WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF EMPLOYER BRANDING THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA?
- **A Delphi Study among Academics-**

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The Future of Employer Branding through Social Media.

A Delphi study among Academics.

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Management summary

Employer branding has become very popular among Human Resource (HR) professionals because it offers the possibility for them to think strategically on promoting the organization as an Employer. It is defined as a long term oriented strategy of any given company, aimed both at building a unique and desirable employer identity and managing the perceptions of perspective and current employees, in order to gain competitive advantage. Recently, with the increase use and dependency on internet, companies have started to gain more interest in the possibility of using the World Wide Web (WWW) for business purposes. Such is the case for employer branding strategies which have been present on some social media platforms. Social media is defined 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" (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010, p.61). Previous research and real life evidence shows that from year to year the numbers are increasing as regards to the usage of social media for branding; still, there is still little research that tackles the future of these issues.

The goal of this study aims at understanding if there is future for employer branding through social media. Therefore the research question is: *What is the future of employer branding through social media, in the view of Academics?*

The literature review undertaken focuses on the previous existing theory on employer branding, social media and recent studies that tackle both issues together. Before embarking into the empirical research, a possible match between characteristic of different social media types and 3 employer branding categories was considered.

The respondents of this study are all Academics with expertise knowledge in Human Resource Management (HRM) or all other related organizational studies. The data were collected in the period of November 2010 – April 2011. There were 3 different rounds with three different questioners send to the same respondents. The analysis of results is detailed for each round; the first round questionnaire was qualitative and the answers provided resulted into a number

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of 225 items which were then clustered per question. For the second round it was used a Likert scale to determine the most important categories for each question . Finally, the third round asked the respondents to rank from 1 to 5 the top 5 most important categories resulted in Round 2.

The findings of this study suggest that in the next 5 years social media will be used for employer branding and each category will be affected in different ways, in the view of Academics. Moreover, it seems that the roles of HR professionals are also predicted to be influenced if companies decide to delegate them the responsibility of using social media. Accordingly, social media will strongly influence the following categories of:

Employer branding in general	Targeting of audience for recruitment Marketing/Company Brand Ways of Communication/HR competencies.
Value Proposition	Engagement with both employees and applicants Opportunities for promoting the organization Targeting for specific audience
Internal Market	Organization's image/Marketing strategies Openness about working at that company Internal recruitment
External Market	Reputation Talent Management Transparency of organizations
The role of HR pros	Need of knowledge in Marketing and Communications studies Need of web-based applications knowledge/Need to develop new skills Image of HRs in organizations

For this research, limitations occurred. The difficulty of suggesting that the respondents are experts in social media and employer branding since it is a relative new subject of research, and the geographical location of all the Academics which might have a different influence for each of them, on the opinions generated here.

This study comes as a response to those willing to engage in social media activities or research. It provides an expertise forecasting of what might happen when companies decide to use social media, a guideline to follow and understanding of why and for what they should use it for employer branding.

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I. Introduction

A simple search on one of the most accessed search engines on the Web, *GOOGLE.com:* "Obama social media"., will enlighten the reader with a bundle of information: either it is about how the current President of USA won the election thanks to social media or how he manipulated the masses through *Facebook*, *Twitter* and *Youtube*. The search reveals over 9 other related topics and 59.400 results. In his campaign, Barack Obama utilized *Facebook*, *MySpace*, *Twitter*, emails and blogging both to promote his message to the public and "to instigate his message receivers to foreword the content of his campaign" (Oluseyi and Gallop, 2010, p.251). Whether it is rather inaccurate to acknowledge that the success of one of the most powerful leaders of the world is due to his proactive use of social media, it is noticeable to understand that these assumptions are based on utilizing a type of media accessible to every individual. This might mean that social media, whether it is used by a future president or a teenager uploading pictures on *Facebook*, could be a powerful tool of communication, marketing, promotion and recruitment for organizations and individuals, if handled consecutively.

If you fail to be convinced by the power and growth of social media, you might be for sure motivated by the speech of the Pope, Benedict XVI, the representative of one of the most conservative Church. With the occasion of the 45th World Communication Day, The Pope announced: "In the digital world, transmitting information increasingly means making it known within a social network where knowledge is shared in the context of personal exchange. The new technologies are not only changing the way we communicate, but communication itself, so much so that it could be said that we are

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living through a period of vast cultural transformation"[1]. If any person might want to find information about The Pope's activity, it is sufficient to visit http://pope2you.net/index.php?lang=en , and check He's Facebook or Vatican YouTube.

Nowadays, the way people interact is rapidly changing; it is common sense to admit that the most used interaction mean that individuals adhere to is related to web-based technologies. Whether it is internet, e-mails, personal WebPages, blogs, search engines, social networks or chats, these days individuals are more and more connected through these types of media communication. This type of interaction is supported by the term "social media" which refers to a group of internet-based applications which allow the creation and exchange of content for all the people that use it (*Kaplan &Haenlein 2010, p.61*).

But the interest in social media is not only for entertainment purpose, such as YouTube, Facebook or Twitter, it can serve also as an appropriate cyberspace for companies to both advertise/promote themselves and connect with current and prospective employees. HR professionals identified the rapid growth of social media usage and, through the use of technology to attract and recruit candidates (recruiting), they have understood the power of information sharing that could be obtained. Companies have Facebook profiles to announce job openings, use LinkedIn to search for potential qualified personnel and advertise on blogs, Twitter or YouTube new jobs available. Moreover, social media has also created the opportunity for organizations to enhance their employer branding strategies. Creating an image of a desirable and unique employer through social media has received much attention in the last years. According to a survey conducted by OSCAR GbmH (an European student management consultancy

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[1] http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/communications/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20110124_45th-world-communications-day_en.html

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based in Cologne) and presented on March 2010, already 53% of companies use social media for recruiting and employer branding, while 2/3 of the internet population visits regularly social media sites. In the same matter, Facebook officials declare that currently there are more than 500 million active users and more than 1 million developers, companies and entrepreneurs from more than 180 countries (www.Facebook.com) , while LinkedIn promotes themselves as the social media space where more than 75 million professionals exchange information, ideas and opportunities (www.linkedin.com) . This growing interest and power of social media seems to be of major interest for companies that want to make themselves known as an interesting employer and to recruit perspective employees, through the techniques that are more commonly used by students, job seekers and professionals.

A 2009 report conducted by CIPD[2] finds that HR is failing to take advantage of many opportunities presented by Web 2.0 social media technologies. One year later, the OSCAR study concludes that the numbers of organizations willing to access social media networks is continually growing for both recruiting and employer branding purpose, thus assessing the power of social media (http://www.slideshare.net/squeakernet/social-media-recruiting-and-employer-branding-survey-results).

Other sources mention that "social networking adoption more than doubled in use from 2008 to 2009. Social networking, such as Facebook, used for branding, went up by 50% and the various tools that support collaboration and knowledge sharing tripled in use "(Cedar Crestone, 2009, pg. 33).

Every company wants to stand out, and who else could better promote and represent you as a company, other than your employees; but increased popularity and success derives from the image you create yourself as an Employer. In order to retain top

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[2] Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) 26 February 2009

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talented graduates or perspective employees, you must differentiate from other competitors, by imagining what do employees want, which channels of communication are most appropriate to use and how can I convince them that this is the best place for them to work? These are questions that employer branding specialist should find answers too, and this is why it should be so important for a company.

In its full understanding, employer branding "cuts across many traditional HR specialists and becomes an umbrella program that provides structure to previously separate policies and practices" (Edwards, 2010, p.5). The attractiveness of Employer Branding, especially if promoted through Social Media, is that it gives great opportunities for HR professionals to get involved in activates beyond their traditional HR tasks. Recruiting could become more interesting and efficient by tweeting a job opening; head hunting could be facilitated by the vast number of Linked profiles; allowing employees to blog about how it is to work in that company could enhance the organizational image, thus could increase the number of applications interested in that company.

Since evidence shows that from year to year the numbers are increasing as regards to the usage of social media for branding, there is still little research that tackles the future of these issues. We know organizations use it since we see most of the corporations out there on the platform, but what does this mean for the future? Should academics embark on using and researching as much as possible the social networks or should they stick to the same means as before?

From the President of the U.S.A to the Pope, everyone is using social media. This study considers relevant to understand future trends and consequences of using employer branding through social media, based on this rapid growth. It is considered that, by "looking into the future", the present usage of social media for employer branding could be better valorized or explained. Advantages and disadvantages could come up, things to avoid, ideas to enhance employer branding, tips and advices, all in the benefit of Employer Branding stakeholders. This rapid growth could be as superficial as its speed;

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so, before embarking into strategies or presumed benefits of using the new media that could dramatically affect the Employer Branding of a company or into costly empirical research, we must first explore the future before taking any actions.

In the light of the above, the Delphi technique can answer some of this questions addressed for the future. "In all subject domains, Delphi has been primarily employed for forecasting, planning, issue identification/prioritization, or for framework/strategies development (Bobeva, 2002, p.104). Such studies use the Delphi method to forecast globalization, international business and trade (Czinkota and Ronkainen, 2005), the future of knowledge management (Scholl et al, 2004), the future of future studies in management (Schwarz, 2008) or the future impact of enterprise resource planning systems on supply chain management (Akkersman et al, 2003).

Findings of a study conducted in 1999 by Rowe and Right , suggest that Delphi groups outperform both statistical groups and standard interactive groups, while Landeta (2006) confirms, based on a literature review, that the Delphi method "is a valid instrument for forecasting and supporting decision-making" (Landeta et al, 2006, p.467). The Delphi method is mainly preferred for forecasting because it allows the experts to analyze their answers, after the controlled feedback, so that in the last round they reach a consensus. By using a normal questionnaire, there would be no common agreement, just opinions or statistical numbers, which will inform and not predict. Although no one can predict the future, by analyzing the answers and emphasizing the most relevant ideas of each round, the experts could envision better what will be the trends of a certain subject.

The focus of this study will be Academics, who are considered experts based on their knowledge and research experience in HRM and employer branding fields of study. Little research and theory has been given to social media, especially in relationship with employer branding. Thus, academic insight of the future could set the foundation of theory building and empirical research. The participants of this study are academic

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members all over the world, involved in either research or teaching courses related to the field of Management, HRM, Work and Organizational studies, Online Recruiting, International Business or Knowledge transfer. All have knowledge of HRM and some already have been actively participants of social media usage through online blogging or personal profile pages on SNs.

This study will contribute expanding the already limited existing knowledge on social media and employer branding, to methodology by developing the only Delphi study aimed at forecasting the social media usage for employer branding, bringing the method into the area of Business studies, and to science by trying to find an answer to something that is not known by now.

In this matter, it is therefore adequate to address the following research question:

"What is the future of employer branding through social media, in the vision of Academics?".

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II. Social Media and Employer Branding

2.1 Social media

2.1.1 Social media literature research

In order to find the most accurate, useful and relevant articles there were used 2 main search engines: **Google Scholar** and **Scopus.**

On **Google scholar** the first search process started from the word "social media" resulting in 2,450,000 hints. The search process was then narrowed to social media as the exact phrase, searching articles only in the following subject areas: Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities; Business, Administration, Finance and Economics resulting in 20, 100 articles. Next, it was considered social media as the exact phrase in the title of the article and no citations resulting in a number of 832 articles. After an initial look of the abstracts of each article it was considered that the articles from Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities were not relevant for the topic of this research focusing more on social behavior studies, teen psychology, healthcare and social interaction. The final search was then accomplished in the field of Business, Administration, and Finance resulting in 197 articles. Based on the abstract of these 197 articles it was made a selection of 70 articles that might be of major interest. This selection was possible as that there were numerous studies either focused on financial aspects of social media such as ROI, social responsibility, steps on how to improve different applications such as Facebook or Twitter, advices on how to make better use of social media or social media design.

The following step was for the three researchers involved to agree upon the articles that could provide the most useful information, for this particular study. It was commonly agreed to have an overview of the abstracts of the articles and understand the main interest that previous research had on social media. Based on this, it was

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observed that the number of articles has rapidly increased (from 2010 and 2009) thus indicating a new domain of research, and a strong interest where there is still a lot of theory to be developed.

In order to systematically decide upon the 70 articles it were considered the following items of interest: description of social media, users of social media, implementation of social media and outcomes of social media. Keeping this into account, there were selected a number of 29 articles which were in accordance to one or more of this items. (see Fig. 1)

Fig. 1: Google Scholar article search
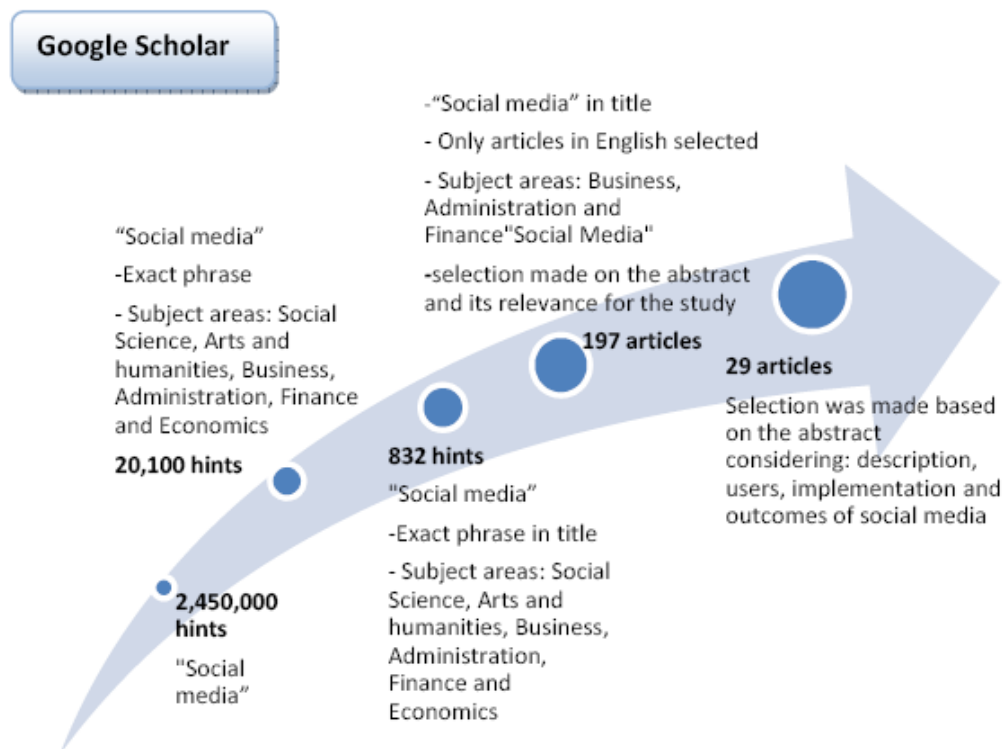
The starting point in searching articles on **Scopus** on "Social Media" was finding the integrated phrase in Article Title, Abstract Keyword and Authors. All types of studies from all years and from subject areas like Life Science, Health Science, Physical Sciences

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and Social Sciences and Humanities were displayed. This resulted in finding 25, 445 articles.

The next step was to narrow the search of "Social Media" as integrated phrase in the title and the subject area was reduced only to Social Sciences and Humanities, taking out Life Science, Health Science, Physical Sciences . Also, the publication year was set after 1999 and the document type was limited to articles. Thus, at the end of this search, on Scopus 290 articles were found.

The researchers noticed that the number of articles found dropped considerably, meaning that social media as research topic it is pretty new and not too many studies were developed in the last 10 years. Still the newest articles were selected, most of them from 2010 and some from 2009 and 2008.

Another selection was made, based on the subject of the articles. After a better look on the abstract of the articles, the three researchers found studies involving social media and technical or IT development, social and psychological factors, mass-media, health care, etc. thus, articles not related to the topic of this research were not chosen. Out of 290 articles 64 were debating issues on social media in the context of organizations, communication, PR, branding, users, marketing, etc, that could have been useful for the present study. The researchers read the articles and organized them in four categories: description of Social Media, types of users, outcomes, and types how it is implemented. In this final selection only 30 articles were selected to match the four categories.

The total number of articles used for Social Media was 59 (see appendix I).

Fig. 2: Scopus article search

ics
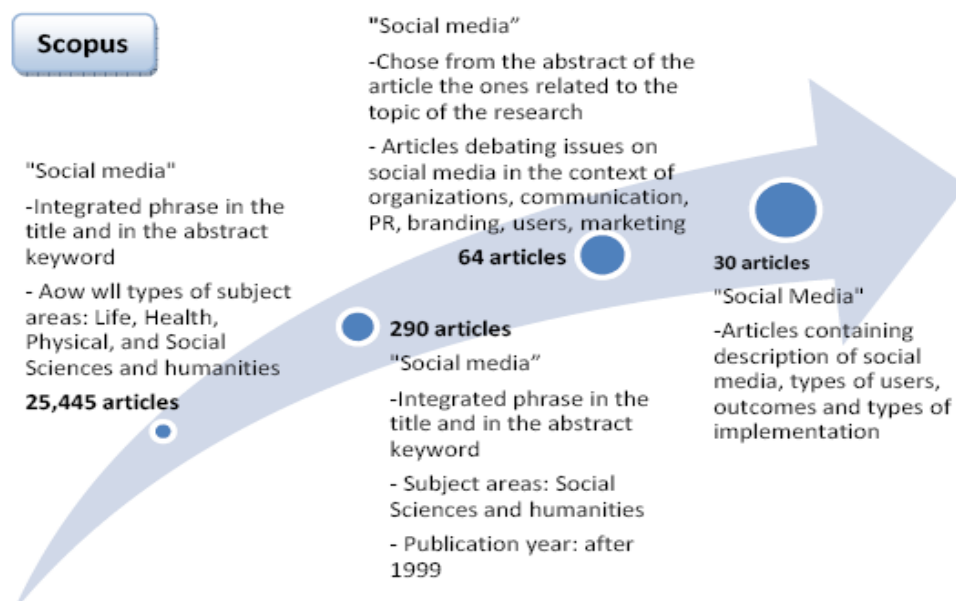
2.1.2 Social media defined

Social media represents a revolutionary new trend according to the opinion of Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), replaces traditional media and communication (Perdue, 2010, p.35) is among the fastest growing segment of the Web (Jansen et al, 2010, p.3854) and will be the locomotive via which the World Wide Web evolves (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010, p.68).

Several studies that focused their attention on social media, social networking or Web 2.0 research, have attempted to classify and give a proper definition to what social media actually stands for. In most of the cases, social media is associated or even equaled to Web 2.0 or User Generated Content. Since it is still a new concept that experts are debating regarding its definition, a universally accepted definition may prove impossible (Solis, 2009). Thus, considering some of the definitions of previous academics may provide a clear and accurate understanding of what social media represents on the world of Web.

Social media relates to the sharing of information, experiences, and perspectives throughout community-oriented websites as suggested by Weinberg (2009). This definition may not capture completely the essence of social media due to its generalization, thus Bruns and Bahnisch (2009, p.5) suggest a narrower definition, according to which social media is defined by "websites which are built on Web 2.0 technologies to provide space for in-depth social interaction, community formation, and the tackling of collaborative projects". Since this definition may not offer a clear understanding of the content of social media, because it suggests that through social media u can only interact, form communities and tackle collaborative projects, this particular study considers the definition of social media given by (Kaplan and Haenlein

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2010, p.61). The authors argue that in order to properly define social media, it must first be established an understating of the two concepts most associated with it: Web 2.0 and User Generated Content. "Web 2.0 is the platform for the evolution of social media while User Generated Content is the sum of all ways in which people make use of social media".

From this, the following definition is depicted: "Social media is 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" (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010, p.61).

Although there might be some other definitions available that explain the concept, the main point that needs to stand out is that social media and related technologies are "in the beginning stage of their evolution" (Oluseyi and Gallop, 2010, p.252). Social media has increased its popularity in the last years, overwhelming organizations with its rapid power of sharing information, networking and identity building. Research about social media or the impact it might have on companies and HRM is still at a premature faze; this particular study which aims at forecasting employer branding through social media could eventually point out if social media will continue its evolution or fade as quick as its growth.

Social media covers a large area of activities and websites which differ from content, purpose, users and information. We all hear about Facebook, Twitter or MySpace but social media covers much more than the profane knowledge of an internet surfer. Although the social web communities mentioned before are indeed part of social media, according to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) there are 6 different categories of social media that are discussed below.

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2.1.3   Types of social media

1. **Collaborative projects**

Collaborative projects are the most democratic manifestation of the user generated content and allow the joint and continuous creation of content by many end-users Kaplan and Haenlein (2010). The advantage of using such type of social media is that all the information is available for free, and due to the large number of members who constantly check the content of the information, useful and accurate information could be found only by browsing the website.

The most known collaborative project of such type is Wikipedia, which allows the registered users from all over the world to add, remove and change information about encyclopedic subjects of all nature. This online encyclopedia is available in 230 different languages (www.wikipedia.com).

2. **Blogs**

Blogs are "the primarily form of social media and provide a channel for users to express opinions, facts and thoughts" (Java, 2007, p.1). Traditional media was based on personal web pages which not many had the interest or time to own one; it was mostly dedicated to organizations, celebrities or entities that needed space for advertising on the web. With the development of Web 2.0, blogs represent the equivalent of personal web pages; the difference is that anyone can easily start up a blog whether it is a company, employer, teenager or any other individual. The content of any blog can differ from personal diaries of different people to specific information on a specific subject. What can be particular of blogging is that "bloggers influence each other and engage in conversations that ultimately lead to exchange of ideas and spread of information "(Java, 2007, p.1). In the blogosphere, "the blogger becomes aware of a topic by reading another blog then writes about the topic, spreading awareness of the topic among its

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readers. The blogger may choose to write about the topic again offering a fresh perspective or not "(Oluseyi and Gallop, 2010, p.244)

3. Content communities

This category covers all the network channels purposed at sharing media content between users. Content communities share a vast amount of different types of media from text – Bookcrossing which involves sharing books from user around the world, photos – FlicKr, "a network currently holding billions of photographs stored and hundreds of thousands of paid subscribers, in addition to the free ones" (Weinberg, 2009), power point presentations via SlideShare and videos – YouTube, the most accessed video sharing channel with over 100 million of videos uploaded each day

4. Social Networking Sites (SNSs)

Social networking sites are applications that enable users to connect by creating personal information profiles, inviting friends and colleagues to have access to those profiles, and sending e-mails and instant messages between each other (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010, p.63). One of the most famous social networking site is Facebook, which, according to Facebook officials, is continuously and rapidly increasing its number of users each day. Facebook started from Mark Zuckerberg who initially developed the network to keep in touch with his Harvard colleagues in 2004. Since then, it registered an amazing growth being available all over the world, emphasizing the rapid expansion of social media networks amongst users. Sociolnomics.net, a famous blog that covers every aspect of social media on W.W.W, posted a video on YouTube called Social Media Revolution which goes back in history pointing out that it took 38 years to Radio to reach 50 million users, 13 years for Television, 4 years for the Internet and less than 9 months for Facebook to register 100 million users (www.sociolnomics.net retrieved on 10<u>th</u> October).

Other known and accessed social networking sites are for example, MySpace, Hi5 and Twitter. Twitter users tweet about any topic within the 140-character limit and follow others to receive their tweets and is considered to be "a new powerful medium of information sharing, for both individuals and organizations" (Kwak et al, 2010, p.591).

5. Virtual game worlds

In this category are included platforms "that replicate a three-dimensional environment in which users can appear in the form of personalized avatars and interact with each other as they would in real life" (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010, p.64) A known example of virtual game world is "World of Warcraft" with more than 12 million subscribers as of October 2010, according to Wikipedia information.

6. Virtual social worlds

Similar to the virtual game worlds, this platform allows the user to create avatars of themselves but with a lot more freedom of action and without restrictions, as in a game. This allows the users to create a virtual world where they can act as in real life: talk, socialize with others, design their clothing, purchase and sell different goods etc. Second Life is a virtual social world where everyone can join and create a life of their own. "Virtual social worlds have recently become very popular because they offer a multitude of opportunities for companies in marketing (advertising/communication, virtual product sales/v-Commerce, marketing research), and human resource and internal process management" (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010, p.64).

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Table 1: Social Media characteristics

Criteria for comparison SM types	Examples	Unique Characteristics	User Attractiveness
Collaborative projects	Wikipedia Discovery Network Wordpress	- Creation of content - Collaboration of users	- Possibility to quickly access necessary information about any given topic - Possibility to become an active user and contribute to the creation of content
Blogs	Personal Blogs Corporate Blogs	-expressing opinions, facts and thoughts - accessible to every individual - exchange of ideas	- Dairy replacement - Alternative for writers, celebrities, organizations to share their thoughts with the others - Supporting causes/NGOs - Personal advertising - Receive feedback on your opinions or writing skills -Possibility to commercialize goods (e.g. vintage, book, music selling blogs)
Content Communities	Flickr YouTube SlideShare	- Possibility to upload high quantity of data - Sharing videos, photos, music, presentations etc.	- Sharing videos/photos for family, friends, organizations, communities etc. - Promoting/advertising yourself - Access millions of videos on all kinds of topics - Video blogging - Possibility to comment, subscribe, favorite or browse endless times.

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SNSs	Facebook Hi5 Twitter LinkedIn	- Creation of personal profiles - Instant messaging - Possibility to accept or reject the people you want to interact with -Privacy settings - Individually centered service	- Create a profile that represents You - Upload pictures -Update your friends about your day, through messages, pictures, videos, instant messages - Connect with people leaving on different corners of the world -Chat with your friends - Hold discussions through forums - post blog entries for other to read - Possibility to make your profile private and accessible only for your list friends
Virtual game worlds	World of Warcraft	- Virtual game interaction with other users	- Online gaming with other users - Playing in an alternative virtual world - Creation of your own avatar - Communicate with other users (textual or real-time voice communication)
Virtual Social Worlds	Second Life The Sims	- Creation of avatars - Creation of a virtual world - Freedom of actions	- Creation of avatars - Creation of your own social virtual world where u can do all social, commercial, relational, financial aspects inspired by real life - Make your own rules - Interact with other online users and their virtual self-made world

All of the 6 types of social media are designed for interaction and communication with other users that might have similar interests. Although they seem similar in their overall purpose, each of them is unique and offers different opportunities for its users. Collaborative projects are designed for knowledge sharing; it is already commonly known the expression "Wikipedia says so". Blogs are a form of personal diary, accessible to everyone or alternative for personal websites, which take more time and money. Content communities are strictly designed for sharing media content between users. Social Networks allow you connect with your list of friends whom you rigorously select, while Virtual game and social worlds offer the possibility of not playing/interact alone, but play/interact at the same time with people all over the world.

