becoming increasingly popular. They were defined by scholars such as Boyd and Ellison (2007) as web-based applications that provide users with the ability to

[a] construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, [b] articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and [c] view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. (p. 211)

Balas (2006) viewed them as environments for building global, online communities.

Preece and Maloney-Krichmar (2005) defined OSNs as platforms where individuals gather together to share a specific purpose.

According to Hogben (2007), the defining properties of OSNs are manifested within their suite of tools, applications that are used for posting personal information into a user's profile, creating customized social interaction, and defining online social relations. These tools are especially useful for those who have problems developing and maintaining relationships. For instance, prior research has shown the Internet may help those with low self-esteem issues resulting from having few acquaintances by providing

access to new, virtual communities of potential friends (Bargh & McKenna, 2004). Additionally, computer-facilitated communication may lower barriers to personal interaction and actually support deeper levels of SD. As such, these tools may make connections possible that would not have otherwise transpired (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007).

In summary, OSNs provide a virtual space in which users who share similar interests and goals may gather to form like-minded communities (Kasavana et al., 2010). These communities provide a medium within the Internet where users may gather to access information, discuss issues, chat, and confide in each other. Specifically, these virtual communities serve as an arena in which people share information. Ridings, Gefen, and Arinze (2002) defined them as “groups of people with common interests and practices that communicate regularly and for some duration in an organized way over the Internet through a common location or mechanism” (p. 273). The authors also noted that over time, these people foster a sense of membership (either formally or informally) as they develop relationships with others in the community, as well as standards regarding accepted interpersonal behavior (Ridings et al., 2002).

Through technological advancement, social networking has transformed itself from localized, person-to-person conversations to global broadcasts incorporating the latest digital media capabilities in text, voice, and video. The Internet has progressed from one-directional to concurrent, omnidirectional communication able to sustain virtual communities, special interest groups, blogs, and wikis. From this combination of an advanced technical infrastructure and sophisticated social media applications, collaborative social environments have been created to facilitate social interaction and

relationship building that would not have been possible only several decades ago (Kasavana et al., 2010).

Social Exchange Theory

This research employed social exchange theory as its theoretical framework. Social exchange theory postulates that people will make a conscious effort to respond in kind to those who help them. This standard of reciprocity establishes a universal “moral code” that enforces an obligation to reimburse, or at least be appreciative for, assistance received from others. As such, social exchanges are predicated on the belief that in the long run, the other participants in the exchange will satisfy their responsibilities with respect to reciprocity. Eventually, as exchanges between members occur, a “general social indebtedness” (Chen, Chen, & Farn, 2010, p. 196) is fashioned, creating the foundation for a community whose social balance may be maintained over time and throughout the membership. Given that Internet culture nurtures collaboration, teamwork, and communication, reciprocity may be viewed as the standard that characterizes online interaction.

The use of social exchange theory is appropriate for this study as it describes the thought process of weighing benefits and risks that individuals undertake before disclosing information during interpersonal communication (Lowry et al., 2011). With respect to this investigation, it provides the context for examining the cognitive process job seekers undergo as they determine the level of personal information to reveal and for studying those factors that influence the trade-off between the desire for connection to advance one’s career against the necessity of protecting personally identifiable information during interpersonal communications and relationship building.

While social exchange theory has been used in information science research for examining business-oriented relationships, authors such Krasnova, Spiekermann, Koroleva, and Hildebrand (2010) and Lowry et al. (2011) have used it as a foundation for investigating more intimate, interpersonal behavior. Social exchange theory postulates that interpersonal relationships are formulated upon a subjective risk analysis regarding the benefits and costs of forming connections with others. Culnan and Armstrong (1999) expanded upon this concept as they addressed how people incorporate their own “privacy calculus” (p. 106), a method of determining whether the returns gained from disclosing personal information outweigh the risk of compromising their privacy, to subjectively evaluate their risk of revealing information.

Using a model based upon social exchange theory, Lowry et al. (2011) investigated the relationship between one’s desire for online, interpersonal awareness and their use of SD technologies. The authors’ research aligns with this study, as it examined individual beliefs regarding the disclosure of personal information via online SD technologies, such as blogs, instant messaging, podcasts, and social networking sites. Notably, one core assumption with respect to their model is that using SD technologies is an act of communication involving the disclosure of personal information; as such, an individual’s general attitude towards using SD technologies is related to one’s belief system regarding their use for disseminating personal information. Integrating social exchange theory into their assumption, the authors continued by emphasizing that one’s attitude is not merely a summation of behavioral beliefs regarding SD, but also includes an assessment regarding the consequences of such disclosure and an evaluation of its desirability. Therefore, inherent within one’s belief system regarding SD resides the

awareness that performing an act, such as publishing personal information within an online social networking site when seeking employment opportunities, results in a set of subjective probabilities regarding potential consequences resulting from said action.

Taking an economics-based viewpoint regarding SD, Lowry et al. (2011) observed that the costs of SD included the risks associated with revealing too much personal information and losing control of one's privacy, while the benefits involved reciprocal communication, awareness, and intimacy. Specifically, one of the themes discussed within the literature of SD involves the trade-off between the desire for connection and necessity for protection during interpersonal communications and relationship building. While individuals wish to experience a sense of intimacy and comfort that arises from the sharing of personal information, they do not want to later regret their decision to share such information. Social exchange theory suggests that the level of SD within an interpersonal relationship decreases as forecasted costs are greater than perceived benefits and increases when benefits outweigh the costs.

This trade-off between the desire for connection and the necessity for cyber self-preservation results in a buildup of internal tensions as people seek to satisfy their need to connect and build relationships. According to Lowry et al. (2011), "people want to feel a sense of connection, awareness, and intimacy, which helps them feel comfort and rewards disclosing personal information to others; however, people do not want to feel regret about their disclosures" (p. 168). The authors concluded that people desire to maintain their online privacy by disclosing personally identifiable information only to particular groups or individuals.

Costs and Benefits Associated with Self-Disclosure

Social exchange theory, SD, and privacy calculus share a common element: the notion that individuals conduct a subjective cost/benefit analysis as they develop interpersonal relationships. While developing their model regarding SD within OSNs, Krasnova et al. (2010) discovered that not only did users of OSNs perceive the costs and benefits associated with their SD activities (results that aligned with expectations associated with social exchange theory, online SD, and privacy calculus), but also that they recognized strategies for mitigating those costs.

With respect to the benefits of SD, Krasnova et al. (2010) discovered the most important factor was the *Convenience of Relationship Maintenance*. OSNs provide their users with the means to effectively communicate with each other, as well as intrinsic opportunities for social interchange, an essential capability for the maintenance of online, social relationships. Additionally, maintaining one's relationships may be accomplished with relatively little time or effort. In contrast to e-mail or instant messaging, OSNs provide members with a convenient and informal method for broadcasting updates to their entire group of friends without having to leave the community, a savings in time that may actually motivate users to reveal personal information (Kai-Lung, Tan, & Chyan-Yee, 2006). Research by Il-Horn, Kai-Lung, Sang-Yong Tom, and Png (2007) supported this hypothesis by demonstrating that people will trade some of their privacy in exchange for additional convenience in the form of either increased message personalization or decreased frictional costs. Therefore, increases in the OSNs' efficiency regarding relationship maintenance may motivate their members to select them as their primary

communications medium for sharing information, irrespective of prevailing risks to privacy.

Following *Convenience of Relationship Maintenance*, the next most important benefit uncovered for OSNs users was *Enjoyment* (Krasnova et al., 2010). As Kai-Lung et al. (2006) revealed, OSNs might be able to induce their users to increase their level of participation and reveal personal information by manipulating their desire for pleasure through online activities. For example, over 70% of Facebook users utilize platform applications such as “iLike” or “Compare Tastes” that encourage them to reveal personal preferences concerning such areas as movies, music, and books (Krasnova et al., 2010). As people increasingly trade bits of their privacy for entertainment or pleasure, their level of SD may increase incrementally across the spectrum of OSNs they frequent, perhaps leading to desensitization regarding the frequency and amount of personal information they are revealing to the global community.

While many believe that OSNs are primarily used to manage current networks of people who are acquainted in the physical world, Krasnova et al. (2010) revealed that people also use OSNs to build and support new relationships. The ability to *Build New Relationships* provides users of OSNs with the ability to connect with a broader group of people as they forgo physical constraints and expand into cyber communities. As users grow their circle of connections, they acquire new and useful information and perspectives that in turn enhance their social capital and standing within both physical and cyber communities (Ellison et al., 2007). Additionally, Gibbs, Ellison, and Heino (2006) suggested that in accordance with interpersonal theories, a positive correlation exists between one’s desire to establish new friendships and their willingness to disclose

personal information. Therefore, job seekers who desire to develop new relationships, and hopefully increase their possibility for finding employment, may be more willing to divulge personal information as a means of attracting new contacts.

The final benefit presented by Krasnova et al. (2010) resulting from the use of OSNs is *Self-presentation*. Kimmerle and Cress (2008) proposed that one's desire for self-presentation played a key role in their readiness to share information with others. In the context of online SD, self-presentation refers to those strategic activities one carries out in order to give a specific, calculated impression of themselves to others. According to Walther (1996), the asynchronous methods of communication present within OSNs provide users with the requisite time and opportunity to sculpture the impression they wish to portray. The emphasis on verbal communication (and lack of nonverbal communication) combined with the time to prepare one's presentation affords people the opportunity to present themselves in the most favorable light, a degree of personal control they may not have in real-world, physical meetings. Compelled by their need for self-presentation, users of OSNs utilize their sites' technical functionality to share (perhaps even embellish) their accomplishments via their online profile. OSN-centered research revealed that self-presentation positively affects participation levels within online communities (Krasnova et al., 2010).

On the cost side of the equation, Krasnova et al. (2010) discovered the most significant factor dissuading people from revealing personal information was *Perceived Privacy Risk*. The authors suggested this factor impedes SD, as users of OSNs seek to avoid those risks particularly associated with sharing personal information upon a public stage. These risks include the secret sharing of information between known and unknown

parties, collection and sharing of information by third parties, identity theft, and phishing (Hogben, 2007). Research concerning controversies surrounding OSNs regarding users' privacy by authors such as Rizk, Marx, Schrepfer, Zimmermann, and Guenther (2009) substantiated Hogben's findings and included other risks, such as the use of personal information by third parties for commercial advertising, the sharing of information through such tools as Facebook's Beacon application, and the willingness of users to propagate others' personal information. Krasnova et al. contended that as consumers' awareness of those privacy risks associated with the use of OSNs increases, their willingness to share information decreases.

However, Krasnova et al. (2010) also discovered that users believed controlling their personal information via such mechanisms as a site's customizable privacy settings or privacy policy could mitigate these risks. The authors also learned that users relied on trust in their fellow community members and the OSN provider to ease their concerns regarding risk.

The Influence of Trust on Self-Disclosure

While a review of the literature does not provide a consensus regarding the relationship between trust, risk, and behavior, several authors have provided observations relevant to this study. In the context of social exchange theory, Metzger (2004) suggested that trust may act as a mechanism that encourages users to participate in online social transactions by reducing their perceived costs. While stating their belief that risk affects behavior, Gefen, Srinivasan Rao, and Tractinsky (2003) commented that when participating in seemingly risky activities, the act of placing trust in another party serves as a viable strategy for risk reduction. Supporting the observation by Gefen et al., Kim,

Ferrin, and Rao (2008) argued that the significance of trust between parties intensifies when users engage in activities viewed as inherently risky and in which they cannot control the outcome.

McKnight, Choudhury, and Kacmar (2002) categorized trust into three areas: competence (the ability of the trustee to do what the truster requires), benevolence (the trustee's performing in the best interest of the truster), and integrity (the trustee's honesty and level of commitment with respect to the truster). Within the milieu of a virtual community, competencies bestow influence and are usually focused on areas such as specific interests, hobbies, concerns, or occupations. As such, one's influence and relative standing within a community are proportional to their perceived competence regarding specified bodies of knowledge. Benevolence occurs when the trustee responds to the truster with supportive or helpful advice, assistance, conversation, etc., thereby displaying a desire to comfort another. Benevolence is vital within an online community, because without positive reciprocation, it would cease to exist. Integrity implies that the other party will behave in accordance with a community's established norms. Within a virtual community, the norms of reciprocity forged by integrity integrate with benevolence, allowing the community to function in a proper and healthful manner (Ridings et al., 2002).

As witnessed in the literature, trust is a multifaceted construct whose definition is dependent upon the context in which it is employed. In the case of information systems research, authors such as Gefen et al. (2003) argued that one must differentiate between the notions of trust as faith in another party's beneficial characteristics and trust as the intent to assume risk and allow oneself to become vulnerable before others. For their

research, Krasnova et al. (2010) adopted the first choice and considered trust as one's belief that other parties possess benign qualities that constrain them from participating in opportunistic behavior. Based upon their analysis of the relevant literature, Krasnova et al. assumed the following cause and effect hierarchy: "trusting beliefs mitigate risk perceptions, which then impact self-disclosure behavior" (p.114). Additionally, the authors strongly maintained that users must equally trust OSN providers and members not to misuse the information entrusted to them via the OSN's virtual environment. Consequently, Krasnova et al. distinguished between trusting beliefs associated with OSN providers and those with OSN members.

Regarding the placement of trust in an OSN provider, McKnight et al. (2002) argued that when users revealed personal information to an OSN provider, they were more anxious about its benevolence and integrity than its competence. Following their lead, Krasnova et al. (2010) excluded any evaluation of an OSN's competence in their research, but instead focused on user belief patterns involving benevolence and integrity. The authors contended that if OSN providers were thought to be caring, honest, and consistent in their interactions with users, the members would attach a minimal level of risk to their sharing of personal information within their sites.

Online social networking participants appear to hold their fellow members in less regard than they do OSN providers. While members realize that any fellow user has the potential to violate their privacy, they tend to bestow a higher level of trust to those on their friends or contact list than those who are not. Ridings et al. (2002) believed that the baseline level of uncertainty regarding potential negative outcomes resulting from the actions of fellow OSN members may be exacerbated by the lack of personal contact and

visual clues. However, Walczuch and Lundgren (2004) suggested that a perception of similarity between users, combined with feelings of familiarity nurtured by an OSN provider's environment may provide a foundation for the development of trust between parties. The growth of intimacy between users and their audience (that could scale from a single individual to the entire community) may alter their perception of risk and lead to increased SD.

Online Interpersonal Awareness

Lowry et al. (2011) defined *online interpersonal awareness* as “the awareness of the presence, connections, and activities of others in a shared interaction experience via a mediated online technology” (p. 169). The authors also defined the *desire for online interpersonal awareness* as “the motivation to experience online interpersonal awareness” (p.169). The desire for online interpersonal awareness represents a significant personality characteristic exhibited by those engaging in SD activities within virtual communities.

Online interpersonal awareness is fostered within environments that allow for shared workspaces where people may communicate, collaborate, and work together. These shared experiences facilitate embedded coordination, enhanced interpersonal communication, positive social pressure, as well as increased contributions and disclosures. Its absence leaves a noticeable void, as Lowry et al. (2011) argued that the lack of or desire for interpersonal awareness leads to the collapse of online communications and coordination between dispersed parties. The authors identified five major areas relating to interpersonal awareness: group awareness, presence, awareness, connection, and workspace awareness.

Lowry, Roberts, Dean, and Marakas (2009) defined *group awareness* as “the ability to know what other group members are doing at a given time without direct communication; this implicitly increases social pressure on group members to contribute more, coordinate work, and avoid duplicate work” (pp. 176-177). It includes identifying who is about (social awareness), what events are happening (action awareness), and who is conversing with whom (activity awareness). Generally, group awareness provides a window into the actions of others as they lead their daily lives and may result in casual exchanges, development of impromptu relationships, and the growth of shared cultures (Dourish & Bly, 1992; Carroll, Neale, Isenhour, Rosson, & McCrickard, 2003).

While acknowledging that concept of *presence* has an assortment of definitions and meaning, Nowak and Biocca (2003) suggested that it infers either a sense of being “there” within the media (telepresence), in the “company of others” (copresence), or able to access the mind of another (social presence). When experiencing telepresence, one has the impression of being engulfed by the digital environment, a sense of being in a mediated area separate from their physical location. In the context of OSNs, users feel as though they are in a community that has instantiated itself from the physical realm and serves as a virtual meeting place for its members. Copresence occurs when one experiences a psychological connection with another person, a condition in which the participants feel they are able to perceive each other’s intentions. In this case, users shed the cloak of physical isolation and feel as if they were part of a location independent interaction. Biocca, Harms, and Burgoon (2003) defined social presence as exchanges that occur within environments where technology mediates social interactions. To be more specific, social presence may include one’s feelings regarding the degree to which

they perceive being together with others, involved with and known by others, or involved in community orientated activities. However, the authors note that investigating social presence is extremely challenging, as it represents a fleeting, dynamic assessment regarding the characteristics of an interaction between parties that is constrained or augmented by the medium in which it occurs.

Within the context of online communication, *awareness* refers to one's feeling in touch with the presence and activities of those with whom they are conversing. Dourish and Bellotti (1992) defined awareness as “an understanding of the activities of others, which provides a context for your own activity” (p. 107). This understanding is necessary to ensure that contributions made by an individual are pertinent to the activities of the entire group. Increasing awareness within a collaborating team (e.g., a group of people seeking to enhance their career opportunities) provides two discernible advantages: (a) casual, spur-of-the-moment conversations (via such methods as the phone or videoconferencing) are more common, since the parties involved are more likely to know each other's schedule and hence when one may be interrupted without disrupting their work; and (b) community members are kept up-to-date regarding important events, allowing them to make more informed decisions. Therefore, awareness is required to both facilitate communication within communities and ensure a high degree of collaborative teamwork (Schlichter, Koch, & Xu, 1998).

With respect to online interpersonal awareness, *connection* refers to the feeling of sharing an experience with others. These connections are facilitated by OSNs, as they provide an alternative means for people to join with others who share common interests or goals. Ellison et al. (2007) reported that not only are Internet users more likely than

non-Internet users to have a larger network of close ties, but they are also more likely to receive assistance from their community's core participants.

