Title:

Icarus, Grannies, Black Holes and the death of privacy: Exploring the use of digital networks for career enactment

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This study was approved by the ethics committee at Nottingham Trent University, UK.

All participants who took part in this study have given written consent for the inclusion of

material pertaining to themselves; none of the participants can be identified by this paper and

they have been fully anonymised.

There were no health and safety concerns attached to this study

Abstract:

New perspectives on how digital networks can be understood as an environment for career enactment are explored in this article, in particular, through using critical perspectives on technology, especially in the context of prevailing instrumental perspectives in the majority of the career development literature. Thus, the narratives of people using digital networks for their careers were explored using an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. The results are captured in three main themes or critical discourses: the speed and scale of digital environments, game-like features of social media interactions and a divide between offline and online worlds. These are presented as sites for critical investigation and are aligned with technological and socio-cultural critical theories.

Keywords: Career development, technology, digital, social media

Introduction

New perspectives on how digital networks can be understood as an environment for career enactment are considered in this article. Building on earlier work from Buchanan (2017), Green (2017) and Staunton (2016), in this paper I make use of critical perspectives on technology as theoretical tools to explore the experience of career enactment. I expand on my earlier work (Staunton, 2016) by providing more depth and theoretical precision to this introduction to critical perspectives on social media and present empirical data. I have explored the career experiences of individuals' digital network use through the means of an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), due to its focus on lived experiences. By considering technology from a more critical perspective and exploring empirical data concerning this, the aim is to open up new understandings of how digital technology and individuals' careers interact. Primarily this is concerned with moving away from only considering technology as a tool for individuals' career enactment and instead seeing the ways that technology interacts with and acts upon the individual. This is not to say that critical perspectives on technology should supersede other understandings of digital technology and career, but instead to understand the heuristic value of more critical perspectives on technology towards career development as a field.

Career development literature

To contextualize this study, I am going to outline some of the main themes in the career development literature on how career and digital technology interact. There are two main themes: instrumentalist approaches and critical approaches.

Instrumentalist Approaches

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Instrumentalist approaches to digital technology and career development can be seen as those in which technology is understood as a tool to be used by individuals to develop their careers. This view can be explained using Horkheimer's (1974) critique of instrumental rationality. Horkheimer identified and critiqued instrumental rationality (or instrumental reason) as the view that reality is something that can be used and controlled by people. For example, Hooley (2012) described the key question for the individual aiming to develop their career as 'what do people need to know to pursue their careers in the internet age?' (p.3) Here the focus is on what people can do with the Internet. Hooley described four functions of the internet relevant to career enactment: a career resource library, an opportunity marketplace, a space for the exchange of social capital, and a democratic media channel. Hooley sees digital networks as a tool to be used in the hands of individuals developing their careers. Elsewhere, Hooley et al. (2015) have developed this thought by discussing how career management skills need to incorporate digital career literacy as a key concept. Hooley (2012) has defined digital career literacy as the 'ability to use the online environment, to search, to make contacts, to get questions answered and to build a positive professional reputation' (p.2). In this narrative from Hooley, correct use of the internet is needed to enable career development and can be manipulated by the individual to achieve this end. This temptation to view career development as individualistic and as something that the individual has significant agency over is not unique to Hooley or the discussions around digital networks. As both Irving (2010) and Sultana (2011) have pointed out, these individualistic and agentic tendencies occur throughout much of the career literature, which often valorises individual agency and downplays wider social factors and critical perspectives.

Throughout the literature, several other writers appear to make claims similar to Hooley's. Ryan and Hopkins (2013) have claimed that the internet enables the exchange of social capital. In their study, Ryan and Hopkin conclude that the internet allows youths from disadvantaged backgrounds to use social media to develop strong social support networks that were able to support their ongoing career and academic transitions. Similarly, Benson, Morgan and Filippaios (2014) have contended that social media has the potential to assist career transitions through supporting social capital and that graduates need to develop the skills to build this sort of capital. Moekotte et al. (2015), using Hooley's work, have also urged that social media is both a place to develop social capital and also an information resource to tap into and learn from.

