

How Social Media Recruitment Influences Organizational Social Responsibility

Gabriel-Andrei BREZOIU¹

ABSTRACT

More and more employers declare they used or plan to use social media throughout human resources management processes. On one side, it is part of employer branding policy to offer relevant information to people about how it is to work in that organisation, including social media channels. On the other side, these means are really attractive regarding targeting options and reaching a wide range of applicants at a low cost.

This paper summarizes the main evolutions of social media use in businesses in general, but also in recruitment, in particular. Moreover, we consider the ethical implications and possible solutions.

KEYWORDS: *e-recruitment, ethics, human resources, social media, social responsibility.*

JEL CLASSIFICATION *M12, M14*

INTRODUCTION

With more than 1,15 billion users on Facebook, over 500 million on Twitter and on Google Plus and also more than 238 million users on LinkedIn (Bernstein, 2013) we can surely say that **social media is creating a trend** by influencing several other sectors and perhaps all the economy. In human resources management, social networks are having a double role:

- 1. they can serve as a promotional support of recruitment announces (calls for applicants) offering excellent targeting tools and a very spread pool of candidates;*
- 2. it can be a source of information regarding the candidates profiles;*

Considering the second approach (for investigation purposes), there are major concerns among candidates and recruiters regarding the ethical issues of this process:

- candidate`s social media activity relevance towards his job application;
- social media investigation process as a matter of privacy violation;
- social media presence as a matter of public information which needs to be assumed by the candidates;
- employee`s social media notoriety impact on organisation`s brand;
- role and responsibility of the organisation in case that employee`s social media notoriety impacts on organisation`s brand.

Moreover, HR specialists need to take into account that the fast development of digital practices changes human behaviour online and they need to adapt their policies towards the trends of the market.

¹ Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania, Master Student, gabriel.brezoiu@gmail.com

1. SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE IN BUSINESS

Probably we live in the so-called “social media marketing” or “digital marketing” period. Social media marketing “*seeks to engage customers in the online social locations where they naturally spend time. By comparison, social businesses pick up on what they are talking about and what they are interested in and connect this back into the business where it can be processed and used to create the next round of customer experiences and hence the next round of conversation*” (Evans, 2010).

The way people communicate, interact and socialize within social media is quickly changing and businesses need to develop new strategies to adapt to those trends. For example, according to <http://www.businessinsider.com/>, the most outstanding social media statistics are the following (Smith, 2013):

- The fastest growing demographic on Twitter is the 55 to 64 age bracket.
- 189 million of Facebook's users are "mobile only."
- YouTube reaches more U.S. adults aged 18 to 34 than any cable network.
- Every second two new people join LinkedIn.
- 93% of marketers use social media for business.
- 25% of smartphone owners are aged between 18 to 44 say they can't recall the last time their smartphone wasn't next to them.
- Even though 62% of marketers blog or plan to blog in 2013, only 9% of U.S. marketing companies employ a full-time blogger.
- 25% of Facebook users don't bother with privacy settings.

To adapt these changes, organisations develop several strategies for their departments:

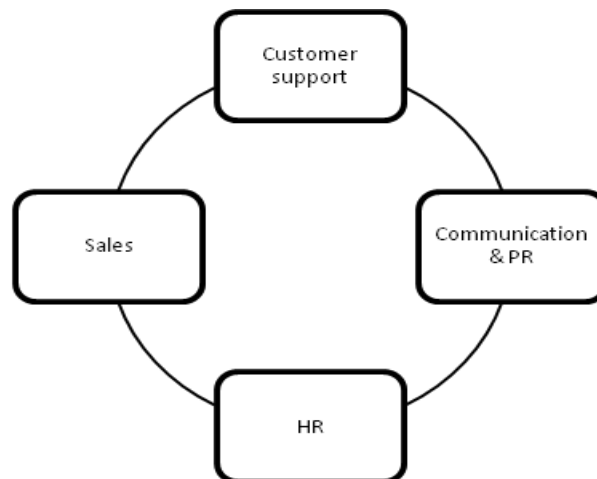


Figure 1. Social media influence at organisational level

Source: author

1. **Customer support** department is developing on a day by day basis a larger social media component as many users prefer to share their issues via social media channels;
2. **Communication & PR** – pays a lot of attention to the content they provide on social media channels;

3. **Sales** departments use social networks to find customers and to promote their products;
4. **Human resources** departments use social media channels for employer branding, internal communication, promoting calls for candidates and getting insights on their personal and professional aspects.

