

## THE INFLUENCE OF DIGITALIZATION IN THE RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION PROCESS. PRESENT CHALLENGES AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

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**Abstract.** *The aim of this research paper is to identify and analyze the current trends and challenges within human resources management, especially in the recruitment and selection processes by using online social networks. The research is specifically focused on identifying the perceptions of human resources specialists regarding the use of popular online social networks in searching for talent, to investigate whether the use of special job recruitment platforms and human resources management platforms are useful for these endeavors. Within this research both perceived advantages and disadvantages of using online social networks as tools towards reaching the desired job are presented. From a methodological perspective, the research uses qualitative methods. The semi-structured interview was used for human resources professionals with more than 7 years of experience within the field, and with less experienced specialists. The research sample consisted of 12 participants between 23 and 45 years old. Considering the digitalization of human resources processes and the expansion of online social networks use within the recruitment and selection processes, the herein paper proceeds in exploring the nuances that appear in a competing environment. The interview analysis revealed that human resources professionals start developing a PR (public relations) and marketing mind-set considering the challenges that they are faced with in attracting a relevant pool of candidates on social media, but are also constrained by the limits imposed by the HR (human resources) norms within the organization. The HR professionals from our sample suggested that they are also getting involved in researching the online platforms where candidates spend most of their time and their efforts combined with the marketing objectives should reach desired results, when possible. The research findings are relevant for human resources activities and management considering the challenges these professionals face in understanding and grasping the new digital technologies.*

**Keywords:** *online social networks; human resources; recruitment.*

### Introduction

Recruitment and selection processes have gained a lot of attention in the context of rising new information and communication technologies (ICT). The digitized and globalized society has allowed recruiters to extend their candidate resource pools, to simplify and improve the selection process of these candidates and to obtain high efficiency in the recruitment activity when considering both costs and time (Novac, 2009).

According to Eurostat (2017), almost half of EU-28 enterprises use social media for various activities, with online social networks being the most popular. Social media do not represent only social networks, as they refer mainly to every Web 2.0 platform that allows UGC (User Generated Content), collaborative sharing and connectedness, including: online forums, blogs, wiki projects, podcasts etc. (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Various applications and uses of social media on behalf of organizations have been researched, especially focusing on how they help organizations from a marketing perspective (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2012), but there is still need for research as far as the human resources management (HRM) is concerned. Recruitment through LinkedIn and Facebook, or even through Amazon Mechanical Turk (Dworkin et al., 2016) allows organizations to identify potential candidates, but also to evaluate them (Sivertzen, Nilsen & Olafsen, 2013), even though this evaluation does not necessarily lead to decision making as far as the candidates' relevancy for the position is concerned (Ciochină, 2012). As Khullar and Pandey (2014) pointed, the human resources department demonstrates a dynamic role „of designing strategies for attracting talent digitally” (p. 216) and also safeguards the organization from potentially harming digital actions taken by socially active employees. Considering that human resources activities and management have been digitized, human resources professionals gain an even more important role in leveraging the relationship between the organization and its employees and between the organization and other external entities. Therefore, this research proposes the following research questions:

RQ1. How do human resources professionals use online recruitment and selection through social media?

RQ2. What are the future strategies for online recruitment and selection?

## **Theoretical background**

### ***Information and communication technologies and online recruitment***

The evolution of social media usage has brought changes in both recruitment campaigns, as well as in the way employers choose to approach future candidates for a job role. New information and communication technologies have allowed human resources professionals to improve their activities specifically when concerning recruitment and selection (Gregory et al., 2013), this process being defined as “e-recruitment”, used for explaining the ways employers use internet technologies for facilitating the recruitment process (Smith & Rupp, 2004). Aggerholm and Andersen (2018) suggest that “a social media 3.0 recruitment strategy thus breaks with fundamental notions of employees (as the notion of employees as individuals are rearticulated into networked and social human being), of work life (as the distinction between work hours and social life is dissolved) and of the employing organization (as the boundaries between the organization and its surroundings are broken down)” (p.133). The authors stress, therefore, how the employing organization is facing challenges from both an internal and an external perspective, requiring agility in redefining and adapting to the way employees and future employees are influenced and managed.

