

Research Paper

The use of social media in the recruitment process

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Andrea Broughton, Beth Foley, Stefanie Ledermaier and Annette Cox
(IES)

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Andrea Broughton
Beth Foley
Stefanie Ledermaier
Annette Cox



Prepared for Acas by:

Institute for Employment Studies
Sovereign House
Church Street
Brighton BN1 1UJ
UK

T: 01273 763400

F: 01273 763401

www.employment-studies.co.uk

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1 Introduction

Social media tools and social networking sites have revolutionised communication methods, both privately and increasingly, at work.

Communication through social media involves the use of an online platform or website (a social networking site) that enables people to communicate, usually for a social purpose, through a variety of services, most of which are web-based and offer opportunities for people to interact over the internet, e.g. via e-mail and 'instant messaging' (a form of real-time, direct text-based communication between two or more people using personal computers or other devices).

Box 1: Definitions of social media and social networking sites

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define **social media** as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0*, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content".

One such set of applications are **social networking sites** (SNSs); the subject of a previous report for Acas by IES, which looked at their various implications for employment relations (Broughton et al 2011). Boyd and Ellison (2007) define SNSs as: "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system".

**The term Web 2.0 was coined in 1999 to describe web sites that use technology beyond the static pages of earlier web sites. A Web 2.0 site allows users to interact and collaborate with each other in a social media dialogue as creators of user-generated content in a virtual community, in contrast to websites where people are limited to the passive viewing of content.*

In terms of the use of social media for jobseeking, Nigel Wright Recruitment (2011) found that more than half of all UK jobseekers use social media sites in their search for employment, including 18 per cent who use Facebook and 31 per cent who use LinkedIn (see box 2 in section 2.2 for examples of these and other social networking sites and tools). Young people are reported to be increasingly using social media tools in order to build an online career presence and search for jobs. A survey carried out by Potentialpark in 2011 of over 30,000 graduates, students and early career professionals worldwide found that in Europe, almost 100 per cent of survey participants would like to interact with employers online. The preference was for LinkedIn (48 per cent), with Facebook scoring 25 per cent (Potentialpark, 2011).

The use of social media as a recruitment tool throws up some opportunities and challenges for employers. Social media potentially offers speed, efficiency and the ability to target and attract specific, particularly apposite candidates in the recruitment process. It can provide a useful additional source of information on

potential job candidates, especially since some data (at the personal as well as the professional level) may not be generated for the purpose of recruitment, and therefore may provide candid supplementary information on the applicant. For candidates it potentially offers multiple sources of information about the employer and the possibility of contact with existing employees to gain a more realistic job preview. However, there are a number of issues that need to be considered.

Firstly, there are ethical questions of privacy and the extent to which it is appropriate and relevant for employers to seek information about workers' private lives. A US survey found that the most common reasons for not shortlisting and rejecting candidates were based on 'lifestyle' rather than employment-related information. For example, 35 per cent of those surveyed said that they found material on SNSs that caused them not to hire a job candidate; social media postings that included 'provocative or inappropriate' photographs or information were cited by 53 per cent of HR managers as a reason to turn down an employee (careerBuilder.co.uk 2010).

Secondly, employers may leave themselves open to charges of discrimination; using social media to alert potential candidates to vacancies could potentially discriminate against those who do not have access to social media or indirectly discriminate against groups which are under-represented in a targeted campaign strategy. By vetting candidates online, employers are likely to gain a range of information about candidates, including sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, marital status, age and political views, making it easier for rejected candidates to claim unfair discrimination, although it is at present unusual for cases of discrimination at the point of recruitment to be brought to employment tribunals. According to the Survey of Employment Tribunal Applications (SETA) 2008, only 1 per cent of claimants were job applicants, although this figure rose to 5 per cent in cases of discrimination (BIS, 2010). Some of the major issues to address include: how to handle the discovery of information not intended for employers; how to avoid infringing user agreements with websites; the risk of 'bias creep' in letting information which is not linked to the personnel specification influence the hiring decision; how to find out and what to do if information is posted on a candidate that is malicious or incorrect; and, the issue of reciprocity in providing access to corporate information and insights into the job and working conditions at the employing organisation which might previously have been concealed during the selection process, but which candidates may now expect (Jones and Behling, 2010).

1.1 Research questions

Against the background of these issues and dilemmas, and building on previous work for Acas (Broughton et al 2011), which looked at the overall implications of social media for employment relations, this small-scale research project aimed to answer the following research questions:

- How and why do employers use social media tools for recruitment, and at what points in the recruitment and selection process? Which tools do they choose and why?
- What do they perceive as the costs and benefits of using social media in the recruitment process?

- What are the risks and opportunities that employers associate with using social media for recruitment, particularly in relation to violation of privacy and employment legislation relating to discrimination in recruitment?
- What policies and strategies do employers put in place to manage legal and reputational risks?
- What are the implications of this research for provision of advice to managers, individual workers and employer and employee representative bodies on using social media for recruitment purposes?

This research has attempted to answer these questions by means of a literature review and case studies of three organisations that have used social media for the purposes of recruitment. These organisations are:

- Pets at Home
- G4S
- Monmouthshire County Council.

The case studies were carried out in February and March 2013 and each involved face-to-face interviews with company representatives in the areas of digital strategy and human resource management. The interviews were carried out using discussion guides that are appended to this report.

The findings from both the literature review and the case studies will be presented thematically together, with the backgrounds to the case study organisations presented at the end of the report.

In addition, this report draws on the results of an online panel survey undertaken on behalf of Acas in March 2013 by the research agency Accent. A representative sample of 401 HR decision makers (with a decision-making role relating to recruitment) were polled using questions designed to complement this study. Respondents were asked about their own organisation's use of social media when recruiting staff with regard to the extent and types of their social media usage as well as their rationale for and uncertainties about using (or not using) social media to recruit staff. Appendix 2 presents the headline results in full.

2 Background

The rise of the internet has revolutionised the way in which individuals communicate, both privately, and, increasingly, with one another and with organisations in a work-related context. Some research even suggests that employers are under pressure to embrace this trend in order to stay up to date in their recruitment practices. For example, Smith and Rupp (2004) argue that:

"The Internet has drastically changed the face of recruitment. Employers must now actively market themselves by instituting a well-implemented e-recruitment program to find better quality candidates and improve hiring decisions, all in less time and at a lower cost." (Smith and Rupp 2004)

2.1 The growth of e-recruitment

E-recruitment, where employers use the internet in some form to aid conventional recruitment processes, has a number of important advantages compared to more traditional forms of recruiting, according to Smith and Rupp (2004). Firstly, it allows companies to shorten hiring times through an increase in information flow and an acceleration of recruitment processes. Secondly, it can help reduce recruiting costs, hiring times and employee turnover as processes are generally job-specific and offer computer assisted screening interviews and statistical predictions.

"Shifting hiring processes from the paper and time-intensive manual method to an automated one saves time and money and boosts productivity by leaving positions vacant for shorter periods of time. In addition, the cost associated with posting on a job board compares favourably with placing job ads in newspapers, and, in some cases, may be more cost-effective." (Smith and Rupp, 2004)

Moreover, it gives employers the opportunity to hire staff both locally and globally, significantly extending the reach of more traditional staff recruitment. Thirdly, e-recruiting offers companies and prospective employees a number of important features and specific abilities such as:

- "The ability to initiate interview requests and order background checks.
- Unlimited cost information tracking for all activities associated with the hiring process.
- Customised e-mail notification of recruiters for both active and passive candidates.
- Improved integration of recruiter-specific communications activities.
- Dynamic creation of an employer's job page.
- Multiple language support with candidate accessibility for US and global partners.
- Extensive ability to personalise the candidate experience by allowing employers to tailor the candidate and recruiter interfaces." (Smith and Rupp, 2004)

In terms of deciding on an approach to e-recruitment, companies can choose among a variety of options to reach suitable candidates. They can make use of job sites which can be either generalist in nature (websites such as monster.com, hotjobs.com, headhunter.net) or focussed on specific industries (such as dice.com or computerjobs.com). Another option is to make use of private recruiting exchanges (companies such as CareerEngine or Workplace Diversity offer such tools). Companies may also choose to post job openings on their own website, which is very cost-effective for small and medium sized companies. They might also choose to set up their own corporate recruitment webpages which may or may not include the option of incorporating existing social media websites.

2.2 Recruitment through social networking sites

Specifically, social networking sites (SNSs) allow users to create web-based profiles where individuals can interact, using social media tools. While initially designed for socialising with friends and family, these networks have come to be seen as an important professional tool, particularly in the field of recruitment. Here, they serve two main purposes. The first is as a marketing tool; jobseekers can use SNSs to market themselves to potential employers and vice versa. This is recognised by the three case study organisations in our research. The second is as a screening mechanism; employers can use information available via SNSs to cheaply and easily gain a broader image of a potential employee than that available through traditional recruitment methods.

The recent growth of SNSs as a recruitment method reflects its potential in this area. However, this also raises a number of questions which have yet to be resolved. These include:

- the accuracy of information available on SNSs;
- their accessibility across the pool of potential applicants;
- issues of privacy;
- the relative costs and benefits; and
- the effects of the broader range of information they offer on commitments to equality and diversity in the hiring process.

As Davison, Maraist and Bing (2011) note, "these sites can be valuable 'friends' for HR, but also have the potential to be dangerous 'foes' if used improperly".

Although under-researched, from the perspective of the job seeker, the risks posed by SNSs are typically associated with poor conduct on social media websites, resulting in negative consequences in terms of employment. As Bohnert and Ross (2010) show, unprofessional behaviour, for example related to alcohol consumption and/or drug abuse, displayed on a SNSs might significantly hurt a candidate's chances of being hired and can even result in a lower salary offer. Companies, on the other hand, find themselves confronted with legal or privacy issues linked to incorporating social media information into candidate evaluations and might want to formulate a coherent social media strategy in order to prevent any possible negative outcomes.

Box 2: Examples of social networking sites and tools*

Blog – a discussion or informational site published on the internet that consists of entries ('posts') typically displayed in reverse chronological order, i.e. the most recent post appears first. Until 2009 blogs were usually the work of a single individual, occasionally of a small group, and often covered a single subject. More recently 'multi-author blogs' have developed, with posts written by large numbers of authors and professionally edited. Blogs consist of regular entries of commentary and descriptions of events (*blogging*). The content of a microblog is simply smaller in size.

Facebook – a social networking service where users create personal *profiles*, add other users as *friends* and exchange messages, including automatic notifications when they update their own profile. Additionally, users may join common-interest user groups, organised by common characteristics (e.g. workplace). Users can instant message each other through the website.

Google – an American multinational corporation specialising in Internet-related services; most famously its core search engine, but also a large chain of products including Google+, the second largest social networking site in the world (as of January 2013).

LinkedIn – a business-related social networking site mainly used for professional networking. Users maintain a list of contact details of people with whom they have some level of relationship, called *connections*. This list of connections can then be used to build up a contact network, follow different companies and find jobs, people and business opportunities.

MySpace – an online community of users' personal profiles. These typically include photographs, information about personal interests and *blogs*. Users send one another messages and socialise within the MySpace *community*.

Podcast – a type of digital media consisting of a series of audio, video, PDF, or electronic files subscribed to and downloaded or streamed online to a computer or mobile device.

Twitter – a popular *microblogging* service enabling its users to send and read publicly visible messages called *tweets*. Tweets are text-based posts of up to 140 characters displayed on the user's profile page. Users may subscribe to other users' tweets.

YouTube – a (Google-owned) video-sharing website on which users can upload, share, and view videos. A wide variety of *user-generated* video content is displayed, including film and TV clips as well as amateur content such as *video blogging*. Media corporations including the BBC also offer some of their material via the site. Most videos enable users to leave and exchange

comments. Organisations are increasingly using YouTube as a way of sharing information about their company and its vacancies with potential applicants.

Wikipedia – a collaborative web-based encyclopaedia project; its 18 million articles have been written collaboratively by volunteers around the world, and almost all articles are freely editable by any visitor. A prominent web 2.0 site but not an example of social networking site per se.

Yahoo – an American multinational internet corporation widely known for its social networking services and user-generated content including online discussion boards (Yahoo! Groups), community-driven Q&A site (Yahoo! Answers) and photo sharing (Flickr).

* Adapted from Broughton et al (2011) *Workplaces and social networking. The implications for employment relations* Acas research paper 11/11.

3 The use of social media in recruitment and selection

3.1 Incidence of using social media tools for recruitment

A relatively large number of surveys on the practice known as 'social recruitment' have been conducted in the United States, where the use of SNSs is becoming widespread in recruitment. In 2008, for example, a survey for the US Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) found that the number of organisations that reported using SNSs as an HR tool had grown from 21 per cent in 2006 to 44 per cent in 2008. Thirty four per cent were using these sites as a marketing tool to recruit or contact applicants and 13 per cent were using them as a screening tool (Davison, Maraist and Bing, 2011).

As a marketing tool, Nigel Wright Recruitment (2011) argues that the "passive approach is on its way out". Early moves into online recruitment were initially the virtual equivalent of a traditional 'jobs board' that might publicise vacancies in employment offices or newspapers. However, this approach is quickly being superseded; in 2009, for example, the traditional vacancy posting site Monster.com suffered a 31 per cent drop in revenue (Nigel Wright Recruitment, 2011). Following the idea of 'Web 2.0', the new emphasis for online recruitment has been on fostering interactive platforms, particularly via SNSs. By 2010, it is estimated that more than half of UK jobseekers were using an SNS as part of their job search (Nigel Wright Recruitment, 2011).

In the UK, according to a recent report by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (2012), currently three per cent of UK businesses actively make use of social media as a channel for recruitment. Despite this low prevalence, it seems likely that companies are increasingly making use of social media at different stages of the recruitment process, for example as a means to attract potential employees to their corporate recruitment website or more generally to foster a positive company image among the wider public. This is particularly likely, given the fact that the number of jobseekers using social networking sites to locate potential employers and vacancies is increasing.

In the US, one survey shows that 90 per cent of job seekers believe that companies look at their social media accounts before offering an interview or a job (Simply Hired, 2012). A European study also shows that almost 100 per cent of young job seekers under the age of 25 would like communication with employers to increasingly take place online and also suggest that in the UK Facebook is currently favoured over LinkedIn (64 per cent compared to 52 per cent) by young jobseekers (Potentialpark (undated), cited in Clements, 2012).

It is clear, therefore, that the trend is generally upwards. A recent global study among employers emphasises the increase in importance of social media in recruitment as well as its future potential: "92 per cent of respondents use or plan to use social media for recruiting, an increase of almost ten percent from the 83 per cent using social recruiting in 2010" (Jobvite, 2012). Moreover, since 1998, there has been a 60 per cent increase in applications through corporate websites, with more than 90 per cent of Global 500 firms using this option to attract potential employees (Searle, 2006).

In addition, there has been a sharp increase in both general and specific online recruitment websites (such as monster.com or hotjob.com) which have started to offer complex functions to their corporate and private users.