Moreover, various studies have proven that the social media adoption brings significant better results compared to the traditional ones if managed by people with a good understanding of how social media works.

Having more than 1 billion users, offers Facebook the opportunity to have at a glance all kinds of statistics. For example, they thought about seeing what cities in the world confront the biggest migration rates and they have found Lagos (Nigeria), Istanbul (Turkey) and London (United Kingdom). Besides the obvious economical reasons, they believe political and cultural aspects could also influence migration (Ivan, 2013).

In a recent insight released by E&Y (Radeljic, 2013) they say “put a human face on information”. Therefore, businesses are advised to have a more personal approach with their customers or potential employees throughout social media channels. The biggest change is that people expect to have a dialogue, to get prompt answers and to be stimulated to provide their own content.

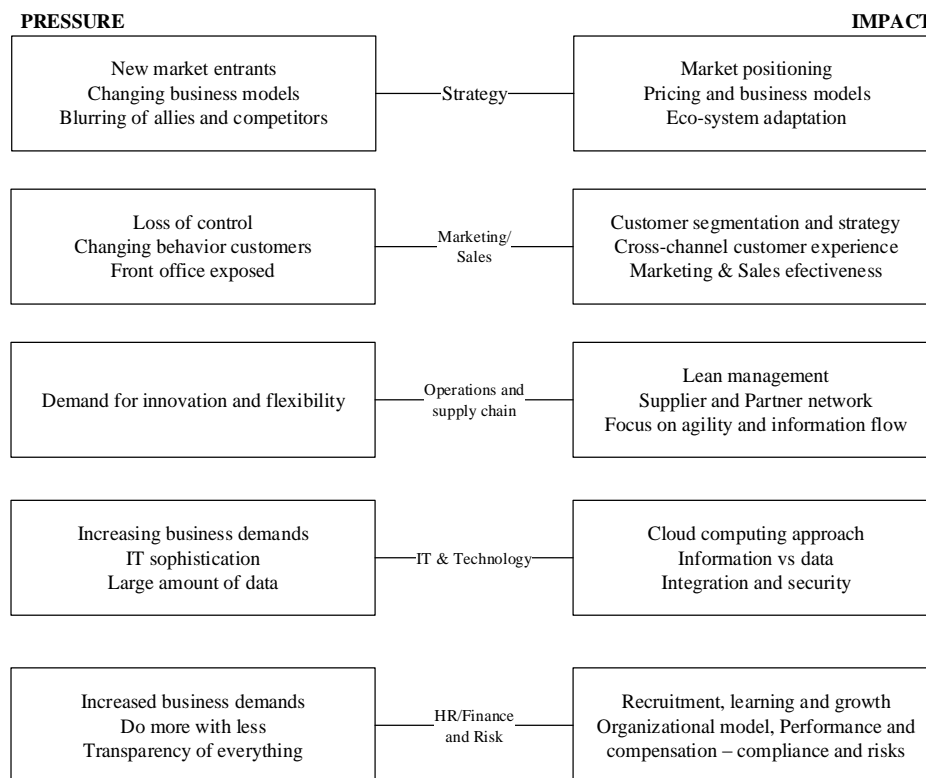


Figure 2. How enterprises are affected by Social networks

Source: adapted from Krohmann & Kobelt (2013, p. 4)

From a business perspective, E&Y goes even deeper and proposes a model to correlate the causes (“*pressure*”) and effects (“*impact*”) on five levels: HR/Finance and Risk, IT & Technology, Operations & Supply Chain, Marketing/Sales & Service and Strategy (Figure 2). If we look at causes, there is a clear direction towards uncertainty, loss of control and higher competition in a more complex environment.