Within the past ten years, online social networks and content sharing websites have been gaining great popularity, especially among younger audiences. Even though internet job boards are amongst the most preferred means for e-recruitment and

screening processes, studies have shown that social networking websites are useful in attracting more passive candidates (Nikolau, 2014) and, more specifically, in attracting users to increase interactions with businesses (Sanchez, Saura & Debasa, 2018). Online users use social media for obtaining information fast and, more importantly, from other users that form a community depending on the interests they manifest (Mahrous, 2016). Moreover, prospective employees can build their professional or personal persona on social networking sites, “search for information on a company to see organizational structures and cultures and exchange information not only with employers, but also potentially with existing employees” (Ladkin & Buhalis, 2016, p.328). In this context, Ladkin and Buhalis emphasize that online users have access to informal information from current or past employees. For instance, Glassdoor ([www.glassdoor.com](http://www.glassdoor.com)) is a recruiting website collecting company reviews from the organization’s most important resource – its employees. The website allows past and current employees to evaluate the organization on various dimensions: salary reports, impressions on the CEO, pros and cons, benefits and so on. As such, Glassdoor employee satisfaction ratings have been used to link employees’ satisfaction to organizational performance or attractiveness (Massmino et al., 2015; Smith, 2014).

Studies have shown that students and young publics, in general, prefer interacting online with potential employers, as they opt for LinkedIn and Facebook for doing this (Potentialpark, 2011). Human resources professionals have recognized these behaviors as opportunities, especially as social media translate into efficient targeting and in attracting specific segments in the recruitment process. For instance, by giving the example of online interactive job interviews, McCarthy et al. (2017) emphasized the importance to contextualize real-time feedback for applicants so that they understand the reasons they failed an interview. However, targeting specific candidate profiles on social media can be considered an ethical issue, considering the excluded candidates (Broughton et al., 2013). Social media targeting implies adding specific target characteristics that make ads efficient enough to attract the desired profiles. However, users who do not have the intended characteristics do not have the opportunity to apply because the add will be less visible for them on social media, compared to the ones that are specifically targeted. In this sense, recruiters also require training for properly using social media tools as they can become overwhelming without strategically applying the tools for the intended objectives (Koch, Gerber & DeKlerk, 2018).

Potential candidates can form more or less favorable representations of the organization based on the information they find on social media. In this context, future employees are able to make their own selection process, which can include other factors than the ones referring to the job role, benefits or salary expectations. Organizations face the challenge to become attractive to potential candidates, especially by delivering the message that corresponds with the reality of the employees (Stanciu et al., 2008). The employer brand should be visible to the potential candidates that are looking for job opportunities, relevant, catchy and unique (Moroko & Uncles, 2009) to attract new employees, but also for brand engagement, or for enhancing the willingness of employees to believe and strive for the brand (Stanciu et al., 2008).

### ***Employer branding and online users***

The concept of *employer brand* was used at the beginning of the 90s, Ambler and Barrow (1996) being the ones who introduced this concept when connecting marketing and

employment situations: “the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company” (p.187). The authors underlined the importance of employer branding especially from a management perspective, as the business priorities and values can be delivered through the employment process, but their research also highlights the importance of collaborating with other departments in achieving the overall business objectives. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development defines the employer brand as the sets of attributes that differentiate the organization and make it attractive for specific public segments that want to work within the organization (2017), emphasizing the need to invest in achieving higher employer attractiveness, or a favorable image on a market that is full of competing forces.

