Does Gender Make a Difference?  
Undergraduate Students’ Use of Smart CVs for Career Planning

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Abstract

In the contemporary society, gender equality in accessing the job market is advocated, and often protected by law in developed countries. In reality, however, gender differences exist in different aspects and stages of recruitment processes and career development, say from career planning, job search, application, recruitment and promotion. Such differences are usually exemplified by different interesting findings in the literature. Some research findings had shown that male candidates spend less time than female candidates to secure a post-displacement job; male candidates in overall are more “linear” in job seeking than female candidates. One proposed explanation on the phenomenon is on how male and female candidates use online CVs for job hunting. This research aims to investigate the undergraduate students’ perceived effects of three facets: Portfolio, Presentation and Presence in career planning, job search and application processes by using online CVs. Initial results indicate that gender differences exist on the perceptions of 3P’s in career planning. Notably, female candidates see their Presence has direct relationship with Career Planning but male candidates do not. While male candidates perceive a direct relationship between Portfolio and Career Planning, but their female counterparts do not.

1. Introduction

Gender differences in accessing to economic opportunities have long existed in the business world [1]. Despite the contemporary evolution through years, pervasive and persistent gender differences still remain across sectors, industries and occupations. Job hunting and recruitment are the foremost and essential part of career planning which have been receiving increasing attention over the past decades.

One of the most significant gender differences in career planning is the amount of time spent to search for a post-displacement job [2]. On average, the time for a male candidate to find a post-displacement job is about 14 weeks, while a female candidate may need to wait over a year. Moreover, females tend to have lower payment rates and lower workforce participation [3].

The following section is a summary of related literature on identifying factors causing such gender differences between male and female candidates.

1.1. Family ties and job mobility

In most of the countries among world, there are large and persistent gender differences in labor market. Career females tend to have lower payment rates and workforce participation [3]. There are many possible explanations account for it. However, one of the two main sets of factors is internal and under the candidate’s control while another set of factors is external, which depends on many contextual issues.

Unlike male employees, female workers are less mobile as they are not willing to accept jobs located far away from their residence. It is usually due to a strong tie with their family members and especially the children [4]. Thus, female candidates are more restrictive than male in their career choices of search area: On average, female candidates search in fewer cities, countries and local labor market areas, who have fewer choices to accept jobs due to physical distance from their residences. These differences remain significant for male and female candidates who are identical in terms of age, ethnicity, employment status, education, experience, other skills and place of residence. For male candidates,
job search bases mainly on matching with their abilities, skills and interests. For female candidates, they have more considerations and restrictions including the geographical location and distance from their family.

The above results may not apply to some female candidates with higher qualifications and skill-level who are even willing to migrate to another country for a new job [5]. For female candidates with post-secondary or higher educational background, the search area is broader for white-collar jobs. “Imposter phenomenon” over the time were found less in males than in high achieving females, who persists in believing their intellectual abilities and strengths are weaker than males [6].

1.2. Job application channels

There are two common channels for people to seek job opportunities and make applications, informal channels and formal channels [7, 8]. In general, it is believed that a successful job application depends on the application channel being adapted.

One view of the informal channel indicates that personal networks tend toward gender-homophiles, due, employers familiarly track job-seekers toward gender-typical lines of work, perpetuating occupational gender segregation, and earning gender inequality as well [9-13]. Therefore, it is advocated that female candidates are less likely to obtain jobs by using informal channels.

Regardless the personal social network or ‘Guan Xi’ [14] in Chinese, formal channels act as an opened and fair tools in hiring people, since the open channels will have a measurable effect on equalizing the labor market opportunities of women and minorities. Therefore, female candidates tend to use and being employed through formal channels.

1.3. Information-seeking strategies

Job search can be viewed as an information-seeking activity [15]. Martey [16] suggests that notice, user comments, feelings, beliefs, and cognition, on oneself and on the job search activity are crucial to this information-seeking activity. It was also found that in terms of the gender differences on job search strategies, female candidates were also influenced by social, cultural, psychological, and personal factors.

Tomaskovic-Devey [13] advocates male and female candidates adopted different job search strategies. For example, in additional to the salary rate, female candidates put a higher emphasis on other benefits and welfares provided by the employer than their male counterparts. Female candidates also reflect that they will lack the interest to join a company if the job descriptions on the Internet fail to address other benefits and welfares.

Research on gender differences and information-seeking strategies found that male and female candidates demonstrate somewhat different navigation patterns. In general, the information-seeking strategy of female candidates are more linear at the initial stages than male candidates, but the strategy of female candidates are less linear than male candidates after initial stages [17, 18].