Social networks connect people, let them discuss and share their views which may raise their demands and refine their preferences. On the other side, the impact is the following: organizations need to be more flexible, innovative and able to manage the change.

2. SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE IN A RECRUITMENT PROCESS

E-recruitment, the process where internet tools are used for recruitment, has many benefits in comparison with the traditional one (Broughton et al., 2013, p. 4):

- Shortening hiring time;
- Reducing recruiting costs;
- Offering computer assisted screening;
- Hiring locally and globally;

Social networks are considered the main tool for e-recruitment. However, together with the great benefits of using them, we need to consider the following concerns (Broughton et al., 2013, p. 5):

- Accuracy of information;
- Accessibility throughout the pool of candidates;
- Privacy issues;
- Costs vs. benefits;
- Being ready for dealing with a broader range of applicants;

Analysing a recent study called “Why do companies use social media for recruitment?” (Broughton et al., 2013, pp. 19-20), we notice that the main reasons are: “to access a wider range of candidates” (64%), “ease of use” (64%), “costs” (54%) and “to target niche candidates” (46%) (Figure 3).

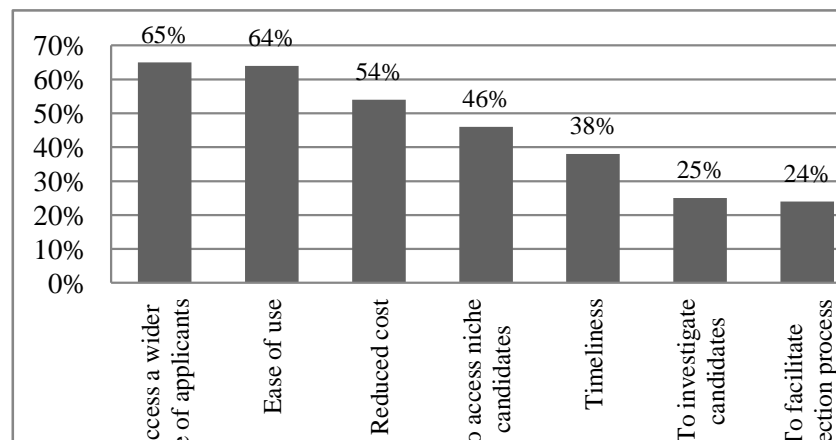


Figure 3. Why companies use social media recruitment?

Source: adapted from Broughton et al. (2013, p. 20)

“Employees referrals” (belonging to social networks) is considered to be the most powerful tool to get a job. *Jobvite* specialists released a report saying that “*employee referrals have the highest applicant to hire conversion rate – only 7% apply but this accounts for 40% of all hires*” (Hebberd, 2013).

They provide a simple example: *an organisation with 100 employees could reach 15.000 people* (considering that each employee has, in average, 150 different friends) with very low efforts. Besides that, candidates applying through referrals are getting the position faster (Figure 4) and the endorsing employees could also facilitate their induction.

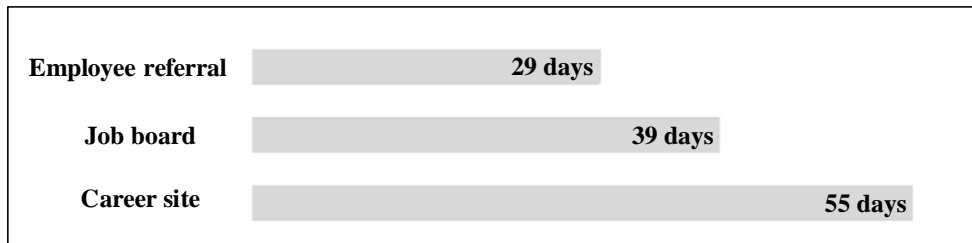


Figure 4. Duration between application and employment

Source: adapted from Hebberd (2013)

Nevertheless, it has been drafted a list of recommendations regarding the use of social media in recruitment including: “consider the potential issue surrounding the use of social media”, “seek to verify information on applicants’ social networks through other means” and “do not over-invest in social media tools” (Broughton et al., 2013, p. 38).

