Career Guidance and Digital Induction

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to explore the process through which higher education students in the U.K. are inducted into using digital platforms for their careers. This paper will present data from a longitudinal study looking at how students use digital social media platforms as part of their career transitions after graduating. A key finding from this study is that the university plays a central role in why and how students start using digital platforms for their career. Qualitative data was gathered from students both before and after graduating about their experiences of using digital platforms for their careers. This data was analysed using an interpretative phenomenological analysis. The themes developed from this pointed to four main themes: induction, hybridity, imaginations and exposure to e-safety. This is contextualised through exploring this process as an example of the platformisation of career in a higher education context.

ABSTRAKTI

Tämän artikkelin tarkoitus on tarkastella prosessia, jonka kautta Britannian korkeakouluopiskelijat perehdytetään käyttämään digitaalisia alustoja urasuunnittelussaan. Artikkeli esittelee aineiston pitkittäistutkimuksesta, jonka aiheena on miten opiskelijat käyttävät digitaalisia sosiaalisen median alustoja osana valmistumisen jälkeisiä urasiirtymiä. Keskeinen tulos tästä tutkimuksesta on, että yliopistolla on keskeinen rooli siinä miksi ja miten opiskelijat alkavat käyttää digitaalisia alustoja osana urasuunnitteluaan. Opiskelijoiden keskuudesta kerättiin laadullista aineistoa sekä ennen että jälkeen valmistumisen koskien heidän kokemuksiaan urasuunnitteluun liittyvistä digitaalisista alustoista. Tämä aineisto analysoitiin tulkitsevan fenomenologisen analyysin avulla. Analyysin perusteella aineistosta erotettiin neljä pääteemaa: perehdytys, hybriditeetti, ennakkouskomukset sekä digitaalinen turvallisuus. Nämä pääteemat kontekstualisoitiin tarkastelemalla opiskelijoiden prosessia esimerkkinä uran nivoutumisesta alustoihin korkeakoulukontekstissa.

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INTRODUCTION

Career guidance has had a relationship with technology since its inception. Watts (2002) traces the use of technology to support career guidance back to the 1960s, but since the development of the Internet and the proliferation of digital technologies, there has been a particularly increased focus on the relationship between career practice and digital technology (e.g. Hooley & Staunton, 2021; Jynge et al., 2024; Kettunen et al., 2013; Longridge et al., 2013). This has been explored in terms of its impact on practice (e.g. Hooley et al., 2010) and on career development and the career needs of individuals seeking to enact their careers (e.g. Hooley, 2012; Hooley & Staunton, 2021). It is in this later context that this paper is written. Primarily this paper is concerned with exploring the reasons for individuals to start using digital technology for their careers. As we will see, much has been written about the benefits of using digital platforms for career development (e.g. Benson & Morgan, 2016; Bridgstock, 2009; Hooley, 2012) but less has been done to explore how and why individuals start using digital technology. This paper will explore the relationship between career practice and an individual's career development with digital platforms from a critical perspective.

This paper is developed from the conviction that career guidance is not just a technical practice but exists in a social, cultural, political and economic context. Hooley and Sultana (2016) approach career guidance as a social practice and highlight that career guidance is not just a technical discipline that can be performed more or less effectively but is also a practice that exists in a social context. They argue that career guidance is always either contributing to 'reproductive and oppressive' aspects of society or developing 'transformative and emancipatory' elements. This is particularly articulated in their focus on hegemony and discourse concerning neoliberalism. Career guidance either (implicitly or explicitly) promotes beliefs that contribute to the maintenance of neoliberal hegemony or it is a social practice which critiques and resists them. This creates a particular starting point for studying career guidance and its relationship to career development, how is the social practice of career guidance related to existing cultural hegemonies? This takes a position inside the wider school of critical realism (Bhaskar, 2011; Reed 2005; Saunders et al., 2007) which as an ontological position argues that social reality can only be studied through a recognition of the subjective nature of personal reality but with the belief that this can be used as the basis for constructing understandings of how personal reality is connected to wider social structures.

