

Recruitment in Public Administration in the Age of Social Media

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ABSTRACT: This article examines the potential and challenges of using social media in the recruitment process within public administration. The focus is on the extent to which digital platforms can contribute to the successful recruitment of qualified professionals, particularly against the backdrop of demographic change and increasing competition for young talent. It is demonstrated that social networks such as LinkedIn, Instagram, or TikTok not only increase the reach of job postings but can also promote employer branding and interactive dialogue with potential applicants. Key success factors for an effective social media strategy in the public sector are analyzed, including a target-group-specific communication strategy, a consistent brand image, and data-driven campaign management. At the same time, structural barriers such as hierarchical decision-making processes, limited resources, and a lack of digital skills are identified as inhibiting factors, particularly in the municipal sector. Finally, it is demonstrated that the targeted use of social media must be understood not as a supplementary tool, but as an integral part of modern, strategically oriented talent marketing. Only through a consistent integration of employer brand, digital visibility, and dialogue-oriented communication can the full potential of digital channels be realized and public administration be sustainably strengthened in the competition for skilled workers.

KEYWORDS: Recruitment, public administration, social media

I. INTRODUCTION

Due to demographic change and the growing staff shortage, the public sector faces significant challenges in attracting qualified employees. At the same time, competition for talent between public institutions and private-sector companies is intensifying.

Against this backdrop, digital recruitment tools are becoming increasingly important. In particular, social media platforms such as LinkedIn, Instagram, and TikTok enable employers to target potential applicants effectively, increase their visibility, and support the development of an attractive employer brand.

While social media is already firmly established in the private sector, the potential of these channels has not yet been fully realized across the public sector. This paper therefore examines the opportunities and challenges of social media recruiting in public administration. The aim is to analyze the importance of social networks for attracting qualified professionals and to identify key success factors for their strategic use.

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The focus is on key issues in strategic recruitment in the context of demographic change, the targeted use of digital communication channels to reach relevant target groups, and increasing the effectiveness and reach of recruitment measures. The goal is to gain evidence-based insights into the extent to which social media platforms can make an effective contribution to recruiting qualified professionals in the public sector. The underlying research question is: To what extent can social media in the public sector contribute to the successful recruitment of qualified professionals?

III. RELEVANCE OF THE CHOSEN TOPIC

The recruitment process typically begins with HR marketing, whose primary goal is to make potential applicants aware of vacant positions and to motivate them to submit an application through targeted communication. In addition to generating initial interest, the key requirements of the advertised position must be clearly communicated to enable an initial qualitative pre-selection (see Humanus 2025).

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In recent years, social media has become increasingly important as a recruitment tool (source). Thanks to their wide reach and the ability to target specific audiences, social networks offer new perspectives in recruitment strategy. Platforms such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok not only allow for the publication of job postings but also serve to authentically present the employer and facilitate direct, low-barrier interaction with potential applicants (see Softgarden 2025). Particularly in the competition for qualified professionals, the strategic use of social media is increasingly viewed as a critical factor for success. In addition to the traditional functions of recruitment, social media channels also make a substantial contribution to employer branding by fostering transparent and dialogue-oriented communication between the organization and its target audience (see IHK Munich 2025).

The use of social media is increasingly shifting from one-way information dissemination toward interactive exchange. This dialogue-oriented approach enables a more personalized and needs-based engagement with potential applicants. Through cooperation with established career portals, subject-specific blogs, or university-affiliated platforms, visibility and credibility can be further enhanced (see Joveo 2025).

In the public sector, social media channels serve as a useful complement to traditional recruitment methods, particularly given limited financial and human resources. Cities and municipalities can enhance their appeal as employers through a targeted, authentic presence on social media, thereby better positioning themselves in competition with private-sector actors. For locally based professionals in particular, these digital communication channels can provide good access to public administration (see Germann 2022). In addition to the digital approach, public employers continue to have various conventional tools at their disposal within the framework of personnel marketing (see ICR 2025), such as employee referrals, print advertisements, and participation in career fairs and information events (see MokaHR 2025).

Targeting Generations Y and Z in recruitment brings additional challenges. These target groups place greater emphasis on aspects such as work-life balance, the meaningfulness of their occupation, job security, and flexible working time models. Other expectations include a collaborative work environment, clear career development opportunities, and an open, transparent communication culture (see Heyflow 2025). To meet these expectations, not only appropriate content but also tailored communication channels are required. While platforms such as Instagram or YouTube offer particularly visually oriented, authentic formats for engagement, Facebook is primarily suited for reaching older target groups (see Bornscheid 2020).

