New Trends in Qualitative Research

BY-NC-ND

VOLUME 22 | Nº 4

DOI:
https://doi.org/10.36367/ntqr.22.4.2026.e1367

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Submission date: October, 2025
Review date: April, 2026
Publication date: October, 2026

QUALITATIVE EXPLORATORY STUDY ON CANDIDATES' DIGITAL IDENTITIES IN MOROCCAN RECRUITMENT

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the research is to determine the strategic importance of digital identity in human resources management (HRM) through exploratory qualitative research. The qualitative methodology allows us to understand the complexity of discourse and digital practices and to analyze them in depth. Thus, employing a qualitative approach brings forth the complexity posed by discourses as well as digital practices while ensuring sufficient depth of interpretation. In this case, digitalization changes a candidate's digital footprint into a strategic asset which is very important for talent assessment during recruitment. The main methodological contribution of the paper rests upon the use of descending hierarchical classification (DHC) through the IRaMuTeQ software applied to the digital HR interviews' corpus. Through this paper, it has been possible to identify both the opportunities and the obstacles arising from the incorporation of digital innovation, as well as ethical issues concerning the protection of personal data and algorithmic bias. The findings confirm five main classes that are divided into three thematic clusters: the evolution of organizational processes, the significant influence of digital tools on recruitment effectiveness, and potential ethical concerns related to data privacy and algorithmic fairness. The importance of this study is in its analysis of the less researched relation between digital identity and human resource management. The study employs concepts of self-presentation and social identity theories to clarify the way digital technologies influence the recruitment and assessment process. This study suggests an enhanced foundation of human resource management policies that is capable of being more practical to be implemented in real life. It questions the old models of recruitment of employees in addition to providing an outline of recommendations to make amendments to Law 09-08 in order to improve the application of the personal data and ensure that the risks of using artificial intelligence (AI) for making employment decisions are minimized. Furthermore, this research offers a methodological reflection that critically analyzes the research process, epistemological choices, and the combined use of thematic analysis and IRaMuTeQ.

Keywords
Digital Recruitment; Digital Identity; Data Ethics; Digital Transformation; Recruitment Process.

1. Introduction

In the digital era, companies keep changing in the landscape shaped by digital technologies. As technological innovations, these technologies have impacted not just operations of organizations but also the management practices, including those of human resources management (HRM). Indeed, In fact, digital technologies (such as applicant tracking systems, AI recruitment solutions, e-learning platforms, performance analytics dashboards, etc.) and social networks are vital in a significant role in streamlining recruitment processes and hence automate certain key functions of the recruitment process (the main topic of this paper) and using the digital identities of people (candidates) to strategically manage talent (Wowor et al., 2022). Indeed, digital identity essentially means that all information available on the internet collectively constitutes what is known as a person's digital footprint, which they leave behind - intentionally or unintentionally - while browsing the web, making it an important instrument in recruitment, performance management, and training. (El Yazidi, 2024; El Yazidi, 2020; Van Dijck, 2013).

Nevertheless, digital transformations can prove to be a double-edged sword for organizations as they create opportunities and obstacles. Among the obstacles are primarily the protection of personal data (of applicants tracked by the organization), transparency of procedures of processing this data about applicants, and tackling algorithmic biases, which can affect recruiting processes assisted by machines or augmented by machines, which lead to increasing ethical and regulatory concerns (Gunuganti, 2018). Therefore, in the context of rapid digitalization, it is very important to think about the possibilities of using digital identity while respecting certain principles of fairness and compliance.

Considering these challenges, the primary aim of this research is to comprehend the strategic importance of a digital identity within HRM in the digital world. The research specifically intends to explore the opportunities created by digital technology and analyze the relevant ethical and legal issues.

Although digitalization has been studied in many studies in terms of its various effects, including changes to business processes (Vial, 2019), emergence of e-HRM (Parry & Tyson, 2011), or utilization of AI in recruitment (Tambe et al., 2019), still some gaps in the literature remain. One of these gaps refers to the absence of studies devoted to the connection between applicants' digital identity and the technologies applied in the recruitment process (Ore & Sposato, 2022). Moreover, there are still many gaps in research pertaining to ethical and legal issues in the utilization of digital data. This leads to an important question about "*How can digital identity be strategically leveraged in human resources management processes to capitalize on the opportunities offered by digitalization?"*

There are two key reasons for presenting the problem: on one hand, the necessity of adapting practices to the changes taking place in the environments (Vial, 2019), and on the other hand, the point that ethical and effective management of digital data is a strategic issue in terms of improving the organization's performance and facilitating the atmosphere of organizational trust for the stakeholders.