A commitment to critical realism also underpins how technology will be approached in this paper. Though technology enables and creates a need for different practices, a fuller understanding of technology also considers the wider socio-political context in which technology is developed. We will particularly consider this through the concept of digital platforms in which social media sites are described as 'platforms' with a particular focus on the economic models they promote and the way they impact social reality. Srnicek (2017) argues that our current form of capitalism has become increasingly focused on extracting and using data as a resource. Srnicek (2017) goes on to say that the need to work with extracted data as a resource has led to the emergence of a new type of form, the platform (e.g., Google, Facebook, Uber, Amazon). Platforms allow spaces for users to connect and often the opportunity for third parties to build tools which users can make use of on the platform (e.g., Apple's App Store). This allows platforms to create a unique position for themselves according to Srnicek "…since a platform positions itself 1) between users, and 2) as the ground upon which their activities occur, which thus gives it privileged access to record them." (Srnicek, 2017, p. 44). Srnicek says this means that platforms are reliant on "networked effects" to extract data, meaning they need to attract users and to get users to use the platform as much as possible to be successful. This often leads to platforms presenting themselves as "empty spaces" (p. 46) for users to make use of as they will but instead digital platforms are tightly controlled spaces designed by the platform owners. This means that the social media platform's desire to be driven by users' sense of community, freedom, play and belonging increasingly becomes a strategy to gain and maintain users and by doing so maintain profit streams. This brings us back to Srnicek's (2017) conception of the platform, social media are not just utilities that create the possibility for users to interact but instead present a particular business model that is focussed on extracting a resource, namely data.

When exploring what role career guidance has in inducting individuals into using digital platforms for their career, this study will focus on how this process is related to wider hegemonic and social structures. Individuals starting to use digital platforms is not just a technical act of

developing a new set of proficiencies but recognises that the forces that encourage this practice are related to wider social phenomena. This in turn has broader consequences beyond how well an individual makes use of a particular digital artefact or digital space. We will approach these as platforms, sites on which social interaction is based and through this create a context which leads to the corporations who run them setting the context for social interaction and being able to extract data from a site that appears to be free.

This paper will have the following structure; Firstly, I will set out a literature review exploring how career guidance literature has approached individuals starting to use digital technology and will particularly argue these have been dominated by theories focussed on 'digital natives' or on 'digital literacy', this will be followed by a critique of both of these perspectives. Secondly, I will describe the methodology used in this study. This will explore the context of this study in the HE sectors but also relate this to career guidance practice more widely. Thirdly I will provide a summary of the findings from this study providing a thematic understanding of my data. Fourthly, I will use this data to underpin a new theorisation of the process through which individuals are inducted into using digital platforms and which has implications for theory, practice, policy and further research. In this section, there will be findings presented which indicate that student's induction on digital platforms was the result of advice given in their courses. This process of induction led students to take on a set of beliefs about technology but also exposed them to negative aspects of online paces such as harassment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This article focuses on students who do choose to use social media for their careers. There is a significant literature that explores why individuals are excluded from using social media (e.g. Helsper, 2012; Warren, 2007) which has been extended to cover HE students as well (Eynon & Helsper, 2011; Khalid & Pedersen, 2016) but for this article we are specifically focussing on students who start using digital platforms for their careers in U.K. This literature focuses on two theoretical conceptions, firstly of the conception of 'digital natives' and secondly of 'digital career literacy'.

