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Implementing Educational Courses on Social Media Within Prisons to Decrease Unemployment Rates Among Ex-Prisoners and Reduce Recidivism in the United States

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Implementing Educational Courses on Social Media Within Prisons to Decrease Unemployment

Rates Among Ex-Prisoners and Reduce Recidivism in the United States

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Submitted to Professor Giduck in partial fulfillment of MSCR 696 Capstone Project

Regis University

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Implementing Educational Courses on Social Media Within Prisons to Decrease Unemployment

Rates Among Ex-Prisoners and Reduce Recidivism in the United States

by

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Table of Contents

Abstract

This paper focuses on whether or not it would be beneficial to implement educational courses on

social media within prisons in order to prepare prisoners for release, improve post-release

unemployment rates, and improve recidivism rates in the United States. Since the early 1990s,

technology has grown to a point where it has become a part of everyone's daily life, which

includes social media platforms (Greenstein, 2012). While society has adapted to these

advancements, prisoners who have been removed from society for many years are unable to

achieve the same levels of social media comprehension, which can cause disparity between their

skill levels and preparedness for release. If society has an expectation for ex-prisoners to

assimilate seamlessly, it would be beneficial if prisons aided prisoners by keeping them updated

in the necessary skills needed to be successful post-release. This paper will discuss background

information and past research to provide in-depth knowledge on social media, social media

advancements, current prison programs, studies that have looked into social media within

prisons, and statistics on the success rate of securing employment opportunities through social

media. The analysis of past research will support whether or not implementing educational

courses on social media within prisons can be beneficial in improving unemployment rates

among ex-prisoners, which could improve recidivism rates long term due to the interconnectivity

between the two.

Implementing Educational Courses on Social Media Within Prisons to Decrease Unemployment

Rates Among Ex-Prisoners and Reduce Recidivism in the United States

Introduction

In recent years, social media Internet service providers have allowed users to utilize the

available services to network with people around the world, connect with friends, build new

friendships, find romantic relationships, share pictures, and seek employment opportunities.

Social media has become a useful tool, but this tool has not always existed. Social media

platforms are a product of continuous, technological advancements since the early 1990s

(Greenstein, 2012). Due to these advancements, society has been urged to adapt, whether this

means purchasing a smartphone, updating software on the smartphone, downloading new

applications, creating new social media profiles, or learning a new feature that has been updated

within these social media applications. While society has been able to keep up with these

advancements, not every member has been able to adapt and utilize these platforms.

Those who are incarcerated have been removed from society for a period of time that

varies upon the outcome of the defendant's case. As prisoners are incarcerated, the world around

them continues to advance. For example, a prisoner who has been imprisoned for at least 10

years and then released would struggle to adapt to the advancements since he has been removed

from society. The criminal justice system has an expectation that once a prisoner has been

released, he must reintegrate into society and meet the terms of his release such as sustaining

employment and housing (Li, 2018). This is significant because it demonstrates how prisoners

have expectations to fulfill post-release. This paper hypothesizes the following: if prisons

implemented educational courses on how to utilize social media platforms like Facebook,

LinkedIn, and Instagram, prisoners would have higher chances in securing employment post-

release, which would also aid in lowering recidivism rates.

Problem Statement

If prisons implemented educational courses on how to utilize social media professionally, these lessons could aid in more employment opportunities post-release, which will also have a positive impact on recidivism rates. In the United States, offenders who have been convicted of a crime are removed from society as a form of punishment and ostensibly for rehabilitation, among other theories for the benefits of incarceration. While prisoners serve their sentences, society continues to evolve. In fact, since the early 1990s, society has evolved in technology due to the introduction of the Internet, which resulted in the introduction of social media (Greenstein, 2015). This advancement has opened up more opportunities for networking, employment, and entertainment. While users have adapted quickly to the continuous advancements of social media within the past 10 years, prisoners who have never used these tools face another challenge when preparing for release.

Prisoners are already at a disadvantage because their criminal records follow them post-release, which can negatively impact job, school, and housing applications (Simmons Staff, 2016). Additionally, prisoners may lack formal education, necessary skills needed for jobs, and adequate experiences due to incarceration (Simmons Staff, 2016). This is important because it demonstrates some of the challenges prisoners face post-release.

Defining Terms

Prisons and Jails

Definitions and alternative terms can differ when referring to jails or prisons, which can lead to the terms being used incorrectly. For example, a common term for jails could be detention facilities and another term for prisons could be penitentiaries (Hutchinson, 2018).

When specifically looking at different states within the United States, definitions of jails and prisons differ as well. In Pennsylvania, some jails are labeled as county prisons. In states like Alaska, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Rhode Island, and Vermont, some facilities combine jail and prison functions within the same facilities (Clem Information Strategies, n.d.). Another element that can differ among states is the definition of long-term and short-term sentences. Some states consider two years to be the cut-off for short-term, which means that inmates sentenced to serve less than two years may serve their sentences in jail instead of prison (Clem Information Strategies, n.d.). This is meaningful because it is important to understand the full definition of these terms, as they will be used throughout this paper. In addition, since prisons are meant for long-term sentences they are equipped with more amenities for prisoners (Hutchinson, 2018). This is important to note since this paper will analyze the programs offered to prisoners during incarceration.

   Jail. As mentioned, definitions can differ when comparing jails and prisons. One definition mentioned is that jails are "temporary holding facilities, used to hold people who have been recently arrested or people charged with a crime and unable to pay bond or bail. It can also house those serving short-term sentences" (Katz, 2012). Another definition confirmed this information as well, but also stated that "a person may be sentenced to jail for contempt of court and jails can hold defendants who have been sentenced to prison, but have not been transferred" (Larson, 2018). If a person is able to post bond or pay bail, he is likely to be released from jail after one or two nights (Larson, 2018). This is significant because many definitions focus on short-term sentencing as a major difference, but the interpretation of short-term can differ. Depending on the state or the individual, short-term can be one day, one year, or two years. Due to this, jails experience high turnover rates compared to prisons (Larson, 2018). Additionally,

part of the distinction between jails and prisons includes how they function and by whom.

Research by Katz (2012) and Larson (2018) stated that a county sheriff's department, local law

enforcement, and/or local government agencies operate jails.

      Prison. According to Roberts Law Group, PLLC (2018), there are state prisons and

federal prisons. President Hoover established federal prisons in 1930, for those who broke

federal laws and these federal prisons were operated by the federal government (Roberts Law

Group, PLLC, 2018). The differences between state and federal prisons consist of the types of

crimes committed and court proceedings. Those accused of federal offenses like tax evasion,

commit crimes on federal property, or commit crimes that cross state lines proceed through

federal courts to be ruled upon by a federal judge (Kramer, 2018). In contrast, those who commit

state crimes are tried in state courts and incarcerated in state prisons (Kramer, 2018). The

differences between the two also consist of other factors as well. According to Kramer (2018),

with some exceptions, federal prison sentences can be longer than state prisons due to mandatory

minimum sentence lengths. Federal prisoners can be sent anywhere in the country; federal

prisons tend to have a higher percentage of non-violent offenders compared to state prisons, and

federal prisons are perceived to have better resources due to more available funding (Kramer,

2018). This is demonstrates that it is important to note the differences, especially when analyzing

prison programs.