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Taking into consideration the table above, it can also be observed that SNSs could be the most comprising of all of the 6 forms of social media. By becoming a member of social networking, you can post/promote on your profiles videos both made by you or subtracted from YouTube, promote/suggest others peoples blogs that you might find interesting, ask questions on your Wall to which you might find answers from friends whom you trust more than Wikipedia, share your pictures or play with the hundreds of games applications available. Although there could be identified some characteristics of other types of social media, SNSs could be more the main channel to promote all these other types of social media, since the purpose itself of a SNS is to virtually communicate with others.

2.1.4. - Research into Social Media-

Social media has opened various means of communication that in the past were either impossible or destined to a particular segment of users. What social media brings new to the world of media and internet is that every single individual or organization can easily participate to any of the types mentioned above. Moreover, it has come to a point where "peer-to-peer communication is proved to be more trustworthy than top-down messages, turning to "people like us" to get input and advice on products and services", as to the opinion of Fichter (2007, p.57).

Initially, social media started from "people like us", as a form of blogging where ordinary individuals would register under a certain blogging website and share all their thoughts, complains and stories to their friends. Some years later Facebook and MySpace came as a need of teenagers and graduates to keep in touch with their friends and share pictures, information and gossip. Along with the interest in using social media came the interest of behavioral and psychological studies; following the roots of Ervin Goffman's

(1959) idea of self-presentation in everyday life, psychological studies suggest that Social Media allows the individual to self-present in a way that would influence or control the opinion that others might have about them. This matter is the focus of impression management, according to which an individual attempts to control the impression or image someone might have about him (Leary and Kowalski, 1990). A study conducted at Albany State University in 2010 by J.Rosenbaum, reveals that students, when actively engage into SNSs activities, try to control the impression their colleagues might form and also create a unique self-presentation for authenticity. The same idea of self-presentation could be directed into the organizational environment; if companies deicide to use social media, then they would self-present themselves in a way that should create a positive impression for online customers and also a unique image to emphasize distinctiveness. Nowadays, "businesses of all types are getting involved in social media in an attempt to reach new audiences and strengthen their ties with existing customers" (Perdue, 2010, p.3).

A study of Lenhart et al (2007) among a sample of 935 parent-child pair suggested that 93% of teens use the internet, "and more of them than ever are treating it as a venue for social interaction – a place where they can share creations, tell stories, and interact with others" (Lenhart et al, 2007, p.2). Still, the registered increase of social media usage is not particularly influenced by teenagers and young students or graduates: three-quarters of American adults have been online, and almost all Internet users say one of their primary purposes for going online is for communication (Jones, Fox, 2009). The results of a research sampled on 1482 respondents points out that on a scale from 1 to 10 (1 being never/rarely and 10 often), the respondents rate their average social media use at 8,03; from this sample, 74,5% of women respondents and 67,7 men respondents use social media (Coreea et al, 2009, p.250).

"Most users visit the sites to keep in touch with people they already know, and more than half have two or more profiles online" (Lenhart, 2009, p.3). One trend that

emerges is that the more social media platforms that a person has, the more willing they are to engage in opinion sharing practices, commenting, responding to polls (Jansen et al, 2010) and being an active participator.

Facebook statistics declare that amongst their active users, there are more than one million developers and entrepreneurs from more than 180 countries, proving that social media interest is not of entertainment and socializing purpose only. In fact, "if there is one certain path to failure , it involves thinking that social media is just about posting existing TV spots on YouTube or putting prefabricated press announcements on corporate blogs" (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p.66).

Companies have understood the power of social media and the direct contact they have with their customers and clients, thus engaging in more and more activities via social networks. In the United States alone, 86% of the top 100 companies use at least one social media platform (Coon, 2010). "The enormous growth of social media—at least in terms of users—carries many implications, one of which is how social media technologies can transform business" (Perdue, 2010, p.5). LinkedIn offers great opportunities for HR professionals to recruit thanks to the numerous profiles of all types of professionals, Facebook, Twitter and Youtube could allow public relations and marketing to communicate and promote their products while in the same time make use of free advertisement space etc. "Social Media allow firms to engage in timely and direct end-consumer contact at relatively low cost and higher levels of efficiency, making it not only relevant for multinational firms, but also for small firms and medium sized companies, and even nonprofit and governmental agencies" (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p.67).

 "Whether companies like it or not, social media is impacting business" (Tsai, 2009, p.1). Wright and Hinson (2008) analyses the effect that blogs and social media have on PR and communication within companies and externally. They found that, at the end of 2005 there were 38 million blogs and at the end of 2007 the number increased up to

100 million. Rees and Hopkins (2007) reveal in their study a Melcrum report in 2007, showing that by adopting social media communication companies improved their employees' engagement- 71% respondents agreed with this affirmation, internal communication- 59% respondents agreed with this affirmation and also internal communities were helped to develop- 51 % respondents agreed with the affirmation. Thus, social media through its various channels positively affected businesses by increasing communication among employees and encouraging individuals to interact more than just in professional purposes.

Social media, decided from the beginning how and what to use it for, is free and it can be seen either as global focus groups to inform employees exactly what customers want, or as means for publicity. As this section presents, several outcomes useful for companies can arise from appropriately using social media. Various users refer to the concept of social media as "great tools that we need to embrace and use" (Wright and Hinson 2008, p.17), or state that "they make public relations two-way symmetrical thus enhancing and facilitating mutual understanding" (Wright and Hinson 2008, p 17). Many companies noticed that the effects of social media can be worked out in their advantage, so they encourage their employees to start using social media and get into direct contact with their customers or executives.

Using social media enhances communication between customers and organizations. Users become a member of a network, exchange opinions, share knowledge and collaborate more efficient for organizations. (See text box 1)

Text box 1

John Simpson is a professional runner and a member of Nike+ online community. Social media connects him to people who share the same preoccupation, life style, stories, challenges, training tips, etc. Nike online community does not limit only to discussion about shoes or sport wear, but all related topics that interest the members. Also, Simpson runs a company called Jama Software, competing with big names like

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> **IBM. Jama Software built an online community, Jama Backstage, in which clients discuss open and without secrets with staff members.**
>
> **Source: Grensing-Pophal, 2010, p. 37**

Bruns&Bahnisc (2009) argue that online communities well educated and trained can be drivers for innovation and valuable free feedback. Online communities are not a given, they require to be formed, carefully developed and managed according to the expected result. Members should be guided and should also be provided with the necessary tools regarding what type of behavior, attitudes and actions are accepted, they should share a sense of purpose, common values and beliefs. Therefore, a set of guidelines can be added, toolkit set, or section with Frequently Asked Questions. Having these instruments, online community can contribute to the organization's new product development. (See text box 2)

> **Text box 2**
>
> **Spore is an evolution game, issued by Maxis/Electronic Arts, in which players have to build from single-cell organisms to much more complex ones. In 2008 Spore Creature Creator was released in a limited demo version, along with an online community. Members of the community discusses about strong/weak points of the game, type of creatures they were controlling, tips on how to do it, etc. They provided valuable information to Maxis/Electronic Arts and in the same time practice on how to play better. When finally an improved version was released to the large public, the game had a history- users came with 1.5 million creatures- online community was strong and useful information was being provided constantly.**
>
> **Source: Bruns and Bahnisch, 2009, p. 20**

Moreover, by developing strong forums, customer service department can improve its results, by helping both customers asking online questions and those who use the

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classical phone method. Simultaneously social media can be used as new product generator or to simply get feedback from clients and stay in direct touch with them. (See text box 3)

Text box 3:

"Lenovo has seen a 20% reduction in call-center activity in the U.S. over six months because nearly 50,000 customers go to its community website for information about laptops". (Swartz, 2010, p. 3)

A well known multinational company, Starbucks, relies on its online followers- through their own social network MyStarbucksIdea.com- to develop new products or get feedback from clients. Still, this does not mean that Starbucks is not present on Twitter or Facebook, where the company has 230.000 followers, respectively 3.2 million fans. (Swartz, 2010, p. 9)

Source: Swartz, 2010

Information about brands, products and services are all available though social media. Swartz (2010), in his study into social media's effects on marketing, has revealed peer-review of products that 9 out of 10 consumers trust more their peers than regular marketing. Information on events, arguing good or bad reviewing, all can be done instantly through social media so the gap between customers and organizations is slowly breached (Swartz, 2010, p. 3).

Companies choose and manage social media channels to build trust and to gain loyal customers. Social media channels usage creates and adds value for the organization and it is cheap. For instance, HP adopted a social media system, in which they manage blogs providing answer to their customers' questions by commenting to different posts.

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Customers know that their concerns, thoughts, problems are being considered, which builds a strong connection between them and HP (Perdue, 2010, p. 17).

Attempts of increasing communication through social media happen not only in private and profit oriented companies, but also in public organizations. U.S. Air Force educated its employees how to use Facebook, Twitter and MySpace, what information to post not to interfere with the security routine they have respect, but still to be able to communicate and stay in touch with their families and friends. (See text box 4)

Text box 4

David Faggard, chief of the emerging developing department within Pentagon established as goal for his team to learn how to communicate online. They want to explore and develop the Web 2.0 application on the one hand for their employees and on the other hand for those who might use it against the nation: "We obviously have many more concerns regarding cyberspace than a typical social media user," Faggard says. "I am concerned with how insurgents or potential enemies can use social media to their advantage. It's our role to provide a clear and accurate, completely truthful and transparent picture for any audience"

Source: Scott, 2010, p. 1

Internet World Stats presented statistics of 2009 saying that 1.7 billion people use internet, which represents a 380% growth from 2008 (Perdue, 2010). Gordhamer (2010) came with four ways in which social media changes business (Gordhamer, 2010). One point in his article is that due to increased social media usage, executives and companies in general can shift from "hard to reach" to "available to everyone". Explanation lies in the fact that before contacting a company, customers first search for it on the Internet: Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, etc. and more important, on discussion forums. The piece of advice he provides for the companies, is that they should allow

their customers to search for them through the means clients choose and so to increase the awareness about their company.

Communication through social media seems to be useful also in politics or public administration, by reaching the electorate much easily and saving time for communicating with large audience. For instance, Barack Obama, in winning the elections used social media platforms- Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, E-mails- to reach his electorate and to make his message known all over USA. Online audiences address different questions to which politicians can answer by posting YouTube movies with explanations. In this way, although their schedule is tight, politicians and public persons manage to communicate in due time to as many citizens as possible. "In this regard, it is the collective opinion of social media users that help to set a political agenda" (Hilts and Yu, 2010, p.1).

As text box 5 shows, social media as a whole can be used for different purposes, if manager properly. (See text box 5)

Text box 5

An example of company using social media to get three different results is Sun Microsystem, an international company with more than 35.000 employees, globally distributed. For them, social media bridged distances by creating virtual half-ways and allowing the employees from different countries to connect regardless their geographical position or hour; provided innovative ideas for the company-which being a technical one had to be competitive and come up with improvements in products- and through social media employees posted various ideas, information, etc. leading or enhancing the innovative process; and connected employees and executives, which resulted in less money and time spent on travels and more focus on the strategy and on the company's mission.

Source: Barker, 2008

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Although no scientific research validated the exact effects of social media on businesses, but as seen in the light of the given examples, we assume that social media can be used in a wide range of fields, for different purposes: private companies use it to gain loyal customers, public defense authorities use social media in strengthening national security and politicians use it to stay in touch with their electorate. A properly designed and used social media can have positive a positive impact on business, resulting in enhancing communication, saving time and reaching a large audience (US Air Force, politicians), encouraging people to share knowledge, collaborate, exchange opinion in the company's benefit (Nike online community), increase awareness about companies, innovating and providing valuable feedback (Spore game), building trust, adding value and gaining loyal customers (HP).

Several advantages can be depicted from the literature review on Social Media. Nowadays Social Media gathers both individuals and companies, and moreover, it builds a bridge between the two of them. Some individuals' actions considered to be insignificant to their field of activity may have a big impact on a company or service provider. For example, peer-to-peer communication which proves to be more important than advertising or marketing strategies companies may apply. On the other hand, individuals can find information easily, can make an idea on a company's profile and environment, and can find a job suitable for their requirements.

As noticed in the reviewed literature, companies make most use of social media and invest time and resources for taking advantage of the available tools (blogs, social networking sites, content communities, virtual social worlds). When it comes to companies' social media usage, all the advantages are professionally related. Going online and creating a virtual image of the company, reflecting the real one can transform companies. For example, through social networking sites companies reach new and large audiences. *LinkedIn* became famous for job recruiters and it is used by both individuals who are looking for job opportunities and companies that search for

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qualified job candidates. Also, the connections companies have with customers can be maintained through social media. Furthermore, companies obtain valuable feedback free of charge or with considerable fewer budgets through social media than through traditional way of interviewing customers.

The Potential advantages of Social Media table (below) containing an accurate analysis of this section offers a clear image of social media influence on individuals, companies and on both of them. It can be noticed that mostly, individuals use social media means to communicate and to keep in touch with their friends. That is to say, individuals mainly use social media for fun or regard it as leisure activity.

The same applications of social media can be used by individuals just for fun, or by companies in professional purposes (see **Table 2).**

Table 2: Potential advantages of Social Media

Potential advantages of Social Media	
Specifically for individual users	1. Easy access for users 2. Keep in touch with friends 3. Social interaction
For both individual users and organizations	1. Peer-to-peer communication 2. Strengthening ties with friends/customers 3. Maintain existing contact with friends/customers 4. Free of charge 5. Share knowledge 6. Increase awareness about companies
Specifically for organizations	1. Reach new audiences 2. Reach large audiences 3. Transform business 4. Search for job candidates 5. Extensive marketing 6. Timely and direct costumer contact 7. Low cost contact with customers 8. Advantageous for all kind of companies 9. Increase employee engagement 10. Allows formal and informal communication among employees 11. Enhances mutual understanding between companies and employees 12. Offers valuable free feedback

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13. Potential for a new product generator
14. Saves time for communication with large audience
15. Saves time and money for communication with subsidiaries worldwide located
16. Gain trustworthy and loyal clients
17. Improve customer service department

2.1.5. -Social Media adoption in companies-

As pointed out before, it took less than one year for social media to reach an incredible high number of users- e.g. "iPhone applications hit 1 billion in only 9 months" (Coon, 2010, p.2), - compared to the development of the previous media like radio or television. There is no certainty that once stepping into social media, your business will prosper more, unless this step is planned very carefully in advance. Literature does not offer strict guidelines for a proper implementation of a working social media system, but recommendations are being mentioned. Scholars offer general issues to think of when deciding to implement social media.

For instance, in Sun Microsystem, the implementation of social media firstly had to be in alignment with the strategy. Therefore they approached a 3 stage plan as follows:

- Community Mashups- virtual gatherings with all the stakeholders in the company were created so members can discuss, share information, networking, connect different groups, etc.

- Getting Started with Social Media Guide-introduced to make things clear and easier for their users, and also to offer the opportunity to learn how social media tools work or in which purpose they can be used.

- Building online forums- made for users to interact, connect, solve problems and create multi-way conversations by answering to multiple questions.

Stating that the process of adopting and using social media in Sun Microsystem is and on-going process, Barker (2008), suggests 6 issues to consider before choosing to implement social media in a company:

- Collaboration- cooperate with employees and technical department
- Simplicity- easy to access and use
- Flexibility- offer an integrated mix of social tools (Wiki, Facebook, Twitter)
- Focus- establish achievable targets
- Control- set guidelines, but give users freedom
- Embrace the chaos- the process is a dynamic one, things will always change

Bruns and Bahnisch (2009) highlight other several aspects that should be taken into account when choosing social media for companies:

- Be as open as possible to new users, and encourage the community to sort good from bad- new users have to be in balance with the ones that leave or are inactive. The old users are needed so they can show the new comers what behavior to adopt, which form of participation etc. The more connected the community will be, the more difficult will be for users to give up.
- As the community defines its aims and values, work with those who emerge as leaders- connect with most active users, reward them, give feedback, rate and look on the rating the other users give. Be aware of the individual status of the users within the community.
- The community and its processes will change over time. Follow and encourage this evolution- number of users might increase and decrease, innovative ideas may become the core of the community. Provide both technological and social tools for development.
- The community will feel a sense of pride in its achievements. Don't take it away from them- members of the community will feel like the own a part of it. This

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feeling should be encouraged, because it comes with both loyalty and pride, which lead to more engagement in the community and solid partnerships.

In the same line, Rees and Hopkins (2009), present their personal experience in using social media for private, public and business purposes. Based on their experience, the authors come with 10 items to be considered when adopting social media for corporations:

- Assess the organizational culture readiness

- Focus on people not on technology

- Think about the business purpose of the tool

- Make sure the difference between tradition and social media is understood

- Prepare to relinquish and share the process

- Be experimental and involve employees

- Clarify what employees can and can't do

- Don't push staff too hard to adopt social media tools

- Integrate social media tools to existing system

- Don't obsess about the number of participants and usage

Although there are no tested guidelines for implementing social media, scholars advice companies to bear in mind general attitudes before or while stepping into social media world. Flexibility, out of the box thinking, willingness to share, setting up guidelines, user friendliness, step by step implementation etc. are only a few of the aspects that literature suggests companies to plan before implementing.

Nokia can be considered one of the companies that implemented carefully social media, considering the company's philosophy. A case study made by Katajisto (2010) describes what social media channels Nokia uses, how and for what purposes. (See text box 6)

Text box 6

Nokia is active on Facebook, Twitter, Nokia support videos, Second life, Nokia support

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discuss and Nokia conversations. At the time of writing the article, Katajisto found 948,000 fans. At the time of writing the present paper (October 2010), on Facebook there were 1,561,366 fans. Nokia uses Facebook for marketing and sales: posts advertisements, news related to new product launch, sends messages containing marketing information and even have OVI toolbar, which directly connects you to their online store. For NOKIA Twitter is more business oriented, twitting information on the management, changes in the company's strategy and launches of new products. On Twitter, at the time of the present study there were 38,022 users who follow Nokia. Youtube is another social media channel where Nokia has its own channels: Nokia Channel, which is also marketing oriented. Subscribers post videos about Nokia, videos made with Nokia mobile phones and of course the administrators post news whenever there is necessary. On Second life Nokia owns an island, where there is one product showroom and one lecture. Each user creates an avatar and they can improve it by buying different features, ask about experiences and leave feedback and suggestions. Beside these channels, Nokia has Nokia support discuss at <u>www.nokia.com/discuss</u> and Nokia conversations- <u>www.conversations.nokia.com</u>- which is the official Nokia blog. These are its own online platforms for ensuring 24h support to their clients and encouraging group discussions on different topics.

Source: Katajisto (2010) p. 238-241

Before organizing the social media system, Nokia made a strategy and planned all steps as it follows:

- Careful company planning
- Clear new guidelines and brave mindset for both technical communicators and users
- Implement social media according to the company's strategy, profile and policies

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- Implementing one step at a time- technical communicators to be familiar with social media, become creators rather than spectators or collectors, learn new skills

- Competitor analysis to know what channels to take into use- check on the competitors' adoption of social media channels and make a product analysis

- Offer direct assistance- one question receives detailed answers and it is translated for all social media channels: YouTube, Facebook, Blogs, Twitter, etc.

Although there is no standard recipe to implement social media, the guidelines presented in this section can be clustered into several items. The researchers chose the following aspects as being important when implementing social media:

- Design social media implementation according to the organizational culture

- Make the implementation a step by step process and make sure that both employees and members are ready for this change

- Set guidelines to clarify what members can and cannot do

- Be open to new members and offer them various channels to reach you

- Be continuously prepared to react to the changes around you, to evolve and be an important part in the interactive process

Recommendations on how to implement Social Media strongly remind general recommendation on how to implement Information Technologies in companies. It may mean that researchers still have a great deal to work it out and find specific guidelines for Social Media issues important for its implementation.

Being a new concept, social media is referred to by scholars as a useful tool for promoting a company, attracting valuable employees and gaining competitive advantage. Still, some questions remain for further discussions:

- The present trend encourages companies to adopt social media and advertise their unique organizational culture and employer identity. It might be argued on how much information should companies reveal to they keep the unique

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features and attract employees and customers in the same time. How do companies remain simultaneously original and open to their clients?

- The adoption of social media places the client in a very comfortable area, where he has the freedom to choose, give feedback, influence on the products and most important to give up and chose other products/services whenever he wants. So in the end is it about building trust by keeping balance and creating a win-win situation between clients and companies, or is it an ingenious strategy to take advantage of the endless and costless feedback and innovative ideas from the users?

2.2. Employer Branding

2.2.1. - Employer branding literature research-

The search process started from the word "branding" resulting in 3,800 word on Scopus and 794,000 on Google Scholar. The immediate narrowing was on the word "employer branding" resulting in 32 articles on Scopus and 32, 900 on Google Scholar. In order to make a selection of the most cited articles that debate the employer branding issue, the following process of narrowing was accomplished:

For Scopus, there were selected only articles in English, which have the exact word in the title from Business, Management and Accounting and Economics, Econometrics and Finance subject areas, resulting in 8 articles.

For Google Scholar, there were selected only articles in English, which have the exact word in the title, from Business, Administration, Finance and Economics subject areas resulting in 54 articles.

The three researchers involved in the process of selecting necessary articles for building the theory, decided to firstly consider the articles on "employer branding" according to the number of citations of each article. From this preliminary consideration, a number of 21 articles resulted (from 66 citations to 1 citation per article). Based on the abstract of these 21 articles, it was commonly agreed upon a number of 10 articles for employer branding. The 10 final articles were chosen according to the information provided by the abstract, considering the followings: - conceptualization of employer branding – dimensions of employer branding and outcomes of employer branding. In addition to the 10 articles used from Google Scholar and Scopus, 4 more articles were found during the theoretical research (see Fig. 3). The total number of articles used for Employer Branding was 14 (see appendix II).

Fig. 3: Employer Branding article search

- SCOPUS
- "Branding": 3,800 articles
- "Employer branding": 32 articles
- Only articles in English - "Employer Branding" in the title; Subject areas: Business, Management and Accounting and Economics, Econometrics and Finance : 8 articles

Scopus 8 articles

- GOOGLE SCHOLAR
- "Branding": 794,000 hints
- "Employer branding": 32,900 hints
- Only articles in English - "Employer Branding" in the title; Subject areas: Business Administration, Finance and Economics : 54 articles

Google Scholar 54 articles

- SCOPUS & GOOGLE SCHOLAR
- Number of citations of each article (citations from 66 to 1): 21 articles
- Information in the abstract on: conceptualization, dimensions and outcomes of Employer Branding: 10 articles
- 4 more articles were found during the theoretical research
- see appendix II

Total number of articles: 14

2.2.2. -Employer Branding defined-

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Corporate brand personality gained a lot of credit in the last years. If in 2004 Google was offering more than 3,000 results when typing employer branding (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004), in 2010 the number increased to more than 6,450,000 (www.google.com retrieved on 16 November 2010). Companies spend considerable amount of money on creating an identity inside and outside the company, which they hope to lead to adding value to their organization. Along with human capital, brands became a firm's most valuable assets (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004). "There is an increasing realization that corporate brands serve as a powerful navigational tool to a variety of stakeholders for a miscellany of purposes including employment or consumer buying behavior "(Balmer and Gray, 2003, pg.972). Thus, corporate branding refers to the general strategy of branding within a company which also includes employer branding; Personnel have a crucially important role in transmitting the brand's values and as such bring them to the heart of the corporate branding process (Balmer and Gray, 2003, pg.979). But employer branding is more than the personnel within a company, it is an entire process designed for the image of the company as an employer, the employees and future possible candidates.

One of the most important sources of information on Internet, Wikipedia, refers to employer branding as to the image of an organization as an employer (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Employer_branding, retrieved on Nov 2010). The term *branding*, refers to "a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or combination of them which is intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors" considering the definition given by the American Marketing Association. Applying branding to HRM field resulted in employer branding (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004, p. 502).

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The concept became known around the '90s and started being widely used in the management world. The rapid growth of the concept's usage lead to organizing a Conference Board on employer branding in 2001, which revealed its positive effects, like gaining competitive advantage, helping employees to internalize the company's values, employee retention, etc. During the conference, employer branding was understood as establishing the identity of the firm, as an employer.

The concept received various definitions during the years and development of the academic material. Reichenberg (2009), discusses employer branding as involving the development and communication of the culture of an organization as an employer, defining and delivering the employment experiences. According to him, the basic principle is that all employees are consumers who must be recruited and retained.

A definition given in 1996 by Amber and Barrow and taken over by Backhaus and Tikoo (2004, p. 502) refers to the rewards of employer branding, calling it "the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment and identified with the employing company."

Citing Sullivan (2004) from Backhaus and Tikoo (2004, p. 501), employer branding is defined as "a targeted long-term strategy to manage the awareness and perceptions of employees, potential employees and related stakeholders with regards to a *particular* firm". In the end, the conclusion reached in their study defined employer branding "as the process of building identifiable and unique employer identity, and the employer brand as a concept of the firm that differentiates it from its competitors". This study considers both definitions, but suggests the following combination:

- *Employer branding is viewed as a long term oriented strategy of any given company, aimed both at building a unique and desirable employer identity and managing the perceptions of perspective and current employees, in order to gain competitive advantage-*

Employer branding is a significant part of the HR function supporting to be more strategically focused (Bach, 2007, p.268), in the way that the major interest is to search and identify workers that would best fit that organization's culture, values and vision. "A stronger employer brand therefore fosters a positive image, identity, reputation and encourages employees to identify with the organization". Thus, HR specialists are in charge of creating a compelling and unique environment that would convince the job seeker that their organization is the best place to work. This fact brings out the concept of employer attractiveness which refers to the "envisioned benefits that a potential employee sees in working for a specific organization" (Brethon et al, 2005, p.151).