Looking at some of Hooley's other concepts, Papakonstantinidis (2014) has explored the opportunities afforded to Greek students going through a graduate transition. In this study, Papakonstantinidis highlighted the important place that social media played in these graduates' transitions by increasing potential opportunities - an idea that echoes closely with Hooley's concept of the opportunity market. Finally, McCorkle and McCorkle (2012) have drawn attention to the importance of teaching social media skills in a business studies context, focusing on potential sites such as LinkedIn for personal branding and marketing which appears illustrative of Hooley's democratic media channel.

Clearly, a number of different authors are making use of concepts similar to the four career-related functions of the Internet identified by Hooley (2012). This literature is consistently underpinned by an instrumentalist approach, in which the internet is seen as a tool for individuals to make use of as part of their career enactment. These accounts also consistently

view the internet as passive, benign and open to be used in various ways by individuals. This builds on assumptions in the career literature that career development is both individualistic and agentic, and that social space tends to be neutral and unproblematic.

Critical Approaches

Though there is less literature that explores critical perspectives on career and social media, there are, however still some themes to consider. A key theme present in the literature is that of surveillance. While Hooley (2012) and others have focused on how individuals can manage their social media image(s) in a world in which surveillance occurs, others have moved the focus away from the responsibility of the individual and on to the technology itself. For example, in a notably early article, Pleace (2007) has explored how the UK welfare system has increasingly become a site for surveillance by the government on marginalised populations. Pleace examines how these information systems both include and exclude certain understandings of poverty and welfare, and so have the potential to uphold certain versions of political reality concerning marginalised groups. Similar work has also been done by Maki (2011) who has explored how the welfare system in Ontario, Canada, was increasingly upholding neoliberal values of 'market citizenship', which created forms of exclusion and deviancy. Mueller (2010) has taken a comparable perspective and looked at surveillance and the welfare system in Ontario and again drawn links between how technological surveillance attempts to understand individuals and, in doing so, creates forms of exclusion. In all such public policy literature, the links between technology, the political ideologies that infuse their management and the ensuing effect on the individual's career management have been explored. Green (2017) has taken a similar position on surveillance to examine how the same technology is made use of by potential employers as part of their

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recruitment initiatives. Green (2017) has considered the effect of this on employability in general, underscoring how technological surveillance makes it more possible for organisations to screen out minority candidates with less traditional qualifications, and that 'social recruitment' can create other forms of exclusion as minorities are less likely to have the social connections needed to perform in this sort of environment. Finally, Buchanan (2017) has employed a feminist perspective to explore how surveillance and the ensuing need for individuals to manage their digital footprints have led to forms of unpaid labour, which serve to enhance neoliberal norms over career enactment. This summary of the literature related to surveillance provides a perspective that technology does not so much create a neutral platform for career enactment to occur on but more that it creates a space where individuals may come into contact with social actors. This contact may lead to individuals self-regulating as well as being externally regulated by these actors as well. Furthermore, far from seeing technology as passive, these writers explore how technology is a site that propagates and disseminates various ideological norms, and so from a critical perspective could be seen as part of the architecture of neoliberal ideology.

The critical literature has, to a large extent, focused on surveillance and the effect it has on career enactment. Different to this, Law (2012) considered the need to be critical of the internet, drawing attention to the dangers of surveillance, yet also discussing how the internet may not be as social as once thought but instead, encourage enclosures and 'groupthink' and that the 'point and click' culture of the internet may reduce the possibility of high-level learning online. I too have argued (Staunton, 2016) that social media can both enhance and disrupt inequalities linked to career development. As well as discussing surveillance, I have also used Mejias (2013) to explore how the architecture of social media requires individuals

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to compete for attention. This means that rather than being collaborative (and a point of departure from neoliberal norms), it is norms of individualism and competition that are enhanced by social media, which demonstrates that inequality is hardwired into social media relationships online. Clearly, some wider issues related to learning and community online as well as the prevalent concern around surveillance can be further explored using Law (2012) and Staunton (2016). These insights particularly align with Buchanan's (2017) work and her focus on critiques of neoliberalism as a lens for understanding the relationship between digital networks and careers.