Programs

      According to Larson (2018), while in jail, there are services offered to aid those suffering

from drug addictions or emotional problems. Additionally, some jails may offer educational

programs to inmates depending on funding, staffing, and the length of an inmate's sentence

(Larson, 2018). Lastly, some jails may offer flexible programs, which are meant to prevent a

person from losing his job while serving his sentence. According to Larson (2018), "weekend sentencing is a flexible program that allows a person to serve time on weekends. The person will get credit for serving two days of jail time for each weekend served." Work release is the second flexible program that allows a person to leave jail to go to work, following a very tight schedule that only allows time for commuting and completing the shift (Larson, 2018). This means that different programs that are meant to aid inmates nearing release.

Since state and federal prisons are meant to house long-term inmates, these facilities have more funding and are able to provide more programs (Katz, 2018). In agreement, Larson (2018) stated that prisons often have better drug programs compared to jails, more efficient GED programs, and may also have better recreational or entertainment facilities. In a later section, the types of prison programs will be discussed in depth in order to demonstrate current conditions and how it would be beneficial to add educational courses on social media to aid in post-release unemployment rates.

Society

For this paper, society will be defined as all members residing in the United States. Society members will include those who have never been convicted of an offense, those who have been but are released, and those currently serving their sentences. This paper will consistently compare prisoners, ex-prisoners, and those who have never been convicted of a crime, in order to establish the challenges prisoners and ex-prisoners have compared to those who have never been to prison long-term. For example, this paper will depict prisoners as being "removed from society," which is to explain how prisoners have moved away from their peers in order to serve their sentences. While prisoners serve their sentences, the rest of society will continue to live their lives and progress.

Prisoners

Due to the complexity of this topic and definitions of prisons and jails, it is important to specify the definition of the prisoners that will be referenced. For the purposes of this paper, prisoners are defined as adult men and women serving their sentences in prison. The reason this paper specifically discusses adults is because depending on the state, an inmate under the age of 17 or 18 could be considered a juvenile. The purpose of this paper is to analyze past research to determine if the implementation of educational courses on social media could aid adults in obtaining employment post-release and reduce recidivism. Another reason this paper focuses on the adult inmate population is because if an inmate has been sentenced long-term, it is likely that he will be released as an adult even if he was sentenced as a juvenile. Most adults being released from prison will have been removed from society for a significant time since prison sentences are long-term. This makes it difficult to assimilate post-release and this difficulty can lead to an increased rate of recidivism.

Social Media

Social media is a significant variable in this paper, but difficult to define. For example, Cohen (2019), stated, "social media is a multi-directional stage for human conversation." Additionally, social media allows people to generate content, share experiences, and share insight with others (Lake, 2009). For this research paper, social media will be defined as a website that allows users to engage with one another by generating content. The social media platforms that will be presented in this research include Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn. These platforms have grown from being a part of personal lives to businesses. Throughout this research a plethora of studies will be presented and analyzed in order to conclude whether or not

implementing educational courses on social media in prisons would positively impact post-

release unemployment and recidivism.

Prisoner Re-Entry

The next term is prisoner re-entry. For this study, prisoner re-entry will be defined as

prisoners who have completed their sentences and are released from prison. This paper will

specifically focus on prisoners who have served a minimum of 10 years in prison and struggle

with re-entry due to their absences. It can be difficult for inmates to re-enter society due to a

multitude of re-entry challenges (Simmons Staff, 2016). The re-entry challenges prisoners face

will be discussed in a later section.

Bail, pretrial services, probation

This paper will focus on prisoners who have, or, who are currently serving long-term

prison sentences. It is still important to gain an in-depth understanding of the distinctions

between jails and prisons due to the complexity of this topic. Bail, pretrial services, and

probation are terms associated with releasing someone from jail, not prison. According to Litvin

(2014), bail is defined as cash or bond given to the court in order to secure conditional release for

the accused. This is met with the promise that the prisoner must return for his proceedings and

failure to adhere to this promise will result in the loss of the cash or activating the bond

agreement (Litvin, 2014).

According to Rabner and Grant (2017), the purpose of pre-trial monitoring is to handle

the defendants' risk of failing to appear in court, his community safety risk level, and his risk

obstruction. Pretrial services are available throughout the United States but policies differ for

each state. The idea behind this type of service consists of lowering community risk and ensuring

that individuals appear in court (Rabner and Grant (2017). Lastly, probation is a result of a judge

mandating that an individual report to a probation officer instead of serving time in jail. Often,

someone would be sentenced to a short-term jail sentence, followed by a probation period. The

root purpose of probation is to test a person's conduct or character (Duhaime's Law Dictionary,

n.d.). Failure to adhere to the probation terms or report to the assigned officer will result in the

individual serving the rest of his sentence in jail (Duhaime's Law Dictionary, n.d.) The specific

stipulations a prisoner must adhere to during the probationary period will be discussed in a later

section.

Parole

Parole is a form of release associated with prisons compared to probation being

associated with jail. According to Carlson (2015), parole is a conditional release before the

completion of the full sentence. Just like probation, the parole officer assigned to a prisoner

supervises the terms of the parole, but a parole board determines the granting of parole and

during this time the board takes into consideration a plethora of details. These details include the

inmate's character and public safety risk level. If parole is granted the stipulations are discussed

as well (Carlson, 2105). This too varies among states and the most common stipulations will be

discussed in a later section.

Recidivism

Recidivism is a difficult term to define because it is commonly misinterpreted. According

to Goldstein (2014), recidivism in misinterpreted because many studies are inconsistent in

measuring recidivism. For example, the federal government calculates recidivism for each state

by considering a sample size of prisoners who have been rearrested, reconvicted, and returned to

prison within a five-year period post-release (Goldstein, 2014). In contrast, a 2011 survey from

the Pew Center and the National Institute of Justice (2019) provided statistics on recidivism

within a three-year period. It is evident that the time frame for recidivism is inconsistent. This study will define recidivism as those who were re-arrested, re-convicted, or returned to prison within nine years after release. The reason nine years was chosen is because a nine-year follow-up study will be discussed in the literature review and nine years allows a lengthy time frame to analyze recidivism rates and when a prisoner is most at risk. There are many factors that can lead to recidivism and some include: unemployment, negative environments, negative peer influences, drugs, alcohol, and failure to adhere to probation or parole stipulations (Li, 2018). Specifics on recidivism as well as statistics will be discussed more in depth in a later section of this research paper in order to provide a well-rounded review of the topic.

Background

Background on Social Media

    LinkedIn. According to Rangwala (2017), the first known social media website released in 1997 was called Six Degrees and allowed users to connect with friends and build new connections. In 2001, Six Degrees shut down and in 2002 LinkedIn emerged (Rangwala, 2017). According to Gregersen (2019), LinkedIn is considered to be the most professional social media website that allows users to build and utilize professional connections. This website also has a unique style that allows users to create a profile that mirrors a résumé for free, which permits users to list their skills, achievements, and experiences (Gregersen, 2019). This means that LinkedIn is a popular website used for job searching and networking.

    Companies that utilize this website are able to post job opportunities and search for candidates while general users are able to seamlessly search and apply for jobs as well as connect with their professional networks to capitalize on other employment opportunities (Gregersen, 2019). For example, a user may connect with an old friend who works for a company looking to

hire. This company may not have created a job posting as it is looking to hire within or through a recommendation. By connecting with this friend, the user is more likely to learn about this opportunity and apply for the position.

Additionally, once companies have created job postings, applicants can visit their profiles to gain a sense of its dynamics before applying and this transparency can help foster deeper connections between applicants and companies (Gregersen, 2019). This is important because when a company is hiring, managers interview a multitude of individuals, making it competitive, but if a manager comes across an applicant's LinkedIn page that stands out, it allows him to view the applicant in a unique way that leaves a positive impression.