2.1 Social media impact on the professional life of Romanians

If two years ago, 27% of the Romanian employees that participated in a survey on www.bestjobs.ro (a popular Romanian recruitment platform) said they “don’t use social media for their professional life” (BestJobs, 2011), perhaps nowadays the situation is a bit different. The same study has revealed the following insights about the respondents:

- 28% have separate personal and professional accounts on social media;
- 14% use social media only for work tasks;
- 8% have a Facebook account only and they will not register on other platforms.

Therefore, BestJobs advisers raised attention on the importance of digital identity for networking and personal branding and encouraged the candidates to try to have a positive image online.

A recent study of Ernst and Young Romania (Andriescu, 2013) among companies with annual revenues of over 10 mil. EUR revealed that they are using mainly Facebook (93%), LinkedIn (43%) and YouTube (43%); half of them post on a daily basis; and the main reasons for posting are: brand communication, marketing/sales and recruitment.

A survey released by BestJobs (Mihaescu, 2013) questioned about 3500 employees on if they are comfortable or not with adding their boss as a friend on Facebook. The results are interesting:

- 57% will not add their boss in order to separate their personal and professional life;
- 9% do not even add their co-workers;

- 11% would agree to add their boss as they are friends in the real life as well;
- 19% would agree to add their boss even they are not friends in the real life.

On the other hand, a similar study held on employers revealed that 38% checks candidates' profiles before the interview and 16% will do it in the near future. Another study of BestJobs (BestJobs, 2011) says that even 83% of the recruiters use social media during recruitment. The main aspects they check are:

- 37% - if their qualifications are true;
- 24% - if they proved to have communication problems;
- 18% - if they post problematic comments or photos;
- 12% - if they had comments against a former employer;
- 9% - if they had a discriminative speech.

The same study asked also the candidates how they prevent a negative image on Facebook. Most of them were concerned about having a proper communication style, avoiding indecent content or not having negative comments about a former employer.

Romanian Media covers quite often the topic of "how social media could influence your professional life". For example (Mihaescu, 2012), they warn the candidates about the possible negative impact of posting about their social life on internet. On the other side, HR specialists (Mihai, 2012) advise organisations to allow their employees to use social media during work believing that they need to alternate periods of concentration and relaxation.

2.2 Ethics as a matter of social responsibility

At first sight, respecting the law should be the basis of ethics as a matter of social responsibility. There are several concerns brought by the use of social networks (Krohmann & Kobelt, 2013, p. 9):

- Using Social Networks at work and on the job (as part of the job description).
It is recommended to issue a policy on this topic and to train the employees;
- Possible violations of data protection and confidentiality regulations in Social Networks;
- Permissible procedure for screening applicants on Social Networks;
- Marketing in Social Networks;
- Respecting intellectual property.

For example, a recent study (Commerce & Industry Chamber - Maramures, 2012) revealed that Romanian organisations associate social responsibility with respecting law, employees' human rights and avoiding employment discrimination (offering equal chances to everybody regardless their gender, nationality, religion, sexual orientation etc.).

At a deeper level, having an ethical behaviour is one of the seven principles of ISO 26000, the social responsibility standard (ISO, 2010). Therefore, these concerns need to be integrated into all business segments.

