



# Branding in social media. Using LinkedIn in personal brand communication: A study on communications/marketing and recruitment/human resources specialists perception

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## ABSTRACT

Due to the growth of Web 2.0, the fact that all the activities transcend from offline to the online environment and the control of your information is more complicated; personal branding comes into play. This study aims to investigate the importance of developing, maintaining, and promoting the professional identity on LinkedIn of a communication and marketing specialist and show their perception on which aspects are essential for hiring someone for such a position. Also, this study investigates the attitude of recruitment and human resources specialists towards the development of a personal brand on LinkedIn and the criteria used in evaluating a communication and marketing specialist. Quantitative research based on two questionnaires was used to understand the perceptions of the study participants. The results indicated that social media networks are a useful tool for developing a personal brand, but communication and marketing specialists show an average involvement. Likewise, recruiting specialists have high expectations, while communication and marketing specialists are using the same methods for self-presentation.

## 1. Introduction

Over history, defining and developing a personal brand turned out to be quite a debated concept from many specialists and author's perspectives in various fields. But, it can be confirmed that this concept is essentially a representation of reputation. This concept is primarily based on how an individual exposes his identity, especially professional identity. Branding became one of the most important aspects of a business strategy. The author of the book *'The Brand Called You,'* Peter Montoya (2003), says that the key to a personal brand is to know how others perceive you. Montoya (2003) suggests that a person should develop a personal brand first when his accomplishments are not recognized when others achieve the goals he has set for himself. Also, someone should create a brand when he feels he has reached as far as possible or when he wants to distinguish from the competition.

In modern society, self-promoting is necessary for your career and requires a dynamic approach. Shepherd (2005) argues that the importance of owning a personal brand is recognized thanks to the more significant pressure of globalization and social media development. So, cleaning up your image, maintaining your reputation, and developing a personal brand are imperative for many reasons. Firstly, it separates an

individual from the competition, its reputation representing a competitive advantage that separates him from other persons. A personal brand helps an individual increase his visibility, but it also helps him become known for certain aspects. Another reason would be to remark someone as an expert in the field in which he performs. A successful brand promotes an individual as the best, not only the solution for the problem but the optimal option, recommending and offering him different job opportunities (Shepherd, 2005).

In an online environment, this exposure comes from quick access through online search platforms or within online social networks where social capital is created (Pawar, 2016). In economic studies, it can be observed that social media networks play a vital role in the way professional identity is promoted; this feature is greatly influencing an individual's online reputation.

This study aims to analyze the role of developing, maintaining, and promoting a personal brand on LinkedIn and identifying the motivations and benefits obtained using this professional network. Therefore, the main research questions that will be examined are:

1. What are communication and marketing specialists' perceptions of using LinkedIn to build their professional online identity?

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2. Which criteria are used in the evaluation of communication and marketing specialists by recruiters on LinkedIn?
3. Which elements the communication and marketing specialists consider crucial for a recruiting specialist when reviewing their on-line profile within the LinkedIn network?

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Brand construction strategies. Perspectives and current challenges

To gain a clearer perspective on a personal brand's meaning, we must first understand the identity concept. A personal brand is a difficult concept that continues to be debated in various areas, from psychology to political science, architecture, and urbanism. A more comprehensive definition of this concept was given by Charon (1992, p.85), who mentions that identity refers to how *'the individual think it is and how it is presented to the world.'* To be more specific, identity can be presented as the totality of the elements and characteristics that control a person's identification. Another discussed topic underlying the development of a brand is the image. The image, as opposed to identity, is the way an individual is perceived by society. This concept was derived from the imaging literature of brand, organization. According to Marconi (2007), an organization's image is *'what most people perceive as representing the organization.'* From this perspective, the image can be confused with reputation, although the author interchangeably uses them. Instead, the personal image can be described as a combination of people's knowledge and beliefs about an individual and its attributes. Even the reputation concept is somehow known and widespread in the actual context, but it doesn't have a definition accepted in the academic environment. Broadly, this can be considered a significant element that evaluates a person's performances and characteristics, or it represents what people remember and shares about him. Another essential thing about reputation is that it is a fundamental element of image and impression management.

To understand the personal brand, we must first define the brand itself. In post-modern societies where individuals want to give the name to their consumption, brands can be analyzed through various perspectives: macroeconomics, microeconomics, sociology, anthropology, history, semiotics, philosophy, and so on (Kapferer, 2004). According to Kapferer (2004), a brand is a direct consequence of market segmentation and product differentiation strategy. From his perspective, branding consists of transforming the product category, requiring a long-term involvement and a high level of resources and skills. The American Marketing Association (AMA) defines a brand as a *'name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of the intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of the sellers'* (2015, p.1).