Gutwin and Greenberg (2002) defined *workspace awareness* as “the up-to-the-moment understanding of another person's interaction with the shared workspace” (p. 417). The authors incorporated two key aspects in their concept of workspace awareness. First, the idea involves more than one's merely being aware of their workspace; instead it focuses on how they interact with it. Second, workspace awareness is bounded by the events that occur within the workspace itself. As such, it lacks the informal awareness regarding the knowledge of who is available for collaboration and nonverbal, communicative clues from those operating outside of the workspace's temporal boundary. The authors continued that workspace awareness represents a specialized subset of awareness. When working alone, focus is centered on the workspace and the task at hand. However, when collaborating with others to accomplish a task within a shared workspace, one must maintain awareness not only on the task and temporal environment, but also their collective efforts.

Interpersonal Self-Disclosure

As a method for fostering interpersonal awareness, interpersonal SD “occurs during interpersonal communication and refers to the personal information individuals intentionally and voluntarily reveal about themselves to others in an interpersonal relationship” (Lowry et al., 2011, p. 166). Within online communities SD is typically viewed as a positive undertaking that reduces stress, increases intimacy, and enhances community acceptance of one's thoughts. OSNs represent one of the several technologies frequently utilized for facilitating SD within cyberspace; the others include e-mail, blogs,

Twitter, and instant messaging (IM). As this study examined privacy concerns within an online environment, theories that address issues regarding the adoption of online, SD technologies (e.g., OSNs) by users should also be considered.

Technology Acceptance Models

Within IT research, three models have been developed to investigate the acceptance and use of information technology: the theory of reasoned action (TRA), the technology acceptance model (TAM), and the theory of planned behavior (TPB). As this research examines one's attitudes towards privacy and their influence on self-disclosure, these models enhance the foundation provided by social exchange theory by accounting for user perceptions regarding the use of OSN technologies (Nasri & Charfeddine, 2012).

According to the TRA, one's intention may be revealed by their attitude towards a specific behavior and a subjective norm. Fishbein and Ajzen defined this attitude as "an individual's positive or negative feelings (evaluative effect) about performing the target behavior" (as cited in Nasri & Charfeddine, 2012, pp. 950-951). The subjective norm refers to the belief held by those who matter to the user, whether the individual should or should not execute the behavior in question. Between the two, Lowry et al. (2011) suggested that one's attitude regarding an action is a better predictor of behavior than subjective norms. With respect to one's intention to utilize SD technology in general and a specific technology in particular, the authors proposed that a positive attitude towards the technology being considered increases the likelihood of its use.

Derived from the TRA, the TAM explains those attitudes affecting one's intention regarding the use of a specific technology. According to the theory, this intention is driven by two factors that significantly shape one's beliefs regarding the technology

under consideration, *perceived usefulness* and *perceived ease of use*. According to Davis (1989), perceived usefulness is defined as the extent to which an individual believes the use of a specific technology would enhance their performance on a given task.

Technologies that present a high degree of perceived usefulness are considered to offer a positive use-performance ratio. The author defined perceived ease of use as the level at which a user considers that applying a technology would free them from exerting a great effort. Generally, perceived ease of use holds that those technologies deemed relatively easier to use are more likely to be accepted by the user community.

By adding the concept of perceived behavioral control, the TPB extended the TRA by considering people who did not have absolute control over their own behavior. This addition to the TRA model reflects both the internal and external limits on one's behavior and is linked to both their intention to use and actual use of a technology. With the inclusion of this consideration, TPB proposed that the fundamental factor influencing human behavior is behavioral intention, influenced by one's "attitude towards that behavior, the subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control" (Nasri & Charfeddine, 2012, p. 951).

Information Privacy

As the Internet has grown as an increasingly popular channel for global communications, concerns regarding one's digital privacy have also escalated. While users may marvel at the communications options, impressive imagery, search capabilities, and relationship building opportunities offered within cyberspace, they may also be oblivious to the various mechanisms hidden behind-the-scenes, specifically designed to capture their personal information. Once an individual's personal information

has become digitized, it becomes essentially irretrievable, leaving digital footprints wherever they travel throughout the social media landscape (Moore, 2012).

Information Privacy Defined

Clarke (2006) defined privacy as a multidimensional concept composed of four elements: *privacy of the person*, *privacy of personal behavior*, *privacy of personal communications*, and *privacy of personal data*. From these elements, the author selected two as the defining characteristics of *information privacy*: privacy of personal communications and privacy of personal data. Communications privacy refers to an individual's ability to communicate with others, employing various types of media without their messages being subject to regular third party monitoring. Data privacy refers to the concept that one's personal information should not be routinely accessible to third parties, and that, even if data were acquired by another, the person should have significant control over both the data and its usage. Specifically, Clarke defined information privacy as "the interest an individual has in controlling, or at least significantly influencing, the handling of data about themselves" (as cited in Bélanger & Crossler, 2012, p. 1018).

Other definitions support Clarke's depiction. For example, Westin (1967) viewed information privacy as "the claim of individuals, groups, or institutions to determine for themselves when, how, and to what extent information about them is communicated to others" (p.7). Bélanger and Crossler (2011) defined information privacy as "the desire of individuals to control or have some influence over data about themselves" (p. 1017). A breach of one's privacy "occurs when an organization, in its efforts to pursue the

organization's objectives, collects, stores, manipulates, or transmits personal information unbeknownst to the individual" (Il-Horn et al., 2007, p.15).

The concept of information privacy has been further distilled to the notion of *information privacy concerns* where it refers "to an individual's subjective views of fairness within the context of information privacy" (Malhotra, Kim, & Agarwal, 2004, p. 337). The term "subjective" is the key, as the authors observed that an individual's privacy concerns are influenced by their personal characteristics and previous experiences. As such, online community members often have diverse views regarding what actions are considered fair and unfair with respect to the collection and use of their personal information.

Given the importance of trust as a factor influencing one's level of online self-disclosure, privacy concerns are considered its greatest barrier because "the internet, by design, lacks unified provisions for identifying who communicates with whom; it lacks a well-designed identity infrastructure" (Leenes, Schallabock, & Hansen, 2008, p. 1). As reported by O' Brien and Torres (2012), privacy concerns must be satisfied for trust to develop between parties, a condition necessary for online activity to flourish.

Information Privacy Concerns, the CFIP and IUIPC

In order to investigate the complexity of individual information privacy concerns, Smith, Milberg, and Burke (1996) developed a multidimensional scale, the concern for information privacy (CFIP), to describe apprehensions regarding organizational privacy practices. The CFIP scale consists of four dimensions: collection, errors, unauthorized secondary use (internal and external), and improper access. *Collection* identifies the "concern that extensive amounts of personally identifiable data are being collected and

stored in databases” (p. 172). *Errors* raises the “concern that protections against deliberate and accidental errors in personal data are inadequate” (p. 172). *Unauthorized secondary use (internal)* refers to the “concern that information is collected from individuals for one purpose but is used for another, secondary purpose (internally within a single organization) without authorization from the individuals” (p. 172). While *unauthorized secondary use (external)* denotes the “concern that information is collected for one purpose but is used for another, secondary purpose after disclosure to an external party (not the collecting organization)” (p. 172). Lastly, *improper access* refers to the “concern that data about individuals are readily available to people not properly authorized to view or work with this data” (p. 172).

As an alternative to the CFIP scale, Malhotra et al. (2004) incorporated the concepts of collection, control, and awareness of privacy practices into their Internet user’s information privacy concerns (IUIPC) scale. According to the authors, the mere act of information *collection* represents the tipping point that leads to concerns regarding the privacy of one’s data. Framing their analysis on social contract theory, specifically its principle of distributive justice, the authors stated that in an equitable transaction users are willing to trade a valuable asset (in this case their personal information) for something of equal or greater value after performing a cost and benefits analysis. Given the need for a positive return, individuals are hesitant to provide their personal information if they anticipate a negative consequence from their action.

People consider the collection of their personally identifiable information to be fair only when they have control over the data and are notified regarding intended use. As such, the collection dimension exhibits two properties: *control* and *awareness of privacy*

practices. Malhotra et al. (2004) viewed control as critically important within the context of information privacy, as users assume great risks when divulging personal information. This risk stems from the possibility of a breach in the social contract between the parties involved in the exchange, resulting in the potential misuse of the acquired data. During these exchanges, users demonstrate control when they have the option to either grant approval of the transaction or leave (i.e., opt-out). Conversely, the lack of control intensifies concerns regarding personal privacy. The awareness property indicates the degree to which people are concerned regarding their awareness of an OSN's information privacy practices. This property is composed of two justices taken from social contract theory: interactional and informational. Interactional justice involves matters of transparency and propriety with respect to one's data and its violation results in decreased perceptions of fairness. Informational justice concerns the release of specific, detailed information. With respect to informational justice, Okazaki, Li, and Hirose (2009) stated that one's perception of fairness increases "with the specificity of information used to provide justification" (p. 65). Issues involving interactional and informational justice that are categorized within the IUIPC's awareness of privacy practices property are denoted by the CFIP model via the dimensions of unauthorized secondary use, improper access, and errors.

During their development of the IUIPC scale, Malhotra et al. (2004) demonstrated how their model provides a greater explanation regarding the variance associated with an individual's motivation to conduct transactions than does the CFIP. Regardless of their claim, the IUIPC scale has not been broadly used in ensuing research regarding information privacy concerns, as the majority of academics utilize the CFIP scale. The

substantial use of the CFIP even with the presence of an argumentatively superior alternative suggests two possibilities: (a) research may have already begun before publication of the IUIPC, or (b) the CFIP was already deemed the standard for measuring information privacy concerns within the academic community (Bélanger & Crossler, 2011). For this research, both the CFIP and IUIPC offer insights regarding potential concerns community members may have regarding information privacy as they interact with others through OSNs.

Information Privacy Attitudes

In addition to examining views and responses to policies, practices, and tools, studies involving information privacy attitudes have also investigated issues related to one's sensitivity regarding the sharing or loss of personal information, or their inclination to share such data with others. Generally, people are less apt to perceive the collection of personal information as being intrusive when the information is gathered within the milieu of a current relationship, they believe that they have the capability to control the use of the information, the collection and use of the information is pertinent to the transaction, and the information will be used to infer accurate and reasonable conclusions about them (Culnan & Armstrong, 1999).

Fazio (1986) proposed that an attitude's strength is influenced by its structure. This structure is composed of three elements: the source of the information (actual experience versus secondary sources), the valence of the information, and the situations in which the information is considered pertinent.

The degree to which an attitude may affect one's behavior is a function of whether the information used during its formulation is processed from firsthand

experience or secondary sources. This distinction is noteworthy, as one's attitude towards information privacy may be significantly different depending upon whether the information used to develop it originated from primary or secondary sources. For example, one's attitude towards privacy may be formulated entirely from information gleaned from media and other external sources without any firsthand experiences. An attitude formulated in this manner may be significantly different from one developed via firsthand experiences (Norberg & Horne, 2007). With respect to the predictive qualities, Thørgersen (2002) noted that attitudes formulated from personal experience are stronger predictors of behavior than those based upon secondary sources. Thus, individuals who realize that their sharing of personal information has directly resulted in compromising their privacy would have stronger privacy attitudes than those whose beliefs were formed from secondary sources, such as magazine articles.

In their research examining the active disclosure of personal information, Norberg and Horne (2007) wrote that not only does the source of privacy related material affect the development of one's attitude, but so does its valence. As reiterated by Ajzen (2001), individuals process positive and negative information differently, as negative news has a greater impact upon the formulation of one's attitude than does either neutral or positive data. Therefore, attitudes are more influenced by information that stresses risk. For example, a news story regarding security breaches involving major OSNs is more likely to negatively influence the development of one's privacy attitude than a story describing the benefits associated with exchanges of personal information via online communities, positive material that may have little if any impact. Consequently, individuals who have never personally experienced a violation of their privacy may develop negative attitudes

resulting from their tendency to give greater credence to negative information from secondary sources and less to positive information.

According to Bassili (1996), an attitude's importance relative to a particular behavioral event directly influences the strength of that attitude with respect to that situation. So, for an attitude to exhibit predicative behavior, the individual must be capable of generalizing from one event to another, and in so doing associate a specific attitude with similar situations. Regarding attitudes relating to information privacy, people appear to form specific privacy concerns after experiencing a specific violation of their privacy and general concerns when relying on secondary outlets of information (Norberg & Home, 2007).

Having extensively analyzed research concerning information privacy attitudes, Bélanger and Crossler (2011) revealed that their most intriguing discovery was that “in the presence of privacy attitudes, greater concern for information privacy no longer influences willingness to disclose personal information” (p. 1021). As an example, when an individual's attitudes towards information privacy change after being informed that an OSN site has instituted a policy of applying fair information practices to manage personal data, their apprehension regarding privacy is sufficiently alleviated so that they will either readily furnish personal information online or fail to take actions to safeguard their privacy. Some may contend this attitude appears naïve and agree with Rosenblum (2007) when he suggested, “users do not exercise in the virtual world even the routine common sense they would exercise in the real world” (p.10).

Gross et al. (2005) suggested several reasons as to why users may provide personal information even when their privacy may be at risk. The authors' list included

- Signaling, as the perceived gain from disclosing information to carefully selected strangers may outweigh the cost of potential invasions of privacy,
- Peer pressure,
- Herding behavior,
- General lack of interest regarding concerns involving personal privacy,
- Lack of information regarding the implication of divulging personal information,
- Confidence regarding the OSN site's security provisions,
- Trust in fellow community members,
- Narrow-minded view regarding privacy risks, and
- User interface designed to foster acceptance of default privacy settings.

Information Privacy Practices

Given the lack of technology for assisting users in determining what information they should share, to whom they should share it, and how to control its propagation, people are finding their own methods for protecting their privacy. Their information privacy practices include exercising sound judgment when revealing personally identifiable information, utilizing privacy protection software, employing “opt out” options, when available, using browsers capable of concealing routing information (McGinity 2000), fabricating personal information, using passive restraints (e.g., filtering or deleting unsolicited e-mail), and employing identify modification strategies (Chen & Rea, 2004).

To safeguard their online identities and personal information, users may decide not to accurately represent themselves while online. Lanier and Saini (2008) recognized four tactics from which users may select to manage their online identities: (a)

identifiability (providing full disclosure of personal information with a high degree of accuracy), (b) confidentiality (providing limited disclosure with a high degree of accuracy), (c) secrecy (not providing any information), and (d) anonymity/pseudonymity (providing erroneous information).

Based upon their survey, Milne, Rohm, and Bahl (2004) reported that users employ the following methods to control information privacy: ensuring that online forms are accessed through a secure connection, choosing to opt out of third-party data sharing, and employing several (work and personal) e-mail accounts. Additionally, the authors noticed that a majority of their participants also refused to provide information to a website if they believed the data to be too personal, requested that a website not share their information with third parties, and refused to use a specific website if they were not sure as to how their personal information would be used. However, the authors also discovered that less than 20% of their respondents encrypted their e-mail, employed anonymous re-mailers, or used anonymizers for Web browsing. While recognizing that consumers are becoming more knowledgeable regarding the risks associated with divulging personal information while conducting online activities, the authors warned that users are still at risk by not taking advantage of available technical safeguards or understanding the manner in which websites collect data.

Reciprocity and Boundary Management

Reciprocity

An argument may be made with respect to the literature of SD that people who are apprehensive regarding the privacy of their information are inclined to value and safeguard not only their own personal data, but also that of others and, therefore would

believe the knowledge or disclosure of anyone's personal material to be undesirable and detrimental. However, researchers such as Lowry et al. (2011) and Patil and Kobsa (2003) have argued that such a viewpoint is rather simplistic, as one's attitude regarding SD may be either negatively or positively correlated to their beliefs concerning information privacy. To investigate this belief pattern, the authors suggested utilizing a central concept found within SD literature, that of reciprocity. Reciprocity explains how one's yearning for awareness, anxiety regarding information privacy, and inclination to give personal data to an exclusive group of associates may coexist (Lowry et al., 2011).

Lowry et al. (2011) explained reciprocity as *quid pro quo* informational exchange in which the parties adopt a "you tell me and I'll tell you" (p. 170) approach towards SD. In this context, reciprocity serves as an indicator to each party that the communicator is agreeable to accepting a certain level of risk regarding the release of personal information in order to maintain the SD relationship. This act reflects the level of worth given by the communicator to their association with the other party and their desire to continue its development through additional SD. Therefore, the authors contended that reciprocity facilitates intimacy and social bonding, while allowing the parties to penetrate deeper into the strata of SD, demonstrate their willingness to disclose personal data, and as a result, optimize the value gained from their exchange. As communications continue over time, recipients of personal information feel obliged to respond to their partners SD at an equivalent level of intimacy and depth. Thus, the combination of SD and reciprocity facilitates an individual's willingness to share personal awareness and privacy information to a select group of others. As long as others in the group reciprocate in kind,

anxieties regarding information privacy and the desire for personal awareness may coexist and be nurtured via SD.

Boundary Management

In conjunction with reciprocity, the concept of boundary management is applied within SD research to describe the association between issues regarding privacy and the need for personal awareness and SD (Lowry et al., 2011). Within dynamic social environments, such as may occur within online communities, the establishment of interpersonal boundaries is vital, as they provide a sense of order and enable members to identify and convey their role to others within the group (Petronio, Ellemers, Giles, & Gallois, 1998).

As suggested by Petronio and Martin (1986), interpersonal communications entails a simultaneous requirement to be both open and self-protective. This seemingly paradoxical behavior requires a control system for managing one's boundaries. According to Derlega and Chaikin (1977), this system regulates boundaries through adjustments in SD related inputs and outputs, a mechanism that reflects one's control over the exchange of information between parties and hence the level of privacy maintained within any given relationship. An individual's decisions regarding these adjustments not only determine the type of relationship (e.g., friendship or power centric) they have with their associates, but may also influence their own sense of self-identity, autonomy, and self-esteem.