DIGITAL NATIVES

'Digital Natives' as contrasted with 'digital immigrants' is initially a concept developed by Prensky (2001). Prensky's work portrayed 'digital natives' as able to fluently 'speak' the new 'language' of digital technology which older generations in society (such as teachers and parents) were not fluent in. This positions individuals who grew up in a generation where the Internet was already a significant part of society (often referred to as 'millennials') as having a natural propensity towards technology and an innate ability to use technology well. This idea has been picked up in various studies focussed on career development. Smith (2018) argues that because of their generational status and associated 'digital wisdom' millennials naturally look to digital platforms such as LinkedIn to support their job search. Similarly, Smith, Hewitt and Skrbiš (2015) argue that because millennials grew up with 'Web 2.0' this generation viewed using digital technology 'through the lens of their own transition to adulthood' meaning that using digital technology in more areas of life, including in their careers, was a natural part of coming of age for millennials. Smith, Hewitt & Skrbiš (2015) argued that this association with maturity meant that individuals were keen to take on the new technology so not as to fall behind their peers with adopting technology. These understandings are echoed in Smith and Watkins' (2023) assertion that millennials have a propensity for using LinkedIn for their job search, similar arguments are also made by Fam, Soo, and Wahjono (2017) as well as by Lucero-Romero and Arias-Bolzmann (2020). Digital natives as a concept have been criticised extensively, for example, Selwyn (2009) argues that young people's use of technology is both varied and unspectacular, arguing against the conception that 'millennials' are all the same in having a particular affinity for technology. Helsper and Eynon (2010) argue that even if there is a generational gap it can be closed through appropriate exposure and instruction. In terms of this study, the argument we need to pay attention to is if individuals using social media for their careers is determined by their generational status both in terms of their decision to use digital platforms and in terms of the effectiveness of the actual practices which they make use of.

DIGITAL LITERACY

Helsper and Eynon's (2010) contribution to the digital native's debate brings into focus the other theoretical conception that will be interacted with within this study, digital literacy, or more specifically digital career literacy. The "digital career literacy" concept was initially developed by Hooley (2012) and aims to map out the set of skills that individuals are encouraged to use to develop their careers in a digital context. It has become a wide-ranging theme in the literature (Benson & Morgan, 2016; Hooley et al., 2015; Longridge et al., 2013). Digital career literacy more broadly is comparable to a range of other theories that aim to conceptualise the skills individuals need to operate in society. These include human capital theory (Becker, 1962; Mincer, 1958) which postulates that as individuals invest more in their education and skills they can secure greater access to higher levels of work and pay, career management skills (Hooley et al., 2013) which aims to describe the skills and attitudes individuals need to manage their careers and finally digital literacy which refers to the skills needed to use technology effectively (Beetham, 2015; Belshaw, 2011; Reddy et al., 2020). What all of these conceptions hold in common is the idea that investing in the right forms of skills will translate into career success. Hooley (2012) among other authors has argued that this involves investing in the correct digital competencies and literacies in order to manage an individual's career effectively. This makes a distinction from seeing digital literacy as a graduate skill that students might present to make themselves appear more employable (Adachi et al., 2018; Matilda & Neena, 2017). Instead, digital career literacy focuses on career management.

PLATFORMISATION

Digital natives and digital literacy theories present individual choice and agency as the central context for understanding digital platform use. What this ignores is how digital platforms set a social context which intertwines with individual agencies. We cannot understand the impact of digital platforms on career without studying the platforms themselves and the accompanying process of 'platformisation'. Srnicek (2017) describes digital platforms as economic models that create a site for users to interact and for their data to be extracted. This is allied to the process of platformisation which is described by Fernández-Macías et al., (2023) as the way that the activities of various institutions have become co-ordinated by digital platforms pointing to platforms not just being an economic model but increasingly one of the dominant models of social relations in contemporary society. Poell and colleagues (2019) go further by arguing that it is not just structured that are coordinated by platforms but also "social practices and imaginations are organised around [them]" (p. 5). This develops platformisation into the process by which digital platforms come to coordinate various social activities and because of this organise social practices and 'imaginations'. When applied to career development platformisation articulates the way that various activities related to career development (such as developing social relationships and applying for jobs) have become co-ordinated by digital practices and as a result the way that individuals carry out these activities and how they think about these activities is set by the overall context of the digital platform. This theoretical description points to the need to understand why platforms become so dominant in career development in the first place. This also fits into the wider critical realist tradition which we introduced above, looking to explore how individuals' social realities can be connected to wider social structures through theoretical investigation.