The term personal brand was first discussed and used in an article in 1997 by Tom Peters. According to the author, *'regardless of age, regardless of position, regardless of the business we happen to be in, all of us need to understand the importance of branding. We are CEOs of our own companies: Me Inc. To be in business today, our most important job is to be head marketer for the brand called You'* (Peters, 1997, p.1). Lair, Sullivan, and Cheney (2005) affirm that personal branding appeared sooner, in 1982, once with Dale Carnegie's book *'How to win friends and influence people.'* Jim Joseph (2013) argues that personal brand begins at birth, when the parents offer a name to their child, unconscious creating a new brand, and from that day, the person keeps it. A recent definition is being provided by Kheder (2014). Kheder (2014, p.33) refers to personal branding as being *'the process of establishing a unique personal identity, developing an active communication approach of one's brand identity to a specific target market and evaluating its impact on one's image and reputation, to fulfil personal and professional objectives'*. Different authors have different points of view about the need for personal branding. Still, all of them agree that this concept plays the same role that a brand does, more specifically to differentiate a product or service from others,

respectively, a person from another.

### 2.2. Communication of personal branding

Over time, self-promotion has become a normalized phenomenon in people's lives. Many users, especially teenagers or people between the ages of 18–25, followed the examples of self-presentation, self-promotion of celebrities. Thus, they started modeling an online identity to increase their popularity and reach a comfortable recognition and connection level (Van Dijck, 2013). Nowadays, with the power of the web, owning a personal brand means *'creating and maintaining profiles on social media, personal websites, and blogs, as well as using SEO techniques (Search Engine Optimization) to encourage accessing the information presented'* (Labrecque, Markos, & Milne, 2011, p.39). Labrecque et al. (2011) argue that virtual space offers individuals different platforms for self-branding their identity with Web 2.0 technology. According to Pawar (2016), there are currently various platforms through which a person can create and build a personal brand. The development of social networks has proven to be increasingly important in recent years. This technology encourages people to provide media produced by them to posts photographs, text, videos, and other content. As a result, the Internet has now become a platform for maintaining personal brands. Nowadays, social media is the best and easiest way to build a personal identity, maintain a reputation, and become visible in a specific or niche industry. This is the best place to update your personal brand because almost everyone uses the online environment and thinks about using it when they want to find someone and find out more about this person and their activity. Social media is an efficient tool because it allows people to improve their auto-affirmation and auto-efficacy. Another advantage of promoting a personal brand on social media is that you can easily reach the people you want to get in contact with. When someone builds their brand on every social media platform, it is vital to present it in a good light and not stain his public image due to an *'unpredictable error.'* Some of these errors are visible, and even professionals are doing them.

A person should think about their social media profile as a stock to consolidate throughout their career. Owning a reputation on social media is a challenge. It is difficult to find original methods to communicate your brand due to the flow of information conveyed in social media.

In the second half of the 21st century, the Internet's use became an integral part and a vital business world tool. Social networks such as LinkedIn, Facebook have become popular in business since they facilitate the recruitment process and attract the best candidates. In the past, organizations promoted vacancies in the local press, hired a recruitment consultant, or, more recently, posted jobs online on the company's website or on popular job platforms to recruit employees. Nowadays, job hunting is highly diversified. For example, young people usually get jobs using various methods, such as internships, social media, or by setting up their businesses. In this abundant world of the Internet and social media, which offers diversified options in choosing the best tool in the recruitment process, many recruitment specialists are in difficulty (Galanaki, 2002; Sinha & Thaly, 2013). Dutta (2014) affirms that it must not be confused with a complete strategy despite social media opportunities in recruitment. It should form only a part of an organization's recruitment strategy. But for recruiters, social media became one of the essential tools to find potential employees.

Given that an increasing number of recruitment specialists are using social media platforms to examine potential candidates, the latter are presenting themselves in various online communities to impress potential employers (Bohnert & Ross, 2010; DeKay, 2009). This screening process for information for selecting the candidate eventually transitioned into a new term known as cybervetting. This term was typically described as performing Internet searches and background checks on the social media pages of a candidate (Berger, 2015).

Employees may consider cybervetting as an invasion of their

personal lives. Still, this practice offers a complete reputational picture of an individual, reflecting its pre-employers impression, capability to protect proprietary information or trade secrets, and association with sensitive content.

An individual's online reputation is a critical element of a personal brand. In the digital age, it's increasingly complex to manage a personal brand. Nowadays, a simple message sent on Facebook, a link, or inappropriate information shared on LinkedIn can destroy all the work done to develop a personal brand and ruin a reputation built up over the years. On a national study done by CareerBuilder (2017) on 2300 hiring managers and human resources professionals, 70% of employees had used social media to screen job candidates, and 38% had rejected a candidate because of their social media posts represented by evidence of alcohol consumption or drug use. For this reason, an individual must keep under control its online communication strategy. What a person does online, even if it's harmless, can hurt them when he/she is looking for a job. That is why it is appropriate to monitor quite often their online brand so that others do not control it.

