
The Role of Individual Diversity Value on Recruitment Message Preference and Job Pursuit Intention

Abstract

This study aims to examine organizational recruitment efforts targeted toward two minority groups: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQ), and veterans, whose latent characteristics may make them the less obvious group to receive more attention in the field. By assessing an individual's value for diversity, we proposed that those who value diversity more would be attracted to organizations that emphasize diversity and inclusion more in their recruitment message. The results suggest that individual value for diversity positively relates to job pursuit intentions toward an organization that emphasizes diversity and inclusion in its recruitment message. Yet, such value is not associated with the perceived richness of the recruitment message. The theoretical and practical implications are discussed, which may advance the current understanding and efforts in diversity management and targeted recruitment.

Keywords *Diversity, Targeted Recruitment, Recruitment Message, LGBTQ, Veterans*

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Introduction

Over the last two decades, diversity management has received attention from researchers in different domains (i.e., Baum et al., 2016; Kalargyrou & Costen, 2017; Kulik & Roberson, 2008; Lievens et al., 2016; Manonaran et al., 2021; Mor Barak et al., 1998; Russen & Dawson, 2023). Diversity management, particularly during the recruitment process, can create a positive impression of the workplace and attract individuals to apply for open positions (Avery & McKay, 2006; Klysing et al., 2022; Muduli & Trivedi, 2020; Walker et al., 2012). Because of the potential influence on prospective applicants, this has driven researchers to examine the effectiveness of targeted recruitment. Targeted recruitment is concerned with identifying, attracting, and influencing the job choices of applicants by presenting organization-related information to a specific group of individuals (McKay, 2024; Goh & Okumus, 2020; Volpone et al., 2014). Also, presenting the company as an inclusive work environment positively affects general recruitment and the non-targeted groups (Mor Barak, 2000; Mor Barak et al., 2022; Pless & Maak, 2004).

However, most targeted recruitment literature focuses only on certain identifiable demographic classes, such as race and gender (Kalargyrou & Costen, 2017; Sabharwal et al., 2018). Thus, research is unclear as to how organizations can engage in targeted recruitment efforts directed toward other minority classes such as lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender, queers (LGBTQ), and veterans. One reason targeted recruitment remains difficult for these two groups is that membership in these minority classes does not manifest itself by simple observation. Although diversity consists of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, or genetic information (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2024), some characteristics are more explicit to be observed by one's appearance (e.g., sex, race) while others are more implicit (e.g., religion, sexual orientation). Additionally, not all minority classes are perceived as equally favorable in society, as implicit bias still makes individuals hesitant to reveal their identity to the public (Yen & Lee, 2023).

From a recruitment standpoint, this is important because organizations frequently use pictorial ads (e.g., pictures of African American women or Hispanic men) to signal their values on diversity as well as personalization (Avery et al., 2004; Pfiffelmann & Pfeuffer, 2022). Thus, organizations must understand how to recruit protected group members whose characteristics and features cannot be easily portrayed in pictures. Specifically, LGBTQ and veterans have experienced employment discrimination in the past (e.g., Shipherd et al., 2018) and are protected classes under United States legislation (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2024). While there is legislation on protecting LGBTQ individuals in the European Union (EU) (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2022), there is no specific legislation on veterans' rights and protections in the EU. Nevertheless, existing EU legislation and member state laws protect individuals from discrimination and ensure equal treatment associated with employment (European Union, 2019, 2024). Even though there is practical and legal evidence that individuals' employment rights are protected, research has yet to identify ways in which organizations can create diverse workforces by recruiting individuals based on their membership in latent, unobservable protected minority classes (e.g., Kazmi et al., 2022; Triana et al., 2021).

Using the signal theory and the person-environment fit theory as the theoretical foundation for this research, organizational recruitment efforts targeted toward two minority groups, namely LGBTQ individuals and veterans, were examined. This specification is because the characteristics of individuals in these two groups are not easily identifiable by a simple observation, as described above. Therefore, it is necessary to understand individuals' information processing mechanisms and perception development when they receive the recruitment message. Explicitly, two concepts were incorporated in this study: individuals' value of diversity and the richness of the recruitment message.