Employer branding is used to attract better candidates, to help them picture themselves as being a part of the corporation. By using employer branding companies show why they are different from their competitors and why should the best applicants choose to work for them. "Employees as well as customers like to be associated with distinctive organizations. One role of employer branding should be then to distinguish the employer in the minds of the employees" (Davies, 2008, p. 670). Furthermore, they create loyalty, satisfaction and develop emotional attachment for the already existing employees. Employees become loyal as long as their opinions are paid attention and unless they deal with stressful situations at work, job dissatisfaction or lack of commitment to the employer, they are less likely to quit their job (Davies, 2008, p. 670). One purpose of employer branding is to increase the satisfaction degree among employees. Employees who are satisfied also create better relationships with customers (Davies, 2008, p. 670). A powerful campaign on employer branding in time results in emotional attachment from employees towards the company. They evaluate their job and company based on their affective evaluation rather than objective rational criteria. "As the success of branding is concerned with promoting and emotional response from the target, the employer branding should promote an effective response from the employee (Davies, 2008, p. 671).

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Lievens et al. (2007) refer to the emergence of employer branding as to the usage of marketing principles to personnel recruiting. In the same idea, Van Geffen (2010) comprises traditional vs the Web 2.0 employer branding practices. (see Table 3: Traditional vs Web 2.0 Employer Branding practices)

Table 3: Traditional vs Web 2.0 Employer Branding practices (Van Geffen 2010, p. 3)

Traditional	Web 2.0
Advertisement in print(Stowsand and Wenzel, 1979)	Business Networking Sites (Donath and Boyd, 2004; Parise and Guinan, 2008)
Commercials on Television (Renforth and Raveed, 1983; Stanton and Herbst, 2006)	Company Blogs (Rosenbloom, 2004; O'Reilly, 2005; Parise and Guinan, 2008)
External Quality Certification (Guler et al., 2002)	Employee Blogs (O'Reilly, 2005; Rosenbloom, 2004; Parise and Guinan, 2008)
Mailings (Balasubramanian, 1998)	Search Engine Optimization (SEO) of company site/brand(Zhang and Dimitroff, 2005; Sen, 2005)
Online company presentation at other websites (Muylle et al., 1999; Sherman and Deighton, 2001)	Social Networking Sites (Donath and Boyd, 2004; Boyd and Ellison, 2007; Cormode and Krishnamurthy, 2008; Parise and Guinan, 2008)
Online company presentation at own websites (Muylle et al., 1999)	Syndication (RSS)(Cormode and Krishnamurthy, 2008; O'Reilly, 2005)
Sponsorship (Porter and Kramer, 2002; Collins and Stevens, 2002; Copeland, 1996; Madrigal, 2001; Ruth and Simonin, 2003)	Virtual Worlds (Thilmany, 2008; Parise and Guinan, 2008; Les, 2008)
	Wikis (Hasan et al., 2007; O'Reilly, 2005; Parise and Guinan, 2008)

Employer branding can be seen as a 3-fold process, according to Backhaus and Tikoo (2004):

- *Value proposition*- information on the organization's culture, management style, qualities of the current employees, current employees' image, etc. an image on what the company can offer to its employee

- *External marketing*- presenting the value proposition to recruiting companies, placement councilor, to reach and attract the target population. Creating a different image allows possible candidates to picture themselves within the company, increasing the commitment degree. Distinctiveness of the brand allows the firm to acquire distinctive human capital.

- *Internal marketing*- lies in respecting the promises made to the employees before recruiting them and so it becomes a part of the organization's culture. It is meant to build a workforce difficult to imitate and committed to the organizational goals, but also to achieve a unique culture and increase employee retention degree.

Employer branding gained a lot of attention in the last years and its usage to create and spread corporate identity became familiar for more and more companies. Van Geffen (2010) used 109 Dutch companies for the website analysis and then he ranked the usage of various aspects of employer branding. (see Table 4: Usage Employer Branding Tools)

Table 4: Usage Employer Branding Tools (Van Geffen 2010, p. 5)

Employer Branding tool	Used by % of companies
Online Company Presentation at own website	98%
External Quality Certification	49%
Online Company Presentation at other websites	27%
Search Engine Optimization (SEO) of company / brand	22%
Wikis	9%
Syndication (RSS-feed)	7%
Career Fair External	7%
Career Fair In House	6%

Lievens et al. (2007) concluded that the conceived identity of the outsiders usually is ranked higher than the actual identity, known by the current employees. The study was conducted in the Belgian army, on a sample of 179 employees, suggesting that the

applicants might have an optimistic view of the army, than the employees themselves (Lievens et al., 2007, p11).

2.2.3. - Employer Branding and Social Media -

As revealed by the previous inquiry into the social media world, with this "easy to access and ever growing source of people, brands have begun to realize the potential to reach these people through social networks" (Coon, 2010, p.2). How to make best use of social media or how to promote yourself as a company or as an employer, are questions that marketing, HR professionals, public relations and advertising practitioners are pursuing to answer. Studies have shown that "social media are replacing traditional media in the eyes of the consumer by informing their views on brands, purchases and services offered" (Fichter, 2007, p.57). People trust social media, trust the people in their network and not only do they seek and share opinion but "they also act on the opinion they received" (Jansen et al, 2010, p.3858). The outcomes and benefits of social media diffusion of information could be of major interest for companies willing to establish a strong employer branding reputation. Imagine if someone is looking for a job and he asks or searches for information about various companies before applying somewhere; what if he receives negative information or considers that the company does not offer enough information about the job openings? Organizations could lose a potential qualified and fit candidate for their vacancies. Indeed, not all the companies are comfortable about " a world where the consumers can speak so freely with each other and businesses have increasingly less control over the information available about them on the cyberspace" (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010). Still, companies might notice that the struggle to recruit and retain competent future employers takes place "in a world where technological advances and global competition are driving widespread change in employment pattern (Osborne and Jones, 2001).

How do you build and promote your company' employer branding? An optimum and direct solution would be to promote it through social media (Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, Blogs, Content Communities) and media channels. A major possibility is to advertise on TV, radio, newspapers, magazines, personal websites etc. since advertising in general is considered a critical tool "in the efforts that firms make to identify, acquire and retain skilled employees (Brethon et al, 2005). But, what happens when more and more researchers suggest that traditional media has been replaced by social media and 65% of organizations are actively involved in this type of networking? "Efficient employer branding requires innovative methods of personnel market research to control and target the employer attractiveness of companies (Erlenkaemper et al, 2006). A recent study conducted by OSCAR GbmH (an European student management consultancy based in Cologne- http://www.slideshare.net/squeakernet/social-media-recruiting-and-employer-branding-survey-results -retrieved at 16th of October) confirms that 53% of companies use social media for recruiting and employer branding while 65% of respondents hesitated to give personal data on social media sites, as potential employers could find these private information. "When used effectively, the internet is the best tool for improving reputation" (Jones et al, 2010, pg.930) and creating the image that each organization sets out for. Nevertheless, the social media platforms capture a "risky environment and corporations need to be creative as well as transparent and honest in order to captivate and communicate effectively with their various publics" (Jones et al, 2010, pg.930).

As depicted from previous research on social media, organizations understand that it offers the possibility of promoting themselves with less costs involved, gain competitive advantage and improve the quality of their service. Although employer branding, in general, has been on the minds of researchers in the past years, it comes to a point to address the future of employer branding strategies since "there is no telling what the future will hold for business, but social media will only continue to grow" (Coon, 2010)

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Fig. 4: Match between Social Media and Employer Branding

SOCIAL MEDIA

EMPLOYER BRANDING

Value Proposition
-Organizational culture.
-Management style.
-Image of current employees.
-Image on what the company can offer to its employees.

External Marketing
-Reach and attract employees.
-Recruiting.
-Creating a unique image.
-Distinctiveness.

Internal Marketing
-Respecting the promises made before recruiting.
- Build a workforce difficult to imitate.
-Achieve a unique culture.
- Increase employee retention.

Social network
Blogs
Collaborative Projects
Content Communities
Virtual social and Game Worlds

Legend:

1 Creation of organizational profiles; Peer-to-peer communication; Knowledge sharing; Creation of a trustworthy and loyal image.
2 Knowledge sharing; Accessible to all individuals; Organizational advertising; Supporting causes/NGOs; Receive valuable free feed-back.
3 Creation of content; Creation of an objective company image.
4 Creation of your own virtual company destined to inform/promote.

1 Creation of a profile that represents the company; Filter information for specific target groups; Reach new and large audiences; Search for job candidates; Timely and direct customer contact.
2 Knowledge sharing; Advertise job vacancies; Increase awareness about companies; Receive valuable feed-back; Low cost contact with large audiences of potential employees.
3 Upload videos advertising certain positions within the company; Promote vacancies through YouTube channels.
4 Advertise job openings; Virtually interact with customers; Synchronize real job openings with the virtual ones.

1 Formal and informal communication with in employees; Instant messaging; Strengthen ties with and between employees.
2 Information accessible to every individual; Express opinions about being part of that organization; Advertise the company through its employees.

Following the tracks of the previous research and literature preview we have gathered from the theoretical inquiry of social media (see table 1 and table 2) and employer branding, we suggest an illustration of the connections between Social Media and Employer Branding (see Fig. 2). If we take into consideration the characteristics of each type of social media, it can result a match between these unique characteristics of each category and employer branding, based on what we identified as being the use of social media for organizations.

For example, we purpose that SNSs could enhance *Value Proposition* through its disposition of creating organizational profiles, peer-to-peer communication, knowledge sharing, creating a trustworthy and loyal image (see1 🔴); for *External Marketing* through the characteristic of creating a profile that represents the company; filtering information for specific target groups, reaching new and large audiences, searching for job candidates, timely and direct customer contact(see 1 🟡) and also enhance *Internal Marketing* through formal and informal communication with the employees, instant messaging and strengthening ties with and between employees (see 1 🔵).The same reasoning goes for all the other connections within the scheme.

In addition to our Fig. 4, solely based on the literature review, without suggesting that the use of Social Media is either beneficial or harmful, we conclude with an in depth proposition of how can organizations make use of Social Media when engaging into Employer Branding activities. Thus, in order:

a) To create value, create an image of desirable employer and strengthen the organizational culture- value proposition-, companies or even HR /PR/ marketing managers might use blogs, tweets on Twitter or Facebook instant messages to continuously keep current and future employees updated as regards to the value proposition of the company. Wikipedia could also provide unique information about that specific company since the content is generated by users all over the world. The responsibility of HR managers is to make sure that what they promise and propose as an employer is valid and long-lasting.

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b) To recruit, attract targeted population and create a unique and distinctive image as an employer –external marketing- could be possible almost through all the social media channels available. First of all, since blogging is the primordial form of social media, companies and managers should actively create and write on their blog. Bloggers exchange information continuously and spreads the word around faster than any other media channel. Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn could offer a new perspective of recruiting for HR practitioners since all the personal and professional information of users is available online. Posting original and creative videos on YouTube could allow the creation of a unique and desirable organization and also promote job openings for ideal candidates. Virtual games and worlds allow companies to create their own island where they can promote themselves as a company but also as a desirable and open-minded employer.

c) To respect the promises made before recruiting and build a workforce difficult to imitate - internal marketing- could be achieved through social networks and blogs. Having an account on either Facebook or Twitter allows the organizations to promote themselves daily using tweets, instant messages or suggest topics of discussion. Describe the everyday life of an employer within that company, share inside secrets that might sound attractive to perspectives employees or create an inner blog for the current employees where they can participate and share their opinions could represent a successful employer branding strategy.

The most important aspect of social media is that companies have to promote only what they already have. The advertised image of the company has to meet the reality. Social media might be a fast way of communicating and spreading your values and intentions as an employer, but if the information is not true and turns out to be fake advertising then the negative publicity will probably spread even faster.

Giving the abundant literature review and our vision of matching Employer Branding with Social Media, it is therefore adequate to remind the research question of this study: *What is the future of employer branding through social media, in the vision of Academics*

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III. Methodology

3.1. -The Delphi method-

Researchers at the RAND Corporation starting from the premises that "two heads are better than one" (Dalkey, 1969. p.5), began to develop the Delphi method, which uses individuals estimations as prediction for short-term periods. Rand Corporation conducted studies and built the Delphi method from the simplistic version- formulate group judgments- to how it is used nowadays. One of the developed experiments to prove the method's validity took place at the UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles), where upper class and medium student were asked general but difficult questions. Though, they could make an estimation considering their background knowledge. Some of them received additional feedback relating their answers to the group's answers. The results showed participants' responses got progressively narrowed and that the group response became more accurate (Dalkey, 1969). In the following years the method has been long used and various definitions were given. For instance, in a study published in 2000 "Research guidelines for the Delphi survey technique", Hasson et al define Delphi method as:" a group facilitation technique, which is an iterative multistage process, designed to transform opinion into group consensus". (Hasson et al., 2000, p.1008) Landeta (2006) stated that "the Delphi method was conceived as a group technique whose aim was to obtain the most reliable consensus of opinion of a group of experts by means of a series of intensive questionnaires with controlled opinion feedback. (…) It is a method of structuring communication between groups of people who can provide valuable contributions in order to resolve a complex problem." (Landeta, 2006, p. 468)

According to Landeta (2006), the main characteristics of the Delphi method are considered to be the following:

- Repetitiveness- participants should be questioned at least two times on the same items
- Anonymity- answers are kept anonymous and considered as part of the entire group

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- Controlled feedback- the communication between experts is externally controlled

- Group statistical response- all the answer can be found in the final answers.

As literature argues, "In all subject domains Delphi has been primarily employed for forecasting, planning, issue identification/prioritization, or for framework/strategies development (…)Whatever the perceived reasons for its choice, the method offers reliability and generalizability of outcomes, ensured through iteration of rounds for data collection and analysis, guided by the principles of democratic participation and anonymity." (Bobeva, 2002, p.104). Furthermore, during the time, other researchers (Landeta 2006, p. 478) found that "Delphi method continues to be used and is a valid instrument for forecasting and supporting decision-making". The argumentation lying behind the statement, focus on the valuable solutions that are offered to problems, due to the reduction of undesirable psychological influences, like dominant behaviors; selective feedback providing valuable information and more extensive consideration thanks to the repetition (Landeta 2006, p. 469). Okoli and Pawlowski (2004, p. 16) emphasize a very important advantage of the method in the way that it "avoids direct confrontation of the experts", strengthening the independency and originality of the answers.

Following the evolution of the Delphi explanations, the researchers gathered the important features and combined the definitions Landeta (2006) and Bobeva (2002), which resulted in the following interpretation of the Delphi method used in the present research: "the Delphi method was conceived for forecasting, planning, issue identification/prioritisation, or for framework/strategies development (Bobeva, 2002) through obtaining the most reliable consensus of opinion of a group of anonymous experts by means of a series of intensive questionnaires with controlled opinion feedback (Landeta, 2006).

Okoli and Pawlowski (2004, p. 17) present a table of Delphi applications based on an inquiry in the already developed Delphi studies, in which forecasting is the main purpose of using the Delphi method (see table 5). Delphi studies have been developed for identifying and prioritize

various factors. Also, the follow up studies show that the method is valid and accurate for both long- and short- range forecasts. By using the Delphi method, the panelists are free of social pressure and the risk of personality influence or individual dominance is completely reduced, enhancing independent thinking and helping them to gradually formulate assumptions on the trends. The participants do not meet each other and are completely anonymous. Still, it allows the researchers to select necessary information to be shared among all participants who are experts in the field (Okoli and Pawlowski 2004, p. 16). A comparison made between the Delphi method and the direct classic interaction methods reveal positive results for the Delphi method. Forecasting studies have massively been developed in Japan, Austria, India or Korea. Furthermore, there is an institute specialized on forecasting- Institute for Prospective Forecasting Studies- mainly using the Delphi method (Landeta 2006, p. 469).

Table 5: Delphi studies example on forecasting (Okoli and Pawlowski 2004, p. 17).

Application of the Delphi method Example studies	Example studies
Forecasting and issue identification/prioritization	• Brancheau et al. - Purpose: Identify the most critical issues facing IS executives in the coming3–5 years. Participants: Senior IS executives • Czinkota and Ronkainen—Purpose: Forecast changes in the international business environment over the next decade and the impact of these changes on corporate practices. Participants: Experts from policy, business and academic communities • Hayne and Pollard —Purpose: Identify the critical issues in IS in the coming 5 years perceived by Canadian IS executives and non-management IS personnel and compare to global study rankings. Participants: IS personnel • Kendall et al. —Purpose: Forecast the role of the systems analyst in the 21st century • Lai and Chung —Purpose: Identify a prioritized list of international data communications activities vital to multinational corporations in managing information

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	exchanges for control and implementation of global business strategies. Participants: IS executives
	• Viehland and Hughes —Purpose: Compile a ranked list of 12 future scenarios related to the potential success of the Wireless Application Protocol (WAP). Participants: Industry and academic experts

Another research on using Delphi method from Skulmoski and Hartman (2007) revealed that in ProQuest Digital Dissertations database there were at that time more than 280 dissertations using the Delphi method, mostly in topics as education or healthcare.

In comparison with the survey, the Delphi method can be considered more complex, in the way that it is based on iterative rounds of questions along with a feedback from the previous session. Also in each round participants are allowed to modify their answers and to argue on their decision. This exercise is repeated until consensus is reached and in the end a final summary is sent to the participants. Thus, more information can be gathered from the participants by using the Delphi method than survey.

The present research aims at forecasting the future of employer branding. Taking into account the literature review, Delphi method is mostly used for forecasting, issue identification or to explore assumptions or information leading to differing judgments. As stated before, research on employer branding and social media captures the uncertainty and unpredictability of the platform they develop. Little we know if social media will grow or vanish, thus if employer branding will shift from traditional media to Web 2.0 applications, following the trend. There are numbers indicating growth and usage of social media for employer branding activities, but still no information about what will the future bring for HR representatives. Consequently, as theory reveals, the Delphi study is the optimum method to take into consideration for achieving our goal.

The experience and information that experts poses, in this particular case Academic members, allow the researcher to analyze the data received both qualitative and quantitative, in order to

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generate consensus regarding the future of employer branding through social media. In addition, controlled feedback can enable to narrow the most important ideas of the experts and obtain reliable and general information. Still, "while the Delphi method is flexible and superficially simple, the researcher needs to take into account many design considerations in order to use the method" (Skulmolski et al, 2007, p.9). Starting from the panelists, questionnaire, data gathering, achieved consensus and findings, each stage has to be rigorously explained and taken care of, so that the study can be pondered as accurate and proficient. All the information regarding the development of the research and steps undertaken will be available and discussed under the corresponding chapter. This particular method has received also criticism centered mainly on its "sloppy execution" and accuracy (Rowe and Wright, 1999, p.367). In order to understand the performance and execution of the method, this study considered previous research and literature on the Delphi method both supporting and criticizing it; this way the researcher can understand which steps to undertake and which situations to avoid, with the intention of having accurate results.

Considering the fact that the research is subject to a master thesis, Delphi method could provide valuable information from experts in a shorter period of time and using less financial resources, compared to applying questionnaires or interviews. In addition, the Delphi method combines both quantitative and qualitative methods and such "flexibility not only affords the ability of the method to answer many research questions, but also can be well matched to the abilities and aptitudes of the graduate student" (Skulmolski et al, 2007, p.9).

3.2 - Data collection and analysis-

The experts considered for this study were all Academics from various Universities all over the world. They were selected from the database of University of Twente, upon previous verification of matching the profile needed, and were sent an e-mail in which they were kindly asked to confirm their willingness to participate. It is worth to notice that the same study is

being undertaken by a colleague researcher, focusing only on the opinion of Practitioners. Results of that study will be shortly discussed later.

Electronic mail was chosen due to the fact that the panelists are internationals and sending the questionnaires by mail would take too long and the response time could be much higher; in addition, "quick turnover times help to keep enthusiasm alive and participation high" ((Skulmolski et al, 2007, p.11).

The data were collected in the period of November 2010 – April 2011.

First round

A total number of 11 experts agreed to be part of the study; all of them are academic members which are researching and teaching courses related to the field of Management, HRM, Leadership, Work and Organizational studies, Social Networks, Online Recruiting, International Business and Knowledge transfer. All of them have knowledge and studies of HRM, e-HRM and management and some are actively writing blogs regarding HR and organizational matters. Some are professors that teach these courses while some are research associates within their Universities. After the confirmations were received, there was sent another e-mail, containing all the information necessary for this study, the methodology, and the 6 questions (see table 6) needed to be answered requesting them to provide us with the answers in two weeks' time.

Table 6: Round 1 questions

1. **What are the consequences of using Employer Branding through Social Media?**

2. **Which developments of social media will positively and/or negatively influence employer branding in the coming 5 years?**

3. **What implications will social media have for the employer branding proposition, in the coming 5 years?**

4. **What implications will social media have for the internal marketing, in the coming 5 years?**

5. **What implications will social media have for the external marketing, in the coming 5 years?**

6. **What implications will these developments have for the role of the HR professionals?**

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This constitutes the beginning of the first round of our Delphi study. After a period of 14 days, there were received 3 answers from the experts, to whom there were sent e-mail to thank them and inform them about the current progress of the research. On 5th of December there was sent a reminder suggesting the respondents how important their answers were for this study in order to continue and proceed to the second round. After the reminder, there were received another 5 answers. During this entire process, there was established permanent contact with the experts, informing them about the work in progress and thanking those who already have replied. The second reminder was sent on 16th of December, after which another 5 answers were received. By January, after a third reminder was sent to the only responded left, it was concluded that the research will go one with just 10 experts who already responded. The next step was to analyze the answers and cluster the responses so that we can pursue to the second round. For this matter, the 3 researchers independently separated each response into items that could be clustered into various categories. A total number of 225 items resulted. After all the work was done separately, the 3 researchers met and discussed each of their interpretations. In order to get a higher trustworthiness for the study, each question was analyzed and compared and for which of them there was calculated the inter-coder reliability.

For this round, intercoder reliability was used in order to make the clusters clearer by classifying separately the same data and discuss on the agreements and disagreements. Intercoder reliability is applied when analyzing or categorizing qualitative data. A strong disagreement shows that a definition should be amended or expanded. More researchers analyzing the same data might provide different original perspectives, further discussed and commonly agreed on. "The analysis of qualitative data can be enhanced by organizing an independent assessment of transcripts by additional skilled qualitative researchers and comparing agreement between the raters" (Armstrong et. al 1997, p.2). It rewards the research in terms of developing a common vision on the categories. Check-coding aids definitional clarity and is a good reliability check.

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The intercoder reliability was calculated following the ICR= number of agreements / (total number of agreements + disagreements) formula.

The ICR was calculated for each question, based on the total number of disagreements and agreements between the 3 researchers. Thus, the first question had an ICR of 81% with 43 agreements and 10 disagreements, question 2 had an ICR of 78% with 33 agreements and 9 disagreements, question 3 had an ICR of 92% with 25 agreements and 2 disagreements, question 4 had an ICR of 78% with 22 agreements and 6 disagreements, question 5 had an ICR of 78% with 26 agreements and 7 disagreements and question 6 had an ICR of 82% with 32 agreements and 7 disagreements. The existence of disagreements in the analysis are due to the fact that all the items that had no clusters and were considered independent by one of the researchers, was considered disagreement, in order to maintain the level of accuracy. Also, if some items were in 3 different clusters it was considered disagreement, although after the discussions it was mutually agreed where those items should be included.

Along the discussions, it was also decided to combine the first question: *What are the consequences of using Employer Branding through Social Media* with the second question: *Which developments of Social Media will positively and/or negatively influence Employer Branding in the coming 5 years,* because it was noticed from the responses that most or the answers were either similar or the respondents had difficulties separating the meaning of these 2 questions. This aspect, along with the initial list of items and the final categorizations will be further elaborated in the Findings chapter.

Second round

Next, it was discussed how to approach **the Second round.** Since all the qualitative text was coded into quantitative data, it had to be established a scale to be used for the second round of questions. Likert scales are widely used for measuring attitudes, opinions or preferences in areas such as sociology, psychology, quality control or management. The individual is invited to define his attitude towards each statement by choosing among a number of r grades on the r-grade Likert scale (Gob et al, 2007, pg. 601). The first round responses were clustered in such

matter that it allowed the reduction of the qualitative data into items that could be used for a quantitative grading. Since the eventual purpose of this study was to determine the experts to reach a common agreement upon social media's influence on employer branding, ranking these resulted items as Strongly agree and Strongly disagree seemed the optimum solution. Giving them the opportunity to decide from a list of items to which they agree or disagree, was the step needed to be done in order to understand their top most important categories so that in round 3, they rank these top items from 1 to 5.

For this round, it was considered a Likter scale from 1 to 5, where 5 represents the strongest agreement and 1 the strongest disagreement. Thus, the questionnaire for the Second Round comprising 5 propositions (see table 7) was sent to the 10 respondents on the 7th of February.

Table 7: Second Round propositions

Proposition 1:
I believe that, in the coming 5 years, Social Media will strongly influence:
Proposition 2
I believe that, in the coming 5 years, Social Media will strongly influence the following categories of the Employer Branding Value Proposition:
Proposition 3:
I believe that, in the coming 5 years, Social Media will strongly influence the following elements of the Internal Market:
Proposition 4:
I believe that, in the coming 5 years, Social Media will strongly influence the following elements of the External Market:
Proposition 5:
I believe that, in the coming 5 years, Social Media will strongly influence the following elements of the role of HR Professionals (HR Pro's):

 All the answers were received by 28th of February so the preparations were made for the final round of questionnaires. Initially, due to the method chosen for this second round, the analysis should have been quantitative, but given the small number of respondents, the data was introduced in SPSS but the analysis was qualitative. The purpose is to reach consensus and caring for common agreement, so looking just for the mean and standard deviation did not seem suitable for this particular case. The main challenge of the third round was to identify the

5 most important categories per each proposition. Thus, the three researchers carefully looked at the distribution of answers per each category, analyzed similarities and divergence and ran the factor analysis to identify inter-category correlations (for a better understanding of why and how this process was made per each question, there is the complete description in the *Findings* chapter along with the distribution charts).