"The search for a job has been eased considerably by on-line message boards. They offer both organisations and applicants quick and easy posting of vacancies. The internet is the preferred source for those actively searching for jobs (Weiss and Barbeite, 2001), often providing far more information than traditional means of searching (Van Rooy et al., 2003). There are now many specialist sites keeping applicants abreast of potential vacancies across a wide range of organisations. Geographically dispersed applicants can now see potential jobs far more easily." (Searle, 2006)

3.2 Changing ways of searching for talent?

There is a wide range of 'traditional' ways of reaching out to potential employees, including a vast amount of HR-specific literature from both academics and practitioners (see for example Joost et al, 2010 for an overview of the literature on electronic Human Resource Management) on how the search for new talent can be organised efficiently and further optimised.

Traditional ways of recruiting typically involve advertisements, paper applications and CVs, or face-to-face networking, including phone calls. As Joos (2008) puts it, these tools largely rely on the so-called 'spray and pray' method where large numbers of advertisements or applications are sent out ('sprayed') while both employers and job seekers wait ('pray') for feedback.

With the emergence of the internet and social media more specifically, new approaches have entered the sphere of employment and recruitment. However as Joos (2008) notes, new ways of recruitment have not yet replaced more traditional approaches but rather added to existing HR processes: "Social-media tools and techniques as currently used are not a direct replacement for traditional hiring processes, but rather a supplement to them". This finding is borne out by our case study research (see below). In a similar vein, Searle (2006) notes that some people have argued that these internet search facilities provide a distinctively different approach to recruitment, although when looked at in more detail, it would appear that traditional headhunting is still being carried out through this new medium, but just re-branded by researchers: "relationship management remains an enduring feature of recruitment firms, maintaining links with skilled candidates ... The internet makes such contact easier." (Searle, 2006)

Moreover, research suggests that a switch from traditional to online recruitment might not be as simple as just changing the tools, as it might require more strategic changes in the wider recruitment process (Parry and Tyson, 2008). In their analysis of current UK practices, Parry and Tyson (2008) also come to the conclusion that although e-recruitment has become widespread among UK companies, it has not dominated the recruitment market in the way that was predicted by the popular media.

Generally speaking, the use of social media in recruitment might also be determined by company-specific characteristics. Company size for example can be an important factor. Small and medium-sized companies (SMEs), which only hire on an occasional basis, might find it too expensive and resource-intensive to

set up specific social media processes for recruiting, although dabbling in social media is in itself relatively simple and straightforward for SMEs. Industry or activity might be another important factor, as in certain industries, such as technology, finance or engineering, the use of social media forms part of a wider industry norm with which companies tend to comply. Moreover, as a recent UKCES (2012) report shows, young growth businesses¹ are more likely to make use of social media for recruitment purposes (7 per cent compared to 3 per cent of all businesses).

However, as Bohnert and Ross (2010) highlight, there is no strict line between traditional and new media recruitment as information on potential employees increasingly is “used in combination with other, more traditional information, such as an applicant’s cover letter and résumé”.

Nevertheless, as Bohnert and Ross (2010) show, social media can have an impact on the screening and selection of potential employees. In an experiment, the authors show that behaviour and preferences indicated on social media profiles of applicants, such as their drinking behaviour, had a significant impact on the overall evaluation of job candidates.

A 2013 online panel survey of HR decision makers carried out for Acas on the use of social media when recruiting staff found that there was limited use of social media among survey respondents (based on 401 respondents in organisations operating across the economy, mostly (79 per cent) in the private sector). Only 9 per cent said that they made *extensive* use of social media when recruiting staff, although 36 per cent of respondents said that they made *some* use of social media when recruiting staff. Just over 38 per cent of respondents said that they *never* used social media when recruiting staff. However, 16 per cent of respondents said that although they did not currently use social media in this way, they were planning to do so in the future.

Those respondents who said that they *never* use social media for recruitment (154 respondents in all) were asked why (and could give multiple reasons): the single most popular reason for non-use – given by 58 per cent of these respondents – was a preference for more traditional forms of recruitment; satisfaction with current forms of recruitment and privacy concerns were the next most commonly-cited reasons (chosen by 42 per cent and 27 per cent respectively).

3.3 Triggers for the use of social media in recruitment

The three case study organisations in our research all had a relatively relaxed culture around the general use of social media. Although all three organisations had a policy on the acceptable use of social media tools in terms of conduct, staff were permitted free access to social media from their desks and in working time. In some cases, the philosophy was that employees often needed social media tools to do their jobs – for example at Monmouthshire County Council social media is viewed as a good way of communicating with the local community. In

¹ Defined by UKCES as businesses that have been operating for less than three years and which are on an upwards trajectory with confidence for future growth.

2011, the Council made the decision that all Council staff should have access to social media in order to enable them to interact with the community and be aware of what the community is saying.

In other cases, the organisational view was that social media sites are part of everyday life and staff should be trusted to use them appropriately. For example, the retailer Pets at Home permits employees to access social media sites during working time, on the basis of trust, and this is reported to work well.

"We're quite relaxed about that – if they're not getting their jobs done, then we would manage that, but otherwise, we're relatively relaxed. Anyway, you can't lock down people's mobile phones."

People Director, Pets at Home

The security firm G4S actually goes one step further and actively encourages its employees to use social media, believing that this has become an important aspect of promoting the brand.

"Our best ambassadors for the brand are people who work for us and we do want to encourage current employees to get involved on Facebook and any other social channels as much as possible."

Resourcing and Community Manager, G4S

In the context of this relatively relaxed attitude to social media, none of the case study organisations in this study had a clearly-defined and planned strategy on recruitment via social media channels. For Pets at Home, the trigger was a perception of social media as a tool to be investigated as potentially useful, and the company was aware that other retailers were using social media in recruitment.

"It wasn't really that much of a thought-out strategy, it was more, everybody else is doing it, and we need to be there."

People Director, Pets at Home

Although Pets at Home has a policy on the use of social media, there is no company policy on the use of social media in recruitment. Likewise, Monmouthshire County Council does not have a standard policy on recruiting using social media and its activities in this area up until now have been based on a number of ad hoc projects, and at the search stage of the recruitment process.

Out of the three case studies, G4S has the most clearly-defined recruitment strategy involving social media, largely because it recruits in such large volumes – around 250,000 employees a year. G4S has a small team involved in social media activities for recruitment purposes, consisting of the head of resourcing, the resourcing and community manager and a resourcing team administrator. In fact, the social media activities of G4S focus mostly on recruitment rather than promoting their products and services.

"In fact we have very little corporate social media activity ... We are a services business, we are a people business, our product is people ... With regards to our B2C [business to consumer] offering, the only real consumer offering we have is jobs and a lot of them - we recruit around 250,000 per year."

Head of resourcing, G4S

3.4 Different tools and ways of using social media for initial candidate search

Social media is a broad category, encompassing practices such as podcasting, blogging, text messaging, internet videos, and HR e-mail marketing, which are some of the more widespread applications used in recruitment (Joos, 2008). In addition to these tools, there are a small number of highly popular sites which employers are using increasingly such as Facebook, Wikipedia and Yahoo. These incorporate tools to attract the attention of potential candidates typically ranging from websites to blogs, wikis, podcasts and video platforms. For an overview of the main social media tools, see Box 2 in section 2.2 above.

A recent study by Jobvite (2012) among employers reveals that globally, LinkedIn is currently the most popular social network tool being used for recruiting (used by 93 per cent of employers), followed by Facebook (66 per cent) and Twitter (54 per cent). Moreover, it seems that use of social media tools and their application at different stages in the recruitment process differ, as does their application between different employers.

"Some recruiters are using the leading social media channels simply to search and advertise, while others are building longer-term strategies, such as investing in permanent, interactive online talent pools." (Clements, 2012)

Alongside the question of how companies are using social media in recruiting is the issue of who they are targeting. As Joos (2008) highlights, there are some groups of potential employees which might be more easily reached by online recruitment activities than others.

"The internet lends itself well to finding and attracting college graduates, skilled workers, managers, and executives. These groups tend to be computer-literate, and technology use is an integral part of their daily routines, helping them develop and maintain connections at work as well as in their personal lives." (Joos, 2008)

The author further specifies that the use of social media is growing particularly in the case of graduate recruitment, with the so called 'millennials'¹ responding extremely well to social media. This is presumably due to their familiarity with internet tools. In addition, e-recruitment may also attract the attention of passive

¹ Broadly taken to include those with birth dates from the late 1970s/early 1980s to the late 1990s.

job seekers, i.e. those who are currently employed but are open to learning about new job opportunities (Joos, 2008).

Although so far the extent of social media used in the recruitment process remains relatively under-researched, there are a small number of studies which indicate its increased use, especially among young job seekers. For example, research firm Potentialpark (based on a sample of over 30,000 students and graduates worldwide) has found that in Europe close to 100 per cent of young jobseekers would like to interact with employers online, and that in the UK, Facebook (64 per cent) is favoured over LinkedIn (52 per cent) as a good place for employers to be present (Potentialpark, 2011).

From our case study research, we found that the most popular social media tools used by organisations in their recruitment activities tend to be LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube and Facebook. LinkedIn is a social media network targeted specifically at professionals, and so it makes sense for organisations to exploit this. YouTube is a tool that enables organisations to display more information about themselves and vacancies, by recording interviews with key individuals in the organisation. Twitter can be used to broadcast vacancies and information about vacancies, and while Facebook is predominantly a social networking tool, some organisations use it for recruitment purposes or to direct candidates onto their careers site.

The 2013 Acas online panel survey of HR decision makers asked those respondents who confirmed having used social media when recruiting staff to specify which services their organisation had made use of (and could specify all that applied). In response, the most commonly-cited social media service was LinkedIn (selected by 71 per cent of these confirmed social media users), followed by Facebook (52 per cent of users) and Twitter (31 per cent of users).

None of the case study organisations used social media as a recruitment tool in isolation on a routine basis. Rather, they used social media as a part of their initial search strategy, complementing more traditional search routes, such as print media and specialist journals.

3.4.1 LinkedIn

LinkedIn is often used by organisations to recruit senior and technical staff. For example, Pets at Home uses LinkedIn to search for senior and technical employees through searching in the style of traditional forms of headhunting. The recruitment team also place vacancy postings on their own LinkedIn accounts. The organisation believes that the value of LinkedIn is its wide range of targeted contacts. The recruitment team at Pets at Home has become quite adept at using LinkedIn as a recruitment tool, and the team also connects with recruitment agencies in order to broaden its contact network.

"At first, I would only connect with people I knew. I then cottoned on to the fact that that wasn't really the point – it's about creating as wide a network as possible. Now, I'll occasionally have a bit of a blitz and go through all the people suggested that I contact, and people are willing to connect. If we only had 50 contacts each, that would be tricky."

People Director, Pets at Home

So far, Pets at Home has recruited just a handful of employees through LinkedIn. It would seem, however, that this is a growing area, as the recruitment team has noticed that an increasing number of people are contacting them through LinkedIn, partly due, they believe, to the company's increasing profile as a good employer. If there is no immediate suitable vacancy, the team keeps potential applicants on file for future vacancies as they arise.

At Monmouthshire County Council, many available jobs are posted on the relevant LinkedIn groups. As the Council has not pursued any particular digital recruitment strategy, focusing instead on how to market specific jobs, a lot of thought goes in to how to target specific online groups. For example, teaching jobs might be more suited to advertisement through Twitter, whereas social care jobs are more suitable to being advertised on LinkedIn. This takes more management time and thought, but managers believe it is worth the investment. Adverts will be placed on LinkedIn through HR and management team members' individual accounts or through the Council's account.

G4S makes extensive use of LinkedIn, which allows it to target recruitment for senior level positions and also to engage with passive candidates currently not actively seeking employment.

3.4.2 Twitter

Twitter was used for recruitment to varying degrees by the case study organisations. G4S, for example, makes extensive use of Twitter for recruitment purposes, by tweeting vacancies as they arise and answering queries from potential candidates. At Monmouthshire County Council also, all jobs are advertised on Twitter more or less as a matter of course. The Council believes that this also ensures that advertisements have a wider reach, as they can be re-tweeted by people who are not personally interested, but know people who might be. The Council's Twitter feed is not automated in that it does not send out job vacancies automatically, as the view is that posting vacancies needs some targeting.

"You need to make sure that it reaches the right communities in Twitter, you need to hashtag it correctly. If you automate it from the website, it's just going to be a standard piece of untargeted information."

Digital and Social Media Manager, Monmouthshire County Council

By contrast, at Pets at Home, the company's Twitter account is not used on a systematic basis for recruitment purposes, although the People Director will tweet vacancies occasionally from his own Twitter account.

3.4.3 Facebook

Facebook is one of, if not *the* best-known social media tool, and is extensively used by people to connect socially. Some organisations do, however, include this tool in their recruitment strategy. Pets at Home, for example has a company Facebook page on which it publishes information that is relevant to the organisation, for example posting a photo of the new team if it opens a new store. The company uses Facebook in this way to attract applicants, usually for jobs in its stores, rather than for senior vacancies. For vacancies posted on the

site, a link will then take people through to the company's separate careers website, through which individuals can submit an application. The general philosophy is to attract potential candidates to the Pets at Home website and give them a flavour of the company's culture and what it would be like to work there.

"We're trying to engage people, rather than just bombard them with jobs."

Recruitment Manager, Pets at Home

G4S also makes extensive use of Facebook as a recruitment tool, encouraging potential applicants to engage with the company through its Facebook page. The G4S Facebook page provides information about the company, a range of photos, and information about jobs, and job initiatives, with links to the company's careers centre. It also posts general advice and tips to candidates about how to submit an application.

By contrast, Monmouthshire County Council does not tend to use Facebook for recruitment purposes, although there is a Council Facebook page, which would carry some job advertisements. The Council Facebook page is intended to function more as a social space where people can interact with news and information on issues affecting the people who live in Monmouthshire, make comments and ask questions of the Council.

3.4.4 YouTube

YouTube allows video messages to be posted on the internet, which can then be viewed by a very wide audience (around 800 million are estimated to visit YouTube worldwide every month). Some organisations have found that this can be a useful part of a recruitment strategy, particularly in the case of very targeted recruitment, for key roles or senior and technical staff. Monmouthshire County Council, for example, has experimented with YouTube over the past two years, first using it as part of the recruitment process for a senior position within the Council. A total of four three-minute videos were made with key individuals who could talk about the post with accuracy and knowledge, in order to give a realistic picture of the job from a variety of different angles. The videos were uploaded onto YouTube and embedded into the vacancy advertisement on the Council's website. They were also shared on LinkedIn and Twitter. This approach was deemed to be very successful, with the Council receiving significant positive feedback that the approach had given a very good feel of what it was like to work in the Council. All the shortlisted candidates said that this had been an element in their decision to apply for the job. The successful candidate said that this was integral to their decision to apply.

"Alongside other jobs in the newspaper, it wouldn't have really stood out. So, we thought about the aspects of the job that were really good, and built on that. We got really good feedback – one of the candidates said, 'I wouldn't have known anything about the Council, had it not been for that social media aspect, which gave us the real view, the chatty view, of the job'."

Digital and Social Media Manager, Monmouthshire County Council

More recently, the Council has used a short video from the chief executive as part of the recruitment for another senior role. The feedback on this from candidates and potential candidates was also very positive.