METHOD

The data collected for this study was part of a larger study focusing on the impact of digital platforms on graduate transition in U.K. This paper made use of the following research aim; what can we learn from this study about the process of students starting using digital platforms for their careers? This aim is then theoretically linked to the discussion of platformisation developed above. This overall research aim was then developed into the following research questions: 1) Why did students start using social media platforms for their careers? 2) How did this initial decision shape their thinking? 3) How did students' feelings about starting to use social media change over time?

DESIGN

This research was designed as a longitudinal study (Flick, 2018; Saldaña, 2003) focused on participants› experiences of using social media during their career transitions post-university in U.K. The study drew on Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as the overall frame of reference for the study as well as for the analysis. IPA was selected for this study due to its focus on developing new theoretical insights from users› data and developing an understanding of how individuals experienced specific phenomena, in this case, the phenomena of digital platforms. This was explored using semi-structured qualitative interviews (Pathak & Intratat, 2012). The longitudinal study was then conducted from the final year of a student's degree through to twelve months after graduating typically involving three interviews per participant. The interviews took place between November 2019–January 2022. The first interview happened while a student was still studying for their degree, the second happened after there had been an initial gap after a student finished a degree and they had had some initial experiences of the graduate labour market and then the third interview happened nine to twelve months after the second interview. Twenty-two participants attended a first interview for the project, seventeen attended a second interview for the project and fourteen participants attended a third interview for the project meaning that the attrition rate between interviews one and two was 77.2%, between two and three was 82.3% and the overall attrition rate for the project (between interview one and three) was 63.6%.

SAMPLE

In total, twenty-two participants took part in the study. This follows the sampling recommendations from Smith et al., 1999 and Lyons and Coyle (2016) for an IPA study which prefers a sample under 30 with a homogeneous nature (in this case the sample was all students from the same university in U.K). A sample of this size is methodologically sound but does create some limitations. Looking at students' experiences from more than one university both nationally and internationally could add to this work as could focusing on more academic programmes or looking at larger samples from single or related discipline areas (e.g. arts courses or business degrees). Generalisation is not typically a concern from IPA studies, instead, this data presents a unique perspective on a particular case from which theoretical resources can be drawn.

Participants were classified according to their university department. Six were studying a Business or Economics degree, two Education, six studying Health and Social Care, three Social Sciences, two studying Law, one Humanities, one IT and one Natural Sciences. Of the participants eighteen identified as female while four identified as male. Participants were asked to identify their ethnicity, thirteen described themselves as White British three described themselves as White European, two described themselves as Black, one as British-Pakistani, one as British-Indian, one as Sri Lankan and one participant preferred not to say. Participants were asked if their parents had attended university. Six had both parents attending, six had one parent attending and ten had neither of their parents attending. Participants were asked to identify what social media platforms they were using to support their career development. Every single participant said they were using LinkedIn, three said they were also using Twitter, three Facebook, four Instagram and one also listed YouTube. Finally, participants were given a pseudonym using an online random name generator.

APPROACH TO ANALYSIS

As noted above, this study used IPA as the method of analysis. IPA is a qualitative approach focused on understanding the experiences of individuals (Smith & Osborn, 2015). Building on the qualitative and ideographic commitments from IPA semi-structured interviews were used to develop in-depth conversations about the phenomenon under analysis. This was particularly supported with a focus on quality interview skills, active listening, making use of open-ended questions and paying careful attention to what is being conveyed by the participant. These were all aspects that were made use of in this study and particularly came out in the choice of questions, as described in the section on research procedures below. In this study, transcripts were recorded electronically and then transcribed verbatim before the scripts were worked on in more detail. When using IPA Pietkiewicz and Smith (2012) encouraged an initial stage of taking notes and developing thoughts and questions. A separate file was kept where these thoughts were developed. Thirdly, these initial notes and comments were turned into initial themes. This was done through an iterative process which allowed closer checking between data and

themes. Notes were used as a guide to generate some initial themes which were then checked against the next transcripts as they were used on the transcript; the list of themes inevitably developed and changed so that theme development occurred between the initial notes and the themes themselves. Through this process, a particular focus was given to the reasons and manner under which participants first started using digital platforms for their careers.

