



# Modeling corporate social performance and job pursuit intention: Forecasting the job change of professionals in technology industry



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## ABSTRACT

Various social trends in modern society have changed the attitude of high-tech personnel who look for a job. An important factor for successful recruitment in technology industry is to increase the pursuit intention of a variety of potential high-tech job seekers. This research predicts such pursuit intention by proposing a model based on social identity theory and social signaling theory. In the model, this study hypothesizes that perceived corporate ability, positive publicity, and corporate social responsibility are positively related to pursuit intention and word-of-mouth indirectly via the mediating mechanism of career development expectation and firm's attractiveness. Such mechanism has not yet assessed in previous literature. The findings of this research complement prior studies by presenting how a firm's ability, publicity and social responsibility should be jointly taken into account to strengthen recruitment campaigns. Last, managerial implications and limitations are provided.

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## 1. Introduction

Organizational recruitment has been found to be a critical success factor for building up a firm's competitive advantages (Wright et al., 1995). An important step for recruitment campaigns is to enhance the job pursuit intention of working professionals (i.e., potential job seekers) and their word-of-mouth (to attract their social others) as the first priority (Williamson et al., 2003). Job pursuit intention is defined as the degree to which job seekers would like to pursue job opportunities from specific firms in the future. It is more possible for a firm to hire superior employees if more working professionals possess stronger job pursuit intention or share their word-of-mouth with each other. As a result, a firm that has a larger number of qualified superior applicants to choose from their job applicants leads to greater utilities of its recruitment

campaigns and stronger competitive advantages in the future (Williamson et al., 2003; Wang, 2012).

Performing good deeds and being competent are both important for improving a firm's recruitment (Lin et al., 2011). Developments in these areas have led to two key traits regarded as corporate ability and corporate social responsibility (referred to as corporate social performance or CSR) (e.g., Berens et al. (2007), Lin et al. (2011)). These two traits are crucial for the efficient communication between firms and their potential job seekers, thus facilitating successful recruitment campaigns. Corporate ability is defined as a firm's professional capability in producing, and delivering its outputs, whereas CSR (corporate social responsibility) represents the moral obligations that maximize a firm's positive effect on its social environment and minimize its negative effect (e.g., Berens et al. (2005), de los Salmones et al. (2005), Lin et al. (2012)). It is understandable that working professionals are likely to strive for a firm that is identified as more outstanding in the market (i.e., high corporate ability) and welcome by the society (i.e., high CSR).

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Accordingly, it is necessary to assess perceived corporate ability and perceived CSR as two independent variables that eventually drive job pursuit intention. To complement previous literature that has not yet tried exploring job pursuit intention by simultaneously taking both variables into account as motivators (i.e., corporate ability and CSR), this research will explore such variables in more depth.

Previous studies have further called for more research to investigate the substantial mediators that influence job pursuit intention during the applicant generation phase of recruitment (Williamson et al., 2003; Rynes, 1991). It is too arbitrary and assertive to conclude that job pursuit intention can be simply increased by perceived corporate ability or CSR without realizing key mediators in the formation of job pursuit intention. For that reason, this study proposes two key mediators and verifies their mediating roles. Collectively, this study contributes to literature by examining not only exogenous determinants (such as corporate ability and CSR) but also their key mediators. Our theoretical rationale for hypotheses is justified in detail in the followings.

## 2. Research model and development of hypotheses

This study proposes a model that examines job pursuit intention, its antecedents and mediators. Based on signaling theory, this study hypothesizes that the perceived signals related to a firm's ability, corporate social responsibility, and publicity are strongly associated with firm attractiveness and career success expectation. Literature has suggested that firm attractiveness (Turban, 2001; Turban et al., 2001) and career development expectation (e.g., Greenhaus et al. (1990), Larsen and Phillips (2001)) are key motivators in the job seeking process (e.g., Behrend et al. (2009), Williamson et al. (2003)). Such firm attractiveness and career success expectation are then related to job pursuit intention and word-of-mouth on the basis of propositions from social identity theory.

