

Discussion Paper for SRHE Conference 2014

Employability, Enterprise and Graduate Careers (EE) Research Domain

Title: How do I decide on a Year in Industry (YINI) Placement: Assessing the Credibility of YINI Opportunities: A Qualitative Content Analysis Approach

Horton-Walsh Sarah¹, Montano Sarah², ¹*Coventry University, UK*, ²*University of Birmingham, UK*

The need for employability skills in graduates remains a concern (Wilton 2008). Recently, Woolcock (2014) argued that companies are having difficulty filling graduate vacancies as students do not have the required employability skills. Since the Dearing Report in 1997 (NCHIE, 1997) employability has become a key tenant and central aspect of university education. One way of achieving this is to offer a YINI as part of degree programmes. Yet, there are no formal criteria that students can use when they apply for these important placements as Bullock et al (2009) argue.

Therefore, our rationale, for this research, is that there is little practical guidance for students when they evaluate placement offerings. Each company offers their own information, often pitched to attract the best students. In recent years specialist websites have been developed to help students e.g. Rate my Placement (RMP). These also have their own agenda and often duplicate company information. Whilst, they claim to be independent there is little evidence to support this independence. Thus, how do students know that placement information is credible?

Source Credibility

Source credibility is defined by Kelman (1961) as the degree of confidence the receiver has that the source can provide an expert and/or objective opinion. Source credibility is the way in which the message is interpreted by the students. Petty and Tormala (2004) note, that source credibility can be defined as the message source's perceived ability to provide accurate and truthful information (e.g., Kelman & Hovland, 1953).

Work placements are considered in the context of experience products and experience attributes as those that require consumption to be validated (Wright & Lynch, 1995). This definition suggests some degree of risk for students to engage with placements. They will have some pre-awareness and knowledge of work placements which is likely to impact the effect of source credibility on attitude and intentions (Wu and Shaffer, 1987). Being more sceptical of experience attribute claims (Ford, Smith & Swasy, 1990), students may be uncertain about the specific claims that are made. If the credibility of the source is perceived to be low the arguments presented in the message are likely to be discounted by the respondents (Eagly and Chaiken, 1975).

Students look to the credibility of the message source as a quality signal to increase persuasion by lowering counter argumentation and enhancing believability in the message claim. Research from the marketing literature suggests that the use of employee testimonials on recruitment websites to inform and attract potential employees may be more credible and persuasive (Geisheker, 2001). In the online environment students may want to reduce the risk they take when they trust information (or similarly: trust that the other person gives out correct information (Lucassen et al, 2012). This may, for instance, be the case when the consequences of incorrect information are high (i.e., making important, but wrong, decisions based on the information). Established or credible companies or brand names can serve as cues of reassurance in online environments (Kim & Choi, 2012).

Qualitative Content Analysis as a Methodology

Whilst, content analysis is a research methodology that originates from the nineteenth century (Harwood and Garry 2003) it is a method that is directly applicable to a key contemporary issue of how to analyse placement communications (Evans 1991). When students are considering a work placement they have a variety of sources to use. These sources can be information intense. Indeed students may face contradictory communication e.g. positive information about a placement from the company website and a negative placement review on Rate My Placement. Content analysis allowed the researchers to view exactly the same information as students considering a work placement and to categorise, describe and quantify these myriad communications (Elo and Kyngas 2007).

Qualitative content analysis was selected as in order to establish the credibility of such messages as the authors needed to interpret and deconstruct the communication tools and messages used by the population of interest (Krippendorf 2013). This study used conventional content analysis (Heish and Shannon, 2005) due to the underexplored nature of the subject matter. Importantly, conventional content analysis enables emergent insights to develop from the research, appropriate as the objective of the research was to view the credibility of such communications from the perspective of the students (Heish and Shannon 2005). Conventional content analysis allowed the understanding of the social construction of meanings (Sayer 1992). This is because social phenomena depend on the meanings that we give them. The process of content analysis begins with description, this description allows concept development and enabled the researchers to establish connections between each concept leading to fresh description (Dey 1995). By using content analysis it was possible to draw inferences from placement communications placed within the students' context (Krippendorf 2013). Context is critical to the message that is interpreted by the students e.g. peer-to-peer communication or hierarchical company to student messages. The source of such messages directly affects their credibility. Context is important, as the understanding the context of such communications is the key to meaning. The meanings can then only be conveyed if the context is understood correctly (Dey 1995).

