Forecasting on LinkedIn-based recruitment in the audit sector: a scenario study.

Author: Robbin-Jan Haar
University of Twente
P.O. Box 217, 7500AE Enschede
The Netherlands

ABSTRACT: As LinkedIn emerged as the most popular career networking site, questions started to rise about the effectiveness for recruitment of the platform. More people entered the pool of applicants, but the quality of the applicants did not seem to rise. The future is uncertain; therefore a scenario study is the chosen approach for this research. To clarify future directions, a scenario-matrix is developed based on two variables: the extent to which quantifiable measurements are implemented in LinkedIn (recruitment metrics) and the extent to which other recruitment channels disrupt LinkedIn (recruitment disruption). As the Big Four audit firms are popular and their LinkedIn usage is sophisticated, the focus is on the audit sector. Experts in the field of recruitment and LinkedIn within the Big Four are interviewed to gather knowledge on practical implications. With their information and the developed matrix, three different scenarios are explored by means of a narrative. The first scenario is marked by low recruitment metrics and high disruption, expecting to be an end-phase for LinkedIn. The second scenario is marked by high recruitment metrics and high disruption, expecting to be a difficult scenario for LinkedIn as this implies competition. The third scenario is marked by high recruitment metrics and low disruption, expecting to be the best for both LinkedIn and recruitment. The narratives help to enlighten the future situation and implications the future might have, enabling organizations to adapt and providing the academic world with a clear set of directions to which LinkedIn-based recruitment may go.

Supervisors:
Prof. dr. T. Bondarouk
Dr. S. van den Heuvel

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PROLOGUE

Predicting the future has captivated the minds of many throughout the centuries, and is still appealing to many these days. Not by future foretelling through a crystal ball, but by significance found in academic literature and research. That is what this research is about: building key elements to make realistic predictions about the future. Not just any future, but sound predictions on the future of LinkedIn for recruitment.

INTRODUCTION

Founded in 2003, LinkedIn emerged as a social network site (SNS) for professionals to re-connect with past and present colleagues, power your career and get answers from experts in your industry (Valkenburg, 2008). Nowadays, LinkedIn users gain the comfort of more than 300 million users, 2.1 million groups and over one billion endorsements (Bullas, 2014). LinkedIn is booming, but there are questions rising about the effectiveness for recruitment of the platform as more applicants seem to enter the pool, but the quality of the applicants does not rise with respect to traditional recruitment (Stone et al., 2015).

This research helps to explore futures in which that pool of applicants might be narrowed down and with that, quality may even rise again. This research explored the implications of such futures with scenarios in the form of a narrative. As there is a lot of uncertainty involved with futures, this is the chosen approach. The determinants of the scenario-model are based upon literature. The actual description and narration of the scenario itself is determined around interviews with experts on the field of recruitment and LinkedIn. The interviews were used to justify the determinants of the scenario-model as well.

The structure of this research is based on the scenario-forming stages by Peterson et al. (2003). The fourth step is included by means to extract the information necessary in this research to proceed to the fifth stage. The stages are:

1. Identification of focal issue
2. Assessment of focal issue
3. Identification of alternatives
4. Data gathering
5. Building the scenario
6. Testing the scenario
7. Policy screening

Please note that stages six and seven are not included in the scope of this research and will therefore be left for further research.

Stage 1: Identification of focal issue

This stage concerns the research problem and research question. To enlighten the focal issue, this research confined itself to the following domains of interest:

I. This is a *futures* study. Futures are not something to be vaguely kept in mind, but rather something to be built: futures studies can provide a direction to be worked towards (Masini, 2006). This direction provides the business with a better grip on the online recruitment process and adaptation towards the scenarios proposed.

II. Since LinkedIn is considered the top career networking site (Adams, 2013; Schawbel, 2009) and is most frequently used for hiring amongst other SNSs (Statista, 2011), the focus is solely on LinkedIn.

III. LinkedIn's original vision was to become a professional SNS for bringing people together, but it is increasingly used for recruitment purposes. The recruitment process as known is changing since the appearance of LinkedIn:
- LinkedIn enables the recruiter to include the passive candidate in the pool;
- Job postings are turned into highly targeted ads; and
- LinkedIn enables the company to brand itself with a career website (Bersin, 2012).

IV. The audit sector gained a doubtful reputation in the sense of business ethics (O'leary & Cotter, 2000) and their influence with regard to the financial crisis (House of Lords, 2011). However, as much as 99% of the FTSE 100 index listed companies are audited by one of *the Big Four* audit firms (Jones, 2011), and the number of employees in the Big Four is rising each year (Statista, 2014b). Because of this, recruitment in the audit sector is expected to be generally sophisticated and therefore the sector of choice for this study.

V. Because a scenario-based design has the emphasis on the functionality of the future state of being, this method describes how people will eventually use the platform: they are concrete at once (Rosson & Carroll, 2002). This, combined with the first confinement, makes the direction to be worked towards cognizable.

With these confinements the following research question is constituted:

What are the future scenarios in LinkedIn-based recruitment for the audit business?

Research on recruitment through the use of LinkedIn is very scarce; the available research focuses on e-recruitment and SNSs, or are comparing the SNSs in an exploratory sense (e.g. boyd & Ellison, 2007; Brandenburg, 2007; Haferkamp & Krämer, 2011; Kluemper & Rosen, 2009). The available research is not able to set a clear direction in either where LinkedIn can go, or which direction can be worked towards. This study intends to provide relevant LinkedIn-specific conclusions based on the scenarios proposed later in this paper – a direction to which one can adapt.

Stage 2: Assessment of focal issue

This stage is aimed at confronting the focal issue to what is known about recruitment through SNSs. This stage reflects the determinants of effectiveness, potential advantages and disadvantages of SNSs for recruitment and sampling on LinkedIn and the Big Four's usage of LinkedIn. Recruitment is defined as the process of finding and hiring the best-qualified candidate from either within or outside the organization for a job opening, in a timely and cost effective manner (Devi & Banu, 2014). The effectiveness of this process is determined by various determinants. Breaugh (2008) argues that results on recruitment are determined by recruitment objectives, strategy development, recruitment activities and intervening job applicant variables. An executive paper by Oracle (2013) determines the effectiveness by the time to hire, cost to hire and efficiency of the recruiter. To both [1] time to hire and [2] cost of hire, following Slezak (2014) I add [3] sourcing channel (the ability to track where the applicants come from), [4] retention rates (the degree to which employees remain in the organization), [5] open/filled vacancies ratio, [6] offer/acceptance ratio (proportion of offers made before the vacancy was filled), [7] diversity (the balance between genders,

cultures and backgrounds) and [8] quality of hire (Laurano, 2013; Qualigence, n.d.). The eight determinants for effectiveness lead to credibility to the recruiter and a means of displaying objectives and goals (Qualigence, n.d.).