Roy and Chi [19] examined the information-seeking strategies among eighth-grade students and found that males tended to search more horizontally, scanned through more number of pages, while females searched more vertically, examining less number of pages with deeper understanding. Jamshid and Moukdad [20] found similar results and concluded males were more actively engaged in browsing, jumped to more pages, and entered more searches at search engines than females [18].

1.4. Attitudes towards search engines

Studies have found that computer and internet technologies were being perceived as masculine in nature [21]. Such perception contributes to findings which generally show male candidates have more favorable attitudes toward computers [22, 23].

Thanks to the advancement of the World Wide Web, the proportion of female internet users rose steadily, until about half were female at the end of 2000. Chirieac, Burns and Case [24] identified changes in gender-based perceptions toward the internet as related technologies become more essential to the workplace, businesses, and daily life. These findings suggest gendered patterns in use and interest, even as women’s access to and experience in internet technologies become equal with men’s.

Today, the gender difference in using the Internet and search engine is less than before, but it still exists. From this perspective, the job seeking tool may bring inconvenience to female workers who are not skillful and usually not preferred in using computers, but can be influenced by their information-seeking strategies, selection of job application channels, and attitudes towards online and search engines.

1.5. Research approach

Our research questions are: 1) Does gender make any difference in career planning? 2) How do one’s portfolio, ways of presentation of his/her artefacts and online presence influence his/her career
planning? The contribution of this paper is two-fold. Theoretically, user experiences are analyzed to investigate the usefulness and impact on career planning in the form of quantitative assessment, which will be of interest to researchers. Practically, one of the best practices of using an ePortfolio for career placement or online CV would be illustrated by the teachers in a series of workshops, which will be something practical and useful for practitioners’ and programme leaders’ interests.

2. 3P’s for Career Planning

In the context of this research, 3P’s are defined as Portfolio (P1), Presentation (P2) and Presence (P3). It is also believed that Portfolio with proper consideration of ownership and guidance could promote active, reflective and constructive/self-directed learning particularly in career counselling [25]. It is the foundation and essential steps for presentation (P2) [26] and presence (P3) [27]. Presentation enhances the awareness purposes and motivates one to exert efforts on meeting goals, required standards and/or expectations. Presence refers to the encounter, availability and interaction of an online CV developer(s) and user(s). The encounter, availability and interaction would have effects on the presentation through reflection based on viewers’ feedbacks and analytical data drawn from the access and use of it. The following subsections are the illustrations of each “P” in this research.

2.1. Portfolio (P1)

A “Smart CV” could be best backed up by an ePortfolio with selective and substantial collection of logs, narratives and artifacts. Depending on the tools/platform, the Smart CV can be used for presentation directly. It can also be constructed over time in a form of a digital repository with documentation of thoughts, actions, outcomes and feedback, etc. The portfolio/repository may be hosted in one place or many other places depending on users’ preference of tools and platforms. Therefore thoughtful planning and management are required.

2.2. Presentation (P2)

A Smart CV has its immediate look and feel as created upon the medium used which are ranging from electronic documents, books, videos, blogs, sites, portfolios and profiles etc. An impression however is aimed to create through a defined narrative and showcase of artifacts and evidence in addition to the sensory illustrations.

2.3. Presence (P3)

A Smart CV can be used and sent out as traditional practices for job specific applications. However it has become a trend to exist virtually as one’s online presence, digital identity and footprints through purposeful or even casual use of information and communication technology, social networking media and search functions.

Not too many literature discuss the gender differences with the use of ePortfolio for career planning. To address this research gap, we assess the influence of Smart CVs to career planning as perceived by undergraduates, this study attempts to provide a workshop of using Smart CV for purposes of job hunting and placement. Such workshop covered different layout designs and Search Engine Optimization (SEO). Feedbacks from participants will help us evaluate the gender differences on the 3P’s and their effects towards Career Planning (CP).

3. Hypothesis Development

Due to pedagogical considerations and media technology development, Smart CV, often in the form of a special ePortfolio targeted for job hunting, has evolved from a collection of work to become a critical vehicle for learning and development. It is also a catalyst for collecting feedback from diverse audiences and stakeholders which could facilitate reflection and provoke new ideas. More importantly, it supports a continuum of learning experiences which can be out of expectation and dynamic [28].

