# Technologies for Employability

Corina Sas

Lancaster University, School of Computing and Communications, UK

**Abstract**

*The graduate job market is highly competitive and prospective candidates could greatly benefit from new tools for self presentation. This paper explores one such tool, namely the video CV and its value for graduate employability. We report on 16 interviews with prospective employers and career coaches to investigate its benefits and challenges. Findings suggest its specific characteristics relating to the script content, performance and format. We conclude with several suggestions for supporting graduates' preparation of video CVs including awareness of their challenges, provision of professional help, and dedicated training sessions.*

## 1. Introduction

On the one hand, in an increasingly competitive job market featuring high graduate unemployment (Shadbolt, 2016; Wakeham, 2016), innovative and successful self-presentation tools are much needed. On the other hand, the advent of Web 2.0 technologies has changed people's leisure and work practices, providing easy access to such tools for self-presentation. The time is right to intersect these social and technological trends, with a focus on video CV, which has become a popular tool in the last years for corporate recruitment.

While most of young people's use of web 2.0 has been within the personal and academic life, its value for employability has recently started to be explored. A specific technology for employability is video CV. Several UK universities are currently providing students' access to tools for preparing video CVs, for example through partnership with MeetTheRealMe, an online video CV platform. Such initiatives however, focus exclusively on the technology side of recording, archiving and browsing video CVs. This is problematic because students receive neither support for the composition of their scripts, nor for the delivery of such scripts in front of a camera. An extreme example of how things can go wrong is the case of a Yale's student who sent an embarrassing video CV to a prospective employer, which after it went viral; it has led to student's suicide.

This paper explores the value of social media in general and of video CV in particular for graduate employability. We run 15 interviews with prospective employers and career coaches to investigate the value of such technologies for employability. Findings point to the importance of guiding future graduates' efforts for self-presentation not just through video CV, but in social media at large. We conclude by discussing the implications of these findings for employability training.

In this paper, we draw from our previous work on self presentation in social media (Sas et al., 2009), memory curation (Viet Le et al., 2016, Davies et al, 2015; Sas and Whittaker, 2013), teaching and learning innovation (Sas, 2006a, 2006b; Sas and Dix, 2007, 2009a, 2009b), knowledge transfer (Sas, 2009), and employability (Sas et al., 2016).

## 2. Study Findings

We report on 16 interviews, 8 with career coaches, and 8 with prospective employers. Here we focused on their perceived values and challenges of social media in general and of video CVs in particular faced by prospective candidates, i.e., STEM graduates entering the job market. The questions we asked focused on the perceived value and limitations of video CVs for employability, as well as the best ways to prepare the script and to format the video CVs.

### 2.1 The Added Value of Video CVs

Findings indicate specific benefits of video CV emerging in contrast to paper CV such as easier discrimination of prospective candidates, their social skills, personality, and motivation for the job: *"Where a visual impression counts because it's far easier to sell yourself in person or by video, than on the paper because many CVs are very alike [anything] that requires any sort of creative business, would prefer a video CV".*

A few study participants noted that video CVs allow for better discrimination among the prospective candidates. They provided two reasons for this. First, because it is a newly emerging technology, video CV is less formalised, leaving more space for candidates' creativity. As the same time, it requires additional preparation which may indicate stronger commitment for a specific vacancy. Second, video CV provides a better media for getting a glimpse into who the candidate is like a person. Soft aspects such as presence, energy, charisma, rather than factual data come to the foreground. This in turn may speed the filtering process in recruitment practice.

More specifically, participants also mentioned that video CV better supports the identification of interpersonal skills: *"You don't get a real sense of a person [from paper CV]: how they present themselves, how articulate they are, how confident they are - you just can't get that from a written CV".* One's personality and attitude towards the job are also easier to recognize: *"Paper CV: qualifications, skills and ability to do the job. But I'm also interested in your attitude and personality and your genuine interest in the career you're progressing".* Such a sense of who the person is, goes beyond candidate's abilities and qualifications, to capture more subtle aspects such as personality and attitudes. In a video CV, attitudes can be conveyed through how confidently, professionally and comfortable people present themselves. Not at least, video CV also supports the identification of prospective candidate's motivation: *"The enthusiasm in the voice can give me more context".* Motivation for a job is arguably more convincingly expressed in a video rather than on the paper. Here most interviewees noted the importance of displaying the right level of energy and enthusiasm within video CVs: "*The key things about this are fun, energy and selling yourself".*

### 2.2. Script Content

With respect to the content of video CVs, most participants recognised its importance noting also that it should be open, less prescribed, and probably challenging to get right: *"[What should the script be like?] That's the million dollar question".* They also agree that it should mix in a

unique way, both objective achievements and personal qualities and values, such as: *"Where you are from, what you have done, what you are looking for and something that's inspired you or some project that you could speak about it yourself".*