Potential advantages of SNSs for recruitment

The increase in technology that came with the rise of the Internet, brought the organization the ability to assess knowledge, skills and ability in a virtual setting (Aguinas, Henle, & Beaty, 2001). This enables the ease of globalization, hence the organization is enabled to hire across borders. Mentioned before, SNSs enables the recruiting firm to include the users who are not actively in search of another job (Valkenburg, 2008). These passive candidates are of interest for the recruiter, since the pool is larger (Crispin & Mehler, 1997) and these candidates are less sought-after. Another benefit from using SNSs in recruitment is the positive impact on the drive and satisfaction of the applicant (McManus & Ferguson, 2003; Stone et al., 2015). Furthermore, it has been shown that the amount of organizational information provided leads to a significant increase in the applicant's image of the organization (Allen, Mahto & Otondo, 2007). Organizations therefore need to make sure they are actively and carefully managing their image, which the use of SNSs enables. By some considered a major externality, but of great benefit to the recruitment process: SNSs enable the organization to retrieve data on the applicant, like background checks (Cears en Casteleyns, 2011; Clark & Roberts, 2010), but also more demographic data concerning the pool of applicants (Sullivan, 2014). Still being in its infancy, this data can be used to specify the recruitment strategy upon. This data-benefit underwrites both Slezak's sourcing-channel [3] metric and eventually the offer/acceptance ratio [6]; hence the data could serve as a predictor of when the applicant would say yes to the offer (Sullivan, 2014).

Potential disadvantages of SNSs for recruitment

The biggest challenge in e-recruiting is that recruitment through SNSs increases the amount of applicants, but that the quality of the applicants does not increase with respect to traditional recruitment (Stone et al., 2015), therefore being negatively related to the [8] quality of hire metric (Laurano, 2013). Cappelli (2001) and Zusman & Landis (2002) argued that online recruitment increases efficiency and lowers the costs of the recruitment process, but a larger pool of applicants ultimately leads to higher administrative and transaction costs (Stone et al., 2005). It is argued that technology in recruitment can bring an artificial distance between the applicant and organization, but web 2.0 applications like LinkedIn may enhance the two-way communication between applicant and organization and therewith change the nature of the recruitment process (Dineen & Allen, 2013; Stone et al., 2015). Because SNS users see the internet as an easy way to explore job opportunities, they are more likely to be *job-hopping* (McManus & Ferguson, 2003), therefore being negatively related to the retention [4] metric. In relation to diversity [7], the use of SNSs has shown to be negatively related as well (Kuhn & Skuterud, 2000). One explanation given for this finding is that some minorities may have less access to computers and the Internet, also referred to as the *digital divide* (Fairlie, 2003).

The success of LinkedIn: sampling

When LinkedIn was founded in 2003, it had as few as 20 signups on some days. By 2005, revenues started to emerge as they went in to their fourth office, and memberships started to accelerate by 2010. With 90 million members since then, 10 offices and 1000 employees, it was impossible to ignore the significance of the platform. This period also functions as a tipping point in its successes. Three years later, in 2013, LinkedIn reached the milestone of two new members each second, with a total of over 255 million members worldwide. In April 2015, LinkedIn reached over 350 members worldwide (LinkedIn, 2015a). In table 2.1, we find some key numbers on LinkedIn from the *tipping* period as compared to 2003, when LinkedIn started:

Year	Members (at Q1)	Quarterly revenue (at Q1)	Employees
~2003	± 4,500	-	± 10
2009	± 37 million	23 million USD	± 320
2010	± 78 million	45 million USD	± 500
2011	± 102 million	94 million USD	± 1,000
2012	± 161 million	188 million USD	± 2,100
2013	± 218 million	325 million USD	± 3,500
2014	± 296 million	473 million USD	± 5,700
2015	± 364 million	638 million USD	± 7,600

Table 2.1 *Stats and figures on LinkedIn*
Adapted from: LinkedIn (2015abc); Quora (2014); Rao (2012); Statista (2014). Stats retrieved on 12-05-2015.

One may argue that the total number of professionals will eventually saturate, meaning there is no growth potential left. However, the success of LinkedIn cannot be measured by its growth in the amount of members alone. Furthermore, the amount of "knowledge professionals" is expected to amount 600 million people (LinkedIn, 2014), meaning there is still a lot of potential available.

LinkedIn in the Big Four: sampling

Recruitment by the Big Four is expected to be generally sophisticated. With respect to that, their usage of LinkedIn corresponds well with their size and success:

Firm	Revenue in 2013 (in billions)	Amount of LinkedIn followers	Amount of jobs posted
Deloitte	$32.40	1,505,880	1,782
PwC	$32.09	857,011	544
EY	$25.83	1,048,447	3,439
KPMG	$23.42	268,999	1,673

Table 2.2 *Sampling in the Big Four*
Figures via LinkedIn and Statista, retrieved on 24-04-2015.

To give an idea what this means in comparing the Big Four's LinkedIn usage relatively to the other large audit firms; Grant Thornton LLP has 80,781 followers, BDO USA LLP 27,626 followers, Baker Tilly has 18,988 followers and Smith & Williamson a "mere" 4,492 followers. This confirms that the practice of LinkedIn by the Big Four is indeed: sophisticated, and may even be a benchmark for the audit sector.

Stage 3: Identification of alternatives

This stage is aiming to identify the alternative ways the future for LinkedIn-based recruitment could appear. As described by Peterson et al. (2013), one way to do this is by determining two driving forces. The findings on recruitment effectiveness taken into account lead me to conclude that there are two dimensions for future scenarios that this study needs to confine itself to. In order to establish a clarifying preliminary scenario matrix, the two dimensions are determined. The determinants of effectiveness (Breaugh, 2008; Laurano, 2013; Slezak, 2014; Qualigence, n.d.) apparently need quantification in order to be judged in a sound and evidence-based fashion, whilst the leading position LinkedIn obtained (Adams, 2013; Schawbel, 2009, Statista, 2011) is its right to exist in the first place. Any disruption from this position would soon lead to a decrease in the shelf-life of the platform. This proposes the following dimensions:

x-variable – recruitment metrics in LinkedIn

Recruitment metrics are quantifiable measurements used to make better informed decisions in order to, in the long term, receive the best return on investment (Qualigence, n.d). Yet a major lack of HR is the ability to make data-driven decisions, the availability of proper metrics and analytic models to assess effectiveness (Boudreau & Ramstad, 2005; Lawler, Levenson & Boudreau, 2004). Not to mention the bias resulting from this (eQuest, 2015). It is argued that HR, and explicitly recruitment for this matter, will probably be more data driven and more metric (Libbenga, 2014; Sullivan, 2014). A utopia of this type of metric would then be real-time big data analysis (Asay, 2015) on the candidates and recruitment-performance metrics in order to readjust the recruitment strategy in the blink of an eye. Because of these lacks and emphasis, the first determining variable to build the model on, is the extent to which quantitative data from LinkedIn is implemented in the recruitment process. A greater extent to which the data is implemented can, evidently, be regarded as a benefit for the future scenario, as it helps to make a qualified hire and solidifies the reputation of HR, especially with respect to talent acquisition (eQuest, 2015; Sullivan, 2014). The origin-point in this is the status quo; not necessarily bad, but certainly open to improvement as it does not meet up to the utopia-scenario in this dimension.

y-variable – recruitment disruption

Recruitment disruption is the process of the emergence of other recruitment channels relative to the business model of the established channel, eventually disrupting the established market or technology (Christensen, 2006). There is a tendency for professionals in recruitment to agree on the expectation that the usage of SNSs in their profession will rise (Geneste, 2013). However, the certainty of where the SNS is in its product life cycle (PLC) often remains unknown (Levitt, 1965; Conway & Steward, 2009). When comparing SNSs or recruitment sites with the analytics of Google (2015) (see appendix figure A.1), one can, to a certain extent, determine the PLC phase the SNS or recruitment site is in.

SNS	PLC phase
LinkedIn	maturity
Facebook	decline
Twitter	decline
Monsterboard	decline
Indeed	growth

Websites like Hyves, MySpace, Plaxo and Jobster are left intentionally out, since they are considered 'dead', i.e. at the end of the PLC. Interesting to note is that the decline of some sites goes with news articles, for instance in the declining phase of Jobster in 2009, the Puget Sound Business Journal (2009) read: 'Jobster changes name to Recruiting.com'. Sometimes, sites are declining because of a disruption (often being another site). With the decline of Hyves in 2010, for instance, came the news post by Dutch Nu.nl (2010), reading: 'Hyves declines, LinkedIn and Facebook grow". The new 'technology' – LinkedIn and Facebook in this case, meant the end for Hyves. Since any disruption can mean the end for the established 'technology', the future of LinkedIn will to most extent be determined by whether another technology disrupts it and they need to discontinue their service. Because of this simple, yet realistic determinant of product existence, the second variable in the matrix model will be the extent to which LinkedIn is disrupted. A greater extent to which disruption has taken place will then, evidently, be a disadvantage for LinkedIn on the future scenario. The 'smaller' the disruption, the more monopolistic the future for LinkedIn is assumed. Since there are alternative SNSs available which lend itself for recruitment, it is unclear how to define the status quo. However, LinkedIn being in the leading position, I conclude the level of disruption to be relatively low.

With these two variables determined, the following preliminary scenario-matrix is constituted (figure 3.1):

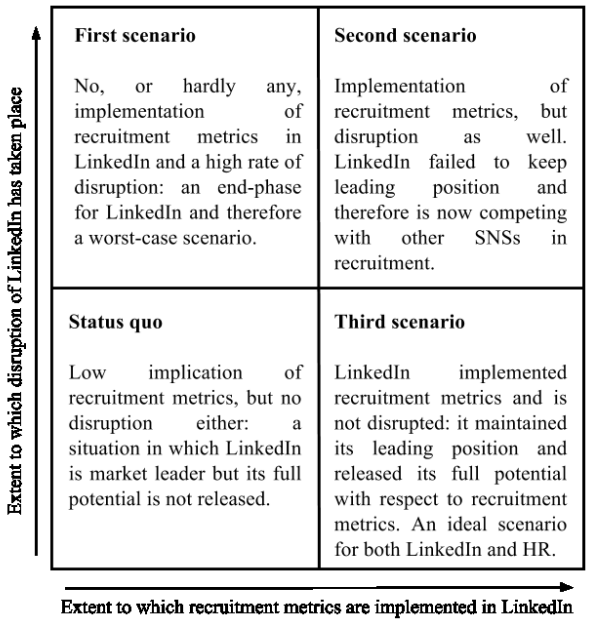

Figure 3.1 *Preliminary scenario-matrix*

The matrix consists of four quadrants in which one functions as the status quo. Three to four scenarios are considered the desired amount of scenarios, as two does not expand thinking enough, and more than four leads to unnecessary uncertainty (Peterson, 2003; Wack 1985; Schwartz 1991; Van der Heijden 1996). To provide the reader with better understanding, I briefly elaborate on the different combinations of dimensions:

-The status quo is LinkedIn as we know it now; no (or hardly any) disruption and no extensive recruitment metrics in the system of LinkedIn.

-The first scenario implies a situation in which there are no additional recruitment metrics implemented in LinkedIn, but LinkedIn is disrupted by another technology, possibly

containing the described recruitment metrics. Since this is most likely to mean the end for LinkedIn, this is considered the worst-case scenario.

-The second scenario implies a situation in which LinkedIn implemented sophisticated recruitment metrics, but failed to keep the leading position in the recruitment-SNS market. This would mean LinkedIn has to compete with other similar SNSs. If it would not, it would respectively shift to the first scenario since the extent to which metrics are implemented can be considered relative to similar SNSs.

-The third scenario implies a situation in which LinkedIn implemented recruitment metrics in their technology, and no disruption has taken place, meaning LinkedIn maintained her leading position. This is the most profitable for LinkedIn as they do not have to share their market with other SNSs, and this is the most cost-efficient for HR as they do not have to spend time on other SNSs, enabling them to specialize on LinkedIn. Therefore, the third scenario is considered as the ideal situation.

Operationalization on dimensions

Following the preliminary explanation in the matrix, a clear and tangible understanding towards the extents of implementation is based on the works of Slezak (2014) and Sullivan (2014), as well as observations on LinkedIn as website.