To study the interrelationship between Portfolio (P1), Presentation (P2), Presence (P3) and Career Planning (CP), a series of hypotheses have been developed with reference to the literature. Firstly, technical barriers are reduced for digitizing multimedia and moving them onto the Internet. Portability is greatly enhanced with fewer constraints on time and space for communication and collaboration. Flexibility in allowing very selective and customized presentation of work to specific audiences for respective purposes through specific channels/means and on either or both formative and summative bases is feasible [28]. The content and layout design of the Smart CV vary with study Majors, career needs, industries and employers’ expectation towards candidates. ‘Student in business, for example, might want to illustrate their business-software skills or stream a presentation, while
education Majors could provide sample lesson plans.’ [29]. This comes to our first hypothesis:

**H1: Portfolio has a positive and direct relationship with Presentation.**

The portability and flexibility characteristics [28] of Smart CV reduce the technical barriers in creating an online ePortfolio. Reflection as facilitated by weblogs helps engage learners actively instead of passively receiving information but to reflection upon actions for future direction [30]. Barrett [31] suggested a modifier to add to the term, “portfolio” to define the specific purpose of it upon respective application. The needs of a descriptor and highlight on diverse purposes portfolios can serve to illustrate the idea of “presentation”. The presentation can be regarded as a selective portfolio generated for and presented to a specific audience and purpose and could be drawn from a larger and generic portfolio or repository. This comes to our second hypothesis:

**H2: Portfolio has a positive and direct relationship with Presence.**

As summarized by Barrett [31] a framework for ePortfolio research as proposed by Carney [32] includes “purpose(s) of the portfolio” and “social interaction”. “… Even so, the multiple purposes for which portfolios can be developed make the research task even more challenging. Adding to the multiple purposes, there are many different contexts that portfolios can be found: K-12 schools, higher education, professional portfolios, making comparison a further challenge.”

In her presentation at the 2004 American Educational Research Association conference, Carney identified a framework for conducting ePortfolio research, based on the work of Herman and Winters [33]: technical quality, fairness, effects, and feasibility, categories for documenting portfolio effectiveness were intended primarily for assessment portfolios. Carney adapted these characteristics for the use with learning portfolios, adding Zeichner and Wray’s critical dimensions of variation [34], we have:

1. Purpose(s) of the portfolio,
2. Control (who determines what goes into the portfolio and the degree to which this is specified beforehand),
3. Mode of presentation (portfolio organization and format—including the technology chosen for authoring),

4. Social Interaction (the nature and quality of the social interaction throughout the portfolio process [32])
5. Involvement (Zeichner & Wray [34] identify degree of involvement by the cooperative teacher important for pre-service portfolios; when considered more broadly, other important portfolio participants might include university teachers, p-12 students and parents, and others),
6. Use (can range from low-stakes celebration to high-stakes assessment [31])

This comes to the remaining 4 hypotheses:

**H3: Presentation has a positive and direct relationship with Presence.**

**H4-H6: All 3P’s (Portfolio, Presentation and Presence, respectively) have positive and direct relationships with career planning.**

In addition to H4, H5 and H6, we have formulated three propositions with respect to gender differences from the literature, i.e.,

P1 to P3: Male and female candidates have different perceptions on the effects of 3P’s (Portfolio, Presentation and Presence, respectively).

**4. Data Collection**

This study utilized an online survey website to collect data from current undergraduates of ages from 19-22 at a local university in Hong Kong. The Smart CV system was promoted in a number of lessons in a year-two undergraduate course. The GoogleSite web service was used as the platform with various layout design and some ePortfolio design templates for choices. SEO for helping their online presence was taught in the course and adopted in their online presence for search engines. Upon completion of the course, they were being asked to complete the online survey when they completed and polished their Smart CVs. Table 1 below summarizes the demographic information of the respondents and descriptive statistics of the measurements. 323 cleaned data was collected and analyzed as below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Portfolio</td>
<td>323</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>0.581</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>0.615</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>0.656</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>0.668</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 Demographic information and descriptive statistics (CP: Career Planning)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Portfolio</th>
<th>Presentation</th>
<th>Present</th>
<th>CP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>155 (Male)</td>
<td>3.96 0.575</td>
<td>3.80 0.652</td>
<td>3.75 0.657</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>168 (Female)</td>
<td>3.74 0.664</td>
<td>3.90 0.581</td>
<td>3.84 0.615</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1. Reliability and validity

In PLS analysis, the Internal Composite Reliability (ICR) attempts to assess inter-item reliability, so as to ensure the internal consistency of the indicators. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) is used to measure the amount of variance that a latent variable component captures from its indicators relative to the amount that is due to measurement error, so as to assess the convergent validity of the constructs. The acceptable value of ICR for perceptual measure is above 0.70, and the AVE should be higher than 0.50 [35].