On online social networks potential candidates have the possibility of contacting current employees directly and ask them details about the jobs they will fill in (Broughton et al., 2013). This can become problematic for organizations who are delivering a message to future employees that does not correspond to the internal positioning. Moreover, Carrillat et al. (2014) found that employers engaged in social media for attracting job candidates should develop online messages with entertainment value as this leads to more favorable responses toward the employer. Looking to identify the factors that should be used in employer branding strategies, Sivertzen et al. (2013) found that innovation, psychological value, application value and the use of social media all relate positively to corporate reputation which influences favorably the willingness of candidates to apply for a position within the organization.

Regarding the perceptions of future employees, Bruschi, Bruschi and Kozłowski (2018) investigated which company characteristics are most valuable for students between 25 and 40 years old, the most commonly cited being trust, environmental and social awareness and progressiveness. Building trust is challenging considering the consistent volume of information online users are dealing with on a continuous basis. As Bruschi et al. (2018) emphasizes, “the biggest challenge is to create a uniform, harmonious employer brand and to communicate this effectively” (p. 150).

Online social networks represent a space of constant interactions and opinion formation that could affect the decision making of individuals looking for a job. Human resources professionals have started to adapt to these online social spaces that represent an additional source of evaluation as far as new candidates are concerned, and a fast and efficient way to allow candidates to submit their intention to join a company (see also Mihalcea. 2017).

## **Methodology**

This research paper is focused on identifying the tactics used by human resources professionals in the recruitment and selection process through social media, specifically to understand the platforms they use in attracting the most appropriate candidates for their organizational needs, the social media channels they use to advertise the job ads and the conversion rate for this medium. The research method we used was the semi-structured interview, applied between 12 and 16 May 2018. We sent out online invitations to 20 subjects two weeks before holding the interview, however only 12 human resources professionals replied positively. Each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes and they were all conducted face to face.

The sample contains participants with various expertise levels: 2 of them have a management position, 2 are juniors (between 1 and 3 years of experience), 3 are specialists (between 3 and 7 years of experience), and 3 are seniors (over 7 years of experience). The participants work in both multinational organizations, as well as in independent human resources consulting agencies, they all have a master's degree and live in the urban area, in Bucharest, and their ages vary between 23 and 45 years old.

### ***The research instrument***

The first research question was conceived in order to identify the general attitude towards social media from a human resources perspective: "How would you characterize social media recruitment? Can it become the main recruitment method?". Then, the participants are asked to enumerate the specific advantages of using social media in recruitment, and whether there are any characteristics that are present locally, compared to the practices that are adapted from western societies. The fourth question seeks to find the specific approaches to online social networks, the tactics that are being used with the best results. Considering the fact that HR professionals need to adapt to the information seeking behaviors of candidates, we asked them what they know about their candidates in terms of their user journey: "Where are candidates looking for jobs? On what types of websites or social platforms?" The last question intended to identify the tendencies in future e-recruitment strategies and the differences between online recruitment and social media recruitment, if there are any.

### **Results**

Regarding the answers related to the first question from the interview, the participants mentioned that social media has become a trend offering the possibility to initiate a professional discussion with potential candidates, although the final employment discussion is led in a safer context in order to build a relationship with the candidate. One of the HR professionals suggested that social media should not be the only method for recruitment, however: "At the time being, social media is part of the organizational communication strategy. I don't think it benefits the employer to become the only recruitment method."

The following question referred to the advantages and challenges of using social media as a recruitment tool. The HR professionals mostly mentioned the benefits and the advantages these tools have. Some suggested that social media offers the possibility to reach a large audience and to send out authentic messages, all with low costs. As challenges, one of the interviewees mentioned the importance of moving the discussion in another setting where the human factor will be more relevant "There are many advantages! But it is very important that the discussion is moved in another setting where the human factor will be more important, and this is something that some HR specialists lose sight of." Another participant shared the same opinion, considering that social media "helps with identifying talents in real time, as we do it ourselves within the company; but I do not consider it as the only recruitment method."

