

*Full Length Research Paper*

# The impact of information specificity in recruitment advertisements on the application pursuit process in Pakistan

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**Recruitment ads play a very important role in generating pool of applications. The aim of all recruitment ads is to attract as many as possible applications for generating hiring options. This study investigates the impact of specificity of information on application pursuing process. Four recruitment ads were used (two general ads and two specific ads) to check their impacts on application pursuing process. The results showed that three variables including ad information, ad appropriateness and ad truthfulness have significant differences for specific job ads and general job ads, while application pursuing process is generally the same for both specific and general job ads.**

**Key words:** Specific recruitment ads, general recruitment ads, application pursuing process.

## INTRODUCTION

Marketing is a communication of something which is specifically directed to some one. The target audience of any marketing activity can be its customers, competitors, employees or even potential employees, these communications can be in a direct form like marketing of a new or existing product by a company or it can be in an indirect form such as recruitment advertisements (Ryan et al., 2000). As the major aim of marketers is to analyze consumer motivations, their needs, wants and demands and then provide range of products to satisfy those needs wants and demands. Similarly, human resource department also has to analyze the employee motivations, their needs wants and demands and try to offer meaningful employment that will attract prospective employees. They have to treat those potential employees as employment customers who have other suppliers available in the market (Price, 1996; Ryan et al., 2000).

Theories from marketing literature are particularly important and effective for the study of recruitment ads because marketing ads are similar to the recruitment ads as their aim is to communicate information to influence the perception and actions of different individuals (Cable and Turban, 2001). The recruitment advertising should be based on the need and wants of the desired applicant. These ads should be developed after a complete research of the targeted applicants (Stoops, 1984a). Due

to the impact of technology every aspect of job market has changed and the approach of human resource managers toward recruitment advertisements is also affected as there are more information accessible in to selling and marketing of their job packages and benefits (Stoops, 1984b).

Three theoretical foundations on which individuals choose any organization for future employment were identified by Behling et al. (1968). The first one is the objective factor theory according to which, individual decision regarding an organization selection for job are based on sets of objectives like salary offers, career development prospects, benefits, timing, job description etcetera. The second theory is critical contact theory which suggests that individual contact with the organization is very limited and usually the recruitment advertisements are very vague due to lack of information the decision is neither on objective basis nor the individual are able to discriminate between the job offers. Meanwhile the third theory is subjective factor theory according to which choosing an employer is very personal and emotional, and this decision is based on the individual's personality and corporate image.

Recruitment advertisement in newspapers is considered to be one of the traditional and commonly used approaches to employee recruitment (Martin, 1987;

Fyock, 1988, Greenberg, 1986). Over the last thirty years, the research on recruitment topic has been dramatically increased but despite this increase but the recruitment literature still has many gaps (Breaugh and Starke, 2000). Similarly over the last decade researchers are calling for more and more research on the first stage of recruitment and that is the stage in which the employer attract potential candidate and generate applications (Robinsons et al., 2005).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Realistic job preview provide more realistic job expectations with fewer turnover intentions and higher survival rates (Wanous, 1973). The initial stage of recruitment is the most critical one for the survival of a new comer as well as for those individual those who did not apply and very little is known about the factors which are working at this stage (Barber, 1998). The pre-interview information that is specifically targeted to increase applicant awareness and interest in learning about organization's offerings is the most important recruitment efforts (Boudreau and Rynes, 1985).

The lack of creativity in the early 1990's in recruitment ads was due to lack of research in this area (Kaplan et al., 1991). Five main objectives of recruitment ads were identified by Palkowitz and Mueller (1987). These objectives show what the basic intentions of recruitment ads are.

1. Impact on reader attention
2. Holding this attention
3. Establishment of credibility toward the ad
4. Differentiation of the firm from the rest of industry
5. Motivating the reader to take positive action.

Many researchers have found that physical features of an ad such as logo, size, borders graphics and white space can attract larger applicant pool (Kaplan et al., 1991; Stoops, 1984a). While few researchers have also suggested that more detailed information may have an impact on the applicant intentions. The study by Rynes and Miller (1983) indicated that information regarding job attributes and characteristics have strong influence on the perceived desirability of the job seekers. Similarly study by Belt and Paolillo (1986) suggested that the degree of specificity of the applicant qualification does not have significant influence on the reader response to a recruitment advertisement while Mason and Belt (1986) identified that specificity of applicant qualifications had a negative impact on the response of unqualified individuals.

The recruiter behavior and recruitment outcomes that how much response is received from prospective employees is mediated by different process variables like applicant attention, message credibility, message information, message attractiveness and so on (Breaugh

and Starke, 2000). Four early recruitment related activities were studied by Collins and Stevens (2002), they have found that these activities (publicity, sponsorship, word of mouth and advertisement) indirectly relates the general attitudes toward the company and perceived attributes with applicant intentions and decisions.

Roehling (2002) investigate the process under which the applicant decide whether to apply for a specific job or not, their result revealed that location and compensation as the most important factors similarly the amount of information provided is also perceived to be important. There are also some evidence that perception about an organization and intentions to apply are affected by the recruitment practices like training and development, salary, compensation, future opportunities (Powell, 1984; Taylor and Bergmann, 1987).