Finally, it is compulsory to follow the national laws regarding the establishment of the Commission Nationale de Contrôle de la Protection des Données à Caractère Personnel (CNDP) in Morocco in order to evade legal penalties and preserve the image of the company (CNDP, 2020).

To answer this question, this study employs a qualitative methodology and approach to explore the perceptions and practices of human resources professionals regarding digital identity. Using the IRaMuTeQ software, the research would structure and analyze the information and data that have been collected by applying DHC. This method would facilitate the emergence of the key topics addressed in the study and would elucidate the interrelationship between digitization, digital identity, and HRM.

2. Theoretical And Conceptual Background

Social identity theory (Tajfel et al., 2001) and self-presentation theory (Goffman, 1956) explain digital identity and e-reputation. Identity construction is based on social groups and socialization (El Yazidi, 2024; Ellison et al., 2007). The Social Networking Sites (SNS) let individuals construct their own image and manage e-reputation (Schlenker, 1980). Using several SNS enables people to express their experiences, skills, qualities, and achievements, shaping a professional and personal digital identity (Zhao et al., 2013; El Yazidi, 2020; Papacharissi, 2010; El Yazidi & Rhouiri, 2026).

Social media offers several advantages in Human Resource Management (HRM), including access to large talent pools and effective recruitment, as well as improved sourcing, background checks, and performance management (Wowor et al., 2022; Sparrow et al., 2016). It also provides access to diverse applicant profiles (Gueutal et al., 2009). Although social media improves the match between candidates and jobs, its use in the hiring process is two-sided: it offers a strategic advantage while also posing systemic obstacles (Joos, 2008) related to bias, accuracy, and assessing online reputation. Furthermore, social media influences recognition, motivation, and overall organizational culture, including employee motivation, performance, and morale (Gasparovich & Ruslanova, 2025; Costa et al., 2014; Saisudha et al., 2025; Westover, 2025; Brunetto et al., 2014).

Using social media platforms in HRM raises ethical and legal issues, including data protection and confidentiality, as stipulated by the National Commission for the Supervision of Personal Data Protection (CNDP) in Morocco (Gunuganti, 2018). Furthermore, monitoring employees raises privacy concerns (Binns, 2018). Best practices require robust policies, training, and an ethics committee (Shaffi, 2021).

In addition, they require transparency, respect for individual rights, compliance, risk mitigation, trust, and commitment, as well as a strong reputation and a respectful, inclusive work environment.

3. Methodology

The study adopts an exploratory qualitative approach, as recommended by Creswell and Poth (2018), which is suited to understanding complex phenomena and human and organizational interactions. Consequently, semi-structured interviews -lasting an average of 45 minutes, conducted in complete confidentiality with informed consent- allowed participants to express themselves freely in a climate of trust (Au, 2019). Five themes were used to develop this interview guide: 1. Digital Transformation 2. Practices of Human Resource Management 3. Use of Professional Social Network 4. Criteria for Selection 5. Ethical Issues. By using each of these themes to guide the interview, participants were able to openly share their experiences and feelings in an environment that allowed all discussion to be completed in agreement on a uniform methodology. Transcripts were anonymized in accordance with ethical recommendations for qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The sample includes eight professionals from the public and private sectors, selected using a purposive sampling strategy (Patton, 2015). Occupying strategic positions (HR, recruitment), they provide informed expertise on digital identity in recruitment. The selection is based on three criteria: professional status (social entrepreneurs), availability, and consent. A diversity of profiles (sectors, functions, seniority, gender) was sought to enrich the perspectives (Saunders et al., 2018). The interviews were conducted by the first researcher, both face-to-face, which encouraged greater interaction between participants, and remotely, using digital communication tools, which enabled people in difficult geographical and/or organizational situations to participate. This mixed methodology is based on the methodological recommendations made by Papacharissi (2010), Delefosse and del Rio Carral (2017), as it offers data collection processes that are both flexible and robust. The sample size was determined according to the principle of saturation in order to ensure the relevance and adequacy of the data collected.