	Low	**High**
Recruitment metrics	Low availability of data in LinkedIn; LinkedIn as a company sticks with the data used now and does not take further development of data implementation into account. Therefore, maximum analytics is limited to: -Page views data. -Search filters options. -Personal data archive. -Other (premium) data options. These analytics are in general observable by anyone who uses LinkedIn.	High availability of data through LinkedIn; -LinkedIn enables HR to make predictions based on real-time analytics on their candidates. -Availability of talent demographics, sourcing channel and clusters of their common factors. -Option to use gamification to enhance predictions on talent recruitment and offer acceptance. -Metrics available to assess and predict quality of hire based on experience, education and/or skills.
Disruption of LinkedIn	No significant competition present; LinkedIn remains the number one professional SNS and this is confirmed by either or both business articles and statistics. All other "attempts" in disrupting LinkedIn lack the power to actually do so.	Competition present; Different recruitment SNSs are available and gain significance to such degree that it disrupts LinkedIn in: -Amount of usage (number of members, logins, amount of posts, amount of vacancies, endorsements, etc.) -Amount of revenue. -Amount of employees (either by firing or lack of motivation)

Table 3.1 *Operationalization of the preliminary matrix*

Stage 4: Data gathering

This stage concerns the methodology in gathering and using data to make predictions about the future for LinkedIn-based recruitment. The research used expert interviews to gather information on which the scenarios were built and by which both axes of the preliminary scenario-matrix were justified. The purpose of the interviews is to build the scenarios upon based on views, experiences and beliefs of the experts concerned (Gill et al., 2008). Interviews help to provide a deeper knowledge of the matter concerned (Gill et al., 2008), and the information the interviewees provided is confidential to the extent that the interviewees preferred the interview to be transcribed anonymously (i.e. with no direct leads to company names and figures). Because of these reasons, interviewing was the research method of choice (McIntyre, 2012). The transcriptions of the interviews are available on request.

Population and saturation of interviews

Since this study focuses on LinkedIn-based recruitment in the audit sector, the population for the qualitative research is aimed at experts in either this sector or experts in LinkedIn in general, which were asked between six and ten questions in a semi-structured interview. Because the Big Four is the largest in the audit sector and their LinkedIn usage is sophisticated (see table 2.2), I decided to perform most interviews in the Big Four. To reach saturation on the topics, the amount of interviewees is often discussed (Francis, Johnston, Robertson, Glidewell, Entwistle, Eccles & Grimshaw, 2010; Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006; Romney, Batchelder & Weller, 1986). Research found that, in general, saturation is reached after 12 interviews (92-97%). However, when working with experts, consensus theory (Romney et al., 1986) argues that saturation can be reached with just four interviews. Since this study deals with experts on the same field, seven interviews were conducted, which appeared to saturate the topic of interest. On the recruitment metrics axis, no new topics appeared after four interviews, and on the disruption axis, saturation was reached after just two interviews (see appendix tables A.1 and A.2). Different types of recruiters were interviewed to achieve diversity and different perspectives in the answers.

Interviewee 1	LinkedIn expert, trainer and author
Interviewee 2	LinkedIn & recruitment expert and author
Interviewee 3	Senior corporate recruiter at one of the Big Four
Interviewee 4	Recruitment sourcer at one of the Big Four
Interviewee 5	Senior recruiter at one of the Big Four
Interviewee 6	Campus recruiter at one of the Big Four
Interviewee 7	Recruitment advisor at one of the Big Four

Interview analysis and findings

To build the scenarios with a narrative that is comprehensive, the interviews were analyzed following narrative analysis. Narrative analysis aims at focusing on the general idea of an experience or story from the perspective of the participant (Schutt, 2011). The transcriptions were coded around the topics that repeatedly appeared to show consistency with the other transcriptions and were by doing so, classified into general patterns (see tables A.1 and A.2 in the appendix for details). The topics that repeatedly reappeared were included in the narrative of the scenario. The findings implied similarity around the topics that were discussed. Most interviewees tended to agree upon each other on topics concerning analytics, pre-knowledge and using whatever means to find the candidate,

referred to as 'following the market'. No real divergence was found amongst interviewees, except for the face that some brightly brought up the issue of Internet privacy. Considering the importance of this matter, the issue of Internet privacy is intertwined in one of the narratives as well.

It appeared that six out of seven interviewees considered the preliminary scenario-matrix to, in general, cover the scope of this research. Furthermore, four out of seven interviewees explicitly mentioned the third scenario to be the ideal one. Based on these findings, the matrix built is considered to satisfy the content it covers.

Framework for scenario building

According to Van Notten (2005) a scenario is a consistent and logical description of alternative hypothetical futures. The great benefit of scenarios is that they describe how the situation will be using a concrete sketch of interaction, which is interpreted more easily and thoroughly than abstract material (Rosson & Carroll, 2002). Instead of a solution-first approach (Cross, 2001); the scenario-based approach easily abandons options since they are built to be abandoned if they do not appear to meet reality. The goal in this research was to refine the scenarios based on the above mentioned expert interviews.

In his typology of scenario characteristics, Van Notten (2006) framed scenario characteristics in macro- and micro characteristics. This research followed this typology to characterize the proposed scenarios.

A typology of scenario characteristics

Broad "macro" characteristics	Detailed "micro" characteristics
The goals of scenario studies	*The function of the scenario exercise*
Exploration – Pre-policy research	Process – Product
	The role of values in the scenario process
	Descriptive – Normative
	The subject area covered
	Issue-based – Area based – Institutional based
	The nature of change addressed
	Evolutionary – Discontinuity (Abrupt – Gradual discontinuity)
Design of the scenario process	*Inputs into the scenario process*
Intuitive – Analytical	Qualitative – Quantitative
	Methods employed in the scenario process
	Participatory – Model-based
	Groups involved in the scenario process
	Inclusive – Exclusive
Content of the scenarios	*The role of time in the scenario*
Complex – Simple	Chain – Snapshot
	Issues covered by the scenario
	Heterogeneous – Homogeneous
	Level of integration
	Integration – Fragmented

Table 4.1 *A typology of scenario characteristics.* Adapted from Van Notten (2006, p.72).

-The goal of this scenario study is exploration. As it concerns the nature and quality of the scenario, the function is product-oriented. The role of values is normative, as we deal with an ideal situation where HR can work towards. The scenarios are institutional-based because of the emphasis on the audit sector. As discontinuity is optional due to the disruption-variable, the nature of addressed change is considered as gradual discontinuity.

-The design of the scenario process is intuitive. Its inputs are literature and interviews, and therefore qualitative. The methods employed are positioned between participatory and model-based, as the model is used as a mainframe and a lot of desk-research is involved. Furthermore, this research aimed for exclusive groups involved, as these are two recruiters and a jobseeker (see stage 5).

-The content of the scenarios will be simple as the scope is somewhat narrow and focused. The time is a snapshot – a specific moment in time. The issues covered are homogeneous, therefore they are focused. The variables are integrated in the scenario as they interrelate with each other.