Facebook. According to Rangwala (2017), Facebook went live in 2004, launched "Facebook Ads" two months later, released "Facebook Newsfeeds" in 2006, and was the first social media platform to introduce a "like" button feature. This is remarkable because in the span of three years, Facebook advanced in a multitude of ways by allowing users to share their lives, connect with friends, and stay updated on topics of interest. Facebook is not considered to be as professional compared to LinkedIn because users have the option of creating accounts for personal entertainment (Rangwala, 2017). Even though Facebook is not on the same level of professionalism as LinkedIn, it is still a useful website, especially since it has adapted by allowing users to create business based accounts (Rangwala, 2017). This is significant because it demonstrates how Facebook can be useful despite not having a résumé-based appearance. Lastly, Facebook allows companies to purchase advertisement space on the website, which can lead to recruiting employees (Rangwala, 2017). This is also significant because it demonstrates how all users can come across an advertisement that could lead to employment opportunities.

A business-based account includes self-employed users seeking to expand their businesses and clientele (Rangwala, 2017). For example, if an individual has a talent in making jewelry, he is able to create a business page advertising his creations and conduct sales. The "like" button feature on this platform also allows users to express products they like, helping the creator gain feedback on popular designs. This same feature holds true for companies that place advertisements on Facebook. Users might come across a job advertisement of interest and click the "like" button, which is a form of feedback for the company. Additionally, Facebook uses an algorithm based on users' likes (Rangwala, 2017). This is meaningful because it allows Facebook to tailor the type of advertisements that appear while users are logged in.

Instagram. According to Rangwala (2017), Instagram launched in 2010 and skyrocketed in users within two months. Instagram is a social media platform predominately used on cellular devices, which allows users to express themselves by uploading pictures with the ability to like and comment, similar to Facebook (Rangwala, 2017). As the popularity of Instagram grew, Facebook acquired it in 2012 and this acquisition allowed Facebook to utilize the same algorithms for Instagram by introducing business accounts and advertisements targeted to users (Rangwala, 2017). This is important because it could mean that companies utilizing Facebook or LinkedIn could expand to Instagram, create job advertisements, and gauge potential candidates if a profile is public. Additionally, Instagram has allowed entrepreneurs to create business pages and monetize their accounts similar to Facebook (Rangwala, 2017). This means that Instagram can be useful to gain an in-depth knowledge of a company or candidate based on posts.

Lastly, a feature called "Instagram stories" has been added to the platform, which allows users to capture a short recording and post it so followers can stay updated in real-time (Rangwala, 2017). These stories are placed on the very top of the main screen and set up so that

once users view one person's story it automatically continues to the next. Additionally, it is common for advertisements to seamlessly pop-up between stories (Rangwala, 2017). This means that less job searching is needed through Instagram since the advertisements come to the users.

The Shift in Applying for Employment

The launching and advancing of social media platforms have caused a shift in job searching. According to Elliott (2017), in 2007, there were not as many employers who would use social media platforms to search candidates as compared to the present, and, as a result, candidates had to ensure that the impressions made during interviews were positive. Currently, many employers consider checking social media profiles to be routine, which could hinder applicants depending on their posts (Elliott, 2017). For example, if a user posts pictures partaking in drugs, this could leave a negative impression on employers during a social media check. By 2016, about 60% of managers used social media as part of a background check per each applicant (Elliott, 2017). This is noteworthy because users have to be aware of what they post online as it can hold the same weight as a first impression at interviews.

Another shift consists of the human element when considering applicants. According to Elliott (2017), in 2007, applicants applying in person or online could expect their résumés and cover letters to be viewed by a hiring manager and contacted via phone call. Now, most applications are submitted online, leading companies to invest in algorithms to sift through applicants (Elliott, 2017). This is important because applicants have to be mindful of how to build their résumés in order for the algorithm to capture its keywords. This algorithm can potentially miss quality applicants but it is necessary since technology has allowed users all around the world to apply for the same positions, making it difficult to manually read each application.

Not all changes in job searching are negative, in fact, due to the advancements in technology and social media, there are positive changes as well. According to Elliott (2017), to search for a job in 2007, many released prisoners had to resort to newspaper print listings, go to businesses to inquire about open positions, or search on the Internet for open positions. Ten years later, job searches have become easier through platforms like LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram due to the aforementioned benefits of these websites. According to Elliott (2017), in 2007, LinkedIn reported only having about 8,000,000 members worldwide, compared to 500,000,000 by 2017. This growth demonstrates the shift of individuals adapting to the growing age of social media and utilizing these platforms, which also increases the amount of people who are exposed to job advertisements and other business based opportunities.

In addition to accessibility, job searching became even easier as social media platforms created mobile applications, allowing users to job-hunt "on the go" (Elliott, 2017). As such, an individual can upload his completed résumé to Google Drive, download the Google Drive application on his phone, and every time he comes across an opportunity to apply for a job, he can apply immediately via phone with the saved résumé. This aspect makes applying much more convenient for those who have a multitude of tasks to complete throughout the day and cannot always be in front of a computer. Lastly, according to Elliott (2017), when applying to jobs, an applicant had to put a lot of faith in the company he was applying to, unless he knew someone who worked there. This means that an applicant would not know about the true nature of the company or job unless he was hired and experiencing it first hand. Now, applicants can do a thorough search on companies to gauge whether they are a suitable fit before taking the time to apply. With all the advancements technology and social media made within the past 10 years, employers might expect applicants to have an understanding of how to use these platforms.

According to Kettunen, Sampson, and Vuorinen (2014), "career service sectors have placed an increasing demand upon career practitioners' abilities to take advantage of online technologies" (p. 43). This means that the skills applicants had 10 years ago would not be sufficient compared to today if they had not learned to adapt and learn to use social media. For example, some customer service jobs might require agents to communicate with customers via Facebook, through the company profile, to address concerns and post content. This requirement is new due to companies adapting to societal advancements and it can become an issue when analyzing those who have been incarcerated long-term because they are expected to secure employment after being released into a society with which they are no longer familiar.

Background on Prisoner Re-Entry Challenges

According to Li (2018), about 600,000 prisoners are released from prison each year. Most of these individuals are not prepared for their release, which makes re-entry difficult (Li, 2018). Previously incarcerated individuals face a host of challenges post-release that can be organized into three categories: micro, meso, and macro challenges (Simmons Staff, 2016). These challenges, which will be described below, all put these individuals at risk of re-offending.

Micro Challenges

Obtaining employment remains a critical stipulation upon being released from jail or prison, yet about 60-75% of former inmates remain unemployed one year after release (Fornoff & Kerri, 2017). This statistic demonstrates the disparity between the expectation of obtaining employment post-release and how many ex-prisoners are able to obtain employment. There are many factors contributing to the difficulties of obtaining employment on a micro level. One example is limited education, as many individuals do not have an adequate education prior to being arrested (Fornoff & Kerri, 2017). Some individuals may drop out of school at an early age,

while others may graduate high school, but decide not to continue their education as a personal

choice or because of the financial burden. According to Aldershof (2016), about one-third of the

US population over the age of 25 holds a bachelor's degree or higher with a low percentage

consisting of African Americans and Hispanics. This is noteworthy because race, culture, and

inequality are some of the reasons why this disparity exists. Additionally, for the prison

population, 30% of incarcerated adults had less than a high school diploma, low literacy levels,

and low numeracy assessments (Tofig, 2017). This demonstrates how the prison population is at

a disadvantage when discussing education and securing employment since these two variables

are interconnected.