Table 1. Characteristics of the exploratory study sample. (Prepared by the researcher)

Interview	Area of activity	Sector	Position	Gender	Experience
1	Transport and logistics	Public	HR and recruitment manager	Female	24 years
2	Civil society	Private	HR Director	Female	12 years
3	Food industry	Private	Regional HR Director	Male	5 years
4	Programming	Semi-public	Recruitment Manager	Male	6 years
5	Health	Public	HR Manager	Male	20 years
6	IT	Private	HR Manager	Female	3 years
7	Operations	Public	Foundation Director	Male	20 years
8	IT and Programming	Private	General Director	Men	15 years

Table 1 summarizes in condensed form the diversity of organizations (public, private and para-public) and professional fields.

All information collected during the interviews, including the position of the respondents, the length of each interview, is included as contextual data. These contextual data enable a multidimensional analysis of the practices and challenges facing human resource management in Morocco.

3.1 The phases of thematic analysis

This study aims to understand how public and private recruiters perceive the challenges of implementing and evaluating digital identity practices in professional contexts. To explore these perceptions, thematic analysis was chosen for its ability to identify, analyze, and report on trends within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Paillé & Mucchielli, 2021). Indeed, it enables a structured breakdown of interviews into empirically defined themes, offering deeper insight into participants' experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The analysis was then combined with computer-assisted textual analysis using the IRaMuTeQ software.

Within the framework of this in-depth study, thematic analysis was conducted in five main phases, ranging from corpus preparation to the interpretation of textual and statistical analyses.

- The first researcher transcribed the interviews to make them accessible. The coding process took place in two complementary steps: the first researcher performed open coding, following an inductive logic, and the second performed axial coding. Significant segments were manually identified based on the interview guide, which included five predefined themes. Axial coding grouped the themes without creating new general codes, with the exception of a few manual reclassifications aimed at grouping certain text fragments. This ensured a high degree of consistency between the data collection method and the analytical framework adopted. The coded dataset was then prepared for analysis with IRaMuTeQ.
- The third phase combined quantification with descriptive statistics, counting and measuring the frequencies of lexical forms.
- The fourth phase applied the DHC, which grouped the text segments into interpretable classes based on their lexical similarities. This process involved comparing the identified classes via the hierarchical grouping of segments by the "IRaMuTeQ" software, with the manually coded themes in order to check the consistency and refine the boundaries of the segmented shape classes.
- Finally, the interpretation phase synthesized the software-generated classes and the manually coded themes to uncover their underlying meaning and draw conclusions, tracing the analytical process from the raw text segments to the final themes.

3.2 Human-software analysis

The combination of manual and computational analysis was organized as follows.

Manual coding produced the coded segments and themes; IRaMuTeQ software generated the lexical classes through the DHC. The two strands were then systematically compared, class by class, to verify their consistency and to ensure that the statistical groupings did not contradict the contextual meaning identified in the manual coding. Coding was hybrid: the open phase remained inductive, while the axial phase organized the codes in line with the five themes of the interview guide. Each lexical class was finally evaluated against the original text excerpts, using the diagrams generated by the software, to validate its contextual significance.

3.3 Criteria for the validity of qualitative research

This qualitative research followed methodological criteria to ensure scientific adequacy and transferability. We verified adequacy through a rich description of the research context and the diversity of respondents' profiles (Geertz, 1973; Saunders et al., 2018). For reliability, a detailed protocol was followed, including an interview guide, full transcription, manual fragmentation of the corpus into codes, and preparation of a UTF-8 file conforming to IRaMuTeQ requirements for identifying texts and final themes (Hennink et al., 2020). Confirmability was ensured through a reflexive approach and a research journal documenting all data processing and analytical decisions (Nowell et al., 2017; Morse, 2015).