As different contexts require different approaches, there is no one-correct typology. In our scenario, we can identify driving forces, signs of emerging trends and with that, prioritize possible dangers (Van Notten, 2005).

Stage 5: Building the scenario

This stage incorporates the actual scenario based upon the matrix. Each scenario following the matrix is briefly described in the form of a narrative with fictitious people. This way, the essence of the direction to which LinkedIn can go is captured in a comprehensive and tangible way. In each narrative, the perspective of both the jobseeker (Peter), the recruiter (Eric), and the competing recruiter (Francine) is addressed. Please note that the characters in this research are fictitious. Any resemblance to actual persons or firms is coincidental.

Introduction

Peter is a 24 year-old highly talented graduate from the University of Twente. He finished his master in financial engineering and is aiming to be hired as an auditor by a Big Four organization. Next to his study he was a board member at his student society, which delayed him for about a year. Peter likes to cycle and has a passion for travelling. Eric is a corporate recruiter at a Big Four organization and works there for almost two years. He attends events at universities and uses the internet to get in touch with potential candidates. Francine is a campus recruiter of a competitor of the Big Four organization Eric works at. She tends to be quite old-fashioned and reluctant to change.

First scenario

As Peter logs on to his poorly updated LinkedIn profile this early Tuesday morning, he sees he has no new profile views and no new messages. Not that he expected any, but he just likes to check. That is why he assumes he will be a good auditor after all – checking things. He quickly opens some new tabs and logs on to his other professional profile pages, but no messages there either. After updating his magnet.me page, Peter finds himself disappointed and opens his Facebook. "How is it possible that with the technology of today, I just cannot seem to connect with people I really want to connect with?" Peter asks himself. He has been trying to get hired for about six months now, without any success. Dishearten he scrolls down his timeline until he suddenly stops: the student society he has been a member of the past six years is staging a network event *this* evening?! He quickly makes a phone call to the current board of his old student society and hears there is a place left for him. He clicks the 'participate' button at the event's Facebook page and finds himself delighted, checking companies' webpages the remainder of this morning and guessing what recruiters will attend.

Meanwhile, Eric is at his office at the Amsterdam Zuidas, busy with Boolean searches at all the SNSs the world provides and still, just once in a while, he searches on LinkedIn because he knows he will find his *experience hires* there. "Students must be nuts to spend time on LinkedIn nowadays," he thinks. "Unless

some grey hairs start to appear already, of course". Sleep deprived because of a current HR-project he is working on and the necessity to check on five different SNSs makes him somewhat grumpy and rushed today. To make it in time, he hops on the train to the campus of the University of Twente at 11:45 with his suitcase in his hand. "The month just started, and this is the seventh network event already," he mumbles. "How is it possible that with the technology of today, I just cannot seem to find the specific candidates I need?" Eric decides to grab a newspaper, which headline reads: "LINKEDIN BOUGHT BY TELEGRAPH MEDIA GROUP" With a déjà vu in mind, he reaches out to his iPhone 9s in the inside of his pocket, and starts three different apps simultaneously to continue his already predestined search. When checking the Facebook event he is about to attend, he quickly swipes through some attendees that appear to be attractive and charismatic, but he knows Facebook is not the platform for suit-up pictures of potential candidates, so he finds almost no-one "suitable" for what he is recruiting.

Peter is one of the first to attend at the network event. Dressed up nicely, he finds himself confident and decides to walk up to the stand of one of the Big Four offices. Here he meets Francine, a campus recruiter of one the companies. After his introduction, he is asked to hand in his résumé and exchange business cards. Unfortunately, Peter forgot to bring a few copies of his résumé but is happy to find some stack of crumpled business cards in the inside of his jacket and he hands one over. Trying to keep eye contact with Peter, Francine awkwardly accepts the business card. "We'll definitely call, Peter!" she says, but fumbles the business card away in some corner of the room. "How is it possible that at a network event like this, someone attends without himself being prepared?" she thinks. Peter's confidence almost vanished, decides to hit the restroom before he makes another attempt. Here he accidentally bumps into Eric who, because of his somewhat corpulent appearing, needed more space than Peter could estimate. "I'm so sorry!" Peter blurts out, his confidence sinking though the floor at this moment. "Nah, it's cool, I needed a work-out after all, ha-ha!" Eric brightly responds, pointing at his belly. They shake hands and they appear to be getting along pretty well. "Hey Peter," Eric asks after some conversation, "you may be just the guy we need, how is it possible I've never heard of you before?" Peter's confidence going through the roof right now, says: "I wondered the same thing! How is it possible that with today's technology and big data *everywhere*, people cannot connect with each other as they wish?" Eric asked for Peter's résumé, but said he didn't have to worry about it. "I'll just get you in the CRM system right away" and he pops out his laptop, asking Peter to fill out every field.

Friday, just after noon, Peter finds himself chest-forward at the steps of this large corporate office in Amsterdam, shaking hands with Eric. "So we meet again," Eric says. Two weeks later, Peter got a phone call from Eric. "You got through the assessment, see you tomorrow at 09:00!"

Second scenario

As Peter logs on to his LinkedIn profile this early Tuesday morning, he sees he has three new profile views and one new message. Before reading those, Peter quickly opens some new tabs and logs on to his other profile pages, and finds that another SNS he has been on for about half a year new, offers the option to view your network in a graphical map kind of way. His attention is drawn to this new functionality, and sees that all his study mates are clustered around some big auditors, so he zooms in and finds - in the midst of all other recruiters - Eric, a recruiter at one of the Big Four organizations. "That might come in handy," he says to himself, and connects with Eric. Peter has been searching for a job for two months already after all, so some peer-connected-invite will hopefully do the trick. Peter just recently filled out all the fields at his LinkedIn profile and ticked the *i-want-to-be-found* box, because he knows that will make him easier to find and contact. However, Peter needed to do this with his four other professional SNSs as well, which he regards as time consuming and nitpicky. Peter gets back to the InMail he received. It's a mail from Francine, a recruiter at a Big Four organization, if he would like to come over to the office next week, the mail reads. Peter is bouncing up and down from his enthusiasm, but before responding, he likes to check on Francine – is she really the recruiter he is prepared to get around the table with? After some research on different SNSs, Peter finds that Francine is only to find on the company's webpage and on a poorly updated LinkedIn page. "Let's put Francine in cold storage for the moment," Peter thinks while taking a sip of his coffee. After updating all his SNSs and finishing his breakfast, he gets on his bike for his daily workout. "That's one of the benefits of being a jobseeker these days," Peter thinks. "Let the jobs find you while you burn some calories!"