The self-presentation narrative can be strengthened by explicitly expressing one's motivation for a particular job and organisation, while candidate's personality could be also reflected in the video CV: *"Succinct things that open up your motivation for something, what makes you excited. So highlight them and then wrap them up with your personality"* or "*Why they want the job, what can they bring to the organization".*

The presentation of motivation can be further supported by one's unique combinations of skills, particularly if the job requires social skills which the video CV is particularly good at allowing people to convey: *"skills that are important for the job they are applying for, like presentation skills".*

Not at least, several participants mentioned the importance of tailoring the video CV to the organisational culture of the institution where the candidate applies for a job: *"it's always worth checking with the organisation first because video CV is a new concept and for many organisations it might just be a bit too far".* An important finding is the preferred use of the video CV for specific sectors where extrovert qualities are appreciate, such as media, communications, design, PR, or marketing. Even within the same sector, companies may vary in their attitude towards video CV, so some preparation work is needed here: *"For jobs in the media , communications or marketing, video CV would work very well but [not so in] more traditional business sectors like banking, accountancy or law. You need to be very careful about the sector you are applying for".* In contrast, more traditional sectors like law or finances may be less receptive to video CVs preferring the traditional paper CVs.

Findings also suggest two specific types of content. One is the classic self narrative where the candidate talks in front of the camera, while the other uses the video to showcase one's work such as design portfolio: *"Include a demo of a product or project completed".* This is an interesting finding, indicating new ways of appropriating the content of video CVs.

## *2.3 Script Performance*

Study participants suggested the "performance" characteristic of the video CV. We can think of Goffman's work (1978) on self presentation where actors, stage and scripts are carefully orchestrated to support a believable performance, and its application to social media (Sas et al., 2009).

In terms of performance: eye contact with the camera has been particularly emphasised: *"You do need to make eye contact with the screen. And so many people just look down on their notes".* Other participants mentioned the importance of presence: *"Put in something you are passionate about [that] helps people engage with you and look at the camera".* Clarity of narrative and one's voice is also important – and this can be achieved through rehearsal: *"Keep it short, practice, make your voice clear".* Finally, a good performance requires props, such as professional attire: *It is important how they dress like and sometimes is worth it putting some makeup, just to look good".*

*2.4 Staging the Performance*

Following the similar idea that video CV is a performance, the importance of purposefully staging it has been clearly made, for example in terms of a professional background: *"You want a plain background or some bookshelves maybe. You don't want to see the bed. You need to tidy up your room".* Even if the video is shot in one's room, it should look tide and uncluttered. The more props reflecting the skills required for the job, the better.

*2.5 Video CV Format*

We know that video CVs should be short, but what does it mean? Findings indicate that they should be between 30 seconds and 2 mins, and that their format is less prescribed than the one of paper CVs, allowing candidates the opportunity to more creatively express themselves.: *"Paper CVs tend to follow the same format [while video CV] require fairly decent skills and presentation and I think you can normally tell pretty much straight away if a candidate is going to be right for your organisation"*.

## 3. The Challenges of Video CVs

Several study participants identified some risks associated with video CVs and their content: the risk of inappropriate disclosure, poor performance, as well as the risk of being easily dismissed.

First, there is the risk of inappropriate or harmful self disclosure: *"Don't put too much in there and don't say anything that you feel will put anyone off".* Or *"Don't make a fool of yourself"*. Therefore, careful preparation of the script is vital. Getting professional help from career advisers has been suggested as valuable input into this preparation process.

Second, there is the risk of poor performance, as some people are not natural performers in front of a camera: *"people don't always present themselves well and if they're not photogenic, then it may do them a disservice because they may come across somebody who's not looking at the camera and not engaging".* Relevant here is that the scrip needs to be played out, rather than simply read, and rehearsing is the key to achieve this: *"Some video CVs are really dull, it's like they're reading a script"*.

Beyond content, additional limitations of video CVs concern recruiters' perception that videos are time consuming and may reflect an unserious attitude. Hence, the specific format of video CVs makes them more likely to be discounted, either because they may be perceived as lacking seriousness: *"Video CV is a gimmick",* or as requiring more time to be processed: *"I can look at a paper CV for nine seconds, why would I spend two minutes looking at somebody's video".* Or: *"having the option to look at it once is OK, but if someone sends me a video CV, chances are I'm just going to delete it and I know a lot of people who feel the same way".* This limitation is difficult to address, and suggests the importance of exploring how open an organisation is towards video CVs.