Many cases can illustrate situations when the employees were fired because they violated their employee's social media policies. One of the examples is represented by the case of the journalist Kristopher Brooks. He received a job offer from the Wilmington News Journal and announced it on his personal Tumblr blog by quoting his offer letter using its company logo when making the announcement. After, he has notified that his job offer had been rescinded because of this publication (Giang, 2012). In another example, a factory worker, Ashley Heffran, posted on Facebook after discovering that she will receive a \$100 holiday bonus from her company. As a result of her action, her supervisors fired her for violating the company's zero-tolerance policy for work-related social media posts (Galli, 2014). This kind of behavior can arise when the recruitment process came into place, like in Cheryl James's case, after violating the HIPPA privacy protections for patients (Katarsky, 2010).

The brand from the online environment is how a person positions himself in front of the recruiters, demonstrates his expertise, and defines how the rest of the people see him. Dealing with your virtual space image is one of the most robust tools used in professional development (Karaduman, 2013).

A strong personal brand increases an individual's competitiveness, both internally (in the organization in which he works) and externally (local, regional) on the labor market. Greater competitiveness in the internal labor market offers employees better promotion prospects and the possibility of more significant decisive and executive autonomy. That said, a strong personal brand facilitates creating a professional career with all the benefits of a professional and personal nature. Personal branding is one of the most important aspects of marketing today.

### 3. Methods

#### 3.1. Methods and research tools

The research's overall objective is to identify the role of using LinkedIn in building individuals' personal brands. Through LinkedIn, users can promote their image and can develop or maintain a long-term online reputation in front of employers. The other elements which will be presented in this study focus on the following objectives:

- O1. Identify the motivation of using LinkedIn.
- O2. Identify the usefulness of LinkedIn in professional identity building.
- O3. Identify the usefulness of LinkedIn and the benefits perceived in this respect at the recruitment level.
- O4. Identifying the advantages and disadvantages of using LinkedIn.
- O5. Identifying the most important aspects and features considered to be the most visible in building a professional identity.

The research method used is quantitative because of its ideal fit for achieving the proposed objectives, applied through a questionnaire. The study was conducted via social media (LinkedIn and Facebook) on a random probabilistic sample. The information needed to define the research results will be obtained by using two surveys for two audiences. Thus, the first group includes communication and marketing specialists and candidates for this position, and the second group comprises recruiters and human resources specialists.

The questionnaires structure was developed following the research objectives. The first part of the questionnaires includes questions that emphasize LinkedIn and other tools used for recruitment and identity building. The second part of the questionnaires focuses on the usefulness of LinkedIn in reputation and professional identity building. More specifically, it is worth seeing how a candidate/communication and marketing specialist builds their online professional identity, the originality of their LinkedIn profiles, and, finally, the criteria used by recruiters to evaluate candidates. The last part of the questionnaire provides demographic questions (see Appendix for the questionnaire questions).

Thus, the first survey investigates the perception of communication and marketing specialists and individuals who run for this position about using LinkedIn to build their online professional identity. The second analyzes the recruiter's impression about building an online professional identity on LinkedIn and the criteria used in evaluating an online profile for hiring someone for a communication and marketing specialist position. The results obtained will be compared to see the differences between the perception of these two groups.

The research study has been conducted accordingly to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) during and after the consent process. The human participants entered the research voluntarily with full information about what it means for them to take part and give consent before entering the research. The respondent's answers were used only for the research study and were not transferred to any other party. No personal data such as email address and name were collected during the research study.

#### 3.2. Description of the research group

The study was conducted on 156 people, of which 75 are recruiters/human resources specialists, and 81 are communication and marketing specialists. The first group includes 77% communication and marketing specialists, 19% people with different positions but want to apply for this position, and 4% do not work and are looking for a job. Respondents in the first batch are 78% females and 22% males with ages between 22 and 59 years. The majority (37%) are 22–25 years old, and the following percentage are in the age groups 26–35 (31%) and 36–45 (25%). Of these, 51% have a bachelor's degree, 36% have a master's degree, 10% have postgraduate studies, and only 1% have Ph.D. studies. More than half of the participants work (74%) in Communication and Marketing, 6% work in the Administrative area, 3% have as a field of activity Event Organization and 3% work in Accounting, Finance, and Banking, 9% have a leading position, 1% are active in the field of Human Resources and 4% in other areas. As for the experience in field, 85% of the study participants have less than 5 years at the current job, 6% have 5–9 years, 5% have over 15 years, 3% have 10–15 years, and only 1% of respondents have five years expertise in field.