Credibility was obtained through methodological triangulation -combining manual coding with IRaMuTeQ textual statistics; and peer-to-peer debriefings to discuss analyses and methodological decisions. Saturation was reached when no new information emerged, and interviews were stopped (Guest et al., 2006; Saunders et al., 2018). These criteria support the credibility and validity of the analysis process while capturing the complexity of the data obtained.

3.4 Statistical approach to the study

IRaMuTeQ (the R software for multidimensional text analysis) was used to apply DHC, which groups text segments into classes based on lexical similarities (Reinert, 1983). DHC was selected for its capacity to organise data rapidly and to clarify relationships among themes, with results displayed as a dendrogram that supports interpretation (Lebart et al., 1998; Lahlou, 2011).

The statistical results were supplemented by a thorough analysis of qualitative data. The researchers compared the lexical trends identified by IRaMuTeQ with the manual coding of the narratives to validate these results. By combining these two types of data, the study provided a more comprehensive understanding of recruiters' perceptions of digital identity and the challenges they face during the recruitment process.

4. Results Of Text Segmentation And Structuring By DHC

DHC is a technique for dividing and classifying large amounts of information based on their similarities; it constructs a schematic representation (i.e., a dendrogram) of the text corpus in order to define thematic classes (Reinert, 1983).

Currently, this approach is widely used in humanities and social sciences research to highlight recurring themes, discourses, and narrative structures (Lebart et al., 1998; Lahlou, 2011), all of which can provide additional support for the interpretation of qualitative data through the complex relationships between different segments (Greenacre, 2017). By exploring these relationships, the classification helps bring out the latent thematic structures of the corpus.

Table 2. Characteristics of the corpus. (based on IRaMuTeQ-0.8a7 outputs)

Statistics	Value
Number of texts	1
Number of text segments	318
Number of forms	1748
Number of occurrences	11 375
Number of lemmas*	1423
Number of active forms	1097
Number of additional forms	313
Number of active forms with a frequency ≥ 3	398
Average number of forms per segment	35,77
Number of classes	5
Percentage of segments in class	71,70 % (228 segments ranked out of 318)

* Lemmas: are lexical forms reduced to their root, which allows for the uniform analysis of words that have the same root but different grammatical forms.

Table 2 provides a reliable overview of the text classification process. From a corpus of 318 segments, IRaMuTeQ identified 1,748 lexical forms and 11,375 occurrences, with 1,097 active forms contributing to the classification. Five thematic classes were extracted, covering 71.7% of the segments (228 classified segments), confirming strong lexical density and internal coherence and offering a solid basis for the interpretation of the classes and for thematic analysis.

