

LinkedIn Usability Study

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ABSTRACT

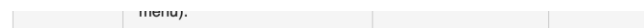
This study evaluated LinkedIn's mobile and desktop usability for university students and recent graduates looking for jobs. We used a Heuristic Evaluation followed by a counter-balanced user study with ten participants. Users experienced difficulty with certain tasks, especially on mobile. Key issues included: poor Consistency and Standards (mismatch between "Saved" and "My Jobs"), a bad Match between System and the Real World (Events hidden under "Manage my network"), and a lack of User Control and Freedom (hidden "Leave event" option). The study provides recommendations to improve the discoverability and navigational consistency of these features.

1 INTRODUCTION

LinkedIn's main goal is to help people build their professional profiles, grow their networks, and connect with opportunities that move their careers forward. For our study, we focused on students and asked them to complete tasks related to the system's usability, such as finding a job, returning to a saved job, and exploring events by having them find, attend and leave them. We then compared how these tasks performed on the desktop site versus the mobile app.

2 HEURISTIC EVALUATION

We evaluated the LinkedIn system through Nielsen's 10 usability heuristics [1]. As a result, the following problems were listed as very important:



As our target group of users is university students and recent graduates looking for employment opportunities, it is crucial for them to be able to search, find, save and apply for jobs easily as well as network with potential employees (through events). LinkedIn is the system that provides our target group with these opportunities, so it is important that these features' usability is evaluated.

3 USER STUDY

3.1 Selection of Participants (Sample Composition)

The study involved a total of 10 participants whom we recruited to evaluate the usability of the LinkedIn platform.

3.2 Participant Demographics and Platform Usage

A large portion of the sample consisted of students and primary mobile users, which helped ensure the study's relevance to the target demographic for professional networking platforms.

3.3 Occupation

The participant pool was predominantly composed of students (80%). The remaining participants were either employed (10%) or unemployed/actively looking for work (30%). Note that participants could select multiple occupations, hence the total percentage greater than 100%.

Occupation	Count (n)	Percentage (%)
Student	8	80%
Employed	1	10%
Unemployed / Actively looking for work	3	30%

3.4 Platform Usage Frequency

Usage frequency indicated that most participants were active LinkedIn users, with 80% using the platform daily (30%) or weekly (50%). This ensured that the sample consisted of users who were familiar with the platform's general functionality.

Usage Frequency	Count (n)	Percentage (%)
Daily	3	30%

Weekly	5	50%
Monthly	1	10%
Rarely / Never	1	10%

3.5 Preferred Device

The majority of participants reported using Mobile (60%) as their primary device for accessing LinkedIn, followed by Desktop (30%). This finding highlights the need for a robust evaluation of the mobile experience.

Preferred Device	Count (n)	Percentage (%)
Mobile	6	60%
Desktop	3	30%
Both equally	1	10%

3.6 Testing Environment and Materials

The user tests were conducted in our rooms, utilizing controlled, standardized setups for both desktop and mobile testing. A new, clean LinkedIn profile was created for the purpose of the study to ensure task performance was not influenced by existing user data or network connections.

Desktop Setup: Users performed tasks on a monitor with a standard keyboard and mouse. The moderator controlled the monitor's screen from a laptop.

Mobile Setup: Our personal mobile phones were used for mobile testing.

Data Collection: Both desktop and mobile sessions were screen recorded. Sequence (SEQ) and subjective usability scale (SUS) questions were administered via Google Forms by the monitor.

3.7 Team roles and Procedure

The research team consisted of three people. For each test session, two researchers were present:

Monitor: Responsible for guiding the test-taker, reading the tasks, and administering the post-task questionnaire (SEQ/SUS).

Note Taker: Responsible for observing the session and recording real-time qualitative data, including user actions, quotes, errors, points of confusion, etc.

3.8 Study Design

The study employed a within-subject, counter-balanced design to evaluate the LinkedIn platform across two conditions: Desktop and Mobile.

Within-Subject: Every participant completed the same set of tasks on both the Desktop and Mobile platforms.

Counter-Balancing: Participants were divided into two groups to mitigate order effects:

Group 1 (Half of participants): Started with Mobile tasks, then moved to Desktop.

Group 2 (Remaining participants): Started with Desktop tasks, then moved to Mobile.

3.9 Tasks

Participants were asked to perform three core tasks that represent key user goals on a professional networking platform: job search, job management, and event engagement.