A three steps process was followed. The first step was to calculate the frequency of the "Good" answers, which were considered the ones of 4 and 5. So, for each question only the items with a high frequency of good answers were selected. Still, more than 5 items remained. The next step was to check if there were similarities between items, go back to the first round responses to check for similar content and eventually see if they correlate. If so, then they were considered one item and the number decreased. Even so, if the number of 5 items per question was not reached, the next step was to select from the left items only the ones with a mean of 4 or above, or, where it was necessary the ones with the highest mean, if the number of items was below 5 when using only the items with a mean of 4 or above

Third round

Upon mutual agreement, the final questioner comprising 5 categories for each of the 5 propositions, asking the experts to rank the categories from the highest important (1) to the least important (5), was sent on the 24th of March.

All the answers were received by 26th of April. For the analysis of the final results, the researchers mutually agreed to use SPSS again and preceded in a similar way as for the Second Round findings. Since the number of Academic respondents is not that high, analyzing the data, which is both quantitative and qualitative, in a purely quantitative matter was considered to be inaccurate. It seemed more appropriate for this study to both show the statistical data and explain the answers per each propositions and each category. If there was the situation when categories of the same proposition were ranked the same, the mean would make a difference between them. Since 1 was most important and 5 least important, the smallest mean would

have indicated a distribution of answers towards 1. Thus, based on the frequencies of the answers, the mode and the mean, the most important clusters were discussed.

Round 1
- 11 Academic Experts
- 6 qualitative questions
- 225 items clustered
- Inter-coder reliability analysis
- 5 propositions

Round 2
- 10 Academic respondents
- Likert scale (1 strongly disagree/5 strongly agree)
- 17 clusters P1, 11 clusters P2, 12 clusters P3, 12 clusters P4 and 10 clusters P5
- Distribution of answers, frequencies and mean based analysis
- 5 most important clusters

Round 3
- 10 Academic Experts
- Ranking the final 5 categories from 1 most important to 5 least important
- Explanation of choosing the most important category per proposition
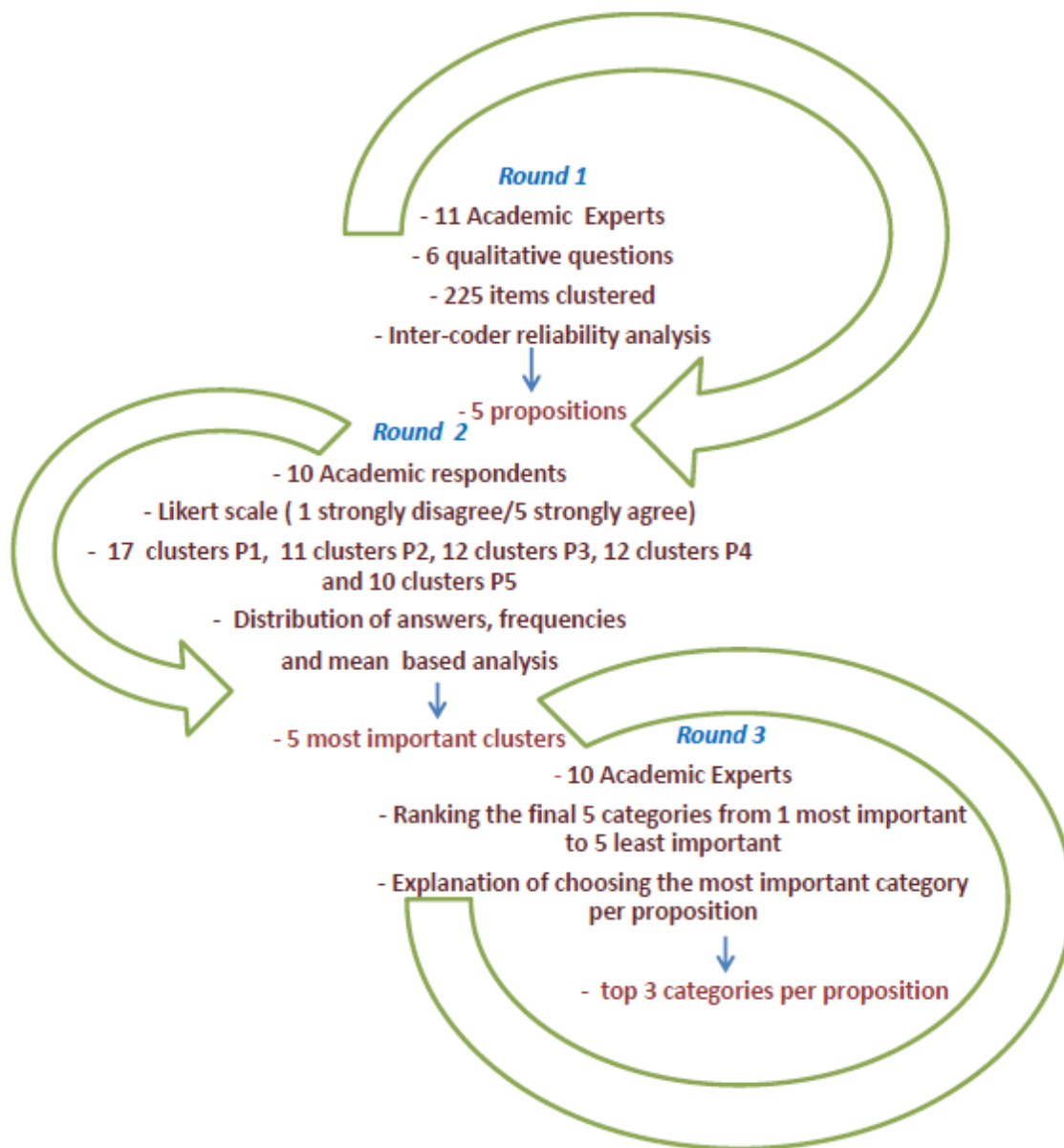- top 3 categories per proposition

Fig. 5: Methodological steps taken

IV. Findings

4.1- Content of first round findings-

Consequences and implications of Social Media for Employer Branding

The first round responses are the basis of the entire research; on account of the initial qualitative data received by the experts, it was possible to formulate the second and third round questionnaires. All the answers were elaborated and well justified, showing not only an interest from the expert's side but also an understanding of the terms implied for this particular study, such as employer branding or internal/external marketing.

Although there was plenty of information, the researches understood from the analysis of the first and second question that the answers or the idea of the answers were similar for both questions. This might be interpreted as either misunderstanding of the meaning of the second question **Which developments in social media will positively and/or negatively influence Social Media** or that the question was poorly formulated. Some answers did indeed relate to the question such as " *the dialogue emphasis of Web 2.0 recruitment methods (blogs, online social networks, virtual worlds) will provide an avenue to enhance an organization's image*" , *"the developments that will affect employer branding is the ability to enable employees to self-select to follow and/ or like an organization"* or *"online videos of organizations, online communities for organizations arranged around costumer and employee preference aligned with product lines of organizations"* but other than that the majority of answers were not related to development of Social media, but rather to consequences of using social media: *"social media gives employees a way to easily disseminate information about their brand", " employees will become real ambassadors of the brand", " social media will grow on increasing the organization's success"* or *"the risk is that the audience is not selected, therefore many applicants could not meet the first requirements"* Moreover, after the analysis of the data, individual clustering and discussions of the first round, it was observed that from the 15 clusters of the first question and the 16 of the second question, 9 initial clusters were similar:

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Better targeting of audience for recruitment/Better recruitment and new target groups; Increased interactivity/Greater interactivity and usage; Innovative and direct ways of communication/Increased communication channels; New social media skills/New specialized skills; Improved marketing/New marketing opportunities; Employee involvement/Employee involvement in EB; Organizational policies/Positive social media policies; Increased risk/Risk management and Control over employee behavior/Managing employees.

After grouping the first two questions into a single one, there were identified various different categories which will be impacted by social media. Academics did not retain themselves to answering as much as possible and elaborate on what they think it will be the future and consequences of using social media for employer branding, in the next 5 years.

The findings suggest that Academics consider that by introducing social media within the companies, major changes will come up and new policies, competencies or management positions should be developed. The distribution of answers does imply neither a positive nor a negative side of using social media, but reflects on both advantages and disadvantages that may occur in the future. Indeed, there can be identified numerous positive implications but for most of the time it depends on the approach the company decides to take for their employer branding.

Table 8 indicates the content of the first and second question findings, comprising 17 categories, their items and example of quotes from Academics. Initially, the clusters were title according to the main idea of the items comprising them. After discussions, it were considered that using words such as "better", "increased" or "higher risk" could somehow influence the opinion of the experts. Since the overall purpose it to reach consensus between them, and under no circumstances to point out the positive or negative side of social media, it was decided that the final clusters/categories should be impartial so that the experts decide forthemselves. In order to proceed to round 2, it was formulated the following proposition: **I believe that, in the coming 5 years, Social Media will strongly influence:**

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Clusters	Items	Quotes
Transparency of organizations	Transparency. Internet users access social media before making a decision, to form an opinion on a product or service and also on their future employer. Being transparent about organizational activity and work condition. Options to know and see the employer. Info transparency. Gaining access, search, collaborate and triangulate information about organizations. Possibility to see how the organization positions itself on the marketplace as a potential employer Information about organizations, based on other opinions and comments. Visibility of message to a vast audience	*" must interact more directly with potential applicants, partners and employees, by giving more and more information and being transparent about their activity and work conditions"* *''more info transparency"* *"the messages that are communicated through social media are highly visible to a vast array of individuals".*
Interactivity with customers	Employers involved in the process of Employer Branding. Internet users create and share content. Internet users express their opinions online or criticize businesses. Internet users share their interests, their professional experiences. Dialog with users. Interactivity with recent university graduates. Usage of social media by customers. Usage of LinkedIn to associate with brand leaders/networks. Social and business network usage. Employees self-select to follow and/ or like an organization. Online videos of organization.	*"employers will have to use social media in order to be positively perceived by a large segment of the applicant population (especially recent university graduates)"* *"If companies use social media to really interact with people and not to manipulate opinions, it can only be positive"*
Ways of communication	Rethinking the way of communication. Reaching a mass of people with various communication tools. Dissemination information about company brand. Communication channels. Employer and employee blogs. Direct mailings. RSS syndication. Communicate the value proposition to all the stakeholders. Communicate the value proposition to all the stakeholders.	By *"forcing companies to rethink the way they communicate"*, *" you reach a mass of people with various communication tools"*, *"you have a better way to easily disseminate information about your brand"* and *"increase the company's communication channels".*
Risk management	Risk implications. Information flow. Ineffective use of social media tools. Deliver realistic benefits. Negative publicity. Individual opinions. Scan and respond to the environment. Watch online conversations. Crisis management. Non-selected audience.	*"much faster than with traditional media"* *"If companies fail to deliver the set of benefits they suggest through their employer branding, individuals will have the potential to express mass negative feelings".* *"If done in a manner that ends up as being perceived as Machiavellian or manipulative,*

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	Facebook awareness. Company reputation implications. Headhunting.	*the strategy may backfire and tarnish the company's reputation".* *"Facebook will be the most powerful platform for negative complaints regarding organizations".*
Targeting of audience for recruitment	Coverage of target audiences. Ability to reach a wider audience (and a large proportion of younger people). Employer is closer to the candidates, especially those that are young (Y gen). New target. Dynamic relationship with young talents. Engaging with potential targeted employees. Identifying and recruiting appropriate talent who identify with the employer branding. Specializing the target. Reaching potential targeted employees.	*"it can enable organizations to engage with a larger cohort of potential employees through the mass dissemination of messages"* *"identify and recruit appropriate talent who identifies with the employer branding".* *"employer is now closer to the candidates, especially the Y generation"* *"it offers a great opportunity for enterprises to establish a more direct and dynamic relationship with young talents".*
HR competencies	Employees' knowledge of employment brand. Particular competences to manage social media. Social media experts. Knowledge of the information communicated. Ability to use LinkedIn to identify talent.	*"new competencies are needed to manage these media"* *"employ social media experts"* *"employees must know how to efficiently represent the employment brand when using social media".*
Costs involved in EB	Costs involved in the communication of employer branding. Cost savings. Costs associated with the communications. Cost implication for sharing information.	*"It can enable organizations to share information with a wider audience at a lower cost than with traditional methods of employer branding"* *"higher cost efficiency of communication employer branding".*
Organization's reputation	Reputation boost. Creation of organizational image. Create a specific attitude as a potential employer. Availability on the labor market.	*"by monitoring their online reputation, companies will have the opportunity to improve, adapt their employer branding proposition by taking into account the needs and issues expressed by applicants and employee"*
Marketing	Professional input of communication and marketing experts, designers and IT specialists. Large scale organizational image marketing. Efficiency and effectiveness of the market. Marketing.	*"large scale organizational image marketing"*

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Relationships between employer and employees	Creating a bond between the employers and the applicants. Creating a sense of belonging among their potential and current employees. Maintain engagement.	*"will help the creation of a strong emotional bond between the employers and the applicants/employees".* *"organizations should strive to make this connection to create an undeniable sense of belonging among their potential and current employees".*
Employee involvement	Employees' involvement. Employees - ambassadors of the brand Internal blogs for employees.	*"employees must be involved in these new practices and become real ambassadors of the brand"*
Organizational policies	Social media policies. Aligning online communities with product lines of organizations. Specific practices for specific employees. Special employer branding policies.	*"positive social media policies to help and encourage employees to use it will come up"* *"different practices toward diverse employees"*
Company brand	Innovation in doing PR, recruiting and communications. Authentic Employer Branding. Creation of company brand.	*"using it for employer branding, it shows that organizations are innovative in doing PR, recruiting and communications"* *"Organizations can use social media to enhance the visibility of their organization to current and future stakeholders and to make themselves known on the labor marketing".*
Control over employee behavior	Employee's perception on employer branding. Intrusion to employee's private life. Managing employees.	*"it could be perceived as an intrusion to employee's private life" but also the control could manifest "on how potential employees see the employer".*
Employee mobility	Self-initiated online employee movement.	*"evidence of major impact of social media on employer brands in companies such as self-initiated online employee movements"*
Reaching employees with mobile devices	Communication targeted to reach employees with mobile devices.	*"more communication efforts targeted to reach employees with mobile devices"*

Table 8: Content of Question 1 and 2/Round1 findings

The next three questions were related to specific aspects of employer branding: value proposition, internal and external marketing. At first, there was considered the possibility that experts will be confused by these terms, so along with the questions, as footnote, each term had a brief explanation of its content. From the answers, it seemed that experts understood for example the difference between external and internal marketing, although it can be depicted some similarities between the answers, which will be discussed later. All the content of the first

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round is presented in the tables per each question, showing the final categories that were considered for the next Round, the items that correspond to them and some quotes from the Academics regarding that category.

Value Proposition and Social Media

The third question addressed the implications of social media for the value proposition of employer branding, in the coming 5 years. The experts consider at this stage of the study that Social Media can impact, positively or negatively, the creation of the value proposition and its characteristics. Thus, with 12 clusters resulted, the second round proposition was **I believe that, in the coming 5 years, Social Media will strongly influence the following categories of the Employer Branding Value Proposition:**

Clusters	Items	*Quotes*
Opportunities for promoting the organization	Creation of a unique organizational culture. Message and image strategies. Establishing distinction from competitors. Promoting HR. Promoting the organization.	*"the creation of opportunities for organizations to engage with current and potential employees, so that it positively share its policies and practices"* *"the idea is to integrate the different initiatives and think about a consistent employer branding strategy"*
Realistic Value Proposition	Realist and up to date employer branding proposition. Dynamic employer branding proposition.	*"emergent communication about employer branding will make it more realist and up to date"*
Balance between proposition and reality	Unbalanced branding proposition. Matching the external speech and the internal reality.	*"unbalanced branding proposition (large differences between proposition and reality)"* *"difficulty in matching the external speech and the internal reality"* *"a possible gap between proposition and reality"* *"more necessary than ever to match the external speech and the internal reality"*
Engagement with both employees and applicants	Considering the needs and issues expressed by applicants and employees. Engagement with current and potential employees.	*"companies will have the opportunity to improve, adapt their employer branding proposition by taking into account the*

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		needs and issues expressed by applicants and employees",
Transparency of organizations	Transparence in the employer-employee communication. Transparency for the organizational culture, related to work environment. Information transparency.	*"more transparence in the employer-employee communication"* *"the information will be available to individuals to consider whether employment in the organization fits with them"*
Employee involvement in EB activities	Engagement of employees in employer branding efforts. Assigning personnel to participate in social media activities. Avenue to create a social fabric among employees.	*"for reactive companies, a potential need to keep personnel assigned to "troll" or "scour" social media to ensure that the firm is perceived in a way that fits organizational objectives"* *"it will provide a strong avenue to create a social fabric among employees"*
Targeting of specific audiences	Execution of damage control strategies Young target appeal. Communication of branding and value proposition to a specific target.	*"it provides the opportunity to target specific audience, since communication is done "in a way which is familiar and particularly appreciated by young people"* *"it will enable an organization to communicate its branding and value proposition to a specific target"*
Building the Value Proposition	Building a positive brand.	*"organizations that do not use social media will probably have a harder time building a positive brand"*
Equity between employers and applicants	Perceived equity.	*"with social media there will be more perceived equity"*
F2F activities	Face to face activities replacement.	*"they will completely replace the face to face activities*
Control issues	Control over branding proposition.	*"less control over their own branding propositions"*
HRM strategies.	Legitimation and strategic role for the HR department. Strategically fitting manner approach. Employer branding strategy. Tactics towards generating the employer branding proposition.	"*Creation of tactics that contribute toward generating a positive employer brand, their measurement and follow-up"* *"the idea is to integrate the different initiatives and think about a consistent employer branding strategy"*

Table 9: Content of Question3/Round 1 findin

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Internal Marketing and Social Media

The next question was about the implications of social media on internal marketing. At this stage, internal marketing was briefly explained to the respondents as all activities aimed at reaching and attracting employees and the creation of a unique image that will allow candidates to picture themselves within the company. Apart from one respondent who personally suggested that he would not "*include the attraction of candidates, external, to the firm as part of internal employment brand strategy*" the answers were consistent and in accordance with the meaning of the question. The tendency was to imply that social media can have positive implications for the internal marketing, but with some disadvantages if not used accordingly. The content of findings for internal marketing and social media are shown below clustered in 11 categories; the second round proposition was **I believe that, in the coming 5 years, Social Media will strongly influence the following elements of the Internal Market**:

Clusters	Items	Quotes
Internal Recruitment	Recruiting process through social media. Announcing jobs on Twitter. Realistic job previews.	"*organizations will benefit from including effective social media into their overall recruiting process*" "*announcing jobs on Twitter could enhance visibility of the job posting*" "*in the recruitment blogs of Microsoft, current employees write about their typical day at work. Thus, potential applicants get a real glimpse of how their jobs in Microsoft and can self-select if they want to work for the company*"
Openness about working in that company	Openness towards the external market. Communicate information about company's culture, work and benefits. Posting videos on YouTube of what is like to work at that company. Employees blogging about what it is like to work at that.	"*it will enable organizations to communicate information about their culture, work and their benefits*" "*Allowing employees to blog about what it is like to work at that company would likely be an effective strategy as well as posting videos on YouTube of what is like to work there*"
Organization's image	Balance between being honest and real. Consistency of the web proposition with the real work conditions.	"*strike a balance between being honest and real and creating a favorable impression*"

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	Competitive environment. Risk activity for traditional firms. Reputation damage.	*"the risk is that the firm loses credibility and damages its reputation, if there is no consistency"*
HR skills	Re-trained HR professionals. Learn SEO to position your organization. Marketing and communication skills. Level of professionalism required.	*"they will have to be highly professionals in order to communicate a positive image about your organization"* *"HR pros will need to learn where and when their potential customers and employees are online".* *"marketing and communication skills will become more valued talents in an organization"*
Organizational boundaries	Importance of the organizational boundaries. Control over job posting.	*"less importance of the organizational boundaries"* *"loss of control where the job posting will go".*
Marketing strategies	Engagement, motivation and the feeling of belonging strategies. Marketing on mass. Planning for crises and online blogging.	*"Valorize better the employer branding proposition, HR actions, work conditions and the expertise and competencies of the current employees, in order to develop strong engagement, motivation and the feeling of belonging"* *"internal marketing needs to plan for crises and negative online blogging"*
Control over employee behavior	Employees free rein to interact through social media.	*"some negative information would be acceptable, but it's unlikely that many organizations will give employees free rein to interact like this"*
Decentralization	Decentralized information flow. Decentralization.	*"much more challenging to asses recruiting practices as information flow is less centralized"* *"social media might help diminish the distance between top management and middle-layer, once people become more adept at using them in a constructive manner"*
Organizational performance	React as organizational entities to external threats. Every message has the potential to be an avenue for the marketing.	*"innovative companies that are willing to take chances might see large gains in their ability to react as organizational entities to external threats"*
Employee involvement in organizational performance	Employees involvement based on the knowledge of the organizations business strategy.	*"every individual posting/sharing information through social media platforms should be knowledgeable of the organizations business strategy"*
Legal implications	Law-suits.	*"there will be lawsuits against companies that impose disciplinary measures on employees".*

Table 10: Content of Question 4/Round

External Marketing and Social Media

Employee involvement and employee training seem to be of some importance for the respondents, since similar answers can be identified also in the fifth question, regarding external marketing and social media implications. According to them, in the 5 coming years, external marketing thorough social media will have an influence on employees; they will be more involved, they *"will become ambassadors of the brand"* and they *"will create bonds online"*. Also, in order to be involved and engage in social media activities *"companies will try to train their employees on how to behave when using social media"*. It seems that experts consider that for both internal and external marketing, social media usage will imply involvement also from the employees not only from HR professionals or specialists delegated with employer branding, employees that need to be trained on how to use this activities in the benefit of the company. For this question there were identified 12 clusters specifically designed to fit the following proposition: **I believe that, in the coming 5 years, Social Media will strongly influence the following elements of the External Market:**

Clusters	Items	Quotes
Employee involvement	Employees - ambassadors of the brand. Employees as opponents. Creating bonds online. Opportunities for applicants/employees to know how it is to work in the organization. Employee pride.	*"satisfied employees will become ambassadors of the brand in the online social network world while dissatisfied employees will become strong opponents"* *"it provides the opportunities for applicants to get a real sense of how it is to work in the organization, even before they join"*
Talent management	Attracting and selecting talented applicants. Employee retention rate. Establishing long-term relationship with a talent pool. Reaching the best employees/applicants. Communication with the potential employees. Employee retention. Attracting qualified employees	*"social media will enable to better attract and select potential talented applicants by developing a better reputation"* *"establishing long-term relationship with a talent pool, even before the beginning of the recruitment process. It enhances employee retention rate, creating an idiosyncratic workforce"*
Internal vs external information	Controlling the information shared internally vs. externally.	*"Organizations will not be able to control the information shared internally vs. that which is*

	Re-sharing internally vs. Externally. Information. Divide between internal and external operations and marketing.	*shared externally"* *"increase use of these platforms means that the divide between internal and external operations and marketing will become blurred"*
Reputation	Image of the company. Image created by the employer. Developing reputation.	*"I suspect that having an effective social media environment within the firm would be unique and hard to imitate"*
Organizational policies	Putting policies in place. Integration of applicants. Strategy to deal with negative messages.	*"Organizations will need to have a strategy to deal with negative messages shared about the organization"* *"there will be the time for companies to put their policies in place"*
Employee's training	Training employees on social media behavior. Training HR professionals for legislative and technological changes.	*"companies will try to train employees how to behave when using social media and HR professionals need to be trained for any legislative and technological changes"*
Organization's modernization	Being part of the digital moves. Being digitally in the mind of target groups.	*"I consider that it will be necessary to be part of the digital moves to join where the mass of people is joining and for organizations to make sure to be digitally in the mind of their target groups. Otherwise, external marketing might suffer"*
Organizational resources	Implications for work around engagement. Unique and hard to imitate workforce.	*"social media could have interesting implications for work around engagement"*
Transparency of organizations	Transparency. Various channels to promote organizational news.	*"with social media there will be more transparency"*
Competition	Competition on the mind of potential customers and employees.	*"competition to be present in the mind of potential customers and employees will increase"*
Organizational barriers	Barriers (space and time)	*"I predict that with social media there will be less barriers, both in time and space"*
Flexibility	Flexibility considering different channels and targets.	*"more flexibility considering the different possible channels and targets"*

Table 11: Content of Question 5/Round 1 findings

HR professionals and Social Media

The last question of the first round referred to HR professionals and the implications of social media developments on their roles. According to the answers provided by the Academics, it

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seems that this was of high interest for them, considering that *"the implications of the increase use and proliferation of social media for HR professionals will be substantial".* It has already been established from previous questions that the experts consider that social media will increase its usage in the next 5 years and will impact all aspects of employer branding. With this final question, it is also revealed that social media implies some various changes in HR skills, behavior and strategies, and without this adjustment, building employer branding through social media will be difficult.

