

## THE IMPACT OF THE DIGITAL ERA ON HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT. SOCIAL MEDIA AS RECRUITING ENVIRONMENT FOR POTENTIAL CANDIDATES

**Carmen NOVAC**

National University of Political Studies and Public Administration  
30A Expozitiei Blvd., 012104 Bucharest, RO  
carmen.novac@comunicare.ro

**Raluca Silvia CIOCHINĂ**

National University of Political Studies and Public Administration  
30A Expozitiei Blvd., 012104 Bucharest, RO  
raluca.ciochina@comunicare.ro

**Abstract.** *The 21<sup>st</sup> century is defined by the increased interest for the multidimensionality of the labor market. Digitalization is a process holding an important effect on the relationship established between the employer and the employee. In Romania, digitalization is becoming a relevant topic of discussion throughout various domains. The need to strengthen the Human Resources Management (HRM) in Romania represents a growing area of interest, as this is considered to be the "backbone" in any modern organization. This paper focuses on the impact of the digital era on specific HRM processes. The paper addresses recruitment and selection processes within the context of the development of social networking usage, specifically focusing on the attitudes of human resource specialists in regards to the challenges and opportunities of using online media for recruitment and selection purposes. The paper is supported by the results of the analysis of twelve interviews with human resources specialists responsible for recruitment and selection. The aim is to explore recruitment and selection opportunities, challenges and tendencies considering the continuous development of online media, which has transferred HRM activities in this new sector. The results suggest that even though online communication channels such as social networking sites include many advantages in the recruitment process, human resources specialists still lack specific objectives and a wider vision for incorporating the vast opportunities of online media into a more extensive recruitment and selection strategy.*

**Keywords:** *recruitment; selection; social media; social networks; selection tools.*

### Introduction

As Social Media has become one of the biggest trends of modern society, the overwhelming development of Social Networking Sites and its increase in popularity has gained the consideration of many industries, including Human Resources. The increase in the use of social networks to 37% in 2015 compared to 35% in 2014 (Măgdălina, 2016) for staff recruitment has led to the research aim to identify the opinions of Human Resources specialists on the use of Facebook and LinkedIn for the purpose of recruitment and selection processes.

As a business function, Human Resources has the greatest influence in conducting the business to its objectives. By harnessing the abilities, strengths, and talents of their employees, organizations can position themselves favorably before their competitors. By understanding globalization and the current business environment, one of the most challenging roles of Human Resources is to place the right person in the right role and to make sure that person constantly develops through training and coaching so they can face the constantly rapid changes (Lundby, 2010).

Based on a qualitative research method, the structured interview, the present paper proposes, to highlight the characteristics of recruitment through social networks, the main forms of selection, as well as the challenges and benefits of online recruitment from a Human Resources perspective

The study was conducted by interviewing twelve people employed in multinational companies from Romania, in the FMCG and IT & C industries. The FMCG industry (Fast Moving Consumer Goods) refers to specialized companies providing the most commonly bought products such as food, beverages, hygiene products, with relatively affordable prices. The IT&C (Information Technology and Communication) field includes specialized companies in the use of the technologies necessary for processing information using processors, computers, hardware and software, programming languages or data structures (Găitănar, 2002).

## Literature background

Whether an organization is recruiting externally or internally, Social Media has been found to be most useful. Social Networking sites and blogs began to be used as a recruiting trend since the past few years. Professional head-hunters across the world use Social Networking Sites as a recruitment strategy, especially through full access to LinkedIn accounts (Lundby, 2010) This is a new, cost-effective and developing way of recruiting top talents. Another method is web-site flipping, when recruiters can access individual home pages that are linked to organizational websites, providing valuable passive candidate information. Also, creating attractive websites and blogs can attract candidates, by providing relevant information, like news, updates, projects which are developing in real time and so on.

Since 2002, when Friendster was first launched, social networking sites have been attracting millions of users. Networks like MySpace in 2003 and then Facebook in 2004 along with Twitter in 2006 developed a trend in people's daily behavior, engaging a variety of audiences and supporting the maintenance of pre-existing social networks (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Therefore, it was only a matter of time until Human Resources professionals started using these sites as reference checks for potential candidates.