*3.1 The Ethical Challenges of Video CVs*

An important finding relates to the ethical challenge of video CVs which may allow discrimination of candidates on the basis of age, gender or ethnicity: *"It could be used to discriminate against you".* Other answers pointed that such bias risks also affect interviews: *"There is always a danger that could happen [but] organisation that would discriminate, would discriminate at the interview anyway…"*

## 4.  Suggestions for the Use of Video CVs for Graduate Employability

We now reflect on the value of these findings for supporting students and graduates in harnessing the value of video CVs, while properly addressing their challenges. We conclude with several suggestions such the need for careful preparation, often with professional help, and dedicated training sessions, as well as the importance of recognising that video CV should complement rather than substitute the paper CV.

First, preparing video CV is challenging, with most of the work going into the preparation rather than filming. This requires exploring the sector's and company's values, including their readiness for accepting video CVs as part of the recruitment process. The value of rehearsing the script in front of the camera and of staging the performance should be strongly acknowledged.

Given the risks associated with video CVs, professional help may be particularly useful. Preparing video CVs is a form of digital literacy which may become mainstream in the next decade. Until then, fresh graduates need to find their way through trial and error or, for a shorter learning curve, by enlisting the support of a career advisor proficient in social media.

For Universities providing students with access to video CV platforms is important to consider providing support for script preparation, for example through workshops with career advisors and drama stage coaches.

Finally, video and paper CV shared similarities, but at the same time differ in some essential aspects. Rather than seeing them as mutually exclusive self-presentation and recruitment tools, we can consider their complementary values. In this case, they can be used discriminatively for the appropriate sector, company and job application.

## 5.  Conclusions

This paper reports on 16 interviews with career coaches and HR recruiters. Findings suggest the added value of video CVs and their specific characteristics such as script content, performance and format, as well as their main challenges. These insights are reflected in several suggestions for supporting graduates' preparing video CVs including awareness of their challenges, provision of professional help, and dedicated training sessions, as well as the importance of recognising that video CV should complement rather than substitute paper CVs.

## References

Davies, N., Friday, A., Clinch, S., Sas, C., Langheinrich, M., Ward, G., & Schmidt, A. (2015). Security and privacy implications of pervasive memory augmentation. *IEEE Pervasive Computing*, *14*(1), 44-53.

Goffman, E. (1978). *The presentation of self in everyday life* (p. 56). Harmondsworth.

Sas, C. (2006a). Learning approaches for teaching interaction design. In *HCI educators workshop*.

Sas, C. (2006b). Teaching Interaction Design through Practitioners' Praxis. In *Proceedings of the 7th Annual Conference of the Higher Education Academy*.

Sas, C. (2009). Research knowledge transfer through business-driven student assignment. *Education+ Training*, *51*(8/9), 707-717.

Sas, C., Mauthe, A., Mills, S., McLaughlin, C., Finney, J and Fish, S. (2016). Curriculum Innovation: Reflection on MSci Integrated Master with Industrial Experience. HEA Conference Transforming teaching and learning in STEM, 28-29 January, Nottingham, UK.

Sas, C., & Dix, A. (2007). Alternative Design Brief for Teaching Interaction Design: Finding New Applications for Existing Technologies. In *HCI Educators Workshop*.

Sas, C., & Dix, A. (2009a). Enhancing creativity in interaction design: Alternative design brief. In *Creativity and HCI: From Experience to Design in Education* (pp. 175-188). Springer US.

Sas, C., & Dix, A. (2009b). Designing for reflection on experience. In *CHI'09 Extended Abstracts on Human Factors in Computing Systems,* 4741-4744. ACM.

Sas, C., & Whittaker, S. (2013). Design for forgetting: disposing of digital possessions after a breakup. In *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems,* 1823-1832. ACM.

Sas, C., Dix, A., Hart, J., & Su, R. (2009). Dramaturgical capitalization of positive emotions: the answer for Facebook success? In *Proceedings of the 23rd British HCI group annual conference on people and computers: Celebrating people and technology* (pp. 120-129). British Computer Society.

Shadbolt, N. (2016). Shadbolt review of computer sciences degree accreditation and graduate employability: April 2016.

Viet Le, H., Clinch, S., Sas, C., Dingler, T., Henze, N., & Davies, N. A. J. (2016). Impact of video summary viewing on episodic memory recall: design guidelines for video summarizations. *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, 4793-4805. ACM.

Wakeham, W. (2016). Wakeham Review of STEM degree provision and graduate employability.

**Authors' Short Bio**

Corina Sas received her PhD degree in 2004. She is Senior Lecturer in the School of Computing and Communications (SCC), and Associate Director of the Institute of Social Futures at Lancaster University. She was Chair of the British HCI'07 conference and associated chair for CHI and DIS 2014. Since 2013, Corina has been Director of Studies in SCC overseeing the undergraduate programmes delivered to over 500 students. She has been an investigator on grants totalling over £6m, and has over 80 peer-reviewed publications. Her expertise focuses on technologies for reflection and remembering, and the role of affect in reflection, memory and sense-making.