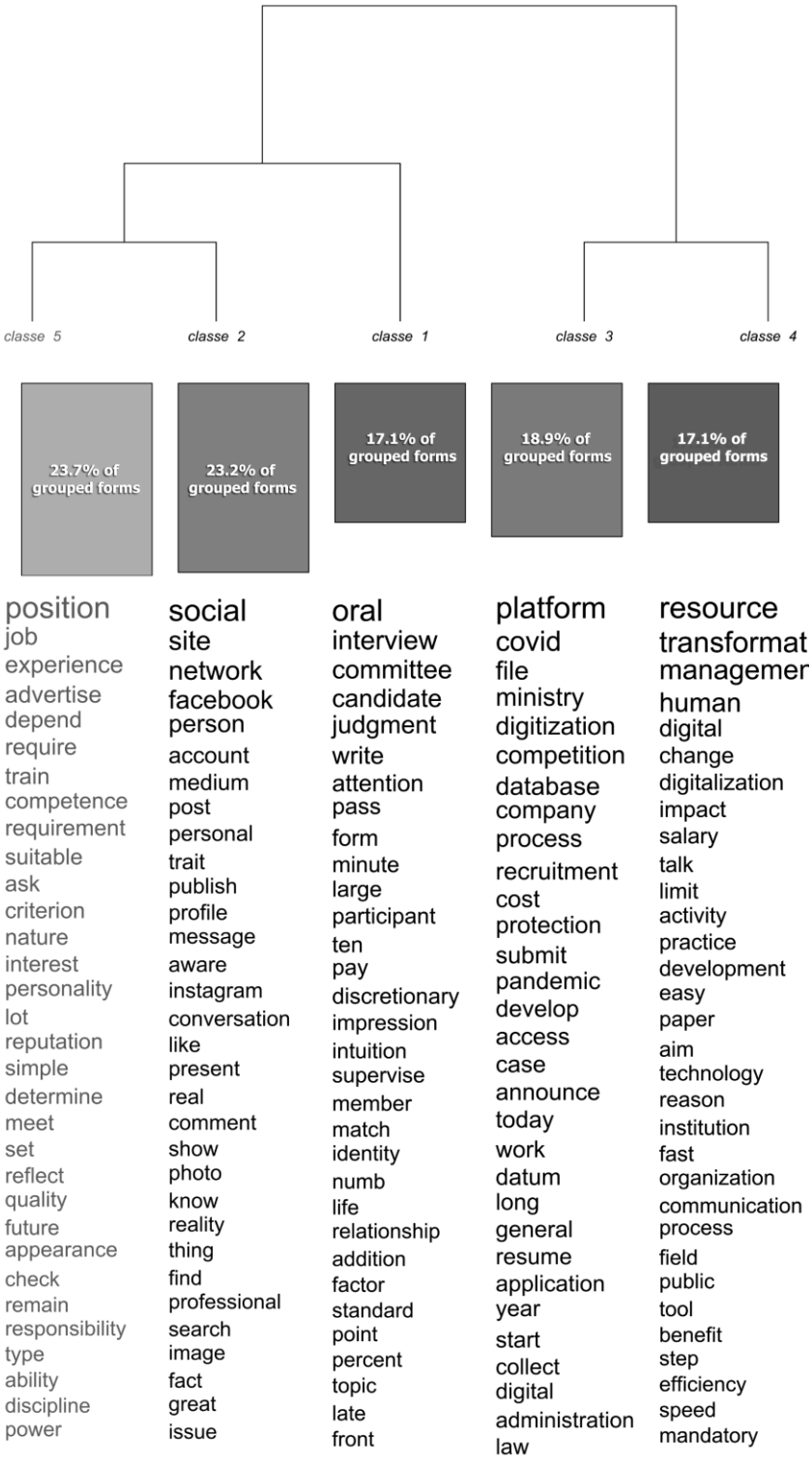


Figure 1. DENDROGRAM - *Distribution from DHC*

According to the DHC in figure 1, there are five principal classes among 228 segments (71.7% of the total corpus). Classes 5 (23.7%) and 2 (23.2%) get more representation than the rest of the classes. The dendrogram depicts two major branches whereby in the first one classes 4 and 3 are classified together (36% of classified text segments) whereas the second branch contains class 1 (17.1%) along with classes 5 and 2 (46.2%). The percentage included in the classes mentioned refers to the share of 228 classified text segments. Each class corresponds to certain keywords representing the thematic issues that concern the digital identity, organizational processes, and HR processes in Morocco. The five classes constitute a ground for thematic analysis.

Table 3. Thematic representation of the classes obtained from the dendrogram. (based on IRaMuTeQ-0.8a7 outputs)

Class	Percentage of classified text segments	Themes
Class 1	17,1%	Digital Transformation and Modernization of Organizations
Class 2	23,2%	Role of social networks in the construction of digital identity and their effectiveness in HRM
Class 3	18,9%	Impact of digitalization on the recruitment process
Class 4	17,1%	Role of digital identity in the selection of candidates
Class 5	23,7%	Ethical challenges and the protection of personal data

The table above presents the categories identified by semantically interpreting the relationships between segmented forms and grouping those that share contextual links in the collected verbatim data. These categories do not remain isolated: they are organized into broader thematic clusters that allow dominant themes to emerge, and are compared with the existing literature to better understand the interpretations that arise from them, as developed in the "Discussion" section.

5. Discussion of Results by Clustering

The results of the descending hierarchical clustering (DHC) reveal three thematic groups. The first group includes classes 4 and 3, the second corresponds solely to class 1, and the third includes classes 5 and 2. Interpreting these classes from the perspective of clustering allows for a clearer articulation of the effects of digitization on recruitment, organizational modernization, and the ethical and legal issues related to digital identity.

5.1 First cluster: Digitalization of Recruitment and the Role of Digital Identity in Candidate Selection

The first cluster comprises Classes 4 and 3. The key point is that digitalization affects the recruitment process, focusing on the relevance of the candidates' digital identity.