The combination between social media and recruitment process has turned into a concept called *social recruiting* which is defined as "harnessing the evolution of Web 2.0 technologies and social media tools to communicate, engage, inform and recruit our future talent", allowing recruiters to connect professionals and talented people from a variety of niche communities. Social Networking Sites like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter are used by people to meet old friends, make connections, upload personal

information, whereas LinkedIn, which focuses more on business connections, is used by people who upload job qualifications and application information.

Looking at a Social Networking Site for a candidate or an employee can provide a good perspective for the employers who look for what the person is doing after work or even during work. A resume usually provides professional information, while the personal information can be found online, with many job applicants placing inappropriate, unprofessional or unappealing material on publicly accessible Social Networking sites.

Over 800 human resources professionals and employers from the US have responded to a survey conducted by JobVite in 2011, with the majority admitting they always search candidate profiles, especially LinkedIn followed by Facebook, then Twitter and a blog, 2 out of 3 of them have successfully hired through social networks. Most employers believe that recruiting passive candidates is the leading strategy for competing against other employers (Jobvite, 2011).

LinkedIn is probably the most popular site used by recruiters and candidates. Professionally, it is a great way to maintain one's list of professional contacts, to establish contacts with potential employers or candidates, to recommend one's services, to work on personal branding or PR, to do some research on a person, organization or an industry (Newson, Houghton & Patten, 2009) Social Media, as a word of mouth tool, has a powerful impact on delivering person-to-person information, providing a valuable source for human resources specialists looking to gain more personal insights about their candidates.

Through Social Networking Sites, organizations can connect with current employees, retired employees, and employees on the leave, being used as a collaboration tool. Also, from a candidate's perspective, employees are the most trusted source of information with more than 80% of candidates believing that current employees are credible sources of information about organizations (Philips & Edwards, 2008). This means that the information found on a professional or personal profile of an employee can be a factor in choosing the organization a candidate is applying for.

It is true that if an employer must review information on a social network, LinkedIn would be the best choice to do so as it is constructed as a professional site for its users with job-related information and minimal personal information, describing the professional background and facilitating connection with other professionals. LinkedIn provides two advantages, a profile and a group: the profile can be used in recruiting and keeping connections with the past, present and prospective employees and the group can be used for recruiting, marketing, industry news, posting job opening, starting discussions etc. Facebook offers its users the possibility to use both a profile and a fan page: the profile can be used for HR and communication purposes, posting status updates about the organization's HR news, internal communications, job openings, links for the blog and job description, events created for job openings to reach as many people as possible.

## Research questions

With the scope of analyzing the recruitment processes as well as the selection methods used by companies for identifying and selecting the best candidates and for the purpose of formulating the best strategy for attracting human capital, the following research questions were formulated:

1. How do employers perceive the practices of recruiting via social media platforms?
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages identified by employers in the online recruitment process?
3. What are the dominant trends in the candidates' selection process?

## Methodology

The qualitative research method used was the structured interview. Each respondent received an email with the invitation to participate in the research. Respondents who accepted the invitation were told that the interview would be recorded using a tape recorder to transcribe the conversation with the maximum accuracy to interpret responses strictly for academic purposes.

For efficiency purposes, each quote was accompanied by respondent data. The R symbol replaces the name of the interviewed person and is appended to a number (from 1 to 12) which represents the number assigned to the respondent according to the chronological order of the recording interviews.

The group of respondents was made up of twelve female employees, employed in Human Resources departments, aged between 24 and 35 years. From the experience point of view, the group of respondents has a working age varying from 2 to 13 years, with 8 out of 12 respondents working for more than 5 years in multinational companies, with over 500 employees in Romania.

## Research results

The first question in the interview was designed to identify the respondents' experience ("Tell me your name and for how long have you been working within the human resources field"). 7 respondents occupy positions in IT multinational organizations, while 5 respondents work in FMCG organizations, from Bucharest. The research sample characteristics are the following: 8 respondents have over 5 years of work experience, one person has 4 years of work experience in HR and 3 respondents have about 3 years of work experience within this field. Even though experience is a sign of a better knowledge of a domain, it has been shown that respondents with fewer years of work experience have a well-defined vision, being aligned with current trends.

