RECRUITMENT WEBSITES, COMPANY REPUTATION AND APPLICANT ATTRACTION

PURPOSE OF THE PAPER AND ADDRESSED RESEARCH GAPS

In the last decade, a number of studies have focused on web recruiting (e.g., Cober *et al.*, 2004; Perry and Wilson, 2009). Drawing on the study by Williamson and colleagues (2010), who investigated the relationship between the firm's reputation, the features of its website and applicant attraction, our first aim is to contribute to extant literature by investigating the extent to which applicant attraction is affected by the amount of two specific kinds of information provided by a company on its website - workplace and green information. Our second objective is to explore the role played by a company's reputation as an employer (Ahlrichs, 2000) and its green reputation (Bansal and Roth 2000; Chen 2008) on the association between the information provided by company websites and applicant attraction. We believe that this paper could advance our available knowledge in two fundamental directions. First, this paper extends our knowledge on the relationship between recruitment websites' attributes, company reputation and attractiveness, consistently with some calls from HR literature (Ployhart, 2006; Breaugh, 2012). Secondly, our focus on green information and green reputation advances extant knowledge on the role played by HRM in supporting environmental management (Jackson and Seo, 2010; Jackson *et al.*, 2012).

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Company websites are seen as effective recruiting tools (e.g., Walker *et al.*, 2011). However, in line with previous research (e.g., Lievens and Highhouse, 2003), companies should look carefully at some features of their website in order to exploit all potential advantages. More specifically, the content on a company's website plays an important role in attracting the attention of job applicants and in reducing their uncertainty about job opportunities (e.g., Davis *et al.*, 1989; Williamson *et al.*, 2010). For example, in one of the first studies on this issue, Rynes and Miller (1983, in Allen *et al.*, 2007) manipulated the quantity of information while keeping the attractiveness of jobs offered constant, and they found that there was a relationship between the amount of information and the job applicants' willingness to follow the jobs up. In line with this, we argue that the amount of information provided by a company on its website influences applicant

attraction. In particular, two kinds of information are important. These involve, first, information about a company (e.g. its mission and values), job openings and career opportunities (known as workplace information). Previous research (e.g. Saks and Uggerslev, 2010) demonstrated that the amount of workplace information provided by companies impacts positively job seekers' desire to enter into employment with the prospective employer. Therefore, our first hypothesis is:

> HP1: The amount of workplace information provided by a company on its website has a positive and
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> direct influence on applicant attraction.

The second kind of significant information concerns the green policies and practices within a company. Several studies have investigated the specific role played by company websites as providers of green information to job applicants (e.g., Behrend *et al.*, 2009; Gully *et al.*, 2013), supporting the idea that the amount of information about environmental policies and practices supplied on company websites has a positive effect on applicant attraction. We therefore advance the following hypothesis:

> HP2: The amount of green information provided by a company on its website has a positive and
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> direct influence on applicant attraction.

Before starting along their job seeking process, applicants can have – and usually do – pre-existing beliefs about an organization (e.g., Allen *et al.*, 2007). It follows that company reputation can influence applicant attraction (e.g. Turban and Cable, 2003). We argue that two aspects of a company's reputation play a relevant role. First, the level of applicant attraction can be influenced by a company's reputation as an employer (Ahlrichs, 2000). Specifically, in accordance with Williamson and colleagues (2010), since a company's good reputation as an employer reduces job applicants' level of uncertainty about their prospective employers, the amount of information on the website of a company with a good employer reputation could have a minimal effect on applicant attraction. Conversely, when companies have a poor or bad reputation as employers, a job applicant may find that a large amount of information on the company's website is better, as this information can contribute to reducing any pre-existing negative views he/she may have about the company. Thus, our third hypothesis is:

> HP3: The relationship between the amount of workplace information provided by a company on its
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> website and applicant attraction is moderated by the company's reputation as an employer, that is,

the higher its employer reputation, the lower the impact of the amount of workplace information provided through its website on job applicants.

