



A fit perspective approach in linking corporate image and intention-to-apply[☆]



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ABSTRACT

Marketing principles not only attract consumers but also recruit talented people. This study applies person-organization fit to examine the relationship between an organization's corporate image and a job seeker's intention-to-apply. This study further explores how recruitment messages affect the relationship between corporate image and person-organization fit. The study focuses on human resources management positions and uses the information of real job openings from 28 companies as the research data. The research follows a formal encoding procedure for the recruitment messages and job advertisements as well as the completion of a survey; this study yields 1568 observation samples for analysis. The results from hierarchical linear modeling and the fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis show that (1) corporate image relates positively to both intention-to-apply and person-organization fit, (2) person-organization fit fully mediates the relationship between corporate image and intention-to-apply, and (3) comprehensive recruitment messages strengthen the positive relationship between corporate image and person-organization fit.

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1. Introduction

Antecedents of the intention-to-apply to an organization receive the most attention in the research on job application decisions (Roberson, Collins, & Oreg, 2005), among which corporate image is significant (Gatewood, Gowan, & Lautenschlager, 1993; Kim, Jeon, Jung, Lu, & Jones, 2011; Tsai & Yang, 2010). Because job applicants have access to minimal relevant information during the decision-making process, they usually rely on their knowledge about a firm's corporate image in assessing whether or not to apply (Rynes, Bretz, & Gerhart, 1991).

Although researchers agree that corporate image is a key antecedent of the intention-to-apply, most studies apply an organizational attractiveness perspective to examine a perceived direct relationship (Barber, 1998; Gatewood et al., 1993; Rynes et al., 1991). However, organizational attractiveness cannot specifically explain why job applicants apply to a corporation with a superior image. As employment choices affect an individual's long-term career development and differ qualitatively from consumer buying behavior, the relationship between corporate image and intention-to-apply requires advanced explanatory concepts.

According to social identity theory, a strongly positive social evaluation of a company's corporate image can cause job seekers to identify with the company's values and ideals and increase the perceived fit of the job seeker with the company. This study thus incorporates the concept of person-organization fit (P-O fit) as a mediating factor, because P-O fit is an important predictive factor of a job seeker's work choice intentions (Cable & Judge, 1996; Carless, 2005).

Job seekers first obtain information about a company from the company's recruitment messages (Roberson et al., 2005). Comprehensive recruitment messages not only offer work-related information but also expose job seekers to the company's culture, increasing their knowledge of both the job position and the company. These messages ensure that the company recruits requisite talent, which brings economic benefits (Rynes et al., 1991). This study therefore argues that recruitment messages are an important contextual factor that may change the relationship between corporate image and P-O fit. Comprehensive work information helps job seekers to make rational assessments and engage in self-selection, which may reduce the ability of a superior corporate image to influence job seekers' perceived P-O fit.

This study, therefore, aims to demonstrate the mediating effect of P-O fit on the relationship between corporate image and intention-to-apply. Additionally, this study conducts a cross-level model to understand the moderating effect of recruitment messages, the results of which contribute to the existing literature.

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2. Literature review and hypotheses development

2.1. Corporate image and application intentions

Lemmink, Schuijff, and Streukens (2003) define corporate image as social or public knowledge or perceptions about a given company. Corporate image's sources, comments on a company's news, employment experience, consumer experiences, as well as the positive and negative behaviors of the company itself (Turban & Cable, 2003).

The pros and cons of a corporate image and its effects on the choices of job seekers are important considerations. Organizational attractiveness perspective emphasizes the ability of a successful corporate image to attract the attention of more job seekers and strengthen their intention-to-apply. Gatewood et al. (1993) argue that a more attractive corporate image stimulates job seekers to pursue knowledge about and jobs at a company. Corporate image is an enduring signal of identity that a company communicates to the public: the better the corporate image is, the stronger the inclination of job seekers to apply for work at the company is. According to social identity theory, individuals affiliate with organizations that they identify as superior, believing that they will accordingly appear more successful in the eyes of others (Hogg & Terry, 2000). Organizations with superior images can increase customers' intentions to use the service (Wu, Yeh, Huan, & Woodside, 2014) and attract job seekers better than can organizations with poorer images (Gatewood et al., 1993; Tsai & Yang, 2010; Turban & Cable, 2003).

2.2. Corporate image and P-O fit

P-O fit refers to an individual's subjective beliefs about their perceived compatibility with a workplace: individuals with a close P-O fit believe that their values are similar to those of the workplace (Kristof, 1996).