In the second research group, which recruitment/human resources specialists represent, 67% of the respondents are females and 33% male. Respondents are between ages 20–51, with the most prevalent segment being 26–35 (64%), followed by 36–45 (20%). Of these, 48% have a master's degree, 36% have a bachelor's degree, 8% have secondary education, and 7% have postgraduate studies. Most of the recruiters/human resources specialists work in IT & Tech, BPO services, Retail and Trading, HR, Finance, and consultancy. As for experience in the field, 69% of the respondents have less than 5 years at the current job, 12% have 5–9 years, 9% have 10–15 years, 7% have five years, and only 3% have over 15 years expertise.

The two questionnaires were distributed between April 22, 2019–May 17, 2019 on LinkedIn to individuals whose activity field is Communication and Marketing and Recruitment/Human Resources. Also, the surveys were distributed on Facebook for persons who have an account on LinkedIn and whose area of activity is Communication and Marketing and Recruitment/Human Resources. Respondents were provided with confidentiality and anonymity of responses, and the average length of completion was 10 (ten) minutes.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Analyzing the results of the questionnaire applied to communication and marketing specialists

#### 4.1.1. General use of LinkedIn

Regarding the collected data from the survey addressed to communication and marketing specialists, it can be mentioned that LinkedIn ranks first among the most common platforms used to find a job. From the people surveyed, 71% use this network frequently or even always. Only 26% of the sample use the platform rarely or sometimes. Only 3% of the respondents do not use this social network. At this point, LinkedIn is a well-used and well-known network among most people, and they are aware of the value of this platform. From the point of view of frequency, eJobs, Bestjobs, Glassdoor, and Indeed are among the most used sites. The least used are Hipo, Facebook, and CareerBuilder.

#### 4.1.2. Reasons for opening an account on LinkedIn

First, the top reasons why communication and marketing specialists choose to create an account on this network is developing social capital (36%) and replacing the traditional resume (33%). To take part in this phenomenon and interact socially were other reasons for this network's choice. The respondents also had other motives. Although the primary interest respondents have shown in using LinkedIn was based on developing a professional identity and replacing the traditional resume, only 16% of the respondents have earned their current job through this network.

#### 4.1.3. Frequency LinkedIn use

Regarding the frequency of use, it is noted that most of the respondents access the network daily (42%), some of them accessing the platform several times per day (17%), 30% have weekly activity, and only 7% of them are present monthly on the network. Therefore, it can be concluded that the main reasons why respondents use this platform would be to interact with other users, to develop new professional relationships, and to create and develop professional identity, besides job search.

Regarding the age in the network, 42% have more than five years, 40% are 2–5 years, 12 have only one year, 5% of respondents are only three months old, and 1% six months. Thus, users familiar with this platform are aware of the platform's new features and new functionality.

#### 4.1.4. LinkedIn functionalities for building a professional identity

Respondents consider that professional skills (12%), professional experience (12%), followed by mutual connections (9%), education (9%), licenses & certifications (9%), and industry-related posts (9%) are among the most useful functionalities in developing the professional identity on this network. This result indicates that this platform offers real opportunities for communication specialists in building a professional identity. It is noted that besides the mentioned functionalities, the headline (8%), the recommendation section (8%), the seniority (8%), and the examples of personal projects (8%) are useful too. Less impressive are the interest section (7%) and other functionality types (1%).

It was found that users consider LinkedIn more effective in developing a professional identity than a traditional resume. Most of them (73%) think that this network is suitable for promoting themselves

beyond communication or interaction functionalities.

#### 4.1.5. Frequency of updating LinkedIn profile information

Regarding the frequency of updating the LinkedIn profile information, it is noted that 18% of respondents update their profile every 5–6 months, 13% at 3–4 months, 8% at every 1–2 months or even every month (1%), which indicates a high degree of interest in their online professional identity. It has also been noticed that 27% of all participants update their profiles each year. From the sample surveyed, 33% have not revised their page for more than a year. Most users update their profiles when they are looking for a job. (see Fig. 1)

#### 4.1.6. The presence of a communication and marketing specialist on LinkedIn

Another aspect analyzed in this study is the importance of a communication and marketing specialist presence on LinkedIn. Respondents say it is extremely important (57%) and very important (31%) for a person with this position to be present and active. However, some participants consider that communication and marketing specialist presence on such a network (11%) is moderately important. It is already proven that social networks are part of our everyday life but being on LinkedIn is not just about having a profile. The presence is necessary; it starts from a complete profile and involves a substantial involvement in this network's virtual space.

#### 4.1.7. The building of a professional profile on LinkedIn

Communication and marketing specialists perceive different aspects of the building of a profile on LinkedIn. So, professional experience (11%) and professional skills are the essential aspects of developing a profile. Also, the seniority (9%), the education (9%), and examples of personal projects (9%) have proven to be very important to some users, possibly even signaling the skills and abilities of an individual. Respondents considered that the recommendation section (8%), the headline (8%), mutual connections (8%), industry-related posts, licenses, and certifications (8%) are not essential but are useful.