Another factor includes limited work experience and the lack of skills required for a job

(Fornoff & Kerri, 2017). The time an individual could spend working and gaining experience

becomes lost when that person is incarcerated long-term. This is significant because he will have

been so far removed from society that he will no longer possess the necessary skills and

experiences needed to meet the desired requirements. While the prison system offers

opportunities for inmates to work, the dynamics within prisons differ from the outside world and

do not have as much value compared to an applicant who has not been arrested and possesses the

necessary skills.

Lastly, some employers have a fear of negligent hiring (Fornoff & Kerri, 2017). This

means that an employer can be biased against an applicant with a criminal record if the company

has a policy in place stating that ex-convicts will not be considered for the position. The Equal

Employment Opportunity Commission under federal law enforces any discriminatory violations

of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (HG Legal Resources, n.d.). This means that this entity ensures

that companies are not violating through disparate treatment or disparate impact. An example of

disparate treatment would be hiring a Caucasian with a felony conviction but not hiring an

African American with the same felony conviction (HG Legal Resource, n.d.). An example of

disparate impact would be if a company imposes a blanket statement against hiring felons that

affect a certain ethnic group (HG Legal Resources, n.d.). These laws hold employers accountable

in making fair policies, but companies can still have an aversion to ex-convicts. Lastly, those

serving long-term sentences will lack the necessary skills and experiences, which could hinder

the productivity of the company and result in employment rejection (Fornoff & Kerri, 2017).

With all these limitations hindering the likelihood of securing employment, there is an added

challenge of being able to progress with the aforementioned technological advancements. The

inability to adapt can create a disparity between the previously incarcerated and obtaining

employment.

Meso Challenges

Additional challenges the formerly incarcerated face include the lack of family support

during incarceration and post-release (Fornoff & Kerri, 2017). During incarceration, prisoners

are allowed visitation from friends and family, but this is not always guaranteed. For a lot of

families, the locations of jails or prisons are often far away and a lack of transportation poses

challenges (Fornoff & Kerri, 2017). Additionally, if an inmate has children, visits are less likely

to occur as jails and prisons are often inhospitable and most caregivers are hesitant to have

children visit a family member who is incarcerated, as it can be uncomfortable or traumatic for

them (Simmons Staff, 2016). These challenges can cause strain on familial relationships and

translate post-release. For example, an inmate who has been released may hold resentment

towards his family for the lack of support. Similarly, a family member may disapprove of the

choices that led to incarceration and decide to not support his re-entry.

Another challenge consists of meeting societal expectations after being released. There are many stipulations that have to be met as a part of release. For example, ex-prisoners are expected to secure housing and employment, as previously discussed (Simmons Staff, 2016). If an ex-prisoner does not have a home to return to, he must find a family member willing to house him, apply for public housing, or live at a halfway house (Fornoff & Kerri, 2017). This relates back to securing employment because having a steady income can aid in acquiring residence and sustaining basic needs.

While there are many challenges in regard to securing employment and housing post-release, progressing with society becomes an added challenge. For example, an individual who has been released after serving at least 10 years cannot afford a smartphone, does not know how to use social media, and will struggle to integrate with society, because it is unfamiliar. This can become challenging for ex-prisoners because unlike the rest of society, they are not updated on the latest technology and gadgets. As mentioned, understanding social media has become an important skill in searching and securing employment as well as other opportunities. For example, social media can be used to connect to family members who may be able to aid in housing support, which can be just as beneficial as using these platforms to obtain employment.

Macro Challenges

On a macro level, ex-prisoners have limitations placed on them due to collateral consequences and parole. Collateral consequences are the legal restrictions someone faces that are unrelated to the crime (Simmons Staff, 2016). For example, it may become difficult for ex-offenders to obtain food stamps because, of their records and they cannot apply for a federal grant (Simmons Staff, 2016). For example, some states like Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina, and West Virginia do not allow ex-prisoners to apply for food

stamps if the prisoner has been convicted of a drug offense (HelpforFelons, 2018). Lastly, while

having a criminal record does not automatically result in rejection for public housing, it can be

used to determine whether or not acceptance is granted and this is normally at the discretion of

the public housing facility and administrators (Simmons Staff, 2016). Many may not want to deal

with the burden of applying for such if the assumption is an automatic rejection. It is evident,

that while resources for ex-prisoners exist, their records can become a factor in everything they

apply for, including jobs or college, if they want to continue with their educations.

Parole is another issue that poses limitations because those who are released are confined

to a certain geographic area, which is often the same area that contains negative influences

(Simmons Staff, 2016). For example, if a young man turned to selling drugs as a means of

income due to living in a poor community, he would have to return to that same community and

be re-exposed to the negative influences that were factors in him engaging in criminal behavior

in the first place. Additionally, ex-offenders have to submit to searches at the discretion of their

parole officers, which can include their homes or belongings (Simmons Staff, 2016). This can

foster the feeling that, even though they are back in society, they are still heavily restricted, much

like they were still prisoners.

Lastly, ex-offenders on parole must pay supervision fees, but may have no income and

must also obtain permission if they want to change residence (Simmons Staff, 2016). A lot of

these stipulations become challenging to accomplish without employment and if there are

employment opportunities in another town or state, one must ask for permission to accept the

opportunity (Simmons Staff, 2016). It is evident that meeting post-release expectations while

facing these challenges is extremely difficult and can lead to ex-offenders feeling despondent.

For those who want to make better decisions for themselves and their children, they are in

positions where they are in the same negative environments, with no jobs to assist in re-entry. These factors can influence re-offending, adding to the rate of recidivism.

Women and Re-entry

Women who are released from prison face the same challenges listed above, but research has found that there tends to be a difference in priorities after release (Lindquist, Lattimore, Barrick, and Visher, 2010). In fact, when women are released, their focus is more likely on reuniting with their children, improving relationships with their families, and sustaining a suitable lifestyle (Lindquist et al., 2010). A study completed in Houston, Texas showed that women were optimistic about reuniting with their families and having their support (La Vigne, Brooks, & Shollenberger, 2008). This is important because, generally, a lack of familial support can be a challenge post-release, but this study found that to differ in women compared to men. This does not mean that re-entry for a woman is easier compared to a man as a whole. In fact, women connecting back with their children can present an issue if not well prepared for release.

According to Schweitzer (2017), a lot of women, especially those dealing with substance abuse, are not ready to reunite with their children and need time to transition and gain assistance before taking on that responsibility. Most women leave their children in the care of a family member while they are incarcerated and, once released, that guardian as well as society, expects mothers to immediately care for their children (Schweitzer, 2017). This pressure can become a risk factor for female ex-prisoners due to the fact that they are already unable to take care of themselves and have added pressure to care for a child. As stated, this is not to conclude that women have an easier or more difficult re-entry experience compared to men, but it is important to note that there are some differences.

<center>**Current Programs Prisons Offer in the United States**</center>

Prisons within the United States offer a variety of programs to prepare inmates for release, but these vary from state to state due to funding (Bender, 2018). For example, in 2016, the United States Department of Education reported that state and local spending on prison programs is triple compared to that of pre-K-12 classes, from 1979-2013 (Bender, 2018). This demonstrates how expensive it is to fund courses for each inmate, compared to educational classes outside of prison. According to Bender (2018), 41% of the prison population does not possess high school diplomas, 35% of state prisons provide college-level courses, and inmates who partake in an educational program are 43% less likely to return to prison. These statistics indicate that prisons are trying to assist in providing some basic educational courses but it is not enough compared to what employers seek in a candidate in terms of educational background. Additionally, these statistics demonstrate that for approximately 60% of inmates, they have to complete their GED before even enrolling in the college courses.