IV. ANALYSIS OF RECENT RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS

Recruitment is a central function within strategic human resource management. It encompasses all measures aimed at adequately meeting an organization's quantitative and qualitative staffing needs, taking into account temporal and geographical parameters (see Nastase et al. 2025). Recruitment should not be understood as an isolated administrative process, but rather as an integral part of operating value added and long-term human resource development (see Gabrhelova 2026).

In addition to internal conditions, external factors also significantly influence the recruitment process. In particular, the state of the labor market, demographic changes, technological innovations, and the legal framework are decisive external factors. The organization's HR strategy also plays a key role in shaping the recruitment strategy (see SHRM 2024).

The central goals of recruitment lie in filling open positions with qualified candidates who are suitable both professionally and personally. This serves to secure and enhance organizational performance. At the same time, recruitment aims to retain qualified employees within the organization over the long term to prevent turnover and ensure continuous knowledge development (see Weihmann 2024). In this way, recruitment not only contributes to operational effectiveness but also plays a significant role in securing the organization's strategic future.

The recruitment process is typically triggered by the identification of a staffing shortage or due to expansion, retiring, or internal restructuring. The process encompasses both internal and external recruitment. The first step involves precisely defining the required qualifications based on a detailed job description. Building on this, a targeted job advertisement is drafted and published via the company's own career pages as well as external platforms, recruitment agencies, or social networks (see Manchester Community, n.d.). Upon receipt of the application materials, a systematic review and pre-selection of suitable candidate profiles takes place. Subsequently, selected applicants are invited to in-person interviews. Depending on the complexity of the vacant position and the size of the organization, additional selection procedures such as structured interviews, diagnostic assessments, or practical trial workdays may be integrated to enable a well-informed selection decision (see CIPD 2025).

The recruitment process concludes with the onboarding phase. The goal here is to integrate new employees into existing operational processes, social structures, and cultural contexts as quickly, smoothly, and sustainably as possible. The onboarding process is thus a crucial link between recruitment and talent development and contributes significantly to the long-term retention and productivity of new employees (see Ferriman 2024).