These aspects could help highlight the particularities of the image a person creates on the platform. Less critical issues are the interest section (7%) and some other aspects (4%).

#### 4.1.8. Important aspects for the employer in viewing a LinkedIn profile

More and more employers choose LinkedIn as a tool for looking for a further employee. The recruiters/human resources specialists have defined a list of criteria according to network functionalities that can determine whether it is appropriate for a role or not. Considering the opinion of the communication and marketing specialists on the employment criteria based on the LinkedIn profile view, the professional experience in a similar role (10%), communication skills (10%), problem-solving skills (10%), and the fact that the profile matches the professional qualifications (10%) are to a great extent essential.

It can be noticed that planning and organization skills (8%), positive impressions offered (8%), projects or own articles (7%), prizes, and certificates (7%) contribute to hiring a communication and marketing specialist. Less critical are budgetary management skills (6%), responsiveness to posts of interest (5%), number of connections (4%), engagement in community activities (4%), and the groups in which the individual is involved (3%).

#### 4.1.9. Profile views on LinkedIn

Referring to the LinkedIn profile views, it can be noticed that 38% of respondents have more than 30 per month, and 31% have 20–30 views on average per month. Thus, this aspect can translate in the first place that the profile is of interest to an employer looking for a communication and marketing specialist. The individual uses multiple keywords and is identified as a potential result for several different searches. Also, 18% of respondents have 10–20, and 4% have less than five views per month. Only 9% do not know the impact of their profile visibility over



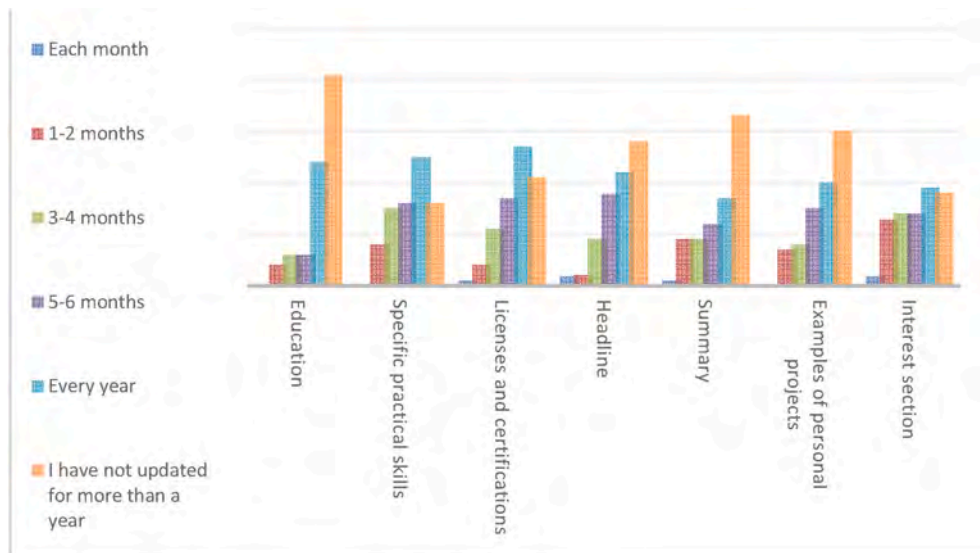


Fig. 1. Frequency of updating LinkedIn profile information.

professional identity.

#### 4.1.10. Connection request on LinkedIn

Regarding the number of LinkedIn profile requests, it can be noted that 43% of study participants receive an average of 20–30 and 29% less than five requests per month. However, there are communication and marketing specialists that receive 10–20 (12%) or even more than 30 requests per month (10%). A small number of participants share neutral responses (6%). LinkedIn is a useful tool for network expansion. Most people send requests to connect with individuals who share the same interests or simply because they are part of the same organization or the same groups.

#### 4.1.11. LinkedIn profile photo features

The profile photo is another vital aspect analyzed that every communication and marketing specialist must pay attention to it. The essential attributes of a profile photo are its clarity (16%), the clothing of the individual (15%), the look (14%), and the smile (14%). Among the less important aspects are the brightness (13%), size (11%), and the presence of accessories (4%).

#### 4.1.12. LinkedIn's profile headline importance

When recruiters use LinkedIn to identify candidates for available positions, the first information that appears is their name and headline. Although it does not have a significant dimension, it is one of the essential elements of a person's profile. After analyzing the study data, it can be confirmed that a headline's presence is moderately important (34%) and very important (50%).

#### 4.1.13. Posts shared on a LinkedIn profile

Regarding the type of distributed content, it was noted that the most preferred are the professional ones (27%), followed by news (19%), scientific articles (13%), and documents of interests (12%). Respondents also share motivational, inspirational messages (8%), content communicated by various companies (8%), recruitment (7%), and personal content (6%).