With the focus on diversity management, the value of diversity may play a significant role in this process. Because membership in and attitudes toward these two groups are driven mainly by individual values (e.g., Chang et al., 2024; Cragun & Sumerau, 2015; Fisher et al., 2017), we believed that an individual's personal value placed on diversity would have important implications for one's responsiveness toward targeted recruitment ads designed to attract LGBTQ and veterans. Therefore, we proposed the following research question: *Does an individual's value of diversity influence their recruitment message preference and job pursuit intention?*

Theoretical Framework

Numerous theories have been used to explain the effects of recruitment messages on individuals' perceptions and behaviors, including signaling theory and person-environment fit theory. The underlying idea behind the signaling theory is that individuals often possess limited information during the initial stage of recruitment. Hence, they would use the content from recruitment messages as cues to enrich their understanding of the posted jobs and the hiring organizations (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016).

Previous studies have suggested that during the early stage of recruitment, individuals will seek information to develop an understanding of the job and the organization (Barber, 1998). Thus, how the information is presented in the content of the recruitment message is critical to attracting and influencing individuals' perceptions of the job and the work environment (e.g., Asseburg et al., 2018; Muduli & Trivedi, 2020). The more information an organization can provide, the more individuals can assess whether they fit the job and the organization.

Once individuals receive recruitment messages, they process the content and assess whether there is a fit between themselves and the job (person-job fit, PJ fit), the organization (person-organization fit, PO fit), and other dimensions of the work environment (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005, 2023). Usually, a favorable fit indicates compatibility between individuals and organizations that they share similar values and beliefs (PO fit) or possess the skills and abilities necessary to accomplish what the job requires (PJ fit). If there is a perceived fit with the organization, the individual would remain in the recruitment process and proceed to the next stage (Kristof-Brown et al., 2023; Santos & De Domenico, 2015). However, previous studies also suggest that although individuals would be affected by the information provided by hiring organizations, individuals still rely on their beliefs, values, and cultures to interpret the information and develop their perception that affects their work-related behaviors (e.g., Kristof-Brown et al., 2023; Yen et al., 2011).

Depending on the design of the recruitment messages, individuals may pay attention to different aspects that matter the most to them (Huang, 2022). Thus, the richness of the content would affect how individuals perceive the recruitment message and how they can develop a positive impression of the job and the organization that would encourage them to apply for the job with the hiring organization and accept the job offer eventually (Baum & Kabst, 2014; Frasca & Edwards, 2017). Based on the reviewed literature, the following hypotheses were proposed:

Hypothesis 1: Individual value for diversity positively relates to job pursuit intentions toward an organization that emphasizes diversity and inclusion in its recruitment message.

Hypothesis 2: Individual value for diversity positively relates to print richness advertisement toward an organization that emphasizes diversity and inclusion in its recruitment message.

Research Methods

Data and Sample

We used Qualtrics, an online platform, to recruit participants and collect their responses. Since the data were collected from a paid panel, we implemented a stringent screening mechanism to ensure data quality, such as contradicting answers, and deleted observations that failed the assessment. As a result, one hundred twenty individuals (84 male, 36 female) were retained. All participants were 18 years of age or older; 49.2% were between 26 and 28 years old, 45.8% were between 23 and 25 years old, 4.2% were between 29 and 31 years old, and 0.8% were 32 years old or above. The racial composition of the sample was 80.8% White, 10.0% Black, 4.2% Hispanic, 3.3% Asian/Pacific Islander, 0.8% Middle-Eastern/Indian, and 0.8% Other. The sample consisted of 94.2% heterosexuals, 4.1% homosexuals, and 1.7% bisexuals.

The participants were randomly assigned to view one of three conditions depicting pictorial recruitment ads for a fictitious, nameless organization: neutral condition (N = 39), LGBTQ condition (N = 42), and veterans condition (N = 40). Before viewing the ad, participants were instructed to assume that they were actively looking for a full-time mid-level managerial position in the hospitality industry and were seeking information about

potential employment opportunities. The position and organization were kept vague to avoid bias in participants' evaluation of the ad based on the specific occupation or industry. Each ad depicted 22 “professional appearing” individuals of each sex and various races. Further, each ad read “Diversity + Inclusion = Success!” signaling the ad was recruiting from a diversity perspective.