For the last proposition of the Second round questionnaire, **I believe that, in the coming 5 years, Social Media will strongly influence the following elements of the role of HR Professionals (HR Pros),** there were considered the following 10 clusters:

Clusters	Items	Quotes
Need for web-based application knowledge	Competence in understating social media and its effects. Reflect upon the mass of information captured and used to meet business requirements. Technology developments knowledge. Knowledge on using information systems and internet service.	*"They will have to be competent in understating social media and its effects "* *"HR professionals need to learn as much as possible about technology developments"* *"HR professionals need to learn as much as possible about technology developments"*
Need to develop specific skills	Shaping perceptions and attributions of HR practices. Proficiency in using social media for recruiting and branding purposes. Training for older manager. Awareness of the people selected to engage. Controlling the actions and words of individuals. New competencies. Challenging environment. Data analysis and statistics knowledge. Developing skills and capabilities to facilitate the appropriation of social media.	*"HR professionals will need to become proficient in using social media for recruiting and branding purpose. There is much to learn from the marketing field in this area"* *"HR professionals will need to develop skills and capabilities in the area to facilitate the appropriation of social media. This also means that data analysis and statistics knowledge will need to be held within the HR function otherwise they will not be able to extract data to establish information about the organizations operations and activities"*
Need for knowledge in Marketing and Communication studies	Business administration and HR knowledge not enough. Marketing studies. Creative, marketing, technological and risk management skills.	*"creative, marketing management skills will be required by HR managers in addition to general HR domain knowledge, it will not be enough anymore to have basic business admin and HR knowledge to maintain effective*

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	Communication background. Master degrees in communication.	*communication channels and enhance organizational branding"* *"more HR professionals will be seen with communication background or master degrees in communication"* *"there is much to learn from the marketing field in this area"*
HR policies	HR tools designed for social media. Social media HR policies. Thinking more creatively to find innovative solutions. Initiatives to be promoted through the Web.	*"some HR tools will be designed for social media"* *"they will also need to address social media HR policies (what can/cannot employees do with social media related to work)"*
Strategic role	Business partners. Strategic role. Alignment with business. Delivering the brand and value proposition communicated.	*"HR pros will have a more and more strategic role to play within the organization"* *"HR professionals and senior managers need to ensure they deliver the brand and value proposition that they actually communicate"*
Need for knowledge of social structures in organizations	Understanding social structures of employees. Playing a consulting and networking role.	*"HR professionals will have to understand the main ideas about social structure of their employees (and their online appearance)"*
Development of new roles	HR community manager. New roles to improve the visibility of HR policies.	*"new jobs are appearing. HR community manager positions could be generalized. Their role will be to improve the visibility of HR policy and employer brand, by managing internal and external community through social media"* *"HR professionals with social media and internet in general, will tend to be business partners and to play a consulting and networking role"*
Need for knowledge of legal implications	Law breaking awareness. Understanding the legal implications for recruitment (discrimination).	*"some HR managers might find themselves under unexpected scrutiny whenever a high-profile case of employee or employment abuse hits the headlines in business or popular press, to make sure that the company does not unwittingly breaks the law"* *"the need to stay on top of any legislative changes will be more apparent for this subset of HR professionals"*
Segmentation considering HR practices	Segmentation considering HR practices.	*"I foresee more segmentation considering HR practices"*

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| Image of HR in organizations | Image perceived from employees. Being perceived as innovative by management. | *If they use social media they will be percied as innovative by management* |

Table 12: Content of Question 6/Round 1 findings

4.2 - Content of the Second round findings-

Round two differed in content from the previous Delphi round, because the data received from the experts was not qualitative but quantitative. After having the responsibility of grading from 1 to 5 the importance of each category, the researchers' duty was now to analyze the answers and understand the top 5 most important items for each of the 5 proposition. The purpose of this study is to find out what is the future of employer branding through social media usage, thus the answers provided by the experts will eventually lead to reaching our goal.

The content of this round's findings will be shown as it follows:

First proposition: *Consequences and implications of Social Media for Employer Branding*

The first proposition seemed more difficult to analyze then the other 4, because it contained 17 items that needed to be reduced to 5. The first thing to do was to understand the frequency of answers and look over their distribution charts, strictly focusing on this and not on the mean or the standard deviation. Since three researchers were involved in this process, the final clusters chosen were commonly agreed upon and it will be explained why some items were selected while others were not. At this stage of the analysis 7 items were considered to be not relevant for all the experts.

For the *Employee involvement* the majority of answers were 2 and 3. Since 1 represented strongly disagree, it was considered that items graded with 2 are not significant and 3 is somewhere in the middle, a value that does not say much about the importance of that item. The same goes for *Organizational Policies* (with 1 of 1, 1 of 2 and 5 of 3), *Control issues* (with 2

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of 2 and 4 of 3), *Risk Management* (with 1 of 1, 2 of 2 and 5 of 3), *Employee mobility* (with 1 of 1 and 5 of 3), *Control over employee behavior (*with 1 of 2 and 5 of 3).

The last item that was not considered good was *Costs involved in Employer Branding.* The distribution of answers revealed that there are experts who strongly agree that it will have an influence in the future, while other experts consider it irrelevant and not influential for Employer Branding when using social media. Indeed 4 experts answered 4 and 5, but the other 6 chose disagreement with only one grading of 3. This was interpreted as disagreement. The main goal of this particular method is to reach consensus, so disagreement between them does not reflect consensus. The role of the researcher is to action objectively and chose the items that indicate the same answers for all the experts. In this case, the answers suggest that consensus cannot be reached through an item that is torn in two different sides. The distributions of answers for each of the categories that were not considered good are present in **Table 15** with RED highlighting.

Apart from identifying the items that had no significant importance for the experts, the three researchers tried to grasp the idea behind the remained items. Going back to the first round and analyzing the frequencies of answers, it seemed that some items could have been similar as meaning and importance.

 Such example of similar items is Ways of Communication with HR competencies. The individual answers under each of these Round 1 final clusters, suggest that *"new ways of spreading information force companies to rethink the way they communicate"* and that HR professionals" *can reach a mass of people with various communication tools"*. Thus, there is a *"necessity to employ social media experts" and" new competences are needed to manage these media.*" These are answers clustered (In the First round) under Ways of communication and respectively, HR competencies. It seems that HR competencies need to be developed in order to learn how to manage these new ways of spreading and communicating information. Identifying connections between the categories was not sufficient enough to consider them one

item, so it was also revealed that there is also a statistical relationship between the two variables.

Table 13: Correlation between HR competencies and Ways of communication

		Q1_HR_competencies	Q1_Ways_of_commu nication
Q1_HR_competencies	Pearson Correlation	1	.688[*]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.028
	N	10	10
Q1_Ways_of_communication	Pearson Correlation	.688[*]	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.028	
	N	10	10

On the same basis, two other categories correlated and similarities between Round 1 answers were identified. This is the case of *Marketing* and *Company Brand.* According to the experts, companies that will use social media "*will have a more foreword/cool image than for its competitors"* and there will be "*more pressure for authentic Employer Branding*". Same experts suggest that marketing will also be influenced since social media usage will offer *"large scale organizational image marketing".* This could mean that through these new marketing possibilities companies can promote and enhance their company brand.

Table 14: Correlation between Marketing and Company brand

		Q1_Marketing	Q1_Company_Brand
Q1_Marketing	Pearson Correlation	1	.802[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.005
	N	10	10
Q1_Company_B rand	Pearson Correlation	.802[**]	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.005	
	N	10	10

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

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After these interpretations of the answers, there were 8 categories left. Except *Transparency of organizations, Relationships between employer and employees* and *Reaching employees with mobile devices*, which had a statistical mean of 3, 80, 3, 70 and 3, 70, the final most important categories for the experts at this stage of the study are:

1. *Targeting of audience for recruitment*
2. *Interactivity with costumers*
3. *Ways of communication/HR competencies*
4. *Organization's reputation*
5. *Marketing/Company brand*

The distributions of answers for the final 5 categories are shown in GREEN highlighting in **Table 15.**

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Table 15: Consequences and implications of Social Media for Employer Branding distribution of answers in SPSS -

The Future of Employer Branding through Social Media: A Delphi study among Academics
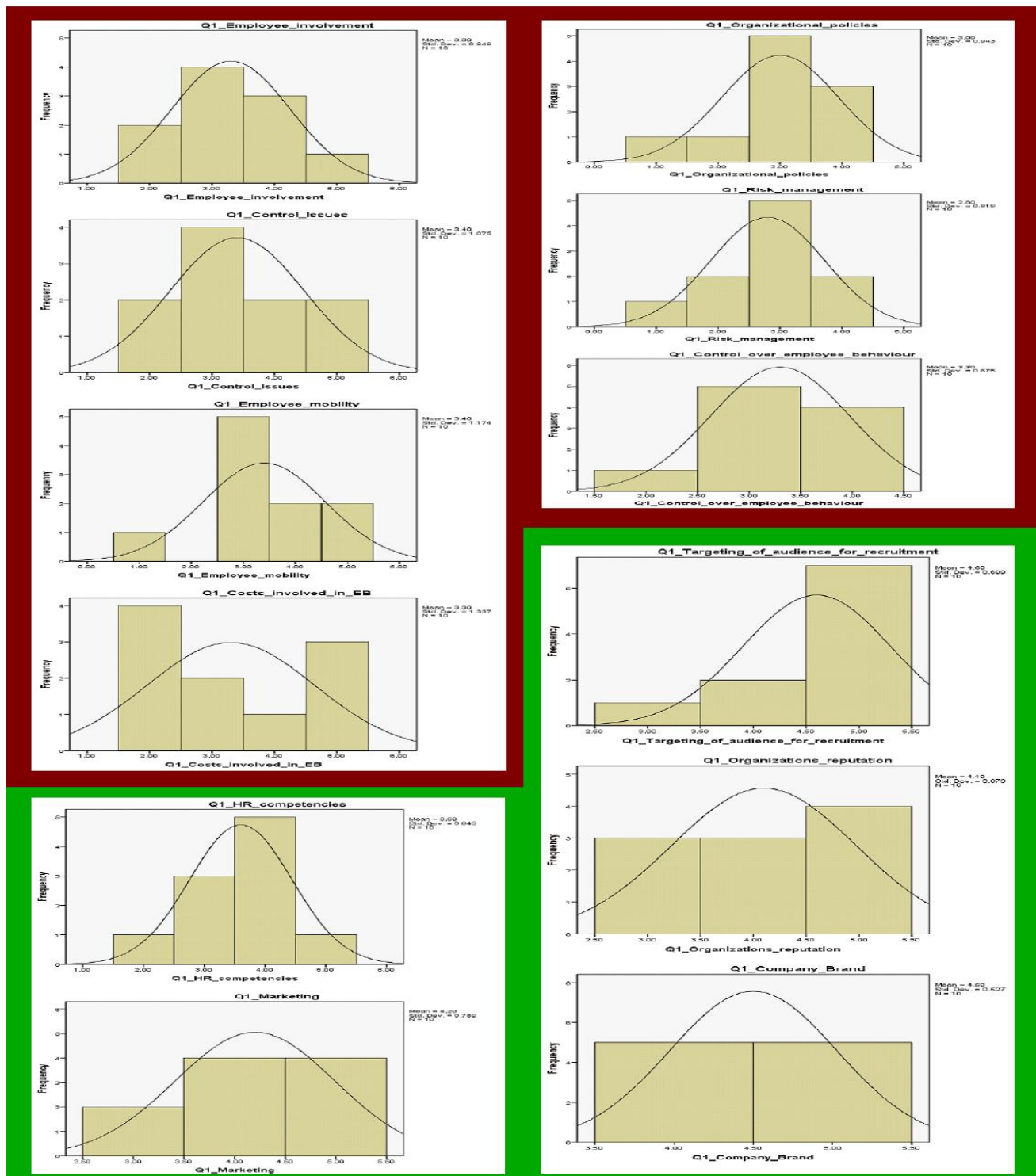
Second proposition: *Social Media influence on Employer Branding Value Proposition*

For the second proposition it seemed Academics responded in a more similar way and deciding upon the 5 final clusters was much easier. Of course, there were only 12 categories as compared to 17, but the overall impression was that the majority of answers aim at the same direction. Following the steps explained before in methodology and also in this chapter, correlations were considered between some categories but the analysis showed no significant correlation for either of them. The ones not considered good were *Balance between proposition and reality* (with 1 of 2 and 6 of 3) and *Control issues* (with 1 of 2 and 7 of 3).

Two particular categories were not consider good because it was the same situation as for *Costs involved in Employer Branding* from the first proposition. The distribution of answers reveal a disagreement between the Academics, and since the main purpose is to reach consensus, this 2 particular categories, *F2F activities* and *Equity between employers and applicants*, is nothing but trivial. The distributions of answers for each of the categories that were not considered good are present in **Table 16** with RED highlighting.

With 8 good categories left, from which 2 had a mean lower then 4 (3, 80 and 3, 90) and one was a disagreement, the 5 categories remained for the 3rd Round were:

1. ***Engagement with both employees and applicants***

2. ***Employee involvement in Employer Branding activities***

3. ***Opportunities for promoting the organization***

4. ***HRM strategies***

5. ***Targeting of special audiences***

What is interesting to notice is that *Targeting of special audiences* is the same as the first proposition's Targeting of audience for recruitment. This shows that targeting for recruitment is of great importance for Academics and it is seen as a significant outcome for the use of social media for employer branding in general, and specifically for value proposition.

The distributions of answers of the 5 categories are shown in GREEN highlighting in **Table 16**.

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Table 16: *Social Media influence on Employer Branding Value Proposition distribution of answers in SPSS -*

The Future of Employer Branding through Social Media: A Delphi study among Academics
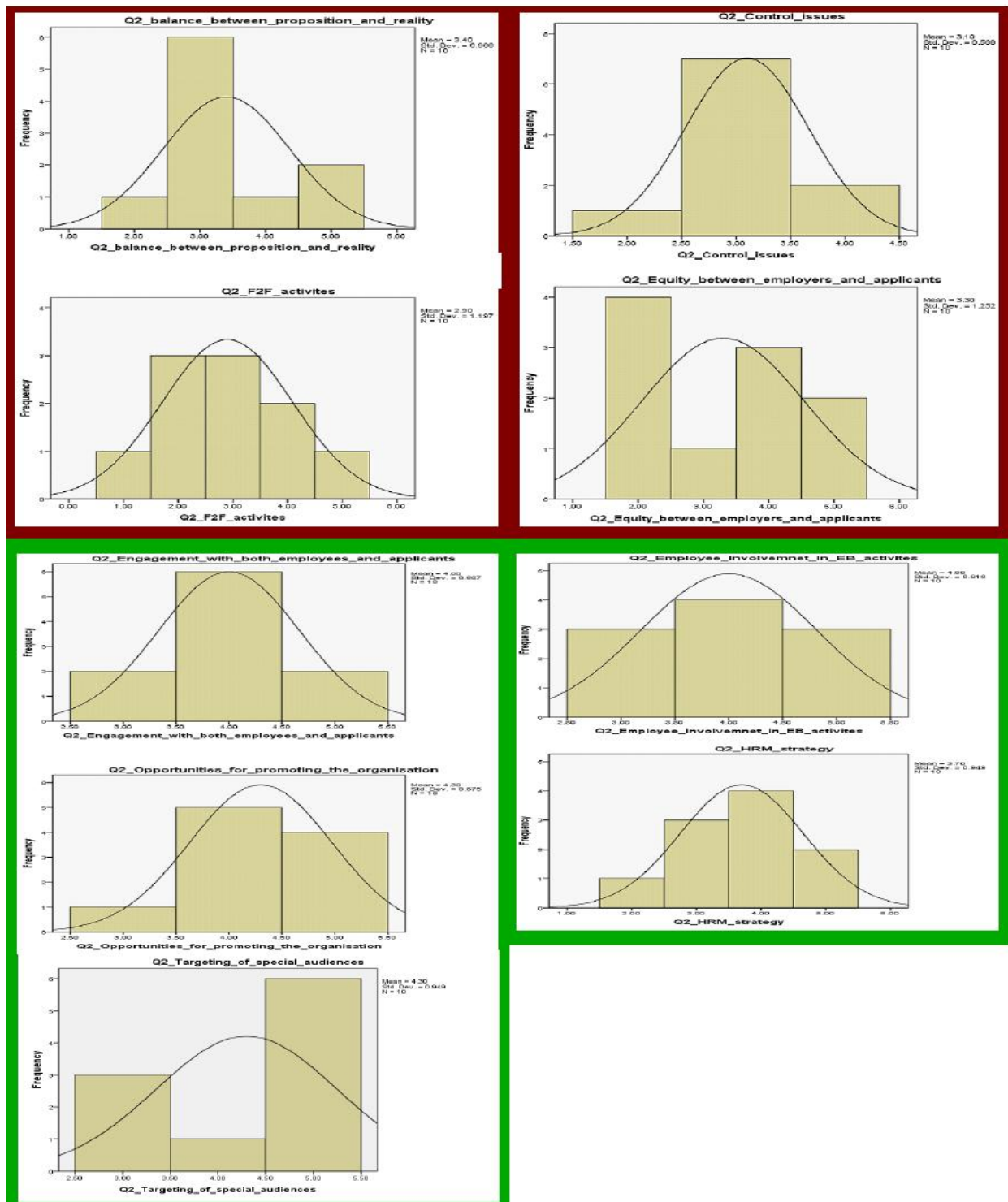
Third proposition: *Social Media influence on Internal Market.*

The findings for this round reveal, on yet an early stage to acknowledge consensus, great agreement between Academics. For internal marketing the academics had similar ideas about what will mostly be influenced by the usage of social media. This statement is possible because the distribution of answers speak for themselves: out of 11 categories only 7 were considered significant. Not relevant for the study were *Control over employee behavior* (with 1 of 2 and 7 of 3), *Decentralization* (with 3 of 2 and 4 of 3), *Employee involvement in organizational performance* (with 1 of 2 and 5 of 3) *and Organizational performance* (with 2 of 2 and 5 of 3). The distribution of answers for each of the categories that were not considered good are present in **Table 18** with RED highlighting.

The findings for the first proposition show a correlation and similarity for Marketing and Company Brand. For this case of internal marketing, following the same principles, correlation between Organization's image and Marketing strategies was considered.

Table 17: Correlation between Organization's image and Marketing strategies

		Q3_Organization s_image	Q3_Marketing_strategies
Q3_Organizations_image	Pearson Correlation	1	.703[*]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.023
	N	10	10
Q3_Marketing_strategies	Pearson Correlation	.703[*]	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.023	
	N	10	10

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

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Taking this into account and also that one selected good category had a mean of 3,60, the final 5 items considered for the round 3 questionnaire were:

1. *Internal recruitment*
2. *Openness about working at that company*
3. *Organization's image/Marketing strategies*
4. *Organizational boundaries*
5. *Legal implications*
6. The distributions of answers for the final 5 categories are shown in GREEN highlighting in **Table 18.**

Table 18: *Social Media influence on Internal Market*

distribution of answers SPSS -
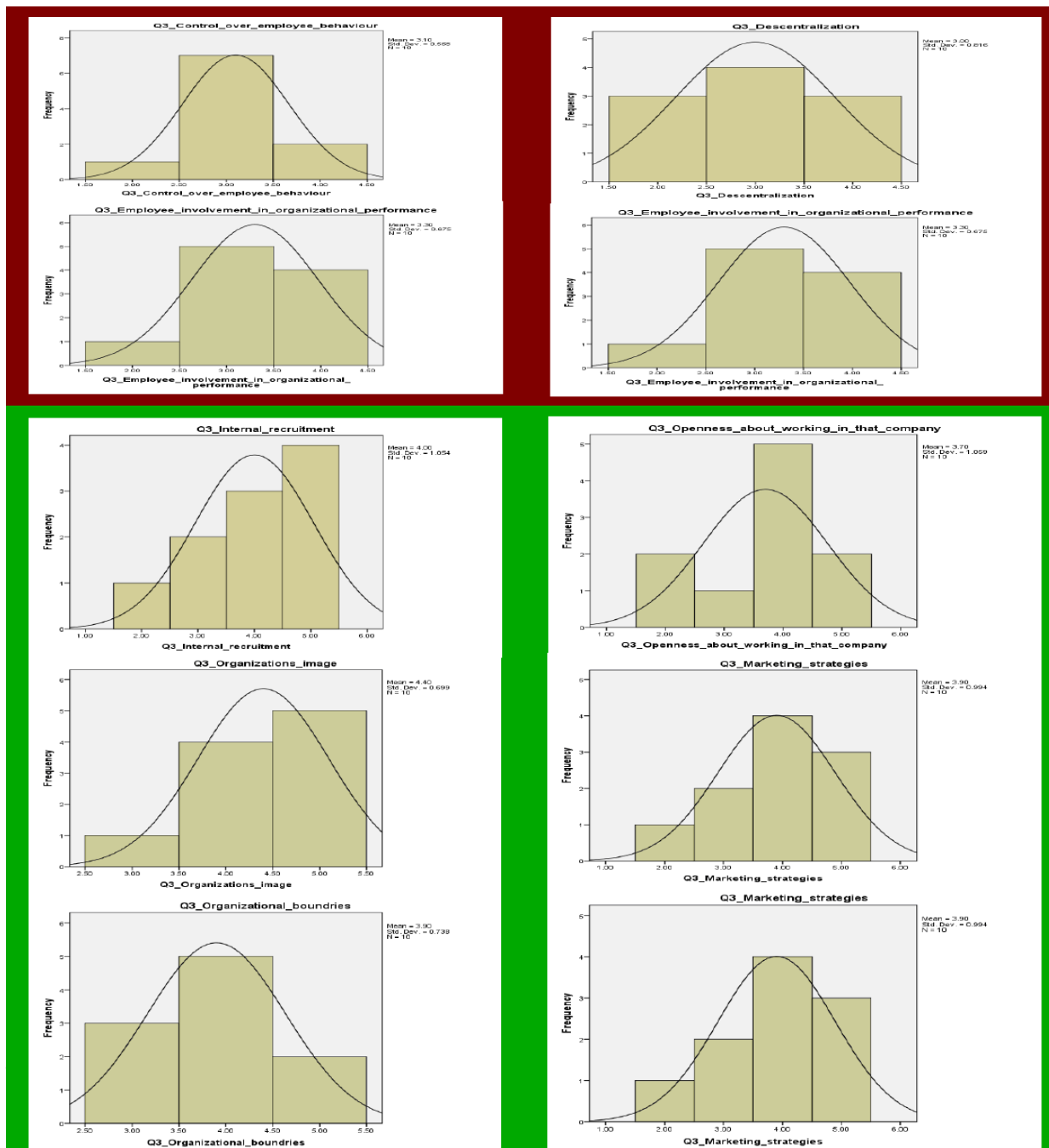
4th proposition: *Social Media influence on External Market*

The answers provided by the Academics for the 4th proposition are another example of sharing similar opinions about what social media might influence external market. Out of the 12 categories, 6 were relevant for the study, while the one that had to be left out, since only 5 were required for the next round, had a mean of 3,60. No correlation was considered for this case, since the items selected were different in content and meaning. The categories not relevant were *Internal vs External Marketing* (with 1 of 2 and 4 of 3), *Employees training* (with 1 of 2 and 5 of 3), *Organization's modernization* (with 1 of 2 and 4 of 3), *Organizational resources* (with 1 of 2 and 4 of 3), *Organizational barriers* (with 1 of 2 and 5 of 3) and *Flexibility* (with 1 of 2 and 4 of 3).The distribution of answers for each of the categories that were not considered good are present in **Table 19** with RED highlighting.

Thus, the 5 final categories for the next round are:

1. *Employee involvement*
2. *Competition*
3. *Reputation*
4. *Talent Management*
5. *Transparency of organizations*

The distributions of answers for the final 5 categories are shown in GREEN highlighting in **Table 19.**

Table 19: *Social Media influence on External Market*

distribution of answers SPSS -

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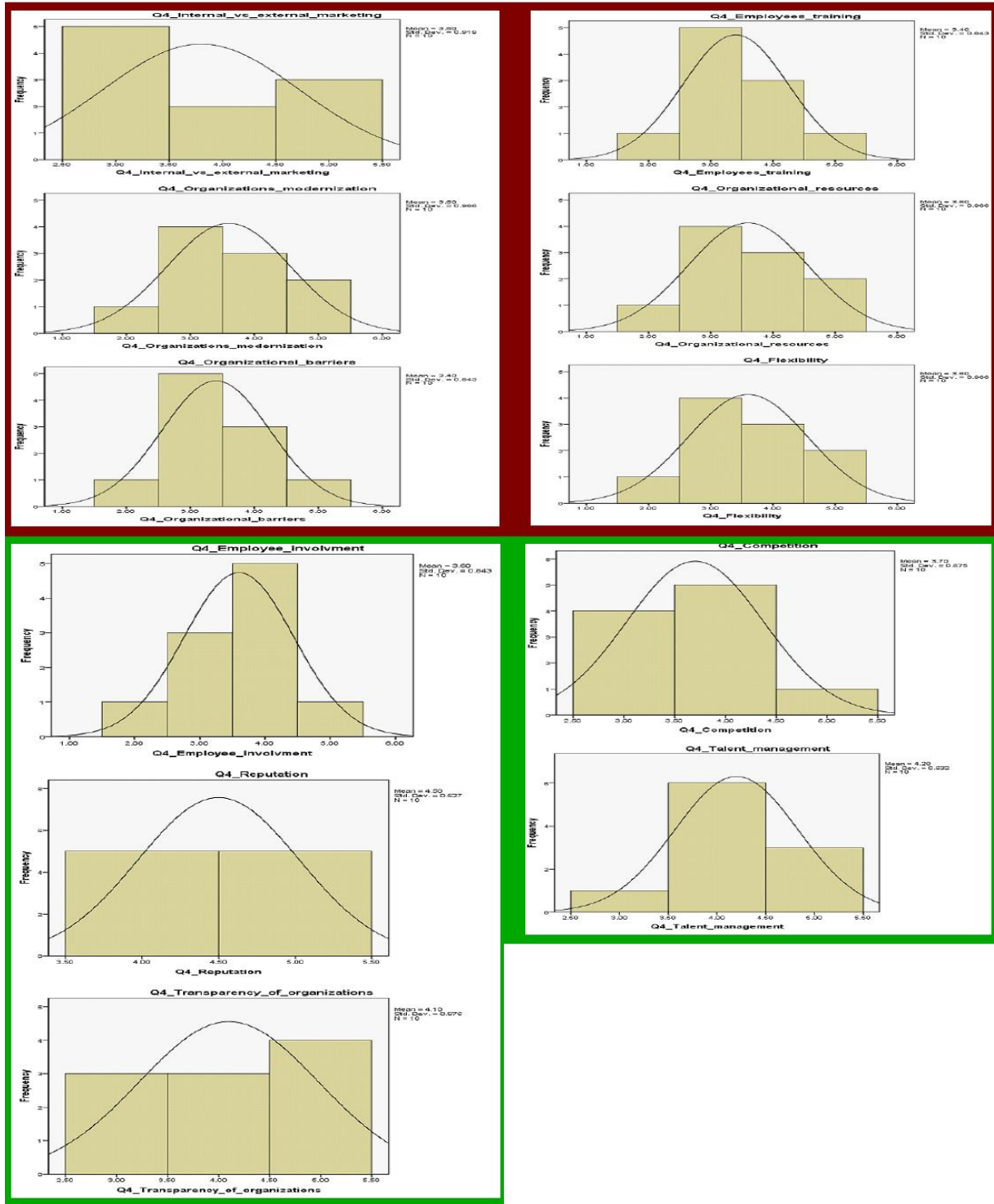
5th proposition: *Social Media influence on the role of HR Professionals (HR Pro's)*

The results for this final proposition were a bit different then for the other ones, because after analyzing the distribution of answers and the correlations, 9 categories remained out of 10.
*The only category who was not considered good from the beginning was Segmentation considering HR practices (*with 1 of 2 and 4 of 3). The distribution of answers for this category is shown in **Table 21** with RED highlighting.