According to the Federal Bureau of Prisons (n.d.), most prisons offer literacy classes, English as a second language, parenting lessons, wellness and continuing education, and some offer access to prison libraries. The Washington County Jail, located in Washington County, Oregon, is an example of a facility that offers these courses, in addition to basic computer skills, GED prep, credit recovery courses, individual tutoring, skill-building, and courses on how to find and sustain employment (Washington County Oregon, n.d.). Courses like these provide inmates with opportunities to spend their time wisely, earn an education, and improve their skills in preparation for release.

These courses are necessary because the basic requirements needed to apply for a job are constantly changing, and if most inmates do not have high school diplomas, they cannot take advantage of the courses offered to complete or continue their educations. According to Meyer,

Fredericks, Borden, and Richardson (2010), inmates who participated in post-secondary

education reported increased feelings of self-esteem and positive behaviors. These findings made

researchers believe that the newly confident inmates who participated in these courses would

have better chances of securing employment after release. When that confidence is met with the

reality that they no longer recognize the society they are released into, however, that confidence

is at risk and can potentially lead to negative attitudes and, ultimately, failure in free society.

Recidivism

Alper, Durose, and Markman (2018) conducted a nine-year follow-up report on

recidivism for those who were arrested in 2005. They found that 83% of prisoners across 30

states were arrested at least once during the nine years. Specifically, 44% were arrested at least

once during the first year of release, 34% were arrested during the third year, and 24% were

arrested during the ninth year (Alper et al., 2018). These statistics are significant because they

demonstrate how those who are being released from incarceration are at most risk during the first

year. For the rest, they were re-arrested as the years continued but the percentages were not as

steep. These percentages through the nine-year follow up totaled 67,966 ex-prisoners from 30

prisons in the United States. These findings demonstrate the large amount of ex-prisoners during

this time frame that re-offended and fell into the cycle of recidivism.

Additional findings proved to be significant regarding recidivism during this time period.

The overall estimated arrests during the nine-year period totaled 1,994,000, which meant each

prisoner averaged five arrests each after release (Alper et al., 2018). Additionally, 47% of

prisoners who were not arrested during the first through third years were arrested during years

four through nine, indicating that re-arrest seems inevitable for most (Alper et al., 2018). It is

also important to note that in this sample, the majority of prisoners were male, Caucasian or

African American, ranged between 25 and 29 years old, and were arrested predominantly on

drug or property offenses. Due to the large sample size analyzed in this study, it could be

determined that the majority of the incarcerated population consists of young adult minorities.

During the nine-year post-release period, 45% of males were arrested during the first year

compared to 35% of women, but after that year the percentages between male and female re-

arrests remained similar (Alper et al., 2018). It was also found that within the first year 46% of

African American prisoners were re-arrested compared to 47% of Hispanics and 40% of

Caucasians (Alper et al., 2018). After the first year, the percentages of race were similar just like

the trend found with gender. While this study does not specify why individuals were re-arrested,

it provides insight as to the large percentages of those who were rearrested during the first year

of release and years following. It could be determined that these individuals were re-arrested due

to any of the challenges previously mentioned when trying to re-enter society.

Method

This paper does not consist of new studies, instead, it relied on the analysis of past

research in order to provide new conclusions. The topic of this paper included multiple complex

variables, and because of this, the approach was to discuss each variable independently in order

to provide an in-depth understanding of its importance. This was executed by listing key

definitions first and then providing background information on each element of the paper: social

media, applying for jobs, and re-entry. Once an in-depth background was provided, the literature

review served to present past research on social media and employment, recidivism, and social

media in prisons. The implementation of educational courses on social media within prisons has

not been done before and, due to this, and efficient literature review was used to link the

relationships of the variables to determine whether or not the implementation of educational

courses within prisons would positively impact post-release unemployment rates and recidivism.

The research for this paper was conducted online through the Regis University library, legal

websites, government websites, and published articles.

<div align="center">**Literature Review on Prisons and Social Media**</div>

Social Media and Knowledge Exchange

Past research has recognized the importance of social media as a tool for knowledge

exchange and the importance of keeping up with these tools, especially for those who have been

incarcerated. A qualitative study by Imran and Iquabl (2007) defined knowledge into two

categories: tacit and explicit. According to Imran and Iquabl (2007), tacit knowledge was

deemed to be the most powerful and unique form of knowledge and explicit knowledge was

defined to be accessible information provided by an organization. This is importnat because it

demonstrates how individuals possess unique knowledge based on their experiences, while still

being able to obtain the same knowledge provided by organizations, such as a school or job

training. For example, a class of students may possess the same knowledge needed to pass a

course, but each student has individual knowledge based on personal life experiences.

Imran and Iquabl (2007) hypothesized that social media would be helpful to access and

gain knowledge, as well as promote knowledge transfer. Their study consisted of 22 doctors

practicing medicine for at least a year and active on social media. Opinions on social media and

knowledge exchange were obtained by a series of open-ended interview questions. After the

responses were transcribed and coded, four major themes were discovered: social media is a

communication mechanism; facilitator for relationship building; mechanism to gain existing or

new knowledge; and a tool for knowledge transfer. The results presented a positive correlation in

all four themes, demonstrating the usefulness of social media in professional settings (Imran &

Iquabl, 2007). As a result, it could be argued that, as social media becomes a useful tool for

professionals, ex-prisoners must learn to utilize these platforms in order to assimilate.

Capitalizing on Social Media for Career Development

Research conducted by Escoffery, Kenzig, Hyden, and Hernandez (2018) discussed the

benefits of social media and specific ways to use these platforms to professionally capitalize on

job opportunities. The benefits of social media are as follows: it allows users to build a network

of professionals; it facilitates finding information; aids in promoting professional activities, such

as webinars or publications; and assists in rapid updates within the profession. This is significant,

as these advantages aid organizations and private users who want to capitalize professionally by

securing employment.

Five key steps to capitalizing on social media were identified in this body of research.

The first step for new users would be to choose the most appropriate social media platforms,

which would be LinkedIn or Facebook. As mentioned, these platforms are considered the two

major sites that allow users to build their networks and search for employment opportunities. The

second step is to establish a professional presence so that potential employers can view profiles.

A professional presence (e.g. a professional profile picture, a brief biography that highlights

important skills and listing credentials) can leave a positive impression on employers (Escoffery

et al., 2018). Incorporating these aspects in a profile can leave the impression that an applicant is

professional and is a great candidate.

The third step is to connect with schools, organizations, and leaders. This could help

users to build a professional network as it allows them to connect with old friends, co-workers,

and individuals who work for a company of interest (Escoffery et al., 2018). It also allows users

to search organizations they are interested in for updates on job postings and opportunities to

connect with professionals within that field. The fourth step is to search for jobs or other

opportunities that can lead to a job.

A platform such as LinkedIn often presents of job opportunities and employers will reach

out to users who they feel would be a good fit (Escoffery et al., 2018). This is important because

job searching has become a collaborative effort on these sites. Employers actively seek

candidates just as much as candidates search for jobs. The last step mentioned is to study the

social media guidelines of a company and to practice proper etiquette (Escoffery et al., 2018).