While Class 4 (17.1% of the total grouped forms) deals with the social aspect of the candidates' digital identity in focusing on candidate selection keywords: resource, transformation, management, human, digital, impact, salary, activity, practice, institution, technology, organization, communication imply that the candidates' digital identity plays a role in the assessment of the candidates' behavior, skills, and cultural fit to the values of the company. One of the respondents stated:

> *"In fact, as the director of the organization and in charge of recruitment, I have to look at social media profiles. [...] it allows me to exclude or retain a candidate. It also saves us time. Because instead of summoning someone, subjecting them to a training period, finding out about their life, their mistakes and their qualities, we can get all this information in one go and with the click of a button. Digital technology has changed everything in the hiring process."*

In this regard, digital identity is not a simple compilation of online data but a digital extension of an individual's personality, making it essential to social and professional interactions (Van Dijck, 2013). This allows employers to gain a deeper understanding of the candidate than they would from a resume alone, improving the match between profile and organizational needs (Bondarouk et al., 2017).

Class 3 (which is 18.9% of the grouped forms) complements this analysis by illuminating the role of digitalization in the recruitment process. The keywords of this class - platform, covid, file, ministry, digitization, competition, database, company, recruitment, cost, protection, submit, work, resume, and digital - speak for the introduction of modern digital platforms into recruitment processes. These platforms allow to post vacancies, to track applications, and to communicate after job interviews while eliminating the restrictions of geography. As one of the participants remarked:

> *"In the past, the recruitment process traditionally took place where the person submitted an application and placed their file with the company, then the recruiter checked the candidate's resume and then contacted them for an initial interview in case the company or institution needed that person... Today, thanks to digitalization, applications are submitted directly via a dedicated digital platform instead of traveling to the company. [...] one of the algorithms we adopt looks for keywords in candidates' resumes that match the requirements of the position [...] then sorts and shortlists the candidates with whom the recruiter will conduct an interview, saving a lot of time and effort. and reduce the cost of recruitment."*

Applicant tracking systems (ATS) and sorting algorithms enable keyword searching, candidate ranking, and profile matching against job requirements, lowering recruitment time and cost (Black & Van Esch, 2020; Ore & Sposato, 2022; Zibarras & Woods, 2010).

Thus, clustering indicates that digitalization of recruitment and digital identity use provide strategic potential for organizations, resulting in time-saving, cost-reducing, increased transparency, and better matching.

However, this advancement raises dilemmas about quality, equality, and algorithmic bias, making the use of personal data necessary within the bounds of inclusiveness and transparency.

5.2 Second Grouping: Digital Transformation and Organizational Modernization

The second cluster consists exclusively of Class 1 (red, 17.1% of total forms). This category is associated with the process of organizations' transformation and modernization. The key terms comprise the following: oral, interview, committee, candidate, judgment, writing, attention, pass, form, minute, large, participant, intuition, identity, factor, standard.

This class reflects the move from paper-based management to the use of digital information systems. As one of the respondents said:

> *"The storage of information, the first reason that seems to me for management is the storage of existing information on paper, which means that paper storage is very limited and poses a lot of problems compared to unlimited digital storage [...] to work through digital platforms or the Internet, it makes you faster and more efficient. A file is rejected immediately or after 24 hours and the case can be viewed [...] while if the file is processed digitally electronically, We will be able to follow the file from its arrival and process it either by rejection or by acceptance immediately. [...] Thirdly. The preservation of information, archiving and follow-up because paper is prone to damage and loss [...] but on the contrary, if the files are digital and stored somewhere, they will never be lost."*

This dynamic corresponds to the strategic understanding of digital transformation as an activity aimed at enhancing organizational capacities through digital technologies (Vial, 2019). The Covid-19 pandemic accelerated this process by prompting the active implementation of digital technology (Verhoef et al., 2021). Therefore, companies should build the digital skills and infrastructure needed for their transformation.

5.3 Third Grouping: Ethical Challenges, Data Protection, and the Role of Social Networks

The third cluster consists of Classes 5 and 2. It deals with the ethical and legal issues concerning the management of personal data in a more digitalized environment while including the function of social networks in the creation of digital identity and in the way of managing human resources.