Firstly, it was observed that two categories seemed similar in content, that is *Need to develop specific skills* and *Need for web based applications knowledge*. Going back to the first round findings, it could be observed that the first one reflects the need of HR professionals "to become proficient in using social" and "data analysis and statistics knowledge will be needed", while the second one suggests "they will have to be competent in understating social media and poses "new knowledge on using information systems and internet service". Consequently, it could be considered that developing specific skills when using social media for HR professionals is related to the need of having web-based applications knowledge, which is mandatory in using internet applications such as social media. In order to see if the Academics responded similar for both of the categories, correlation was made.

Table 20: Correlation between Need to develop skills and Need for web-based applications knowledge

		Q5 Need to develop_specific_skills	Q5_Need_for_Web_based applications knowledge
Q5_Need_to_develop_specific_skills	Pearson Correlation	1	.659*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.038
	N	10	10
Q5_Need_for_Web_based_applications_knowledge	Pearson Correlation	.659*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.038	
	N	10	10

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Secondly, the purpose of the study is to reach consensus between the experts, thus, coming to a final number of 5 categories per proposition was considered the optimum solution for the third round. Although there were some categories that some Academics might have considered them as relevant (two or three might have said 4 and 5 but the majority responded 1, 2 or 3), the main purpose was to select the ones that reflect the majority of opinions. For this final proposition there were no disagreements, on the contrary, more categories seemed to be relevant for Academics. Since the last step in the analysis procedure was to consider the mean, there were put aside 3 categories (means of 3, 60, 3, 60 and 3, 80) while the final 5 are the following:

1. *Need for web-based applications knowledge/Need to develop new skills*
2. *Need of knowledge in Marketing and Communication studies*
3. *HR policies*
4. *Need for understanding legal implications*
5. *Image of HR in organizations*

The distributions of answers for the final 5 categories are shown in GREEN highlighting in **Table 21.**

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Table 21: *Social Media influence on the role of HR Professionals distribution of answers SPSS* -
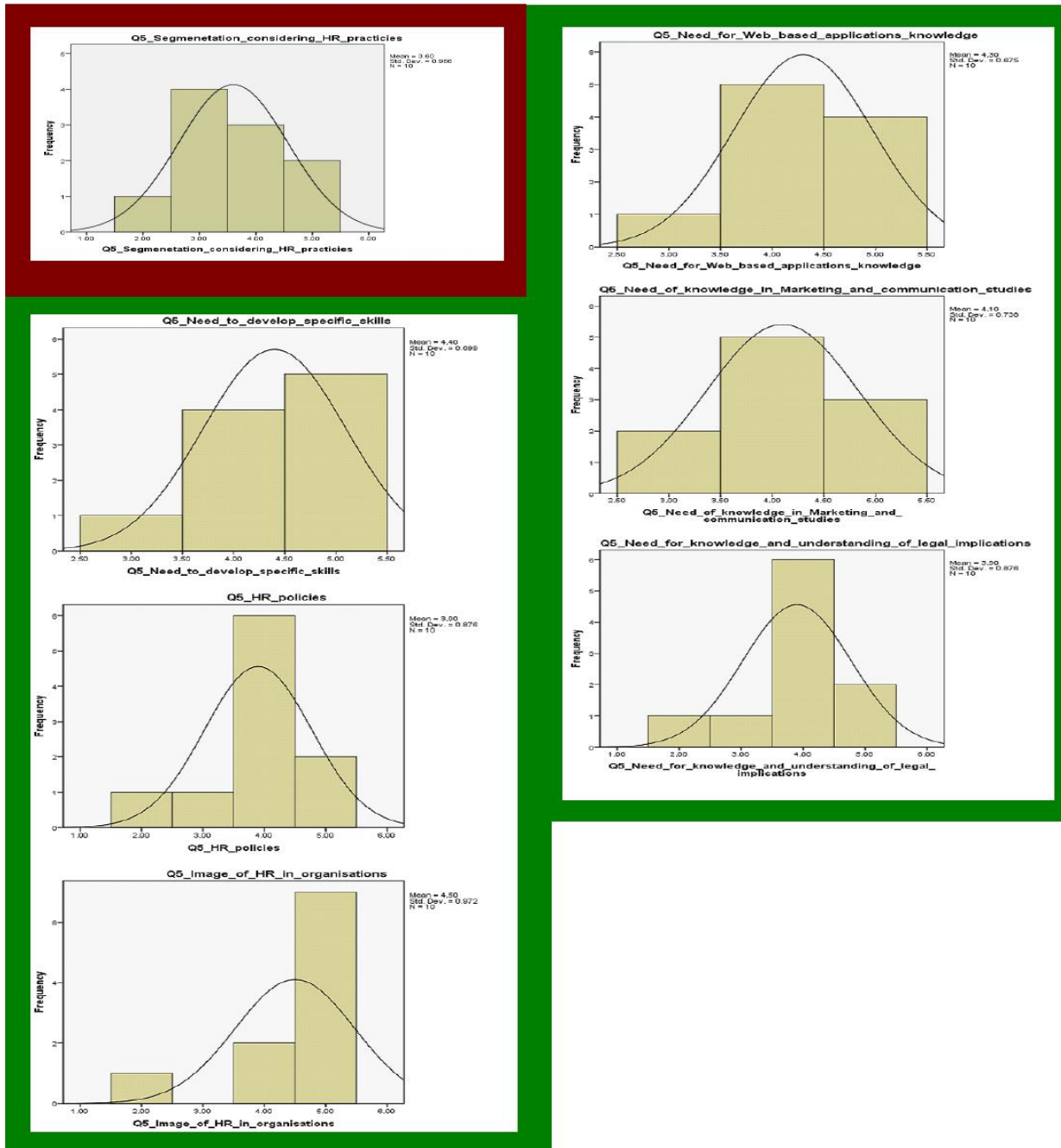
4.3 -Content of Third Round findings-

For this round, it was considered the mean and the mode of the variables, to show both the distribution of answers (mean) and also the value that occurs most frequently within the answers of each variable (mode). The content of each proposition is showed below, together with the explanation given by the Academics, regarding their number 1 most important category choice.

Consequences and implications of Social Media for Employer Branding

Table 22: Analysis of the final 5 categories of the first proposition

		P1_Targeting_for_recruitment	P1_interactivity_with_customers	P1_Ways_of_communication_HR_competencies	P1_organizations_reputation	P1_Marketing_Compnay_brand
N	Valid	10	10	10	10	10
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		2.7000	3.5000	3.2000	3.4000	2.2000
Mode		1.00	5.00	2.00ᵃ	3.00	1.00ᵃ

a. Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown

According to the results, the 3 most important categories for the Academics, as regards to Social Media's influence on Employer Branding, are:

1. **Targeting of audience for recruitment**,
2. **Marketing/Company Brand**
3. **Ways of Communication/HR competencies.**

The content of the findings for Round 3 are shown in **Table 23.**

Targeting of audience for recruitment

This category was considered most important by the majority of Academics, although, in comparison to the other nr.1 mode Marketing/Company Brand, had a higher mean. This is possible, because 2 experts considered it completely irrelevant and ranked it on the 5th place while the other category did not receive any 5 ranking. Thus, it can be considered that these are the most important for the Academics, without suggesting one as to be more important than the other.

"social media will largely influence the way applicants are recruited as we see more of Gen Y in the workforce, hence organizations may find that social media methods of recruitment are very critical"

" will involve in particular young employees and contribute a lot to the transparency of the labor market allowing both the parties to access more information"

"companies must adapt their communication by using social media to target potential applicants"

"social media will influence Targeting of audience for recruiting, only when thinking of communities of practice, so to say "professional" social media, like LinkedIn."

"Using social media for recruiting is clearly growing and has, in my opinion, the most potential to impact actual employer branding. I don't see marketing and customer relations as having so much impact on the company's brand as an employer."

Marketing/Company Brand

Marketing/Company brand are composed of two clusters from Round 1 who correlated and were considered together for the questioner of Round3; it seemed of high importance for the respondents, since the majority of rankings were 1 and 2.

"seems to be used more for communicating with customers than to attract employees"

"the proliferation currently and in the future is focused upon marketing and company branding rather than being another form of HR technology or E-HRM"

"the difference in social media is that it can be used by many functions of the organization, and the consequences stem further than HR".

"I see the company brand as an umbrella concept

	including everything on the list. Within this, new ways of communication with employees and potential employees along with ways of following them will be paramount."
Ways of Communication/HR competencies Correlation resulted from the Second round. Only one responded ranked this category as his number one choice, but the rest of Academics gave 2 and a middle of 3. Moreover, as the last quote from the previous category suggests, new ways of communication with employees is paramount; social media will influence how HR will communicate with applicants and employees, requiring them to be competent in doing it.	*"the ways HR people, employees and future potential employees communicate get enriched by various social media means. HR staff will need to get new competencies (information systems, internet research, and marketing skills) to properly use and understand the value and implications of social media as communicating, recruiting and marketing tool. The job boundaries between HR, Strategy, Marketing and Operations staff may overlap and require a clear strategic orientation and role descriptions to know what one's job will entail and in future and what is part of another department's duties."*

Table 23: Content of Proposition 1/Round 3 findings

Organization's reputation and *Interactivity with customers* are considered least important for the Academics. While the last category has a mode of 5 and a mean of 3, 5, there was one responded ranking it as number 1, who suggested that in the future, social media will influence what it has already started to influence by now, interactivity with customers: "*When I was ranking the categories, I was thinking of social media like e.g. Facebook, MySpace and Ping, and not professional communities of interest. I gave 1 to the interactivity with customers, as that is what companies already do and will even continue building up their presence".*

Social Media influence on Employer Branding Value Proposition

Table 24: Analysis of the final 5 categories of the second proposition

		p2_Engagement _with_both_emp loyees_and_app licants	P2_Employee_i nv_in_EB_activit ies	P2_opportunities _for_promoting_ the_organization	P2_HRM_strate gies	P2_Targeting_of _specfic_audian ce
N	Valid	10	10	10	10	10
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		2.4000	3.3000	2.6000	3.7000	3.0000
Mode		1.00[a]	3.00[a]	1.00[a]	5.00	3.00[a]

a. Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown

When it comes to the influence of Social Media on Employer Branding Value Proposition, the most important categories for the respondents seem to be:

1. **Engagement with both employees and applicants**
2. **Opportunities for promoting the organization**
3. **Targeting for specific audience.**

The content of the findings for Round 3 are shown in **Table 25:**

Engagement with both employees and applicants	*"Social media is about involving and engaging employees and applicants, they will also be much more strongly involved in proposing employer brand value".* *"Organizations all over the world are moving towards a strong presence in the social media world as employees and applicants spend a predominant time on social media networks. In an effort to stay engaged with both employees and applicants, organizations will be socially active"* *"I selected engagement as the most important because it is a broader category than can include some of the others (e.g., employee involvement in EB activities would be part of an engagement strategy)".*

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Opportunities for promoting the organization For Academics, a pattern within the responses could be identified. Some categories are similar in content and purpose but for different propositions; it seems that those who chose to consider let's say social media as a platform for promotion and marketing, have responded around the same pattern, choosing their number one category for another proposition, in a related matter to his previous response; such as opportunity for promoting.	*"I assume that communication, promotion and marketing an organizations' brand is key to social media and the opportunities will further increase. Yet, engagement between employees and potential applicants need to be considered with a critical lens – what HR people may like and find innovative may be annoying for an organization's customers and applicants. HR staff should not get the image to spy and over-do social media campaigns yet employer branding without social media may belong to the past web 1.0 generation. Interactivity will increase but also the dangers to it and strategy planning to manage a positive image."* *"Following on from my thoughts as stated above the opportunities presented to the organization through social media are in relation to marketing and branding. As part of the proliferation of information, organizations will be able to promote their organization, operations and products and services. Through social media avenues like Facebook they will be able to disseminate lots and lots of information"* *"Again, I am choosing my number 1 rank based upon the assumption or observation that Social Media is not used as much for intra-organizational purposes but for interacting with external stakeholders".* *"I have given 1 again to a more marketing –related category. I think that if companies have to choose they would first and foremost pursue marketing objectives, and only then focus on activities like involving employees through social media".*
Targeting for specific audience Second round findings discussed this particular category because it was present for more than one proposition. It was suggested that since it came up for two different categories it could be of some importance for the Academics. Although for the previous category it was mostly ranked as 1, for Value Proposition it is somewhere in the middle. Nevertheless, it is an important category.	

Table25: Content of Proposition 2/Round 3 findings

Employee involvement in Employer Branding activities is the close follow up of *Targeting for specific audience*, while HRM strategies is a category ranked as 4 and 5 for the majority of Academics. Only one respondent considered it difficult to rank the categories, because in his view, *"social media will influence in some ways HRM strategies in general (recruitment, HR policies, competence management etc.)"*.

Social Media influence on Internal Market.

Table 26: Analysis of the final 5 categories of the third proposition

		P3_Internal_recruitment	P3_Openess_about_working_at_that_company	P3_Organizations_image_Marketing_strategies	P3_organizational_boundries	P3_Legal_implications
N	Valid	9	10	10	10	10
	Missing	1	0	0	0	0
Mean		3.0000	2.0000	1.8000	3.7000	4.5000
Mode		3.00	2.00	1.00	3.00[a]	5.00

a. Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown

Regarding the influence of Social Media on Internal Marketing it seems more obvious than for the previous 2 propositions. The 3 most important categories for Academics for Internal Marketing are:

1. **Organization's image/Marketing strategies**
2. **Openness about working at that company**
3. **Internal recruitment**

The content of the findings are shown in **Table 27**.

Organization's image/Marketing strategies	*"Through social media, organizations will be able to disseminate information about many facets of the organization and its operations both externally and internally. Organizations will use social media to*

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Two respondents who ranked this category as 1 made also a reference to their number one choice for Value Proposition, Opportunities for promoting the company, suggesting that both organizations' image/marketing strategies and promoting the company are related, and social media will mainly influence these aspects of Employer Branding.	*inform and educate internal stakeholders whom will then be able to better represent the organization and its operations. This dissemination of information is believed to have a number of positive implications for the organization".* *"As for the internal labor market, I believe that social media will contribute to the employees' idea that transparency and open communication is a value for the company, thus sustaining meritocratic career paths".* *"Various social media applications eventually impact an organization's image. Organizations may not be fully aware of positive/negative digital communication."*
Openness about working at that company	*"how companies handle transparency regarding people management and working at the company will be essential. Of course the decision could be for open or closed model. That is they could either try to be very opened about it and see how organizational image emerges bottom-up trough SNS or try to strategically create organizational image trough social media"* *"Employees working in the organizations are going to provide their RJPs (realistic job previews) as social media will be an excellent way to keep others informed about what is going on in the organization"*
Internal recruitment	*"social media will mainly influence internal recruitment "by identifying easily experts, competencies within the company (ex. some companies are developing their own social network)".*

Table 27: Content of Proposition 3/Round3 findings

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Social Media influence on External Market

Table 28: Analysis of the final 5 categories of the forth proposition

		P4_employee_involvement	P4_Competition	P4_Reputation	P4_Talent_Management	P4_Transparency_of_organization
N	Valid	10	10	10	10	10
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		4.4000	3.7000	1.7000	2.9000	2.5000
Mode		5.00	4.00	1.00	1.00	2.00

Similar to Internal Marketing, it is not difficult to understand which categories are more important for the Academics, when it comes to social media and external marketing.

Thus, social media will mostly impact the following 3 categories of External Marketing:

1. **Reputation**
2. **Talent Management**
3. **Transparency of organizations.**

The content of these findings are shown in **Table 29.**

Reputation	*"External Market will be mostly influenced by the opportunities and risks to an organizations' reputation. New opportunities for Talent Management will emerge and innovative companies will benefit may benefit from "first mover" advantages. Increasing transparency of organizations will require new jobs to be created to manage an organization's online image (blogs, forums, Facebook, company profiles etc.)"* *"social media will have an enormous effect on reputation, it is a digital WOM. The diffusion of information is much faster and people are more inclined to believe stories from other people"* *"I think that in the near future, social media will serve best as the way for improving reputation. It might change though later"*

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	"again, my assumptions that Social Media is used to interact with external stakeholders makes me choose my first (and even second) ranks". *"information disseminated through the various mechanisms of social media will have implications for an organizations reputation. The information shared has the potential to be both positive and negative, however either way, an array of stakeholders will have access to more real time information about an organization, it's operations as well as the conduct and opinions of their internal and external stakeholders".*
Talent Management	*"talent management will become more of a challenge in many ways due to social media. While it allows new opportunities for talent management, it also becomes more difficult in part because of effects on competition (increasing) and reputation (harder to control)"* *"Social media for External Marketing will impact talent management by establishing long-term relationships with a talent pool, even before the beginning of the recruitment process".*
Transparency of organizations Although only one respondent ranked this category as number 1, transparency in organizations is mentioned more than once in other responses, suggesting that in the future, Academics do consider social media to have on impact on it, but not as much as for the other categories.	*"I think social media can contribute to give a more realistic image of the organization and let the potential employees have an idea of the organizational culture and kind of work environment. What is critical for candidates is to understand what is reality and what is just image, but social media should be of help also in this case, because of the opportunity of finding people who had a direct experience in that organization".*

Table 29: Content of Proposition 4/Round 3 findings

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Social Media influence on the role of HR Professionals (HR Pros)

Table 30: Analysis of the final 5 categories of the second proposition

		P5_Need_for_web_based_applications_need_to_develop_new_skills	P5_Need_of_knowledge_in_Marketing_and_Communications_studies	P5_HR_policies	P5_Need_for_understanding_legal_implications	P5_Image_of_HR_in_organizations
N	Valid	10	10	10	10	10
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		2.2000	2.1000	3.5000	4.1000	3.1000
Mode		2.00	1.00	4.00	5.00	2.00[a]

a. Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown

According to the Academics, HR professionals will be influences by Social Media as regards to the following top e most important categories:

1. **Knowledge in Marketing and Communication studies**
2. **Knowledge for web-based applications/develop new skills**
3. **Image of HR in organizations.**

The content of these findings are shown in **Table 31.**

Need of knowledge in Marketing and Communications studies	*"In order to best represent their organization and its operations, HR professionals will need to be aware of the organizations marketing strategy, business strategy and how both of these align with the organizations HR strategy. If organizations are to use social media in a way that is beneficial for the organization, then HR will need to understand and recognize these opportunities rather than be concerned with controlling the use of the technologies. This may require a change in mindset for more traditional HR professionals"* *"HR professionals will have to learn how to use social media as a tool to properly package and diffuse their solutions – this could correlate strongly with the success of their interventions"*

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	"HR professionals have already begun using the word communication, and the focus on the communication is increasing. In some companies I have studied, HR departments have already begun recruiting employees with degrees from communication-related studies"
	"While all of the points above are important, I feel HR staff first needs to get aware of the changing role requirements and evaluate various social media tools to communicate with current and future employees. Larger organizations may give the social media/communicating/promotion role to separate departments and not the HR function while smaller organizations may embed more responsibilities such as developing web-based knowledge, marketing skills and legal knowledge of online communication into the HR role. The boundaries between marketing, HR and IS jobs need to get re-designed".
Need of web-based applications knowledge/ *Need to develop new skills*	*"In order to apply any of the rest of these elements, HR professionals will need to develop more technical skill to use social media. From what I see even in my students, they know how to use Facebook for social purposes but are not skilled in using many other elements of social media for actual business purposes"* *"As the world becomes more digitized, online HRM skills and practices will have a strong role in organizations".* *"There probably will be national differences as some cultures are more jealous of their privacy than others. As we know, there already are strong differences on the way that personal data can be shared with others between Europe, the USA and many other nations. This suggests that, in some countries, the need to understand legal implications and develop appropriate HR policy will be higher than in others. Regardless, I believe that the need to "stay on top" of new skills and ongoing technological developments will be of great importance for HR Pros"* *"HR pro's need to develop both internet skills and marketing/*

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	communication skills".
Image of HRs in organizations The third category ranked as 2 and 3 is a lot connected to the overall content of these results. By now, the image created by a company has been around the preferences of Academics for other propositions, thus it seemed natural for them to also suggest that HR image will also be impacted by social media.	*"I think social media give the opportunity to the HR Department to communicate more directly with both potential employees and the internal labor market, thus letting people to have direct perceptions of its initiatives and actions"*

Table 31: Content of Proposition5/Round3 findings

Although the *Legal implications* category was present for both the role of HR and Internal Marketing, and despite one particular Academic's firm point of view, it seems that for both cases the respondents suggest that social media will have higher impact on other aspects of Employer Branding

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V. Discussions and Conclusions

5.1 –Discussions-

E-HRM literature is abundant with research and theories that describe the role of IT in the HR department and its efficiency. When technology came into the lives of HR professionals, with or without their permission, it was a fundamental change for the employees who were stuck behind their piles of documents and papers. They were promised that IT specialists will help them understand and facilitate the usage of IT programs for HR purposes and that this is the new way of managing human resources. It was a matter of transition that eventually will settle into a state of equilibrium. This study, as many others that tackle social media, is here to prove that this change within the HR department is becoming bigger than the expected.

When it comes to the role of HR professional and the impact social media might have on it, Academics commonly agreed that in the future we will see more HR Pros with **Marketing and Communication studies** and more **knowledge regarding web-based applications is needed**. Why is this important? Because it proves that Social media usage might determine in the future the competences or the studies of HR professionals. So far, it was required for them to skillfully master the HR delivery and be competent in using various technological programs aimed at facilitating their work. Now more than ever, if social media is part of their strategy, they will need to both learn/know the principles and tricks of using social media and communicate in a professional demeanor their HR purposes.

As regards to Marketing studies, it seems fair that Academics consider relevant for them to poses marketing knowledge since they also consider that social media will have an impact on the **company brand** and on the **marketing** of the organization as an employer. According to the Academics, Social media will give the opportunity to create a company brand with a unique employer branding strategy through large-scale organizational image marketing. If so, HR professionals will need to know the principles of marketing and branding and apply them for HRM. Marketing and Communication studies are required for them so that they know how to

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represent the company online. In addition, using social media for employer branding will also have an impact on the image of HR department in the organization.

An important change will also reflect upon the way HR department will **communicate** with their employees and applicants. Social media is already showing that new ways of communication are chosen by so many organizations to interact with their customers, and who knows if in the futures employees will eventually end up being reached with mobile devices. This new mean of communication might mostly influence **recruitment**, by allowing companies to target the audience for recruitment. For both round 1 and round 3 respondents mentioned the Y generation, suggesting that since young applicants and graduates are mostly on the web, they will be the first to whom companies will appeal through social media. A study published on April, 2011 on SHRM Online alerts that "*Employers in the U.S. looking to recruit members of Generation Y for their workforces might want to consider their organizations' social media strategies and incentives, according to survey findings from 8,088 university students from the Class of 2011".* According to the article, the Y generation is online and they have become the ones that search the companies and select them based on how companies present themselves as employers. But, as long as they are online, their privacy and personal lives are too, which means that HR Pros could also look them up. This would mean that the sentence should be rephrased to 'companies and the Y generation might both have to consider their social media strategies and incentives'. Labrecque et al (2011) developed a research on personal online branding which eventually supported the idea "*that people both explicitly and implicitly brand themselves using the content they place online. Professional information displayed in the profile, in terms of education and work experiences, is important, as are pictorial accounts of their social life and the public conversations posted*".

However, the Y generation is not the only generation that can be targeted for recruitment; it is just the one mostly present on the web. Targeting for recruitment could also mean for a specifically professional or technological audience of interest for a certain company. One respondent pointed out at the beginning of the study that some potential employees, who do

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not use social media as much as younger generations could be unwillingly discriminated. Some questions should be raised as regards to the older generations and how they can be part of the employer branding strategies through social media.

Engagement will be influenced because the availability of information and openness to any comment or opinion will give the opportunity, if companies chose to do so, to engage in conversations, chats, micro blogs or instant messaging with interested applicants or current employees. It seems that along with social media there is a new trend in online users, their willingness to participate. "*These individuals seek greater engagement with their preferred brands, and involvement–with or without the company's approval—in creating brand personalities"* (Parent et al, 2011, p.219). Although this recent study focuses on branding and social media users, it can be depicted that the situation could be the same for job applicants or employees, who will be willing to engage.