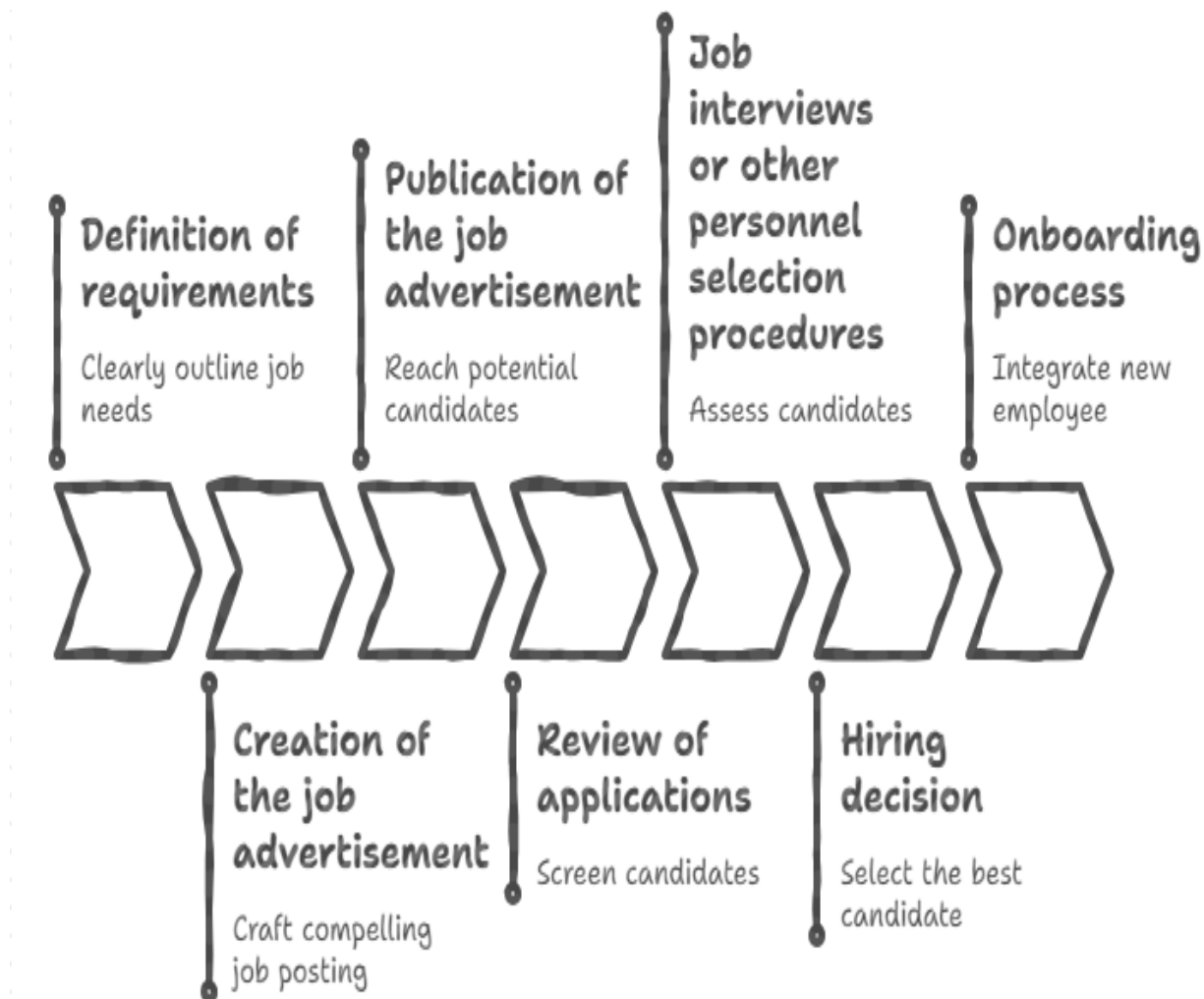


Figure 1: Streamlined Hiring Process

Source: Author's own illustration

V. PURPOSE OF THE ARTICLE

Recruitment in the public sector is subject to specific legal requirements that differ significantly from the regulations of the private sector. The central normative reference point is Article 33, Paragraph 2 of the German Basic Law, which mandates the filling of public offices based on the criteria of suitability, competence, and professional performance. This so-called merit principle forms the legal basis for the requirement to select the best candidates and demands a non-discriminatory, objective selection process (see Brandmons 2025). This constitutional framework is supplemented by the General Equal Treatment Act (AGG), which ensures that applicants receive equal opportunities in the selection process regardless of age, gender, origin, disability, religion, or sexual identity (see Kliemt 2025).

Furthermore, data protection regulations are of central importance, particularly with regard to the confidential handling of personal application data (see Kommunalreform 2026). A professionally designed recruitment process must therefore meet the requirements of traceability, equal opportunity, and formal correctness. Compliance with DIN 33430, which establishes quality standards for job-related aptitude assessments, is an important factor in ensuring validity and fairness (see DIN Media 2025). Violations of the law, such as those against the merit principle or the prohibition of discrimination, can result in legal consequences. Applicants have the option of filing competitor lawsuits to have the legality of selection decisions reviewed (source). Inadequate documentation of the selection process can lead to the court overturning the hiring decision. Furthermore, claims for compensation under Section 15 of the General Equal Treatment Act are possible if discrimination can be credibly demonstrated (see Brandmons 2025).

The requirements for personnel recruitment in the public sector are further exacerbated by demographic change. German society is characterized by rising life expectancy, falling birth rates, and increasing cultural diversity, which has far-reaching implications for the labor market and social security systems in particular (see Federal Institute for Population Research 2022). Demographic changes such as the aging of the workforce and the staff shortage also affect the public sector to a particular degree.

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For instance, the average age of employees in the public sector is significantly higher than that of other groups of workers. As early as 2022, over 25% of public sector employees were older than 55. In addition, the percentage of women is above average, which places additional demands on family-friendly and flexible working time models (see Federal Institute for Population Research 2022).

While the number of people of working age is increasing only slightly, competition for qualified personnel is intensifying, particularly between the public sector and the private sector (see Federal Institute for Population Research 2025). This requires targeted HR strategy measures, such as forward-looking management of demographic change and effective strategic workforce planning, to secure key and critical roles in particular at an early stage (Menzl 2020).

In the wake of these developments, the use of digital technologies, and social media in particular, is becoming a focal point of recruitment. Social networks not only enable the wide-reaching dissemination of job postings but also the targeted outreach to specific audiences and the authentic presentation of the employer brand. This dialogue-oriented form of communication allows public employers to reach younger target groups in particular, such as Generation Z, who rarely use traditional media channels anymore (see Harenberg 2024). The content on these platforms facilitates low-threshold engagement and an interactive applicant experience (see Priyadarsini 2025). Within the context of social media marketing, two strategic approaches can be distinguished: The proactive approach encompasses the active creation of content, community management, and the integration of user-generated content. The reactive approach, on the other hand, focuses on monitoring and analyzing social media to draw conclusions about applicant preferences, employer image, and relevant trends (see University of Bamberg 2025).