Development of a boundary management system involves three elemental rules: boundary rule formulation, boundary coordination, and turbulence. Xu, Dinev, Smith,

and Hart (2011) maintained these elements are critical to establishing boundaries for online interpersonal communication.

Boundary rule formulation. Xu et al. (2011) presented four criteria from which individuals create boundary rules: cost-benefit-ratio, context, motivations, and gender. Together, these elements influence how individuals create a personal, rule based framework for boundary management. As discussed in the literature (Culnan & Armstrong, 1999; Krasnova et al., 2010; Lowry et al., 2011), individuals perform an internal cost-benefit analysis (a privacy calculus) to determine whether to disclose personal information. Within the context of boundary management, Xu et al. discussed two important variables that are included in this analysis, those being risks and control. When perceiving that a stream of information may flow across their boundaries, people begin their privacy calculus, a process in which they evaluate both the potential risks regarding disclosure and their degree of control regarding the flow of data. Based upon their assessment, a person determines whether the flow of information across their boundaries is either acceptable or unacceptable. If an individual concludes the flow were acceptable, then their level of privacy concerns will be lowered, resulting in an opening of boundaries and subsequent release of personal information. However, if the result indicates the flow were unacceptable, then an individual may react to the perceived threats by increasing their level of concerns, resulting in the closure of one's boundaries and subsequent prevention of data flow (Xu et al., 2011; Stanton & Stam, 2002).

Boundary rules are not constructed within a vacuum. Instead, they are influenced by an individual's general beliefs and perceptions regarding the disclosure of personal information framed by the context of what are determined to be acceptable and

unacceptable disclosures given a specific situation. As such, privacy considerations associated with a unique set of circumstances may denote different responses from different people, depending upon the relationship dynamics between the parties (Xu et al., 2011). As summarized by Stanton and Stam (2002), “the negotiation of boundaries depends in part upon the status of the relationship between the sender and the audience (individual or institutional) receiving it” (p. 155) and are as such, context specific.

Xu et al. (2011) noted the formulation of rules concerning one’s privacy boundary is also shaped by motivational factors. According to Stanton and Stam (2002), those sending messages control their level of SD information in such a manner as to achieve one of two different end states, either promotion-focused or prevention focused. Some individuals may feel a need to engage in opportunities allowing them to express their feelings (promotion-focused), while others may seek to maintain their privacy by avoiding SD (prevention focused). Therefore, one’s motivation becomes part of their internal privacy calculus, as they strategically decide how much information to reveal or withhold in order to achieve their preferred end state.

Xu et al. (2011) also mentioned that gender plays a significant role regarding the opening and closing of informational boundaries. The authors suggested that males and females establish rules that are grounded upon their own distinctive viewpoints regarding privacy maintenance.

Boundary coordination and turbulence. After each party discloses their respective personal information to the other, they become, in essence, co-owners of the data with the shared responsibility to keep the material private. The concept of boundary coordination comes into play, as both the subjects and recipients of the information have

collective control regarding how the data are used. As such, the decision to release personal information requires prior coordination between the parties regarding expectations as to how the disclosed material will be handled and who outside the boundary will have access, as well as distinguishing which material is considered public and private. This coordination involves establishing a set of rules regarding information privacy that are situational and personally dependent, a process that forms the collective boundary between the parties. This shared boundary serves as the primary mechanism for controlling who has access to the information and how much is revealed. However, boundary coordination is a complex process and sometimes fails, possibly due to external forces or a failure of the coordination mechanism. This failure results in boundary turbulence, as those aggrieved by the breach of protocol seek recourse against the offending party by such means as complaining or even dissolving the relationship. (Xu et al., 2011).

Summary

After recounting how the technical evolution facilitated the emergence of online communities, this literature review examined four main topics: social exchange theory, online interpersonal awareness, information privacy, and reciprocity and boundary management. The central theme of this review concerned issues regarding the manner in which privacy considerations affect online self-disclosure. Social exchange theory served as the theoretical framework for examining the process individuals undertake as they decide how much personal information to disclose during online communications. The concept of online interpersonal awareness provided insight regarding how users experience the presence, connections, and activities of others as they share experiences

within online communities and introduced its central tenants: group awareness, presence, awareness, connection, and workspace awareness. This review examined the nature of information privacy in terms of user concerns, attitudes, and practices. Finally, this review discussed reciprocity and boundary management in terms of establishing rules for conduct and self-protection during online interpersonal communications.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter explains and justifies the methodology used for this research. It describes the study's research design, sampling process, instrument, data collection, data analysis, validity and reliability, and ethical considerations.

This research was grounded in the area of information security, specifically online personal security with respect to social media. As a result of technological advancements, privacy concerns have grown and evolved. Today's information communication technologies have the capability to effectively collect, aggregate, store, and redistribute data on an individual basis. As such, these technologies have changed the very nature of data, from being sparse to massive, from transient to permanent, and from detached to associated with specific entities. As such, the ubiquitous nature of data collection poses significant threats to one's privacy and autonomy over the long term. With access to the requisite data repositories, individuals about whom one may not even be aware may gather enough personal information to use for any objective (proper or improper) without the original owner's consent or knowledge (Spärck Jones, 2003).

This research focused on the examination of privacy concerns that influence the degree of personal information those utilizing social networking for career advancement divulge online. This research built upon previous studies that examined how personal information is shared, as people attempt to establish online relationships (Dwyer et al.,

2007; Houghton & Joinson, 2010; Lowry et al., 2011), and extended investigations regarding the manner in which individuals utilize social networking for career development (Benson et al., 2010).

This research explored a gap in the literature with respect to those factors influencing the disclosure of personal information in online communities, as individuals seek to advance their careers. It offers an increased understanding regarding the theoretical construct of personal privacy by examining the decision making process job seekers undergo as they determine the level of information to reveal in the hope of enhancing employment opportunities, weighed against potential risks. Additionally, this research transferred the investigation of privacy and trust issues from a social context to one of professional development. By examining those factors that influence the degree of personal information one divulges while pursuing activities related to career advancement, this dissertation contributed to the understanding of patterns regarding the revelation of such information and its privacy implications when social media is utilized for self-promotion. To focus this investigation, this study posed the following research question: “What factors influence the level of detail and type of personal information job seekers divulge when seeking employment opportunities via online social networking?”

Research Design

According to Merriam (2002), the meaning behind any phenomenon is a social construct derived from how people interact with their world, or reality. This philosophical approach was appropriate for this study, as its purpose was to explore how individuals interact with cyber communities, when confronting issues of privacy. However, as Merriam continues, their reality is not fixed, single, agreed upon, or measurable, and as

such is open to different interpretations, conclusions that may change over time. Given the nature of the research problem and the dynamic environment in which these interactions occur, the initial task when developing a design strategy involved the selection of an appropriate methodology that takes these factors into account. When deciding upon a suitable research approach, Jones (2009) advised that,

Selecting the appropriate methodology for a research problem is therefore much like selecting the right tool out of your toolbox; you might be able to get the job done with a screwdriver, but it will not be as effective or efficient if you really needed a hammer all along. (p. 24)

As the purpose of this research was to gain an understanding regarding these varying interpretations at a specific point in time and within a specific context, it employed a qualitative approach, one that was conducive to investigating how and why privacy decisions are made. This methodology presents four distinctive properties: (a) the researcher attempts to understand the meaning that people associate with an experience, (b) the researcher serves as the principal medium for data collection and analysis, (c) the researcher collects data in order to develop concepts or themes, and (d) the researcher presents a product of his inquiry that is elaborately descriptive. This approach emphasizes investigating the manner in which people experience and interact within their world, online social networking communities in this case, and the meaning their experiences have for them (Merriam, 2002).

This research explored a gap in the literature with respect to those factors influencing the disclosure of personal information in online social networking sites, as individuals seek to advance their career. Given the relatively sparse research and theoretical framework regarding this study's topic, this dissertation used a qualitative

methodology that allowed for an in-depth investigation and subsequent understanding of the significant issues regarding this phenomenon.

From the various qualitative methodologies available, this research used exploratory qualitative inquiry, an approach that involves the methodical collection, organization, and interpretation of recorded material derived from in-depth interviews, a traditional technique for conducting exploratory inquiries. As it provides an inductive process for gathering data and developing concepts when the lack of theory hinders the explanation of a phenomenon, exploratory qualitative inquiry was the optimum choice. According to Marshall (1996), this approach is especially appropriate, as it facilitates the understanding of complex psychosocial issues by addressing the questions of “how?” and “why?” as they relate to events experienced by the participants. These two areas of inquiry are of primary interest to those conducting qualitative research, as they illuminate people’s methods and motivations.

Using exploratory qualitative inquiry facilitated an understanding regarding the how and why of people’s experiences, as firsthand accounts were gathered through interviews. Collecting data via personal interaction with the participants allowed for the acquisition of information that provided great depth, openness, and detail. This richness of information provided an opportunity to gain an in-depth understanding regarding the nature of privacy in the context of job hunting via online social networking (Merriam, 2002).

The strength of this methodology lies in its ability to facilitate the exploration of social phenomena within the context of firsthand experiences (Malterud, 2001). As the goal of exploratory qualitative inquiry is to gain understanding directly from participants,

its use of interviews allows for the collection of both verbal and nonverbal data, immediate data analysis, the opportunity to clarify and summarize material, the ability to verify the data's accuracy directly with participants, and the exploration of unanticipated areas as warranted (Merriam, 2002). By utilizing this interpretive approach, this research investigated the manner in which privacy concerns influence the degree of personal information job seekers divulge within online, social networking communities, as well as their perspectives and worldview concerning the issue of online privacy.

As this study used a qualitative methodology, the following assumptions were made regarding the research process:

- Purposeful sampling allows the deliberate selection of participants whose experiences directly relate to the problem being investigated (Draper & Swift, 2011)
- Addressing the questions of “how?” and “why?” as they relate to the participants' experiences, results in the understanding of complex psychosocial issues (Marshall, 1996)
- As qualitative research results in a large collection of data, its analysis implies a degree of abstraction and generalization (Malterud, 2001)
- The collection of data via personal interaction with the participants results in information that provides great depth, openness, and detail (Merriam, 2002)
- The researcher asks relevant questions to the right people and turns their (perhaps seemingly disconnected) data into a valid narrative (Neuman, 2003)

Additionally, the following theoretical assumptions regarding exploratory qualitative inquiry were also recognized:

- Exploratory qualitative inquiry is used to investigate little-understood phenomena, discover important categories of meaning, and generate hypotheses for further research (Marshall & Rossman, 1999)
- Exploratory qualitative inquiry allows the researcher to focus on the characteristics of the phenomena being investigated by examining the

respondent's experiences, feelings, and motivations (Ashill, Meadows, & Stewart, 2001)

- The interpretive approach to exploratory qualitative inquiry allows the researcher to investigate the manner in which people experience and interact within their world and the meaning their experiences have for them (Merriam, 2002)
- The researcher does not try to influence the phenomenon being investigated (Patton, 2002)
- Truthfulness comes from one's firsthand experience (Neuman, 2003)

Sample

The sample for this research consisted of individuals who had utilized social networking as a tool for their career advancement. The sample contained males and females of legal age who were either unemployed (seeking employment) or currently employed (seeking to further their career). Specifically, participants had an account with at least one of the following Internet sites: LinkedIn, Facebook, Google+, or Twitter. Their accounts were primarily used for career development and management and not for initiating social relationships. Additionally, they had actively utilized social media in their employment search for at least six months and shared personal information with at least one online community. Those who were not of legal age, were not currently looking to advance their career, had not used any of the previously listed sites as tools for career advancement, or lacked the required experience were excluded from this study. The unit of analysis for this research was at the individual level.

Criteria for selection were based upon the researcher's own, practical experience, literature, and indicators from the study itself (Marshall, 1996). In order to fulfill the requirements of this research, participants were selected based upon their experiences using social networking as a tool for career advancement.

Perspective participants were selected from social and professional networking sites on the Internet. Introductory recruitment information was posted on bulletin boards and forums within online communities (e.g., LinkedIn, Google+, and Facebook). Those interested in participating were asked to respond via e-mail for additional information, a process that signaled their interest and automatically provided initial contact information. In each case, the respondents were e-mailed detailed information regarding the research and a pre-survey screening questionnaire (Austen, Jefferson, & Thein, 2003).

Those interested in participating submitted the pre-survey screening questionnaire. The requisite consent forms and a copy of the survey questions were then forwarded to those who met the criteria for selection. Candidates who agreed to participate were placed within a pool from which they could be selected for inclusion into the sample. Participants were selected based upon their potential for expanding upon previously identified categories, concepts, and constructs, as well as for introducing new ones. This selection process occurred throughout the data gathering process until a point of saturation was achieved.

For the purpose of this research, participants were divided into two groups: those who were currently employed and those who were not. This segregation allowed for the observation as to whether or not one's employment status influenced the degree of personal information they disclosed.

With respect to the sample's size, qualitative exploratory inquiry utilizes purposeful sampling to enlist a relatively small number of participants. Participants were selected because their past experience related specifically to the problem under

investigation; as such, they were chosen with a purpose (Draper & Swift, 2011).

According to Patton, the

Logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term purposeful sampling. (as cited in Coyne, 1997, p. 624)

The use of purposeful sampling was appropriate for this study, as it reflects a preconceived, calculated decision that aligns the characteristics of those making up the sample with the nature of the problem under investigation. When using qualitative exploratory inquiry with purposeful sampling, individuals are intentionally selected for their potential to provide in-depth data based upon their firsthand experiences with respect to the research question (Draper & Swift, 2011). Participants for this study were selected according to specific inclusion criteria that ensured familiarity with and actual experience using online communities for career advancement. As such, their experiences added knowledge and contributed to existing social exchange theory with respect to the manner in which privacy issues influence the online disclosure of personal information.

As purposeful sampling involves the gathering of participants with experiences specific to the question being studied, the selection process continued until the sample size was large enough to answer the problem question, while not being so large as to encumber in-depth analysis. In order to fulfill the requirements of this research, participants were selected based upon their experiences using social networking as a tool for career advancement. According to Draper and Swift (2011), the size of the sample is positively related to the broadness of the problem under investigation. However, the authors admitted that the requisite size of a particular sample would only become clear as the study progresses. In reality, the required number of participants only becomes

apparent during the study's data collection phase when new categories, themes, or explanations cease appearing (Marshall, 1996).

Citing prior research regarding qualitative sampling, Draper and Swift (2011) indicated that theoretical saturation might occur as early as the first six interviews. According to Marshall (1996), a suitable sample size for qualitative research is one that sufficiently answers the research question. Regarding this research, individuals were added to the sample until a deep understanding of the relevant concepts emerged and the core category became saturated (Coyne, 1997). This study used a sample of 14 participants, at which point saturation was considered achieved. Considering the explanatory nature of the research, the allotted timeframe, and the limited resources, this size appeared reasonable. If information saturation had not been reached, additional participants would have been recruited and interviewed until at least two interviews in a row revealed no new information or themes.

Instrumentation/Measures

When utilizing qualitative exploratory inquiry, the researcher serves an instrument for data collection, as they interview people regarding their experiences and perceptions regarding the subject being studied. The end result of this process is an analysis that provides understanding and insights regarding the themes and patterns discovered during the researcher's investigation. The quality of this analysis is directly contingent upon the researcher's ability to solicit quality data from the study's participants, a process dependent upon the researcher's methodological skill, sensitivity, and integrity (Patton, 2002).

To provide a consistent interview experience, an interview guide (See Appendix) was developed to ensure that topics related to the research question were addressed during each interview. (Interview guide was designed and created by Moss, 2013.) These questions were based upon the literature review and addressed areas regarding the participants' views with respect to their motivation for using online social networks, privacy considerations, awareness of site privacy policies regarding user privacy and information storage/usage, attitude towards disclosing personal information, and considerations regarding risk versus reward from divulging personal information.

Data Collection

The application of exploratory qualitative inquiry with respect to data collection involves interviewing those who are closest to the phenomenon under investigation. Personal interviewing is essential to this process, as the results lead to deeper levels of understanding and perhaps even to previously unconsidered pathways for exploration and enlightenment. The in-depth interviews and notes that comprise the data collection process provide the requisite tools by which the researcher records situations, events, feelings, and ideas, all of which combine to form an increasingly rich source of material for future analysis (Draper & Swift, 2011).

A series of semi-structured, open-ended questions (ranging from general to specific) were presented during the interview to solicit the participants' beliefs and feelings regarding the manner in which privacy considerations influenced their willingness to divulge personal information within online communities. These questions examined such areas as the participants'

- Motivation for establishing online relationships,

- Criteria for establishing connections,
- Familiarity with self-disclosure technologies,
- Attitude towards disclosing personal information within online communities,
- Awareness of potential risks from disclosing personal information,
- Desired level of protection,
- Risk/reward tolerance,
- Desire to form online connections,
- Views regarding fairness regarding the exchange of information, and
- Awareness of site policies regarding user privacy and information storage/usage.

From these questions, patterns developed regarding the manner in which the participants' attitudes and beliefs influenced their willingness to divulge information and the manner in which they shared personal information.

These in-depth interviews (lasting approximately an hour) were conducted on an individual basis and revealed personal attitudes, beliefs, and feelings regarding the disclosure of personal information while using self-disclosure technologies. Interview questions were developed to address all constructs (social exchange theory and information privacy) and elements (online interpersonal awareness and interpersonal self-disclosure) of interest. By examining those factors that influence the degree of personal information one divulges while pursuing activities related to career advancement, this methodology addressed the study's research question.

Perspective participants were selected from social and professional networking sites on the Internet. Prior to being interviewed, they received an introductory package containing a preliminary demographic questionnaire and an informed consent form. The

informed consent form detailed their rights and understanding of the nature, scope, depth, and approximate length of the interview. The participants returned both of these documents before an interview took place.