3.5 Using social media as a screening tool

Using social networking sites as a screening tool is an important aspect of employers' social media use to consider, since it gives rise to the potential for social media to breach privacy and data protection regulations. Nevertheless, some surveys have found that this practice can be widespread, either on a formalised or informal basis.

In the US, a Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) survey (SHRM 2011a) found that organisations engaged in the practice cited their reasons for using social media to screen job applicants as: being able to gain information with little time and effort (63 per cent); obtaining information beyond that in a cover letter or CV (70 per cent); verifying information in a cover letter or CV (28 per cent); and assessing applicant fit with the organisation (34 per cent). However, the survey also found that organisations which do not use SNSs for screening: questioned the legality of using these sites (66 per cent); were worried about not being able to verify information obtained (48 per cent), and; had concerns about invading applicants' privacy (33 per cent).

In 2012, a survey of 2,300 hiring managers conducted by the US website CareerBuilder.com explored the issue of screening in more detail. It found that 37 per cent of hiring managers searched SNSs to learn about job candidates (CareerBuilder.com, 2012). This was a slight fall from the 45 per cent who had reported doing so in 2009 (CareerBuilder.com, 2009). Of those who did not in 2012, 15 per cent indicated that their company prohibited the practice and 11 per cent did not use this screening method currently but were planning to start (CareerBuilder.com, 2012).

One-third of the employers who used SNSs for screening reported they had found information which had caused them *not* to hire a candidate (CareerBuilder.com, 2012). Reasons for screening out candidates ranged from the posting of inappropriate photographs or information, displaying poor communication skills, conveying information associated with alcohol or illegal drug use, revealing information that falsified qualifications listed in a CV, and posting content disparaging previous employers. However, one-third of these managers also reported that information found on SNSs had made them *more likely* to hire a candidate. Positive qualities which could be highlighted in candidates' profiles included professionalism, creativity, good communication skills and strong references from others. However, the most commonly mentioned appealing aspect of an applicant's social media profile was in fact the least tangible; 58 per cent of managers were more likely to hire if they 'got a good feel for the candidate's personality' from their profile (CareerBuilder.com, 2012). As noted above, however, there are potential risks here, in terms of possible breaches of privacy, and the validity and reliability of the results gleaned. Individuals may not know that their online profiles are being viewed and may have objections to this. Further, employers cannot be certain that the content of online profiles is accurate – for example, as discussed above, individuals may create profiles expressly for potential employers to view.

As Brown and Vaughn (2011) point out, survey results indicate that much of the information which hiring managers report using may not be explicitly job-related. SNSs offer a tool to explore aspects of a candidate that traditional recruitment screening cannot always easily reach, such as their personality and organisational 'fit'. However, it follows that this type of screening is also less easily justified by employers and is more liable to leave them open to charges of discrimination. This is discussed in more detail in section five.

The 2013 Acas online panel survey of HR decision makers asked those respondents who confirmed having used social media when recruiting staff to specify how their organisation gone about doing this (and could specify all the different ways that applied). Here, social media tools were most commonly said to have been used at the initial recruitment stage, to advertise job vacancies that are already being advertised through more conventional recruitment routes; 64 per cent of respondents confirmed having done this. Additionally, 45 per cent had used social media to promote the company in general terms among potential candidates or to make contact with a pool of potential candidates for a job vacancy (45 per cent); around two in five had used social media tools to 'headhunt' (42 per cent). In addition, 35 per cent of respondents who had used social media for recruitment reported having done so in order to undertake screening and background checks or to obtain information on candidates as part of the application process.

On the whole, the case study organisations in our research tended to restrict their use of social media to the initial recruitment stage, rather than using it to gain additional information in order to screen and shortlist candidates. This did not seem to be due to an overt recognition of the potential risks of discrimination or invasion of privacy, but rather that there was no time to do this, or that information gleaned from Facebook would not be relevant.

Pets at Home uses neither Facebook nor LinkedIn to search for *further* information about job applicants. In any case, the organisation felt that LinkedIn – which it uses for posting vacancies and headhunting – provides all the information available on individuals that is relevant to their job application when profiles are initially accessed. In the case of Facebook, there is no systematic vetting of candidates, partly due to the fact that Pets at Home does not have the capacity to do this. In addition, the company does not believe that this is necessary or relevant.

"We haven't made a conscious decision about this, but people put all sorts of personal stuff on Facebook, and it doesn't necessarily reflect how skilled they're going to be at their jobs – it's best not to know ... It's also just time-consuming, and so unless something triggers it, we are unlikely to check people out."

People Director, Pets at Home

The company will, however, think about using Facebook or other online means to check on individuals if it believes that there is a specific issue that needs to be addressed, for example if it has good reason to believe that a candidate is not being truthful in their job application.

Monmouthshire County Council does not have a formal procedure on checking candidates' profiles either. In many cases the Council already knows candidates because they are commonly part of the local community and it will often have already been communicating with them online about local issues. The Council does not see its lack of formal procedures for vetting profiles as having been a problem up to now, although it might look at this again in the future. It was anticipated that one way in which this *may* develop would be for the interviewer to look at a candidate's online profile *with them*, during the job interview itself.

G4S takes the view that accessing any information that is published by applicants themselves and is freely accessible online is acceptable, and therefore includes accessing information via candidates' Facebook profiles as part of the recruitment process. The onus is therefore on applicants to ensure that information which they do not wish to be scrutinised by a prospective employer is kept private. However, the screening of potential applicants is standardised as far as possible, with the focus restricted to job-relevant questions.

4 The benefits of using social media to recruit

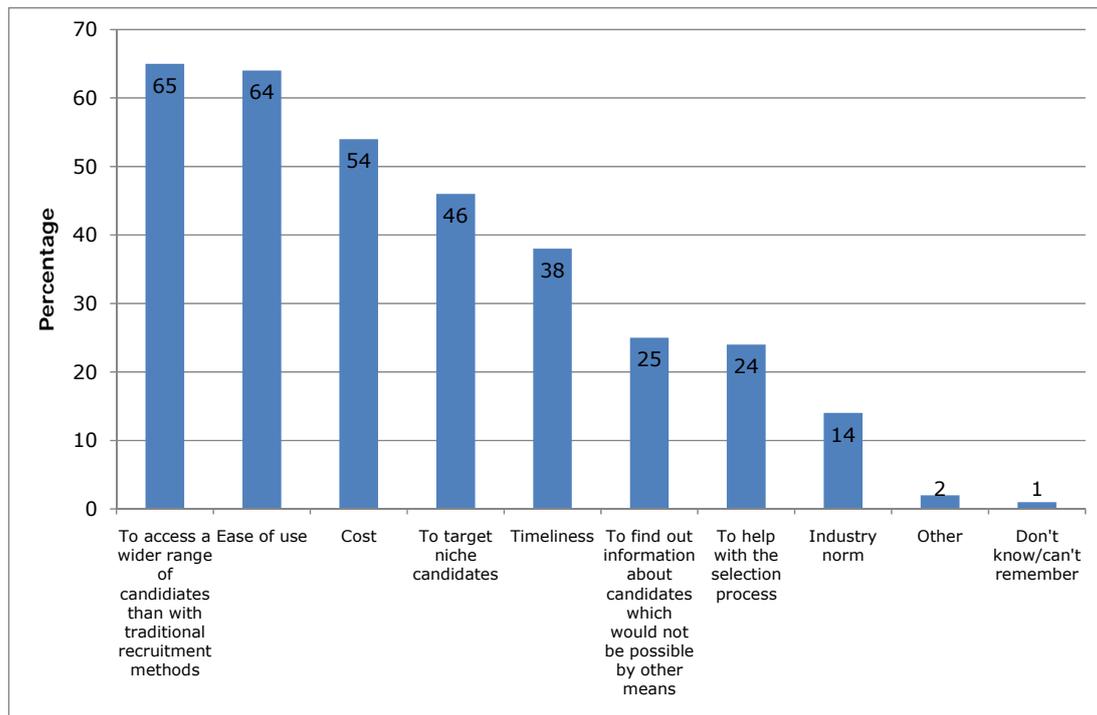
There are a wide range of benefits associated with using social media in recruitment, centring largely on cost savings, increasing the pool of applicants reached, and being able to target recruitment at specific groups of potential candidates (Davison, Maraist and Bing, 2011). Social media sites can be used to identify potential applicants with certain characteristics or qualifications and to reach non-traditional applicants – i.e. those who are not in the usual target groups, or who have different backgrounds and experience – quickly and easily. A strong and creative social media profile can also reflect positively on an organisation's image for potential candidates, which is something that is driving the approach of case study organisation G4S. Moreover, the use of social media may also increase the quality of applications. As Jobvite (2012) highlights, "49 per cent of recruiters who implemented social recruiting saw an increase in the quantity of candidates, and 43 per cent noted a surge in the quality of candidates". Quality in this context would mean that the qualifications, experience and overall suitability of the candidates matched the job specification closely.

As a screening tool, social media tools:

"... provide a readily available public forum to research candidates while incurring minimal cost, allowing even small businesses to engage in such practices... Potential employers may have access to detailed information that would allow them to draw conclusions or make inferences about the applicant's character or personality that might not be as easily or economically obtained through traditional means." (Brown and Vaughn, 2011)

Respondents to the 2013 Acas online panel survey of HR decision makers whose organisation *had* used social media in recruitment were asked to explain why (and could select as many reasons as applied). A wide range of motivations were put forward, with the two most commonly-cited reasons being the need to access a wider range of candidates than with traditional recruitment methods (chosen by 65 per cent of these respondents), and ease of use (64 per cent). These were followed by cost (54 per cent) and targeting niche candidates (46 per cent). One quarter (25 per cent) of respondents also confirmed that their organisation had used social media to find out information about candidates that would not be possible using other means. For details, see Figure 4.1 below.

Figure 4.1: Reasons for companies to make use of social media for recruitment



Source: Acas online panel survey of HR decision makers (2013) Base: 177 – All respondents who make some or extensive use of social media when recruiting staff Note: Multiple responses were allowed therefore responses may sum to more than 100 per cent

When these respondents were asked to single out the one *most important* reason for having used social media in the recruitment process, accessing a wider range of candidates than with traditional recruitment methods emerged as the most popular reason, being selected by 36 per cent of respondents.

4.1 Cost-saving and targeting

The literature widely accepts that online recruitment offers a cost-effective alternative to more traditional ways of recruiting. Statistics from the US show that traditional job adverts on average cost a firm \$3,295 and are significantly more expensive than their web-based counterparts at \$377 on average (Harris and De War, 2001 in Searle, 2006). Clements (2012) quotes Jon Hull, Global Head of Resourcing at RS Components – an electronics distributor headquartered in the UK – who states that, on average, hiring for a senior post using social media costs them £714, compared with £7,500 via more traditional methods. In terms of targeting, SNSs are now offering fairly sophisticated tools. For example, software is now available to make job advertisements more targeted by 'scanning' an individual's LinkedIn profile once they click a link related to the organisation and subsequently bringing up vacancies that are deemed most relevant to them.

From the case study research, we found that the two aspects of cost saving and targeting were often interlinked. For example, for Pets at Home, the main

benefits of using social media for recruitment are being able to have access to a wider pool of people, and as a result of that, being able to reduce costs.

"Head of Internal Audit would not have been a role that we would even have thought about recruiting ourselves a couple of years ago ... This is saving a lot of money that would have been spent on a recruitment agency, which is what we would have done. We have access to the same tools as recruitment agencies, so the only way that you would pay them now is if you couldn't be bothered to do it yourself, or if you were too busy."

People Director, Pets at Home

This was also the case at Monmouthshire County Council, which uses social media to reach a pool of potential candidates that is at the same time wider and more targeted.

"For jobs where we're looking for a wider pool of talent, someone who is a bit different from your average candidate, the adverts will go on LinkedIn as well as in the traditional advertising spaces. It's so easy to advertise on LinkedIn, and so cheap, and incredibly targeted. It's very cost-effective. It's not as prestigious and won't be seen by as many people as an advert in the Guardian, but they will be relevant people. It's very targeted."

Digital and Social Media Manager, Monmouthshire County Council

Social media could also be used as part of equality and diversity policies, as it potentially allows recruiters to tap into online discussions and forums that are engaging potential candidates in groups that they may be struggling to reach. This strategy could be part of a general net-widening search strategy, aimed at ensuring that organisations are not always searching in the same types of areas for potential candidates.

4.2 Fostering realistic expectations

Interactive tools such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter can play an important role in the general process around recruitment, providing recruitment information and fostering realistic job expectations among potential employees. In a similar vein, Searle (2006) highlights not only the importance of websites in attracting future employees but also the fact that they can help to present realistic job previews to candidates:

"[They] can create positive reactions to the firm (Highhouse et al., 2004). They may also have a longer-term value by implicitly conveying the organisation's values and thereby promoting early organisational socialisation. They may shape new employees' psychological contracts"

Thus, a potential candidate can gain quite a lot of information about a potential employer through its website and social media pages. This can help them to decide whether they like the general feel and culture of an organisation. If not, they can simply decide against applying, saving them and the organisation time and money.

Fostering more realistic expectations about the job in question might also help the company to deter unsuitable candidates. In this context, Searle (2006) describes so-called 'work fit questionnaires' which can feature on corporate websites and are used to assess potential applicants' preferences and 'deselect' unsuitable candidates at an early point. This 'deselection' of candidates may lead to significant cost savings for companies in terms of saved time. G4S cites this as an important aspect of the advantages of social media: its social media presence essentially offers a platform for both attracting and deterring potential applicants by giving a more accurate picture of what working at G4S entails. This might not always correspond to applicants' previous perceptions.

"People have a kind of idea and expectation of what it means to come and work for a company like us and sometimes that is quite unrealistic. I think there has to be an element of deselection as much as there is selection for the candidate and if they get a realistic idea of what the job is from someone who already is doing that role, I think that is a lot better and a lot better from a candidate's experience view."

Resourcing and Community Manager, G4S

It is, of course, important for organisations to present as fair and realistic picture of an organisation as possible, and to devise questionnaires that are based on neutral criteria, in order to avoid any type of discrimination.

Social media also has the potential to be used as a means to improve the recruitment experience for candidates who are not successful. For example, if a candidate has engaged with an organisation through two-way interaction via social media, they might be more inclined to feel that they have had a personalised experience, rather than limited interaction via letter. This could help organisations with high ratios of applicants to acceptances to ensure that applicants who are turned away retain a positive impression of the company and would consider applying again.

4.3 Improving external communication

Social media can help to improve communication generally, which for public sector organisations such as Monmouthshire County Council can be hugely beneficial. Tools such as Twitter help staff to communicate in ways that are clearer and more succinct, which, for a Council, is an advantage, as communication and engagement with the local community is a key issue for them.

"If you had a choice between a huge pdf document full of Council jargon, and a short blog post giving you the basics, most people are going to go for the blog post that talks like I talk to you now. What we are trying to do is remove the idea that you are more professional if you talk in jargon. We can be incredibly good at our jobs, but also be approachable and friendly. Social media has helped us to break down the walls between 'them' and 'us'."

Digital and Social Media Manager, Monmouthshire County Council

This type of communication helps organisations to show a more approachable and human face, which in turn is likely to encourage people to think about wanting to work for such an organisation.