This study links identity theory to the relationship between corporate image and P-O-fit. Social identity theory asserts that individuals define their identities in terms of the surrounding environment and the similarity between themselves and others (Tajfel, 1982). Further, individuals acquire self-respect and self-approval by undergoing a process of categorization, identification, and comparison (Herriot, 2004). Hence, job seekers readily perceive credibility and value in well-regarded companies (Breugh & Starke, 2000) because they hope to align their status with the firm's high ratings and thereby raise their own image (Chatman, 1991). Thus, good corporate image influences job seekers to align their values with those of the company.

2.3. The mediating effect of P-O fit

The present research uses fit theory to examine the relationship between corporate image and intention-to-apply. The study contends that, before a desire to work for the company can fully manifest, a superior corporate image must first produce a psychological response, a desire to belong to the company, and the perception that a good fit exists between the job seeker's values and those of the company.

According to social identity theory, individuals socially evaluate their own organization to differentiate themselves from the employees of other organizations (Hogg & Terry, 2000). Further, when the public gives a company a positive evaluation, the employees of the company experience self-enhancement and social approval (Herriot, 2004), thus increasing their trust in the company (Eggers, O'Dwyer, Kraus, Vallaster, & Guldenberg, 2013). Though job seekers are not company employees, they still assess the core values and culture of a company drawing on the company's corporate image. Individuals want to become employees when they feel that their values and those of the organization are compatible.

Schneider's (1987) attraction-selection-attrition (ASA) model contends that job seekers select organizations with development goals

and characteristics similar to their own. Further, when job seekers make decisions about their future career development, they depend heavily on fit criteria (Cable & Judge, 1996). Job seekers eliminate companies with which they identify less and pursue those with matching values. Job seekers prioritize their career development and emphasize company culture and the nature of the work when choosing companies (Roberson et al., 2005) even to the extent of accepting lower salaries (Cable & Judge, 1994). Researchers find that P-O fit is an antecedent of the intention-to-apply (Cable & Judge, 1994, 1996; Roberson et al., 2005). Therefore, superior corporate image creates a stronger identification with a company and the feeling of "fitting in" in job seekers.

People need to have a sense of belonging. Applicants who are demographically similar to recruiters evaluate organizations more positively than dissimilar applicants do (Goldberg, 2003). When applicants perceive that the company culture aligns with their personal values, personalities, and career goals, they come to believe that they will be valuable insiders in the work environment, leading to a stronger intention-to-apply. Thus, a superior corporate image should create a feeling of good P-O fit among job seekers, producing an intention-to-apply.

H1: P-O fit mediates the positive relationship between corporate image and intention-to-apply.

2.4. The moderating effect of recruitment messages

Recruitment messages are want ads that present content and information from a job and company (Rynes et al., 1991). A close connection exists between recruitment ad content and job seekers' decision-making. Recruitment messages are vital references for job seekers and a direct source of contact with the company (Barber, 1998), and can raise organizational attractiveness (Barber & Roehling, 1993; Van Hove & Lievens, 2007). Although great detail in recruitment messages can actually reduce the number of applicants, great detail can also increase the number of qualified applicants (Belt & Paolillo, 1982).

Again, the better the corporate image, the higher the perception of a fit with the company's values and beliefs among job seekers. However, corporate image provides general knowledge (Gatewood et al., 1993); that is, corporate image cannot provide job seekers with specific information about job positions or corporate culture (Roberson et al., 2005). With this limitation, corporate image contrasts with recruitment messages, which commonly include the company's name, job title, job location, and job requirements, extending to specifics such as corporate identity and spirit, corporate long-term growth goals, salary and benefits, and career-development possibilities. This information clearly communicates to job seekers the kind of talent that the company is seeking and the company's corporate values. This understanding gives job seekers an opportunity to evaluate whether the company's values fit their own (Belt & Paolillo, 1982; Dineen & Noe, 2009). Thus, the effect of recruitment messages should become weak when a prospective job applicant considers a company with superior corporate image and matching values. Comprehensive recruitment messages enable job seekers to clarify their situations relative to the company's needs, thereby reducing the influence of the company's image on the perceived P-O fit.

H2: Recruitment messages moderate the relationship between corporate image and P-O fit so that the relationship is weaker when the recruitment messages contain more detail.

3. Method

3.1. Study design and samples

The target population consisted of fresh graduates from the Institute of Human Resource Management in Taiwan and human resources graduate students who graduated in 2010. The study sample comprised entire classes of students. The study randomly selected the classes and

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