Thus, users should ensure that their privacy settings are in place, that they are mindful of their

posts, and they should search themselves periodically to garner insight into what others see from

a external perspective. These steps can be followed on platforms such as LinkedIn, Facebook,

and Instagram.

Conceptions of Competency for Social Media in Career Services

In 2014, researchers studied the perspectives of career practitioners regarding the

importance of social media and competency (Kettunen et al., 2014). Through this study, they

aimed to answer the following: "what are the career practitioner's conceptions of competency for

social media in career services and what are the critical aspects that differentiate ways of

understanding competency for social media" (p. 44). This study adopted a phenomenological

approach, and 16 participants were asked a series of questions about social media.

The first theme addressed competency for social media as a necessary part of general

knowledge because these platforms have become a part of their daily life. Additionally, the

ability to differentiate accurate and valid knowledge on social media was regarded as

highlighting competency (Kettunen et al., 2014). This demonstrates that career practitioners

acknowledge the competency of social media as a necessary skill in the job market. It is also

important to acknowledge that not everything posted on the Internet is accurate, so being able to

determine validity is vital.

The second theme that emerged in this study was social media competency for delivering

career services (Kettunen et al., 2014). According to research, social media platforms are

content-driven; therefore, the key skills required are writing and grammar (Kettunen et al.,

2014). Therefore, those who use social media platforms must be cognizant of written content, as

it reflects communication competency levels. For example, when using LinkedIn, it would

reflect poorly on a user if his profile has misspellings or slang, as the purpose of the website is to

present oneself as a professional. Privacy is an ethical concern because users can use their

profiles for personal use. This is significant because not everyone who utilizes social media

platforms is interested in searching for jobs and might use the platform as a form of self-

expression. As previously stated, the best way to utilize social media includes checking the

privacy settings and being mindful of what is posted so that it aligns with intentions of the

profiles.

The third theme in this study included the competency for social media for collaborative

career exploration. The participants expressed that social media has become a platform where

individuals can come together, making these platforms an interactive workspace (Kettunen et al.,

2014). This means that a team can unite on social media to share ideas, but, as with any type of

teamwork, it is important to maintain professionalism, respect, and equal participation. This is

difficult for someone who enters a job while remaining a novice in social media. The last theme

is the competency regarding social media for co-careering. This is important because career

services cannot control social media, so they are forced to adapt in order to use these platforms to

their advantage (Kettunen et al., 2014). This is important because it demonstrates how companies

and individuals alike have to adapt. An example of this would be a car dealership due to the fact that advertising in earlier years would be listed in newspapers. Since the emergence of social media, dealerships are able to utilize these platforms to advertise their inventories, which would now require employees to know how to post on the business profile in a marketable aspect and communicate with costumers.

Technology Use During Incarceration

According to McDougall, Pearson, Torgerson, and Garcia-Reyes (2017), prisons are meant to rehabilitate offenders, but prisons often fail to prepare offenders for release. A study of 13 prisoners during a span of seven years was conducted to analyze the impact of technology during and after incarceration. First, this study examined the readiness prisoners felt for release and found that many did not feel ready, especially for those who had been incarcerated for many years (McDougall et al., 2017). This is notable because these prisoners knew that they would be entering a world they no longer knew. This study also followed prisoners who used the prisoner self-service (PSS) technology newly installed in these prisons. Once taught to the prisoners, PSS helped prisoners maintain their daily routines in jail and provided educational functions including applying for education classes, employment and rehabilitation programs, as well as enrolling in healthcare programs (McDougall et al., 2017). This is important because this platform helped to educate prisoners specifically to prepare them for release.

Results found that the implementation of PSS increased positive attitudes among prisoners regarding preparedness for release and there was an increase in confidence (McDougall et al., 2017). Additionally, in some prisons that were a part of the study, the rate of re-offending decreased over the seven-year period. These findings are significant because they demonstrate

how implementing the necessary tools in prisons for a successful re-entry can positively affect

prisoners and their attitudes.

Social Media Can Have a Negative Impact on Re-entry

Teaching prisoners how to utilize social media for professional purposes can have many

benefits, but social media can also hinder a prisoner's re-entry. A pilot study conducted by

Perkins, Rand, Allison, and Sheaffer (2017) consisted of 89 incarcerated women. This study

aimed to understand how social media impacted their re-entries into society. The participants in

this study completed questionnaires that asked whether they had social media accounts prior to

incarceration, how many friends they had on social media, and how much time they spent on

those platforms.

According to the current study, incarcerated women often face other battles such as drug

addiction, domestic violence, and PTSD (Perkins et al., 2017). Additionally, if a female and/ or

her partner struggles with substance abuse, their social media platforms may contain a higher

number of triggers (Perkins et at., 2017). A trigger for a drug addict may be activated when the

addict sees many users on social media using drugs. The results of this study indicated that most

of the females utilized at least one social media profile prior to their incarceration, they had an

average of 300 friends, and they checked on their profiles at least twice per day.

With the daily use of social media, it was determined that returning to social media post-

release was a trigger, similar to returning to an old neighborhood with negative influences

(Perkins et al., 2017). For example, if an individual battling substance abuse is released from

prison and returns to his same neighborhood, he is forced to be around the same friends or family

members who use illegal substances. Likewise, since social media has become a part of many

individuals' daily lives, it is the secondary neighborhood that users turn to (Perkins et al., 2017).

Users on social media may share posts that demonstrate themselves taking part in the same

activities that trigger a relapse, which means that social media can be seen as a negative tool for

an ex-prisoner's rehabilitation. Therefore, it is important to establish educational courses on how

to utilize these platforms for positive reasons, such as finding a job, and perhaps deleting those

negative influences if they serve as triggers.

New Media in Prisons

As stated by Jewkes and Reisdorf (2016), "it is argued that prisoners experience profound

social isolation and constitute one of the most impoverished groups in the digital age" (p. 134).

This statement is significant because it demonstrates the disparity between prisoners and the

advancements that have been made in social media. This is especially true for those serving long-

term sentences of at least 10 years because there is an increased likelihood that these inmates

never used social media.

Jewkes and Reisdorf (2016) observed five prison facilities, which included four in

Northern Ireland and one in England. They visited the facilities over the course of two days in

Northern Ireland with the approval of the Director General of the Northern Ireland Prison

Service, and they spent one day visiting the facility in England. Hard data could not be collected

during this study as researchers had to respond rapidly when accepting their arrangement notices

from the facilities and, as a result, they could not obtain full ethical approval. Consequently, they

did not voice record the sessions held with the prisoners, staff, and prison governors.

Additionally, researchers did not take notes of the sessions. According to Jewkes and Reisdorf

(2016), each session began with explaining confidentiality and that participation was voluntary.

Once the volunteers were ready, they were divided into groups of between five and eight

individuals, and only one large group consisted of 15 men. In total, approximately 40 prisoners

were interviewed and only two groups required prisoner supervision. As stated, the researchers

did not record the discussions so the findings were based on their observations during these

visits.

Jewkes and Reisdorf (2016) noted that some facilities were already implementing a form

of new technology within the prison through the use of touch-screen kiosks similar to PSS. This

allowed prisoners to schedule their visits, medical appointments, and order their necessities from

the prison shop. These kiosks require PIN numbers and biometric scanning for prisoners to log

in, which facilitates a sense of control and responsibility. For example, being able to schedule an

appointment and order necessities can make a prisoner feel that he has a sense of control over his

life again after constantly following a prison schedule. Additionally, if a prisoner fails to

schedule his appointment, he will simply forgo the benefits of the kiosk, which fosters a sense of

responsibility.