 So far, it was discussed marketing strategies and creation of a desirable brand or image, but it is extremely important to understand how these are related to the **reputation** of a company. With social media everything is connected and all the information is open and available, that is why Academics consider that *social media will have an enormous effect on reputation*. Why? Because the reputation a company has as an employer, has probably the highest impact on its image, branding and marketing; *"it is the currency in which Web 2.0 brands deal regularly"*(Fournier and Avery, 2011, p.203). This is why respondents were suggesting that if companies fail to deliver exactly what they suggest through their employer branding, individuals will have the potential to express negative feelings. These negative feelings will harm their reputation and promoting the employer branding strategy through social media will be extremely hard because the negative information is available to everyone for a long period of time*.* This brings up another important aspect for the Academics, **transparency of organizations.** A recent study on branding and social media has taken this into account, considering it the age of transparency where "*the availability of and convenient access to information is one of the more empowering and revolutionary forces of the Internet. Previously*

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the venue of trained journalists, now anyone with a casual interest can decipher the story behind the story and figure out when a company is misrepresenting the truth" (Fournier and Avery, 2011, p.198). It is important for organizations and HR professionals to promote the truth and the real image within the company when using social media, because everyone has the freedom to express their opinion with an unimaginable speed of sharing that opinion to others.

Talent management will also be influence by social media. There are two possibilities, either talented applicants are attracted and selected as according to the external marketing strategy or it will become more of a challenge in many ways due to social media because of its effects on competition and reputation.
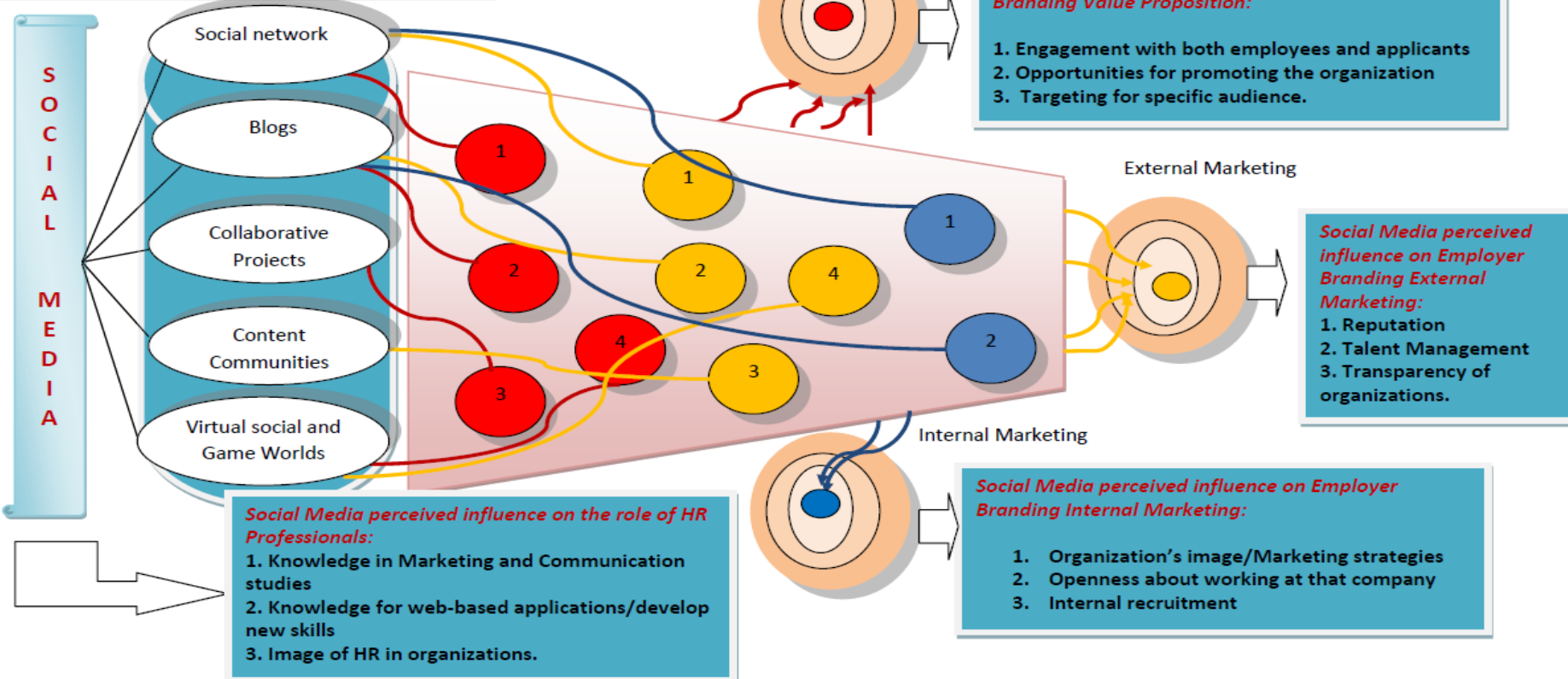
What will also have a strong impact on Employer Branding, specifically for Internal Marketing, is the **organization's image** and **marketing strategies,** when deciding for using social media. In order to create a positive image as an employer it is extremely important to mind the image that your employers have on you. If companies will chose to use social media for internal marketing, they have to be aware that the most important thing to consider is the strategy they plan and the image they will want to promote to their employees. This is why Academics eventually considered that HR professionals will need to have knowledge of marketing, because they must have the knowledge of how to build and communicate these strategies to the employees.

At the beginning of our study, the researchers finalized a scheme of connections between social media and employer branding, based on what the literature was indicating at that time. Taking into account the results and predictions of Academics, the figure was adapted accordingly. If the initial figure was showing a possible match between social media and employer branding, the latter comprises also the perceived influence of social media on particular Employer Branding characteristics, in the vision of Academics. The figure only shows the results of this research and should be taken into consideration as the overall vision after the empirical study, not as an absolute truth.

Fig. 6: Social Media perceived influence on Employer Branding.

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Social Media influence on Employer Branding:

1. Targeting of audience for recruitment
2. Marketing/Company Brand
3. Ways of Communication/HR competencies.

EMPLOYER BRANDING

SOCIAL MEDIA

- Social network
- Blogs
- Collaborative Projects
- Content Communities
- Virtual social and Game Worlds

Value Proposition

Social Media perceived influence on Employer Branding Value Proposition:

1. Engagement with both employees and applicants
2. Opportunities for promoting the organization
3. Targeting for specific audience.

External Marketing

Social Media perceived influence on Employer Branding External Marketing:

1. Reputation
2. Talent Management
3. Transparency of organizations.

Internal Marketing

Social Media perceived influence on Employer Branding Internal Marketing:

1. Organization's image/Marketing strategies
2. Openness about working at that company
3. Internal recruitment

Social Media perceived influence on the role of HR Professionals:

1. Knowledge in Marketing and Communication studies
2. Knowledge for web-based applications/develop new skills
3. Image of HR in organizations.

1 ● Creation of organizational profiles; Peer-to-peer communication; Knowledge sharing; Creation of a trustworthy and loyal image.
2 ● Knowledge sharing; Accessible to all individuals; Organizational advertising; Supporting causes/NGOs; Receive valuable free feed-back.
3 ● Creation of content; Creation of an objective company image.
4 ● Creation of your own virtual company destined to inform/promote.

1 ● Creation of a profile that represents the company; Filter information for specific target groups; Reach new and large audiences; Search for job candidates; Timely and direct customer contact.
2 ● Knowledge sharing; Advertise job vacancies; Increase awareness about companies; Receive valuable feed-back; Low cost contact with large audiences of potential employees.
3 ● Upload videos advertising certain positions within the company; Promote vacancies through YouTube channels.
4 ● Advertise job openings; Virtually interact with customers; Synchronize real job openings with the virtual ones.

1 ● Formal and informal communication with in employees; Instant messaging; Strengthen ties with and between employees.
2 ● Information accessible to every individual; Express opinions about being part of that organization; Advertise the company through its employees.

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Academics vs. Practitioners

As mentioned at the beginning, the same Delphi study has been conducted at the same time by another researcher, but from the perspective of Practitioners. Practitioners - people that will or might have already taken as responsibility employer branding strategies - consider that social media will have an impact in the future, on the following characteristics of employer branding in general: the image of the employer, the visibility of the company, organizations responsiveness, organizational image, communication management, marketing, knowledge sharing and recruitment strategies, with a higher interest on visibility, marketing and communication . This may come as no surprise for this study, since Academics share the same ideas, although differently formulated. What strikes as a big difference is the actual perspective of being that person which has to deal with what Academics are predicting for the future. The most important category for Practitioners as regards to internal marketing was *Work-private life boundary*, something that was not been taken into account at all by Academics; only one respondent suggested in the first round that social media could be perceived as an "intrusion to employee's private life". According to Practitioners, since social media is used in both professional and private matters, this boundary will fade away and private posting could be associated with the company's image*. "Therefore companies will have a keen eye on the postings of their employees and if these postings don't conflict with their working activities".*

Perhaps the most noticeable difference reflects on the prediction of social media's influence on the role of HR professionals. Academics say we will see more Marketing/Communication background, technological competencies and a greater image created for the HR department. On the other hand, Practitioners think that in the future their social media will impact their HR awareness on recruitment trends, HR innovative thinking and HR networking. In their view, HR professionals will have to be continuously updated on what is new in matter of recruitment and use their innovative way of thinking to make competitive advantage off Social Media.

This proves that there are always two perspectives when it comes to theory or research. Academics talk about what they think it will happen in the future, while practitioners talk about

the same thing but knowing that it might have implications for their own professionals' lives. Academics are the objective researcher while Practitioners are more subjective. These differences do not mean that one's vision is better than the other, it just shows that it is both useful to understand the Academic point of view based on their continuous research as well as have the insight opinion from within the company.

HR Professionals	HR Academics
In the coming 5 years, Social Media will strongly influence the following categories of Employer Branding in general	
Image of the employer	Targeting of audience for recruitment
Visibility of the company	Marketing/Company Brand
Organization responsiveness	Ways of Communication/HR competencies.
In the coming 5 years, Social Media will strongly influence the following categories of the Employer Branding Value Proposition	
Organization image	Engagement with both employees and applicants
Communication Management	Opportunities for promoting the organization
Organization privacy	Targeting for specific audience
In the coming 5 years, Social Media will strongly influence the following categories of the Internal Market	
Work- Private life boundary	Organization's image/Marketing strategies
Communication in organization/ Knowledge sharing on organization	Openness about working at that company
Marketing	Internal recruitment
In the coming 5 years, Social Media will strongly influence the following categories of the External Market	
Organization Visibility	Reputation
Recruitment Strategy	Talent Management
Marketing	Transparency of organizations
In the coming 5 years, Social Media will strongly influence the following elements of the role of HR Professionals (HR Pro's)/Academics	
HR awareness on recruitment trends	Need of knowledge in Marketing and Communications studies
HR innovative thinking	
HR networking skills	Need of web-based applications knowledge/Need to develop new skills
	Image of HRs in organizations

Table 32: Practitioners and Academics results

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What companies should know

The results of this study clearly indicate that there will be future for employer branding through social media although it is impossible to say that the Academic assumptions can be considered a general truth. However, what is relevant to point out is that this research tried to find some answers about the future of a topic that has only been discussed and barely researched. This study offers the possibility for companies to both have an idea of a possible match between social media and employer branding (which was considered on the basis of all the literature review) and also have "a look at the future" of employer branding through social media. The study gives them all the information they need, it is up to them if they decide to use social media or not.

Based purely on the opinions of the Academics, we find appropriate to give some advices to companies how and when to handle SNs, if they want to use them for their employer branding creation. Suggesting to companies to either invest or stay out of social media is far from this study's intentions. There is plenty of information available for companies to decide for themselves if social media is the right strategy for creating their employer branding.

1. **Use Social Media only if you need it**

There is no point to invest in social media just because everyone else is using it. It is clear from this research that there are so many options for companies to choose from when it comes to using social media, so companies should think in advance why they should use it and for which purpose. Build your employer branding strategy through social media only considering what will be beneficial for you. If others use it to target their audience for recruitment, it does not mean you have to do the same. Each strategy is individual and social media might enhance employer branding, but always keep in mind your purpose for using it.

2. **Make sure you are ready to be online**

Again, use social media for employer branding only if You think it is beneficial for your company. It is an incredible transparent environment and before deciding to use it, make sure you are also ready to support all the information that is going to be available online. Possible negative feelings from former

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employees, complains about services or working conditions could appear and it is extremely important to know how to deal with this situations, otherwise your reputation as an employer could suffer.

3. Be honest

It is very important to be honest with the online users because it is only in your interest to make the best use out of social media for employer branding. Only by thinking that Academics continuously suggested how Organizational image, Reputation, Company brand or Image of HRs will be mainly influence by social media, it seems clear how important honesty is in such environment. If you are going to build your Employer Branding around unrealistic or fake principles only to attract employees and applicants, then the truth might have a bigger and longer impact when revealed, because the information will always be available online.

4. Understand how to use social media before using it

It seems very important to know how to use social media and everything that is related to its use. Maybe the HR professionals do not need to be trained or they do not need knowledge of web-based applications, that is purely an option that companies should consider. However, since social media might be an unfamiliar domain to an HR professional, companies should make sure that the person to whom they attribute these responsibilities, knows everything that is to know about social media. If you decide to use it for employer branding then you should also decide on who is going to use it and the knowledge required for its implementation. It is a very unpredictable environment so it is important to know everything about it, to avoid any unpleasant situations.
Again, these suggestions only reflect the vision of the researchers based on the results.

All in all, it cannot be given one answer to the research question "What is the future of employer branding through social media, in the view of Academics?". We cannot say it will be bright, dark, better or worse. But for sure we can say that social media will be used for employer branding activities and it will have an important impact to its creation of strategy. In the minds of Academics, it will imply knowledge of Marketing to build proper strategies aimed at enhancing and promoting organizational image as an employer, reputation, company brand, talent management, internal recruitment and

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targeting specific audience for recruitment. Information will be more transparent and companies will be more open to the audiences about how it is to work at that company. HR competences will change; they will need to have knowledge of web-based applications and marketing/communication studies, all reflecting into a better image of the HR department. Finally, our recomandation is the follwing: before any company decides for social media for their employer branding, they should first understand if they are willing to accept this changes.

5.2 – Conclusions-

To determine what will be the future of employer branding through social media in the next 5 years, was a difficult task even for a group of Academics already dealing with this issues. Round one was full of qualitative information that needed to be compacted in a way that would allow all the experts to have an idea of each other's opinions. The Delphi method was considered from the beginning because the respondents, by receiving controlled feedback, will eventually find common grounds for what could possibly happen in the future. Nevertheless, this study has also some limitations.

"The first problem with the selection of informants is when there is no clear definable community that can act as source of expertise, knowledge or opinion" (Bobeva, 2005, p.108). The respondents of this study are all Academics that have knowledge of HRM or any related field of study; yet, it is hard to confirm that they are all experts in social media or employer branding. One limitation is that it is difficult to find real experts with major interest in either social media, employer branding or both of them. First, it is a new domain of research, so it is hard to consider anyone as being an expert in social media and second, the existing knowledge base is of limited value for predicting the future. Thus, Academics with previous knowledge of HR, employer branding or any other organizational studies were considered, because their area of expertise is the closest to the main topic of this study.

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It is important to note that this study is not intended to generalize the results by suggesting that this is the ultimate accurate prediction of employer branding through social media. The views expressed here are heavily influenced by the research sample. However, these personal views of Academics might also be influence by their geographical location. The respondents come from different parts of the world with different levels of development, economical powers or cultural and political implications. Thus, the second limitation could be the influence of the geographic location on the opinions of the respondents. It is possible that those living in more developed countries to have better experience with social media or employer branding, while for those less developed, this field of interest might be less familiar. It is recommended for future research to extend the results of this study to a similar sample, but from different geographical location. In fact, what might be predicted for one country or region, could not work for another, thus the results might be different from those presented here.

The focus of this study has important implications for knowledge creation and scientific relevance, when compared to the State of the Art. Therefore, this study contributes to current literature in 3 different ways:

Theoretical

Until this date, there is no empirical research on the implications of using social media for employer branding. Indeed, there are studies that have been mentioned during the initial literature review, studies that referred to using social media or web 2.0 by organizations for recruitment or other HR responsibilities; similar ideas were also found on professional HR websites that have independent articles based solely on the writers' personal opinions. This study contributes to theory by expanding the very limited existing knowledge of social media and employer branding. Moreover, it offers plenty of information for future research that might be interested in this particular subject. Not only do the results point out that in the future HR will use social media for employer branding, but it specifically details which characteristic of

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value proposition, external and internal marketing will be affected and which will be the impact on the roles of HR professionals. It is recommended for future studies to refine and verify the results for theory building on the usage of social media for employer branding and provide the literature with richer information.

This research is a starting point for future studies since it is the first to question if there will be future for employer branding through social media.

Methodological

This study contributes to the development of the Delphi method in the area of Business studies, in particular HRM. The Delphi method" is a usual instrument in the areas of technological and social forecasting, social diagnosis, and consensus interpretations of health realities, communication and participation" (Landeta et al, 2006, p.467). Although the majority of Delphi studies have been focusing in technological/IT developments, studies have been made in the area of knowledge management (Scholl et al, 2004), international business or trade (Czinkota and Ronkainen, 2005), social sciences (Landeta et al, 2006) or general management (Schwarz, 2008).

This study is the only one to use a Delphi method for forecasting the future of employer branding through social media. Not only is the subject relatively new, but it also uses a method that is only being used for business studies in the last years.

This study shows that the method can be used for HRM studies; before proceeding with the method, previous literature was taken into consideration and all the steps that were being suggested by other researchers have been made. Every detail of how the method was executed is available and all the results are shown either in the text or in appendix, so that it is clear how this study was conducted.

Scientific

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The contribution to science is significant for this study. First, based solely on the literature review on both social media and employer branding, this study suggests a model of connections between the two concepts. Taking into consideration the characteristics of different types of social media and the role of each employer branding category, there are presented different possibilities of how companies could use all types of social media to achieve their employer branding strategies. This model can be used by companies as guideline, if they decide to use social media, and apply It to their individual situations.

Moreover, the results of this study prove something that until now was just being assumptive.

In the next 5 years employer branding will be using social media and it will affect both organizations and HR professionals, as Academics suggest. Indeed, generalizing the results is impossible, but the answers were being generated by Academics who studied and researched this domain, so it can be said that there is future with social media and it will impact employer branding, but there is the possibility that not everything that is predicted will actually happen. Maybe organizational image for example will not be affected, as the results indicate, but this study informs the company in advance of all the implications that might come up if they use social media for any of their employer branding strategy. What science knew before this study was that there is a chance for HR departments to use platforms such as social media but not how they could use it or what will be affected by it, as can be depicted from this research.

Social media can be a dangerous field full of land mining and surprises. YouTube has been the platform of promotion for unknown artists, small entrepreneurial businesses, unconventional research or ordinary people sharing their lives. But one video in particular proves more than others how powerful but at the same time unpredictable social media is. Rebecca Black is a young artist aged 13, who posted a video on YouTube, of her singing the song Friday. Since February 2011 to April 2011, it has reached 126,263,795 million views (making it one of the top ranked videos of all times) on what is commonly suggested as probably being the worst song. Wikipedia reveals an extensive page about the song Friday, especially pointing out the critical

reception (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Friday_(Rebecca_Black_song)). Moreover, on YouTube, it has registered an amazing number of dislikes from subscribers: 2,514,860 (a number increasing by the time this sentence was being written). Regardless of the qualities of the singing or the video, 130 million of people have watched it. She proved that in 3 months, you can become a social media sensation just by standing out with something, even if that something is a bad roughly criticized song. It is a paradox that companies must take into consideration when they decide to use social media for their employer branding. Users are now everywhere and companies need to think in advance, so that they can strategically position their employer branding on social media platforms. This study comes as a response to those willing to engage in social media activities or research. It provides an expertise forecasting of what might happen when companies decide to use social media. Finally, it provides a guideline to follow and understanding of why and for what they should use it for employer branding.

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Appendices

Appendix I- Social Media articles

No.	Article
1	Abel, F., Henze, N. &Krause, D., (2009). Social Semantic Web at Work: Annotating and Grouping Social Media Content. *Lecture Notes in Business Information Processing LNBIP, 18: 199-213.*
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Appendix II- Employer branding articles

No.	Article
1	Bach, S., (2007).Employer and Employee branding: HR or PR? Chapter in Personnel management in transition in Managing Human Resources in context. BLACKWELL PUBLISHING. 3-45.
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The Future of Employer Branding through Social Media: A Delphi study among Academics

Appendix III- First Letter sent to the participants

Dear Mr./ Ms. X**,**

Recently, through the e-mail correspondence with Tanya Bondarouk, you have indicated an interest in participating in a Delphi study regarding the future of *employer branding* through *social media*. Thank you very much for showing an interest in this study which aims to shed light on how will Employer Branding will develop though Social Media in the next 5 years.
We now begin the data collection process. Attached to this e-mail, you will find:
- The sheet with six open questions
- The description of the research and Delphi method.
 The goal of this study is to explore the future of Employer Branding through Social Media.

> **"Social media"** in this study refers to "a *group of internet-based applications which allow the creation and exchange of content for all the people that use it"* (Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube,Wikipedia, MySpace, Second Life, Blogs, etc.). Growing interest and power of social media seems to be of major interest for companies that want to strengthen their popularity and recruit perspective employees. This process is covered by the term "**employer branding"** , seen in this study as *a long-term oriented strategy of any given company, aimed both at building a unique and desirable employer identity and managing the perceptions of perspective and current employees, in order to gain competitive advantage.*

The research employs the **Delphi method**. Delphi method is mainly used for forecasting; relying on systematic interviews with a panel of experts and consists of 2 or 3 rounds of questions. The Delphi method is viewed as a technique to obtain the reliable consensus among a panel of experts. The panel members in this study are worldwide experts and (e-)HRM business leaders. Answering the questions should not take more than 20 min. In accordance to standard Delphi process protocol, **your answers will be treated anonymously.** In this round you are asked to answer 6 open questions. Answers should express your knowledge and opinion regarding the future of employer branding, whether it is a positive or negative perspective.
 Please send your answers to: ut.delphi.study@gmail.com **in two weeks time**. **After 10 days we will remind you about it.**
The next round (Round 2) will take place during December 2010 and will consist of top 10 lists created from answers given in the first round. During rounds 2 and 3 you will be asked to re-evaluate your answers based on the list we provide. Rounds 2 and 3 should take less time to complete than this round.
Thank you for your collaboration and we are looking forward to receiving your answers.
Best regards,
Mrs. Roxana Arama, BSc
Mrs. Elena Axinia, BSc
Mrs. Dr. Tanya Bondarouk

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The Future of Employer Branding through Social Media: A Delphi study among Academics

Researchers at the RAND Corporation starting from the premises that "two heads are better than one" (Dalkey, 1969. p.5), began to develop the Delphi method, which uses individuals estimations as prediction for short-term periods. Rand Corporation conducted studies and built the Delphi method from the simplistic version- formulate group judgments- to how it is used nowadays. The following years, the method has been long used and various definitions were given. Delphi method received various definitions long the time. In 2000 Hasson et al define Delphi method as:" a group facilitation technique, which is an iterative multistage process, designed to transform opinion into group consensus". (Hasson et al., 2000, p.1008)Landeta (2006) stated that "the Delphi method was conceived as a group technique whose aim was to obtain the most reliable consensus of opinion of a group of experts by means of a series of intensive questionnaires with controlled opinion feedback. (…)It is a method of structuring communication between groups of people who can provide valuable contributions in order to resolve a complex problem." (Landeta, 2006, p. 468)

According to Landeta (2006), the main characters of the Delphi method are considered to be the following:

- Repetitiveness- participants should be questioned at least two times on the same items

- Anonymity- answers are kept anonymous and considered as part of the entire group

- Controlled feedback- the communication between experts is externally controlled

- Group statistical response- all the answer can be found in the final answers.

As literature argues, "In all subject domains Delphi has been primarily employed for forecasting, planning, issue identification/prioritisation, or for framework/strategies development (…)Whatever the perceived reasons for its choice, the method offers reliability and generalisability of outcomes, ensured through iteration of rounds for data collection and analysis, guided by the principles of democratic participation and anonymity." (Bobeva, 2002, p.104).

The present research aims at forecasting the future of employer branding. According to the literature review, Delphi method is mostly used for forecasting, issue identification or to explore assumptions or information leading to differing judgments. This study considers the Delphi method due to the experience and information that experts poses, allowing the researcher to analyze the data received both qualitative and quantitative, in order to generate consensus regarding the future of employer branding through social media. In addition, controlled feedback can enable to narrow the most important ideas of the experts and obtain reliable and general information. Considering the fact that the research is subject to a master thesis, Delphi method could provide valuable information from academic experts in a shorter period of time and using less financial resources, compared to applying questionnaires or interviews.

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The Future of Employer Branding through Social Media: A Delphi study among Academics

DELPHI STUDY PROCESS

Selection of participants

- The respondents of this study are all Academics, which share common expert knowledge of HRM.

Delphi Round 1 WE ARE HERE!!!

Purpose: - To receive Academic experts' opinion on 7 open questions, that allows the creation of the survey in Round 2.

- Monitoring the response rate and send reminders.
- Keep permanent contact with the respondents.

Progress to Delphi round 2

Review the responses from Round 1 and cluster the responses into Top 10 (or Top 5 if low variance).

If sample size is acceptable, proceed to round 2.

Delphi Round 2

Purpose: - To inform the participants of the results from Round 1, and give the opportunity to review their opinions considering the previous results.

The survey will contain the opinions given by all the experts in the first round, which were clustered and gathered into a list of Top 10 or Top 5 (if the variance is low).

Progress to Delphi round 3

Make analysis of the responses of Round 2, with regards to changes of opinion, and create new lists.

If sample size is acceptable, proceed to round 3.

Delphi Round 3

Purpose: - To inform the participants of the results of Round 2 and give the opportunity to review their answers.