The researcher took digital recordings for those who agreed to be recorded and written notes for those who did not. The recordings and notes were transcribed into a format readable by NVivo 10, for later analysis. The data were analyzed by utilizing open coding techniques that looked for words and sentences within the transcripts and notes that had meaning relative to the research question and provided explanatory concepts (Goulding, 2005).

The use of a semi-structured format provided the researcher with a standardized list of questions, flexibility regarding their order and phrasing, and the freedom to delve into the subject's responses as warranted (Draper & Swift, 2011). While the wording of the questions within the interview guide (See Appendix) was structured, they were phrased to illicit open-ended responses, thereby allowing the participants to provide as much detailed information as they desired and the researcher to follow-up with probing questions. If post interview clarification were required, follow-up conversations were conducted over the telephone. Instruments for data collection included a digital recording device to document the conversations and a journal to document field notes and post-interview impressions (Turner, 2010).

With respect to objectively interviewing participants, this researcher has 12 years of experience as an information technology professional, during which time he has periodically conducted in-depth interviews with customers, end users, and subject matter experts. During these interviews, the researcher has gathered data using both open-ended

and specific questions to support the development of enterprise level systems. Additionally, this researcher has served as a proposal writer for approximately two years. While developing proposals for federal contracts, he has conducted numerous interviews with subject matter experts, gathering data to develop proposal strategies, storyboards, and technical solutions.

Data Analysis

To support exploratory qualitative inquiry, this study utilized the constant comparative method in which data analysis occurs simultaneously with data collection and begins with the very first interview. This combination of activities allowed the researcher to make any necessary adjustments regarding the collection of data during the study and test emerging concepts, themes, and categories against data as they were presented. This approach mitigated the risk of the researcher's losing the opportunity to gather more reliable and valid data, as the ongoing analytical process facilitated any necessary adjustments with respect to data collection (Merriam, 2002).

During the iterative progression of coding during data collection, core categories were identified that classified the participants' primary concerns and accounted for variations in their patterns of behavior (Ng & Hase, 2008). These categories were identified by using the constant comparative method with analytical support from NVivo 10. As one of the more versatile programs for conducting qualitative analysis, NVivo 10 was selected for data analysis because it offers a wide selection of tools especially designed for systemically analyzing complex, unstructured data. Its tools support the management, extraction, comparison, exploration, and reassembly of meaningful

segments of information from vast amounts of data in creative and flexible ways (QSR International, 2013).

The coding process involved segregating data into discrete elements of meaning suitable for analysis and then evaluating them for any inter-relationships. This process allowed the transfer of data to a higher degree of abstraction from which categories and their related properties could be identified. During coding, words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs from interviews were analyzed and then associated with other markers within the data that demonstrated similarities or differences (Ng & Hase, 2008). The categories and their properties were identified by using open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Malterud, 2001).

Open coding represents the first stage of analysis and served to emphasize what was believed to have significance beyond mere descriptions of their context. During this stage, comparing code-to-code and incident-to-incident occurrences in the data identified similarities and differences. While performing data comparisons, the following key questions were addressed: “What is this data a study of? What category or property does this incident indicate? What is the basic process that processes the main problem that makes life viable in the action scene?” (Ng & Hase, 2008, p. 160). By asking these questions, the process was transformed from description to conceptualization.

As understanding regarding the data increased and categorical properties began to merge, the analysis entered its second stage with the beginning of axial coding for the core categories. The core and subcategories were identified and coding was limited to only those elements that exhibited significant relationships. Once all the relevant categories were identified, the core categories were linked with their subcategories. As

categories became well defined during the interviews, the questions presented to the participants became more focused, an evolutionary process that eventually lead to saturation (Ng & Hase, 2008).

After reaching saturation, the analysis entered its third stage, selective coding. During this stage, conceptualizing the relationship between categories allowed for the assignment of meaning and scope to the data. By applying the appropriate coding family (as determined by the data), the researcher became sensitized to the various behavioral patterns as they were weaved together to present a viable interpretation of the findings (Ng & Hase, 2008).

The data resulting from this study is presented in a sequential manner as follows:

- Results from the open coding
- Results from the axial coding
- Results from the selective coding

Inserts from the interviews were added throughout the report as appropriate to substantiate and add validity to the presentation. Finally, a set of propositions that form a viable interpretation of the findings were described with respect to the original research question, “What factors influence the level of detail and type of personal information job seekers divulge when seeking employment opportunities via online social networking?”

Validity and Reliability

As proposed by Neuman (2003), validity with respect to qualitative research is characterized by truthfulness that comes from one’s firsthand experience. Adhering to Neuman’s principle, this study utilized interviews for data collection. As this methodology relies heavily upon social interaction, the researcher relied on personal

insight and powers of observation to uncover patterns. Additionally, the participants were allowed to accurately and thoroughly express their views regarding their world, as they related to the research question. Therefore, this approach provided an in-depth, unbiased understanding of the issue under investigation, accurately captured what the subjects actually said, provided a truthful representation of the environment and the subjects' interactions with it, and provided direct quotations that are explanatory and descriptive (Patton, 2002). When using interviews for data collection, the burden of proof is truly on the researcher, for they are responsible for asking the right people the relevant questions and then taking all their (perhaps seemingly disconnected) data and turning them into a valid narrative. Therefore, the researcher must have the "ability to conceptualize, to organize, to tolerate confusion with some incident depression, to make abstract connections, to remain open, to be a bit visual, to thinking multivariately and most of all to trust to preconscious processing and to emergence" (Glaser, 2009, p. 2).

As to not allow personal bias to effect data collection, bracketing was used to control the influence of any internal predisposition that may have existed. Through bracketing, the researcher allows the participants to understand and process their experiences with respect to the phenomenon under study, within their own definition of reality. Through bracketing the researcher suspends personal expectations and presents an open mind, focused on actively listening to their subjects. As such, bracketing allows the participants to provide the researcher with new knowledge and understanding based upon their own interpretation of the experience, one not influenced by the observer. The bracketed areas during data collection included assumptions, beliefs, personal

experiences, judgments, preconceptions, and presuppositions regarding the use of online social networking for job seeking (Hamill & Sinclair, 2010).

For qualitative research to be considered credible, the participants must be able to recognize their own experiences within the research findings. To ensure the material gathered from the participants was accurately translated into reliable data, member checking was used to continually test the data, analytical categories, interpretations, and conclusions with the interviewees. This continual assessment process of verifying data with the sources decreased the probability of misrepresentation (Krefting, 1991).

Member checking was conducted by providing the participants with a draft of the analytical codes and a report of the analytical results. In order to test the credibility of the study's overall interpretation, the researcher conducted a final member check near its conclusion with key participants to ensure the final presentation of the data accurately reflected the participants' experiences (Krefting, 1991).

To ensure reliability, the researcher transcribed the digital recordings into documents using a standard file structure, comparing each transcribed line against the original recording for accuracy. Afterwards, the researcher asked each interviewee to review and approve the transcript after it was typed to verify the material accurately reflected their experiences and beliefs. Only after this verification process had been completed, did the analysis phase begin.

Ethical Considerations

The rights of the participants were protected during each phase of this study against "physical harm, discomfort, pain, embarrassment, or loss of privacy" (Cooper & Schindler, 2008, pp. 35-36). To ensure their ethical treatment, the participant's rights and

the protections granted to them were explained through a formal consent process. This process was integrated into the survey procedure that included the following steps

- Introduction,
- Description of the survey,
- Description of the target population,
- Description of the survey's purpose,
- Providing an estimate regarding the time required for completion,
- Assurance of anonymity and confidentiality,
- Reminding the participants their participation is completely voluntary,
- Discussion of the non-response policy, and
- Asking for permission to begin (Cooper & Schindler, 2008).

Before beginning the research, a risk assessment was conducted to estimate the participants' potential level of discomfort or harm in accordance with the definitions provided in Title 45 Code of Federal Regulations Part 46.102(i). With respect to the areas of initial contact, sample recruitment and consenting procedure, preliminary meetings, data collection, data management, data analysis, and presentation, the risk to participants was judged to be minimal. Given the nature of this research, the possibility of physical harm was quite small; however, the possibility existed that participants could suffer psychological harm through loss of privacy, damaged reputations, lowered self-esteem, or general embarrassment. Therefore from an ethical perspective, the overarching concerns involved the manner in which participants would be treated, especially during the interviews and the security and confidentiality of their data.

To mitigate the risk of participants being uncomfortable with the material, they were given the opportunity to review the list of introductory questions and voice any concerns or questions regarding their content. Even though the participants had engaged in online job seeking activities and already posted information on various sites, they could still face repercussions from their employer (if employed). As such, their identity and organizational affiliation remained confidential throughout the data collection, analysis, and reporting processes.

Strict confidentiality was maintained, ensuring that personally identifiable data were kept private from the public and other participants in the study. Data were collected and stored in a manner to ensure confidentiality and security. Participants were assigned cover identities for use on any public media or document, with a document providing a crosswalk between cover and actual names. Interviews were captured using a digital recording device. After the recordings and notes were transcribed into a text format, the resulting documents were stored on a computer equipped with keyword and biometric access safeguards. The files themselves were contained within encrypted, hidden folders. The digital recordings and transcripts will be maintained in a secure environment for seven years, at which time the digital data will be shredded using software that will meet or exceed Department of Defense security standards and hardcopies will be destroyed using a shredder.

CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

This chapter presents the analytical process used and results obtained from this exploratory qualitative inquiry regarding those factors that influence the degree and type of personal information revealed by job seekers, as they search for employment opportunities. It provides a description of the sample, the methodological approach, and how the methodology was applied to data analysis. It then presents the data and provides the analytical results. The chapter concludes with a summery regarding the answers to the research question and recaps the primary themes.

The Study and the Researcher

The purpose of this study was to investigate those factors that influence the extent and type of information job seekers would reveal about themselves within social networking communities while looking for employment opportunities. Specifically, it answered the research question: “What factors influence the level of detail and type of personal information job seekers divulge when seeking employment opportunities via online social networking?” Answering this question involved examining motivations for using online social and professional networks, privacy considerations when releasing information, awareness of site policies regarding user privacy and information storage/usage, general attitudes towards disclosing personal information, and considerations involving risk versus reward from revealing personal information.

Using purposeful sampling, data were collected via interviews conducted over the Internet. Interviews were recorded after obtaining the users' permission and then manually transcribed into Microsoft Word formatted documents. Transcriptions were then compared with the audio recordings to verify their accuracy. Once verified, the transcripts were coded and analyzed.

During the past four years, the researcher has followed the rise of social media, specifically as a means for his job-hunting and career advancement. He has established accounts on LinkedIn, Facebook, Google+, and Twitter for the purpose of developing his professional network, increasing awareness of his personal brand, and investigating employment opportunities (both full time and temporary). As a user of social media, the researcher has developed an interest in the attitudes and practices of others regarding privacy and self-disclosure as they use career orientated websites and communities to discover their own opportunities.

Description of the Sample

For this study, the researcher used purposive sampling to select participants based upon their experience using social media to discover job opportunities. This section describes the participants' demographics and presents profiles for each one.

Participant Descriptions

For this research, the unit of analysis was individual. The sample included only those who were between the ages of 21 and 65 and had the requisite level of experience with social networking. To qualify for the study, participants had to have at least one account among the following Internet sites: LinkedIn, Facebook, Google+, or Twitter. Participants had to have used their account for seeking employment opportunities, not

engaging in purely social, nonprofessional activities. Additionally, they had to have actively utilized social media in their employment search for at least six months and shared personal information with at least one online community. The participants could be employed not seeking work, employed seeking work, self-employed seeking work, or unemployed seeking work.

The selection process consisted of multiple stages. The researcher contacted LinkedIn and Google+ group owners and requested permission to post recruitment notices in their group's forum. Once granted permission, the researcher posted notices explaining the nature of the research and the steps required for participation. Simultaneously, the researcher posted notices in a personal LinkedIn timeline and broadcasted them to his connections. To those who responded, the researcher e-mailed a preliminary questioner that included demographic and qualifying questions and an informed consent letter. The following sections (together with Table 1) provide information regarding each of the study's participants.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Participant	Gender	Age	Employment Status	Seeking Opportunities
P1	Male	62	Self-Employed	Yes
P2	Female	54	Self-Employed	Yes
P3	Female	60	Employed	No
P4	Male	46	Employed	Yes
P5	Female	57	Self-Employed	Yes
P6	Male	40	Self-Employed	Yes
P7	Female	34	Unemployed	Yes
P8	Male	64	Employed	Yes
P9	Female	25	Unemployed	Yes
P10	Female	31	Employed	Yes
P11	Female	26	Employed	Yes
P12	Male	34	Unemployed	Yes
P13	Male	31	Unemployed	Yes
P14	Male	29	Employed	Yes

Participant P1. The first participant is self-employed and currently seeking a new assignment. He uses a combination of traditional job boards and social media to search for engagements. He works as an independent contractor through his Limited Liability Company (LLC) and is open to full-time, part-time, and temporary opportunities. While he uses Internet job-hunting sources, a majority of his engagements are through staffing agencies. He has consistently used LinkedIn for one and a half years and Dice for 10 years to search for assignments.

Participant P2. The second participant is self-employed and currently on an assignment. She uses a combination of social media and an industry specific job board to search for opportunities. She works as an independent contractor and is looking for full-time, temporary assignments. She has used LinkedIn for 10 years and Proposal Café, a job site for those involved in developing proposals for local, state, and federal contracts, for eight years.

Participant P3. The third participant is a full-time employee who recently used social networking to facilitate a recent job transition from one company to another. Before returning to full-time employment with her previous employer, she worked as an independent contractor after being laid-off. She also has a current Department of Defense (DoD) security clearance. She has used LinkedIn for the previous 10 months.

Participant P4. The fourth participant is a full-time employee who is currently seeking a new opportunity. He has used LinkedIn for three and a half years. He has an active DoD security clearance.

Participant P5. The fifth participant is self-employed and currently seeking a new engagement as an independent contractor. If possible, she would also accept full-

time employment. Her employment strategy is to begin work as a temporary employee (independent contractor) and then transition within the company to full-time employment. She uses a combination of social media and traditional job boards for seeking opportunities. She has simultaneously used LinkedIn, Indeed.com, and Linkup.com for the past six months.

Participant P6. The sixth participant is self-employed and currently working on a full-time assignment. As a one-person firm, he is constantly seeking new engagements while developing his client list. He has used LinkedIn for five years, Facebook for four years, and Google+ and Twitter for one year.

Participant P7. The seventh participant is currently unemployed and seeking full-time employment. While seeking a permanent position, she works temporary jobs as an independent contractor. She uses social media as her primary means for finding full-time employment and staffing agencies for her temporary assignments. She has used LinkedIn for two years and Twitter for one year.

Participant P8. The eighth participant is a full-time employee who has been looking for new employment during the past year. He has used LinkedIn for five years.

Participant P9. The ninth participant is currently unemployed and seeking full-time employment. She is very active within a variety of social media communities and has used LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter daily for one year.

Participant P10. The tenth participant is a full-time employee who is currently seeking new employment. She has spent her career in the public sector, serving in the military and federal government. Having five years of experience with LinkedIn, she is currently using it to investigate a transition from the public to private sector.

Participant P11. The eleventh participant is a full-time employee who is currently seeking new employment. She has used LinkedIn for six months and Twitter for three months. She has also posted her profile on Google+, but she has not been very active with that account.

Participant P12. The twelfth participant is currently unemployed and seeking full-time employment. He has used LinkedIn for approximately five years.

Participant P13. The thirteenth participant is currently unemployed and seeking full-time employment. While searching for full-time employment in the legal field, he is also a member in a band. As such, he uses LinkedIn to investigate opportunities in the legal profession and Facebook and Twitter to promote his music career. He has used LinkedIn for three years, Twitter for three years, Facebook for 18 months, and Google+ for 11 months

Participant P14. The fourteenth participant is a full-time employee who is currently seeking new employment. He has used Facebook exclusively in his employment search during the past year.

Research Methodology Applied to Data Analysis

Coding of the transcripts involved a multiple stage process. The researcher organized the material from the transcripts into board topics, assigning each excerpt to either a predefined or newly created category. The data were sorted, reviewed, and coded twice, once by participant and then by question. This process increased the probability that all relevant categories would be identified and coding would be applied consistently throughout the sample. Also, the researcher coded with naiveté in that he remained at the surface level of the material, as to not allow any background or accumulated knowledge

regarding the subject to influence his decisions regarding data classification. Staying at this level during the coding process prevented the researcher from coding what he wanted to find or thought he would find. After finishing the initial coding, the researcher revisited each category to determine whether finer levels of granularity existed that warranted having the excerpts further divided into subcategories (Foss & Waters, 2007).

After coding, classification, and verification had been completed, the researcher sorted and rearranged the categories until a framework emerged that satisfied the following criteria:

- All major categories derived from the sample were included
- A coherent relationship existed among the categories
- A reasonable degree of inference was evident between the schema and the categories it encompassed
- New insights and understandings were produced
- Material seen in the data was accurately captured

Once combined and presented within this explanatory framework, the categories (as a whole) provided the answer to the research question (Foss & Waters, 2007).

Presentation of Data and Results of Analysis

Description of the Case

The purpose of this exploratory qualitative inquiry was to examine those factors that influence the degree and type of personal information revealed in social networking sites, as people look for employment opportunities. This research used a case study approach to investigate how concerns regarding one's privacy influence the level of content they provide and their interactions with fellow community members.

Prior to the advent of Web 2.0 technologies, job boards such as Monster.com, Careerbuilder.com, and Dice.com served as the primary gatekeepers between people seeking employment and organizations wishing to hire them. As yet another example of the Internet's dynamism, the emergence of Web 2.0 facilitated the growth of OSN, first primarily as a means of connecting with friends (e.g., MySpace), but later as a tool for career advancement (e.g., LinkedIn). The growth of career oriented, social networking sites provided active communities in which potential employees and employers could meet directly without the necessity of third party, static gatekeepers. However, increased opportunity brings additional responsibility, as community members must now recognize the privacy risks associated with OSN, determine their tolerance for privacy risk, and decide what (if any) risk mitigation strategies they would employ. These decisions may be reduced to one fundamental question: "How do I determine the level of personal information to reveal within these online communities and during interpersonal exchanges?"