4.4 Building the brand

There is also a brand-building element to the use of social networking sites, which is difficult to quantify, but increasingly important for organisations. On Facebook for example, people can 'like' or share vacancy posts, even if they are not personally going to apply for the job; this raises the overall profile and public awareness of the company. This was particularly the case with G4S, where social media helps to strengthen brand image and generates traffic onto its corporate career website. As G4S recruits around 250,000 staff a year, it is particularly important for it to promote its employer image and generate interest in its work, to which social media activities can contribute significantly. An important focus for the company's online approach is therefore the question of how social media can support the G4S Career Centre, the company's corporate recruitment website. By acting as a channel and directing interested parties towards its website and Facebook pages, the company can offer a large volume of information about itself. If individuals like what they see, they can then be directed to the company's recruitment website.

Linked to this is the issue of whether organisations are happy to allow their existing employees to act as advocates for the organisation by using *their own* social media platforms (e.g. by disseminating organisational content on their personal Facebook or LinkedIn account) to aid with recruitment. Doing so can rapidly increase the reach of content and target like-minded individuals, by offering first-hand accounts and information to potential applicants. For SMEs without recruitment teams, using their own employees to spread the message may be the only option. However, some companies may want to closely monitor content which is linked to their brand in this way, and may not want to be burdened with overseeing large numbers of employees on this issue.

5 The risks and costs of using social media to recruit

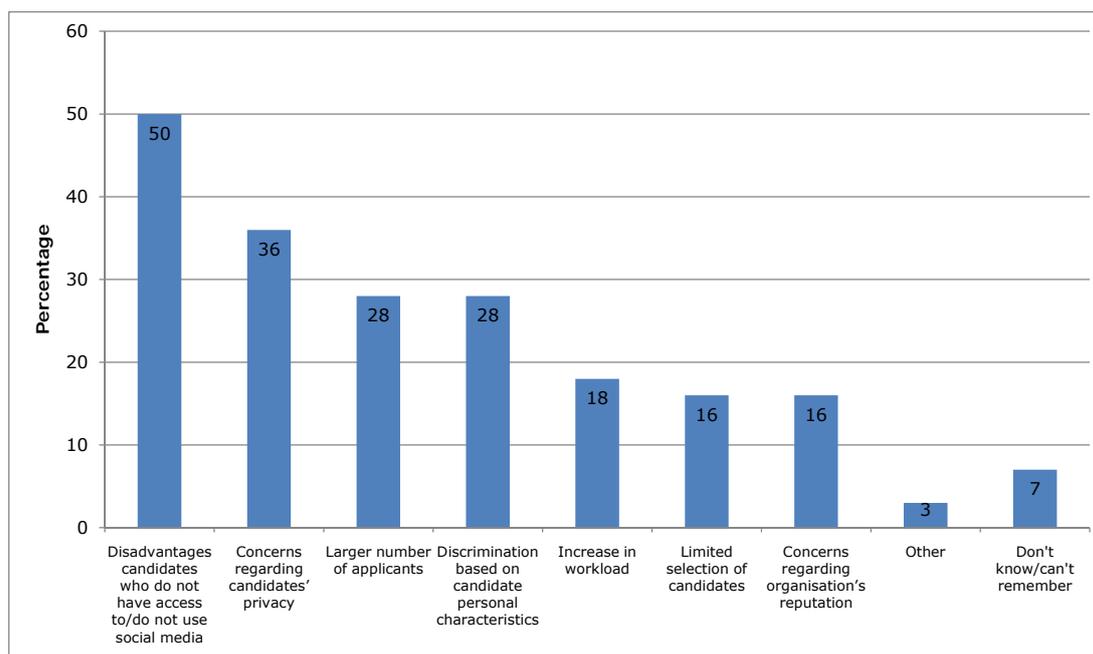
While social media clearly offers particular advantages to employers in terms of making economies and targeting recruitment, using social media to recruit also carries certain costs and risks. The most serious, legal risks – as well as the majority of broader ethical questions – tend to relate to the practice of screening. As Clark and Roberts (2010) point out:

“Employers have always been able to request background and reference information on job applicants but have been self-restrained in doing so because of the cost and legal requirements ... This norm is now shifting, as employers are routinely conducting informal online background checks without applicants’ knowledge. Based on the information they find, employers are making decisions ... While the practice seems to be taken for granted as acceptable, few employers have explored whether the practice is ethical.” (Clark and Roberts, 2010)

The use of SNSs in HR also raises attendant questions about their cost, accuracy, reach and any legal risks they bring. These issues are explored in more detail below.

Respondents to the 2013 Acas online panel survey of HR decision makers whose organisation had used social media to recruit staff were asked which concerns, if any, their organisation had had about using social media to recruit staff (respondents could select as many as applied). By far the most commonly-cited concern among these respondents was the worry that using social media in recruitment may disadvantage candidates who do not have access to or do not use social media (50 per cent of respondents). This was followed by concerns about candidates’ privacy (36 per cent), concerns that this might result in a larger number of applicants (28 per cent) and that it may give rise to possible discrimination based on candidates’ personal characteristics (28 per cent). For more details, see Figure 5.1 below.

Figure 5.1: Concerns regarding the use of social media when recruiting staff



Source: Acas online panel survey of HR decision makers (2013) Base: 177 – All respondents who make some or extensive use of social media when recruiting staff Note: Multiple responses were allowed therefore responses may sum to more than 100 per cent

When these respondents were asked to single out the *one most important* concern about using social media in the recruitment process, the prospect that candidates who do not have access to/do not use social media might be disadvantaged emerged as the top concern – being selected by 38 per cent of respondents.

5.1 Financial costs

Zielinski (2012) argues that, although increasingly used, the actual impact of social media on recruitment – in terms of the costs and benefits it entails – remains largely unquantified. However, a 2011 US Society for Human Resource Management SHRM survey (based on 541 randomly selected HR professionals) found that 56 per cent of responding employers stated that they currently use social networking websites when recruiting for potential jobs (SHRM, 2011b). This is a significant increase since 2008, when a little over one-third (34 per cent) of organisations were using these sites as a recruiting tool (SHRM, 2011b)

The American shipping company UPS is one of the few companies which has studied the costs and benefits of its recruitment-related social media usage in detail. It uses analytical software to measure the performance of its social networking sites (in terms of 're-tweets', numbers of followers and numbers of people accessing company material via SNSs). The firm also uses tools which 'listen to' comments made on SNSs about the company and its recruitment practices so it is aware of how it is being received (Zielinski, 2012).

According to Zielinski, the UPS HR manager felt that staff time was the biggest cost associated with using social media for recruitment (Zielinski, 2012). He also believed that the justification of costs should not be based solely on increasing the number of the organisation's followers, but should instead incorporate the quality of the organisation's online interactions, the number of hires as a direct result of SNSs interaction and the retention rates for these employees.

This view was backed up to a large extent by our case study organisations, which all cited staff time as one of the most significant costs in using social media as part of the recruitment process. Social media sites were said to tend to generate a lot of communications traffic, including queries from customers and job candidates, in addition to a large volume of low-quality applications. They therefore need some dedicated resource to ensure that updates are posted and queries are answered. All three of our case study organisations acknowledged this, although they did not feel it to be a significant issue. In the case of G4S, the cost was largely around ensuring that enough staff time could be devoted to monitoring sites, and also in providing training for managers who would be operating aspects of the online content. The use of monitoring software also requires investment - in both equipment and qualified staff to operate it.

5.2 Accuracy of information

Screening using SNSs is generally not a formalised aspect of the recruitment process. This means that it may not be possible to verify that the information obtained is accurate (Davison, Maraist and Bing, 2011; Nigel Wright Recruitment, 2011). The information people choose to share on SNSs can be edited or distorted by concerns of social desirability and this may be strongly dependent on the perceived audience. For example, somebody might post photographs of themselves socialising and drinking alcohol at parties to showcase their gregariousness and impress their likeminded friends. However, this would not necessarily impress potential recruiters.

Some SNSs, such as LinkedIn, are expressly designed for viewing by potential employers. However, others, such as Facebook, serve a more personal function. Davison, Maraist and Bing (2011) point out that:

"Employers often assume that the information posted will be more accurate than what candidates provide in a cover letter ... because they do not expect the website to be viewed by employers (i.e., they have no motive to "fake good") ... Nonetheless, an individual who creates a webpage may be trying to impress friends and family and the type of distortion or "faking" may differ depending on the intended viewer."
(Davison, Maraist and Bing, 2011)

Employers may also gain access to information about a candidate via third parties on these types of SNSs – information which again cannot be verified (Davison, Maraist and Bing, 2011).

These issues raise the broader question of whether job-relevant characteristics can be measured accurately via SNSs (Davison, Maraist and Bing, 2011). If information cannot be verified, it may be difficult to justify the use of using information gleaned from SNSs in hiring decisions.

Furthermore, Smith and Rupp (2004) ask whether computer programmes should be entrusted with such an inherently human task as evaluating a person's skills and abilities:

"Besides automation, the idea of having computers assess a person's skills and determine whether the candidate should be interviewed seems inconsistent with what the human resources profession is all about – people. Many high technology and people-oriented positions may not be evaluated solely on computer-generated scores and compatibility checks with e-recruiters' databases." (Smith and Rupp, 2004)

Our case study organisations were aware of this potential risk, but had not given it a great deal of formal consideration since they had not encountered any specific problems in terms of false information from job applicants. Only one respondent in the 2013 Acas online panel survey of HR decision makers reported concerns about the quality or accuracy of information.

5.3 Making mistakes

Another important aspect to bear in mind is the potential for easily making mistakes when using social media, especially with fast-moving tools such as Twitter – messages are 'tweeted' very quickly and informally and reactions are quick to happen, which sometimes do not give organisations or individuals a great deal of time to reflect. Monmouthshire County Council has found that the best thing to do is to quickly tweet again and rectify it, and to be relatively relaxed about making mistakes.

"You have to plan to make mistakes on tools like Twitter. We tell employees that we'd prefer them to fail and learn from it rather than carry on doing the same thing. If you've built up a rapport with your audience, they won't mind, they'll forgive you. There aren't really any right answers. It's inevitable that mistakes will be made along the way, as it's uncharted territory, but if your intentions are good, then you will find a way."

Digital and Social Media Manager, Monmouthshire County Council

Likewise, Pets at Home advocates a relatively relaxed, flexible and open attitude towards social media.

"Just go for it – just give it a go. That's what we did. People get nervous about it, and a lot of businesses want to control it, but the reality is that you can't. It is there, people are using it, so the best thing is to go with it, trust people."

The recruitment team, Pets at Home

5.4 Diversity of the applicant pool

The question of the relative diversity of the applicant pool available via SNSs is an important one. It is possible that there will be generational, gender and racial differences in the acceptance and use of these sites for job seeking and recruiting. Davison et al (2012) point out:

“There may be demographic differences in terms of who has a webpage or profile and who does not. Certain socioeconomically disadvantaged racial or ethnic groups may be less likely to have access to computers and Internet and thus may be less likely to access social networking websites. There are also likely to be age differences in access to this technology as well.” (Davison et al, 2012)

A report by Nigel Wright Recruitment (2011) highlights statistics collected by the audience measuring organisation Quantcast, which suggest that just over 80 per cent of LinkedIn users are white and only 30 per cent are at Director or Manager level.

Generally speaking, therefore, the group of applicants responding to online job offers may be more limited than that which replies to a more traditional recruitment processes. This has implications in terms of excluding jobseekers who are not IT-literate and also potentially adverse effects on equality within a firm’s workforce:

“Participation through the internet seems to be attractive to a different population than those recruited using traditional means: this pool is likely to be younger white males, more highly educated, more frequent job changers and already in employment with the sector ... The equity of access to employment and the diversity of the workforce could therefore be affected.” (Searle, 2006)

A limited number of studies demonstrate that job seekers without access to the internet have a competitive disadvantage compared to their internet-enabled peers (Rooy et al., 2003 in Searle, 2006).

This creates the risk that, if this strategy is not complemented with other traditional search methods, then talent will be missed. In a US context, Davison, Maraist and Bing (2011) warn that organisations could be violating civil rights laws by accidentally excluding too many applicants over the age of 40, given younger persons tend to be more likely to use these social media sites. Although there is no evidence of this happening as yet, it is perhaps something about which organisations need to be mindful.

There are also issues around the particular types of SNSs that employers choose to target. SNSs differ in terms of the demographics of their users and their primary purpose. As mentioned above in box 2 in section 2.2, LinkedIn is a professional network, whereas sites such as Facebook are largely used for making social connections. Twitter, in contrast, may be used for professional or social purposes. Thus, the reason why applicants want to access a particular website has important implications for an organisation that is recruiting (Davison, Maraist and Bing, 2011). In this context, LinkedIn is therefore probably more effective than a social space such as Facebook.

The question of attracting a diverse range of candidates had been considered by our case study organisations. In particular, Monmouthshire County Council – which has a public sector equality duty (PSED) under the Equality Act to promote equality in the workplace – was keen to ensure that its recruitment approach is fair. For this reason, it does not use social media as a stand-alone recruitment tool, but in combination with other avenues, such as its website, press

advertisements and notices in targeted journals. None of our case study organisations used social media tools as a lone means of recruiting, as they were aware of the need to ensure a fair approach to recruitment in the first instance.

5.5 Negative online conduct and brand squatting

Although social media can generate positive content on the internet, which helps companies to foster their corporate image, it also provides a platform for criticism and negative remarks, which can spread quickly and easily. Since becoming active on social media platforms, G4S has experienced a range of new challenges, such as how to deal with false allegations made on websites frequented by high numbers of users. Although the company has had positive experiences in terms of asking users to correct material, it stresses the importance of frequently monitoring what is being said on social media sites.

Another issue that arose for G4S when setting up social media profiles was that of needing to merge all existing company profiles, as well as to delete unauthorised groups and accounts that were using the company name or logo. When setting up its Facebook page, for example, G4S had to enter a consultation process with around 120 other groups also labelled as G4S (often set up by other employees). This phenomenon, known as identity theft in the case of individuals, is labelled 'brand squatting' in the corporate sphere. In some cases, however, this may not be intentional, but the result of a group of employees setting up an organisational sporting or recreational club, for example.

5.6 Legal Risks

As the practice of recruiting using SNSs is a relatively new one, its implications are largely untested legally. However, given the wide variety of information employers can freely access online, as well as its permanence, there are clearly a variety of grounds on which candidates could challenge the practice. As Brown and Vaughn (2011) point out:

"The information available through SNSs introduces a series of unique legal issues and challenges. Social networking sites easily allow the potential for individual biases to affect hiring and screening decisions ... Employers are not currently required to disclose what information on an SNS was used in making screening decisions, which may allow managers to discriminate against candidates." (Brown and Vaughn, 2011)

The main risks of informal SNS searches explored in the literature are:

- the accuracy of online information used in HR decisions;
- perceptions of invasion of applicant privacy;
- variability in type and amount of information available across an applicant pool and the equality issues this raises;
- lack of clearly identifiable theoretical constructs used in the screening process, and
- the absence of data to support that the information used in screening is job relevant (Brown and Vaughn 2011).