This review of critical perspectives draws attention to some important themes. Firstly, critical perspectives challenge the view that social media can be seen as a neutral tool for career development. Secondly, most of these concerns have focused on surveillance and discuss how employers' and the government's use of surveillance results in neoliberal norms being upheld such that minority groups may be excluded. Thirdly, some other concerns have focused on the architecture of social media and how it affects patterns of learning and online communities, which are two important aspects of career enactment. Finally, it is worth pointing out that there is a lack of empirical data in the works discussed in this section on critical perspectives. Green (2017), Law (2012) and I (Staunton, 2016) have provided critical reviews of existing theories, while Pleace (2007), Maki (2011) and Mueller (2010) have reviewed policy literature. Only Buchanan (2017) has produced a case study as part of her argument and this is not directly related to the section where she discusses more critical perspectives.

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From the review, it is clear that critical perspectives on social media could be better explored. Firstly, by exploring more empirical data and, secondly, by exploring areas other than surveillance. This is not to say that surveillance should be ignored as an area for critical investigation, but that other areas should also be considered as well. This was done by referring to the wider critical literature on social media as outlined in the section that follows where I outline the theories that inform my research design.

Critical theories informing the research design

To theoretically ground this study, I am going to review wider social theories which consider critical questions and perspectives on digital technology. Firstly, critical questions are asked about the nature of social relations online. Castells (2000) argued that social media is reductive in how it views people. Any facet of relationships not included in the design of digital networks is entirely obscured and unknowable online, meaning that social relationships are consequently reconfigured. Alongside this, Mejias (2013) has advocated a competitive view of relationships in social media since the ability of a social media user to operate is dependent on their ability to gain followers, attention and ultimately status, all of which are competed for online rather than freely available to all users.

Secondly, critical questions are asked about the nature of learning online. Throughout the philosophy of technology, questions have been asked about the relationship between acceleration in society and learning. For example, Virilio (2012) has discussed our time as an age in which, through technology, we have sped the world up to the point where reflective, critical thought is becoming harder as 'philosophy' is left behind. The apparent speed and

efficiency of an online environment potentially obscure a reduced capacity for thought and learning.

Finally, questions are asked about how online environments reshape identity construction and projection. Drawing on Foucault's (1977) concept of the panopticon, Rayner (2012), among others, has applied Foucault to social media to argue that social media aims for 'conscious and permanent visibility'. This can create a need to be constantly ensuring the respectability of our online selves. Pitcan et al. (2018) have argued how this can lead to individuals presenting 'vanilla' respectable versions of themselves which downplay how they differ from social norms. On one level this perspective does look at surveillance, yet importantly looks less at the objective reality of being under surveillance (such as loss of privacy) but instead looks at the subjective experience of being under surveillance and in doing so focuses on how identities are constructed in online environments.

Aim and Objectives

When considered alongside surveillance, this creates three main areas related to how individuals interact with digital networks which are explored as part of this study;

1) The nature of connections which individuals make on digital networks.

2) The manner of learning which individuals experience on digital networks.

3) How individuals represent themselves on digital networks.

Method

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Research Design

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, 1996) was used as an overarching paradigm for this study. IPA was selected because of its focus on lived experiences and its phenomenological basis (Lyons & Coyle, 2016). This correlates with this study's focus on how individuals experience the internet. Similarly, IPA's focus on individuals as meaning-making agents (Lyons & Coyle, 2016) ties in with the qualitative focus of this study and the study's post-positivist paradigm.

Sample

The use of IPA led to a purposive sampling technique (Lyons & Coyle, 2016) based on a homogeneous group with direct experience of the phenomena. The sample included seven individuals working in the career development sector who considered themselves to be using social media to develop their careers. All of the participants were experienced in using social media, describing themselves as regular users with at least three years' experience. The reason for selecting this sample was two-fold. Firstly, focusing on career professionals allowed for a degree of understanding around career development and of technology as these are both aspects that underpin the professional identities of career professionals. Secondly, this sample was conveniently accessible to me as the researcher. Participants were recruited through my blog and postings on social media.

With regard to the sample size, Smith (2004) argued that because IPA holds an ideographic commitment a sample size of one is possible (e.g. Bramley & Eatough, 2005). Lyons and Coyle (2016) in their writing on IPA describe an ideal sample size as between six and eight participants. As well as meeting the selection criteria for the study, six of the seven

participants were working in the higher education sector with the other working freelance, three were female and four were male, and five worked in the British Isles while the other two worked in Australia and New Zealand respectively.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each of the participants over Skype or Google Hangout because of the digital nature of the study. These interviews were recorded and then later transcribed verbatim. Themes for the interviews were established in advance, as described in the literature review, but following the advice of Kvale (1996) were kept loose so as to allow open lines of enquiry. Three themes were principally explored in the semi-structured interviews, mentioned in the objectives.