Task 1 (Find Job and Apply) was a standard function test. Tasks 2 and 3 included specific constraints to force users to utilize the platform's core navigational structure, revealing true feature discoverability. Specifically, Task 2 (Save Job and Open Saved Jobs) required participants to avoid clicking the pop-up shortcut to test navigation via the standard menu structure. Task 3 (Find, Attend, and Leave Event) prohibited the use of the search function to test the ease of finding the features and the intended organic navigational path.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Qualitative Data (from notes during the user study)

Task 1 – Ease of Use (Apply for a Job)

Desktop:

- All participants completed the task without difficulty (10/10).

- A notable behavior pattern was the frequent use of the search bar for navigation (6/10).

Mobile:

- All participants also completed the task successfully (10/10).
- No distinct or recurring navigation behaviors were observed.

Comparative Insight:

- Both platforms demonstrate strong usability for simple, straightforward tasks.
- Desktop users appear more inclined to use built-in navigation tools (e.g., search), which may indicate a higher level of confidence or visibility in desktop navigation elements.

Task 2 – Mild Confusion & Feature Location (Find Saved Job)

Desktop:

- Several users experienced mild confusion (4/10), primarily due to the assumption that saved jobs would be located in the profile section.
- Despite this, most participants completed the task with relatively little difficulty.

Mobile:

- Users demonstrated similar confusion levels (4/10), again commonly misattributing the feature to the profile section.
- Although the mobile results were slightly more varied, the majority were still able to complete the task.

Comparative Insight:

- The confusion observed across both platforms suggests that this is a cross-platform design issue related to feature naming or placement.

- Both interfaces would benefit from clearer labeling or more intuitive grouping of job-related features.

Task 3 – Complexity & Findability (Finding, Attending, and Leaving an Event)

Desktop:

- All users successfully completed the task, though several were initially unsure where to begin (4/10).
- Navigation involved moderate exploration, such as switching between pages.

Mobile:

- Participants experienced substantial difficulty: confusion occurred in all sessions (10/10), frustration was common (6/10), and a majority did not finish the task (6/10 DNF).
- Mobile users relied heavily on trial-and-error navigation, including extensive homepage scrolling (8/10) and checking My Network (5/10), indicating unclear pathways to the Events feature.

Comparative Insight:

- This task revealed significant disparities between platforms. While desktop users managed to locate and complete the tasks, mobile users struggled due to poor feature discoverability and overly complex navigation flows.
- Low visibility of the Events feature affected both platforms, but its impact was substantially more severe in the mobile interface.

4.2 SUS score results

We compared the two versions and found a big difference in how easy they are to use.

The Desktop version got a score of 72.8, which is considered "Good" (better than the average score of 68). However, the Mobile version only got a score of 54, which is considered "Poor":

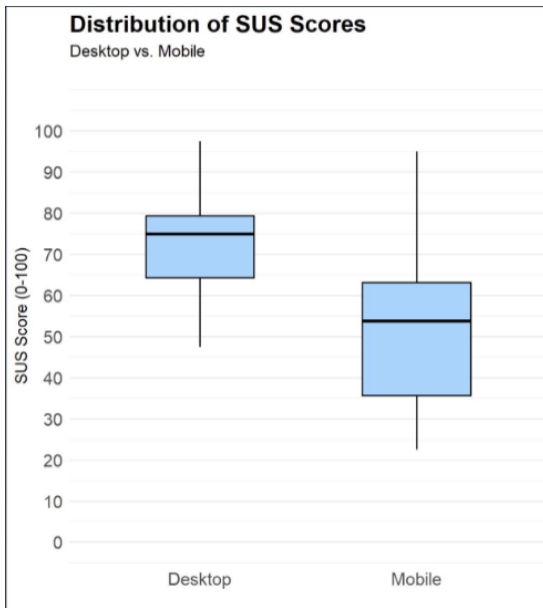


Figure 1: Distribution of SUS Scores

The participants in the study would rate the mobile interface as "unnecessarily complex" (referring to question 2) and "cumbersome" (referring to question 8):



Figure 2: Distribution of answers from SUS desktop questionnaire



Figure 3: Distribution of answers from SUS mobile questionnaire

4.3 SEQ score results

The results clearly show how users struggled with the third mobile task in comparison to the desktop version and how generally Desktop performed better on the SEQ form.