The manipulation of the ad occurred via text near the bottom of each ad. The words used in the text were developed from common themes found on the diversity recruitment websites of several Fortune 500 companies. In the neutral condition, the text read: “Maximizing diversity and inclusion to empower our people, transform our culture, and delight our customers”. The LGBTQ ad read: “Hiring and promoting LGBTQ members allows us to maximize diversity and inclusion, to empower our people, transform our culture, and delight our customers”. The veterans ad read: “Hiring and promoting Veterans allows us to maximize diversity and inclusion, to empower our people, transform our culture, and delight our customers.”

Measures

Participants were asked to indicate their agreement on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Scores on each of the items were averaged. Individual value for diversity (IVD) ($\alpha = .82$) was measured using a 3-item scale developed by Mor Barak et al. (1998). Print Richness Advertisement (PRA) was measured using a 3-item scale developed by Baum and Kabst (2014) ($\alpha = .73$). Job Pursuit Intentions (JPI) were measured using a 5-item measure developed by Ng and Sears (2010) ($\alpha = .89$). Because sexual orientation (SO) may influence reactions to diversity ads, participants were asked “Do you consider yourself to be:” (1) Heterosexual, (2) Homosexual, (3) Bisexual, or (4) Prefer not to answer.

Results

The initial results suggest that there was independence of residuals. We did not find any outliers, and there was homoscedasticity and normally distributed residuals. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and correlation matrix of the study variables.

Table 1 Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations of Variables

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2
1. Individual Value for Diversity (IVD)	4.03	0.76		
2. Job Pursuit Intentions (JPI)	3.68	0.69	.408**	
3. Print Richness Advertisement (PRA)	2.54	0.91	.123	.273**

Note. *N* = 120. ** *p* < .01

We first examined the differences among groups based on the specific focus on the targeted group (neutral condition, LGBTQ, and veterans). A one-way ANOVA was conducted, and the results indicate that there are no significant differences in terms of IVD ($F(2,117) = .115, p = .892$), PRA ($F(2,117) = .107, p = .899$), and JPI ($F(2,116) = .098, p = .907$) based on the experiment. We also examined the differences based on sexual orientation, and no significant difference was identified as well in terms of IVD ($F(2,117) = .609, p = .546$), PRA ($F(2,117) = .276, p = .759$), and JPI ($F(2,116) = 1.240, p = .293$).

Two separate linear regressions were conducted to test the proposed hypothesis. For the first regression, JPI was regressed onto IVD. The results are presented in Table 2. The individual value for diversity accounted for 16.6% of the variation in the job pursuit intention, with adjusted $R^2 = 15.9\%$. The individual value for diversity statistically significantly predicted JPI, $F(1, 117) = 23.31, p < .005$. Thus, hypothesis 1 is supported.

Table 2 *Regression Results for Job Pursuit Intentions*

Model	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>R</i> ²
Dependent variable: Job Pursuit Intentions			.17
Constant	2.17**	.32	
Individual Value for Diversity	.37**	.07	

Note. Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported. ** $p < .01$

For the second regression, PRA was regressed onto IVD. The results are presented in Table 3. The results show that individual value for diversity was not significantly related to print richness advertisement, $F(1, 118) = 1.815, p = .180$. Thus, hypothesis 2 is not supported.

Table 3 *Regression Results for Print Richness Advertisement*

Model	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>R</i> ²
Dependent variable: Print Richness Advertisement			.02
Constant	1.94**	.45	
Individual Value for Diversity	.15	.11	

Note. Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported. ** $p < .01$

Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed to explore whether an individual's value of diversity will influence their recruitment message preference and job pursuit intention. The finding showed that one's value for diversity significantly relates to one's reactions toward diversity recruitment ads. Additionally, an individual's value for diversity was significantly and positively associated with job pursuit intentions.