Furthermore, a distinction is made between internal and external HR marketing. While the former aims to retain and motivate existing employees, the latter focuses on attracting external talent. The central goal is to build a consistent employer brand that stands out positively from competing offers (see Alshammari, A. et al. (2025). Innovative approaches such as so-called reverse recruiting turn the traditional recruitment process on its head. Employers actively reach out to potential candidates—for example, via platforms like LinkedIn, and offer them opportunities for interaction and preliminary information, such as through open houses or digital exchange formats (see Kraus 2022). Especially in the public sector, where resources are often limited, the strategic use of social media opens up new opportunities to increase visibility, attractiveness, and reach as an employer. This applies in particular to locally based professionals and talented young people, who can be reached with low barriers to entry through authentic, dialogue-oriented communication (see Germann 2022).

VI. PRESENTATION OF THE MAIN RESEARCH MATERIAL AND RESULTS OBTAINED

Targeting potential applicant groups poses a growing challenge in the public sector, particularly against the backdrop of demographic change and the acute staff shortage. Although characteristics of the public sector, such as job security, work-life balance, and social meaningfulness, largely align with the values of Generations Y and Z, the employer image is often perceived as uninnovative and unattractive (see Public Governance 2025). This discrepancy is primarily attributable to inadequate external communication. This is where employer branding comes in, aiming to strategically position the organization as an attractive employer. The goal is not only to attract external applicants but also to strengthen the retention of existing employees (Borscheid 2020). In the municipal sector, institutional frameworks often hinder the effective use of social media. Hierarchical administrative structures and lengthy decision-making processes stand in the way of the flexibility and responsiveness required in the digital space. Furthermore, many municipalities lack the human, financial, and digital resources needed to professionally manage social media channels (see Beyer-Mailänder & Zerres 2021). As a result, smaller municipalities without strategic communication concepts lose visibility in the competition for skilled workers.

Another obstacle is the highly regulated pay structure in the public sector. Collective bargaining-based compensation systems leave little room for individual performance incentives or differentiated career paths (see Hammerschmied 2023). Added to this are deficits in the digital literacy of administrative staff, as well as uncertainties regarding data protection and potentially uncontrollable reactions to digital content (see Lehr et al. 2023). While private companies systematically integrate social media recruiting into their HR strategy, in the public sector it has so far often been used only on an operational basis. The successful use of social media for recruiting skilled workers requires a strategic approach that is aligned with the organization's specific objectives and resources (see Peoplecout 2025).