The participants interviewed during this study used online social networking as the primary tool for finding employment opportunities and advancing their career. Their OSN toolkit included sites such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Google+, and Twitter and their associated communities, groups, or forums. Online social networking also represented the venue through which the researcher discovered and contacted these participants.

Direct Interpretation

Using direct interpretation, the researcher examined each transcript several times. Prior to reviewing the material, the transcripts were sorted according to participant and then by question in order to present the researcher with different perspectives.

Additionally, the researcher used word frequency analysis to identify key words used by the participants in their responses, as well as each word's context within the discussion. From the readings and analysis, the researcher identified several single instances that revealed the participants' thoughts, feelings, and attitudes regarding those factors that influenced the level of information they were willing to divulge while seeking employment.

In one instance regarding privacy, a participant lamented that the concept of maintaining one's privacy while online was laughable. This participant's attitude was that any personal information posted online is immediately and forever available to anyone who has the time and resources to access and retrieve it. The risk of having personal information revealed does not always arise from the actions of a malicious individual. In an instance related to privacy concerns, a participant felt that regardless of a site's expressed privacy policy, it not only collected data regarding one's personal demographics, preferences, and browsing history, but also made that information available to unknown third parties.

Given that one's privacy may not be guaranteed when participating in professional, social networking communities, their members have found these sites to be useful as a means of identifying opportunities, pursuing leads, and obtaining employment. In an instance regarding site usefulness with respect to job-hunting, one participant compared the communities to online Rolodexes. He related an example in which he was contacted by a past associate concerning a potential employment opportunity. This exchange eventually resulted in an interview and a job offer.

While participants recognized their personal information might not be as secure as they were led to believe, they still saw value in using social networking for career advancement. In an instance involving the benefits of online networking, one participant expressed how posting professional information online opened her to numerous employment opportunities to which she would not otherwise have been privy. In an associated instance regarding the benefits of sharing information with members of online communities, a participant stated his belief that sharing would result in his gaining the attention of others interested in meeting people with his experience, leading to the development of new relationships and potential employment opportunities.

Even when the benefits of online networking and data sharing were evident, one's willingness to establish a relationship or divulge personal information was not without boundaries, ones formed primarily by trust. In an instance involving the criteria used for establishing connections, one participant limited her online communications to family, friends, and colleagues, people whom she trusted. By limiting her interactions to those with whom she was familiar and who were already knowledgeable regarding her background, this participant mitigated those risks associated with disclosing information to strangers with unknown agendas.

The manner in which one manages informational boundaries during interactions with other parties influences the degree of one's self-disclosure. In an instance involving reciprocity, one participant established clearly defined rules for providing personal information: he provided the same level of information to them as they provided to him. He clearly believed the exchange of information between parties should be equal.

Categorical Aggregation

For categorical aggregation, the researcher employed open coding to label instances and create categories. During coding, the researcher compared new instances to those previously discovered to ensure labeling integrity. As similar, meaning-rich instances appeared, the researcher assigned them to a category that encompassed their properties and dimensions. Each category was given a name that reflected its general essence. The researcher added new categories as required during the coding process to accommodate instances that did not fit into the original list. Table 2 displays the categories of meaning that were identified by the researcher during open coding.

Table 2. Categories of Meaning

ID	Category Name
C1	Boundary Management
C2	Connection Criteria
C3	Fairness of Exchange
C4	Influence of Trust on Self-Disclosure
C5	Information Networking Benefits
C6	Information Privacy Attitudes
C7	Information Privacy Concerns
C8	Information Privacy Definition
C9	Information Privacy Risks
C10	Information Sharing Benefits
C11	Interpersonal Self-Disclosure
C12	Online versus Offline Sharing
C13	Site Activities
C14	Site Usefulness

Within Case Analysis

Having identified categories of meaning, the researcher incorporated axial coding to reconstruct the data into an explanatory framework. During this phase of coding, the researcher moved from inductive to deductive analysis by reorganizing data, as connections were made between the previously identified categories, and combining

them as appropriate to create core categories, often creating parent-child relationships during the process. Throughout this stage of review, the researcher considered the casual conditions revealed by the participants, as he formulated the core categories. Table 3 identifies the core categories and their associated sub-categories.

Table 3. Core Categories

ID	Category Name
CC1	Connection Criteria
CC2	Information Privacy
CC2 (a)	Privacy Attitudes
CC2 (b)	Privacy Concerns
CC2 (c)	Privacy Definition
CC3	Interpersonal Self-Disclosure
CC3 (a)	Boundary Management
CC3 (b)	Fairness of Exchange
CC3 (c)	Influence of Trust on Self-Disclosure
CC3 (d)	Online versus Offline Sharing
CC4	Professional Networking Sites
CC4 (a)	Site Usefulness
CC4 (b)	Site Activities
CC5	Professional Networking Benefits
CC5 (a)	Information Networking Benefits
CC5 (b)	Information Sharing Benefits

After completing open and axial coding, the researcher used selective coding to provide the final layer of categorical abstraction. During this stage, the researcher used the integrated set of core categories and their sub-categories to develop a list of themes (T) and patterns (TP) that addressed the research question (see Table 4).

The researcher used meaningful instances drawn from each participant to support his within-case analysis. The following narratives and participant quotations illustrate the themes and patterns that arose from the data.

Table 4. Explanatory Schema–Themes and Patterns

Theme/Pattern	Name
T1	Job seekers Define Online Privacy Differently
TP1 (a)	Privacy Lost
T2	Job seekers Have Privacy Concerns
TP2 (a)	Attitudes towards Online Privacy
T3	Job seekers Find Networking Sites Useful
TP3 (a)	Site Activities
T4	Job seekers Obtain Benefits from Professional Networking
TP4 (a)	Benefits from Networking
TP4 (b)	Benefits from Sharing Information
T5	Job seekers Establish Criteria for Making Connection
T6	Job seekers Have Standards for Interpersonal Self-Disclosure
TP6 (a)	Online versus Offline Sharing
TP6 (b)	Boundary Management
TP6 (c)	Influence of Trust on Self-Disclosure
TP6 (d)	Reciprocity - Fairness of Information Exchange

Note. Research Question: “What factors influence the level of detail and type of personal information job seekers divulge when seeking employment opportunities via online social networking?”

Theme T1: Job seekers define online privacy differently. Before initiating the examination of a phenomenon, one should first attempt to define it. With respect to online privacy, the participants offered a diverse range of definitions. Taking a somewhat textbook approach, P5 defined online privacy as, “The right or mandate of personal privacy concerning the storing, repurposing, provision to third-parties, and displaying of information pertaining to oneself”. A couple of participants associated privacy with tracking. For example, P1 believed “any site that doesn’t start inserting cookies has got a pretty good level of privacy”. Participant P4 added that privacy was the limitation of a “third party’s or vendor’s ability to track where I have been, what I have done, and what I’ve viewed”. Moving to a more general definition, P7 felt that online privacy was “just being able to keep your private information private and away from the public, and when you want to share, being able to have that ability to share”. While their viewpoints regarding privacy differed, these participants believed in the potential for online privacy.

However, several participants expressed their doubts whether privacy of one's personal information existed in today's online, social websites and communities.

Theme pattern TP1 (a): Privacy lost. Some participants believed that while privacy may exist as a concept, in reality it has been lost. Participant P1 lamented that "online privacy is . . . probably . . . in existence in name only. You have to be very careful about what you provide and where it goes". Participant P3 expressed his opinion even more succinctly, "online privacy is kind of a joke. I really don't trust them". Participant P7 added support, expressing "I really don't believe there is such a thing". Participant P8 expounded on the loss of privacy:

What we've got today, especially with the headline news, is they're using almost every single main portal to snoop on people without their consent The IRS, NSA, and all the rest of them . . . have no business invading the privacy of people . . . in these types of social sites I don't think anything's going to protect you today.

Participant P6 summed up this pattern when he stated, "if I wanted privacy, I wouldn't put it online."

Theme T2: Job seekers have privacy concerns. Participant P1 expressed his general concern regarding how a site's privacy policy may lull one into a false sense of security, "There is a level of complacency that if you accept what the site says about its privacy protocol or privacy policy, you're kind of led to believe that, hey, they're ok; well, they're not okay". Other participants voiced concerns regarding the ability of a social networking site or third party to access personal data and use it without their knowledge or consent. Participant P2 focused on her lack of control over personal material, "My concerns would be that there aren't enough restrictions . . . that I can control, and therefore, too much of my personal information is seen by outside sources

that I have not selected to be in my circle”. Participant P3 voiced her concerns regarding data collection, “My concern would be if they start to pull in very specific information”. She continued to describe how this concern affected her interactions with other community members, “You lose any sense of really feeling free to endorse, you know, someone’s comment if you feel that they are going to be gathering that data”. Participants with security clearances were especially cautious when determining how much information they should reveal online. For example, P4 stated, “I’m very concerned that I’m revealing too much about what I do and where I do it. So, I am very careful in what I say and what I share”.

Not all concerns involved repercussions that could occur in the virtual world, as some voiced wariness regarding how loss of privacy online could carry over into the physical realm. For example, P13’s main concern stemmed from his desire for physical security and awareness of social media’s ability to “let people you don’t know, know where you are [physically]”. He was worried that people using the photo tagging and geolocation capabilities of social media could “piece together where you are, putting the pieces of the puzzle together to see where you are” and either physically confront him or take advantage of his absence.

Theme pattern TP2 (a): Attitudes towards online privacy. While participants voiced concerns with respect to maintaining their privacy when online, they also realized that information had to be divulged during their search for opportunities. Several participants described the manner in which their attitudes towards online privacy influenced their actions regarding self-disclosure. For example, P5 stated:

I am very careful, what I post, what I display, and providing my opinions. It does matter what a person says over the Internet and it can be used against a person, or taken out of context. I provide information with caution. Any information I provide I am prepared for it to travel to several people out of my network. I think about and limit the use of instant messages and social networking sites.

When posting to networking communities, P9 filtered her information, providing only the details she believed were necessary and appropriate:

So my general attitude is that . . . [is] this piece of information . . . really too personal that I would never give [it out]? But . . . personal information that is relevant to make a point . . . relevant to explain something, or to find a job or . . . whatever it's useful for . . . then I don't fear displaying it.

Participant P6 also filtered information, limiting it to material that was appropriate for seeking employment opportunities and could not be “exploited”.

Participant P2 used a two-step approach towards revealing information. As an example, she posted generic information for general consumption and then required a personal request before divulging additional details. As she explained, “Because I’m trying to put information . . . out there, I don’t want to hide it. But, I feel that the information [I publish] . . . on LinkedIn is generic enough; . . . if people want specific information, they have to contact me”.

In addition to deciding what to post, participants such as P3 also considered privacy issues involving photographs and photo tagging. Regarding her LinkedIn profile, P3 stated:

It's got a photo of me and it's a fairly current photo. What I did do, what they told me for facial recognition and data mining purposes, is not to have a front view. So, I have a side view, so that hopefully someone can't . . . copy my picture and then connect it to maybe a university . . . a possible age, [etc.] . . . There are just so many ways they can put everything together to get your full ID. So, I try to do some protective measures, but I suspect that you can't . . . [protect yourself] entirely.

Sometimes attitudes towards maintaining one's privacy are based upon external influences, such as holding a security clearance. P4 understood the risks associated from revealing too much information concerning his current and previous work experience, "If I do not maintain the security of my information and I were to leave the DoD arena, it would be difficult to get back. Where I am right now, that kind of sharing of information is taboo. Period". Participant P4 continued by explaining the consequences he could face by revealing too much detail online, "I could lose my clearance, lose everything, [and] be disgraced in the community. I could be really hosed". As such, he controlled the level of detail he provided online as to neither jeopardize his present position nor future opportunities within the cleared environment.

While displaying an open attitude towards self-disclosure, P7 applied her rule of "common sense" when deciding what to publish:

Everything that's out there, I'm okay with people knowing. So, I'm okay with people knowing what contract I supported. I'm okay with people knowing the companies I've worked at. I'm okay with people knowing my best practices and past experience. I don't put anything out there that will be detrimental and that will come back and hurt me, so the methods that I use are just common sense.

Theme T3: Job seekers find networking sites useful. While not discounting the risks to their privacy, job seekers find professional networking communities a valuable tool in their quest for employment opportunities. For example, participant P1 expressed very favorable opinions regarding his experience with LinkedIn:

I find that first of all, there's a sense of professionalism, true professional in the job postings. They're serious, and they generally don't post those offerings in any other place, at least, not that I've found. Yesterday, I had a face-to-face interview with this organization and this person I spoke with nodded in knowing agreement about the professionalism. Apparently they just refrain from posting anything in any other place, and primarily, seek applicants that are highly qualified, or that come to them by recommendations or networking, referrals, if you will.

He specifically commented on the usefulness of the corporate information provided as a part of LinkedIn's job postings:

There's a lot more information available to you on LinkedIn, and there's a little more explanation on the organization sometimes. For instance, the person who created the LinkedIn posting will also give you a link to their website, or to their internal website, so you can really be prepared to interview with them, or to respond with them with a directed resume.

Participant P10 used social networking to "research potential positions . . . [and] potential companies in which I am interested in [order to] see what they do, the work culture of the organization . . . [whether] it fits my criteria, and if I am even eligible to apply". Participant P2 used online communities not only to search for job opportunities, but also to keep abreast with industry trends: "I job search, I e-mail, and I gain insight into local, well not just local, but industry blogs and information streams". In addition to looking for opportunities, P5 used them to gain insights into the companies where her connections have worked, as well as to search for education and training opportunities. She found them "very useful and easy to use" and "often they have led to a job or teaming relationship". Participant P7 felt that communities, such as LinkedIn, provide an effective means for companies to become acquainted with his skills and experience: "They could look at your information, your feeds, and get a chance to know you even before they interview you".

Several participants found their current employment through online social networking. For example, using LinkedIn as his online Rolodex, P6 found an opportunity through an acquaintance:

Where it has been useful is as a kind of Rolodex. So, in my current job I was contacted by a guy I worked with in the past and we both lost each other's contact information. But, he contacted me through LinkedIn. I got an interview and a better job than I had at the time.

Likewise, P9 found LinkedIn to be extremely useful in finding employment opportunities, sometimes from unexpected places. She recounted a story that occurred in 2012 when “a CEO from a Belgium company called me out of the blue, and said, ‘Ok, I found your profile on LinkedIn and I am really interested,’ and I had a job offer from it . . . and that’s how I got my job in Belgium”.

Theme pattern TP3 (a): Site activities. Participants conducted various activities while engaging with online communities. For example, P4 used online networking to

Maintain a professional network with multiple international associates, [to include those located in] Austria, Australia, various places in the UK, Germany, [and] one or two in Africa. I maintain my professional network through LinkedIn, and a couple other avenues. I have [also] increased my professional network with my academic associates through Lycos.

Participant P7 recently “created a company site” on LinkedIn. She was actively ‘looking at LinkedIn more for business leads” and as a means for keeping track with “what’s going on in industry”. She also maintained her presence in various LinkedIn groups: “I am a part of about 15 groups; I’m active in about seven of them”. Participant P8 has also been active in Linked groups. As he reported, “The two groups that I am most actively engaged in are [those for] Shipley and the APMP”. Skilled in the use of social media, Participant P9 conducted numerous activities as a member of LinkedIn and Twitter communities:

With LinkedIn . . . I keep my profile pretty open, because . . . when you are looking for a job, keeping everything up to date is very important. And, I make sure that I am aware of what is going on in the industry. I also share articles I am interested in and I take part in discussions . . . on LinkedIn. Also, I connect with the fellow students from college communities, people I discovered on Twitter or About Me and if I find these people interesting . . . eventually I’ll add them on LinkedIn. Then, I [look for the web] pages of a company [where] I want to work . . . I try to connect with the people working in these companies, so it’s a way for me to know how it is to work in these companies and also to let them know that I am interested in them. And finally, I use my LinkedIn account to apply to

positions On Twitter, I share articles and news that are relevant to my audience and I try to build relationships with people and companies. I also [follow] . . . companies I want to work for I also [follow] . . . recruitment agencies and job websites. And, I also apply with Tweets. If I see a company looking for [those with experience in] digital marketing and literature, I will send them a tweet saying, “Hi, I am interested. Here is the link to my resume, and [the link] could [lead to my] LinkedIn [profile].” I also use Twitter to apply for jobs directly.

Theme T4: Job seekers obtain benefits from professional networking. All participants shared their work experiences through publishing their online profiles, interacting in online communities, or posting in microblogs (e.g., Twitter). Participation in these online activities required time and effort; therefore, it led to an expectation of receiving benefits, a return on investment. While obtaining new employment was their obvious goal, these participants also derived other explicit and intrinsic benefits from networking and sharing their experience, opinions, and stories.

Theme pattern TP4 (a): Benefits from networking. While discovering new opportunities was an important aspect of their social networking, the participants cited additional benefits they had gained via their participation in professional networking sites and membership in online communities. These benefits ranged from social (e.g., staying in contact with associates) to professional (e.g., discovering models for career development).

Participant P7 found that social networking was “a way to stay in contact with people. [Using online networking,] I found people I worked with back in 1999, whereas, that was unrealistic years ago. When pretty much after you lost one’s phone number, it was hard to find them again”. Participant P11 felt the same way, as he used social media to “find long lost friends and . . . [through social media] establish contact with them”. He stated that social media represents a “good platform [from which] to stay connected and

also understand what they are doing, because it's a small world and we could be working together again". Participant P9 used online networking to get "in touch with people whom I would never have met in life". She continued,

I've never been to places such as China, Australia, or the Middle East [where some of my connections live], so there is no way I could have met them in real life. I see benefit from social media in exchanging ideas with people from around the world.