An interesting observation noted by Jewkes and Reisdorf (2016) included the inmate's

attitudes on learning new media. It was determined that older prisoners, especially those serving

long-term sentences, were not comfortable with learning new media. For some, the threat of

having to learn this new aspect can enforce feelings of ignorance and further highlights the

disparity between an individual trying to assimilate back into society and those who have never

served time in prison (Jewkes & Reisdorf, 2016). While these feelings were significant for the

older and long-term prisoners, younger prisoners who had not served as much time in prison

shared their excitements about catching up with the latest updates and smartphones once they

were released. Women, in particular, shared their desires to re-connect with Facebook (Jewkes &

Reisdorf, 2016). This demonstrates that within the prison systems, there is a gap in social media

literacy between long-term inmates and newer inmates. Therefore, the gap must translate outside

of prison and will continue to grow, which results in more inmates feeling abandoned as the

years pass. Eventually, the social media knowledge of the young inmates will also become

outdated.

This study has many limitations because the researchers were unable to record the data.

The ability to transcribe and thoroughly review the data is a key factor in conducting a sound

study. Since they were unable to obtain ethical approval in time, the study became more informal

and observational. For meaningful findings, this study would have to be conducted again with

proper approval and measures. Another limitation may include inaccurate recalling of the

prisoner's opinions on new media.

Since the sample size consisted of 40 participants with no recorded notes during the

sessions, it could have been difficult to accurately recall all of their responses. At this time, this

study serves to demonstrate how the disparity between prisoners and non-prisoners came into

being and it demonstrates how the aversion towards learning new media can grow while

prisoners serve longer sentences. The unwillingness to progress with society post-release can

hinder an individual because he will be in a difficult position when he has to secure a job. As

mentioned, employers note the value of social media competency and might seek employees who

have these skills. This means that ex-prisoners who are not competent in social media will be at a

disadvantage when searching for jobs.

Attitudes on Social Media and Inmates

When posing the idea of implementing social media within prisons, it is advisable to have

mixed opinions from the public about how usage should be monitored and regulated (Wiltz,

2017). Currently, in the United States, laws vary per state in regard to how prisons are regulated.

For example, some states have not officially banned inmates from having social media accounts,

but they do ban the possession of cellphones. Other states, like New Mexico, however, have

banned inmates from having social media accounts and have implemented fines for anyone on

the outside who helps them establish one (Wiltz, 2017). Some propose that social media be

banned while others feel that since inmates are already removed from society, further alienation

is unnecessary (Wiltz, 2017). As mentioned, the longer an inmate serves time in prison the more

opportunities and experiences they forgo. Due to this, they become insecure in their abilities to

learn a foreign website. This could be avoided by implementing a safe and regulated program

where prisoners receive lessons on familiarizing themselves with these platforms so that in years

to come, the number of prisoners who feel incapable of learning decreases and the percentages of

feeling prepared for release increases.

      According to Wiltz (2017) and as previously mentioned, social media has become a

popular way for people to build their social networks and remain connected with their friends

and family. In fact, it was found that maintaining connections with family and friends aided in

lowering recidivism rates (Wiltz, 2017). With opinions varying on whether prisoners should be

allowed to use social media, it appears that the main concern would be how to regulate this new

idea, especially if social media can be used negatively among inmates.

      When debating whether prisoners should be allowed access to social media, the First

Amendment also becomes an issue. The First Amendment guarantees freedoms concerning

speech, religion, expression, and the right to assembly (Cornell Law, n.d.). A published report

shared the opinion of a family member who discovered a Facebook page created for an inmate

who harmed her child (Chammah, 2016). This family member requested that the page be

removed, which led to Texas officials stepping in and requesting Facebook to remove the

account. This sparked a policy stating that inmates in Texas could not have social media

accounts (Chammah, 2016). Additionally, Facebook updated its policies to disallow inmates

from holding an account in conjunction with their existing policies, which prohibited someone

from creating an account on behalf of another party (Cammah, 2016). It is evident that

implementing social media in prisons for educational purposes requires policies and regulations

that calm public concerns.

Research on Unemployment Post-release and Recidivism

As discussed, prisoners face multiple challenges upon being released. According to

Lockwood, Nally, Ho, and Knutson (2015), many prisoners are illiterate, poor, unemployed, and

lack updated skills that employers require for employment opportunities. A five-year follow-up

study was conducted, which consisted of 6,394 ex-prisoners from the Indiana Department of

Correction, and the study focused only on African American and Caucasian ex-prisoners

(Lockwood et al., 2015). The purpose of this study was to examine unemployment, post-release

recidivism, and how racial disparities play a role in both aspects.

The first aspect these researchers examined was a racial disparity between the African

American and Caucasian ex-prisoners. The first disparity found between them included

neighborhood differences in which the African American ex-prisoners were more likely to return

to an area with high poverty and unemployment rates, fewer businesses, and prevalent crime

(Lockwood et al., 2015). According to Lockwood et al. (2015), the second disparity between the

two racial groups were their educational backgrounds, as it was reported that 8.0% of African

Americans between the ages of 16 and 24 dropped out of school compared to 5.1% of

Caucasians in 2010. The third disparity mentioned included a larger number of African

Americans in prison in 2009, which is 4.8% per 100,000 African American men. These statistics

support the claims that those lacking education are at risk of incarceration and since a large

percentage of African Americans drop out of school, they represent the largest population in

prisons.

The last disparity was employment, as it was determined that ex-prisoners who did not

have the necessary educational backgrounds were likely to be unemployed (Lockwood et al.,

2015). After determining the disparities this sample size faced, the researchers also needed to

define recidivism. For this study, recidivism was defined as a violation of parole, a violation of

probation, or committing a new offense (Lockwood et al., 2015). Thereafter, they collected data

from the prison's Division of Research and Planning, Education Division, and the Indiana

Department of Workforce Development to determine the demographics, educational

backgrounds, and track post-employment among the sample size.

Five years after these prisoners were released, the first finding indicated ethnicity was not

correlated with post-release recidivism (Lockwood et al., 2015). In fact, the factors that

influenced the rate of recidivism included age, education level, and post-release employment

(Lockwood et al., 2015). This demonstrates that although the African American inmates were

likely to return to an impoverished neighborhood, there are many factors that can lead to

recidivism in both races. Additionally, it was revealed that the recidivism rates were higher when

an ex-prisoner was uneducated and unemployed (Lockwood et al., 2015). These findings

demonstrate that there was a racial disparity between ex-prisoners and employment post-release.

The data presented that during the follow-up time, African American ex-prisoners were likely to

have higher unemployment rates compared to Caucasian ex-prisoners due to a lack of education

(Lockwood et al., 2015). In fact, 53.7% of the ex-prisoners were never employed after release

(Lockwood et al., 2015). This is significant because it demonstrates how education, job skills,

employment, and recidivism are interconnected.

As previously mentioned, about 600,000 prisoners are released each year (Couloute &

Kopf, 2018). The prisoners face many challenges upon re-entry, but securing employment has

become one of the most significant issues post-release. In fact, the unemployment rate among ex-

prisoners as of 2018 was estimated to be five times higher compared to the general US

population (Couloute & Kopf, 2018). This statistic is alarming, especially as formerly

incarcerated individuals were found to be more active in the workforce. For example, 93.3% of

the formerly incarcerated population was more active in searching for jobs compared to 83.8% of

the general population (Couloute & Kopf, 2018). These statistics are important because it means

more ex-prisoners were seeking employment but were not being hired.