These issues are addressed below.

5.6.1 Accuracy of information and defamation of character

If applicants are turned down on the basis of inaccurate information, particularly if obtained without their consent, employers may be open to legal challenge. Davison et al (2012) argue: "we believe that Internet screening for deviance or criminality could result in employee rights violations or possible lawsuits, if it were later determined that such information was relied upon erroneously". Another issue is potential defamation of character via online postings from third parties: "defamation of character could be a problem if websites contain inaccurate and libellous information, which is a major legal concern with traditional background checks" (Davison et al, 2012).

5.6.2 Privacy

Obtaining information via SNSs may be classed as an invasion of applicants' privacy, particularly if carried out without their knowledge or consent (Davison et al, 2012). However, several authors highlight the fact that the legal implications of applicant privacy in this area have not been fully clarified in the law. They point to a range of issues that any judgements on this matter would need to resolve: "Whether searching a website for information on a job applicant is unreasonable has not yet been determined by the courts. A court's ruling would likely be based in part on the job-relevance of the information obtained" (Davison et al, 2012). Further, Clark and Roberts (2010) state:

"It is unclear how privacy laws will be interpreted when it comes to information an individual posts on a SNS. Key legal questions are whether the individual consented to the information being made available to everyone, whether the information is relevant to the employment decision, and whether the information falls within a protected realm of personal privacy even if a person makes the information available to many people or does not use provided privacy settings." (Clark and Roberts, 2010)

Clark and Roberts (2010) also highlight the doubtful admissibility of information about crimes or errors that an individual committed while they were still a minor.

While these privacy questions remain unresolved, there is relevant case law in many jurisdictions and organisations operating transnationally will need to be vigilant on this. For example, the EU 1995 Data Protection Directive restricts commercial use of personal data. Under the Directive, any data that identifies individuals is 'personal' unless that data is made anonymous. Davison et al (2012) point out that the EU has recently ruled that social networks are also subject to this regulation: "While not initially intended to apply to HR personnel, the Directive complicates internet screening of applicants. In particular, it requires explicit permission to search be given by European applicants" (Davison et al, 2012).

In addition, organisations may wish to consider their image and the possible reactions of their applicants to screening of this kind. Davison et al (2012) point out that:

“Good applicants might be driven away from the firm if they find out that personal sites are being reviewed ... Indeed, a survey by Deloitte found that 53 per cent of the employee respondents thought that social networking sites were not their employers’ business.” (Davison et al, 2012)

Moreover, the authors also comment on potential privacy and security issues which may arise when applicants post their résumés on job boards:

“An applicant’s name, address, phone number, education, employment history, salary requirements, references, to name a few, are on display for anyone to see. Once this information is posted, others could use it for unethical purposes.” (Davison et al, 2012)

In a similar vein, despite data protection laws (such as the UK’s 1998 Data Protection Act), applicants’ CVs and personal information might find their way to potential employers through a variety of ways, including the illegal dissemination of such data, for example as a result of an individual illegally selling personal data. In this respect, job seekers should be aware that firms might be able to match pre-application and application data (Searle, 2006).

Searle (2006) more generally refers to an “insidious growth in the use of surveillance techniques to gather information about applicants”, not only limited to the use of job boards. As the author argues, surveillance methods are constantly advancing and their application is gaining growing acceptance in everyday life, including in recruitment processes in which they can help to identify both suitable and unsuitable candidates.

None of the case study organisations in our research had experienced any particular difficulties in this area, mainly because they did not review candidates’ social networking sites as a matter of routine – with the exception of G4S, where this practice was more common. However, they were aware of data protection issues insofar as they knew about the legislation in this area. However, as they had not encountered any such problems, this issue was not seen as something that needed to be addressed in terms of policy or guidance.

5.6.3 Equality and diversity

Equality and diversity practice tends to restrict hiring managers’ access to demographic information about applicants which is considered irrelevant to their ability to do the job and/or could lead to discrimination. Legislation in many countries highlights particular ‘protected classes’ who could be subject to this kind of discrimination. This can include information on gender, ethnicity, age, religion, national origin, sexual orientation and disability status (Brown and Vaughn, 2011). Other attributes – such as political affiliations or physical appearance – tend to fall outside of legally protected classes but may still unfairly bias hiring decisions.

While good practice in current hiring practices recommends that information on such characteristics be hidden from recruiters – at least at the early stages of the selection process – the opportunity for employers to carry out informal, undocumented online searches provides an easy way of circumventing these standards. Information collected via online searches and SNSs theoretically enables employers to identify (either intentionally or unintentionally) a wide

variety of 'protected class' characteristics, giving them access to photos of an applicant, their online conversations, their membership of online communities and much else. Brown and Vaughn (2011) point out that this situation creates a high risk of "undocumented discriminatory actions".

If employers are forced to become more open in their use of online screening, this might feasibly lead to legal actions. The situation for organisations operating in multiple jurisdictions will be more complicated, as protected classes and discrimination laws will vary by country (Davison et al 2012).

The case study organisations in this research were aware of the possibility of knowing too much about candidates, which could later form the basis of a discrimination claim (for example, an employee held certain political or religious beliefs, which an employer found out about via an SNS subsequently, at the recruitment stage; if that employer at some later point wished to dismiss the employee on competency grounds, the employee might argue discrimination, based on the fact that the employer was aware of their political or religious beliefs). None of the case study organisations had had this or any similar experience, however.

5.6.4 Other legal issues

If they are challenged on a legal basis, employers will need to consider the justifications for the job relevance of any information obtained through online screening. Brown and Vaughn (2011) point to the need for "well-documented evidence for validity" to back up information used in hiring decisions.

Another element of good recruitment practice potentially violated by the use of online screening is the requirement that – as far as possible – employers collect standardised information for all applicants. However, given that the amount of online information available will vary widely between individual candidates, this will be much harder for employers to achieve when screening online (Brown and Vaughn, 2011). This will inevitably raise questions about how information can be fairly compared.

Furthermore, employers may need to consider the balance between being cautious in their use of online screening and the significance of the information they might uncover. Davison et al (2012) point out that if an employer discovers negative information about the job applicant using an online search, but decides to ignore the information and hire the individual anyway, then the employer could be sued for negligent hiring if the employee later harms a third party such as a customer.

6 Is a policy necessary?

Given the range of issues outlined above, one might reasonably expect organisations which are currently using social media as part of their recruitment strategies to have planned on introducing some form of policy in this area. However, the incidence of policy on this seems to be limited at present. Davison et al (2012) point out that:

“Until very recently, there has been little guidance for HR professionals in dealing with these emerging Internet screening practices ... Thus, managers and HR professionals are using these technologies with limited policy guidance in place. The size of this problem is illustrated by a SHRM (2008) survey, which found that 72 per cent of organizations (out of the 571 surveyed) do not have a formal or informal policy about using websites for applicant screening. Perhaps even more troubling is SHRM’s finding that 89 per cent of organizations did not even plan to implement a policy.” (Davison et al, 2012)

Davison et al (2012) recommend the use of specific policies to address the risks associated with online recruitment. The literature highlights some of the most significant questions that these kinds of policies will need to address.

The use of screening and its risks and benefits is the issue most frequently raised. Davison, Maraist and Bing (2011) encourage employers to review their procedures in this area and exercise care:

“At this time, we are cautious about the use of this medium for gathering information in a selection context unless it can be done in a manner that follows best selection practices and conforms to our current standards of testing and assessment.” (Davison, Maraist and Bing, 2011)

They point out that most organisations do not have these kinds of policies in place and that there is little scientific research available to serve as guidance.

One issue that a policy could address, for example, would be procedures around the use of social media tools and particularly password protocols to ensure that organisations are not vulnerable to a situation in which one key member of staff holds all the passwords to social networking sites.

An important, and unresolved, question for employers is whether to disclose the practice of screening via SNSs to applicants. As Brown and Vaughn (2011) point out:

“Doing so may cause applicants to pre-emptively alter their profiles in a socially desirable way, thus reducing access to potentially helpful information. However, failure to do so may be perceived by applicants learning of this practice at a later time as an unfair hiring procedure or an invasion of privacy.” (Brown and Vaughn, 2011)

Davison et al (2012) believe employers should focus more on weighing up the risks and benefits of SNS screening and argue that, in any case, it should not be used as a substitute for traditional background checks. They advocate a ‘four

level' approach to assessing the risks, with the first two focusing on positive information and the higher-risk approaches focusing on negative information.

- The least risky approach would refer only to sites specifically referred to in the applicant's application materials, for example professional SNS sites such as LinkedIn.
- A second level, possibly for positions of greater importance, would include postings on any official blog from previous employment or an applicant's personal website (the assumption is that these postings would be intentional by the applicant).
- The third and fourth levels would be more focused on checking for negative information, but would likely only be justifiable for sensitive positions, where knowledge of the applicant's private habits and judgements could be proved significant. This type of screening would encompass more 'personal' sites, such as Facebook. As the authors point out, "in practice, searches on Facebook and related sites will be likely to uncover negative things about the applicant" (Davison et al 2012). As such, this approach is legally more open to challenge as the job relevance of information obtained on such sites could be in question.
- The fourth – and most legally risky – level of internet search would be postings of third parties about the applicant. The authors argue "this kind of internet search should be rare at best, and only for the most critical and sensitive positions, because of the concerns cited previously in regard to accuracy of information, defamation and job relevance" (Davison et al 2012).

The 2013 Acas online panel survey of HR decision makers found that the majority of respondents did *not* have a formal policy covering the use of social media when recruiting staff – 55 per cent of respondents did not have a policy, compared with 37 per cent who did (9 per cent did not know or could not remember).

None of the case study organisations in our research had a specific policy in place for using social media for recruitment, although they did have policies on the use of social media and online conduct in general. Their reasoning here was that they were learning as they went along, and wanted to be able to respond quickly to situations as they arose. G4S was the organisation that had the most formalised procedures around recruiting using SNS, largely due to its particular strategy and the volume of recruitment that it undertakes.

For Monmouthshire County Council, the rationale for not having a specific policy on using social media to recruit was that the organisation did not want to restrict its actions by drawing up a policy in what was seen to be a fast-moving world. And whilst it does not rule out putting in place some kind of policy, this would probably take the form of guidance.

"We wouldn't want to over-prescribe procedure in a policy, as it would stop that experimental element in using social media. It seems silly to make too much of a strategy around how we recruit on social media, just because it's new and it's changing so quickly. Besides, it's so embedded in what we do, that it's just a business tool now – we don't feel that we need to have specific departmental written strategies on using social media."

Digital and Social Media Manager, Monmouthshire County Council

7 Conclusions and future trends

Perhaps the defining characteristic of social media is the speed at which they develop. It is therefore difficult to predict the future of any given tool – in five years' time, the sites which are currently household names may have been supplanted by media that have yet to be invented. The recruitment team at Pets at Home acknowledges this trend:

"When we first developed the careers site, none of this stuff existed. We try to constantly keep up to date. Some things take off, some don't – it's difficult to know what will be the next big thing."

People Director, Pets at Home

One thing that seems likely, however, is that an increasing amount of social media traffic will go through mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets. For this reason, the recruitment team at Pets at Home is looking at making sure that its careers page is mobile-friendly, including the use of Quick Response (QR) codes¹, in order to make access easier. Given the growth of this type of mobile technology, organisations should consider ensuring that their SNSs are accessible on these platforms.

When asked about future use of social media in recruitment, a majority of respondents to the 2013 Acas online panel survey of HR decision makers (42 per cent) said that they would make greater use of these types of tools in the future. A further 32 per cent said that they would continue with around the same amount of use, while only one per cent said that they would decrease their use of social media tools in recruitment. Around a quarter of respondents, however, were undecided regarding their future use of these types of tools in the recruitment process.

7.1 Changing the role of HR?

Because social media tools tend to encourage fast and direct communication between individuals one might reasonably question whether their use signals a step-change for the recruitment practices within organisations. Specifically, if job applications are being advertised via social media sites and potential applicants have the opportunity to communicate directly with an organisation, rather than going through more usual HR channels, might the traditional functions of the HR department risk becoming superfluous?

Our case study organisations considered this question, and all felt that there was no particular threat to HR. At Pets at Home, for example, the recruitment team felt that there was no danger that its role would be undermined in any way by the

¹ A QR code is a two-dimensional barcode that consists of black modules (square dots) arranged in a square grid on a white background which was first designed for use in the automotive industry in Japan. The QR Code system is also now used outside of the automotive industry; smartphones with a QR-code scanner application can be used to read a QR code and direct the phone's browser to a website.

use of social media, primarily because they manage the whole recruitment process themselves; social media is another tool for them to use, rather than an alternative recruitment channel. Similarly, at Monmouthshire County Council, the HR department was reported to be very open to new ways of doing things, and had been keen to embrace social media in recruitment. HR also realised that social media is a good way of raising their profile and encouraging feedback.

"It's great for personnel to see that what they're doing is interesting to people, creating an online buzz and getting people chatting. That sort of feedback is really useful."

Digital and Social Media Manager, Monmouthshire County Council

Overall, it is clear that the use of social media for recruitment purposes is increasing, as companies experiment with new tools like LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter and the rest. There is a wide variety of practice in the use of social media tools for recruitment. Use depends on factors such as company size and sector as well as the type of employee whom the employer is trying to reach. Many organisations are experimenting with these tools, which, being relatively new, are moving forward on a trial and error basis.

Triggers for using social media for recruitment include: operating within an environment in which competitors are using these tools (e.g. retail); wanting to target particular groups of people, particularly in the case of senior jobs; and linking the use of social media to brand and awareness-building. Social media tools are usually used in combination with more traditional recruitment strategies rather than substituting for these.

There are a range of benefits available to employers using social media for recruitment purposes, centring on cost and time savings. Organisations that use tools such as LinkedIn for recruiting to senior and strategic positions instead of using agencies or head-hunters are finding that this results in significant cost savings. Furthermore, social media can help organisations to target their recruitment more accurately, present a realistic picture of their workplace, and reach a wider range of potential candidates. This combination of reach that is at the same time wider and more targeted is very interesting for recruiting organisations.

Social media can also help companies to increase brand-awareness and two-way communication with potential candidates, fostering realistic expectations on the part of potential candidates. It can also mean that some individuals can be deterred from applying at an earlier stage, as they are able to gain a realistic impression of an organisation before starting the application process. This saves time and money for both the individual and the company.

There are also, however, a number of potential risks and costs associated with the use of social media for recruitment. There is the actual cost of dedicating resources to social media sites, as traffic can be significant and unpredictable. There are also issues surrounding the accuracy of the information gained by the use of social media tools – there is no guarantee that the information that individuals, or others, post on their SNSs is accurate.

There are also issues around the depth of the applicant pool that social media tools can access, giving rise to potential problems around diversity and discrimination, particularly in terms of reaching older candidates and those who are not as comfortable with using computers. This means that there are a number of legal aspects that employers should consider when thinking about using social media tools for recruitment. These include difficulties arising from HR decisions based on inaccurate information, issues related to employee privacy, equality and diversity and the use of standardised information about candidates. Furthermore, given the diversity of information about individuals available on social networking sites, it is difficult to see how this can be fairly compared.