The survey will contain Top 10 or Top 5 (if low variance) lists, based on the answers from Round 2.

Analysis of the Delphi study Results

- Analysis of the results and qualitative feedback received from respondents
- Summaries of findings sent to the respondents

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The Future of Employer Branding through Social Media: A Delphi study among Academics

WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF EMPLOYER BRANDING THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

DELPHI STUDY

There is no restriction on how much you wish to write, as long as you consider it to be relevant. We welcome as many opinions from respondents as possible. We recommend you to save this document in a special folder, in this way you could return to these answers in case you did not complete them at once. If you work with the Word '97 or older, you simply write the answer "normally", under the question. If you work with the Word 2003, you may use the possibility below to insert your answers. Use any option you prefer.

In your opinion:

1. What are the consequences of using **Employer Branding**[3] through **Social Media**[4]?
   Click here to enter text.

2. Which developments in social media will positively and/or negatively influence employer branding in the coming 5 years?
   Click here to enter text.

3. What implications will social media have for the **employer branding proposition,**[5] in the coming 5 years?
   Click here to enter text.

4. What implications will social media have for the **internal marketing**[6], in the coming 5 years?
   Click here to enter text.

5. What implications will social media have for the **external marketing**[7], in the coming 5 years?
   Click here to enter text.

---

[3] A long term strategy, aimed at building a unique employer identity and managing the perceptions of perspective and current employees, to gain competitive advantage

[4] A group of applications that build on foundations of Web 2.0, like Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, My Space, Hyves

[5] Information on the organization's culture, management style, qualities and image of the current employees.

[6] Reach Activities to reach and attract employees, and create a unique image that allows candidates to picture themselves within the company

[7] Building a workforce that is difficult to imitate; achieving a unique culture, and increasing employee retention

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The Future of Employer Branding through Social Media: A Delphi study among Academics

6. What implications will these developments have for the role of the HR professionals?

Click here to enter text.

After you have completed answering the questions, please save is as a word document and send it back to ut.delphi.study@gmail.com .

Thank you for your collaboration!

The Future of Employer Branding through Social Media: A Delphi study among Academics

Appendix IV Second Letter sent to the respondents

Dear Professor ……………………………,

Thank you for participating in Round 1 of the Delphi study on the future of Employer Branding through Social Media. We have analyzed your answers and now we invite you to participate in the Second Round.

After the first round:
Per question we first identified all possible categories of answers that resulted in 225 so-called "items". After that three researchers grouped those items into larger categories: from a total of **225 items**, the researchers came up with 66 **categories of items.** Those researchers worked individually, and then in a joint session we compared the categories to achieve the consensus. We also decided to reduce a number of questions: from 6 to 5 as many answers overlapped.
What is expected from you now:
Now, in Round 2, you are asked to *rank* the groups according to their importance. There is no "objective" importance! All is about your own opinion!
 Answering the questions below should not take more than 10 min. **Your answers will be treated anonymously.**

Please send your answers to ut.social_media@yahoo.com. **in one week time**.

After Round 2:
In the Round 3, the last round, we will send you the feedback on the second Round, and present you the clusters in accordance to the ranking received.

Thank you for your collaboration and we are looking forward to receiving your answers.

Best regards,

Mrs. Elena Axinia, BSc
Mrs. Roxana Arama, BSc
Mrs. Dr. Tanya Bondarouk

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The Future of Employer Branding through Social Media: A Delphi study among Academics

DELPHI STUDY, ROUND 2

From all the answers in Round 1, 17 categories of the general influence of Social Media on Employer Branding were made (proposition 1 below).

Proposition 1:

I believe that, in the coming 5 years, Social Media will strongly influence:

I strongly disagree   I strongly agree

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Costs implications	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. Transparency	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. Targeting of audience for recruitment	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. Interactivity	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5. Ways of communication	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6. HR competencies	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7. Organization's Reputation	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8. Marketing	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9. Relationships between employer and employees	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10. Employee involvement	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
11. Organizational policies	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
12. Control issues	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
13. Risk management	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
14. Company brand	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
15. Employee mobility	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
16. Reaching employees with mobile devices	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
17. Control over employee behavior	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

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The Future of Employer Branding through Social Media: A Delphi study among Academics

Proposition 2 From the first Round, 12 categories of the influence of Social Media on Employer Branding Value Proposition   were made (proposition 2 below).

I believe that, in the coming 5 years, Social Media will strongly influence the following categories of the Employer Branding Value Proposition:

I strongly disagree   I strongly agree

		1	2	3	4	5
1.	Realistic Value Proposition	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2.	Balance between proposition and reality	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3.	Engagement with both employees and applicants	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.	Building the value preposition	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5.	Employee involvement in EB activities	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6.	F2F activities	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7.	Control issues	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8.	Transparency	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9.	Equity between employers and applicants	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10.	Opportunities for promoting the organization	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
11.	HRM strategy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
12.	Targeting of specific audience	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

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The Future of Employer Branding through Social Media: A Delphi study among Academics

From the first Round, 11 categories of the influence of Social Media on the Internal Market were made (proposition 3 below).

Proposition 3:

I believe that, in the coming 5 years, Social Media will strongly influence the following elements of the Internal Market:

I strongly disagree   I strongly agree

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Recruitment	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. Control over employee behavior	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. Openness about working in that company	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. Organization's image	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5. Organizational boundaries	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6. Legal implications	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7. Marketing strategies	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8. Decentralization	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9. HR skills	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10. Employee involvement in organizational performance	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
11. Organizational performance	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

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The Future of Employer Branding through Social Media: A Delphi study among Academics

From the first Round, 12 categories of the influence of Social Media on the External Market were made (proposition 4 below).

Proposition 4:

I believe that, in the coming 5 years, Social Media will strongly influence the following elements of the External Market:

I strongly disagree   I strongly agree

		1	2	3	4	5
1.	Employee involvement	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2.	Competition	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3.	Organizational policies	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.	Internal vs. external information	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5.	Employee's training	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6.	Organization's modernization	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7.	Organizational resources	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8.	Organizational barriers	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9.	Reputation	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10.	Flexibility	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
11.	Talent management	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
12.	Transparency	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

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The Future of Employer Branding through Social Media: A Delphi study among Academics

From the first Round, 10 categories of the influence of Social Media on the External Market were made (proposition 5 below).

Proposition 5:

I believe that, in the coming 5 years, Social Media will strongly influence the following elements of the role of HR Professionals (HR Pro's):

	I strongly disagree			I strongly agree	
	1	2	3	4	5
1. Need for Web based applications knowledge	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. Need to develop specific skills	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. Need of knowledge in Marketing and Communication studies	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. Need for knowledge of social structures In organizations	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5. HR policies	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6. Strategic role	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7. Development of new roles	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8. Segmentation considering HR practices	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9. Need for knowledge of legal implications	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10. Image of HR in organization	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

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The Future of Employer Branding through Social Media: A Delphi study among Academics

WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF EMPLOYER BRANDING THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

DELPHI STUDY, ROUND 3

Thank you for participating in Round 1 and Round 2 of the Delphi study on the future of Employer Branding through Social Media. We have analyzed all answers from the second round and now we invite you to participate in the last round, Round 3.

After the second round:

Let us remind you that the main idea of the Delphi is to find the consensus between the respondents. Therefore, the main challenge for three researchers, who analysed the data, was to identify the **5 most important categories** per each proposition. For example, in the analysis of the answers for the first proposition we had to narrow 17 categories to only but 5. We carefully looked at the distribution of answers per each category, analysed similarities and divergence; and we ran the factor analysis to identify inter-category correlations.

What is expected from you now:

In Round 3, you are asked to rank 5 categories per proposition, from 1 to 5 (1= highest important; 5= least important). Please put ranking numbers in tables, and also if possible, give a brief explanation of your choice for extreme ranks..

Please note that the items are presented randomly!

Please send your answers to ut.social_media@yahoo.com **in one week time**.

After Round 3:

After we have received all the answers, we will inform you about the progress of our study and as soon as possible we will send you the final results of our study.

Thank you for your collaboration and we are looking forward to receiving your answers.

Best regards,

Mrs. Elena Axinia, BSc
Mrs. Roxana Arama, BSc
Mrs. Dr. Tanya Bondarouk

Proposition 1

According to all respondents,

In the coming 5 years, Social Media will strongly influence the following 5 categories of Employer Branding in general:

Targeting of audience for recruitment	
Interactivity with costumers	
Ways of communication/HR competencies[8]	
Organization's reputation	
Marketing/Company brand[9]	

Please rank these 5 categories, from 1 to 5:

1 = the highest importance

5 = the least importance

Please give a brief explanation of your number 1 choice.

Click here to enter text.

---

[8] Similarities were identified between these 2 initial categories, based on the first round responses and SPSS correlations, thus considered as one category with the common meaning.

[9] Similarities were identified between these 2 initial categories, based on the first round responses and SPSS correlations, thus considered as one category with the common meaning.

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The Future of Employer Branding through Social Media: A Delphi study among Academics

Proposition 2

According to all respondents,

In the coming 5 years, Social Media will strongly influence the following 5 categories of the Employer Branding Value Proposition.

Engagement with both employees and applicants	
Employee involvement in EB activities	
Opportunities for promoting the organization	
HRM strategies	
Targeting of special audiences	

Please rank these 5 categories, from 1 to 5:

1 = the highest importance

5 = the least importance

Please give a brief explanation of your number 1 choice.

Click here to enter text.

The Future of Employer Branding through Social Media: A Delphi study among Academics

Proposition 3

According to all respondents,

In the coming 5 years, Social Media will strongly influence the following 5 categories of the Internal Market.

Internal recruitment	
Openness about working at that company	
Organization's image/Marketing strategies[10]	
Organizational boundaries	
Legal implications	

Please rank these 5 categories, from 1 to 5:

1 = the highest importance

5 = the least importance

Please give a brief explanation of your number 1 choice.

Click here to enter text.

---

[10] Similarities were identified between these 2 initial categories, based on the first round responses and SPSS correlations, thus considered as one category with the common meaning.

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The Future of Employer Branding through Social Media: A Delphi study among Academics

Proposition 4:

According to all respondents,

In the coming 5 years, Social Media will strongly influence the following 5 categories of the External Market.

Employee involvement	
Competition	
Reputation	
Talent Management	
Transparency of organizations	

Please rank these 5 categories, from 1 to 5:

1 = the highest importance

5 = the least importance

Please give a brief explanation of your number 1 choice.

Click here to enter text.

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The Future of Employer Branding through Social Media: A Delphi study among Academics

Proposition 5:

According to all respondents,

In the coming 5 years, Social Media will strongly influence the following 5 elements of the role of HR Professionals (HR Pro's).

Need for web-based applications knowledge/Need to develop new skills[11]	
Need of knowledge in Marketing and Communication studies	
HR policies	
Need for understanding legal implications	
Image of HR in organizations	

Please rank these 5 categories, from 1 to 5:

1 = the highest importance

5 = the least importance

Please give a brief explanation of your number 1 choice.

Click here to enter text.

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[11] Similarities were identified between these 2 initial categories based on the first round responses and SPSS correlations, thus considered as one category with the common meaning.

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Appendix VI Answers from Academics Round 1

1. What are the consequences of using Employer Branding through Social Media?

1. Quicker dissemination
2. Better coverage of target audiences
3. Higher cost efficiency of communication employer branding
4. Less control and higher risk
5. More transparency
6. Pressure for authentic Employer Branding
7. More and more employers involved directly in the process of Employer Branding
8. Employers should be able to reach a wider audience (and a large proportion of younger people) by using employer branding through social media
9. Negative information can be spread widely very fast
10. Important not only for firms to strategically build the identity, but also scan the environment for negative information and respond to it
11. Employees must know how to efficiently represent the employment brand when using social media
12. Ineffective use of blogs, Twitter, etc. can cause significant problems
13. Organizations must accept to lose the control of communication
14. Internet users are no longer spectators, they have become real actors who create and share lots of content
15. Internet users no longer hesitate to express their opinions online or criticize businesses on many independent platforms
16. Internet users access social media in particular, before making a decision , to form an opinion on a product or service and also on their future employer
17. Internet users use social media to share their interests, their professional experiences and thus seek to improve their visibility
18. New ways of spreading information force companies to rethink the way they communicate
19. Companies must watch online conversations, to be aware of problems and expectations of their online reputation
20. Companies must interact more directly with potential applicants, partners and employees, by giving more and more information and being transparent about their activity and work condition
21. employer is closer to the candidates, especially those that are young (Y gen)
22. new competences are needed to manage these media
23. different practices toward diverse employees (according their technology readiness)

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24. new target (less importance for the spatial barriers)
25. for the employees, more options to know more and betters the employer
26. more info transparency
27. for the labor market, more efficiency and effectiveness of the market, new rules and less barriers
28. You reach a mass of people with various communication tools
29. Using social media for employer branding shows that organizations are innovative in doing PR, recruiting and communications
30. Cost savings (traditional EB through print media brochures are more expensive)
31. Large scale organizational image marketing
32. The possibility to influence or even control rather tightly how potential employees perceive the employer
33. A more foreword/cool image for the companies using social media than for its competitors
34. If done in a manner that ends up as being perceived as Machiavellian or manipulative, the strategy may backfire and tarnish the company's reputation
35. Some potential employees, who do not use social media as much as younger generations, are unwillingly discriminated
36. The necessity to employ social media experts, which is not exactly a well-established profession/concentration
37. Opportunity for a larger number of firms to make themselves known on the labour market
38. Possibility to think about employer branding activities on the Web, that will potentially reach a wider number of potential employees
39. If companies do not believe and invest on it, the biggest firms will take advantage of this democratization effect, that social media introduces
40. Social media offers a great opportunity for enterprises to establish a more direct and dynamic relationship with young talents
41. EB through SM helps create a strong emotional bond between the employers and the applicants
42. Organizations should strive to make this connection to create an undeniable sense of belonging among their potential and current employees
43. The messages that are communicated through social media are highly visible to a vast array of individuals
44. It is essential that organizations are mindful of the information that they communicate and the value proposition they express
45. It can enable organizations to share information with a wider audience at a lower cost than with traditional methods of employer branding
46. It can enable organizations to engage with a larger cohort of potential employees through the mass dissemination of messages

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47. Opportunity to maintain engagement and interest as individuals self-select to "follow" or "like" the organization and its practices
48. Individuals will be able to gain access, search, collaborate and triangulate information about organizations
49. Possibility to see how the organization positions itself on the marketplace as a potential employer
50. More information about organizations, based on other opinions and comments
51. Direct dialog with users can enhance an organization's image
52. Create a positive attitude as a potential employer
53. If used for existing employees, it could be perceived as an intrusion to employee's private life

2. **Which developments in Social Media, positive or negative, will influence Employer Branding in the coming 5 years?**
1. Duality of how companies approach social media will result in two different systems of Employer Branding (open, closed)
2. Emergence of social media applications for managing people
3. Creation of "digital hubs" of social media solutions for representing employer branding
4. Self-initiated online employee movement
5. More communication efforts targeted to reach employees with mobile devices
6. Social media gives employers a way to easily disseminate information about their brand
7. Employers will have to use social media in order to be positively perceived by a large segment of the applicant population (especially recent university graduates)
8. If companies use social media to really interact with people and not to manipulate opinions, it can only be positive
9. If companies are transparent through social media, and do not use them to give false promises, they will positively influence their employer branding
10. Employees must be involved in these new practices and become real ambassadors of the brand
11. Positive social media policies to help and encourage employees to use it
12. The new social media will increase the communication channels
13. Online videos of organizations
14. Social and business network usage
15. Online communities for organizations arranged around costumer and employee preferences aligned with product lines of organizations
16. Crisis management, if negative publicity is shared online
17. More employer and employee blogs will appear
18. Direct mailings
19. RSS syndication

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20. Organizations build online their talent pools with no necessity to recruit candidates right away, but stay connected for eventual later recruitment
21. SEO will increase and virtual world for EB will decrease, or remain in selected branches for product and services but nor for recruitment activates
22. Increased usage
23. Potential emergence of new players (e.g. Facebook competitors) or of new "killer apps"
24. Increased familiarity of social media by non-traditional segments of society
25. Social media will grow on increasing their success
26. Will become more and more widespread
27. Will become more and more powerful
28. It will be positive if companies specialize their target
29. It could be negative for recruitment through web based solutions, since the risk is that the audience is not selected and applicants could not meet the first requirements
30. The interactive and the dialogue emphasis of the Web 2.0 recruitment methods will definitely positively enhance an organization's image
31. Organizations can use social media to enhance the visibility of their organization to current and future stakeholders
32. Use social media to communicate the value proposition to all the stakeholders
33. Organizations must be mindful of the message and images that they communicate and share
34. The ability to enable employees to self-select to follow and/ or like an organization
35. May enable organizations to identify and recruit appropriate talent who identify with the employer branding
36. If companies fail to deliver the set of benefits they suggest through their employer branding, individuals will have the potential to express mass negative feelings
37. Facebook will be the most powerful platform for negative complaints regarding organizations
38. If organizations are not able to use LinkedIn to identify talent, , then the organizations could be considered "old school"
39. Organizations should be aware of all new developments, since their employees could be headhunted and depart the company
40. Increase use of LinkedIn will enable organizations to associate themselves with brand leaders/networks, which could further enhance their image
41. It will require professional input of communication and media experts, designers and IT specialists
42. Costs associated with the communication with users should be taken into account

3. **What implications will social media have for employer branding proposition, in the coming 5 years?**
1. Emergent communication about employer branding will make it more realist and up to date

2. **Unbalanced branding proposition (large differences between proposition and reality) will prove to be much riskier**
3. Organizations that do not use social media will probably have a harder time building a positive brand
4. Organizations will have less control over their own branding proposition
5. More necessary than ever to match the external speech and the internal reality
6. By monitoring their online reputation, companies will have the opportunity to improve, adapt their employer branding proposition by taking into account the needs and issues expressed by applicants and employees
7. More transparence in the employer-employee communication
8. More perceived equity
9. More legitimation and a more strategic role for the HR department
10. More transparency for the organizational culture related to work environment
11. Both positive and negative, depending on how much organizations allow the mass to engage in employer branding efforts
12. For reactive companies, a potential need to keep personnel assigned to "troll" or "scour" social media to ensure that the firm is perceived in a way that fits organizational objectives
13. Execution of damage control strategies
14. For proactive firms, the need to engage in social media facilities in a strategically fitting manner
15. Creation of tactics that contribute toward generating a positive employer brand, their measurement and follow-up
16. The employer branding proposition will become more dynamic
17. It will grow in importance because the communication will be in a way which is familiar and particularly appreciated by young people
18. They will completely replace the face to face activities
19. The idea is to integrate the different initiatives and think about a consistent employer branding strategy
20. It will provide a strong avenue to create a social fabric among employees
21. Will allow the creation of a unique organizational culture that becomes inimitable
22. Will enable an organization to communicate its branding and value proposition on mass
23. Organizations need to be mindful of the message and image that it communicates
24. It will present opportunities for organizations to engage with current and potential employees, so that it positively share its policies and practices
25. The information will be used to establish distinction between themselves and their competitors
26. The information will be available to individuals to consider whether employment in the organization fits with them
27. Could provide extra opportunities to promote the organization

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4. What implications will Social Media have for the internal marketing in the coming 5 years?

1. If internal online appls for social networking emerge, the internal marketing will use this medium; otherwise, the differences between internal and external marketing will become blurred.
2. Organizations will benefit from including effective social media into their overall recruiting process.
3. Posting videos on YouTube of what is like to work at that company could be an effective tool
4. Allowing employees to blog about what it is like to work at that company would likely be an effective strategy
5. Need to strike a balance between being honest and real and creating a favorable impression
6. Some negative information would be acceptable, but it's unlikely that many organizations will give employees free rein to interact like this
7. Announcing jobs on Twitter could enhance visibility of the job posting
8. Loss of control where the job posting will eventually go
9. Much more challenging to asses recruiting practices as information flow is less centralized
10. Valorize better the employer branding proposition, HR actions, work conditions and the expertise and competencies of the current employees, in order to develop strong engagement, motivation and the feeling of belonging
11. More openness towards the external market (for e-recruitment)
12. Less importance of the organizational boundaries
13. Internal marketing staff needs to re-train to understand where and when their potential customers and employees are online in order to communicate a positive image about your organization
14. If you are slow, the competitors may wipe you out
15. Internal marketing needs to plan for crises and negative online blogging
16. Learn SEO to position your organization
17. Social media may become a high-risk activity for traditional firms
18. Possible law-suits against companies that impose disciplinary measures on current employees, for lack of understanding on the possibilities that SM enable both inside and outside the organizations
19. Social media might help diminish the distance between top management and middle-layer, once people become more adept at using them in a constructive manner
20. Innovative companies that are willing to take chances, might see large gains in their ability to react as organizational entities to external threats
21. Consistency of the web proposition with the real work conditions
22. The risk is that the firm loses credibility and damages its reputation, if there is no consistency
23. It provides applicants with realistic job previews, therefore allowing them to self-select themselves

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24. It will enable organizations to communicate information about their culture, work and their benefits
25. Organizations can market themselves on mass and to individuals who have self-selected to hold an interest in the company
26. Every message that is shared has the potential to be an avenue for the marketing
27. Every individual posting/sharing information through social media platforms should be knowledgeable of the organizations business strategy
28. Marketing and communication skills will become more valued talents in an organization
29. It will depend on the level of professionalism of the team responsible for the task?? ??

5. What implications will social media have for the external marketing, in the coming 5 years?
1. Satisfied employees will become ambassadors of the brand in the online social network world
2. Dissatisfied employees will become strong opponents
3. Companies will put policies in place
4. Companies will try to train employees how to behave when using social media
5. Social media could have interesting implications for work around engagement
6. There is plenty of room for research on the potential relationship between social media practices and engagement.
7. Having an effective social media environment within the firm would be unique and hard to imitate
8. Enable to better attract and select potential applicants by developing a better reputation
9. Establishing long-term relationship with a talent pool, even before the beginning of the recruitment process
10. Applicants will have a more correct image of the company and of the job offer
11. Facilitate the integration once an applicant is hired
12. More flexibility considering different possible channels and targets
13. More transparency
14. More effectiveness
15. Better image for employer
16. Less barriers (space and time)
17. Competition to be present in the mind of potential customers and employees will increase
18. Necessary to be part of the digital moves to join where the mass of people is joining
19. Organizations need to make sure to be digitally in the mind of their target groups
20. Various channels to promote organizational news
21. Creating bonds online
22. Effective way to continuously reach the employees
23. Direct way to communicate with the potential employees

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24. The risk will be increased competition, since firms will be able to access the new media with their job proposals and employer branding proposition
25. It provides the opportunities for applicants to get a real sense of how it is to work in the organization, even before they join
26. It enhances employee retention rate, creating an idiosyncratic workforce
27. Increase use of these platforms means that the divide between internal and external operations and marketing will become blurred
28. Organizations will not be able to control the information shared internally vs. that which is shared externally
29. Information that is shared internally could be also re-shared externally
30. Organizations will need to have a strategy to deal with negative messages shared about the organization
31. While a positive image of the organization can generate some additional degree of loyalty, the implications are not likely to be significant (HR strategies, salaries, management style will play a bigger role)
32. Employee retention
33. Employee pride to work for such firms
34. To attract qualified employees
35. Some sectors where communication with consumers is essential, will experience stronger usage of social media through employer branding then others

6. What implications will these developments have for the role of the HR professionals?
1. They will have to be competent in understating social media and its effects
2. They will have to be able to use it for shaping perceptions and attributions of HR practices of current and potential future employees
3. Some HR tools will be designed for social media
4. They will have to understand the main ideas about social structure of their employees
5. HR professionals will need to become proficient in using social media for recruiting and branding purposes
6. There is much to learn for them, from the marketing field in the area
7. They will also need to address social media HR policies (what can/cannot employees do with social media related to work)
8. Older managers may need training on how to use it
9. More and more strategic role to play within the organization
10. HR community manager positions could be generalized
11. New roles will be to improve the visibility of HR policies, in order to develop both the attractiveness of the organization (external) and the feeling of belonging (internal)

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12. HR professionals with Social Media will tend to be business partners, and to play a consulting and networking role
13. New competencies
14. More alignment with business
15. More strategic role
16. More segmentation considering HR practices
17. Better image perceived from employees
18. **If they use new media, they will be perceived as innovative by management**
19. **New skills on using information systems and internet services**
20. **Creative, marketing, technological and risk management skills will be required by HR managers in addition to HR domain knowledge**
21. **Having basic business admin and HR knowledge will not be enough in order to maintain effective communication channels and enhance organizational branding**
22. Many HR professionals could not be affected at all
23. If their companies are not within industries that may not benefit from a strong and proactive social media, they might not need to know anything and might be casual users
24. There is a chance they might have larger pools of qualified applicants
25. They could experience a challenging environment that encourages more experimentation and stronger returns on technological and social investments
26. Some HR professionals might find themselves under unexpected scrutiny whenever a high-profile case of employment hits the headlines on popular press, to make sure the company does not break the law
27. HR professionals need to stay on top of any legislative and technological changes
28. Opportunity for the HR department to directly reach employees
29. HR professionals should think more creatively so that they can find innovative solutions to attract young talents
30. HR professionals should think about a wider range of initiatives they can promote through the Web
31. **Have to ensure they understand the legal implications of using the social media for recruitment (it could lead to legal problems if any discrimination is perceived)**
32. HR professionals need to be aware of the people that have selected to engage
33. HR professionals will need to reflect upon the way the mass of information will be captured and used to meet business requirements
34. HR professionals will need to develop skills and capabilities in the area to facilitate the appropriation of social media
35. Data analysis and statistics knowledge will be needed
36. HR professionals and senior managers need to ensure they deliver the brand and value proposition that they actually communicate

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37. HR professionals have to realize that they can no longer control the actions and words of individuals
38. HR professionals need to learn as much as possible about technology developments
39. More HR professionals will be seen with communication background or master degrees in communication

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