Social Media and Jobs

As stated, social media websites such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram are popular

platforms for seeking employment opportunities. According to Osman (2019), millions of

Americans utilize LinkedIn, 44% of users earn $75,000 per year, and 43% of marketers admit to

sourcing at least one customer through LinkedIn. Additionally, 50% of college graduates in the

United States use LinkedIn (Osman, 2019). This is significant because it demonstrates the high

percentages of those using LinkedIn and seeking employment opportunities. This also indicates

that seeking employment can be very competitive, as a high number of users are college

graduates. As stated, the majority of the prison population consists of individuals who lack

education. This means that post-release, ex-prisoners must compete with educated applicants that

know how to navigate on social media in order to seek more employment opportunities.

Facebook is one of the most popular websites used daily; it has over a billion active users

worldwide, and 50 million business accounts (Donnelly, 2019). In comparison to LinkedIn, 62%

of Facebook users attended college, millions of likes are generated per minute, 58% of users are

friends with their co-workers, 26% of users click on advertisements, and 93% of social media

advertisers use Facebook. This demonstrates the high volume of users and businesses that

Facebook experiences daily. According to the Facebook Newsroom, Facebook reported that

local businesses create about 60% of new jobs, so Facebook decided to expand and allow users

to apply for jobs directly on their website (Himel, 2018). In fact, a survey reported that one in

four people in the United States searched for or found a job using Facebook. This data indicates

that Facebook is a popular website used for employment opportunities in the US.

        According to Clarke (2019), about a billion people use Instagram each month, users like

billions of posts per day, 71% of businesses in the United States use Instagram, and 80% of users

follow at least one business account. This is meaningful because, similar to Facebook and

LinkedIn, a large percentage of a users utilize this platform daily, which increases the chances of

securing employment opportunities. While there are no available statistics that demonstrate the

percentage of users who have secured a job through Instagram, research suggests that this

website can still be useful. According to Clarke (2019), users can use Instagram to create a

business account and sell products. A survey completed in the US stated that 55% of Instagram

users who utilize the website for this can make an average of $70,000 per year. As mentioned,

Instagram stories allow users to post videos in real-time and advertisements often present

themselves before the next story. This is meaningful because 500 million users engage with this

tool daily, which means that millions of users are exposed to advertisements that may lead to an

employment opportunity.

Discussion

        Past research has provided substantial information that demonstrated the gap between

what society expects from ex-prisoners and the support provided to aid in meeting those

expectations. This research indicates that an essential aspect of successful re-entry includes

obtaining employment because it will allow ex-prisoners to earn a steady income, which can

assist in accomplishing other goals. While this remains an important element of re-entry, it is

difficult to achieve, for multiple reasons. The most prevalent difficulty in obtaining employment

includes insufficient education and skills needed to meet the application requirements

(Lockwood et al., 2015). Most prisoners do not have an adequate education prior to arrest but are

given an opportunity in prison to complete their GEDs and take part in other state-funded

courses. While prisoners have opportunities to complete their GEDs in prison, society continues

to advance, leading to a new age where social media has become a part of many individuals'

daily lives.

    Since most prisoners are removed from society long-term, there remains a large

population that has never used a smartphone or social media platform. Furthermore, social media

platforms, such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram, can assist users to connect to their

networks and to apply for jobs. Since these platforms have many benefits and require social

media competency, it is important that the education is passed along to those who have been

removed from society, as prisoners could benefit from social media after release to make re-entry

easier.

    Prisons across the United States could implement educational courses for prisoners on

how to utilize these platforms. First, it should be anticipated that such an effort would confront a

significant amount of resistance from various partisan factions. For example, instead of allowing

prisoners free access to personal accounts, there could be one administrative account per each

platform and an instructor could demonstrate how to use it in a positive way to assist in sourcing

opportunities for employment.

This model is similar to a company updating its teams on changes within the company. For example, a hired individual is trained on how to perform the job and use the computer programs. As policies or practices change, employers take the time to update the training to ensure the team is prepared. If this approach is similarly taken among prisoners, they will feel more confident in their abilities to assimilate back into society, which would have an impact on lowering recidivism rates, since this research has shown a significant link between recidivism in poor education and unemployment.

Limitations

Due to the inability to conduct a study that involved primary, original research that sought information from such direct sources as prison wardens, parole and probation officers, and both current and former incarcees, this research references past research on the individual variables and links them together in order to reach an appropriate conclusion. One limitation is that this topic has not been studied extensively because social media platforms are a recent innovation. Since this research has not been conducted, there are no published articles that discuss specific studies on the aforementioned social media websites in prisons. Some studies implemented a form of media kiosks, but that program differs greatly from LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram. Since a study on this particular topic has not been conducted, it was difficult to obtain sufficient research that credited or discredited the idea of implementing such a program. Some research did examine how social media can negatively affect re-entry on a personal level. However, if inmates were to use these platforms professionally, negative online friends would not be an issue.

Future Research

In order to definitively determine the benefits of implementing an educational course on social media within prisons, it would be beneficial to run a longitudinal study. In order to conduct a study, researchers will need to gather volunteers within prisons in the US. Researchers will have to plan educational courses on LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram and obtain approval from the governing bodies of these prison facilities. To exercise greater control over the study, researchers could create one profile per platform and demonstrate how to utilize these platforms to small groups each week. Since prisoners have different sentences, researchers would have to control for that variable by introducing this course at least six months prior to release. This course could be an incentive or bonus course for those nearing release.

Once released, researchers would follow the participant's progress for at least nine years due to the definition of recidivism that this research paper used. Researchers would take note of which participants are able to obtain a job each year, how many are able to secure an interview even if the individual is not extended a job offer, how many of those jobs were due to social media, and how many participants re-offend. This would allow enough time to determine whether the educational courses are beneficial for providing more employment opportunities post-release while reducing recidivism rates.

Conclusion

As mentioned, ex-prisoners are expected to re-enter society and secure employment. The longer prisoners are removed from society, the more societal advancements they miss. Prisoners are already at a disadvantage post-release due to their criminal records, poor educations, and lack of skills (Simmons Staff, 2016). In addition, prisoners must re-enter into a society with foreign technologies and social media platforms, which widens the gap of competency and preparedness. This research paper has presented a plethora of information regarding the growth of social

media, the challenges of re-entry, and the shift in applying for employment. This background

information was necessary in order to present each variable independently for an in-depth

understanding. A thorough literature review on social media and prisons presented sufficient

information to conclude that social media competency is a growing skill needed in the

workplace.

      The information presented on recidivism demonstrated sufficient information to

conclude that unemployment plays a role in recidivism, and if prisoners are unable to secure jobs

because they are not progressing with the necessary skills, they are at risk of re-offending. This

research paper also presented statistics on LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram to demonstrate the

high volumes of users per each website and statistics on securing employment through these

websites. These findings can be connected to conclude that social media is a growing tool used

in society and a useful skill to have in order to seek and secure employment. For ex-prisoners

serving at least 10 years in prison, the disparity between their skills compared to the non-

incarcerated population grows wider, leaving ex-prisoners at a disadvantage when applying for

jobs. This disparity can decrease by implementing educational courses within prisons,

demonstrating how to utilize social media for professional purposes. Since recidivism and

unemployment are proven to be linked, recidivism rates will decrease as a result of these courses

because it will allow prisoners more opportunities to gain employment.

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