8 Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Consider the potential issues surrounding the use of social media

While it is advisable for organisations to have in place a policy on employee conduct and social media, it is less clear whether there needs to be a specific policy to cover social media during recruitment, largely as this is a fast-moving world and the policy could quickly become out of date. Nevertheless, it is advisable to consider potential legal issues, particularly those surrounding data protection and privacy, even if these have not as yet been an issue to contend with. Social networking considerations could, for example, potentially be added to standard recruitment policies.

Recommendation 2: Seek to verify information on applicants' SNSs through other means

If employers do access potential employees' SNSs, it should be borne in mind that the information there may not be accurate – at the least, it may be a site created by the applicant for job application purposes. If employers do decide to access potential employees' SNSs, it is advisable to inform individuals beforehand and to treat all individuals in the same way. It is also advisable to consider data protection and privacy issues beforehand.

Recommendation 3: Do not over-invest in social media tools

It is wise to adopt a fairly cautious approach in terms of investment in social media tools, as it is difficult to predict which tools will become popular and which will become obsolete. Close monitoring of trends is advisable. Social networking tools cannot entirely replace face-to-face contact during the recruitment process.

Recommendation 4: Use social media tools as part of a wider recruitment strategy

In order to ensure that the initial search for applicants is conducted as widely as possible, it is recommended that SNSs should be used in conjunction with other, more traditional, forms of recruitment. This will ensure that candidates who are less comfortable with or lack access to social media are not excluded.

Recommendation 5: SMEs should consider building some presence on SNSs

SMEs should consider engaging with social media tools to some extent, given how cost-effective they can be – setting up a Facebook page and a LinkedIn profile is relatively easy and low-cost, as is maintaining some sort of profile on Twitter. SMEs are unlikely to experience the volume of traffic on these sites that larger organisations may need to contend with, which means that they are unlikely to need an overly large amount of maintenance.

Recommendation 6: Ensure that SNSs are kept up to date

Using SNSs for recruitment purposes requires site maintenance, in order to ensure that queries are answered relatively promptly and sites are updated

regularly. It is advisable to consider how to resource this, possibly by making it a component of someone's job. Further, although SNSs develop quickly, and those using them expect a rapid response to their queries, it may be worth considering letting people know that their queries will be dealt with within a set period of time (e.g. 24 or 48 hours), rather than immediately. SMEs will have fewer resources to devote to social media sites, although the traffic that they will be required to deal with is likely to be of a lower volume.

Recommendation 7: Provide training and information for those involved in using SNSs for recruitment

Employers are advised to provide relevant training and information for managers that are involved in SNSs for recruitment purposes. In particular, it is important to ensure that all information gleaned about candidates is accurate, and that information is handled in a responsible way.

Recommendation 8: Keep SNSs activity for recruitment simple and secure

In order to ensure that applicants are not put off by online recruitment, employers may want to focus on making the process as simple as possible and highlight the security of applicants' data and information.

Recommendation 9: Do not lose control of the security of SNSs

It is easy for organisations to lose control of media such as Twitter – it is possible for individual employees to hold access codes that no other company representative has. It is therefore advisable to put into place protocols relating to passwords and accounts so that individual employees are not the sole guardians of security information.

Recommendation 10: Have a relaxed and flexible attitude

Organisations should remember that social media is an informal medium and its use is relatively relaxed. In this context, innovation and an open mind are crucial –organisations wishing to use social media should not be afraid to engage.

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10 Appendix 1: Profiles of organisations contacted for this research

10.1 Pets at Home

Pets at Home is the UK's largest pet specialist retailer, with 336 stores around the country. It sells a wide range of pet-related products and pets. It has around 6,000 staff and is a rapidly expanding business, opening around 30 stores a year. The company has a support office in Handforth, Wilmslow, employing around 200 people, and two distribution centres – one in Stoke, with around 400 employees, and one in Northampton, with around 200 employees.

The workforce is relatively young; the average age is around 30. The majority of employees work in the company's stores, with each store employing around 15-20 employees (the company uses the term colleagues for store staff). The workforce is largely part-time and predominantly female. Labour turnover is just under 17 per cent, which is low for the retail sector.

Employees are encouraged to bring their pets to work, and 92 per cent of the workforce own pets. The company has won a number of awards, coming second in the Sunday Times *Top Big Companies to Work For* award in 2012, receiving the top three star rating. The company's rating for this award has improved each year.

10.1.1 Social media and Pets at Home

Pets at Home has a company Facebook page, and individual stores are also in the process of setting up their own Facebook pages. These pages are used to post information about the company, give customers information about products, and give a flavour of what it is like to work at Pets at Home.

Individual store Facebook pages are also used to send out up-to-date information to employees, for example about shift requirements. For customers, stores use their Facebook sites to flag up specific information and events, including weekend workshops on pet care – hamster workshops, for example, are popular.

Individual managers, including the HR team, have their own LinkedIn profiles, although there is no company-specific LinkedIn account.

There is also a Pets at Home Twitter account, which gives out information about the organisation and responds to customer queries. The People Director has his own Twitter account.

Overall, Pets at Home encourages the use of social media in the business, believing that it is a valuable tool for communication. The company has a social media policy, which states that employees should act responsibly around social media, for example not posting derogatory comments. It does, however, permit employees to access social media sites during working time.

This policy of employee trust around social media works well – there have been isolated issues around inappropriate use of Facebook by employees, but this has been dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

10.1.2 Using social media in recruitment

Pets at Home has been using Facebook and LinkedIn for recruitment purposes for around two to three years. The trigger was a feeling that social media was something that should be looked into as a developing area, and the company was aware that other retailers were using social media in recruitment.

Although Pets at Home has a policy on the use of social media, there is no company policy on the use of social media in recruitment. Recruitment is carried out by the Pets at Home HR function at Handforth, covering all the company's stores and administrative centres. The two main social media tools used for recruitment are Facebook, primarily for recruiting store staff, and LinkedIn, primarily for senior and technical staff. Twitter is also used to some extent, although not systematically. Pets at Home's company Twitter account is not used for recruitment purposes, but the People Director will tweet vacancies occasionally from his Twitter account.

Facebook

Pets at Home has a company Facebook page, on which it publishes information that is relevant to the company. If, for example, it opens a new store, it would post a photo of the new team. The company uses Facebook in this way to attract applicants, usually for jobs in its stores. Any vacancies are posted on the site and a link will then take people through to the company's separate careers site.

Pets at Home uses a tool called web-cruit, which allows more functionality with reference to Facebook. At the moment, around 20 of its job profiles feed through to Facebook, but in reality, it has around 120 job profiles, so it is looking to develop this. The general philosophy is to attract potential candidates to the Pets at Home website and give them a flavour of the company's culture and what it would be like to work there.

Although engagement of potential candidates in this way has now become routine, it is difficult to say whether Pets at Home has actually hired someone through Facebook, as candidates are not able to apply directly through Facebook – the link on the Facebook page takes candidates through to the careers page, from which an application can be submitted. The company does ask candidates where they saw the job vacancy, but most will refer to the careers site, which may or may not have been accessed through a link from the company's Facebook site.

Overall, when recruiting employees for its stores, Pets at Home uses Facebook as one of many tools, which include placing advertisements on its website, using specialist jobs sites, putting up notices in stores, and using job centres.

LinkedIn

Pets at Home uses LinkedIn to recruit senior and technical employees, primarily through searching in the style of headhunting. The recruitment team also places vacancy postings on their LinkedIn accounts. LinkedIn is used as part of a range of recruitment tools, which includes advertisements in specialist journals and the press.

Pets at Home does not use the LinkedIn recruiter package, believing that the recruitment team can generate enough contacts without it. The recruitment team has become quite adept at using LinkedIn as a recruitment tool. The team also connects with recruitment agencies in order to broaden its contact network.

So far, Pets at Home has recruited a handful of employees through LinkedIn and this is growing. For example, it has just appointed a Head of Internal Audit through LinkedIn. It would seem that this is a growing area, as the recruitment team has noticed that an increasing number of people are contacting them through LinkedIn, partly due, they believe, to the company's increasing profile as a good employer. If there is no immediate suitable vacancy, the team keeps potential applicants on file for future vacancies as they arise.

10.1.3 Further selection

Pets at Home does not use either Facebook or LinkedIn to search for further information about job applicants. In the case of LinkedIn, the recruitment team stressed that there is no point in engaging in any further checking out of applicants, as LinkedIn provides all the information available on individuals when profiles are accessed.

In the case of Facebook, there is no systematic checking out of candidates, partly due to the fact that Pets at Home does not have the capacity to do this – the company recruits around 1,200 employees per year. If there are hundreds of applicants per vacancy, there is no capacity to carry out additional checks on all candidates. Further, Pets at Home does not believe that this is necessary or relevant.

The company will, however, think about using Facebook to check on individuals if it believes that there is a specific issue that needs to be addressed.

10.1.4 The benefits of social media

For Pets at Home, the main benefits of using social media for recruitment are being able to have access to a wider pool of people, and as a result of that, being able to reduce costs.

There is also a brand-building element, which is difficult to quantify. On Facebook for example, people can 'like' or share vacancy posts, even if they are not personally going to apply for the job. This raises the overall profile and public awareness of the company.

10.1.5 The costs of social media

The main cost associated with the use of social media in the context of recruitment is the cost of the resource that needs to be dedicated to dealing with applications and queries. The company's Facebook and Twitter accounts in particular need close monitoring, particularly as the expectation with social media is that a response to a query will be relatively immediate. For example, Pets at Home receives a large number of queries from job applications through its Facebook site – the company has over 27,000 Friends on its main Facebook site, and so careful management of this is needed and it can be difficult to predict how much resource will be needed.

One other aspect of social media, related to ease of communication, is the fact that it can considerably increase the volume of responses to vacancy advertisements. This in turn means that it is more time-consuming to manage the number of replies to advertisements.

10.1.6 The role of HR

The recruitment team feels that there is no danger that its role will be undermined in any way by the use of social media. This is primarily because they manage the whole recruitment process themselves, and so social media is another tool for them to use, rather than an alternative recruitment channel.

If line managers have a LinkedIn profile, the recruitment team may ask them to post out vacancies, particularly for specialist positions, but all applications will come through HR.

10.1.7 The future

Pets at Home sees the future very much in terms of the continuing growth of social media. The company expects to use social media more in recruitment in the coming years, and through a variety of channels. At present, 20 per cent of the traffic on the Pets at Home careers site is already from mobile devices such as phones and tablets. It is expected that in particular, access from tablets such as iPads will increase in the future, as it is more feasible in practical terms (i.e. a bigger screen) to use tablets to apply for a job than it is to use a mobile phone. For this reason, the recruitment team is looking at making sure that its careers page is mobile-friendly, in order to make access easier.

The recruitment team emphasises the fast-moving nature of social media and the need to keep abreast of developments.

In the shorter term, Pets at Home is currently looking at whether it should have a careers element on its main Facebook page. It may also monitor how job applicants come through Facebook in more detail in the future. The company is constantly monitoring the development of social media, and thinking about ways to innovate. For example, the recruitment team is thinking possibly about offering employees a small incentive to share vacancies on their Facebook pages, which would give huge reach at minimal cost.

10.2 G4S

G4S is the world's largest security group, currently employing more than 660,000 staff across 125 countries. The group is organised into five regional clusters, with headquarters in Crawley, West Sussex. Company HR strategies and recommendations for its operations in different regions are formulated at head office and then implemented in accordance with specific regional and national requirements. This decentralised human resource management approach allows G4S to identify and disseminate good practice within the company which can then be transferred to different settings. This also applies to the company's approach to social media: while broad guidelines and strategies are formulated centrally, these take account of specific local requirements, such as differences in the extent of the use of different social media tools in different regions of the world.

10.2.1 Social media at G4S

G4S has an inclusive attitude towards the use of social media amongst its workforce. It is keen to involve employees in the company's social media activities, generating content and taking ownership of the company's activities. They feel this has become an important aspect of promoting the brand.

Nevertheless, the company has established clear guidelines concerning the online conduct of their current staff, which are updated on a regular basis.

G4S advises its employees to understand privacy settings, stay within legal boundaries, respect the terms of their employment contract and be a "good online citizen". The company is currently planning on setting up tools which will allow current employees to further engage in generating social media content.

G4S has, on occasion, needed to intervene in the social media conduct of some employees in isolated cases. This highlights the importance of regularly monitoring the content made available on corporate social media platforms.

10.2.2 Social media in the recruitment process

For a number of years, G4S has been pro-actively attracting new employees, as well as strengthening its reputation as an employer, using social media tools. Social media is an increasingly important aspect of its recruitment strategies, and the company has won a number of awards for this. In 2012 for example, G4S won an award for Best International/Global Recruitment Strategy, and the company's global head of resourcing was voted Online Recruitment Industry Personality of the Year 2011. G4S runs a small team involved in social media activities for recruitment purposes, consisting of the head of resourcing, the resourcing and community manager and a resourcing team administrator.

Overall, the social media activities of G4S focus mostly on recruitment rather than promoting their products and services. The company runs its own corporate recruitment website: the G4S Global Careers Centre. This website closely follows both the design and functions of leading social media websites. Applicants set up an online profile via the site and can use this to join online discussions, share content and link to their other social media profiles. Profiles can also be scanned using the site's job matching functions so that suitable local vacancies can be flagged up to the applicant. The website was initially set up in order to give users a consistent initial experience, centralising and streamlining a range of processes that were formerly in place.

G4S is keen to promote good practice across its different regional groups and tries to highlight the value of social media to its different regional operations, which helps to counter any potential internal resistance to e-recruitment.

In addition to this, the company makes extensive use of social media websites such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter as part of the recruitment process. While Facebook offers access to a mass audience, LinkedIn allows the company to target recruitment for senior level positions and also to engage with passive candidates currently not actively seeking employment. However, as the company's resourcing and community manager emphasises, using G4S's own

technology and its branded environment is of most benefit to the company and these sites aim to direct users to the online company Careers Centre.

The company closely monitors its social media profile. It benchmarks its presence on sites such as Facebook or LinkedIn against a range of similarly sized companies. They also closely monitor how users are engaging with social media platforms. Responsiveness is seen as key to effective use of social media, with the willingness to adapt in light of user requests and prompt engagement with those who use the sites to raise questions.

10.2.3 The benefits of social media

The use of social media in recruitment has resulted in a number of direct and indirect benefits for G4S, in terms of cost savings, building trust and engagement with the brand, and streamlining selection.

Cost saving

G4S's corporate recruitment website plays an important role in saving on recruitment costs. According to the company's global head of resourcing, the site has helped to save £1 million in the UK during its first year and by the end of 2013 will start saving several million pounds globally each year.

Generating traffic and building trust and engagement

In addition to the cost-saving aspect of using social media in recruitment, G4S notes two other major benefits of using social media for recruitment purposes. Firstly, social media helps to strengthen brand image and secondly, it generates traffic onto G4S's corporate career website. As G4S recruits around 250,000 staff a year, it is particularly important for it to promote its employer image and generate interest in its work, an aspect to which social media activities can contribute significantly. An important focus for the company's online approach is therefore the question of how social media can support the G4S Career Centre, the company's corporate recruitment website.