Category 5 (23.7% of clustered types) raises significant issues about the role of personal information in the recruitment process. Some of the terms used are position, job, experience, advertise, depend, require, competence, criterion, reputation, privacy, responsibility, discipline, which indicate the need for compliance with data protection regulations, such as Law 09-08 on the protection of individuals with respect to the processing of personal data developed under the auspices of the CNDP. One of the respondents stated:

"Frankly, no, because we can't do it for legal and professional reasons, because we're forbidden to touch personal things, such as private profiles and information on Facebook and other social networking sites. We only rely on information that is relevant to the professional sphere."

Another respondent added:

"We must respect the privacy of individuals and process personal data in accordance with Law 09-08 on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data."

Not complying with these requirements may have harmful implications for the organization's image and stakeholder confidence (Gunuganti, 2018; CNDP, 2020).

Class 2 (23.2% of grouped forms) addresses the importance of social networks for creating digital identity and their usage in managing human resources.

The main terms - social, site, network, Facebook, account, post, personal, profile, message, Instagram, conversation, reality, professional, search, image - illustrate the role of social media in construction of digital identity of people and its applications in HR practics. As one respondent stated:

"There are a whole series of other effects of the digital transformation, we have an information system for HRM, for example, we produce statistics at the same time as these statistics are requested [...] before we worked on paper, today everything has been digitized, statistics are available, employee status, you can know the location of anyone, who is in any department, in any region [...] Thus, you master more, with the information you master more, the degree of mastery increases. [...] a noticeable decrease in processing time."

Use of social networks allows the collection of relevant data about job seekers and workers, improving management and decision making (El Yazidi, 2020, 2024). Nevertheless, such applications present ethical and legal issues concerning monitoring, privacy, and discrimination.

This combination demonstrates a conflict between the possibilities that digital tools provide and organizations' legal and ethical obligations. Managing this conflict is therefore an important element in the effective implementation of digital technologies in human resources.

The three identified categories show that digitalization affects organizations at three interrelated levels: the introduction of new technologies in recruitment and selection (Classes 4 and 3); the modernisation of administrative processes (Class 1); and the ethical and legal issues concerning personal data protection and social media use (Classes 5 and 2). The findings underline the necessity of a strategic, responsible, and legally-compliant approach to digital transformation.

These findings point to a paradox in digital approaches and the necessity for organizations to comply with various obligations. The organization must therefore resolve this paradox to achieve effective application of digital technologies in HRM.

6. Methodological Reflection

This part presents a critical examination of the research process-epistemology, methodology and reflexivity- by focusing on the important methodological decisions, difficulties, and lessons that resulted from the use of the IRaMuTeQ software for thematic analysis.

6.1 Epistemological assumptions and methodological choices

From an epistemological standpoint, this research study employs an interpretivist approach, which regards reality as a social construction and meaning as a product of human interactions. The methodological choice was made to carry out interviews as a form of data collection and semi-structured interviews were chosen with eight Moroccan HR professionals from both the public and private sectors, who were picked based on a sound basis. In relation to data analysis, thematic analysis was employed using IRaMuTeQ software to carry out the DHC of data.

6.2 Rationale for Key Methodological Decisions

Our hybrid approach integrated manual coding by two researchers (open coding by the first, axial coding by the second) with computational classification using IRaMuTeQ, and then systematically compared the manual coding with the DHC lexical classes, class by class, to verify alignment and refine class boundaries. This moved the analysis beyond simple automation by incorporating researchers' interpretive subjectivity. The main difficulties were the sensitive nature of digital identity in recruitment (risk of social desirability bias), linguistic complexity, and integrating statistical grouping with qualitative interpretation. Interviews were conducted in French or Moroccan Arabic; passages in Moroccan Arabic were translated into French by the first researcher, with original recordings consulted whenever translation could affect interpretation.

The first researcher's knowledge of the HRM context in the Moroccan setting helped them connect with participants and build relationships. In contrast, the second researcher's detachment from this context allowed them to question usual understandings during axial coding. Nevertheless, the lexical profile of Class 5 suggested an interpretation based on legal compliance, judging by its lexical content. Yet, reinterpreting its sections revealed that its participants were actually discussing their self-imposed regulations rather than legal expertise. Moreover, the participants did not validate the results, but the audit trails and numerous quotes from the interviewees support the findings.