Analysis

As mentioned before, IPA was used throughout this study as an overarching paradigm. The analytical approach was mainly based on the work of Smith (1996, 2004, and Smith et al. 1999). Following from Bramley and Eatough (2005), the first stage was to produce a detailed reading and then a re-reading of all of the scripts. Patton (2002) has drawn attention to how there is a double interpretation occurring in IPA by the participant and then by the researcher, and that both of these interpretations are located in the individual's worldview and socio-cultural situation. Smith et al. (1999) set out two approaches to data analysis, either to generate a list of themes from the first transcript and use this for all other transcripts or to create a fresh list of themes for each transcript and then remove themes where there is insufficient evidence. The latter of these was selected for this analysis.

The cyclical nature of IPA as a process (Smith et al. 1999) was maintained so the analysis was conducted by regularly returning to early scripts to check them against themes which emerged from later scripts. As well as this, Lyons and Coyle (2016) have pointed out how IPA can either be empathetic, by mainly focusing on the side of the participant or critical by stepping back and asking questions about "what is leaking out". With this in mind, this analysis took a more critical stance, trying to get underneath what was said and understand the hidden agendas and assumptions which were sometimes made by participants. Finally, in line with Willig's (2001) description of IPA, the focus was on describing an experience more than explaining; the analysis, therefore, was placed in a wider theoretical framework rather than seeking explanations for the data as it occurred.

Ethics, Consent and Health and Safety

This study was approved by the ethics committee at Nottingham Trent University, UK. All participants have given written consent for the inclusion of material pertaining to themselves; pseudonyms were ascribed to the participants and anonymity has been guaranteed.

Findings

As noted earlier, the point of this article was not to create a dualism between instrumental and critical approaches to social media, but rather to explore the heuristic value of more critical approaches. It is, therefore only fair to make a few introductory comments about the data from a more instrumental perspective.

In general, participants felt positive about social media and using it for their careers. They could all articulate positive examples of having made use of social media in a manner that had benefited their careers. Participants articulated a sense of having autonomy, of being

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strategic and making personal decisions about their social media use, which they believed would benefit them in the future. The more critical perspective should, therefore, be seen alongside this.

Three themes were established which are presented as follows:

      1) Speed and scale of online environments

      2) Strategy and game-like behaviours amongst users

      3) An offline/ online divide

1) Speed and scale of online environments

Participants consistently discussed how time affected their ability to engage in online networks. In this theme, participants often looked at the scale of the information available on social media and the time needed to engage with it. One participant, Owen, remarked that:

> *'Well there's just so much out there, it's just the fact that there's so much out there and it's so addictive that you can spend ridiculous amounts of time and not know where they've gone… it's just an endless black hole of information.'*

Several participants discussed that social media was in some ways unmanageable as a tool for their careers because of its scale. It was potentially infinitely time-consuming and beyond them in some way. Similar points were made about the speed of social media. Most participants discussed the positive benefits of social media as a place that allowed them to stay up-to-date and that they could access new trends instantly. But participants often re-produced this as a reason for what they saw as the limits to their practice. Susan and Frances both described themselves as "lurkers" who did not engage in online discussion but mainly

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just consumed them. Susan went on to describe how this was often because she was "late" to conversations and that the topic had moved past her before she could contribute. Tony similarly picked up on this idea of the speed of social media making it hard to manage, describing it like this:

> *"I guess with social media because it's so fast and furious, so many things are coming at you it's almost like a… I've got to be quicker in my responses of how I approach it…"*

This idea of social media being fast and furious is an interesting concept just like the black hole metaphor above, which shows how social media is experienced as ungoverned and potentially dangerous. Owen similarly talked about how the speed of social media mediated his use saying:

> *"I just take most of it, scan it, if it's interesting if it's related to something. Basically, I look for stuff that would be of interest to other people."*

Though not entirely clear, this could be framed as Owen just considering whether he should re-post or share information rather than engage with it in great depth. This could be constructed as presenting the view that, in a high-speed environment, information merely becomes a prop to your identity and not something to engage with for yourself.