The other important aspect of company reputation is green reputation, which is when an organization is recognized for its sensibility towards the environment (e.g. Jones *et al.*, 2013; Rupp *et al.*, 2013 in press). We argue that when the company has a strong green reputation, job applicants expect the green information to be positive; on the contrary, when the company does not have a strong green reputation, green information is a key element for job applicants making their application choices:

> HP4: The relationship between the amount of green information provided by a company on its website and applicant attraction is moderated by the company's green reputation, that is, the higher the company's green reputation, the lower the impact of the amount of green information provided through its website on job applicants.

RESEARCH APPROACH AND METHODS

In order to collect data, we used a sample of 180 students attending the final year of a Master of science in business administration at three universities located in Northern Italy, focusing on seven companies. We sent to each student a questionnaire about one company from the selected sample. Then, each student was asked to visit the website of their allocated company. After this step, we sent a second questionnaire to each student to see how attractive they felt their allocated company was as prospective employer. We collected 174 usable questionnaires. While collecting questionnaires, we analysed the companies' website, collecting data on the amount of information about job opportunities and on the workplace, as well as information about the company's green policies and practices.

Measures

Applicant attraction. In line with previous research (Ehrhart and Ziegert, 2005, Highhouse and colleagues 2003; Williamson *et al.*, 2010), we measured the company's attraction for prospective job applicants through two dimensions: perceived desirability, namely, whether a company is seen as a desirable employer, and job pursuit, namely, how willing a prospective job applicant is to put effort into getting a job with an organization (α=.95).

Amount of workplace information. We measured the amount of information about a company's job opportunities and workplace features by assessing whether each website contained a section or an entire webpage covering any of the following issues: company culture, organizational structure, training opportunities, benefits, career opportunities, information provided by people working in the company and current job openings (Williamson et al. 2010).

Amount of green information. In line with Jose and Lee (2007), we measured the amount of information about each company's green policies and practices available on their website, assessing whether each site contained a section or an entire webpage on any of the following green topics: environmental planning, senior management commitment to making environmental practices an institution-wide concern, environmentally-related structure, leadership-led environmental activities, environmental control, externally validated environmental certifications and spreading awareness of environmental issues.

Employer Reputation. The reputation of a company as an employer was measured by combining the four items used by Williamson and colleagues (2010) and four items from Walsh and Beatty (2007) (α=.86).

Green Reputation. We measured a company's green reputation using seven items from Chen (2008) (α=.94).

Control Variables

We applied controls for *gender and age*, and for the following variables: *internet outcome expectancy* (α=.86) (Williamson et al., 2010), *brand familiarity* (α=.87) (Kent and Allen, 1994) and *green orientation* (α=.78) (Dunlap et al, 2000).

MAIN FINDINGS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

The means, standard deviations and correlations among all variables are presented in Table I. Table II contains the results of the regression analyses.

Table I – Mean, standard deviation and correlation between variables

VARIABLES	Mean	Std. Dev.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Applicant attraction	4.73	1.36									
Sex (1=male)	.40	.49	.01								
Age	24.38	2.40	.08	-.12							
Internet outcome expectancy	5.45	1.14	.13†	-.00	-.15*						
Brand familiarity	2.36	.37	.05	-.13†	.05	.06					
Green perspective	5.14	.70	.00	-.13†	-.01	.00	-.00				
Amount of workplace information	2.78	1.20	.08	.10	-.01	.11	.34***	-.04			
Employer reputation	4.27	.86	.56***	.02	.11	.12	.18*	.04	.15*		
Amount of green information	2.31	1.87	-.09	.07	-.01	-.08	.45***	-.01	-.10	-.17*	
Green reputation	4.44	1.28	.38***	-.14†	.09	-.08	-.06	.05	-.11	.16*	.11