ETHICS

The ethical approach to this project was based on five main principles, minimising the risk of harm, obtaining informed consent, protecting anonymity and confidentiality, avoiding deceptive practices, and finally providing the right to withdraw.

Particularly important to this project was how to consider how the Internet would be considered from an ethical perspective. Buchanan (2012) presents several important ethical questions related to research on the Internet. Exploring questions related to research using social media Buchanan (2012) encourages researchers to consider if the data discussed could be searchable and might compromise individuals if their identities were discovered. This particularly encourages researchers to think about how participants' data can be protected. For this reason, this project was particularly concerned when reproducing quotes from participants to not quote directly from social media posts or provide other information, such as precise courses, employers or other details which could be searched online.

Beyond this informed consent was sought by sending a form to complete before their first interview. This covered the scope of the project, withdrawal and confidentiality as well as an expected timetable for the projects. Less formal consent was sought before all of the following interviews in the project. As discussed above, anonymity was protected by giving all participants a pseudonym. Also, other information such as individuals or organisations who could be identified through their testimonies was redacted from any quotes. This was particularly considered concerning the searchable nature of data on the Internet. Finally, participants were given a clear description in the initial interview of how to withdraw from the study. They were only committed to the interview they were involved in, could withdraw that interview up to two weeks after the interview and could withdraw from the study any time before the next interview.

FINDINGS

An analysis focused on why participants started using social media. This was achieved through using IPA to generate several different themes which sat across all participants in the study. The ideas presented through these themes will then be developed and related to practice in the discussion section at the end of this paper.

THEMES

When analysing data for this study four particular themes were developed about why students started using digital platforms and the consequences of this for their career. These themes were induction, hybrid careers, imaginations and navigating e-safety.

Induction

Induction describes the process by which students started using digital platforms because of the actions and practices of the educational institution of which they were part of. In the data from this study, it was found that students did start using digital platforms for their careers because of the encouragement and views of the university they attended and the university lecturers and other staff that they interacted with. This was especially brought about by the views of their lecturers but also included other university support staff (e.g., careers staff or librarians). Naomi, for example, described how she started using Twitter because a lecturer told her she would need an account, similarly, Joanne described using social media for her career as something which was "pushed by the university" and which she wouldn't have started using without her lecturers telling her about it. Lily went further stating that she was "basically forced" to start using social media on her course because of how it was baked into several assignments. Similarly, Camila talked about having to set up an account for a piece of coursework despite feeling uncomfortable about it. This points to students being inducted into using social media as a product of interacting

with lecturers and how learning and teaching were structured in their courses. This process was mainly overseen by lecturers but some students referred to support staff as well as. Haley, Fatima and Joanne all talked about attending extracurricular programs run by the careers team which encouraged them to start using social media while Camila talked about coming across support on offer through the library to set up a LinkedIn account. Of the participants, none of them mentioned using a social media platform for their career before coming to university and none of them mentioned peers influencing them to start using social media in this way or that there was any sort of instinct for them to use it due to their "generational status" or some other innate instinct or predisposition towards looking to digital solutions.

Participants talked about two main rationales that were impressed upon them to start using social media, building contacts and being active. In regard to building contacts, Annie talked about how she started using LinkedIn "...because there was a recommendation of the lecturers and my programme leader to start using it to build contacts". Similarly, Lottie talked about how as a Law student she had been told she needed to develop a wide range of contacts and that LinkedIn was key to doing this, similarly, Michelle talked about being told that she needed to use LinkedIn and then "add everyone I met" to it. Participants also talked about being encouraged to "be active" on social media. Esther talked about being told by her lecturers to "be interactive" and "keep the engagement going" while Camilla described a meeting with a member of careers staff after she had finished her degree who had told her to keep interacting and posting online and that she needed to be active and visible. In conclusion, we can see from this section a central role for universities in inducting students and students into using digital technology. This was especially focused on encouraging students to connect and to be active online.