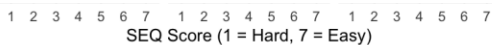


Figure 4: Distribution of answers from SEQ desktop questionnaire

SEQ Score (1 = Hard, 7 = Easy)

Figure 5: Distribution of answers from SEQ mobile questionnaire

5 CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary

In conclusion, user testing fully supported our claims from the heuristic evaluation, clearly showing that the same usability issues appeared in real user behavior and confirming the validity of our initial findings.

Our evaluation of LinkedIn—combining a heuristic review with hands-on user testing—gave us a clear picture of where the platform works well for students and where it creates friction. Across both desktop and mobile, we looked at tasks that matter most to our target group: finding a job, saving a job, and discovering and managing events.

What became obvious very quickly is that desktop generally supports these tasks well, while mobile users struggled much more, often becoming confused or frustrated during the process.

1. Saved Jobs Are Harder to Find Than They Should Be

During the heuristic evaluation, we noticed that LinkedIn uses two different labels for the same feature ("Saved" vs. "My Jobs"). This felt like a small inconsistency at first, but the user study showed that it actually causes real confusion. Participants often clicked around different menus, hesitated, or opened the wrong pages before eventually finding their saved jobs. On mobile, this issue was even more noticeable.

2. The Events Feature Is Hidden—and Users Really Feel It

One of the strongest insights from both evaluation methods is that LinkedIn makes it surprisingly difficult to find Events, especially on mobile. Participants had to dig through "Manage my network" or scroll the homepage for a long time, with several expressing that they had never used Events before. This led to confusion, unnecessary navigation, and in some cases frustration. This single issue became the biggest barrier in Task 3.

3. Leaving an Event Isn't Straightforward

The heuristic evaluation pointed out that the "Leave event" option is tucked away behind a three-dot menu. User testing confirmed this immediately: almost no one found the option quickly, and several participants weren't sure if they had done it correctly. Mobile users struggled the most, with some failing the task entirely.

5.2 Desktop vs. Mobile: A Clear difference

While both platforms have usability problems, mobile consistently made every issue worse.

Mobile users spent more time searching, switching tabs, scrolling, or backtracking, and they expressed noticeably higher frustration, especially during the event task. Desktop users were generally faster, more confident, and completed more tasks successfully.

5.3 Challenges

Since there were three of us running the tests, it took a bit of time to get into a good rhythm. We had to coordinate who was doing what and when, which slowed things down at first. Once we put together a clear step-by-step script for each session, though, things became much easier to manage.

5.4 Limitations

All our participants were students from the same university, which means the range of user perspectives was somewhat limited. On top of that, we were working under a tight deadline, so we couldn't run as many tests as we would have liked.

5.5 Comment from Authors

5.5.1 Tijana Mijatović

My primary contribution to this project was in the execution and moderation of the user study. I participated in six of the ten user sessions, acting primarily as the moderator, responsible for guiding the participants through the tasks and administering the post-task questionnaires. Key preparatory work included setting up the clean LinkedIn profile used across all tests and establishing the optimal technical setup for reliable screen recording and data collection. When it comes to the analysis, I was responsible for processing the SEQ (Single Ease Question) results and creating their visualizations using R Studio. Through this process, I gained more experience in controlling for technical variables in a mixed-method study and learned how to effectively translate subjective data into measurable insights.

5.5.2 Diana Ivanova

For our group's usability study, I contributed to both the data collection and analysis phases. I was a moderator for four user sessions and the designated note-taker for an additional four. Following the sessions, I analyzed the quantitative

results from the System Usability Scale (SUS) questionnaires. This responsibility provided a key learning opportunity: I gained practical skills in processing raw quantitative data and transforming them into effective data visualisations.

5.5.3 Angelina Hess

My main role in this usability study was taking notes during the user sessions and analyzing qualitative data. I kept track of participant reactions, comments, and behaviors, and afterwards, after analyzing all collected data, identified key themes and insights. Additionally, I drew the conclusions of our report by looking at all the data, bringing together the main points from both the qualitative and quantitative findings. Overall, this helped me build more confidence in analyzing qualitative data and presenting research in a clear, understandable way and strengthening my collaborative skills.

REFERENCES

- [1] Nielsen, J. (1994). Usability inspection methods. John Wiley & Sons.