The corporate image and credibility of the job offering organization is also a very important factor which influences the effectiveness of recruitment advertisement in attracting suitable pool and at the same time the recruitment advertising may also influence the organization's corporate image, it's a two way process (Belt and Paolillo, 1982). Information specificity has been studied by David Ogivy (1983) he argued that specific messages are considered to be more memorable and credible than more general messages. Similarly Aaker and Stayman (1990), grade ad information as the most important factor which directly effect ad likeability and brand attitudes.

The present research focuses on the impact of specificity of ad contents on the perception of prospective individuals or job seekers. Different content of job ads including ad truthfulness and information in ad, ad appropriateness, attitude toward ad, attitude toward company and individual likelihood of following up further in the application process is studied. This research is the extension of the literature on the effects of message specificity specifically in the developing country as the previous researches (Fernandez and Rosen, 2000; Biswas et al., 1999; Feldman et al., 2006) have a focus of studying these variables in developed countries.

## METHODOLOGY

Two levels of information specificity in recruitment ads have been studied including specific information and general information. Four advertisements, two general and two specific were taken as instruments for this study. Four different scenarios were given to participants, in the general scenarios only general information (company name and position announced were given) while for the specific scenarios more specified information (job description and job specification were also provided); two of these scenarios (one general and one specific) were taken from Feldman et al. (2006), with minor changes while two scenarios (one general and one specific) were developed by the researcher on the bases of the scenarios given by Feldman et al. (2006).

Each participant of the study received a description of a job advertisement either specific or general and a questionnaire which has been adopted from a published research by Feldman et al. (2006). With the help of questionnaire four aspects were tested that

**Table 1.** Result of data analysis.

Variable	Levene Test for homogeneity	Cronbach's alpha	No. of items
Ad Truthfulness	0.00*	0.650	4
Ad Appropriateness	0.20**	0.703	3
Ad Information	0.22**	0.805	4
Pursuing Application process	0.008*	0.853	5

Significant at \*0.05; \*\*0.1.

**Table 2.** Pearson correlation matrix.

Variable	Attitude toward company	Attitude toward ad	Pursuing application process	Ad truthfulness	Ad appropriateness	Ad information
Attitude toward company	1	0.604**	0.516**	0.337**	0.195**	0.395**
Attitude toward ad		1	0.451**	0.474**	0.286**	0.520**
Pursuing application process			1	0.361**	0.331**	0.366**
Ad Truthfulness				1	0.398**	0.559**
Ad appropriateness					1	0.445**
Ad Information						1

\*\* Significant at 0.01% level

include perceived truthfulness of the recruiting ad, the perceived appropriateness of the recruiting ad, perceived informativeness of the recruiting ad and the likely hood of the follow- up process. All these aspects are measured on five point scale ranging from 1- strongly agree to 5-strongly disagree. While attitude toward ad and attitude toward company were measured on seven point scale ranging from 1- very good to 7- very bad.

### Sample

Convenience sampling technique has been used to collect data. The participants of this study were undergraduate students who are in their final semester of business administration department. The data have been collected from two public and two private sector universities in Pakistan. Questionnaires with job description scenarios were distributed in classes. The participation in this study

was voluntary and the participants were not required to provide their name. There were 300 questionnaires received and out of which 240 questionnaires were usable for further analysis. The sample was evenly split in terms of gender composition (51.7% male, 48.3% female). The mean and median age of the sample is 23 years. There is no significant difference in assignment to the experimental conditions in terms of gender, age, income level and educational level.

### Data analyses

The data has been analyzed in Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). First the normality and reliability of data has been analyzed. For normality of data, Levene's test for normality is used while reliability has been analyzed with Cronbach's alpha; the results are given in Table 1.

The correlation between variables is studied and it has

been concluded that all variables of this study have significant positive correlation with likelihood of pursuing application process. All variables show moderate to low relationship with each other. There is no issue of multicollinearity. The results are given in Table 2. Multiple Regression analysis is applied to check the impact of attitude toward ad and attitude toward company on likelihood of pursuing application process. The regression model is significant with ( $p < 0.01$ ,  $F = 50.01$ ). Attitude toward company has stronger impact on likelihood of pursuing application process with ( $p < 0.01$ ,  $t = 5.61$ ,  $Beta = 0.383$ ). While attitude toward ad has less impact compare to attitude toward company on likelihood of pursuing application process ( $p < 0.01$ ,  $t = 3.22$ ,  $Beta = 0.220$ ).