Hybrid careers

The second theme developed from the data was of students developing hybrid careers. This meant that students learned to traverse between physical and digital spaces as part of their career rather than simply moving aspects of their career entirely online. From the findings presented so far it might be assumed that participants in this study entirely developed their careers online. In fact, participants traversed physical and digital spaces and developed career strategies which were a hybrid of both spaces. This point about the vitality of face-to-face relationships leads into another key point, the hybrid nature of developing online connections. Participants often discussed developing relationships in physical spaces before taking these online. For example, Raven talked about using LinkedIn as a way to develop relationships with people she met in person. Similarly, Annie discussed a very similar experience of using LinkedIn to keep a tab on connections of people she met in person. Several participants made similar comments discussing networking events and recruitment fairs as places where they met people (especially whilst still students) and then LinkedIn (or sometimes other social media platforms) gave them the opportunity to develop these relationships further. Almost always participants saw digital platforms as complementing and supporting face-to-face and embodied relationships rather than challenging and disrupting them. This points towards a hybrid understanding of relationships which fluidly move between digital and embodied spaces.

'Imaginations'

The third theme developed was 'imaginations'. The process of induction led to a process where various beliefs, or what Poell et al. (2019) refer to as 'imaginations, about digital platforms, were taken on by participants. These particularly focussed on the benefits of digital platforms for building connections and creating social capital for individuals. Participants had a strong belief that adding new connections on digital platforms intrinsically led to students becoming more connected. Camila, for example, talked about adding "...randoms on LinkedIn" describing a slightly unconsidered pattern of adding people for the sake of having more connections. Annie made a similar comment about her desire to have more connections "...that was the first idea then to use it to build up your contacts for your career." Cameron made a very similar comment about adding people, "so at the moment, basically, what I do is I just add contacts that I think are going to be useful, for whatever career I'm going for...". Alongside this students also had lots of confidence that digital platforms were making them more visible to employers and so were becoming more employable. Fatima, for example, discussed the need to be present on social media "...so people can see what I'm up to because my profiles' all public, open to the public, so I can get more views". In a similar way, Raven talked about how social media allows you to "show

your personality and get the word out" and that "people aren't going to know what you're doing unless you're talking about it". While Michelle talked about the main point of LinkedIn in particular was to "be present" to other people in her industry, which in Michelle's case was the legal sector.

Participants had a strong belief that being more visible would lead to some sort of passive recruitment where they were headhunted on sent job offers over LinkedIn. Annie talked on a number of occasions through her interview about connecting with "people who would want to hire her" giving the impression that if she connected with the right people someone would decide to offer her a job. Becky similarly talked about maintaining her profile in case "someone who might be interested in hiring her" came across it.

Finally, participants in this study appeared to be happy to make the trade between becoming more visible and increasing the amount of surveillance they were exposed to. They particularly mediated this through the belief that they were able to present a "professional" persona online that was neutral and would avoid negative consequences for their career. Cameron, for example, talked about wanting a particular standard of appearance for his LinkedIn saying "On LinkedIn, it's a bit different. I feel like if you have a professional-looking page, it just might spark something." Similarly, Anita talked about deciding to avoid arguments as she had done when she was younger, "but I keep it I generally keep myself obviously, very professional presenting even on Twitter. I'm kind of, you know, I don't like to say, I don't like to, I'm careful of things that I like and stuff like that. There's nothing that could be construed as unprofessional and stuff." At a later point in the interview Anita went on to say that her social media profile was "very corporate" she also went on to talk about how she intentionally developed a persona online that would support her career, finishing off by saying "so it is still a person behind it. But it's sort of being the nice person I want to present basically."

Navigating e-safety

The forth theme developed was navigating e-safety. A key experience which participants talked about was having to navigate what might be described as "e-safety" that is having to navigate situations where individuals' security might be compromised or harm might befall the participant. In the data from this project participants both talked about navigating potential dangers and directly experiencing some of these negative aspects for themselves, particularly in the form of scams and low-level harassment. Beyond the career consequences (that we will discuss below) participants also talked extensively about having to navigate e-safety. This could be seen as a negative consequence of their career development which developed out of being inducted into using digital spaces for their careers.