User experience and efficiency of selection

From a user perspective, the company wants to ensure a positive candidate experience. G4S specifies that this applies not only to applicants but also to users interested in the company's activities more generally. In this context, its head of resourcing refers to people 'in the process of engagement', i.e. those who want to gain an overview of the activities in which G4S is involved. This assumption is supported by statistics from the company's Facebook page, which shows that many accessing the site may not be primarily interested in applying for a job, but simply want to get to know the company better. This has an important implication for G4S: its social media presence essentially offers a platform for both attracting and deterring potential applicants by giving a more accurate picture of what working at G4S entails. This might not always correspond to applicants' previous perceptions.

For G4S, social media therefore plays an important role in assisting self-selection of candidates which in turn can have a significant impact on the efficiency of the company's recruitment processes.

10.2.4 The costs of social media

Despite the benefits described above, there are also a number of costs and risks likely to be associated to the use of social media in the recruitment process. In the case of G4S, the main drawbacks include the resource needed to follow up and monitor social media sites, and dealing with negative and false material posted on the sites.

Follow up and monitoring

G4S believes that social media activities need to be supported on a day-to-day basis, not only to generate content and engage users but also to oversee the quality of content on its sites. Interviewees pointed out that a social media site which is regularly updated and moderated reduces the risk of users posting negative or irrelevant comments.

In this respect, the G4S team stresses that enterprises wanting to reap the benefits of social media will need to formulate objectives which they are trying to reach with the help of social media and ultimately develop a strategy for their social media activities.

Costs

While setting up most online content is free, interviewees did point out that the company had needed to invest resources into social media. This was largely around ensuring enough staff time could be devoted to monitoring sites, and also in providing training for managers who would be operating aspects of the online content. The use of monitoring software also requires investment - in both equipment and qualified staff to operate it.

Online criticism and 'brand squatting'

Although social media can generate positive content, helping companies to foster their corporate image, it also provides space for criticism and negative remarks, which can spread quickly and easily on the internet. Since becoming active on social media platforms, G4S has experienced a range of new challenges, such as how to deal with false allegations made on websites frequented by high numbers of users. Nevertheless, the company says that it has had positive experiences in terms of asking users to correct material. However, it stresses the importance of frequently monitoring what is being said about the company on social media sites.

Another issue that arose when setting up social media profiles was that of needing to merge all existing company profiles as well as delete unauthorised groups and accounts that were using the company name or logo. When setting up its Facebook page, for example, G4S had to enter a consultation process with around 120 other groups also labelled as G4S (often set up by other employees).

This phenomenon, known as identity theft in the case of individuals, is labelled 'brand squatting' in the corporate sphere.

10.2.5 The role of HR

As a company which is heavily involved in the recruitment of employees (terming itself 'a people business'), G4S has closely evaluated the use of recruitment practices, including social media activities, and their impact on the company's performance.

In addition to this, as a broad underlying approach for its current social media activities, the company states that it seeks to identify enthusiasm for social media activities and match resources to this. For example, if the company discovers that a certain social media activity generates a lot of positive feedback, it will launch a number of similar activities. At the same time, G4S tries to vary its activities and, in order to keep up to date with the social media activities of its competitors, consults around 40 competitor social media websites on a regular basis.

Privacy and screening

The organisation takes the view that accessing any information published by applicants and freely accessible online is acceptable. The onus is therefore on applicants to ensure that information they do not wish to appear is kept private. However, the screening of potential applicants is standardised as far as possible, with focus restricted to job-relevant questions.

10.2.6 The future - building broader engagement

G4S is aware that not all users visiting its social media websites are currently seeking a position at G4S, although some might be in the process of informing themselves about the company in order to apply at a later stage. The company also has an interest in informing the broader public about its activities and generating and reinforcing a strong corporate image. In this respect, social media has been described as a great way of 'humanising the brand' and building engagement in a broader sense.

10.2.7 Lessons for other organisations

When asked what they viewed as the most important lessons from their social media experience for other organisations looking at this recruitment method, the following points were raised:

- Companies should have a clear idea of what they want to gain from using social media and should understand the audience they wish to reach.
- Where possible, companies should put together a strategic plan for using social media for recruitment, focusing on the business case.
- Seek the necessary expertise to develop an effective social media platform.
- Analytics can be a useful tool, as can opportunities for user feedback. Social media platforms need to be developed according to what proves most demonstrably effective in reaching a company's target audience.

- Companies should view their use of social media as an ongoing process and continue innovating and developing their presence. If employers do not continually *engage* with potential candidates, this reduces the attractiveness of the organisation.

10.3 Monmouthshire County Council

Monmouthshire County Council employs around 4,500 staff in Monmouthshire. Employees include administrative staff, teachers and service workers such as refuse collectors and workers in leisure centres. Overall, the main focus for the Council is to improve life for the inhabitants of Monmouthshire. Office staff work on the principle of 'agile working', which allows them to work from a variety of locations, including from home. This is based on hotdesking in the office, working on the principle of 'work is a thing that you do, not a place that you go'. There is a ratio for office workers of one desk per two employees, and this is reported to work well. For these staff, there are no fixed hours, although they are contracted to work 37.5 hours a week; customer-facing staff need to cover core times, however. The Council provides laptops and phones for staff who work flexibly, and all staff know how to look after their data, which is encrypted. The Council uses new technology as a tool to enable the workforce to work in this way.

Overall, staff turnover is low, largely as employees live locally and also due to the Council's flexible working policy, which is attractive to employees as it allows them to combine their work and private lives effectively.

10.3.1 Social media and Monmouthshire County Council

In 2011, the Council made the decision that all Council staff should have access to social media in order to enable them to interact with the community and be aware of what the community is saying.

As a consequence, the Council has a very open policy towards social media and encourages its use by all employees, including service workers. During a recent snowfall, for example, refuse collectors were able to send out pictures of road conditions and updates, which helped the public enormously in terms of being able to plan their journeys.

The Council does have a policy on employee use of social media, however, which warns employees of the possible dangers of misuse. It has a general code of conduct to which it expects staff to adhere, at work and online. There have been no particular problems with privacy to date, although the Council always advises its staff to check their privacy settings on their social media sites.

10.3.2 Using social media in recruitment

The Council does not have a standard policy on recruiting using social media and its activities in this area up until now have been based on a number of ad hoc projects, and at the search stage of the recruitment process. The Council feels that social media will always be an add-on in terms of recruitment: it would not use social media on its own for recruitment purposes, largely as it needs to ensure that it casts its net wide enough in terms of recruitment. The only occasion on which it might use social media channels alone would be for a social media vacancy in the Council, although this has not happened so far. Other

recruitment channels would include newspapers, specialist journals and the Council website.

The main social media tools used are YouTube, LinkedIn and Twitter. The Council does not use Facebook for recruitment purposes, although there is a Council Facebook page, which would carry some job advertisements. The Council Facebook page is conceived more as a social space.

YouTube

The first successful project, around two years ago, was the recruitment of a head of children's services. The Council approached its digital and social media manager to help with the recruitment, and it was decided that a series of videos should be made.

In total, four three-minute videos were made: with the head of social services; the current post holder; a colleague; and a social worker, in order to give a realistic picture of the job from a variety of different angles. Each participant talked about the job from their point of view. The videos were uploaded onto YouTube and embedded into the vacancy advertisement on the Council's website. They were also shared on LinkedIn and Twitter.

The Council received a lot of feedback on this, with many people saying that it gave them a really good feel of what it was like to work in the Council. All the shortlisted candidates said that this had been an element in their deciding to apply for the job. The successful candidate said that this was integral to their decision to apply.

This was carried out alongside the use of more traditional recruitment channels, such as newspaper advertisements and advertisements on the Council's website.

More recently, the Council has been recruiting for a head of children and young people, and used a blog to give information about what the job entailed, as well as a short video from the chief executive talking about the role. The feedback on this was also very positive.

LinkedIn

The Council posts many available vacancies in relevant LinkedIn groups. As the Council has not pursued any particular digital recruitment strategy, focusing instead on how to market specific jobs, a lot of thought goes in to how to target specific online groups. For example, teaching jobs might be more suited to advertisement through Twitter, whereas social care jobs are more suitable to being advertised on LinkedIn. This takes more management time and thought, but is thought to be worth it.

Adverts will be placed on LinkedIn through team members' individual accounts or through the Council's account.

Twitter

All jobs at the Council will be advertised on Twitter more or less as a matter of course. This also ensures that advertisements have a wider reach, as they can be re-tweeted by people who are not personally interested, but know people who might be. For example, one job, on connecting communities was reported to have been re-tweeted hundreds of times.

The Council's Twitter feed is not automated in terms of job vacancies, as the view is that posting vacancies needs some targeting.

10.3.3 Candidate selection

The Council does not have a formal procedure on checking candidates' profiles. The Council often already knows candidates as they are often part of the local community and it will often have been already talking to them online about local issues. It does not see this as a problem as yet, although it might look at this in the future. One way in which this may develop is for the interviewer to look at the candidate's online profile with them during the interview.

10.3.4 The benefits of social media

One of the main benefits of using social media in recruitment is the cost saving that this entails. Placing an advertisement on LinkedIn, for example, is much cheaper than using national newspapers. This can translate into significant savings on recruitment as a whole.

Social media also enables the Council to reach a pool of potential candidates that is at the same time wider and more targeted.

A further benefit of social media for the Council is that it helps staff to communicate in ways that are clearer and more succinct, which, for a Council, is an advantage, as communication and engagement with the community is a key issue for the Council.

There are also benefits for the leadership of the Council, which can reach out more easily to the community. For example, the Council leader will tweet regularly, which shows a human face and makes the Council feel more approachable for the community.

Finally, as a public sector organisation, the Council has more restrictions on the way that it operates, compared with private sector organisations, but that does not mean that it cannot innovate, and it believes that social media helps it to do this. The HR department at the Council is very open to new ways of doing things, and so is keen to embrace social media in recruitment. As a consequence, there is no hesitation on the part of the HR department in accepting social media as a tool. HR also realise that social media is a very good way of raising the Council's profile and encouraging feedback.

10.3.5 The risks and costs of social media

For the Council, there appear to be very few drawbacks to using social media. However, one issue is the fact that staff have to be trained in the use of social

media. Further, it takes staff time to monitor social media sites such as LinkedIn and Twitter.

In addition, it is important for organisations to keep control of the social media process – it is easy to give control of administering the Twitter account to employees, for example, but then it might be difficult to stop them if they behave in a negative way.

It should also be borne in mind that it is quite easy to make mistakes when using social media, especially tools such as Twitter, as things can happen so quickly. The Council has found that the best thing to do is to quickly tweet again and rectify it, and to be relatively relaxed about making mistakes.

10.3.6 The future

The Council is learning and experimenting with social media all the time. For example, it is looking into how it can work with local business to advertise their vacancies on the Council's website.

It does not rule out putting into place some kind of policy on using social media in recruitment, but this would probably take the form of guidance.

Overall, the Council envisages that using social media will become much more of a natural part of the job for all employees, probably within the space of a year or two.

In terms of advice for other organisations, the Council feels that it is important that social media strategy has buy-in from senior management – if the chief executive is enthusiastic, for example, this will cascade down throughout the whole organisation. The Council also believes that organisations need to be relaxed and embrace flexibility when using social media.

11 Appendix 2 – Online panel survey data¹

Introduction

In March 2013, Acas commissioned Accent – an independent market research agency – to undertake a short online panel survey of HR decision makers in Great Britain, to gather evidence on their use of social media when recruiting staff. The survey included questions on each respondent's use of social media for recruiting staff, including if and how they use it, along with if their organisation had a policy in place on the use of social media for recruitment, among other topics. The full headline survey results appear below.

Methodology and sample

The 17 question survey was designed collaboratively by Acas and IES; it was administered online by Accent. Respondents received an email with a URL which allowed them to complete the survey online. The survey was launched on the 7th March 2013 and was live for a period of seven days.

The sample was drawn by Accent from an existing panel of business contacts and consisted of HR decision makers across a range of sectors, industries, GB regions and organisational size. Rather than set quotas, best endeavours were made to include appropriate public and voluntary sector contacts (the risk being that these individuals would be more difficult to reach in sufficient number). The resulting achieved sample was found to be broadly representative of the population at large (as benchmarked against ONS business data) in terms of their geographic region, number of employees, sector and specific industry (although construction was somewhat under-represented and financial services a little over-represented in the final achieved sample). Note: The data presented in this appendix (and cited in the report) are unweighted.

Main findings

Below are presented the main findings for the social media in recruitment poll.

¹ This appendix and all analysis contained prepared by Acas' Research and Evaluation Section, May 2013.

Organisational position on using social media when recruiting staff

The survey asked respondents what their organisation's position was on the use of social media when recruiting staff. The results of this question can be seen in table A2.1 below

Table A2.1 Which of the following best describes your own organisation's position on using social media when recruiting staff?

	Frequency	Per cent (%)
We never use social media when recruiting staff	154	38.4
We make some use of social media when recruiting staff	143	35.7
We make extensive use of social media when recruiting staff	34	8.5
We do not currently use social media when recruiting staff, but are planning to in the future	62	15.5
Don't Know	8	2.0
Total	401	100.0

Source: Acas online panel survey of HR decision makers (2013) Base: 401 – All respondents

Why organisation never uses social media when recruiting staff

Respondents who indicated that their organisation never uses social media when recruiting staff were asked to indicate why this was; firstly they could select multiple reasons from a list, and those who had made more than one selection, were then asked to indicate which reason they felt was the most important.

Table A2.2 For which of the following reasons, if any, does your organisation never use social media when recruiting staff?

	Frequency	Per cent (%)
Preference for more traditional forms of recruitment	89	57.8
Satisfaction with current forms of recruitment	65	42.2
Company policy	29	18.8
Cost	6	3.9
Lack of technical expertise/capacity	13	8.4
No access to social media/no organisational social media profile	11	7.1
Privacy concerns	42	27.3
Concerns over exclusion of candidates	28	18.2
Have never thought about using social media when recruiting staff	37	24.0
Other	9	5.8

Source: Acas online panel survey of HR decision makers (2013) Base: 154 – All respondents who ‘never’ use of social media when recruiting staff Note: multiple responses were allowed therefore responses may sum to more than 100 per cent

Table A2.3 And which one of those is the most important reason?

	Frequency	Per cent (%)
Preference for more traditional forms of recruitment	19	23.5
Satisfaction with current forms of recruitment	23	28.4
Company policy	6	7.4
Cost	2	2.5
Lack of technical expertise/capacity	2	2.5
No access to social media/no organisational social media profile	2	2.5
Privacy concerns	11	13.6
Concerns over exclusion of candidates	9	11.1
Have never thought about using social media when recruiting staff	5	6.2
Other	2	2.5
Total	81	100.0

Source: Acas online panel survey of HR decision makers (2013) Base: 81 – All respondents who 'never' use of social media when recruiting staff and gave multiple reasons why not

Forms of social media used when recruiting staff

The survey asked respondents to select from a list which, if any, of the named social media services they used when recruiting staff. The responses for this question can be seen in Table A2.4 below.

A2.4 Which of the following social media services does your organisation use when recruiting staff?