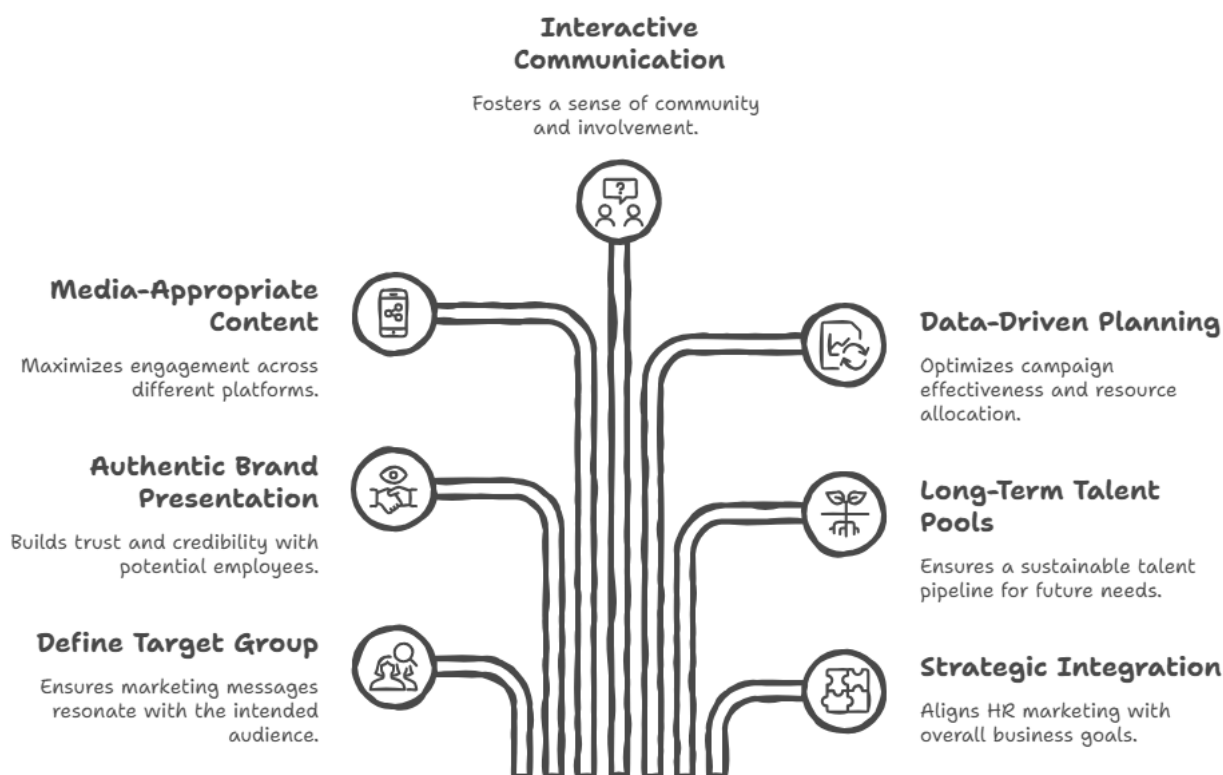


Figure II: Key Success Factors for Social Media Recruiting

Source: Author's own illustration

The selection strategy is a central component of this: it involves precisely defining the target group, selecting suitable platforms, and determining the optimal timing for communication (see Zerres 2021). Different media competencies are required depending on the platform. In addition, behavioral and communication strategies play a significant role. While the behavioral strategy focuses on monitoring and targeted positioning vis-à-vis user groups and competitors, the communication strategy determines which content should be conveyed via which channels, at what frequency, and by which actors. The Fraunhofer Institute identifies seven key success factors for social media recruiting (see Berner 2023).

These points form the basis for a nuanced and dialogue-oriented communication strategy in the digital space. The analysis has shown that recruitment in the public sector is currently shaped by two key dynamics: the demographically driven decline in available skilled workers and the changing expectations of younger generations (see PWC 2025). Traditional recruitment measures are increasingly reaching their limits in this regard. Social media offers the public sector the opportunity to reach new target groups through visibility, authenticity, and interactivity. Core values of the public sector can be effectively communicated through digital formats. The strategic use of social media must go beyond simply posting job ads (see Curately 2026). Platforms such as Instagram, LinkedIn, or YouTube serve to amplify the employer brand, enable nuanced storytelling, and foster trust among potential applicants through mutual exchange. At the same time, the digital space allows for data-driven performance monitoring, which provides additional value in the public sector (see UNECE 2025).

CONCLUSIONS

The results of the study illustrate that social media has become a key success factor for recruitment in the public sector. Against the backdrop of demographic change, the growing staff shortage, and increasing competition for qualified personnel, traditional recruitment tools are increasingly reaching their limits. Social networks offer public employers the opportunity to significantly expand their reach, target potential applicants, and establish direct contact with relevant target groups through dialogue-oriented forms of communication. This makes it possible to reach younger generations in particular, who make only limited use of traditional recruitment channels.

Furthermore, the analysis shows that the success of digital recruitment efforts is closely linked to professional employer branding. Although the public sector offers numerous attractive features, such as job security, meaningfulness in social impact, family-friendly working conditions, and a healthy work-life balance, it often fails to communicate these advantages effectively. A strategically oriented social media presence can help bridge existing perception gaps and position the public administration as a modern and attractive employer.

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At the same time, significant organizational challenges come to light. In particular, hierarchical administrative structures, lengthy decision-making processes, limited financial and human resources, and deficits in digital skills hinder the professional use of social media. These factors mean that social media recruiting in the public sector is often still used operationally rather than strategically, and thus cannot fully realize its potential.

Several recommendations for action can be derived from the findings. First, public administrations should view social media as an integral part of their HR strategy and develop a holistic recruiting strategy that defines clear target groups, suitable platforms, and measurable success indicators. Furthermore, consistent development of employer branding is necessary. Authentic content, insights into everyday work life, and the active involvement of employees can help make the public sector more attractive and strengthen the trust of potential applicants. Finally, there is a need for a targeted expansion of digital competencies within the administration. This includes both training measures in the areas of social media and digital HR marketing, as well as the provision of sufficient human and financial resources for the professional management of digital communication channels. Only by combining these measures can the potential of social media for the sustainable recruitment of qualified professionals in the public sector be fully realized.

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