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2) Strategy and game-like behaviours amongst users

All of this study's participants articulated a clear strategic approach to how they were using social media for their careers. Ali, Rob and Tony, in particular, articulated very clear criteria of who they wanted to connect with online and how they wanted to manage these relationships. This was further extended by the participants who universally made use of the idea of social media being a place for their 'professional self'. Tony, for example, stated that '... I treat my career differently. So, with LinkedIn, it's more my professional identity'. Rob, similarly commented that 'I see it [social media] more as a branding tool now as well, so about consolidating professional status…" This idea of branding came up for several participants: there was a clear link between being professional and giving a very controlled and set impression, which was underpinned by precise purpose and intentions. Owen complained about users who blurred their personal and professional selves online, arguing that this wasn't very strategic as it meant that while you might want to make a 'professional' impression, instead the first thing someone might see was what you thought of 'Doctor Who or Star Wars.' The participants all seemed to share similar views of having their online, career-related activities dominated by a professional self which was 'branded', and this provided purpose to their online activities. To some extent, this could be seen as revealing the participants' views about career development, but it is important to see that social media was seen as an arena that intensifies and enables a very particular view of career development as individualistic, projected and strategic.

The adherence to these sets of behaviours could be further seen when they discussed other users who veered away from these norms. Rob, in particular, discussed how some users may just join social media networks because they were worried about being 'behind the times',

but this just led to the 'following the herd' and not knowing what to do with social media. Ali, Frances and Susan made similar comments about other users lacking purpose in being on social media and that they may just try and connect with you for no apparent reason. This could be seen as noticing users who differed from the norm of professional, purposeful behaviour.

The same idea of social media being governed by a set of rules and activities, which were generally self-motivated and individualistic, was also critiqued by some of the participants. Frances, in particular, commented on how she found social media difficult at times because it just seemed to be like a 'talent contest' while Susan discussed how users on social media involved 'jockeying for position'. Owen, similarly, complained about people who tried to connect with him just to access his contact list. All of these descriptions focus on how social media could be seen as a place where people were just playing to win a game rather than somewhere where social relationships were driven by genuineness and reciprocity, which is often the way that social media is represented by the platforms themselves.

So, for the second theme, one can see participants discussing social media as a place governed by a set of rules, which often cuts against the view that social media was built around genuineness and reciprocity.

3) The offline/ online divide

For the final theme, participants made a clear divide between the online and offline worlds. Tony, for example, made a distinction between 'thin' relationships, which were developed purely online, and 'thick' relationships, which involved depth of relationship and

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offline contact. This can be further seen by participants being most positive about online relationships when they moved into an offline world. Ali, for example, discussed how he had used social media to set up a series of physical meetings with individuals on an overseas trip he had taken. Similarly, Tony and Susan both discussed positive relationships they had developed by moving the relationship offline. By itself, it is worth noticing that this reveals a positive function of social media as a tool that allowed individuals to spread their net of contacts and enable offline development. What is interesting to us from a more critical perspective is the desire across all participants to step offline to develop deeper and more involved relationships.

This was taken further by Frances who described a sense of unreality about her online identity:

> *'I think my online identity is my I'd-happy-for-my-granny-to-see-it identity, it has a level of filtering I suppose… I am aware of my interactions online and how they can be perceived and shared you know and never deleted the more… I'm just aware that this could come back and haunt you. But yes, it's definitely I suppose the kind of let-your-granny-see-it version of who you are which is kind of not a complete picture by any means.'*

What is particularly interesting here is how Frances brings together a sense of what is bland and socially acceptable with the practice of filtering and the online not being a complete picture.

In a similar vein, Jane complained about the lack of 'connectivity' and 'closeness' that you had with online relationships compared to previous experiences she had had in local networks, which she described vividly as having 'tea and coffee involved, or alcohol...' Though this might seem like a throwaway comment, this came across as a significant issue for Jane who looked back fondly to local meetings that involved sharing physical rituals such as drinking with people, something that she saw as important to building the strength of relationship described above.