In addition to finding a new job, P6 combined his location near Seattle with LinkedIn's networking capabilities to meet "a lot of top Microsoft .NET people". By connecting with senior Microsoft employees, P6 found seasoned IT people whom he could use as role models for developing his own career: "I get [the] benefit of seeing where other people have taken their careers. [I] use LinkedIn to see who is successful in the software consulting space. It's helped me determine whether or not a particular career path would be advantageous".

Participant P5 used LinkedIn's networking capabilities for "recommendations, [and] endorsements, [as well as a means for] staying connected". She also used the site to promote the various services she offered through her company. Participant P8 also used LinkedIn to facilitate business opportunities:

Sometimes I'm negotiating with several companies . . . bringing them on board for an opportunity in the federal space. [Having a presence in a professional networking site affords me the opportunity to share] that I have won over forty competitions in the last ten years, [an accomplishment that] is not something a lot of people can say they have done. [Sharing accomplishments like this one] helps me to convince them that I'm a good person. I look at it as marketing, almost as a billboard.

Participant P4 used his professional connections as resources for solving technical issues he faced at work. He stated,

I send out little blurbs [regarding] technical concerns or thoughts I might have to other associates . . . and I get professional feedback . . . in a much more expedient fashion [than I would have by looking up the answer myself]. Sometimes, I throw questions out there to lots of different people and I get back information [that is] useful. [For example, sometimes] you're doing a back infrastructural design for an architecture and you know technically this and that, but the reality is, it doesn't always work the way it says, So, it's nice to get the personal feel from someone who might have used or deployed it.

Theme pattern TP4 (b): Benefits from sharing information. While sharing information is instrumental for exploring career opportunities, participants gained other, more intrinsic benefits from their disclosures. For example, P3 gained “a sense of connectedness”. As she explained,

I spend too many hours each day in an office, working on projects [and] in teams where [I] may or may not like the people . . . or have shared interests [Participating in online communities] . . . is a means in which [I can share interests with likeminded people], even though [I'm] not in the same room, city, or even country with them.

Participant P6 believed that sharing resulted in “getting people to think about you [and keeping] people up to date with what you are doing.” Participant P9 felt that one benefit from sharing her information was that

Interested people are going to see it and they will get in touch with me and start a new relationship It can be a professional relationship, or for some of them just talking about ideas that they have on life or the world, or whatever. If you don't have this kind of information online, there would be no chance for you to meet these people.

Exemplifying a key tenant of networking, P7 stated that “when I share my experiences, or best practices, I feel that it may help someone else”.

Theme T5: Job seekers establish criteria for making connection. Each participant established standards by which they accepted connections from others within their online websites and communities. They based their selection criteria upon whether the participant knew the person either from their personal life or through work, an

associate or friend referred the person, or the participant wanted to connect for professional networking.

Participant P1's criteria was based upon his personally knowing the party: "I got to know them, first of all. If someone just sends me something out of the blue, I don't respond. Because, you don't really know who they are, what they're doing, or what they're up to". Likewise, P3 and P5 also filtered their connection requests. P3 stated, "I try to [limit my connections to my] circle of friends, and then friends of friends". P5 limited her connections to "family, friends, and colleagues [whom] I trust". Before accepting a connection, P7 preferred having met the individual, or at least having received a recommendation regarding them from a friend:

I like to know them. I'd like to have met them once or to at least have had a discussion with them before I start having people to connect to me. I'm pretty big on that. My criteria is that I would like to know you, or know a little bit about you before I connect, or maybe have a recommendation from a friend, saying, "This is a good person for you to work with", something like that.

As with the majority of the participants who expressed their preference for either knowing the individual personally or receiving a referral through a friend, P8 stated,

I usually will want that first degree of awareness in terms of have I worked with them before, or have I heard their name through other people. If they're closely connected to folks that are within my network or within my company, I usually feel fairly safe.

Other participants were willing to ask for or accept connections from those in the same industry. For example, P2 stated,

When I reach out to individuals, it's usually for work related purposes, to be connected with individuals in the industry who would enhance my networking circle. [I also look to connect with] industry leaders. [I'll accept a connection request] if I know them, if I'm in a group with them, if they have been referred to me, or [if they] are linked one or two steps from someone in my direct networking circle.

Participant P6 also accepted connections from those whom he did not know personally, providing they were in the same or related industry: “if they’re in kind of the same industry or any industry that we can do work together, or a friend of mine, than I connect”.

While not requiring personal knowledge for a connection, P4 nevertheless performed her own research and used her intuition before accepting connections:

If they don’t look flaky, I sometimes go in and see if I can find information. Or, I look at their profile page and I check out their other associations or contacts. Then based upon [my research], really to be honest, based upon the way I’m feeling at the time, I grant contact.

Theme T6: Job seekers have standards for interpersonal self-disclosure. As demonstrated by their readiness to establish criteria for deciding with whom they were willing to connect, the participants also established guidelines with respect to the degree of information they were willing to divulge. Generally, the participants were willing to disclose the same level of personal information online as they did in their resumes, or during a job interview. Some, like P1 designed their online profiles to mimic their resume: “I go into chronological detail of what I was doing, the kind of thing that a potential hiring manager would be interested to see [in order to determine] whether you are a good match for what [they] might need”. Participant P3 even referred to her online profile as her resume: “I have a resume in LinkedIn.” Participant P7 also treated her profile as an online resume: “you normally have your typical this is what I do, here are the jobs I worked on, [and] this is the timeframes that I worked with them, etc. ... and those are the only things I’ve shared on LinkedIn”. Additionally, P7 treated her posts as if she were answering interview questions:

I think before I start writing or think before I respond. I look at everything I'm responding to as if I'm in an interview. How would I respond or what would I say? You always want to come off confident. You don't want to seem negative. You want to encourage and give information and help others. So, I feel like in an interview that's the kind of thing you would give. Being open and honest and yet not giving too much.

Participant P6 augmented his profile with posts describing his professional and academic activities: "I talk about what I'm doing professionally, [for example] the products that I've been working on and some of the previous jobs I've had. I'll do posts about cloud computing, which is what I'm studying right now in school". When discussing his professional work or academic studies, P6 tries to "keep the focus" of his posts "on [his] profession".

In contrast to the online activities of P7 and P6, P3 revealed "very little, very little" in her posts. P3 stated that she was always

Very careful not to say anything negative, even when I connect to people and say, "it's so good to hear from you. How are you doing? Send me an e-mail to my personal e-mail." I'll tell them [my e-mail address,] so I wouldn't have any kind of real discussion [publically while online.]

Those with their own business focused on promoting it rather than themselves. For example, P2 provided only "basic, minimal personal information," while focusing on describing her company's capabilities and activities. As she stated, "I try to put as much information about my business on my page as possible without being too self-promoting". Another treated himself as though he were a business. Participant P8 constructed his online profile "like a data sheet for me as a person, [like] what a company will have. [It's] a data sheet (or a specification sheet) for the company level, so I look at it as an asset from that perspective".

Participant P5 represented those who post only a minimal level of detail, providing “only enough information to intrigue the reader”. She maintained a two-tiered approach towards releasing information by publishing relatively high level material online and releasing details regarding her work experience and associated projects to colleagues whom she respected and with whom she desired to connect. Participant P4 also dealt “in generalities only” when revealing information about his experiences, even though he understood that he may have paid a price: “I know it has cost me jobs . . . because they want specifics and they say, ‘well he was just too general’ and that’s just too bad. Well that’s all you’re going to get from me”. As he continued:

It comes down to what I share . . . [and that] depends [to whom] I’m talking . . . [and] what I’m talking about. If they start saying, “well we need to know this to get you a job”, well guess what? I terminate [the] connection because, I obviously don’t want a connection to these people.

When addressing the question regarding whether an increase in the time required to find an opportunity would result in their revealing additional personal information, many of the participants voiced the same response. Participant P1 replied, “No”. Participant P3 said, “No”. Participant P4 replied, “I’d be tempted, but I still wouldn’t do it”. Participant P5 responded, “I would not”. Participant P6 said, “No. It’s always been really been easy for me to find a job”. Participant P7 stated, “No . . . my posting on LinkedIn is extremely detailed, so the only other thing someone would ask me would be references”. Participant P8 responded, “Not any more than I have displayed today”. Contrary to these replies, P2 stated that she would only reveal additional professional information.

Theme pattern TP6 (a): Online versus offline sharing. The participants clearly differentiated between online and offline information sharing. Two key properties of

online communication that influenced their level of self-disclosure were its global reach and its permanency.

The participants understood the global nature of online media and adjusted their communications accordingly. For example, when posting to an online venue, P3 understood that anything she published could “spread to the ends of the earth”. Therefore, she kept her online postings generic, “just typically warm fuzzies”. When communicating offline, she was significantly “more open to discussing things”. When sharing online, P6 would “think more about what I [was] writing because it’s seen by different people”. Whereas, his offline discussions were more “free flowing” and less structured.

The participants also realized they were leaving a permanent and traceable record of their online musings. When asked about online communications, P4 responded that, “the biggest concern is if it’s online, it’s trackable and it’s on record somewhere. You can definitely be held accountable, even if it’s inadmissible as evidence per se, it’s out there. It’s not going away”. However, with offline exchanges, he felt more secure regarding the privacy of his discussions because when “we verbally say something (unless it’s being recorded or tracked in some way) it’s gone. It becomes hearsay”.

Theme pattern TP6 (b): Boundary management. With respect to self-disclosure and boundary management, each participant separated their personal and professional lives, as they connected in online communities. This separation was demonstrated in the manner by which they used the two most commonly mentioned networking sites, Facebook and LinkedIn. The participants were careful to separate their social and professional lives accordingly: Facebook for social networking with friends and family and LinkedIn for professional networking and career advancement. For

example, P6 differentiated between those activities he considered “normal” and those he shared with his artist wife:

I guess there is a line, kind of [line between] what is normal . . . what everyone does, and what might be a little bit risky. [If] it’s beyond what’s normal, I probably won’t post it on my professional network. I would [post] it on my friend [site, but] not work site.

Participant P8’s standard for self-disclosure was based upon whether the information was already a matter of record, part of the public domain. As such, he set his boundaries for disclosing information accordingly:

If it’s public domain, if it’s something of public record like, my college degree, my credentials, my training, [or] my band performances, [then] I don’t have a problem putting it out on a public site. Something that is highly personal is not going to appear on that site. It’s more of a discretionary decision.

As part of her online job search strategy, P9 carefully monitored the information she shared within her networking communities. While she attempted to be open with her connections and followers, P9 also established boundaries regarding the level of information she was willing to share: “I don’t publish that much information because I’m looking for a job. So, I just want people to know [that I am available and looking], So, I say openly that I’m available”. She disclosed enough detail to ensure that “everybody understands [my background]”. She didn’t “want to start a conversation with a company and finish it with well, you know, we didn’t understand each other”.

Theme pattern TP6 (c): Influence of trust on self-disclosure. While some participants were naturally more open and trusting than others, all voiced strong feelings regarding the influence that trust had on the amount of information they revealed within their online communities, especially to relatively unfamiliar parties. For example, P1 believed that sharing detailed, professional information online involved

a situation where you have some trust, either you know the organization or you've had conversation with colleagues about the organization, or there's something . . . that gives you a level of comfort in dealing with those people and providing a lot of stuff that you would not ordinarily provide.

P1 continued that he is very selective regarding the level of detail he provides, even with companies with which he was familiar:

Even with companies that I have some sense of, I'm still very selective. Until I talk to a real person, or until I've had at least a phone interview with them, I'm very reluctant to give a lot of detail. There has to be some compelling reason and something you can see that there is truly a benefit that can arise from giving that kind of information.

Being a relatively private person, P3 especially felt the necessity to develop at least a minimal relationship before sharing details regarding her work experiences. P3 stated that unless she got to "know people well," she would be even less willing to divulge information online than in person.

While P6 stated that he was "fairly trusting," his actions told another story:

I feel there's not a lot of harm they can do to me because they only have my e-mail address. I'm not giving them a lot of information that I feel that could harm me. So yes I'm limiting what I give them . . . [until] I feel I [can] trust these people and [believe that they are] who they say they are.

While P9 said she was a "trustful girl," she also tempered that trust with a sense of realism. Her motto for dealing with people both online and offline was, "Trust people when you share harmless information about you, but distrust everyone else when it comes to sensitive information". For example, when interacting with her Twitter community of followers, she was extremely careful as to what she published:

When it comes to the community members, well on Twitter, for instance, I would be very, very careful of the message that I publish, because it is very easy to be retweeted hundred and thousands of times from anyplace in the world and then there is no way to confirm that kind of information. So, I often say, in French we have a saying, "You have to turn your tongue seven times before you speak", well for Twitter that would be the same. You have to turn your fingers seven times

before you tweet. That would be my idea of what you have to do online. Be very careful of what you do.

Participant P7 was very clear regarding her level of trust when dealing with people online: “I don’t trust them . . . a lot of those members and groups, you don’t know them. And you don’t know what data they are collecting . . . talking to you, trying to be your friend and your advocate”. Having her own consulting business, P7 was especially sensitive to revealing information to those with whom she was not familiar:

I feel that there are a lot of people out there trying to do the same things that I’m doing, which is trying to be an independent consultant, and try to use information against you, “Oh, I don’t like what she wrote. Let me respond and write it this way, so I can sound more articulate”. I just don’t believe that people are always good.

Even when looking for new business opportunities, P7 was weary as to the amount of information she was willing to divulge. She only felt comfortable sharing information with those whom she had developed a personal or professional relationship.

Theme pattern TP6 (d): Reciprocity - fairness of information exchange. With respect to fairness in the exchange of information, the participants generally agreed that the level of detail shared should be equal between the parties. For example P1 expected to be treated as an equal when dealing with recruiters and companies. He stated that he gives “as much information as they do. For instance, if I responded to a recruiter and they are not willing to divulge whom their representing, I don’t give them much information . . . because they’re not reflecting a professional attitude”. While P4 expressed a more open-minded approach, he also maintained control over the information he shared:

It’s not a big problem. But, I feel that if I receive information from someone, I’m going to give them something. I’m careful about what I give them, but I’m going to give them something. And, if I don’t normally worry about if they’re getting information from me, they’re getting it from me because I chose to give it to them. Or they need it for something specific, and I give it, I don’t care. Now,

personally, if it starts mainly impacting my life and all that stuff, then I just stop giving it.

Participant P9 expressed her concept of reciprocity in the context of a relationship that should exist between an applicant and the recruiter:

In terms of job search, recruitment for me is like any other relationship and there is a contract. It should be a win-win relationship based on trust and respect; so, there is no reason to hold any piece of information, as far as that piece is not confidential. For me it is a relationship where you exchange ideas and you question each other . . . For a job, I try to sell myself, but at the same time if I find it disheartening [when] a company is not open and not willing to sell themselves to me.

Thematic Synthesis

This case contained a sample of 14 participants whose inputs were synthesized through a process of open, axial, and selective coding that resulted in the identification of six themes. These themes addressed attitudes regarding online privacy, concerns regarding online privacy, the usefulness of networking sites and communities, the benefits gained from networking, criteria for making connections to other community members, and factors that influenced self-disclosure. The following sections provide direct quotes from the data that are used to elucidate each theme, as well as an interpretation regarding their meaning with respect to the research question.

Theme T1: Job seekers define online privacy differently. While the participants expressed different views regarding the definition and nature of online privacy, they felt that, in theory, online privacy should exist. However, as revealed in TP1 (a), they also voiced their opinions that while online privacy was a noble ideal, it was also illusionary. The following direct quotes represent their attitudes towards issues regarding online privacy.

- “Online privacy is something that is probably only in existence in name only.”

- “If I wanted privacy, I wouldn’t put it online. So I don’t really, I don’t really define privacy.”
- “Too much of my personal information is seen by outside sources.”
- “Online privacy’s kind of a joke.”
- “They don’t always tell you some of the new things they’ve done to their site and all of a sudden it’s launched on you and then it behooves you to try to figure out what’s going on. I really don’t trust them.”
- “I don’t believe in online privacy.”

Theme T2: Job seekers have privacy concerns. Though participants were generally skeptical towards the existence of online privacy, they were still concerned regarding the possible ramifications from their lack of protection while participating in career-oriented websites and communities. The participants were cognizant that a misspoken phrase, or one taken out of context, could have serious consequences regarding their chances of finding employment. As demonstrated in TP2 (a), the participants’ concerns were influenced by their inherent attitudes toward online interaction and their own attempts at risk mitigation. Their concerns and attitudes are reflected in the following quotes.

- “I am very careful, what I post, what I display, and providing my opinions. It does matter what a person says over the Internet and it can be used against a person, or taken out of context.”
- “I’m very concerned about I’m revealing too much about what I do and where I do it.”
- “I provide information with caution.”
- “You lose any sense of really feeling free to endorse someone’s comment if you feel that they are going to be gathering that data.”
- “Working in cleared environment can cause issues, especially if you give too much information.”

- “I think it’s a necessary evil. As long as I’m in the work world, I really need to be in LinkedIn and stay in LinkedIn.”
- “I’m very open about it. The personal information I display should be information that I know is nothing that cannot harm me.”
- “I use social media, I display a lot of information that I use only for professional purposes.”

Theme T3: Job seekers find networking sites useful. Despite their concerns regarding issues of online privacy, job seekers find professional networking sites and their associated communities useful for making connections, developing relationships, and finding employment. As revealed in TP3 (a), participants used their professional communities to develop global networks with those in their industry, create banding opportunities for their businesses, research prospective employers, and apply for employment. The following quotes describe some of their feelings about and uses for online networking.

- “LinkedIn is very, very, good. I find there’s a sense of professionalism, true professional in the job postings.”
- “There’s a lot more information available to you on LinkedIn.”
- “I gain insight into local, well not just local, but industry blogs and information streams.”
- “I find them to be very useful and easy to use. Often they have led to a job or teaming relationship.”
- “I think the groups are helpful in being able to see what other people are talking about.”
- “I maintain a professional network with multiple international associates.”
- “I was able to look into different professional opportunities.”
- “I am looking at LinkedIn more for business leads and what’s going on in industry.”