The second question in the interview ("What do you think about building a strong image of the organization in the online environment? ") is a transition one and makes the transition from the introductory question to the key questions (Chelcea, 2007) in order to obtain information for answering the proposed research questions. Thus, the importance of building a strong image of the company on online communication

channels is a necessary strategy, well-known by all respondents. "Being present" in the online environment is perceived by people in Human Resources as a communication tool, for brand promotion purposes (R3, R5, R8, R9, and R12). As R6 emphasizes this idea: "It is a strategy without which no business will prosper in the future", suggesting the powerful impact of social media presence from a recruitment perspective as well.

In addition to this first idea, by addressing people in the Human Resources field, it is predictable to propose that the presence of the organization in the online environment has a decisive role in identifying and attracting potential employees. This perspective corresponds to R4 - R7, R10 - R12 (R12: "... defining a strong image has a decisive role in attracting candidates to the recruitment process, winning the trust of the target audience being an aspect that brings success to the organization and facilitates identifying capital with potential").

Other respondents (R2, R9, R12) compare the organization's online image with a "business card", R9: "building a strong image here can become the equivalent of a company's business card in relation to customers, collaborators, and potential candidates". In this context, we find that regardless of the size and degree of development of a company, effective management of an online communication channel is a necessary way to present the culture of the organization, to engage audiences on different topics referring to the organization's identity.

The third question in the interview ("Taking into account the increasingly active online presence, tell me about your recruiting process using online communication channels") focuses on identifying practices and actions taken by human resources specialists in order to find the right people, but also to find what objectives they have when using online channels for recruitment purposes (such as the company's website, specialized recruitment sites, social networks like Facebook, LinkedIn or other used means).

The use of specialized recruitment sites is a common practice (R1 - R3, R5, R6, R7, R9, and R12). In the recruitment process, they appreciate the use of sites such as ejobs.ro, bestjobs.ro, hipo.ro as they allow an active search of CVs in databases accessible to employers 'accounts and the storage of job candidates' potential profiles for job positions that may appear in the future, R2: "The first step in recruiting through online communication channels is posting employment advertisements by creating an account... All selected CVs will be kept in a company database for future engagements". R7 talks about using the same types of sites, but the target audience identified here has a 1-2-year experience, senior's profiles being identified on LinkedIn: "...more specifically, we use well-known platforms like bestjobs.ro, ejobs.ro and hipo.ro, but generally here we find the junior profiles or a maximum experience of 1-2 years and for senior profiles, we get the best results from LinkedIn".

Online social networks have also gained popularity in the past few years. Although Facebook is mentioned only by 5 respondents (R4, R5, R9, R10, R12), this seems to be used for posting ads that present business opportunities, an action closely connected to the stable process of positive image-building of the company in the online environment (according to R12).

In this important process, organizations are free to choose the most effective way in which they work, but most of the interviewees prefer LinkedIn. However, employers combine recruitment channels R6, R7, R11, R12 focus on LinkedIn users, this platform being associated with experienced people, professionals, unlike sites where the audience is much more varied, R11: "We're focusing on LinkedIn for specialists and white collar (professionals)".

The stages of this process are described by R2, R3, R5, R7, R9 and a classic model of online recruitment: (1) posting employment ads on the used channels, (2) selecting CVs that correspond to a job description or search in databases when people are not in the active search phase of a job, (3) contacting potential candidates to be integrated into the process and according to company policy, (4) a face-to-face interview or competence testing using an online platform and then (5) the decision to go through the next steps to get the job (R2 and R5 interventions are relevant here).

The fourth question in the interview ("Can you detail how you submit a recruitment announcement referring to your keywords, message size or other aspects that you keep in mind?") and we noticed by analyzing the data that there are many items that are taken into account when posting an ad. For a clearer interpretation, we have classified these aspects into three categories: the size of the ad, the message and the design of the message.

The first aspect, the size of the ad, brings 2 points of view. R3, R4, R7-R9 promotes small-sized recruitment ads with the idea that the target audience can have a highly loaded program, but also the ability to view them from smaller devices, R3 mentions: "We use short messages that can be accessed from mobile and visualized in a reduced format, in a short period of time". Other human resources people are focused on using larger size messages, from ½ - 1 page, as in R5 case ("Ad size varies between ½ and 1/3 pages..."), R6, R9. Recruitment announcements should be of small sizes but must be accompanied by a link that leads to a page with more information. In this way, only people who are interested in the information from the short message will access the link for learning more information and applying for the job.