So, for the third theme, one can see participants distinguishing offline and online relationships, which often involved seeing offline as more authentic and genuine.

Discussion

Following on from Willig (2001), in this section, the three findings of i) speed and scale, ii) strategy and iii) an offline/ online divide are located inside wider theoretical discussions around the use of social media. It is important to restate here that, by exploring the internet, the aim is not to try to establish a strict contrast that social media is either useful or redundant, free or dangerous etc. but instead to posit critical understandings of social media that sit alongside its potential for career enactment. Importantly, in this study, users saw the speed and scale of online environments, strategy and game-like behaviours amongst users, and an offline/ online divide as features and functions of how social media and their career interacted beyond their actions. Participants did not see these aspects as under their control but as things that existed beyond their actions and capacities. This locates an understanding

of social media in the environment of technology and how it interacts with individuals and is less about social media as a tool which might be used for career development.

Two different theoretical approaches draw attention to how social media might be seen as an environment which helps explain what the findings of this study have to say about career enactment. Firstly, there are theories which focus on the effect technology itself has on its users. Seminal in this school is McLuhan (1967), who famously declared that 'the "message" of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that is introduced into human affairs… it is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association.' It is not how media is used that is crucial, but the medium itself that 'shapes and controls' human interaction. Though McLuhan creates an unhelpful dualism by all but eradicating how a media is used by the individual as a site of analysis and instead loading all of the analytical weight onto the media itself, he still creates a helpful starting point for considering the place of media itself.

There are examples of how social media shapes the 'human affair' of career in various ways in this study. It is visible in the way that participants discussed the speed and scale of social media as something which overwhelmed them and framed their interaction online. Virilio's (2012) philosophy of speed is helpful here as he has contended that as social interaction speeds up and its scale increases, the space for analytical and critical thought (what Virilio terms 'philosophy') diminishes - a point picked up by Tony's description of social media as 'fast and furious' or as Owen described it, a 'black hole' of information. This is significant for research into career enactment as it shows how technology frames the experience of career learning in a way which is not entirely positive for the individual.

Similarly, we might see a similar process of technology shaping and controlling social relationships in how social media takes on game-like qualities. As noted, a significant theme in the data was how strategies and gaming were understood as part of social relationships online. While this might be seen as the responsibility of users and how they decide to behave online, Mejias's (2013) work gives us a different stance. Mejias claims that social media has a set of rules embedded inside its structures which he terms as 'network dynamics'. This does not describe how social media is used, but how the platform frames social interaction. Mejias goes on to describe how relationships become competitive in a network:

> "Rather, it is a rationalized game, standardized and institutionalized… Once
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> inside, players encounter a hierarchy between those new nodes with few
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> links and those super-rich nodes or hubs, which everyone keeps linking
>
> to. The game then becomes trying to acquire as many links as possible, in
>
> an attempt to approximate the status of a super-rich node."
>
> (2013, p. 25)

Mejias's ideas were echoed by some of the metaphors used by participants such as Frances in describing social media as a 'talent contest' or Susan discussing social media as 'jockeying for position', both of which are competitive game-based metaphors. Mejias, therefore, gives us a helpful insight into how social media platforms frame the sort of competitive behaviour discussed in this paper. Again, one can see how these rules create a changing environment.

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One can also see the same process in participants discussing the need for offline and embodied relationships. Mejias (2013) pointed out that network dynamics create a filter on information so that any facet of relationships not included in the design of digital networks is entirely obscured and unknowable online. As Mejias has clarified, digital networks are increasingly setting the rules for how we relate socially, and these rules are not significantly negotiable. Mejias particularly focuses on how these rules are often created by corporations in an opaque manner which does not allow users a fair or equitable say in how the platforms they use are structured or operate. This creates the potential for relationships to be reduced. This can be seen in how we become disembodied online; as Law (2012) remarked, the ability to communicate ourselves and connect in the varied and nuanced manner that physical encounters afford is lost. This can be seen in Tony describing online relationships as 'thin', Jane lamenting the lack of closeness and connectivity with online relationships or Frances talking about her online identity being a bland version of who she really is, describing it as her 'happy for my granny to see it identity'.