N = 174; † p < .10; * p < .05; ** p < ,01; *** p < .001

Table II – Hypotheses Testing: results from regressions

PREDICTORS	Model 1[a]	Model 2[a]	Model 3[a]	Model 4[a]	Model 5[a]	Model 6[a]	Model 7[a]	Model 8[a]
Sex	.02	.01	.00	.01	.02	.05	.05	.01
Age	.10	.10	.06	.05	.09	.08	.08	.04
Internet outcome expectancy	.14†	.13†	.06	.06	.12	.19*	.19*	.15*
Brand familiarity	.03	.00	-.05	-.06	.09	.08	.06	-.10
Green perspective	.01	.01	-.01	-.00	.01	.02	.03	-.02
Amount of workplace information		.07	.02	.83*				1.38**
Employer reputation			.55***	.99***				1.22***
Employer reputation X Amount of workplace information				-.98*				-1.58**
Amount of green information					-.13	-.12	-.43	-.02
Green reputation						.40***	.29*	.14
Green reputation X Amount of green information							.34	.09
R^2	.02	.03	.32	.34	.04	.23	.23	.42

N = 174; [a] Standardized coefficients (beta) are shown; † $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < ,01$; *** $p < .001$

As far as the effect of control variables on applicant attraction is concerned, in line with previous research (e.g., Williamson *et al.*, 2010), we found that students attraction is influenced by their expectations about the effectiveness of the Internet as a useful job seeking tool.

As far as the test of our research hypotheses is concerned, results of Model 4 and Model 8 show that our first hypothesis could not be rejected (β= .83, p< .05 in Model 4 and β= 1.38, p< .01 in Model 8). In particular,

our results highlight that the positive relationship between the amount of workplace information and applicant attraction, showing that this relationship - previously tested only in the US (e.g. Allen *et al.*, 2007; Saks and Uggerslev, 2010; Williamson *et al.*, 2010) - is also confirmed in the very different Italian national context.

Results of Model 7 and Model 8 show that the Hypothesis 2 is not supported, since the amount of green information has no significant relationship with applicant attraction (β= -.43, p> .10 in Model 7 and β= -.02, p> .10 in Model 8). Thus, our study does not provide empirical evidence to the growing stream of research that highlights the increasing attention that job applicants, particularly those with pro-environmental attitudes and behaviour, pay to companies' green policies and practices (Zhang and Gowan, 2012). Moreover, it does not support prior research on the role played by company websites as providers of green information that could impact on applicant attraction (e.g. Behrend *et al.*, 2009; Gully *et al.*, 2013 in press).

Regarding to the moderating role of employer reputation, results of Model 4 and Model 8 show that Hypothesis 3 could not be rejected (β= -.98, p< .05 in Model 4 and β= -1.58, p< .01 in Model 8). This means that the higher a company's reputation as an employer, the lower the impact of the amount of workplace information on applicant attraction. Furthermore, employer reputation has also a significant and positive direct effect on applicant attraction (β= .55, p< .001 in Model 3). This result is consistent with prior research (Williamson *et al.*, 2010) and it contributes to extant literature demonstrating that the choices of Italian students seem to be informed by employer branding assumptions.

Finally, results of Model 7 and Model 8 show that hypothesis 4 could not be supported, since green reputation does not moderate the relationship between the amount of green information provided through a company website and applicant attraction (β= .34, p> .10 in Model 7 and β= .09, p> .10 in Model 8). More specifically, green reputation has a significant and positive direct effect on the dependent variable (β= .40, p< .001 in Model 6), but this effect does not moderate the impact of the amount of green information on applicant attraction. (HP 4). It is interesting to note that the predicted relationship does not take place even in a context, like the Italian one, where sustainability is considered to be a key value of the national economic system.

As far as the practical insights are concerned, our findings have relevant implications for HRM practice, providing specific recommendations on how to balance short-term (specifically, the amount of information

provided on a website) and long-term (specifically, actions for sustaining company's reputation) intervention and investment, in order to attract job applicants.

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