#### 4.1.14. Integrity of a profile

Communication specialists consider complete a LinkedIn profile when contains the current job (13%), at least the experience of the last two positions (13%), industry and location (12%), education (12%), practical skills (12%), and a profile photo (12%). Elements with a lower significance are certifications and licenses (10%), interests (9%), and

frequent posts (7%).

## 4.2. Analyzing the results of the questionnaire applied to recruiter/human resources specialists

### 4.2.1. Using social media in recruitment

Analyzing the data collected from the survey addressed to recruiter/human resources specialists, social networks are used by 97% of them, while only 3% choose another recruitment method.

### 4.2.2. Presence of the company on social media

Referring to the presence in social media of the organizations for which recruiters/human resources specialists work, the most used platforms are LinkedIn (41%) and Facebook (28%), followed by Instagram (13%). These networks are the predilected means for promoting the organization, products, or services, communicating with the target audience, increasing the reputation, facilitating knowledge of the organizational culture, and other information. The least used are Twitter (12%), Pinterest (0%), and other social networks.

### 4.2.3. Social media utility in recruitment

It is not a new fact that the Internet, more precisely job sites and social media, came more and more into human resources, playing an essential role in the recruitment process. Therefore, social networks, especially LinkedIn (45%), Facebook (3%), and job platforms (31%), are exploited for the recruitment of potential employees. The career section of the company's official website (17%), alongside other Intranet resources (1%), are also chosen for recruitment purposes. Most recruiters/human resources specialists use LinkedIn (84%), followed by Indeed (4%), eJobs, Hipo, and Facebook (3%). Bestjobs and Glassdoor are among the least used platforms (1%).

### 4.2.4. Viewing the candidate's LinkedIn profile

Employers, but especially recruiters/human resources specialists, have more tools to check the employee's professional background, LinkedIn representing one of them. According to the results, 93% of the respondents use this platform to check a candidate's profile. Most respondents check the profile after receiving the application (85%), 5% after the first interview, and only 1% after the employment offer. However, 8% do not view the candidate's LinkedIn profile, as they are sure of their choice.

#### 4.2.5. Important criteria in assessing a candidate in the communication and marketing industry

Regarding the online evaluation of a potential candidate in the communication and marketing industry, the criteria that recruiters/human resources specialists consider the most important is the professional experience (79%). Examples of personal projects (9%), followed by the recommendation section, interest section (3%), and industry-related posts (3%), are also taken into consideration. The least essential criteria are education, licenses & certifications, seniority, and mutual connections. Based on these results, it is noted that recruiters emphasize the professional experience and personal projects of the potential employees, as they believe that they have acquired specific skills.

#### 4.2.6. Practical skills required for a communication and marketing specialist

At this time, a marketing specialist must have fundamental skills and competencies, but also marketing abilities. The study revealed that on analyzing the profile of a potential employee, the most important practical skills the candidate must possess are the writing and editing skills (19%), planning skills (17%), communication skills (15%), problem-solving skills (14%), organization skills (Kapferer, 2014), and technical/digital skills (13%).

The least essential practical skills required are budget management skills (9%). The reasons why the recruiters/human resources specialists have chosen less the budget management skills than the others are that the communication and marketing specialist must firstly have PR and marketing skills. (see Fig. 2)

#### 4.2.7. LinkedIn profile photo evaluation

In evaluating a candidate's LinkedIn profile, recruiters/human resources specialists also analyze the profile photo. The most essential criteria in the evaluation of the profile photo are the clarity (18%), the clothing of the candidate (15%), and the background (15%). The photo's brightness is also essential, helping to distinguish the details (13%). The candidate's smile also covers an important role (13%), considered to have a psychological effect. The less important criteria are its size (10%) and accessories' presence (2%).

Aspects that hinder the employment of a communication and marketing specialist.

Analyzing the most significant aspect for employers and especially recruiters, namely the image on LinkedIn of the candidate, the following elements have been recorded that hinder someone's employment as a communication and marketing specialist.

On top of the most critical issues that hinder candidates' employment, it can found false information about the qualifications presented in the profile (19%) and discriminatory comments about race, gender, or religion (18%).

Confidential information from the previous job (17%), and if the individual speaks badly about the last company or ex-colleagues (17%)

are the second choice of the study participants.

These results indicate that the potential employee may have the same type of behavior and engage in the same kind of activities in the future, affecting the organization's reputation. The least essential issues that hinder employment are inappropriate photos or videos (15%) and if the name of the candidate's LinkedIn profile is not professional (14%). Thus, it can be confirmed that LinkedIn is beneficial for initiating and developing a career, and young people need to pay special attention to the image they create in the online environment.