Meanwhile, Eric is at his office at the Amsterdam Zuidas, busy updating searches at all the SNSs the world provides and updating his organizational proposition table where he fills out all determinants for what they search in a candidate. One drawback: he has to do this for all vacancies he has, *and* update this table in each SNS one by one. And not every SNS has the same fields, so Eric has to improvise at times. The proposition table is part of the new strategy the office implemented. The strategy aims at connecting vacancies with a certain predetermined proposition table, so that they can be filled out easier at all the SNSs. Eric reminds himself of the words of Jeff Weiner, former CEO of LinkedIn back in the days: *"it's not about our people finding jobs; it's about jobs finding our people"*. Eric knows that this means he and his team of recruiters have to follow the market at all costs, so he does. He started at 08:00 this morning and will have to work until 18:00, coming home afterwards and hit that laptop again for an hour or two after dinner. It are long hours, but the functionalities that came with all the different SNSs are appreciable: LinkedIn offered a candidate pre-selection functionality to automatically update into your talent pipeline in recruiter seat, another SNS offered a graphical cluster of your network and yet another SNS merged a lot of unstructured big data to extrapolate a potential career path for an applicant with predictive analytics. This option is *very* useful for Eric, but unfortunately costs the HR department a significant part of its budget. The financial department looks at HR with askance, as they keep on asking for budget for all the new features but still have a hard time quantifying the work they do. They even had to hire seven new recruiters to keep up the pace!

As Peter returns from his twenty-somewhat-mile workout, he checks his laptop and received an e-mail from Eric, the recruiter he connected with this morning. The mail reads:

> "Dear Peter,
>
> Thank you for your invite. I checked your profile and let the tools we have here at our organization run some analyses on you, which all pointed to one thing: hire that guy! How do you feel about making the online assessment I booked for you tomorrow morning? If you pass, we can get around the table with a manager next week.
>
> Kind regards,
>
> Eric"

With delight, Peter deleted the InMail from Francine, jumped up and was happy the rest of the day. He is going to rock that assessment tomorrow morning.

Third scenario

As Peter logs on to his LinkedIn profile this early Tuesday morning, he sees he has seven new profile views, was indexed higher than yesterday on various scales, has three new invitations because he joined a new group, got a training suggestion on the Lynda tool and last but not least: Peter has two new messages. "Slightly old-fashioned, but okay!" he thinks, and opens them. He notices the messages appeared to be synced with the invitations. "Probably because some recruiters work with Scredible nowadays," he reckons. Peter just read a suggested post about that, so he is known with the options this platform brings. The last message, which doesn't seem to be generated with AI, is from a recruiter named Francine. Peter likes the personal touch of her message, but does not seem to be connected that much to Francine. She just seems like an unrelated connection to Peter, so he decides to ignore her. "With the technology of today, I'm able to get highly targeted connections, not some recruiter who randomly contacted me," he thinks, and updates the magnet-tool LinkedIn just launched after they purchased magnet.me.

Meanwhile, Eric is at his office at the Amsterdam Zuidas, busy understanding a new tool LinkedIn provided. With his company being followed by almost three million followers, he can get targeted suggestions on possible candidates by just uploading a vacancy. And the best thing is that the candidates suggested *must* be highly motivated to work for the Big Four organization Eric works for, as the algorithm behind this tool includes all possible data on the LinkedIn users, including their search and scroll behaviour! "Good thing the government established that law amendment concerning privacy and cookies last year," Eric says to himself. "Sure makes my job easier and we are now able to train our team of recruiters specifically on LinkedIn". The HR department at Eric's office was able to scale down, cut costs *and* better able to quantify their successes because of the new tools LinkedIn provided. This resulted in, of course, a better company performance, but also in better conversations at the coffee table with people from the finance department as they *finally* seem to understand each other. When Eric is doing his daily pipeline-check with new suggestions, he finds Peter amongst four others. He runs some analytics on Peter and calls the recruiter seat for an output. The output looks as follows (figure 5.1):


LinkedIn™

Talent Solutions – recruitment metrics

Job success run on: **Peter**
Applicant code no.: **S10E11-20121501**

Person – job fit	87%
Person – organization fit	95%
Retention rate (> 3 yrs.)	65%
Growth factor first year	1.17
Team work estimation	5/7
IQ estimation	131
EQ estimation	110
Myers-Briggs personality	N/A
Belbin role 1 est.	MON.
Belbin role 2 est.	RA.
Belbin role 3 est.	UNK.
Overall success estimation	**91%**

HIGH POTENTIAL

Disclaimer: please note that all outputs are an estimation based on the information provided by both the person analyzed and the recruiter proposing the analysis. LinkedIn is not held accountable for any business actions whatsoever.

Figure 5.1 *Fictitious example of a recruitment metrics output.*

Recruitment remains entirely human, Eric knows that, but this output helps him to defend his choices better to the HR manager, and makes the process overall easier for him and his team. And let's not forget the conversations with finance at the coffee table.

Graduated just two weeks ago, Peter isn't really looking for a job very active yet. "I feel like unwinding from the years that were before me first," he said to his friends the other day. Because of this, you wouldn't be surprised if I told you this Tuesday started somewhat hung-over for Peter. Juicing the oranges he bought yesterday, he hears his Samsung S8 edge buzzing. Answering with his smartwatch, Peter starts the conversation:

"This is Peter" he says as joyfully as possible, trying not to sound like Johnny Cash who just swallowed a pineapple.

"Hi there, this is Eric from Big Four!"

Peter shivers, and clears his throat immediately: "Oh hi, how are you?"

"I'm fine, thank you!" Eric responds. "Say Peter, I found you in my suggested talent pipeline on LinkedIn, and decided to run LinkedIn analysis on you: you appear to be a high potential for us…"

"Oh wow, that's great!" Peter responds feeling like he's hit a home run right now.

Eric continues: "If you like, I can book an online assessment for you right now. I'm confident you'll pass because of the results the analysis gave us, so why not schedule an appointment with a manager as well?"

So Peter finds himself suit up at the steps of this huge corporate office in Amsterdam on Friday in the same week as the phone call. Eric walks up to him, shakes his hand and they get into conversation. "I never knew," Peter said "…that just technology would bring us *this* far!"

Almost three years in the business now, Peter is looking for a new opportunity. He scored a marvelous 18% higher on his annual assessment compared to the first one he took at his job interview and got along with his team pretty well the past few years. If the new opportunity will be in another Big Four organization or as a manager in his current department, remains unknown, but LinkedIn seems to get him where he wants to be, and the recruiter where he wants employees.