Importantly, McLuhan (1967) and others have been extensively criticised for the ostensibly deterministic nature of their thought. Williams (1974) is probably the most famous among those criticising McLuhan for ignoring the place of agency and wider culture when understanding technology, and instead just considering its technological evolution as driving social change. On a popular level, these ideas are sometimes linked with scare stories that television makes people less intelligent or that computer games lead to violence. It is important to note that this is not how I am attempting to use the idea that technology affects its users. The position I am advocating is to move away from seeing technology as an invisible hand driving human history as McLuhan does (1967); neither is it to see technology

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as mainly having negative and culturally reductive properties (as seen in some popular discourses). Instead, I would like to put the effect of technology alongside the place of individual agency and wider social forces. It is possible to take on Williams's critique whilst still recognising that technology has an impact on its users which is not accounted for by how it is used or by the wider social context. To give an example, news-feeds are a common part of many social media platforms. Users can develop various strategies (individual agency) to learn from and interact with these feeds and the feed itself is developed by a corporation who controls various aspects of it function linked to the capitalistic frame that the corporation operates in (wider social forces). Recognising these two other explanations does not exclude the idea that how individuals experience these feeds is in part shaped by aspects of the technology (for example the information being in short chunks, that it arrives at a constant rate and that it never ends). Rather than trying to reduce how we explain technology into one of these three positions, a richer account can be developed through exploring the interaction and overlap between these three distinct forces. It is this nuanced position that I would like to put forward and which helps us understand the data presented here.

Secondly then, some theories explore the socio-political context in which social media exists and how the platform of social media enmeshes users in these relationships. Van Dijk (2013) has discussed that Facebook and LinkedIn increasingly and consciously create friction between a user's desire to have control over what they communicate to various audiences and advertisers, and other parties' desire to access and process the data for commercial gain. Van Dijk shows how the users' control of how they interact with their audience is eroded by the way digital networks use their power for commercial objectives. This analysis has been further developed by Srnicek (2017) who has noted how social media is an example of the

development of capitalism into a stage where platforms have become an emerging form under which capitalism operates. This draws attention to how a few global technology corporations are transforming capitalism and society.

These theories create a different reading of what is occurring in the data that was analysed in this study. Though Van Dijk and Srnicek would contend that personal agency is not the best way to understand what happens with social media, they would move their focus to not stop with technology but to look at how the architecture of social media is constructed for the economic aims of the corporations who run these sites. This creates a choice of analytic focus between technology itself and wider social forces, which become presented to individuals through technology. This allows one, for example, to consider how the speed and scale of social media is not an accidental occurrence but is a direct result of social media corporations' desires to drive engagement at scale and to, therefore, create profit. Similarly, the game-like features of social media could be explained, not as a Frankenstein's monster (Postman 1993) but, by how social media is framed around the dissonance between social media platforms' rhetoric around the free and meritocratic nature of engagement and the architecture for engagement, which is actually designed to secure profit.

Frances's remark that her online identity is her 'happy for my granny to see it identity' is not just a comment about online identities but chimes with how Van Dijk (2013) has described the desires of users and corporations becoming increasingly in conflict with each other. This is because the exposure that allows social media corporations to profit from Frances's identity also puts her in a position where she has to curate an identity which is safe but, in many ways, bland and removed from Frances's conception of her authentic self. Or similarly,

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Tony's description of social media as 'fast and furious' can be seen not only as a product of the digital technology but also of the way that scale becomes a key mechanism through which social media platforms leverage profit as described by Srnicek (2017).

It is important to acknowledge that the negative aspects of digital technology in relation to their career development that participants have reported can be explained through the economic imperative of social media organisations to drive and control engagement online. This is not so much something that can be underpinned by different elements of the data, but the same data presented earlier could be interoperated differently. This draws attention to the tensions that exist between users' actions, the forms of digital technology and wider socio-political forces that exist inside neoliberal society, though the exact relationship between them is not inside the domain of this study.

Conclusion

This paper has contributed to the literature on social media and career development by exploring new critical perspectives. I have shown the importance of exploring the link between social media and career development from a critical perspective and the importance of critical perspectives not primarily concerned with surveillance. This study has hopefully opened up fresh avenues for career research and practice, exploring how the interaction between social media and career is framed and how this refocuses our understandings of career-related learning and connecting.

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