Social identity theory reveals that job seekers classify themselves into social categories based on factors such as the firm they work for and that these social categories affect their self-concept (Turban et al., 2001; Ashforth and Mael, 1989). For example, firm attractiveness affects job seekers' self-concept because such attractiveness influences how people in the society view the firm (Dutton and Dukerich, 1991). Stronger firm attractiveness can motivate larger applicant pools than weaker firm attractiveness (Turban and Cable, 2003). Working professionals or job seekers are linked to each other by a social network, and this network shares information with each other through word-of-mouth (Calvó-Armengol and Zenou, 2005; Marsden, 1988). Word-of-mouth is regarded as informal, non-commercial, oral, person-to-person communication about a firm (Pollach, 2006). Given a firm's high attractiveness, job seekers are likely to share with significant others (e.g., friends or colleagues) about such firm and its recruitment information (i.e., strong levels of word-of-mouth) (Wang, 2012; Calvó-Armengol and Zenou, 2005; Marsden, 1988; Cable et al., 2000).

Career success expectation is defined as the expected success and accomplishments of employees in their future job career (Bozionelos, 2006). A job seeking process based on higher career expectation makes job seekers more likely to invest their efforts and time into pursuing a job offer from a firm and/or saying positive things about the firm (e.g., Greenhaus

et al. (1990), Rynes and Lawler (1983), Rynes (1991), Wang (2012), Wanous et al. (1983)). Firms with good human resource management about employees' job career development and opportunities for being successful (Ramasamy et al., 2008) substantially lead to people's strong job pursuit intention and/or their positive word-of-mouth (Wang, 2012). Collectively, two hypotheses are derived as below.

**H1.** Firm's attractiveness and career success expectation are positively related to job pursuit intention.

**H2.** Firm's attractiveness and career success expectation are positively related to word-of-mouth.

Corporate ability refers to a firm's expertise and competency, such as the capability to improve the quality of a service (or product) and the ability to generate new service (or product) innovations (Lin et al., 2011). Mayer et al. (1995) conceptual model suggests that a firm's collective skills, competencies, and characteristics (i.e., corporate ability) has a substantial influence in society within its specific business domain, consequently increasing its attractiveness to working professionals or potential job seekers.

Some explanations account for perceived corporate ability as being influential to firm attractiveness and career development expectation. First, firms with higher corporate ability are perceived to have better quality services or products, thus facilitating their higher firm attractiveness. Second, according to social identity theory, job seekers are willing to identify or establish a relationship with a highly-regarded (or highly-capable) firm which facilitates people's self-identification process and satisfies the need for future self-enhancement of career development (Pratt, 1998; Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003), suggesting a positive relationship between perceived corporate ability and career success expectation. Hence, a hypothesis is developed as below.

**H3.** Perceived corporate ability is positively related to firm attractiveness and career success expectation.

Positive publicity refers to mass media publicity about a specific firm's attributes that primarily evidence its success in providing benefits in society (e.g., Pullig et al. (2006)). Potential job seekers have certain expectation about their career development, and often have needs to develop social identifying relationships with a firm due to its positive publicity that signals the opportunities of career success (Ensher and Murphy, 1997). Job seekers often identify with a firm based on their perceptions of the firm's defining characteristic or perceived identity through mass media (Dutton et al., 1994). Hence, job seekers are likely to have higher levels of career success expectation if they perceive a potential employer has positive publicity (Johnson et al., 2008).

A firm's positive publicity helps enhance people's confidence on the firm, because positive publicity is often a credible source of information about its job offers (Ahluwalia et al., 2000). As positive publicity reflects certain reliability to some extent when job seekers encounter a firm, positive publicity substantially increases the firm's attractiveness when they make a judgment about the firm (e.g., Ahluwalia et al. (2000)). Specifically, during the initial stages of job seeking when there

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