DISCUSSION

One potential shortcoming in using interviews as research method could be any sort of bias by the researcher, but as the transcriptions of the interviews were sent to verify by the interviewee the same day, I don't expect this to be the case. Furthermore, it is worthwhile to know that unfortunately one Big Four organization did not wish to participate in the research. However, as most Big Four interviewees seemed to bring up the same topics and tend to agree, the relevance of this shortcoming can be questioned. One may argue that seven interviewees might be too few, but to that: all interviewees have expertise in their profession and we took time for every question to be answered completely. This allowed in-depth understanding of the perspectives of the experts, which highly contributed to narrate the scenarios. Another shortcoming might be the variables the scenario-matrix is built upon. The literature provided clues to use the recruitment metrics and disruption as variables, but one may ask if these are in fact the only determinants to base the future scenarios on. However, six out of seven interviewees mentioned that these axes in general covered the scope of the research, so it is assumed that these variables may be of convincing importance at least.

What I actually experienced myself when using LinkedIn for this research, is that the maximum potential of the platform demands a certain expertise from it. Even some recruiters do not use all functionalities it offers – to the extent that even advanced search remains unknown for some (interviewee 1). Whatever the future might look like: the full potential will ultimately require a certain amount of expertise. I doubt whether this degree of expertise is attainable for every recruiter, because it might require (expensive) training and practice.

FURTHER RESEARCH

As mentioned in the introduction, there are two steps missing in this thesis from the Peterson et al. (2003) stages. The scope of this research did not include the testing of the scenario; therefore this stage is left for further research in order for it to be fully appreciated. It would be interesting to see future research validate the choices and scope of this research and validate the narratives itself with quantitative measures of some kind. An estimation of the scope of time concerned with these scenarios would belong to this section as well. The scope of this research did not include the policy screening stage as well, which is the last one. This stage implies adapting towards the scenario. When the scenarios are tested, it is left for the organizations to adapt. It might be interesting to see the implementation of such adaptation in the audit business, but maybe that is up to consultants and change managers.

CONCLUSION

What are the future scenarios in LinkedIn-based recruitment for the audit sector? Constituted and narrated based on literature and interviews, this research explored the appearance of the future for LinkedIn-based recruitment. This was based on two axes: recruitment metrics and LinkedIn disruption. With the scope and methods of this research, the appearance of the future scenarios can take up three different shapes:

Scenario one: In this scenario, there is no, or hardly any, implementation of recruitment metrics in LinkedIn. Other SNSs or technologies disrupted LinkedIn. This can be considered an end-phase for LinkedIn.

Scenario two: In this scenario, recruitment metrics are implemented by LinkedIn, bus other SNSs as well. LinkedIn failed to keep the leading position as a recruitment SNS, and is now competing with others in this field.

Scenario three: In this scenario, recruitment metrics are implemented by LinkedIn, and LinkedIn remains the leading SNS in recruitment. This scenario is considered an ideal situation for both HR and LinkedIn.

The scenarios help to enlighten the uncertainty about the future to where LinkedIn might go. Eventually, in the case of the second and third scenario, this might mean that the pool of applicants narrows down again, but this remains uncertain. The narration of the scenarios was based on interviews with experts and recruiters in the Big Four. Furthermore, I hope this research contributed in providing organizations clues in adaptation towards the future scenarios, and provides the academic world a comprehensive look at what the futures might look like in practice and provide a clear set of directions to which LinkedIn-based recruitment may go.

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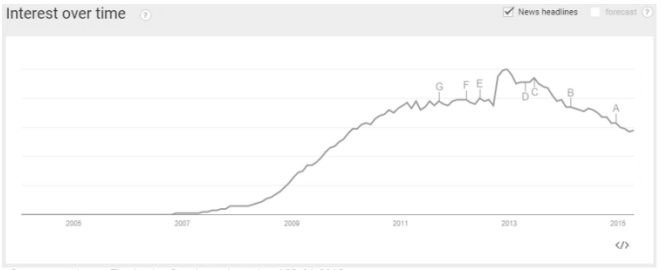
APPENDIX



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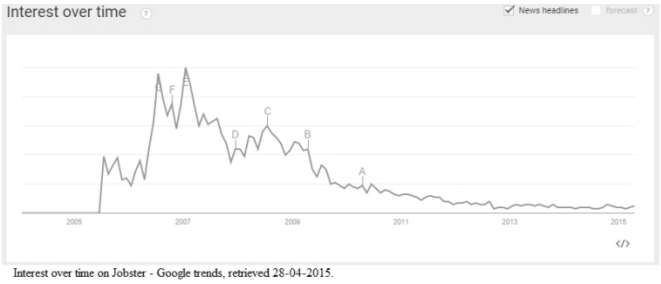

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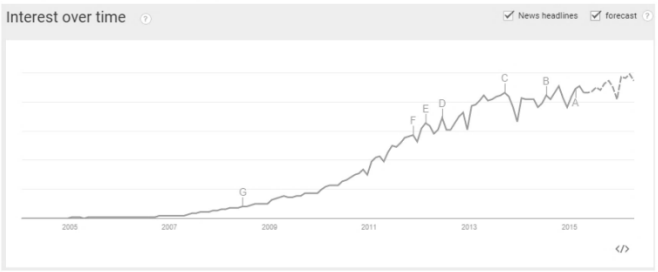

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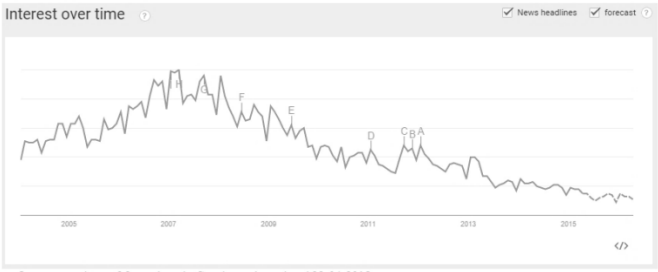