In addition, discriminant validity is determined by comparing the square root of AVE for each construct with other involved constructs. The square root of AVE should be higher than the levels of correlations with another construct [35].

Table 2 below summarizes that the ICR and AVE values were above the acceptable values, and demonstrates the square root of AVE (in grey color) for each construct satisfied the criterion:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CP</th>
<th>P1</th>
<th>P2</th>
<th>P3</th>
<th>AVE</th>
<th>ICR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CP</td>
<td>0.8333</td>
<td>0.3746</td>
<td>0.3371</td>
<td>0.8333</td>
<td>0.4891</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>0.3862</td>
<td>0.8460</td>
<td>0.4964</td>
<td>0.5512</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>0.3933</td>
<td>0.7934</td>
<td>0.4423</td>
<td>0.4943</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>0.3385</td>
<td>0.4171</td>
<td>0.8146</td>
<td>0.4569</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Satisfied Criterion > 0.7

Table 3 Cross Factor Loadings of the items of their corresponding variables. Each variable consists of 3 items (a, b, c).

4.2. Common method variance

Harman’s Single Factor Test [31] is one of the most widely used techniques to address the issue of common method variance. The generally accepted standard for the single factor extracted with all items should be lower than 50% [38]. The computed single factor in Table 4 with all items was 43.87% in SPSS 17, and hence the result indicated there was no single factor which can affect the majority of the variance from the single data source.

Table 4 Common Method Variance

| Harman’s single factor test | 43.87% |
| Satisfied Criteria | < 50% |

5. Data Analysis

The research models and hypotheses were estimated using 200 iterations of the bootstrapping technique in SmartPLS 2.0 [39]. The explanatory power of the structural model was evaluated by examining the R² value of the dependent constructs.

5.1. Overall

We first estimate our research model with all our samples (n = 323). As shown in Figure 1, we have found that four out of six hypothesized paths were significant. More specifically, the paths between (1)
Portfolio and Presentation, (2) Portfolio and Presence, (3) Presentation and Presence and (4) Presentation and Career Planning were positively significant.

Out of six hypothesized paths, we have found that the paths between (1) Portfolio and Career Planning and (2) Presence and Career Planning were not significant.

5.2. Male group

Figure 2 above shows our PLS Path Analysis result (Female, P1: Portfolio, P2: Presentation, P3: Presence, CP: Career Planning).

Figure 2 above shows our PLS Path Analysis result for the male sample group (n = 155). We have found that five out of six hypothesized paths were significant. In addition to the significant paths being discovered in our overall sample group (i.e. (1) Portfolio and Presentation, (2) Portfolio and Presence, (3) Presentation and Presence and (4) Presentation and Career Planning), the PLS Path Analysis results also show a significant path between Presence and Career Planning in our male sample group.

Out of six hypothesized paths, the path between Portfolio and Career Planning was found not significant.

### Path Group Correlation Sig. Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Path</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Correlation</th>
<th>Sig. Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H1: Portfolio → Presentation</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>0.617</td>
<td>p &lt; 0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0.634</td>
<td>p &lt; 0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.609</td>
<td>p &lt; 0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2: Portfolio → Presence</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>0.284</td>
<td>p &gt; 0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0.326</td>
<td>p &lt; 0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.255</td>
<td>p &lt; 0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3: Presentation → Presence</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>0.415</td>
<td>p &lt; 0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0.417</td>
<td>p &lt; 0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.484</td>
<td>p &lt; 0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4: Portfolio → Career Planning</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>0.168</td>
<td>Not sig.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0.279</td>
<td>p &lt; 0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.080</td>
<td>Not sig.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H5: Presentation → Career</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>0.275</td>
<td>p &lt; 0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0.293</td>
<td>p &lt; 0.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.4. Summary of PLS Path Analyses

Table 5 above summaries all PLS Path Analyses results. In general, the results of this study show that all the proposed hypotheses are supported by data. In addition, by comparing three sets of PLS Path analyses, the relationship between Portfolio and Career Planning was found to be significant only in the male sample group. In contrast, the path between Presence and Career Planning was found to be significant only in the female sample group. These two paths of major differences between sample groups were highlighted in grey color in the table.