#### 4.2.8. Aspects that favor the employment of a communication and marketing specialist

To hire someone for such a role, respondents consider that the most important aspects are its experience in a similar position (11%), communication skills (11%), and the fact that the profile matches his professional qualifications. Thus, it can be suggested that it is vital for potential candidates to have professional experience because, based on experience, they can prove that they possess specific skills and are eligible for the next stage of the recruitment process.

Also, the recommendations received from the previous job or influential persons (who have important positions or an extensive network) play an important role in hiring an individual. They can prove that the individual was appreciated, and he maintained a good relationship with his team and his manager.

Furthermore, the recommendations can present that he was professional, confident, and had a proactive attitude (10%). Some respondents considered that the organizational skills (9%), problem-solving skills (9%), and planning skills (8%) occupy second place in hiring a communication and marketing specialist.

Although they are not on top of the most critical employment issues, projects, or own articles relevant to such a position (7%), budget management skills (6%), the involvement in community activities (5%), prizes and certificates (5%), can also favor the hiring of the candidate. Respondents would also employ individuals who demonstrate other skills or strengths that are not part of the ideal candidate portrait requirements. Issues that are not as important are the number of connections (2%), the groups they are involved in (2%), and responsiveness to marketing, communication, and advertising posts (3%).

## 5. Discussion

Since most of the notions presented have been analyzed in the context of the results, it is also necessary to interpret this examination's figurative elements that would generate pertinent conclusions in agreement with the research questions.

Therefore, most respondents confirm LinkedIn is the most widely used platform for using social networks to find a job. This statement is not surprising since, at present, social media is part of all the activities of the daily life of an individual between the ages of 18–31, who has

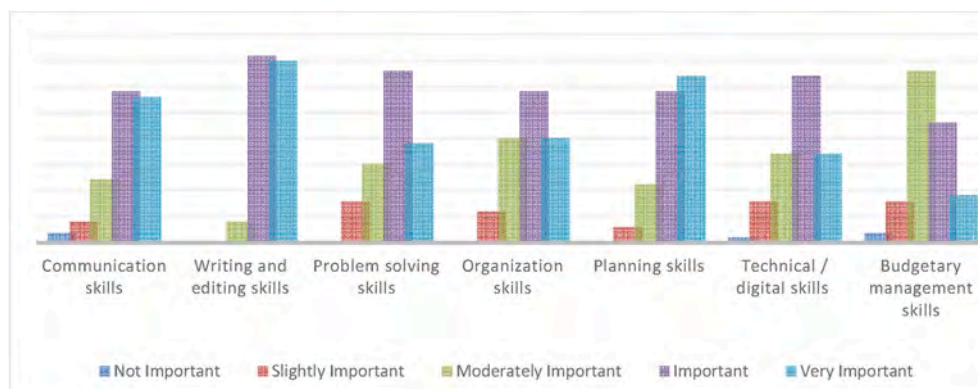


Fig. 2. Practical skills required for a communication and marketing specialist.

graduated higher education and, according to the website [Statista \(2017\)](#), spend about 135 min a day in the online environment.

Although the percentage of those who choose to create an account within this network to develop social capital and replace the traditional resume is relatively high, a small percentage of the respondents state that they have gained their current job through this platform. This circumstance can be explained by the fact that the respondents who claim that they did not get the current job through LinkedIn their ages are between 36 and 45, and this platform wasn't as popular as today when they were looking for a job. Also, the discrepancy between the frequency of use it is visible, the main reasons an account is created, and the time for updating it. The reason behind this statement is that most of the users update their profiles only when they want to change their jobs.

Moreover, the greater use of LinkedIn induces the idea that communication and marketing specialists are concerned about their professional side. Also, it can be observed that the more they use this network, the more activity they have. The activity is mostly in professional posts, followed by news, scientific articles, and documents of interest.

As [Goffman \(1959\)](#) mentioned, people self-promote themselves to gain others' approval and achieve certain goals. So, from those presented, it can be argued that communication and marketing specialists self-promote themselves because they want to influence and be recognized. Also, another fundamental reason why respondents self-promote themselves is that they increase their self-esteem. As [Swann \(1987\)](#) said, individuals create conditions on a public or private level, regardless of whether they may be harmful.

The study participants are becoming more aware of building a professional identity in the online environment, especially its benefits. Among the essential aspects of forming a profile are professional experience and professional competencies, more precisely employers' basics. Even though most of the respondents declared that they are interested in building a professional identity and recognizing its importance, they revise it only when looking for a job. They do not regard this tool as a long-term investment. Nonetheless, communication specialists are aware of the close connection between their professional identity and reputation since the latter is a critical element of their brand. It is considered that an individual's reputation is important since their image can reflect the company's image.