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) is used to find the significant difference in the responses on job specific ads and job general ads. All variables except pursuing application process have significant difference ( $p < 0.01$ ). While pursuing application process shows no significant

**Table 3.** Analysis of variance (ANOVA).

Variable	F - statistic	P-value
Ad Truthfulness	24.7	0.00
Ad Appropriateness	11.9	0.00
Ad Information	62.2	0.00
Pursuing application process	12.4	0.08

**Table 4.** Descriptive analysis of variables.

Variable	Ad type	Mean	N	S.D.
Ad truthfulness	Specific Ad 1	3.35	71	0.54
	Specific Ad 2	3.90	45	0.68
	General Ad 1	3.20	79	0.55
	General Ad 2	2.70	45	0.87
Ad appropriateness	Specific Ad 1	3.53	71	0.70
	Specific Ad 2	4.24	45	0.62
	General Ad 1	3.45	79	0.78
	General Ad 2	3.51	45	0.87
Ad info	Specific Ad 1	3.43	71	0.78
	Specific Ad 2	4.31	45	0.52
	General Ad 1	3.14	79	0.68
	General Ad 2	2.29	45	0.79
Pursuing application process	Specific Ad 1	5.80	71	0.87
	Specific Ad 2	6.00	45	0.90
	General Ad 1	5.84	79	0.94
	General Ad 2	5.90	45	1.09

difference ( $p > 0.05$ ) between specific job ads and general job ads. The results are shown in Table 3. The mean and standard deviation of four ad (two specific and two general) with respect to independent and dependent variables are given in Table 4.

## CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The researcher has used marketing theory to extend prior recruitment research by exploring the influence of recruitment message specificity on applicant attraction to organizations and their intention to pursue application process. The researcher explored whether exposure to explicit recruitment information either general or specific would produce more favourable applicant perceptions and reactions or not. First, the results have confirmed the importance of recruitment ad specificity for influencing applicant perceptions about ad information, ad truthfulness and ad appropriateness. Consistent with prior research, these findings highlight that detail in recruitment advertisements may lead to positive applicant reactions. However, contrary to the expectations,

recruitment message specificity did not have an impact on applicant intentions to pursue application process.

The first finding of this research is related to the attitude toward company which has strong positive and significant relationship with application pursuing process. If attitude toward company is positive the application pursuing process will be higher and this relationship is stronger compare to attitude toward ad which also had a positive significant relationship with the application pursuing process. These results are consistent with the previous research of Belt and Paolillo (1986), according to which corporate image in recruitment ads help in attracting suitable pool. Similarly Kalpan et al. (1991) also identified a positive relationship between physical features of job ads and the amount of applicant pool.

The second finding of this research is related to the applicants' response toward specific job ads and general job ads. Their response showed a significant difference with respect to the ad information, ad truthfulness and ad appropriateness all these variables are more positive towards specific job ads compare to general job ads.

These results are also consistent with the previous findings of Roberson et al. (2005), according to which more detailed recruitment ad increase job seekers attraction toward organization. While the application pursuing process showed a mixed response toward specific job ad as well as toward general job ads without having a significant difference. These results are not consistent with the previous findings of Roberson et al. (2005) according to which specificity of recruitment ad leads toward intention to apply similarly according to Feldman et al. (2006) application pursuing process is higher for the specific job ad compare to more general job ad. Whether the respondent have more positive attitude toward specific jobs ad compare to general job ads the intention to apply and pursuing application process is the same for both type of ads. This is a very important finding of the present research.

The current economic conditions of Pakistan may have some contribution toward these results. Pakistan, a developing country, has suffered from decades of internal political problems and low levels of foreign investment. In 2008-09 the unemployment rose to 15.2% which has been identified as substantial underemployment by international agencies. Inflation remains the top concern among the public, which jumps from 7.7% in 2007 to 20.8% in 2008, and 14.2% in 2009. In addition, the Pakistani rupee has depreciated since 2007 due to the political and economic instability. This economic and political instability put pressures on job seekers. They do have different perception about specific recruitment ads and general recruitment ads but due to high unemployment they try to apply to all opportunities available to them as this will increase their probability of selection. As this research has been conducted in a developing country the results have some contribution to the growing body of knowledge. The previous researchers (Kalpan et al., 1990; Roberson et al., 2005; Feldman et al., 2006) have conducted their research in economically advance and politically stable country and this research has provided some evidence towards the importance of political and economic stability in recruitment process.

## IMPLICATION FOR MANAGERS

As the attitude towards the company and attitude toward ads do have an impact on the application pursuing process so the managers should give importance to the ad development. As an effective ad can help in generating good applicant pool similarly the corporate image should also be given the due importance and manager should try to improve corporate image through effective and efficient human recourse strategies like increase in the retention rate through training and development of employees. Similarly positive attitude towards company can also be developed through corporate social responsibility policies and practices by that specific company.

## LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The primary limitation of this research is related to the generalization of the research results. First, generalization issue is related to sample, as student sample has limited external validity which limits the generalization of the results (Lynch, 1982). But it should be noted that many large organizations try to get recruitment from college campuses (Rynes and Boudreau, 1986) . Second, generalization issue is related to the data as it is collected from Pakistan the country with many economic, political and security problems we can not generalized the results for all developing countries. The experimental stimulus used was not an actual ad, but ads which are specifically developed for this study. This was an important aspect of this study design because it allowed the researcher to standardize and control the information (specific and general) which participants received. However, it may have an impact on the external validity of these findings.

Future research can focus on the physical attributes of job ads (color, space, logos etc.) and check their impact on application pursuing process. Similarly researchers can also collect data from other developing countries to counter check the results as well as the sample can also be improved by collecting data from job seekers (not students from final semester).

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