BOX W

Research with LinkedIn

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Founded in 2002, LinkedIn is a social networking service dedicated to "connecting the world's professionals" with a reported worldwide membership of 690 million users (LinkedIn 2020). Designed to facilitate communication between jobseekers and recruiters as well as among professionals, LinkedIn has the potential to be harnessed as a tool for social scientists in quests to access interviewees, collect biographic data, and analyze professional networks.

International organization (IO) studies scholars working with interviews typically offer snowball sampling, infiltration as a participant-observer, and allying with gatekeepers as techniques for securing dialogical opportunities. However, these strategies assume that the preconditions of access, such as knowing who to talk to and where/how they can be reached, have been met. As IO organizational charts and websites offer scant information on *who* does *what*, identifying interviewees and how to contact them might turn out to be surprisingly onerous—especially when dealing with geographically and/or institutionally fragmented global professionals who cannot necessarily be located in a tangible space at any given moment. Rendering individuals searchable by name, job title, organization, and geographical location, LinkedIn can be exploited as a global directory, albeit limited to registered users, to overcome germinal access obstacles. Potential interview subjects can then be contacted via LinkedIn's messaging function or, when provided, by email. Don't be fooled though, messaging isn't entirely free: for basic account holders, messaging is limited to individuals in your network, whereas paying subscribers can message who they wish.

LinkedIn is also a treasure trove for researchers employing qualitative

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as well as quantitative methods to investigate global dynamics of power, influence, and authority by mapping the structure of career pathways, professional networks, and social fields (Henriksen and Seabrooke 2017: 59; Kipping, Bühlmann, and David 2019). Resembling a CV though varying in their degree of detail (Zhu, Zhao, and Liu 2020: 91), LinkedIn profiles serve as keys to historicizing the emergence of new elites and professional groups, mapping career trajectories, or analyzing the types of resources (i.e., diplomas, organizational loyalty, linguistic capacities, etc.) required to accede positions of power. Displaying connections between users and user adhesion to groups, LinkedIn can equally provide the empirical base for virtual social network analysis (Papacharissi 2009).

Eliminating certain hurdles, doing research online through tools like LinkedIn also comes with a range of concerns and responsibilities that merit consideration, from the validity and robustness of profile data to ethical dilemmas that arise when considering principles such as informed consent and anonymity.

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