Regarding the differences between social media recruitment tactics and American ones, the responses were approximately similar. Most of the participants suggested that in Romania social media is still at the beginning as far as recruitment is concerned, whilst

in America, the apps have been used for a while and recruitment results are relevant in this sense: "As far as I know, in the USA, the apps are used with priority for recruitment and selection. Even the small to medium companies are investing in Facebook pages with extraordinary results in employment." One of the subjects said that comparing them is not even appropriate, as in Romania social media has barely received some popularity and there are still drawbacks in practice. Others mentioned that a favorable climate is present: "Probably in a few years we will have more platforms for using social media, but for the time being we are glad it is gaining notoriety and exposure on the market." Another participant shared this view suggesting that the trend is derived from international practices and that financial and banking organizations are striving to work on their employer brand to attract new candidates in this context. According to the study participants, the domains that use social media recruitment the most are IT, finance, commerce and tourism.

The most diversified answers were present regarding the online social networks that are being used and the future directions. One of the HR managers said that, before including the social media recruitment strategy in the organization, Facebook usage was forbidden within the company. Starting with 2009, the market changes led to a new vision at the top management level which resulted in creating an official Facebook account and page: "Most of the social media candidates were entry level candidates.", emphasizing that this sort of recruitment is not for all positions. Another participant mentioned that they use multiple social media platforms: "Now we use multiple social media platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and I believe that this develops a competitive spirit amongst the employees, but also for candidates, as the interview conversion rate through social media is 2:1." LinkedIn is used by most of the sample from this study, while Facebook is on the second place, then Google+, Twitter and job websites Bestjobs and eJobs.

The interviewees mostly agreed that social media is used for recruiting specialists and juniors, and for identifying and attracting managers. In this sense, one of the study participants emphasized that the 2019 e-recruitment strategy should include the collaboration with social media specialists, communication, marketing and PR departments, for achieving the best results possible: "One of the strategies for 2019 refer to investing and preparing the best social media consultants and specialists from the PR and marketing departments, who really know how to use online social networks." One of the participants underlined the importance of initiating a dialogue that could influence the potential candidate and additional publics: "In the last years, social media platforms have been gaining a lot of popularity, growing from a trend to an essential recruitment instrument, and offering the possibility to initiate a discussion with potential candidates. With their help, the organization can communicate in real time with talents, offering details about the working environment and corporate culture through pictures and videos, and in the same time, to keep an eye on the interests of publics." One of the professionals mentioned that digital marketing campaigns are extremely useful, bringing considerable benefits to both important events, as well as to less budgeted ones.

Even though LinkedIn is the main platform used by HR professionals, the participants mostly agreed that the most visited platform is Facebook, which can be an important source for recruiting talents, especially from the generation Y: "Facebook is the most used online social network in the world. Facebook would not be the main choice for

conducting an executive search, but it can most definitely be an important source of talents from generation Y". In the meantime, others believe that LinkedIn is the safest platform for e-recruitment: "I prefer LinkedIn because it takes some kind of responsibility to developing the professional profile on this social network."

The last interview question intended to identify the main approaches to social media recruitment. One of the HR managers suggested that it is very important for each organization to have a good strategy in using social media "Each organization should have an effective presence on social media, which is more than recruitment, it is about communication strategy and marketing". Another experienced HR professional emphasized that anyone can use social media, but what makes the difference between the competition and the organization is the online visibility and how it is approached. For this, additional expertise is needed.

## Discussion

The research was focused on identifying the perceived advantages and challenges of social media recruitment by human resources professionals, and the future perspectives of incorporating this e-recruitment method in the overall recruitment strategy. Overall, the HR professionals are keen on adopting these new media in their e-recruitment activities because they have seen the potential and the results for reaching specific audiences. However, there are some challenges that should not be overlooked, such as the fact that online social networks are mostly seen as PR and marketing platforms and recruitment should hold a different position. As other studies have found, online social networks are primarily used for promoting various organizational activities, rather than to appeal to potential candidates (King et al., 2014). In this sense, some of the participants suggested the collaboration with social media consultants and specialists who can bring their expertise which is necessary for developing messages and posts that are attractive to potential candidates, and also for allowing the highest visibility possible on these platforms.