The second dimension refers to the content of the message. Eleven respondents emphasized the information in the job description - open position responsibilities, required experience, skills and working capabilities needed to accomplish tasks and details of the benefits and compensation offered by the company, R5: "... the name of the vacancy, the level of experience called entry, middle or senior level, name of the company, city where the activity takes place, knowledge of the required foreign language". In addition to providing a brief presentation of the employing firm (R5, R11, R12), we believe that a good understanding of job description is vital in deciding whether to apply it or not.

The third category of features of the recruitment announcement refers to the design of the message. The message should be suitable for every communication channel, for example, you can also use suggestive images on Facebook, the audience being mostly young, experienced for a few years, but in a more professional context, like LinkedIn, should give the ad a formal look, R9: "The places where we post ads are different, so the format may need to be different".

From our own perspective, there is no fixed formula for transmitting an effective recruitment announcement; both the size, the content and the appearance of the message are elements that are considered for successful ad delivery.

As far as the perception of the practice of recruiting on Facebook is concerned, the answers raise several issues. Regarding recruiting on this social network, R2, R9 argue that Facebook is an important source of information in this process, an effective way to make the brand known (R10, R12), as well as the organizational culture and at the same time a useful resource for promoting career opportunities (R5, R9). R5 stated that: "Within companies, it is increasingly used promoting recruitment ads and checking potential candidates". In addition, viewing a candidate's Facebook profile is a way of evaluating some aspects of his personality (R2, R5, R9), as the Facebook profile acts as a self-disclosure space where individuals present information for others to see. Although it can be argued that this is not an ethical or valid evaluation tactic, as privacy is different than that of a professional profile. Others (R4, R7, R9, R11, R12) associate Facebook with a good way to reach young audiences, this being the main category of users, R4: "It is rather the gateway to reach younger people with less experience". In this respect, companies have access through this network to a category of potential candidates who can hold junior positions, although this is considered (R2, R8) a nonprofessional technique.

With respect to the recruitment process using LinkedIn, all twelve interventions of respondents to this question positively pointed out the use of this platform in searching and identifying potential human capital. Almost all respondents (10 of 12) consider LinkedIn one of the best recruitment platforms, especially for seniors and niche positions, R3: "LinkedIn is clearly the most effective online recruitment channel for senior and specialist positions". The possibility to connect with people in areas of interest, belonging to professional groups (R5, R8, R9, R12), facilitates both the search process for employers (they may have Premium accounts) who find references on the professional status of users and of persons seeking employment through "LinkedIn Job Search" (R2, R5, R7, R10, R12): "Users can easily find information about their favorite companies and communication with their representatives ensures professional and social interaction".

The increasing use of this network seems to have exceeded the expectations of Romanian employers through the very active presence of professionals in this environment. LinkedIn becomes a fundamental tool, focused on connectivity. Candidates and companies meet on this platform under professional circumstances and expectations; the exchange of information leading to the formation of career networks, so ensuring quality staff is streamlined.

Regarding the dominant trends in candidates' selection processes, the analysis of the obtained data presents common elements used by the staff responsible for the selection of candidates; the use of interviews conducted by human resources people, followed by interviews with department managers and test batteries (R1, R2, R6, R7, R9, R11), R7: "...exactly before they come to the interview we send them some online tests on certain technologies. Following the interview with an HR representative, if everything is ok, the interview with a technician follows... If all the feedback is good to this point, the interview with the team manager is performed and then, if he is satisfied, the offer is made to the candidate".

For completing the mix of used tools, some employers also use the assessment center, although this involves high costs and a longer time to coordinate (R3, R5): "As selection tools, structured interviews are used, skills or specifically knowledge tests, as well as the assessment center. Usually, a strong recruitment contains all three components, although in practice they are not used together because of time and money costs" (R8, R10, and R12).

Interviewing with HR seems to be a good stage in filtering candidates, tests are effective ways to check the knowledge within a particular field and the interview with the department manager provides a better understanding of the role and compatibility between the two.

The questions regarding the advantages and disadvantages of the online recruitment process hold relevant points of view. The positive aspects most mentioned by employers refer to low costs (R1, R2, R3, R5, R12) and time savings (R5, R9, R12), and extensive access to a much larger range of candidates, R5: "Positive aspects include accessibility, time and money costs, larger candidate pool and faster sourcing results". Also, time efficiency (R6, R7, R10-R12) accompanies the whole process of the online environment because recruiters have the possibility to directly search for the candidates (R3-R5, R8, R12) by using the desired filters and selecting the right CVs according to the desirable profile characteristics. Online platforms provide the benefits of establishing business relationships, between companies and candidates as well as between users interested in the same business area, R2: "...and the benefits of using the online environment for this process are low costs, building company credibility, well-built in time and the opportunity to establish professional relationships".

