



# Employer branding and CSR communication in online recruitment advertising

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**Abstract** While multiple studies have discussed the importance of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in recruiting, two important but unaddressed questions constrain the understanding and practice of presenting firms' socially conscious efforts to their prospective employees. First, are companies engaged in CSR communicating their CSR practices effectively in online recruitment advertising? And second, what CSR information should companies include in online job advertisements to improve their employer attractiveness to prospective candidates? The findings of this study show that CSR communication in recruitment advertising is often limited, an ad-hoc practice, and mostly focused on company practices concerning employee participation and development. Even companies with a great CSR reputation take surprisingly little advantage of their CSR image when it comes to attracting job candidates. To improve employer attractiveness, we recommend that human resources managers consider (1) optimizing the structure of online job advertisements by including a company overview section in which CSR information can be presented easily, (2) expanding the scope of CSR dimensions in job advertisements to include environmental performance and community relations, (3) offering information about opportunities for employee engagement with CSR, and (4) adopting a strategic approach to the inclusion of CSR content in online job advertisements.

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## 1. CSR communication in online recruitment advertising: An opportunity or another fad?

Employer branding research has shown that perceptions of a company's corporate social responsibility

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(CSR) influence its attractiveness to prospective job seekers (Dögl & Holtbrügge, 2014). In particular, a good CSR image can potentially enhance job seekers' interest due to the anticipated pride from being affiliated with a responsible organization, perceived value fit with the organization, and expectations about how the organization treats its own employees (Jones, Willness, & Madey, 2014). A 2012 study of employee preferences reported that approximately 50% of the respondents surveyed were willing to take a 15% pay cut to work for employers that are environmentally and socially responsible, and would consider a job that could help them make a difference in the world (Zukin & Seltner, 2012).

To enhance their employer attractiveness, organizations use various forms of communication: web pages, print and online recruitment advertising, and even direct communication with their stakeholders. As a result of the growing dependence on social media and the internet for information, online job advertising has become a key tool to recruit employees (Marler & Parry, 2016). The inclusion of CSR information in these advertisements is an important means of attracting job seekers and building a positive employer image. Although employer branding research has established a general link between employer attractiveness and CSR image, there is still some uncertainty as to what CSR information firms should include in their online job advertisements—and how to present it—to achieve better recruitment outcomes. It is unclear whether organizations take full advantage of their CSR engagements in the e-recruitment of talent. Considering these issues, our study addresses the following key questions:

1. Are companies engaged in CSR communicating their CSR practices effectively in online recruitment advertising?
2. What CSR information should companies include in online job advertisements to improve their employer attractiveness to prospective candidates?

To answer these questions, we first draw on existing research to explain the relevancy of companies' CSR image to job seekers. We then proceed with a content analysis of 50 online recruitment advertisements released by 15 companies to identify the CSR dimensions communicated by companies with prominent employer brands. The findings reveal insufficient utilization of CSR engagement in online recruitment. We address this with several practical recommendations regarding how to better integrate CSR content in companies' online recruitment advertising.

## 2. What do job seekers value in employers' CSR activities?

*Employer brand* represents the total benefits an employer offers its employees, with the aim to improve employer attractiveness to current and prospective employees (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). Today, employer brand management is increasingly viewed as an integral part of an organization's sustainability strategy (Aggerholm, Andersen, & Thomsen, 2011). In this regard, there is ample evidence showing that corporate social performance has a substantial impact on its attractiveness to job seekers (Cable & Turban, 2001; Greening & Turban, 2000; Turban & Greening, 1996). Prior research suggested that CSR practices concerning the environment, community relations, and workplace diversity have the largest impact on employer attractiveness ratings (Backhaus, Stone, & Heiner, 2002). Likewise, the results of another study showed that corporate support for diversity (representation of women and minorities, as well as family benefits and programs) and other employee issues (union relations, employee benefits, and employee participation) significantly increases employer attractiveness to prospective job seekers (Albinger & Freeman, 2000). More recent work on employer branding and CSR suggested that an organization's environmental engagement—such as ecological-related philanthropy and employee involvement in energy reduction and recycling—also has a positive effect on employer attractiveness (Jones et al., 2014). Furthermore, organizations that show real compassion and engagement with social issues are perceived more positively by job seekers who use this information to infer that the company may also look after the interests and needs of its employees (Jones et al., 2014). In addition to signaling expected treatment, company community engagement and environmental practices help job seekers estimate the perceived fit between their own values and those of the organization (Backhaus et al., 2002; Jones et al., 2014).

However, not all CSR activities are perceived positively. Prospective employees view companies that appear to be pursuing both financial and social goals simultaneously with some suspicion, as the two can appear incongruous. Profit making is associated with less noble economic self-interest values, whereas socially oriented activities—such as corporate giving to social causes and employee volunteerism—appeal to the personal moral values of the job seeker (Hagenbuch, Little, & Lucas, 2015). For example, the production of low-energy consumption goods—which generates revenue for the organization as well as environmental benefits

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