	Frequency	Per cent (%)
Facebook	92	52.0
LinkedIn	125	70.6
Twitter	54	30.5
Google+	26	14.7
You Tube	19	10.7
Your organisation's blog	49	27.7
Other	10	5.6
Don't know/can't remember	2	1.1

Source: Acas online panel survey of HR decision makers (2013) Base: 177 – All respondents who make 'some' or 'extensive' use of social media when recruiting staff

Note: multiple responses were allowed therefore responses may sum to more than 100 per cent

Ways of using social media when recruiting staff

The online survey asked respondents to select from a list the ways in which their organisation used social media during the recruitment process; multiple responses were allowed.

A2.5 In which of the following ways, if any, does your organisation use social media when recruiting staff?

	Frequency	Per cent (%)
To advertise job vacancies that are already advertised conventionally	114	64.4
To advertise job vacancies solely through social media	35	19.8
To 'headhunt' or approach specific individuals to join your organisation	74	41.8
To make contact with a pool of potential candidates for a job vacancy	79	44.6
To undertake screening/background checks/obtain information on candidates as part of the application process	61	34.5
To promote the company in general terms among potential candidates	79	44.6
As a designated job application portal	25	14.1
Other	1	0.6
Don't know/can't remember	1	0.6

*Source: Acas online panel survey of HR decision makers (2013) Base: 177 – All respondents who make 'some' or 'extensive' use of social media when recruiting staff
Note: multiple responses were allowed therefore responses may sum to more than 100 per cent*

Reasons for using social media when recruiting staff

The survey also asked respondents for what reasons their organisation uses social media during recruitment. Once again, respondents were able to select multiple responses from a list or indicate any "other" options.

A2.6 For which of the following reasons, if any, does your organisation use social media when recruiting staff?

	Frequency	Per cent (%)
Cost	95	53.7
Ease of use	114	64.4
Timeliness	67	37.9
Industry norm	24	13.6
To access a wider range of candidates than with traditional recruitment methods	115	65.0
To target niche candidates	82	46.3
To help with the selection process	43	24.3
To find out information about candidates which would not be possible by other means	44	24.9
Other	3	1.7
Don't know/can't remember	1	0.6

*Source: Acas online panel survey of HR decision makers (2013) Base: 177 – All respondents who make 'some' or 'extensive' use of social media when recruiting staff
Note: multiple responses were allowed therefore responses may sum to more than 100 per cent*

Where they had selected more than one reason for their organisation's use of social media during recruitment, respondents were asked to select which was the most important reason.

A2.7 And which one of those is the most important reason?

	Frequency	Per cent (%)
Cost	28	18.7
Ease of use	18	12.0
Timeliness	5	3.3
Industry norm	1	0.7
To access a wider range of candidates than with traditional recruitment methods	54	36.0
To target niche candidates	26	17.3
To help with the selection process	8	5.3
To find out information about candidates which would not be possible by other means	9	6.0
Other	1	0.7
Total	150	100.0

Source: Acas online panel survey of HR decision makers (2013) Base: 150 - All respondents who make 'some' or 'extensive' use of social media when recruiting staff and gave multiple reasons why they use it

Organisational concerns about using social media to recruit staff

The survey included a question which asked respondents to indicate from a list what concerns, if any, their organisation had about using social media for recruitment purposes. As with other questions, respondents were able to select multiple answers.

A2.8 Which concerns, if any, does your organisation have about using social media when recruiting staff?

	Frequency	Per cent (%)
Concerns regarding candidates' privacy	64	36.2
Limited selection of candidates	28	15.8
Larger number of applicants	50	28.2
Increase in workload	31	17.5
Possible discrimination based on candidates' personal characteristics	49	27.7
Might disadvantage candidates who do not have access to/do not use social media	89	50.3
Concerns regarding organisation's reputation	28	15.8
Other	5	2.8
Don't know/can't remember	12	6.8

*Source: Acas online panel survey of HR decision makers (2013) Base: 177 - All respondents who make 'some' or 'extensive' use of social media when recruiting staff
Note: multiple responses were allowed therefore responses may sum to more than 100 per cent*

As with most of the other multiple response questions in the survey, respondents who selected more than one response to the question about organisational concerns were asked to indicate from the same list of responses which they considered to be the most important reason.

A2.9 And which one of those is the most important reason?

	Frequency	Per cent (%)
Concerns regarding candidates' privacy	12	12.5
Limited selection of candidates	6	6.3
Larger number of applicants	8	8.3
Increase in workload	5	5.2
Possible discrimination based on candidates' personal characteristics	22	22.9
Might disadvantage candidates who do not have access to/do not use social media	36	37.5
Concerns regarding organisation's reputation	5	5.2
Other	2	2.1
Total	96	100.0

Source: Acas online panel survey of HR decision makers (2013) Base: 96 - All respondents who make 'some' or 'extensive' use of social media when recruiting staff and gave multiple concerns

Formal policy on the use of social media for recruiting staff

Respondents were asked if their organisation had a formal policy in place regarding the use of social media for recruitment.

A2.10 Does your organisation have a formal policy covering the use of social media when recruiting staff?

	Frequency	Per cent (%)
Yes	65	36.7
No	97	54.8
Don't know/can't remember	15	8.5
Total	177	100.0

Source: Acas online panel survey of HR decision makers (2013) Base: 177 - All who have made 'some' or 'extensive' use of social media when recruiting staff

Future use of social media when recruiting staff

The survey included a question that asked respondents what they thought their organisation's future use of social media for recruiting staff would be.

A2.11 Do you think that in the future your organisation.....

	Frequency	Per cent (%)
Will make greater use of social media when recruiting staff	141	41.6
Will make the same amount of use of social media when recruiting staff	110	32.4
Will make less use of social media when recruiting staff	3	0.9
Don't know/it depends	85	25.1
Total	339	100.0

Source: Acas online panel survey of HR decision makers (2013) Base: 339 – All who indicated that they never use social media, make some use, or extensive use of social media when recruiting staff or don't know whether their organisation uses social media when recruiting staff.

Organisational questions

The online survey had three questions which asked respondents to identify how many employees are in their organisation and what industry and sector their organisation is in. In addition, respondents were asked to indicate in which part of Great Britain their organisation was based.

A2.12 How many employees are there in your organisation including yourself?

	Frequency	Per cent (%)
1	35	8.7
2 to 9	128	31.9
10 to 49	61	15.2
50 to 249	40	10.0
250 to 499	19	4.7
500 to 999	15	3.7
1,000 to 4,999	35	8.7
5,000 or more	67	16.7
Don't know	1	0.2
Total	401	100.0

Source: Acas online panel survey of HR decision makers (2013) Base: 401 – All respondents

A2.13 Which of the following best describes the nature of your business?

	Frequency	Per cent (%)
Manufacturing	31	7.7
Electricity, gas & water supply	6	1.5
Construction	32	8.0
Wholesale and retail trade	34	8.5
Hotels and restaurants	14	3.5
Transport	24	6.0
Financial services	40	10.0
Other business services	85	21.2
Public authorities	43	10.7
Education	8	2.0
Health	17	4.2
Other	64	16.0
Not for profit	3	0.7
Total	401	100.0

Source: Acas online panel survey of HR decision makers (2013) Base: 401 – All respondents

A2.14 And is your organisation in the.....

	Frequency	Per cent (%)
Private sector	315	78.6
Public sector	72	18.0
Not-for-profit/voluntary sector	13	3.2
Other	1	0.2
Total	401	100.0

Source: Acas online panel survey of HR decision makers (2013) Base: 401 – All respondents

A2.15 In which part of the UK is your organisation based?

	Frequency	Per cent (%)
East of England	18	4.5
East Midlands	17	4.2
London	90	22.4
North East	15	3.7
North West	26	6.5
Scotland	32	8.0
South East	93	23.2
South West	45	11.2
Wales	15	3.7
West Midlands	21	5.2
Yorkshire and Humber	26	6.5
Don't know/other/prefer not to say	3	0.7
Total	401	100.0

Source: Acas online panel survey of HR decision makers (2013) Base: 401 – All respondents Note: Northern Ireland was included as an answer category but removed from the analysis since it falls outside Acas' jurisdiction

12 Appendix 3 – Case study topic guides

Topic guide for HR/recruitment manager

Background for interviewer

Researcher to explain the purpose of the project: IES has been commissioned by Acas to undertake research into the use of social media (such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube or mobile apps) during the recruitment process, in order to understand current company practice and thinking, and to help Acas to update its guidance on recruitment. IES is undertaking three case studies of organisations that have engaged with this issue. We would like to talk to you about how your organisation uses social media in the recruitment process, including any specific issues or challenges that you have had to deal with. We would like to name the organisation, but would not name individuals. We will offer you the opportunity to check our write-up for factual accuracy before publication.

Ask permission to record – recording is for analysis purposes only and will be deleted afterwards. If no permission given, take notes instead.

About the company

1. Could you give me a quick overview of the company, including:
 - its main areas of business
 - sector, size and location of the organisation (including if international)
 - size and profile of the workforce
 - broad overview of staff turnover and levels of recruitment needed

About you

2. Could you tell me about your role in the organisation – main responsibilities and in particular your responsibilities in the area of recruitment/recruitment policy?

Using social media for recruitment

3. Do you use social media in your recruitment process? If so, which tools? *(possible options could be LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, mobile apps).* Are there any specific reasons why you chose these particular tools?
4. Could you tell me exactly how you use these tools:
 - – at which point in the recruitment process? Prompt for:
 - Use as a vehicle for recruitment
 - Use to vet/screen/look up candidates that have been selected through traditional recruitment methods

- Are you directly involved in using them to recruit staff? E.g. to advertise vacancies and encourage candidates to apply, or to select a shortlist. Encourage the interviewee to describe processes in detail. If relevant, ask how many people they have recruited in this way.
- Do you use a mix of recruitment practices (i.e. social media and traditional methods), or have you switched to social media only? For example, do you use social media for headhunting or other non-open recruitment? What are the reasons for your approach?

Encourage the interviewee to describe processes in detail.

5. Why did you start using social media in recruitment? *Prompts could be: looking for specific types of candidate, industry norm, company policy, cost, ease of access to the labour market.*

6. How long have you been using these tools? Does your organisation use social media more extensively in other areas of its business?

Costs and benefits of using social media

7. From your use of social media tools in recruitment, what do you think the benefits, if any, have been? *Probe for lower cost, access to the desired area of the labour market.*

8. Have there been any costs associated with the use of these tools?

9. How has this affected the HR processes in your organisation? *E.g. does this bypass HR in some ways? Is this an issue for the organisation?*

Risks of using social media

10. Have you encountered any difficulties related to your use of social media for recruitment or thought about any potential problems? This could include:

- privacy issues relating to candidates' Facebook sites/social media profiles etc.
- potential discrimination (not treating all candidates equally, or having access to private information about candidates)
- the risks or benefits of targeting a certain pool of candidates only.

Encourage the interviewee to tell a story if they have encountered issues, and to explain how they resolved them.

Policy

11. Do you have a policy in place on the use of social media in recruitment? *If yes, can we have a copy, or can they tell us what's in it. Who was involved in drawing it up? How long has it been in place? What prompted the policy?*

12. If not, why not, and are you thinking about putting one into place?

13. Are you doing anything else to manage potential risks related to the use of social media and recruitment? *This could include warning candidates that their Facebook pages/social media profiles will be checked, and instructing line managers not to access information that is not relevant.*

14. Do you do anything to encourage the use of social media in the recruitment process in your organisation?

The future

15. How do you see this issue developing – do you think that your organisation will increase/decrease its use of social media in recruitment, or begin to use new tools?

16. What advice would you offer to organisations that are seeking to develop their use of social media during recruitment?

17. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Thank you very much for your time.

Topic guide for line manager

Background for interviewer

Researcher to explain the purpose of the project: IES has been commissioned by Acas to undertake research into the use of social media (such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube or mobile apps) during the recruitment process, in order to understand current company practice and thinking, and to help Acas to update its guidance on recruitment. IES is undertaking three case studies of organisations that have engaged with this issue. We would like to talk to you about how your organisation uses social media in the recruitment process, including any specific issues or challenges that you have had to deal with. We would like to name the organisation, but would not name individuals. We will offer you the opportunity to check our write-up for factual accuracy before publication.

Ask permission to record – recording is for analysis purposes only and will be deleted afterwards. If no permission given, take notes instead.

About the company

1. Could you give me a quick overview of the company, including:

- its main areas of business
- sector, size and location of the organisation (including if international)
- size and profile of the workforce
- broad overview of staff turnover and levels of recruitment needed

About you

2. Could you tell me about your role in the organisation – main responsibilities and in particular your responsibilities in the area of recruitment?

3. Do you have a specific team? How many people do you line-manage?

Using social media for recruitment

4. Do you use social media in your recruitment process? If so, which tools? *(possible options could be LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, mobile apps).* Are there any specific reasons why you chose these particular tools?

5. Could you tell me exactly how you use these tools:

- at which point in the recruitment process? Prompt for:
 - Use as a vehicle for recruitment
 - Use to vet/screen/look up candidates that have been selected through traditional recruitment methods
- Are you directly involved in using them to recruit staff? E.g. to advertise vacancies and encourage candidates to apply, or to select a shortlist.

- Do you use a mix of recruitment practices (i.e. social media and traditional methods), or have you switched to social media only? What are the reasons for your approach?

6. Why did you start using social media in recruitment? *Prompts could be: looking for specific types of candidate, industry norm, company policy, lower cost, ease of access to the labour market.*

7. How long have you been using these tools?

Costs and benefits of using social media

7. From your use of social media tools in recruitment, what benefits, if any, do you think there have been, from your point of view as a line manager? *Probe for quicker process, access to the desired area of the labour market.*

8. Have there been any costs associated with the use of these tools?

9. How has this affected the HR processes in your organisation? *E.g. does this bypass HR in some ways? Is this an issue for the organisation? Have you found it to be a problem?*

Risks of using social media

10. Have you encountered any difficulties related to your use of social media for recruitment or thought about any potential problems? Do you think that these are an issue for your organisation? This could include:

- privacy issues relating to candidates' Facebook sites/social media profiles etc. Have you been in a situation where you had access to private information about a candidate? If so, how did you deal with this?
- potential discrimination (not treating all candidates equally, or having access to private information about candidates)
- the risks or benefits of targeting a certain pool of candidates only.

Encourage the interviewee to tell a story if they have encountered issues, and to explain how they resolved them.

Policy

11. Do you have a policy in place on the use of social media in recruitment? *If yes, can we have a copy, or can they tell us what's in it. Who was involved in drawing it up? How long has it been in place? What prompted the policy?*

12. If not, do you think that the organisation needs one?

13. If you do, do you follow it in general? Do you think that it is useful?

14. Do you do anything else to manage potential risks related to the use of social media and recruitment? *This could include warning candidates that their Facebook pages/ social media profiles will be checked, and not accessing information that is not relevant.*

15. Do you do anything to encourage the use of social media in the recruitment process in your organisation?

The future

16. How do you see this issue developing – do you think that your organisation will increase/decrease its use of social media in recruitment, or begin to use new tools?

17. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Thank you very much for your time.