2.3 Case study: "Ethical concerns in social media recruitment"

With the support of GEYC (Group of the European Youth for Change, www.geyc.ro), we have gathered 30 European young people, youth workers and project managers from 12 countries and we have organised a debate with the following format:

- Topic of the debate: *"Is it ethical for an organisation to check on candidates profiles during the recruitment process?"*;
- The debate was held in November 2013 in Newcastle upon Tyne, UK;
- We have asked for 3 volunteers to form a team to support the statement and 3 others to prepare arguments against it;
- They had 15 minutes to prepare their arguments having access to various materials and internet for documentation;
- The audience was asked to think about a question for the PROs team and another one for the CONs team and to write each of the questions on a different piece of paper. We collected those questions separately afterwards;
- During the debate each team had 2 minutes to present each of their three arguments and immediately after, the other team had 1 minute to reply;
- In the end of the debate, each team had to answer one question written by the audience and randomly chosen by one representative of the other team;
- In the end each team had 2 minutes to conclude their arguments;
- In order to assure that the rules are respected, we assigned a judge and a time keeper from the audience;
- After the final statements, the audience was asked to vote for the team that had the best arguments.

The debate was intense in terms of group dynamic and the participants proved to be very involved in the process having documented and spontaneously replies.

The main arguments raised by the PROs team were the followings (arguing that is ethical to use social media during recruitment processes):

- **differentiation of CVs** (usually CVs are almost the same) – social media can raise attention on certain resumes considering the large number of candidates for certain positions;
- **offering valuable insights of candidate's personal and professional live** by helping the recruiter to get a better understanding of their background and interests;
- **developing a relationship** with the organisational brand or even the recruiter itself. It is well known that sympathy is one of the key principles to influence;
- **Social Media is enhancing the formal side** (for example, Europass CV), an opportunity, not a source of oppression, a tool to gain/offer relevant information;

The CONs team tried to find arguments why social media presence should not be considered by HR specialists:

- **Social Media is a personal space** (freedom of choice, freedom of emotional expression in a private area);
- **Social Media should not be seen as a "Big Brother"**, it should have certain limit;
- There should be a distinction between **personal & work** profiles;
- Social Media is **not accurate enough** to be considered as an appropriate proof (for example, you can check in other places than the ones you are in, some applications can post directly without you even being connected at that moment etc.).

According to the vote made in the end of the debate, the winner was the PROs team. However, this result is not necessarily conclusive as the audience was requested to vote not upon their personal beliefs, but upon the arguments presented. Is interesting to see that the major points raised are similar to a study held by Ernst and Young (Krohmann & Kobelt, 2013, p. 11):

- Spying an applicant with a wrong identity violates his/her personality;
- If the social media link is provided in the application it could be considered a consent to check the profile;
- If a research is made, it should be included in the candidate`s file in case of employment;
- A distinction needs to be made between social networks (their target group) and also between personal and professional social networks.

CONCLUSIONS

The fast development of digital tools and technology is impacting various business sectors. In order to adapt the change, they need to be more innovative, more flexible and able to integrate these means into their processes.

As a part of it, social media is maybe one of the most powerful, changing and with a high potential sectors. Nevertheless, businesses see it as a marketing channel, but they need to be aware in the same time of its issues (especially privacy and intellectual property).

As for recruitment, we notice several procedural and ethical such as the accuracy of information, the individuals` right to privacy, but in the same time we can consider these channels as a more powerful tool for candidates to communicate their strengths and to contribute to personal branding.

For sure, "*is it ethical or not to use social media recruitment?*" is a complex question and a simple answer is difficult to offer. However, there are certain things that both candidates and employers can do in order to prevent any ethical issue:

- **Candidates** need to pay attention to the visibility of their posts in order to make sure that only the content they want is visible on internet. It is strongly encouraged to use social media as a personal branding tool;
- **Employers** should define a clear social media recruitment policy and document all the acquired information in the candidates` files. Moreover, employers are strongly encouraged to not rely only on social media tools and, if possible, to ask for candidates consent of checking their profiles in the application process;

Future research

Considering the limitations of this paper, it would be interesting to continue the research on the following key areas:

- *What kind of employers` behaviours in the social media recruitment process are considered to be unethical by the candidates?;*
- *How many applicants would give the consent for checking their profiles?;*
- *How would an ethical social media recruitment policy look like?*

Thus, this paper will be enhanced with a clear view for both candidates and employers regarding social media recruitment ethics.