- “I use my LinkedIn account to apply to positions.”

Theme T4: Job seekers obtain benefits from professional networking.

Through their activities online, job seekers realize benefits, as they seek employment opportunities, share their experiences and industry knowledge, and help others. As referenced in TP4 (a), the participants used professional networking to stay in contact with colleagues, find associates with whom they had lost touch, make new acquaintances with other professionals in their industry, and explore employment opportunities. As seen in TP4 (b), online, professional networking also allowed participants to help others by sharing their experiences, technical knowledge, industry observations, and employment leads. The following quotes reflect the benefits realized by participants from online networking.

- “I got a job from it.”
- “I get benefit from seeing where other people have taken their careers.”
- “It’s helped me determine whether or not a particular career path would be advantageous.”
- “It’s a way to stay in contact with people.”
- “Getting in touch with people that I would never have met in life ... [and] exchanging ideas with people from around the world.”
- “When I share my experiences, or best practices, I feel that it may help someone else.”
- “The benefit from sharing my information is that interested people are going to see it and they will get in touch with me and [I can] start a new relationship with them.”

Theme T5: Job seekers establish criteria for making connection. While participants recognized the benefits gained from growing and interacting with their online network, they were selective in deciding with whom they would connect. One of the

ways in which the participants protected their online privacy was to establish guidelines with respect to whom they would associate and share information. The following quotes reveal their feelings regarding the selection of network connections.

- “If someone just sends me something out of the blue, I don’t respond.”
- “When I reach out to individuals, it’s usually for work related purposes, for to be connected to individuals in the industry that would enhance my networking circle.”
- “If I know them, if I’m in a group with them, if they have been referred to me, or are linked one or two steps from someone in my direct networking circle.”
- “I try to leave it within the circle of friends, and then friends of friends.”
- “Family, friends and or colleagues I trust.”
- “I like to know them. I’d like to have met them once or to at least have had a discussion with them before I start having people to connect to me.”

Theme T6: Job seekers have standards for interpersonal self-disclosure.

These participants understood the inherent risks involved when sharing information through the Internet, even when using sites and communities specifically developed for professionals seeking career opportunities. To mitigate these risks, they established standards for themselves with respect to the level of information they were willing to provide. Several factors influenced the establishment of these guidelines. As shown in TP6 (a), the participants were very aware of the differences between online and offline sharing of information, specifically those involving permanency, global distribution, and personal accountability. Theme pattern TP6 (b) demonstrated that the participants established and followed fairly strict boundary management principles, ensuring separation between their private and professional lives. They understood the difference between social and professional networks and published material accordingly. As

revealed by TP6 (c), trust played a significant influence regarding the level of information the participants were willing to disclose. Relationships that were initially closed before the parties connected online or developed during the course of numerous online interactions over time demonstrated greater degrees of trust than during first contact situations. This trust facilitated greater levels of self-disclosure between the parties during online interactions. Many of the participants also considered reciprocity with respect to the level of information shared between them and other parties when deciding how much material they should reveal. As seen in TP6 (d), their perception regarding the fairness of information exchange influenced the degree of information they were willing to divulge. The following quotes address those factors that influenced the amount of information the participants were willing to reveal while searching for career opportunities online.

- “I’m very careful what I say because you can always be held accountable later on.”
- “I talk about what I’m doing professionally.”
- “Until I talk to a real person, or until I’ve had at least a phone interview with them, I’m very reluctant to give a lot of detail.”
- “Online, I feel you’re always vulnerable.”
- “Once it’s out there on the Internet, it’s out there for all time.”
- “My personal information needs to be an arm’s length away from the business.”
- “Online it can spread to, who knows, the ends of the earth.”
- “If it’s on line, it’s tractable, it’s on record somewhere, and you can definitely be held accountable.”
- “I’m limiting to the amount I feel that I can trust these people.”

- “I don’t trust until I know you.”

Naturalistic Generalizations

The participants believed that online privacy was an oxymoron. Therefore, they clearly understood the risks associated with revealing either personal information as they pursued employment opportunities. Participants were also aware of the benefits they received through their involvement on career-oriented websites and in career focused communities. While they appreciated that information must be presented to and exchanged between themselves and other parties, they established guidelines and practices to mitigate privacy related risks. These measures included establishing criteria for selecting with whom to connect, understanding the differences between online and offline information sharing, constructing informational boundaries between their personal and professional lives, relying on trust as a guide to self-disclosure, and expecting fairness with respect to the exchange of information.

Summary

This study was developed to answer the research question: “What factors influence the level of detail and type of personal information job seekers divulge when seeking employment opportunities via online social networking?” To answer this question, 14 participants were interviewed and their responses were analyzed using open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. This process resulted in the emergence of six themes that reflected their feelings, attitudes, and practices regarding the concept of online privacy, their concerns involving online privacy while participating in career oriented websites and communities, the usefulness of networking websites, their derived benefits from participating in professional networking activities, their criteria for

selecting and accepting networking opportunities, and those factors that directly influenced their level of self-disclosure and the information they revealed.

The participants realized that completely protecting their privacy while searching for employment opportunities using social networking was problematic at best. They also understood the risks associated by revealing personal information, as they created profiles, participated in community interactions, and networked with independent and corporate recruiters. However, they also appreciated the potential benefits that could be derived from using online professional networking based upon the social media framework. Therefore, they embraced social media as a tool for career exploration and advancement.

Still, the participants tempered this approach with risk mitigation strategies and practices that influenced the degree of information they were willing to divulge. They began by understanding the difference between online and offline information sharing. They used this knowledge to filter the material they published in their profiles and posted within online communities.

The participants controlled the flow of information during online interactions by selecting those with whom they would share the material. While the participants would connect with unknown parties if they perceived a potentially beneficial relationship, they preferred to establish online relationships with people whom they either knew previously or were referred by known associates.

They maintained strict boundaries between their personal and professional information. While participants may have provided some personal information online, the

level was no more than that found on a typical resume. With respect to their professional information, participants treated their profiles as online resumes.

During interactions with community members, participants revealed only the level of detail with which they felt comfortable given the situation. As such, one of the primary factors influencing the level of disclosure was a participant's particular nature and attitude towards privacy in general. People who were naturally private revealed relatively little, while those who were open revealed more.

The participants' level of trust when dealing with specific individuals influenced the amount and type of information they shared. They were more willing to divulge information in greater detail and scope with those whom they had developed a trusting relationship; others received more cursory treatment.

The perception of fairness regarding the exchange of information also influenced the degree and type of material shared by the participants. Those who felt the exchange was equitable were more likely to divulge information than those who felt they were being taken advantage of or used by the other party.

Using a case study approach, this research solicited feelings, attitudes, beliefs, and practices with respect to those factors that influence the sharing of information, as people use social media for career advancement. Material was gathered through online interviews conducted with 14 participants who had experience in using social media for job-hunting. Their direct input served as the source for the development of themes that explained these factors. Chapter 5 will provide a discussion and interpretation of the themes that were identified in this chapter.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter culminates the research effort that was conducted to identify those factors that affect the extent and type of information revealed by job seekers, as they weigh their desire to maintain a degree of privacy while engaging in online activities with their need to provide the level of information necessary to attract potential employers. Interviews were conducted with 14 participants who provided material related to their experiences, feelings, and attitudes regarding the relationship between online privacy and self-disclosure, while using social media as a tool for exploring career opportunities. These data were reviewed and analyzed through three stages of coding from which six identifiable themes emerged that, when viewed holistically, answered the study's research question.

This chapter provides a comprehensive introspection regarding inferences, deductions, and possible ramifications with respect to individual privacy and online job-hunting. It is organized into the following sections: summary of the results, discussion of the results, implications of the study results, limitations, recommendations for further research, and conclusion.

Summary of the Results

This research examined feelings, attitudes, beliefs, and experiences that influence the degree and type of information job seekers reveal, as they search for opportunities within social networking websites and communities. Specifically, it answered the study's

research question: “What factors influence the level of detail and type of personal information job seekers divulge when seeking employment opportunities via online social networking?”

The audience for this research is the community interested in social exchange theory, specifically issues regarding privacy within online communities. This study contributed to an increased understanding of the theoretical construct of personal privacy by examining the decision making process job seekers undergo as they determine the level of information they reveal in the hope of enhancing employment opportunities against potential risks, such as having their information misused. By examining those factors that influence the degree of personal information one divulges while pursuing activities related to career advancement, this study contributed to the understanding of patterns regarding the revelation of personal information and its privacy implications when social media is utilized for self-promotion.

The findings from this research provided insight into the decision making process regarding the amount of personal information one reveals while using Internet sites for professional networking. These results provided information as to how comfortable users were in revealing personal information in a public forum. As such, site owners may use this research as an instrument for adjusting their site’s design to promote increased levels of user safety, perhaps leading to users’ increased willingness to share personal information. If users feel safe, they may tend to contribute more. The willingness of a site’s users to share information is a fundamental factor leading to its growth, as it promotes increased content, keeping the interest of current members and attracting new ones.

The review of the literature investigated four areas of interest relating to this research: social exchange theory, online interpersonal awareness, information privacy, and reciprocity and boundary management. These aforementioned areas were examined within the context of self-disclosure. Social exchange theory provided the context for examining those factors that influence the trade-off between the desire to advance one's career against the necessity of protecting personal information during online interpersonal communications and relationship building. The literature review indicated that online interpersonal awareness is fostered within environments that allow for shared workspaces where people may communicate, collaborate, and work together. Therefore, those participating in career oriented websites and networking communities should experience enhanced interpersonal communication, resulting in increased opportunities for career advancement. According to the literature, once an individual's personal information has become digitized, it becomes essentially irretrievable, leaving digital footprints wherever they travel throughout the social media landscape, a lasting record of their published thoughts, opinions, observations, interactions, and experiences. The literature suggested that within online communities, the establishment of interpersonal boundaries is vital, as they provide a sense of order and enable community members to identify and convey their role to others within the group. Additionally, the establishment of rules for boundaries and reciprocity reflects the attitudes of those online regarding privacy, personal awareness, and self-disclosure.

This research used exploratory qualitative inquiry, an approach that involves the methodical collection, organization, and interpretation of recorded material derived from in-depth interviews. The researcher selected this approach, as it facilitated his

understanding regarding the manner in which people dealt with issues involving privacy, while searching for career opportunities online. Following the tenants of this methodology, the researcher utilized purposeful sampling to enlist a relatively small number of participants. In this case, the sample consisted of 14 individuals who had utilized social networking as a tool for their career advancement. To collect data, the researcher conducted personal interviews that consisted of a series of semi-structured, open-ended questions regarding the manner in which privacy considerations influenced their willingness to divulge personal information. Once the interviews had been completed, the researcher segregated the data into discrete elements of meaning suitable for analysis and then evaluated them for any inter-relationships. This evaluation process involved open, axial, and selective coding and resulted in the emergence of six themes.

The findings from this research showed that those using online social networking for career advancement understand that protecting their privacy while searching for employment online is problematic at best. However, they also realize that information must be shared in order to accomplish the objective that facilitated their venture into online social networking. They mitigate privacy risk by connecting with people whom they already had relationships or to whom they were referred by associates. They establish guidelines and boundaries regarding the level of information they are willing to disclose according to the feelings, attitudes, and beliefs gained through their experiences while using social media. Additionally, the research suggested that the level of one's self-disclosure is based upon their trust in the party with whom they share information to keep their confidence and in the media outlet they use to protect their privacy, both from technological and policy perspectives.

Discussion of the Results

As shown in Chapter 4, input from 14 participants was gathered, analyzed, and synthesized, resulting in the identification of six themes and nine associated patterns of meaning. When aggregated, these themes present a holistic perspective regarding the factors that influence the type and degree of information those using social media for career advancement are willing to reveal, as they develop professional networks and seek new opportunities. This section interprets the data that was presented in the previous chapter.

Online Privacy: A Lack of Trust

If there were a single, overarching theme that emerged from this research, it would involve the concept of trust and how people respond when they believe that trust has been violated. When someone sends a letter through the postal system, they trust that it will not be opened, its contents will not be examined, copied, and stored in a gigantic filing system, and it will be not resealed and sent to the addressee, all without their knowledge. They also trust that its contents will not be dissimilated to unknown third parties, or used to track their behavior. They trust that their privacy will be maintained and protected, as they share information with others.

However, the Internet is not the postal service. E-mails, site profiles, community posts, and Internet Relay Chat are not letters and packages. As a government agency has recently suggested, the loss of privacy is the price of admission to the Internet. While each of the participants may have defined Internet privacy differently, they understood that with respect to their dealings with career oriented websites, communities, and other third parties, privacy was an illusion.

This illusion was shattered when participants realized their vulnerability to technologies that facilitated tracking of their online activities, aggregation of personal information, and data mining for extracting individual characteristics. Unfortunately, according to the participants, invasive technologies were not the only cause of privacy loss.

Another source of angst resulting from their perceived loss of privacy originated from the very websites through which the participants published their information and interacted with fellow community members. Regardless of their formal declarations detailing policies for protecting user privacy, some participants exhibited little faith in the ability of a site's management to protect their privacy from external malicious intent. Furthermore, the seemingly incessant changes regarding not only a site's privacy policy, but also the mechanisms for controlling privacy settings only added layers of confusion. While some participants attempted to keep up with the changes, others did not and accepted whatever defaults were in place, thereby in effect giving control of their privacy over to the site's management team. In cases where customers acquiesced and accepted the default setting, one may argue that the company won the battle for control over their information, a potentially valuable commodity. Perhaps an even more revealing revelation, participants expressed doubts whether they could trust the sites themselves not to collect and sell their demographic and behavioral information to commercial parties.

Seeking career opportunities involves exchanging information with other parties. While a necessary component of job-hunting, providing information to relatively unknown parties also raised privacy concerns, primarily one that involved the motivation of those with whom the participants shared information. For example, one participant

expressed concern whether a recruiter was contacting him regarding a position that actually existed, or was simply trying to gather information. Another participant was unsure whether the party with whom she was exchanging information was innocently asking questions regarding her business, or trying to obtain competitive intelligence regarding her capabilities and experience.

The participants' concerns regarding online privacy were influenced by their personal experiences using social media, experiences shared by their associates and friends, and news articles describing the latest online security breach. These concerns in turn shaped their attitude regarding self-disclosure of personal information, and it was this attitude that formed the foundation of their philosophy regarding the sharing of information through career oriented, social media venues.

The participants' fundamental belief regarding the absence of privacy significantly influenced the type and level of information they were willing to share online, even when the lack of information may have prevented them from obtaining employment. While not all participants shared the same level of concern and some were more open than others to divulging professional information, all agreed that the protection of one's privacy when using social media was not guaranteed. This realization resulted in the development of personal risk mitigation strategies, as participants sought to protect themselves against the ramifications from revealing too much information to strangers.

Online Professional Networking: Useful and Beneficial

While realizing that using professional, social networking sites and communities may result in risks to their privacy, job seekers still view them as a necessary tool for

seeking new opportunities. They understand that many companies, recruiters, industry thought leaders, and associates have incorporated social media as their primary networking tool. They also recognize that social media could provide a marginally low, if not cost free marketing channel to promote their professional brand to a global audience.

As a site developed specifically for professional networking, the participants found LinkedIn to be especially useful for advertising their brand, networking with current and potential colleagues, researching industry trends, and finding opportunities. While the quality of job postings on other career boards may be questionable, one participant specifically commented on the quality and professionalism of those on LinkedIn. Other participants gave LinkedIn similar praise with respect to its networking capability, a feature that allowed them to connect and maintain relationships with recruiters and colleagues regardless of their geographic location. Participants also found LinkedIn to be a useful source of information regarding the companies they followed, allowing them to write targeted letters of introduction and prepare for interviews.

In addition to pursuing career opportunities, participants also derived intrinsic benefits from their online networking activities. For example, networking became more than a means for uncovering employment opportunities, as the participants also used their connections to exchange solutions to vexing technical challenges and serve as role models for their own career development. Additionally, online networking provided them with the potential to develop relationships outside of the workplace with likeminded people for other than professional reasons. Sometimes the participants simply needed someone with whom they could share their achievements and frustrations outside of their company. Their online associations provided participants with the freedom to share their

attitudes, feelings, and opinions without the threat of such expressions coming back to damage them (or their career) at their workplace.

So while participants understood the privacy risks associated with using social media for seeking career opportunities, they realized that its associated technologies offered an efficient and effective means to advertise their brand, expand their professional network, follow thought leaders, develop supportive relationships, keep abreast with industry trends, and research companies of interest. They also recognized that companies are increasingly using social media to support talent discovery. So, the participants had two choices regarding their participation. They could either completely protect their privacy and refrain from joining online websites and communities, immediately losing any experience based advantage by basically remaining invisible to companies, or they could at least level the playing field by establishing an online presence. In reality, they were left with little choice. However, they did not rush blindly into the fray. Instead, participants established online strategies for minimizing their risk of privacy loss while simultaneously seeking opportunities.

Risk Mitigation Strategies: A Window to Factors Influencing Self-Disclosure

One of the primary factors influencing a participant's willingness to disclose information was the closeness of their relationship with the other party. In the context of social media, this party could be a website, a community, or an individual person. While offline relationships normally take time to develop, the participants did not allow themselves the same luxury with their online connections. The immediacy and global scope of their postings and exchanges almost mandated that participants carefully select those with whom they would connect. Thus, they tended to connect with those whom

they knew offline and career sites with good reputations. Basically, they connected with those whom they trusted and the greater their trust, the more they revealed. Thus, their online activities suggested a positive correlation between trust and self-disclosure.

As discussed previously, participants established online connections for different reasons; therefore, the level of familiarity necessary for a participant to form a relationship was not uniform. Therefore, not all relationships demanded the same level of trust and or self-disclosure. For example, a participant may form a connection with an industry thought leader, not because they know them personally, but because the other party may be well known and respected in the field. As such, that person carries a certain degree of intrinsic trust that allows the participant to feel comfortable enough to establish at least an informal relationship. However, the type of information shared by the participant in this situation would not necessarily be at the same as that shared with a close associate.