At the lowest level this involved having to assess if someone trying to connect with you was someone genuinely linked to your career or not was a common experience. Haley described trying to filter between people who were "random" and by implication that you couldn't clearly see who they were with other people in her sector. This decision-making was echoed by Jenny who talked about being able to recognise potential cat fishers easily on Twitter but also that she was more open on LinkedIn and that she was assuming it was a safer space. Most participants had this general awareness of avoiding connecting with "just anyone" in a similar manner to how young children are told to "not talk to strangers".

There were a few examples which participants gave of moving past potential situations to more concrete examples. One of these came in the form of scam, or grey semi-legal employment practices. Anita gave an example of being exploited by an employer that she came to realise had no international to pay her and that this recruiter had been specifically targeting graduates in search of work. According to Anita, social media had been particularly used by someone because of its ease to search and find people to "target" who would be more vulnerable and likely to sell their labour for less (or in fact no) money. Anita described how social media combined with her sense of precarity to make her more vulnerable to this sort of approach.

There were also several examples of participants, all female on this occasion discussing forms of low-level harassment related to how they had used social media for their careers. Michelle and Lottie, who are both law students, gave examples of harassment which were a lot more embedded in social media contexts. Both Michelle and Lottie discussed how men started conversations online under the guise of wanting to connect around career matters but quickly turned the conversation towards pressuring them to engage with them more personally. Both Michelle and Lottie discussed they were aware of other of their course mates who had had

similar interactions. Their feeling was that their precarity (not wanting to offend, wanting to develop experience and connections) left them exposed to interactions they would rather not be having. This sits alongside the apparent way that social media allowed individuals to be less conspicuous whilst also searching for individuals they wished to approach.

These are important qualifications to develop in our description of online induction. Individuals were inducted into digital platforms which still existed as hybrid spaces. Also, this induction led to challenges which were amplified because of individuals' career positions. These conceptions begin to help us understand the process and consequences of platformisation for career development. This sits inside the broader critical realist tradition of understanding structures (in this case platforms) through the testimonies of individuals which in turn are developed theoretically, in this case through an understanding and enhancement of platformisation as a process.

DISCUSSION

Following the analyses there are a number of different statements about the process of induction that can be drawn from this study. Firstly, students in U.K started using digital platforms for their careers because of their experiences in their courses. This cuts against the idea of digital natives. Echoing findings from Longridge and Hooley (2012), participants in this study often used digital platforms extensively in other areas of their lives but only started using them for their careers when they were encouraged or made to. They did not have a natural tendency to use digital platforms which could be tied to their generational identity. This shows the centrality of intermediaries such as educational institutions for the development of digital platforms in contemporary society. This indicates that digital platforms palace in society are not natural or part of a passive historical process where generations who are born in contact with them naturally incorporate them into their lives. Instead, educational institutions play a role in promoting and normalising these platforms, this opens up the importance of critically approaching these educational practices and their consequences.

Secondly, this process of induction involved students changing their position and moving onto digital sites but also developing a certain set of beliefs and values about digital platforms. As we noted above this involved taking on views about the power of digital spaces to enable connections and the requirements to focus on visibility and navigate surveillance through a focus on becoming professional. Though this involved changing practices and so may be linked to an individual's digital career literacy (Hooley, 2012) it also involved taking on particular beliefs and subjective understandings of technology. This enhances our understanding of induction as not just moving onto digital platforms but also taking on board a set of accompanying norms and beliefs about digital spaces and how they should be used for career. These were in part developed out of the logic of the networks (that require connections and visibility) but also out of the ideals and norms students heard from their universities.

Thirdly, reflecting on the longitudinal nature of the study, there was a tendency for participants to move towards negative reflections about digital platforms over time, though importantly this was not universal. Participants discussed how they felt that digital platforms had been oversold and overhyped by their universities or just had not been relevant in practice despite their previous assumptions. This draws out the benefits of this longitudinal approach and points to the benefits of a critical stance towards this process of induction.