Recruiting in the online environment comes with its disadvantages. The biggest problem in this context is the incompatibility between CVs and reality, information about past experience or assumed responsibilities not agreeing with the true profile, R6: "...I think prospective candidates tend to over-estimate the experience they have, their current responsibilities or other abilities, things that are easy to observe in an interview and reject them". Another disadvantage refers to a large amount of CVs sent, as the applicants do not carefully read the job descriptions to assess the possible matching with the job offer. Other rarely mentioned issues focus on the lack of face-to-face interaction and the lack of identification of personality traits.

From our point of view, online recruitment has more positive aspects than negative because it revolutionized the classic paradigm of traditional recruitment forms (written press, information centers about available jobs), the initial connection established between companies and potential candidates being one of the factors influencing the process of joining an organization or identifying the items of interest to candidates.

In terms of recommendations, human resources professionals suggest that success can be obtained by users with a high level of honesty in posting information about professional life but also choosing the most relevant aspects of their careers, as a very detailed CV will not determine the employer to call a person and invite them to the interview (R1, R3-R11), R9: "Similar to the way the recruitment announcement is created to attract candidates, candidates should also keep in mind that a disorderly profile, with incomplete information, will decrease chances of an employer's contact".



In addition, it is crucial to understand the environment in which you operate, so the profile on LinkedIn must be a professional one. In conclusion, online social networks' presence involves presenting honest, relevant information, strategically placed for the purposes of managing one's reputation, for one's future career.

### **Study limitations and future research**

This qualitative research presents a number of specific limits: the relatively small sample of human resources specialists who were interviewed accessing the individuals, and subjectivity in data interpretation (Chelcea, 2007).

During the research activity that involved face-to-face interviews with the twelve respondents, employed in multinational Human Resources departments present in Romania, we found that the subjects involved in this research are only part of the private business sector. Therefore, a possible and future research could be done with the help of a group of respondents working in the public sector to compare the vision of private-sector employers, influenced by multiculturalism and those working in the public domain.

In future research, the test-retest procedure should also be applied. The same interview grid can be applied over a period of time to record any changes that may have occurred in the Human Resources department's attitudes and behaviors regarding the use of social networks in the recruitment process. In this way, labor market saturation could be observed through the supply and demand for work in the online environment or on the contrary, a spectacular evolution may be possible by changing the vision of the networks and the selection tools currently in use.

### **Conclusions**

Following the interpretation of the results obtained after the twelve interviews, we concluded the following answers to the research questions:

Employers are familiar with the recruitment practice on online social networks, but as far as Facebook is concerned, the analysis suggests some reticence regarding the identification of potential candidates through this tool. Facebook is rather seen as an important source of information, more exactly for promoting the company, for displaying organizational culture traits, in order to gain visibility and increase notoriety.

The use of LinkedIn's for recruitment is preferred among employers, being considered one of the most effective channels for posting ads and active search for candidates. Unlike Facebook - specific to a less experienced audience, LinkedIn targets a more experienced business sector, occupying senior and niche positions, having the ability to connect to niched targeted networks.

The process of recruiting, through the evolution of the online environment, comes with both positive and negative aspects. Advantages can be summed up in terms such as accessibility and speed of finding a wide range of candidates, the possibility of

initiating and developing professional relationships and reduced costs. However, there may be unpleasant situations when CVs do not correspond to reality, or the department faces a large number of CVs received due to lack of attention of jobseekers.

In terms of applied methods for the selection of candidates, the most common used tools are selection interviews (with a Human Resource employee) and interviews with senior management (department managers). Additionally, depending on the type of job they are recruiting (junior or senior), tests can be applied (psychometrics, of skills, technical, foreign languages) or testing candidates in assessment centers using skills and knowledge in scenarios set by employers (Furtmueller, 2013).

Finally, viewed as a whole, the paper attempts to explain the recruitment and selection processes, and responsibilities within the Human Resources department, using the online environment, which is the new form of engaging with candidates on the labor market, at current times.

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