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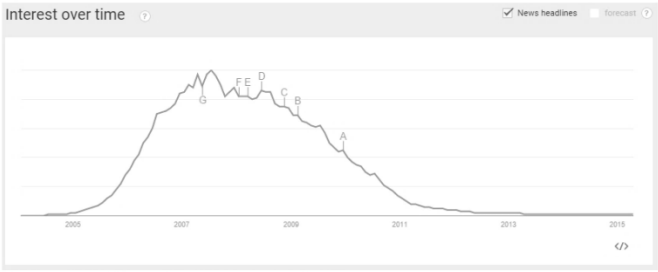
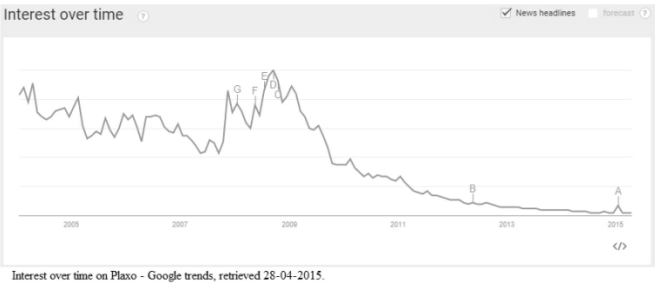
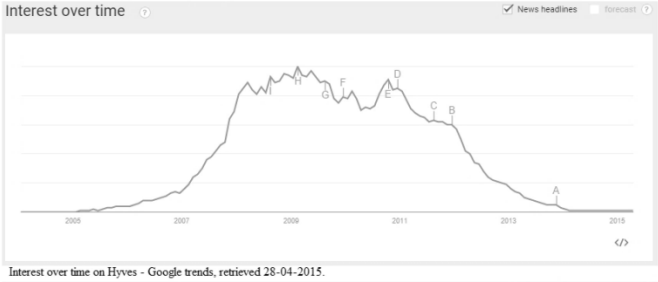


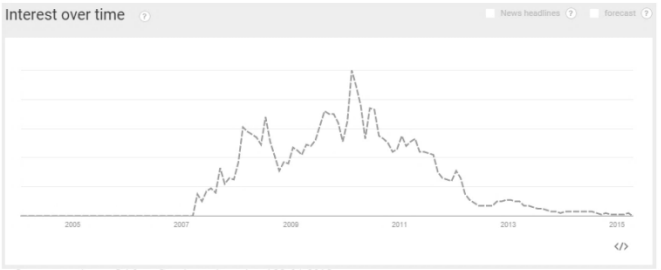
Interest over time on MySpace - Google trends, retrieved 28-04-2015.



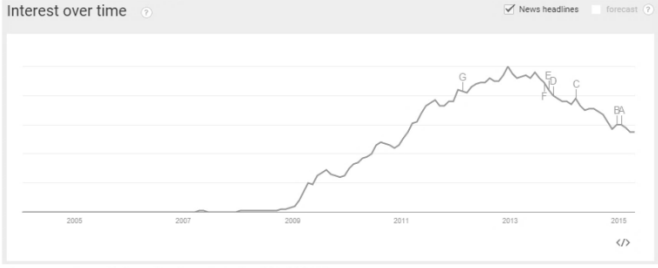
Interest over time on Plaxo - Google trends, retrieved 28-04-2015.



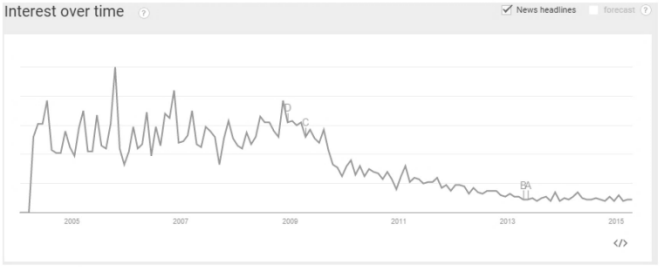
Interest over time on Hyves - Google trends, retrieved 28-04-2015.



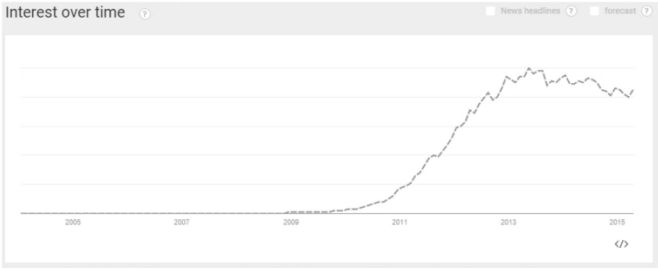
Interest over time on Jobfox - Google trends, retrieved 28-04-2015.



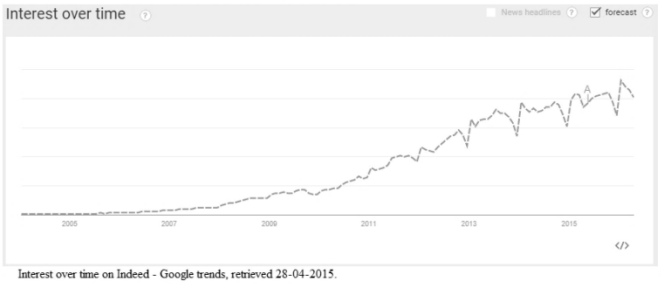
Interest over time on Twitter - Google trends, retrieved 28-04-2015.



Interest over time on Ecademy - Google trends, retrieved 28-04-2015.



Interest over time on Tumblr - Google trends, retrieved 28-04-2015.



Interest over time on Indeed - Google trends, retrieved 28-04-2015.

Figure A.1 *Product Life Cycle* (PLC) *on popular SNSs and recruitment websites.* Retrieved from Google trends (2015).

Topic addressed **Interviewee #**	Mentioned recruitment metrics are already present to a certain extend	Human aspect of recruitment explicitly mentioned as important	Knowing what the recruiter wants mentioned a positive aspect	Knowledge about passive candidates and/or predictive analytics as positive aspect	Candidate search does not work according to wishes of the recruiter	Availability of information mentioned an issue (profile completeness)	Regardless of LinkedIn an own recruitment system or pipeline is used/ mentioned	Privacy issues concerning information on candidates mentioned
Interviewee 1								
Interviewee 2								
Interviewee 3								
Interviewee 4								
Interviewee 5								
Interviewee 6								
Interviewee 7								

Table A.1 *Transcription analysis on the x-variable: recruitment metrics.*

Topic addressed **Interviewee #**	Disruption mentioned as a complexity for recruitment	Mentioned to be using LinkedIn and preference for solely LinkedIn	Mentioned indifference to be using whatever means to find candidate (following the market)	Does not see LinkedIn being disrupted	Mentioned the third scenario in general as the preferred scenario	Mentioned matrix to cover the scope of research
Interviewee 1						
Interviewee 2						
Interviewee 3						
Interviewee 4						
Interviewee 5						
Interviewee 6						
Interviewee 7						

Table A.2 *Transcription analysis on the y-variable: recruitment disruption.*