Most of the participants agreed that the biggest advantage is time efficiency, as it helps both HR managers and recruitment agencies to obtain resumed information about candidates, also allowing the interaction with passive candidates and their filtering in the screening process. Moreover, the interviewees suggested that online social networks presence is relevant for candidates who are actively looking for jobs, as the positions may not always be present on recruitment websites. Some of the organizations prefer using online social networks considering the fact that they are able to see the candidate's profile, due to this transparency and direct communication. However, even though using online social networks is popular for e-recruitment purposes (especially LinkedIn and Facebook), there are limits to their use. Recruiters can find outdated information or incomplete profiles; they can face the friend request rejection from the candidate which is necessary for evaluating the profile. For instance, Facebook still remains a personal interactive space for users and recruiters can be perceived as intrusive on this space.

Similar to other studies (Ladkin & Buhalis, 2016), we found that there are blurring boundaries between traditional and online recruitment and that online reputation and brand visibility are important effects of employees being engaged in online dialogue with potential candidates. However, managing online interactions can become challenging and they are not implicit for everyone using social media, which is the main

reason why social media consultants and specialists should be involved in the process. If existing employees would be involved in managing the online relationships with prospective employees, they should understand the implications that these interactions can have on the overall organizational image and should go through a process in this sense.

The interview did not reveal as many challenges, however. Even though the professionals did mention that they face difficulties in evaluating the public profiles of their targeted passive candidates (because these candidates may not allow them to view their entire profile information, especially on LinkedIn), there were no mentions of the possibility of discriminating specific public categories or regarding the trustworthiness of the information presented on these social networking profiles, that might affect the impressions formed by employers either positively or negatively (Caers & Castelyns, 2011).

### **Limitations of the research**

Even though the data collection was conducted face to face, there are some limitations to this research. Overall, we noticed that there is some sort of reluctance in sharing information regarding the selection process and what they actually evaluate when using social media recruitment. As such, we did not obtain many answers when insisting on the limits or challenges of this online recruitment method. Then, the level of experience of the sample is different, so it is difficult to draw some relevant conclusions for a certain profile of human resources professionals. More details are required when describing their activity on online social networks and the actual tactics they use for attracting the desired publics. Additionally, the participants should also be asked whether the information they find on social media about the candidates is used, at some point, in the decision making process when proposing a candidate for an internal position. Moreover, the research investigated only the perspectives of HR professionals, and further research should also evaluate the perceptions of candidates (both active and passive) using these online social networks regarding the fact that employers are evaluating their profiles from a professional point of view.

### **Conclusions**

Understanding how social media recruitment is conducted by human resources professionals is important to consider the challenges concerning the widely used social networking sites. Even though this medium has been offering many benefits and return on investment to many organizations from both a PR and a HR perspective, there are still challenges in understanding whether this empowerment is being used for or against candidates, and employees, respectively. The paper explores some of these challenges, but the research sample was not consistent enough to draw some specific conclusions concerning the preferences and tactics used for including and combining PR and marketing into the overall human resources objectives. Whereas social media are used for gaining visibility and employer brand awareness, as far as HR is concerned, social media have the potential of bringing relevant and *pre-screened* prospective employees that eases the efforts of professionals in obtaining applications. On the other hand, there are many types of segments of online users who are missing out on potential relevant candidates, which can become an issue. Facebook is still one of the preferred options for connecting with prospective employees, but this is mainly seen as an entertainment and



personal space, so passiveness could disable employers to be successful or cost effective on this social network. Future research should focus on identifying the tendencies in using online social networks successfully, the specific targets set out by human resources departments and the reactions of future or past internal stakeholders, specifically belonging to generation Y, regarding the approaches of organizations using online recruitment methods to attract candidates.

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