Methodological Strategy

Prior to the content analysis an assessment was made of the industry and company destinations of YINI students from two universities. From this list a relevant sample (Krippendorff 2013) was selected of companies. Each researcher selected 10 companies. Each company's information was then analysed on Rate My Placement website and booklet, the company's own website and Prospects website. These were chosen as they represent the students' most likely sources of information. The coding framework was based around Ohanian's (1990) three key dimensions of source credibility perceived expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness. These dimensions were established by coding the findings using Krippendorff's (2013) units of analysis: physical, syntactical, referential and thematic.

Conclusion

This research was important, as we have identified the source, nature and frequency of the messages. The content analysis was a vital first stage in a longitudinal research project. Our next stage is to interview students to establish their understanding of such messages.

References

- Bullock, K., Gould, V., Hejmadi, M. and Lock, G. (2009). "Work placement experience: Should I stay or should I go?", *Higher Education Research & Development*, 28 (5), pp. 481-494.
- Dey, I. (1995). "Qualitative Data Analysis: A User-Friendly Guide for Social Scientists", London: Routledge
- Eagly, A.H. and Chaiken, S. (1975). "An attribution analysis of the effect of communicator characteristics on opinion change: The case of communicator attractiveness", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 32, pp.136-144.
- Elo, S. and Kyngas, H. (2007). "The Qualitative Content Analysis Process", *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 62, 1, pp. 107-115.
- Evans, M. (2013). "Men in Counseling: A Content Analysis of the Journal of Counseling and Development and Counselor Education and Supervision 1981-2011", *Journal of Counseling and Development*, October, 91, pp. 467-474
- Ford, G., Smith, D.B., & Swasy, J.L. (1990). "Consumer skepticism of advertising claims: Testing hypothesis from economics of information", *Journal of Consumer Research*. 16, pp. 433-441.
- Geisheker, P.C. (2001). Writing job advertisements that attract top talent: Job descriptions. August 15 2001. Retrieved June 13 2014, from <http://www.vault.com>

- Harwood, T. and Garry, T. (2003). "An Overview of Content Analysis", *The Marketing Review*, 2, 479-498
- Heish, H. and Shannon, S. (2005) "Three Approaches to Content Analysis", *Qualitative Health Research*, 15,9, pp. 1277-1288.
- Kelman, H. (1961). "Processes of opinion change", *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 25 (Spring), pp. 57– 78.
- Kelman, H. C., & Hovland, C. I. (1953). "Reinstatement" of the communicator in delayed measurement of opinion change", *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 48, 327-335.
- Kim, S. & Choi, S.M. (2012) An Examination of Effects of Credibility and Congruency on Consumer Responses to Banner Advertisements. *Journal of Internet Commerce*, 11:139–160, 2012.
- Krippendorff, K. (2012). *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Lucassen, T., Muilwijk, R., Matthijs L. Noordzij, M.L., & Schraagen, J.M. (2012). Topic Familiarity and Information Skills in Online Credibility Evaluation. *JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR INFORMATION SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY*, 64(2):254–264, 2013
- National Employer Skills Survey for England (2009); Key Findings Report
NCHIE (1997) Higher Education in the Learning Society [Report of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education: The Dearing Report] Norwich: HMSO
- Ohanian, R. (1990). "Construction and Validation of a scale to Measure Celebrity Endorsers' Perceived Expertise, Trustworthiness, and Attractiveness", *Journal of Advertising*, 19(3). pp. 39-52.
- Petty, R. & Tormala, Z. (2004). "Source credibility and attitude certainty: A metacognitive analysis of resistance to persuasion", *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 14(4), pp.427-442.
- Sayer, A. (1992). "Method in Social Science: Revised 2nd Edition", London: Routledge.
- Wilton, N. (2008) Business graduates and management jobs: An employability match made in heaven? *Journal of education and work*, 21 (2). pp. 143-158. ISSN 1363-9080
- Woolcock, N. (2014) "Employers are struggling to find 'work- ready' graduates", *The Times* May 28th

Wright, A., & Lynch, J., Jr. (1995). "Communication effects versus direct experience when both search and experience attributes are present.", *Journal of Consumer Research*, 21, pp. 708-718.

Wu, C., & Shaffer, D. R. (1987). "Susceptibility to persuasive appeals as a function of source credibility and prior experience with the attitude object", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 52, pp. 677-688.

|