6.3 Strengths and limitations of combining thematic analysis and DHC

One of the strong points of thematic analysis coupled with DHC used with IRaMuTeQ software is that the latter ensures a systematic and reproducible segmentation of the textual material, provides insight into hidden structures thanks to dendrograms, and helps mitigate selection bias, without completely removing it.

Nevertheless, DHC, as an analytical method, can face limitations in lemmatization because it disregards the narrative sequence. To address this limitation, the integration required some subjective judgments from the researcher, showing that software can never replace reflexivity.

6.4 Methodological contributions to research in digital technology and organizational studies

Thematic analysis combined with human-machine symbiosis is particularly useful for sensitive subjects like digital identity, as it strengthens ethical safeguards, supports interviews built on trust, and enriches computer-assisted analysis through researchers' interpretations. Merging interpretive sensibility with the statistical framework of DHC contributed to the credibility and reproducibility of this research.

The specific results of this research indicate that computer-assisted thematic analysis - combining manual coding with the statistical classification provided by DHC- cannot give a definitive answer to the research question; however, it serves as a valuable interpretive tool that preserves the researcher's subjectivity.

7. Conclusion

This study underscores the importance of qualitative research in examining the gap between what is legally required as a regulatory framework and what is actually implemented as organizational practices. Through thematic analysis of qualitative interview data, we discovered that the systematic evaluation of candidates' digital identities has become a common practice. This points to the existence of a "grey zone" that participants attribute to the limits of Law No. 09-08 in the face of new technologies such as artificial intelligence and social network analysis; these are perceptions of regulatory limitations, which would need to be consolidated by a dedicated legal analysis. Semi-structured interviews proved particularly well suited to revealing the "tension between optimizing organizational productivity and respecting individual rights," thereby showing how professionals interact with pre-existing laws they now perceive as inoperative. Consequently, the main methodological contribution is to emphasize the importance of qualitative methods, particularly valuable for exploring and assessing the effective application and limiting effects of a law in practice.

This qualitative research generates knowledge that goes beyond the mere reporting of participants' experiences. Within the scope of this exploratory study, the proposal to revisit Law No. 09-08 arises as an implication of the empirical data collected. Testimonies recounting the "fundamental dilemmas" experienced by actors provide arguments to fuel reflection on reform. These data invite a reorientation of theoretical reflection toward notions such as privacy and consent in the digital age. Practically, they support the establishment of human resource management protocols that go beyond a simple appeal to ethics, aiming instead to align with a renewed legal framework.

This study has limitations: the small sample (eight cases) prevents generalisation and may entail selection bias, although the diversity of interviewees yielded a wide range of perspectives; some interviews were conducted remotely, reducing the interaction possible with sensitive topics. Future research would triangulate semi-structured interviews with non-participant observation to generate more robust qualitative data. Beyond its empirical contribution, this research provides methodological insights into the use of narrative methods for examining identity processes, which could help overcome some limitations of remote qualitative interviews by creating vivid and coherent narratives that enrich the analysis. Overall, the results highlight the need to evolve qualitative methods to better integrate digital technologies and contexts, thereby enriching qualitative research practices in human resource management, and more specifically practices related to digital identity management from the perspective of both employees and employers.

Ethical Approval: Ethical approval was not required for this study, as it did not involve procedures subject to institutional review. The participation of human subjects was entirely anonymous and voluntary, with no collection of identifiable personal data.

Informed Consent: Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Their anonymity and the principles of confidentiality and voluntariness were fully respected throughout the study.

Declaration of Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the research, authorship, or publication of this article. The material has not been published, in whole or in part, elsewhere and is not under consideration for publication in any other journal. All authors were personally and actively involved in the work and take full responsibility for its content.

Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI): AI-based language corrector tool was used solely for linguistic correction. It had no influence on the data analysis methodology or the interpretation of the results, and did not affect the authors' scientific responsibility; the authors fully assume their authorship and the integrity of the content presented.

Funding: The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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