Most of the time, recruitment specialists review an individual's profile after they receive their application. This practice may be due firstly to examine whether the profile is in line with the job requirements and secondly to discover information that can adversely affect its employment. Analyzing the data collected in the current study, the criteria that recruitment/human resources specialists consider to be the most important for a communication and marketing candidate are professional experience, examples of personal projects, and recommendation section. The recruitment specialists emphasize these criteria because they consider it essential that the communication and marketing specialist's potential candidate has certain skills based on his experience. In addition to this, it proves he was appreciated and maintained a good relationship with his boss and team.

Referring to the industry in which the recruitment specialists are employed, in the online evaluation of a potential candidate for this role, there is a significant difference percentual speaking. The most important criteria for the IT & Tech industry are professional experience and professional competencies. In BPO & services, professional experience, followed by education to a lesser extent and professional competencies, seems to be the main criterion. Retail & Trading only focuses on professional experience with smaller values. In Finance and Consultancy, an even lower weight can be observed compared to the industries mentioned above. Recruitment Agencies emphasize professional expertise in their evaluation.

Regarding the aspects that favor the employment in IT & Tech, the most significant are the professional qualifications and professional experience, followed by organization skills, communication, problem-

solving skills, and the positive impressions offered. Recruitment Agencies aim to match the profile with professional qualifications, communication skills, professional experience in a similar role, and the positive impressions delivered. In BPO & services, the most important are communication skills, professional expertise, organization skills, and professional qualifications. The retail & Trading industry aspires for a communication and marketing specialist with professional experience, communication skills, prizes, certificates, and his profile matching his professional qualifications. In Finance and Consultancy industry, only professional expertise and capabilities are important for such a role. In other sectors, it can be observed that professional experience and professional qualifications occupy a similar position. Impressions and recommendations offered by previous companies for which the individual worked or by people with influence, followed by communication skills, are also desired when looking for a role candidate. By analyzing the present data, it can be confirmed that the industry can influence the perception and decisions of recruitment/human resources specialists, which is considered normal behavior since they have other requirements following the company policy, and they follow a different public.

Following the study purpose, the results illustrated a positive attitude towards using social networks, focusing on LinkedIn, as a personal brand development tool. The respondents are interested in building a professional identity, considering that this activity can bring them benefits from a professional perspective. Moreover, it has been found that social networks' use brings several benefits to recruiters, as these tools facilitate the process. Subsequently, it can be confirmed that developing, maintaining, and promoting a professional identity on LinkedIn is efficient and can give a person visibility in front of potential employers.

### 5.1. Study limitations

The conducted research suffers from several limitations that need to be recognized and considered. A significant limitation of this study is the collection of data. The method used to contact the participants was individual as a direct message via social media. A potential limitation connected to the technique used for getting the sample can be represented by the fact that the target is likely to be more social media savvy people than a sample drawn from different sources.

Another restriction was imposed by the researcher's inability to have contact with more respondents.

Another problem found was peoples' reluctance to take part in the research and share some information. Additional limitations were also imposed by the GDPR policy (General Data Protection Regulation).

The lack of pretesting on a lot before starting the questionnaires added extra confines. By applying a pretest, a few problems would have diminished, such as the need to eliminate some questions that prove to be useless or to reformulate them, the need to introduce additional guesses, or to remove them in case they are inappropriate.

The questionnaire's length would have influenced the participants' answers because they have lost their patience or attention have been distracted. For this reason, their responses were not given in ideal conditions of attention, sincerity, and patience.

## 6. Conclusion

Results led to the conclusion that while most communication and marketing specialists opt for creating a professional identity within social networks and recognize the importance of having a LinkedIn profile, they pay attention to their online identities only when looking for a new job. In other words, they have a relatively positive attitude towards building a personal brand and the use of social media networks in this endeavor. In support of these conclusions, they use the elements of their online profiles to build their personal brand to a relatively small extent, as updating information is often more than a year away. Concerning the second research question, the results showed that recruiters use social

networks to check potential employees, most often after receiving the application. Based on the results analyzed, it can be stated that it is essential that a communication and marketing specialist has professional experience, communication skills, and its profile matches with professional qualifications. From the perspective of communication and marketing specialists and the assessment of recruitment specialists, it was noted that they also consider important problem-solving skills.

In conclusion, it can be argued that there is an upward trend in building the personal brand at the level of communication and marketing specialists. It is also expected to see a positive evolution in online social networks and their use as tools in building a personal brand. Based on these results, as a starting point for future research, it is advisable to analyze other personal brand dimensions by introducing new sets of questions to capture them. It is proposed to apply the two questionnaires to a larger sample, including the same target audience, to improve this study.

### CRedit authorship contribution statement

**Georgiana Diana Marin:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Data curation, Investigation, Visualization, Validation, Writing – original draft. **Constantin Nilă:** Writing – review & editing.

### Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2021.100174>.

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