The participants' approach towards boundary management influenced the type of information they disclosed. They were careful to establish clear boundaries between their personal and professional information, as well as between the levels of professional information they were willing to provide. The participants were able to compartmentalize their information and associate it with what they considered to be the appropriate social media venue. Participants made clear distinctions between what they considered social (e.g., Facebook) and professional (e.g., LinkedIn) websites and allocated their information accordingly. As such, they did not mix information regarding their private and professional lives while using social media. Therefore, when seeking career

opportunities and establishing professional networks, participants normally divulged only that information that was work related.

Even when using career oriented social media, the participants established boundaries as to how much information they would disclose, especially when developing their profiles. While the participants generally treated their account profiles as online versions of their resume, some were more restrictive. By listing only the more generic information regarding their backgrounds, they established a multistage process for revealing information, thus controlling its level and flow to other parties. Their development of online profiles serves as an example demonstrating that participants did not follow any standardized set of rules or guidelines for managing their boundaries. Each participant revealed as much detail regarding their professional lives, as they felt comfortable doing. Thus, the level of information they revealed became a very personal decision, one that was shaped largely by their attitude towards online privacy.

Another factor that influenced the amount of material participants were willing to share was their attitude towards fairness of exchange, the reciprocity of professional information. Generally, the participants expected to be treated as equals when exchanging information with recruiters, hiring managers, and other parties. Usually, participants viewed the level of detail they provided as a reflection of their relationship and shared their information accordingly. One participant phrased her view regarding reciprocity in terms of facilitating a “win-win” relationship, one based upon trust and respect between parties. Again, trust played an important role, as participants decided the type and degree of information to share, even when discussing employment prospects.

Implications of the Study Results

This research investigated those factors that influenced the type and degree of personal information people disclosed, as they sought employment opportunities using online social media. To derive the implications of this study, the researcher analyzed its results in light of the topics presented during the literature review. This section addresses the manner in which the findings from this research contribute to the body of literature regarding social media, privacy, and self-disclosure.

The first implication involves the Internet's defining characteristic, communication. At its very core, searching for career opportunities involves communication. Using OSNs, these exchanges occur between job seekers and websites, communities, blogs, recruiters, companies, colleagues, and associates. The Internet provides a global environment that makes these interactions possible and social media presents a medium specifically designed to facilitate targeted communication. The combination of the Internet's global reach and social media's ease of use provides job seekers with an extremely efficient and effective channel for promoting their brand, establishing and maintaining relationships, and seeking opportunities. While they may not use every available medium, job seekers are aware of their options and select those with which they feel comfortable and that satisfy their needs. The instant availability of multiple outlets provides job seekers with a vast array of venues thorough which they may broadcast their information, whether in the form of a professional profile, Internet chat, a tweet, a video, or a blog post. As the number of media outlets increases, whether by new technology or additional websites, job seekers will discover ample opportunities to share their brand and in so doing, increasingly share their experiences, opinions, and

advice with their community. This trend gives credence to the supposition by Krasnova et al. (2010) regarding the existence of a positive correlation between the availability of effective communication channels and the level of one's self-disclosure. One may suggest that increases in media outlets will lead to increased interactions, ultimately leading to increased levels of self-disclosure, as job seekers seek a competitive advantage via multiple broadcast channels and touch points.

The second implication reflects the use of OSNs by job seekers to develop professional networks. Using the Internet and social media to break geographical limitations, job seekers may add connections from countries around the world. They are no longer confined to soliciting members from their local chamber of commerce, as professionally oriented websites and communities offer the chance to connect globally with companies, recruiters, and leaders in their industry. Additionally, social media offers an opportunity for job seekers to connect to those with whom they have lost contact. As acquaintances change jobs and residences, personal and professional relationships are often lost. By joining professional websites such as LinkedIn, job seekers have an opportunity to search for lost colleagues, invite them to join their network, and share information regarding potential opportunities. Having recognized the capacity for social media to facilitate the growth and quality of their networks, those seeking career advancement are increasingly using professionally oriented websites and communities for developing their networks. This trend supports the assertion by Krasnova et al. (2010) that the convenience offered by OSNs with respect to establishing and maintaining relationships is their most important benefit.

The third implication is that while job seekers recognize the privacy risks associated with using social media, they understand that its potential benefits outweigh its perceived risks. While the data do not refute the suggestion by Il-Horn et al. (2007) that people will trade some of their privacy for the advantages of using social networks, job seekers operate under different conditions than those using OSNs for pure socializing. As such, this research extends examinations involving the tradeoff between self-disclosure and privacy that occurs in social networks into the realm of online professional networking. Companies and recruiters approach professional websites with an expectation that a certain degree and type of information will be provided. Those seeking employment understand they must provide enough information to attract an employer's attention and interest. As a result, the act of self-disclosure is not necessarily voluntarily, but instead serves as the price of admission for using social media to seek employment. Thus, the very nature of the process requires the disclosure of information, resulting in some loss of privacy. However, the degree of self-disclosure is not standardized; the price of admission fluctuates, depending upon the data a job seeker is willing to provide. Further research along this dynamic could investigate the level of information those seeking opportunities should provide for maximizing employer interest, while minimizing privacy loss.

The fourth implication addresses the significance of trust as a factor that influences self-disclosure. This research supports the proposal by Gefen et al. (2003) that developing trusting relationships with others is a viable strategy for reducing risk. Job seekers reduce their privacy risk by associating and revealing information to those whom they trust. They manifest this behavior as they select others to join their network. First,

job seekers connect to those with whom they are already familiar, usually colleagues in the industry or associates from companies where they previously worked. This association is the closest, as these relationships have been developed over time. Also, the presence of trust is predetermined, as job seekers personally select those with whom they wish to network. Second, job seekers network with those who were referred by people they trust. This relationship represents the next circle, as trust is inherited from the person making the referral. While this relationship may result in a higher degree of disclosure than would occur with a stranger, the referred party must still earn the job seeker's trust before the initial level of disclosure increases. Third, job seekers network with recruiters, hiring managers, and company employees with whom they wish to develop a relationship. These connections represent yet a lower circle of trust and result in an initial divulgence of information comparable to that already published online. As with referrals, these parties must earn the job seeker's trust through the establishment and development of a professional relationship. Relationships are the foundation for establishing trust between job seekers and their connections. Trust serves as the barometer that gauges the level of information job seekers disclose.

Job seekers realize that every profile, post, or comment they publish online becomes public knowledge, permanent, and traceable once they press the "submit" button. Job seekers also understand that by their very act of using social media for seeking employment opportunities, they have relinquished some measure of privacy and are vulnerable to those risks associated with this loss. However, they mitigate these risks by taking control and establishing personal standards, guidelines, and practices for sharing information. Their privacy controls directly influence the type and degree of

information job seekers divulge online. The following implications address those practices used by job seekers that influence the type and level of information they divulge while using social media.

The fifth implication involves the use of boundary management to control the disclosure of information. Job seekers establish boundaries for two primary reasons, to separate their personal and professional lives and filter their personal opinions. They establish and maintain a social/professional boundary for several reasons: restrict the availability of demographic information, separate their social and professional activities, and preserve brand continuity. This finding extends the research conducted by Xu et al. (2011) and Stanton and Stam (2002) by suggesting that boundary management is more than controlling the flow of information. Sometimes, the decision is not to have a flow, in this case a flow of information regarding social activities. Job seekers control the disclosure of their personal and professional information by adopting one of the following strategies: maintain only a professional online account that does not include any references to personal information or social activities; or, maintain two different types of dedicated online accounts, one for social activities and the other for professional. Job seekers also establish guidelines for disclosing their professional opinions. This facet of boundary management supports research conducted by Xu et al. and Stanton and Stam, who suggested that motivational factors, such as self-promotion (i.e., the expression of one's feelings) shape one's privacy boundary. Results from this study suggest that job seekers taper their opinions for two reasons, not to provide material that could support competitive intelligence activities and not to initiate a controversial line of discussion that could damage their employment prospects.

The sixth implication is that job seekers consider the fairness of exchange when determining the degree and type of information to disclose. During their online interactions with recruiters and hiring managers, job seekers use reciprocity as a control mechanism for disseminating information. Before revealing greater details than they have already published, job seekers need assurances that the parties to whom they are addressing represent a serious employment opportunity. For example, job seekers have experienced situations in which a recruiter has led them to believe they were interviewing for an existing opportunity, when in fact, the interviewer was simply gathering information or filling their interview quota. Job seekers use reciprocity to establish an informal contract with the other party to the effect that they will provide the information requested by the interviewer, providing they receive assurances that the opportunity actually exists and they are a qualified candidate. This research extends the suggestion by Lowry et al. (2011) that reciprocity facilitates social bonding to include its functions as a control mechanism with respect to the sharing of professional information during the interview process.

This research contributes to the body of literature, as it examined concepts regarding social exchange theory, privacy, and self-disclose in the context of online professional networking. It offers an understanding regarding the thoughts, attitudes, and practices of those using online social media to pursue employment opportunities, as they balance the need to protect their privacy, while sharing enough information to achieve their goals.

Limitations

This research has several limitations. While the selected methodology was appropriate for this research, aspects of its implementation may have been accomplished more effectively, leading to a richer solution. These limitations are acknowledged and addressed in this section.

The first limitation stems from the possibility that relevant follow-on questions may not have been asked during the interviews. While the questions listed in the interview guide (See Appendix) were derived from the literature review and modified during the interview process, the opportunity to delve deeper into a specific area or explore new ones may have been missed as the interviews were being conducted. One factor that may have led to this limitation was the general lack of time regarding the participants' availability for taking part in the interviews. Several of the employed participants worked on projects that were extremely time sensitive. As such, their availability was limited and their time was a valuable resource to them and their organization. As a result of this constraint, the researcher tried to address as many areas as possible within a given window of opportunity. While interview questions from the guide were always covered, an imposed time limitation may have adversely affected the ability to conduct more in-depth explorations. As a result of this limitation, material that may have provided additional detail and richness to the narratives may not have been captured.

The second limitation reflects the dynamic nature of online social networking and the Internet in general. Given this characteristic, the durability of the data is suspect. Approaches to online social networking are continuously evolving, as new technologies

increase the diversity and capability of career oriented social media and new approaches expand the manner in which it is used. Additionally, both internal and external factors may affect users' attitudes, beliefs, feelings, and experiences with respect to using online networking for career advancement. Changes in a website's privacy policies may significantly alter their users' perceptions regarding the safety and confidentiality of their information. Articles revealing exploits regarding a specific website may not only change its members' behavior, as they become hesitant to divulge information or interact with community members, but also members of other social media outlets who fear their site may also become compromised.

The third limitation concerns the use of purposive sampling, a technique that may have decreased the transferability of this study's findings. Each participant had at least six months of experience using social media for career advancement. This mandated level of expertise might have biased the sample by filtering those with less experience, thereby eliminating the attitudes, beliefs, feelings, and concerns of those who are relatively new to online social networking as a tool for job-hunting. As such, the privacy concerns and factors that influence those who are inexperienced at using this approach were not captured. This requirement also eliminated those who did not use social media for career advancement, thereby failing to capture whether privacy concerns were a factor in their decision not to use this approach.

Recommendations for Further Research

The results of this study have several implications for future research. This section will detail recommendations for research involving the following areas: (a) expansion of the sample to reflect greater diversity, (b) the influence of current events

upon privacy concerns and practices, (c) introduction of a quantitative methodology to measure the influence of each factor, and (d) modification of the methodological approach from case study to grounded theory.

To present a more generalizable solution, the researcher could extend the sample to reflect a more diverse set of demographics in terms of age, geographical location, and social media experience. In terms of age, only three of the 14 participants were in their twenties. Only one participant represented a European point of view with respect to the research question. Therefore, a more concerted effort could be made to enlist participants in their twenties from both the United States and other global regions. An inclusion of participants from currently underrepresented generations who grew up in an era of ubiquitous, Internet based communications could present a richer narrative regarding privacy, self-disclosure, and social media. Also, the addition of participants from foreign countries could provide additional insights regarding attitudes towards and expectations of personal privacy from other cultures. Additionally, the constraints regarding social media experience could be relaxed, thereby allowing the inclusion of feelings, beliefs, and attitudes from those new to the use of social networking for career advancement. The introduction of less experienced participants could allow for an examination of philosophical and behavioral pattern changes, as users become more experienced with the intricacies of job-hunting and social media.

This research presents a snapshot in time regarding those factors influencing self-disclosure within online, career focused websites and communities. Personal attitudes and practices change with the inclusion of new technologies and revelations stemming from current events. Interviews for this study were conducted as initial news reports regarding

the National Security Agency's PRISM program surfaced. These stories highlighted the practices and hinted at the technologies used by a governmental agency for collecting what was thought to be private data from various Internet sources. Follow-up research could be conducted in the near future to determine whether these disclosures affected the attitudes and practices of job seekers, as they used social media venues.

While the qualitative methodology used in this study provided an explanatory narrative regarding those factors that influenced self-disclosure, it did not reveal their degree of influence upon the subjects' actions, while they shared information on websites, in community forums, or with other job seekers. The inclusion of a quantitative based survey instrument would allow participants to indicate the degree that each factor influenced their beliefs, feelings, attitudes, and practices, as they considered the desirability and impact of revealing personal information with respect to their concerns regarding privacy.

As the participants' actual words, experiences, and behaviors have been gathered, documented, and analyzed using exploratory qualitative inquiry, the foundation has been established for the introduction of grounded theory. As grounded theory lends itself to the investigation of goal driven behavior within the context of social interaction, this approach serves as an appropriate methodology to continue this study. The relatively sparse research and theoretical framework regarding this topic, the participants' goal driven activities (seeking career opportunities), and the interactive, social context in which their actions take place (websites and online communities) are characteristics of this study that are well served by this design. Using grounded theory could expand

current theory regarding issues of personal privacy when using online social media for career advancement.

Conclusion

Those seeking employment opportunities must confront two trends that are increasingly in conflict with each other. First, organizations are progressively using social media to search for and recruit talent. Recognizing this movement towards online recruitment, job seekers are following the corporations and enlisting professionally oriented social media venues in their search for employment. Job seekers are using the traditional tools of social media to promote their brand to a global audience. Second, privacy on the Internet is becoming an increasingly scarce commodity, if it even still exists. Appreciating that the use of social media mandates a certain level of self-disclosure regarding their professional lives, those seeking opportunities online must balance their desire to maintain a degree of privacy with the necessity to reveal enough pertinent information to attract the attention of employers.

This research examined those factors that influence the degree and type of information those seeking employment reveal during their online activities, whether the material is transmitted through such media as a profile, community forum, blog, video, or tweet. All of the participants interviewed during this study understood that they were responsible for maintaining the level of privacy at which they felt comfortable. They enforced their privacy by establishing practices and conditions (i.e., the factors) under which they shared information, a set of guidelines that served as their privacy risk mitigation strategy.

The foundation of their strategy involved the establishment of criteria for accepting connections into their professional network. The criteria for sharing information incorporated the strength of each connection's relationship to the participant. Each connection was treated individually and the level of detail provided increased, as the relationship grew and the level of trust improved. Boundary management also served as an important factor with respect to the amount and type of information a participant shared. The participants' use of boundary management was evident in two areas. First, they steadfastly separated their social and private lives when using social media. When using professionally oriented websites and communities, they focused solely on their business activities and experiences. Second, they filtered their online comments when expressing opinions regarding various business oriented topics and their own experiences. They were very careful not to express opinions that may have been deemed controversial and hence, potentially damaging to their career aspirations. Those with their own businesses were also careful not to reveal information that may have been used to seek a competitive advantage by others in the same industry. Finally, participants observed reciprocity regarding the exchange of information. They expected a reasonably equal exchange with respect to the level of detail they provided when interacting with other parties. While at times, participants may have selected to reveal more information than they received, that choice was theirs.

This research extended the body of knowledge regarding social exchange theory, online privacy, and self-disclosure. As previous research has focused on the social aspects of social media and issues regarding online privacy, this study integrated these topics and extended the context into the area of professionally oriented social media.

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APPENDIX. INTERVIEW GUIDE

This Interview Guide provides a list of questions that will be asked during the data collection interviews. Other questions may be asked based upon the participant's responses.

- Regarding career advancement, what are your reasons for joining online, social networking sites?
- What activities do you do within these sites?
- What are your feelings regarding their usefulness? Ease of use?
- How do you define online privacy?
- What are your concerns regarding privacy as you participate in online social networking?
- Are you aware of any specific risks? Which ones?
- Do you see any difference between sharing information online and offline?
- How familiar are you with the site's personal privacy policies?
- How does the site's privacy policy and settings affect your online activities?
- Are you aware of the controls available that allow you to adjust your privacy settings?
- If you changed the site's default privacy settings, what prompted you to do so?
- What are your criteria for establishing connections to others?
- What personal and professional information do you disclose on your profile? In your posts?
- What benefits do you gain from using online social networking?
- What benefits do you derive from sharing personal and professional information?
- Have you shared any information that you later regretted disclosing? If so, what?
- Are you aware of potential consequences from revealing personal information? If so, what?
- What part does trust in your fellow community members and in the site's ability to guard your privacy play in your decision to reveal personal and professional information? How does your level of trust affect the amount of information you are willing to reveal.
- What methods do you use to protect your online identity?
- Given the need to be both open and self-protective, how do you manage your interpersonal boundaries within online communities?
- How much personal information are you willing to disclose if you believe such disclosure would increase your chances of finding a job?
- How would your answer change as the time to find a job increased?
- What are your views regarding fairness during the exchange of information. In other words, how much information should the other party divulge, given the level of information you provide to them?

- How do you determine whether the returns gained from disclosing personal information outweigh the risk of compromising your privacy?
- Generally, what factors do you believe influence your willingness to reveal personal and professional information when using online social networking?
- What is your general attitude regarding disclosure of your personal information through the use of self-disclosure technologies, such as such as blogs, instant messaging, and social networking sites?