The result is consistent with previous findings that individuals use their experiences and beliefs to interpret the recruitment message. Previously, studies have suggested that an individual's behavior and decisions are affected by their perception, values, and beliefs in the context of recruitment (Barber, 1998; Yen et al., 2011). Individuals would interpret the message they receive from hiring organizations to determine whether the organization can provide what applicants would want in the workplace. With the change in society and the emphasis on diversity and inclusion, companies have put a lot of effort into creating a work environment attractive to minority applicants. If job applicants perceive a fit between themselves and hiring organizations, they will remain in the recruitment process by applying for the job and seeking to move to the next stage (Kristof-Brown et al., 2023; Yen et al., 2011).

However, this area still requires additional exploration of the interaction between hiring organizations and job applicants based on individual differences and the design of the recruitment message. Specifically, the findings suggest that individual value for diversity was not related to the print richness advertisement. Regardless of whether they value diversity, individuals would always seek additional information regarding the work environment and the position; as suggested in previous studies, job applicants would like to have more information to assist them in deciding whether they should remain in the recruitment process.

One thing that should be noted is that the overall response to the richness of the recruitment message was close to neutral. Since we only intended to see whether or not emphasizing diversity would be a significant signal to job applicants, any job-specific or company-specific information was not included in the experiment. This exclusion may also indicate that a simple emphasis on one aspect of the work environment is not enough for job applicants to develop enough assessment of the job and the organization. This notion is also supported by the fact that no significant difference was identified based on the experiment. Therefore, more information about the job and the organization is needed for job applicants to view recruitment messages rich in content that yield a lot of information for them to use as a reference to make a job choice decision. Hence, we believe that the results of the present study are essential for researchers and practitioners alike.

Implication

From a theoretical perspective, this study attempts to understand how organizations can recruit members from latent minority groups. Although much is known regarding targeted recruitment based on race and sex, little is known about how organizations may attempt to diversify the workforce in terms of LGBTQ status and veteran status. Using the signaling theory and the person-environment fit theory, we explored individuals' perceptions and behaviors in a recruitment context associated with minority groups with latent characteristics. The findings support that this research direction is still needed, as human psychology and behaviors are complex and must be assessed through different lenses.

From a practical implication perspective, this study's results showed that organizations that verbally state their interest in such minority, protected groups are more likely to influence observer perceptions if the observer values diversity favorably. Organizations wishing to target such groups may need to verbally state their intent, as it remains challenging to depict such individuals pictorially.

On the other hand, since the individual value for diversity is not significantly related to the richness of the recruitment message, hiring organizations need to consider what is the most critical content in the recruitment message that will affect job applicants' intention to apply for the job and remain in the recruitment process. An additional statement on how diversity management is being integrated into the company's daily operation and how it is associated with career advancement, job enrichment, and empowerment may attract job applicants more to the recruiting efforts invested by hiring organizations.

Limitations and Future Research

Although the position listed in the ad was intentionally kept vague, participants' willingness to pursue the job may change based on more specifics offered, such as the field of career interests, location, job title, job description, and job specification. Further, we could only measure pursuit intentions rather than actual job pursuit behavior. Therefore, future studies should examine the extent to which more specific aspects of the job advertisement may influence attitudes toward the ad.

Another limitation of this study is that no differences were identified in job pursuit intentions across the experiments (i.e., neutral, LGBTQ, veterans) and sexual orientation. Thus, it remains unclear as to what effect specifically targeting LGBTQ members and veterans has above and beyond a "neutral" ad depicting simply "diversity". Future research may explore this question more in-depth by trying to strengthen the manipulation of the pictorial ad. For example, more text could be provided regarding LGBTQ opportunities at work, or an individual in military gear may be depicted to strengthen the targeting of veterans. Additionally, more information about equal rights and inclusion should be represented in the ad.

Future research may also benefit from examining the ads' qualities that instill favorable attitudes toward organizations recruiting LGBTQ members and veterans. Although an individual's value for diversity was found to have a crucial role in attitude formation, it would be beneficial to learn what organizations can do to instill favorable attitudes within observers. Although speculative, organizations may tout the fairness of work procedures and policies, training and development opportunities, or support for social welfare and volunteer efforts.

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