5.5. Discussion

Our research questions are: 1) Does gender make difference in career planning? 2) How do one’s portfolio, the ways of presentation of his artefacts and online presence influence his career planning? This study attempted to study the relationships between 3P’s, namely Portfolio, Presentation and Presence, and their effects on Career Planning in the two gender groups. According to our PLS analyses, amongst the 3P’s, Presentation is commonly agreed to be important, having both male and female undergraduates found that Presentation of their Smart CVs is important for their Career Planning (i.e. H5 is always supported). It also plays an important role in designing their Smart CVs to help present contents and artifacts (i.e. H1 is always supported) and make pervasively Presence on the Internet (i.e. H2 and H3 are always supported), which are also noticeable universal for both genders. This echoes the formal channels using Internet as an opened and fair platform in job search. Both genders tend to use formal channels with effort in collecting artefacts for Portfolio construction and a better look-and-feel Presentation for higher exposure on the Internet, i.e. Presence.

Concerning the gender differences on the usefulness of Smart CV for Career Planning, our PLS analyses show that male and female candidates have different perceptions on the effects of Portfolio and Presence towards Career Planning. Interestingly, previous studies found that computer and internet technologies were being perceived as masculine in nature [21]. From our PLS analysis, female candidates show that their presences (Presence) are positively associated with the Career Planning (i.e. H6 is supported in female group) but male candidates do not. The information search strategy of female candidates is less linear than male candidates [17, 18], females may prefer to be “searchable” or be more “online Presence” than males. They excels the SEO skills in their Smart CV design and may result in less linear but more goal oriented to be searched and found on the Internet. In contrast, males is found to have their Portfolios positively associated with Career Planning (H4 is supported in male group) while females do not. Comparatively, males hunting a job may like to demonstrate more about their intelligent ability, self-ability and skills than females do [4]. This again shows different perceptions from the two genders on the usefulness of Smart CV for Career Planning based on their different needs on Portfolio and Presence. However, the effect of H4 and H6 (both are found not significantly supported) cancel out the effects from each other when both genders are considered in the overall group of samples.

5.6. Limitations and future works

This is our first stage in exploring the use of the proposed 3P’s in relation to career planning. However, we acknowledge that there are several limitations in this study. This study recruited undergraduates (mainly in Asian context) to understand the gender difference in using Smart CV for their Career Planning. As most of the undergraduates will target for white-collar jobs, gender difference on the effect of Portfolio, Presentation and Presence from this study may only be applicable to groups of people who are looking for their very first jobs and white-collar positions. Future efforts should be put to broaden the understanding in age groups, job types, relevant work experiences, etc. The Smart CV workshop was conducted in a series of lessons, which were designed by using examples to motivate students to build and design their Smart CVs (Portfolio and Presentation) and to promote their own Smart CVs online, to engage themselves in various search engine activities and to improve their online presences (Presence). To be searchable (i.e. online Presence), it also requires a continuous effort and participation from classmates and viewers throughout the semester. The current study needs more robust theory support on the 3P’s, their relationships and their effects related to gender differences, future studies will attempt to establish a stronger theoretical framework for a more
generalizable conclusion. For a more comprehensive and statistical comparison between the significant paths of males and females, more dimensions of statistical comparison with control variables will be carried out. Due to space limitation, details of constructs and their items (totally 12 items (a, b, c)) will be shared in the conference.

In addition, the persistence characteristics of social networking sites, such as LinkedIn, tends to store our digital footprints in the online environment, future employers may consider information that they can easily find related to a candidate on social networks (e.g. an online background check), the proposed constructs of 3P’s, namely Portfolio, Presentation and Presence may act as a foundation for future research in understanding gender differences under the ever changing social network.

6. Conclusion

This research has set up a framework focusing on three main facets, portfolio, presentation and presence for the use of online CVs as Smart CVs. The contributions are dual. It could provide some substantial ideas on devising career supports and counseling services for male and female undergraduates. The framework can also be used with students and adults at different career stages and situations to investigate the effects and relationships on the perception and actual practices. Our results indicate that gender differences exist on the perceptions of 3P’s in career planning. Female candidates see their Presence positively associated with Career Planning but males do not. While male candidates perceive a direct relationship between Portfolio and Career Planning, but their female counterparts do not. This study selected undergraduates as our preliminary research subjects. Future works of this study will extend our sampling pool and conduct comparisons between freshmen, sophomores and senior year students, for the purpose to understand the longitudinal change of their 3P’s and career planning.

6.1. Implications

To conclude, this paper provides two practical implications. First, with the advance and popularity of professional social networking sites (e.g. LinkedIn), the channel for job search will be increasingly informal. Also, such popularity of professional social networks may provide an easy way for potential employers to conduct online background checks on their candidates. Constructs proposed in this paper, namely Portfolio, Presentation and Presence may provide a foundation for future research in this increasingly popular area. Secondly, based on our research findings, for educators who would like to promote the use of Smart CVs for undergraduates’ Career Planning shall consider the gender differences in order to draw their respective attentions.

7. Acknowledgements

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