REFERENCES

- Andriescu, V. (2013). *Comaniile din Romania descopera social media, dar se concentrează doar pe Facebook și Youtube*. Retrieved December 30, 2013, from http://adevarul.ro/tech/retele-sociale/comaniile-romania-descopera-social-media-concentreaza-doar-facebook-youtube-1_527221b5c7b855ff569e7a18/index.html.
- Bernstein, J. (2013). *Social Media in 2013: By the Numbers*. Social Media Today, Retrieved December 27, 2013, from <http://socialmediatoday.com/jonathan-bernstein/1894441/social-media-stats-facts-2013>.
- BestJobs. (2011). *27% dintre romani nu folosesc site-urile de social media in scop profesional*, Retrieved December 30, 2013, from <http://blog.bestjobs.ro/2011/09/26/27-dintre-romani-nu-folosesc-site-urile-de-social-media-in-scop-profesional/>.
- BestJobs. (2011). *83% dintre angajatori verifica backgroundul online al potentialilor angajati*, Retrieved December 31, 2013, from <http://blog.bestjobs.ro/2011/10/13/83-dintre-angajatori-verifica-backgroundul-online-al-potentialilor-angajati/>.
- Broughton, A., Foley, B., Ledermaier, S., & Cox, A. (2013). *Research paper: The use of social media in the recruitment process*, Institute for Employment Studies, ACAS, Brighton, UK.
- Commerce & Industry Chamber – Maramures. (2012). *Rezultatele sondajului de opinie privind responsabilitatea socială*, Biroul RSI.
- Evans, D. (2010). *Social Media Marketing: The Next Generation of Business Engagement*, Wiley Publishing Inc., Indianapolis, Indiana, USA.
- Hebberd, L. (2013). *Why employee referrals are the best source of hire*, Retrieved December 30, 2013, from <http://theundercoverrecruiter.com/infographic-employee-referrals-hire/>.
- ISO. (2010). *ISO 26000 – Social responsibility*, Retrieved December 31, 2013, from <http://www.iso.org/iso/home/standards/iso26000.htm>.
- Ivan, I. (2013). *Facebook, un indicator al migrației globale*, Retrieved December 30, 2013, <http://incomemagazine.ro/articole/facebook-un-indicator-al-migratiei-globale>.
- Krohmann, K., & Kobelt, F. (2013). *Social Networks, 2013 Data privacy workshop*, Ernst and Young, Brussels, Belgium.
- Mihaescu, A. (2012). *Recrutarea in Mileniul III.sau ce sa nu iti pui pe Facebook daca iti cauti un job*, Retrieved December 31, 2013, http://adevarul.ro/life-style/stil-de-viata/recrutarea-mileniul-iii-sau-nu-pui-facebook-cauti-job-1_50b3812e7c42d5a663a45fba/index.html.
- Mihaescu, A. (2013). *Angajații români nu vor sa fie prieteni pe Facebook cu sefii lor*, *Jurnalul.ro*, 06 February 2013, Retrieved December 30, 2013, from <http://jurnalul.ro/bani-afaceri/piata-muncii/angajatii-romani-nu-vor-sa-fie-prieteni-pe-facebook-cu-sefii-lor-635966.html>.
- Mihai, A. E. (2012). *Recrutare 2.0: unu din trei romani își găsește job prin social media. Cum au schimbat Facebook și LinkedIn instrumentele tradiționale ale specialiștilor în HR?*, Retrieved December 31, 2013, from <http://www.zf.ro/profesii/recrutare-2-0-unu-din-trei-romani-isi-gaseste-job-prin-social-media-cum-au-schimbat-facebook-si-linkedin-instrumentele-traditionale-ale-specialistilor-in-hr-9248006>.
- Radeljic, K. (2013). *Look before you tweet*, online report, *Financial services*, EYGM Limited, EYGM Limited.
- Smith, C. (2013). *10 Social Media Statistics That Should Shape Your Social Strategy*, Retrieved December 27, 2013, from <http://www.businessinsider.com/>