Fourthly, careers are hybrid in nature, it moves between online and offline spaces. Though in this study we were able to see the significant extent to which digital platforms have colonised space related to career in general and graduate transition in particular it is still important to see how individuals often moved between online and offline spaces. This is not conceptualised very well in the digital career literacy literature and is a shortcoming highlighted by this study.

Finally, this study shows the dangerous situations that partaking in digital spaces involved for these participants. Navigating digital spaces involved navigating cat-fishing, scams and online harassment which was often enhanced because of students' precarity but also because of the confidence they had placed in digital platforms. This in part shows the need to educate students on the dangers of online spaces but as Feher (2021) argues there is also a limit to how individuals can effectively protect themselves online and negative consequences may be inevitable or at least enhanced by existing social positions. This echoes Buchannan's (2012) concern that digital literacy narratives should not be used to make individuals responsible for aspects beyond their control.

These findings provide a critique of the two existing understandings of why students would want to start using digital platforms for their careers. This paper's significance can be seen in how it adds continual evidence against 'digital natives' as a theoretical category. Students in this study did not turn to digital platforms naturally or through a desire to be 'digitally mature' instead their decision came about through their experiences on their courses. In terms of digital literacy, this paper adds critiques against how digital career literacy is described in the literature. Starting using digital platforms was not an expression of an individual's ability to change and adapt to new environments but represented taking on an ideological position they were inducted into. The careers that individuals were inducted into remained hybrid where individuals had to navigate physical and digital spaces and traverse between them. Finally, their careers involved individuals encountering 'unsafe' aspects of their careers that their agency could not overcome.

The study points to the process of platformisation being one that is not merely a product of the economic success of platform corporations (though this is not to be denied) but also a product of intermediary institutions, such as universities in this case. We see students being inducted into using digital platforms because of the actions of academics and other university staff. This points to the way that digital platforms have become normalised on campus and in many ways come to be seen as progressive. Similarly, we see the consequences for individuals 'imaginations and beliefs about themselves as well as how they were structurally exposed to negative aspects of online life. This ties in with existing themes in higher education of the growing importance of digital infrastructures and graduate outcomes. This research shows how these have combined but also how platforms have come to be so important in graduate transitions, pointing to the important place of intermediary institutions in these graduate transitions.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Recognising that students' use of digital platforms was significantly shaped by the educational institutions they were part of does show the opportunities for career guidance practice, education made a significant difference to individuals' careers. This points to the contextual nature of career guidance in educational institutions. There is a collegiate nature to careers guidance, recognising that lots of different staff in a career setting have career conversations (lecturers were most significant in this study) and so careers practise as a whole need to integrate the range of people having these conversations. The findings of this study point to the need for careers staff to engage with academics and other support staff who might offer career support enabling them to think about and develop the messages about social media which they might hand on to students. Career guidance needs to engage with the hybrid nature of a career, students cannot just look at social media as doing things like learning and connecting better than physical spaces, instead, they need to learn how to traverse these different spaces as part of developing their careers. Students will need help and support from trained career professionals to do this. Furthermore, this difference should be viewed sociologically (considering how it relates to structures and cultural hegemony) as much as to the technical delivery of an education programme. This study shows a need for an approach to career education that is critical, that explores the dangers and weaknesses of digital spaces. Students need space to think analytically and critically about the tools they are using and the accompanying values and structures that are entwined with these spaces. This discussion does not ignore the need to talk about digital practices but it does caution against just focussing on a few specific digital literacies which are presented as offering solutions by themselves.

This paper presents ideas for further research. Firstly, a better understanding of what messaging was given out by different lecturers and why would be an obvious area for further research. So, too would be more detailed studies of how different parts of the graduate labour market make use of different digital platforms to better understand the challenges students will face in these different areas. Finally, exploring some of the qualifications we discussed earlier about hybrid careers and online safety would provide more detail and more theoretical resources to the findings of this study.

There are limitations to this study, such that all the data is drawn from university students and all from one institution in the U.K. Further research could be enhanced through looking at different life stages, through looking at different educational institutions and making use of international comparison.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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