

A Multi-Perspective, Multi-Criteria Approach to Organizational Attraction

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ABSTRACT

A multi-perspective, multi-criteria (MPMC) approach to organizational attraction is presented in this research. The framework proposed explores the decision-making processes associated with organizational attraction via the company's web page. The multiple perspectives and decision makers are the applicant, the firm, and the web developer. The multiple criteria addressed are environmental orientation of the corporate website, elements of thematization of the website, and employer branding content on the corporate website. The MPMC approach offered in this research evaluates a firm's corporate web page content using multi-criteria decision-making (MCDM) and the multivariate technique correspondence analysis (CA). The utilization of these evaluation techniques provides a quantitative approach based on weighting and correspondence. Primarily this approach allows the firm to make decisions about web content that suggests which elements provide a competitive advantage. Secondly, this approach allows the applicant to make decisions about firms based on web content that each individually finds attractive. Finally, this approach allows the web developer to identify those web content elements that are most value added to the firm in attracting key talent.

INTRODUCTION

No longer should a company assume that the mere presence of a corporate web page and online recruiting content provides a competitive advantage. With the saturation of company recruiting websites and e-recruiting, firms need to find new and innovative ways to stand apart in the war on talent. Over a six year period (1998 to 2003) the number of Global 500 firms with recruiting websites grew from 29% to 94% (Taleo, 2003). This has most surely reached 100% as of the current year (2008). While globalization fueled the need for firms to identify and attract talent on a worldwide basis, it is the internet infrastructure that drove the current levels of adoption of corporate web pages and website recruiting. With the recent economic slowdown and firms looking to identify ways to cut costs while at the same time continuing to identify key talent, there is an increased effort to develop cost effective ways to meet both challenges.

This research focuses on decision-making from three perspectives and based on three specific criteria. The three perspectives are those of the firm, the applicant of the firm, and the web developer. The firm is seeking a specific quantity and quality applicants. The applicant is seeking firms that it finds attractive for a multitude of reasons (values, benefits, reputation, social responsibility, etc.). The web developer is most concerned with what creative, unique elements of the website design may attract potential candidates to the firm website. The firm, the applicant, and the web developer all must make decisions about the content that is found on a firm's corporate web page. The firm must decide what content provides an attractive representation that leads to a competitive advantage. The applicant must decide what aspects of the firm are attractive enough to result in the action of applying. The developer must decide what content has been most effective at attracting the quantity and quality of applicant necessary to support the global talent needs.

The three criteria that will be explored in this research have been found to provide each on their own a unique competitive advantage. The first decision-making criterion is the firm's employer brand. An employer brand is considered the firm's attempt to represent via words and other media what characteristics it possesses that would make it an attractive firm to select for employment. The second decision-making criterion is one of the three elements of corporate social responsibility (CSR) – environmental orientation. The third decision-making criteria is the thematize content that leads to a unique corporate experience for a potential applicant. This thematized content can include virtual conversations with existing employees or video detail of a day in the life of an employee.

The uniqueness of this research is its multi-perspective and multi-criteria (MPMC) focus. The proposed framework will address not only the elements of corporate websites that are attractive to applicants, but also elements of corporate websites that provide a competitive advantage to the firm, and aspects of website content that should be of importance to the web developer. The multi-criteria aspect of this research emphasizes environmentalism, employer branding, and thematization of the firm. These three criteria while addressed individually in prior research have not been evaluated together to understand their combined impact on the decision-making process. The framework also offers a structure for analyzing elements unique to any firm concerned about evaluating their web content to improve organizational attraction.

RESEARCH PROBLEM STATEMENT

The complete saturation of firms that have corporate web pages utilized for online recruiting is no longer seen as a unique competitive advantage. Firms must identify and make smarter decisions about what content features they wish to incorporate on their web pages that will distinguish them from their competitors. Employer branding as discussed above has been shown in the literature to provide a competitive advantage (Balmer & Gray, 2003). By evaluating employer branding along with environmental orientation (Porter & van der Linde, 1995; Backhaus, 2004) and thematized web content, the framework provided will provide a means for utilizing these criteria in the decision-making process from all three perspectives. This approach also allows for the flexibility to change perspectives and criteria based on the unique strategic emphasis of each firm.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The objective of this paper is to evaluate from a multi-perspective and through multi-criteria, those web page characteristics that provide distinct and unique advantages. The perspectives of the firm offering the website, the applicant using the website, and the developer creating the website provide the scoring mechanisms in the decision process. The multi-criteria employer branding, thematization of the firm via blogging, videos, and virtual experiences, and environmentalism are utilized as the unique, distinguishing features. The intent of this evaluation is to provide a way to make decisions about whether the firm, the applicant, or the web content provides distinguishing, separating criteria from a variety of perspectives.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK, VALIDATION, AND ASSESSMENT

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this research is called the MPMC model and is based on communications theory and signaling theory. This model (see Figure 1) begins with an IT

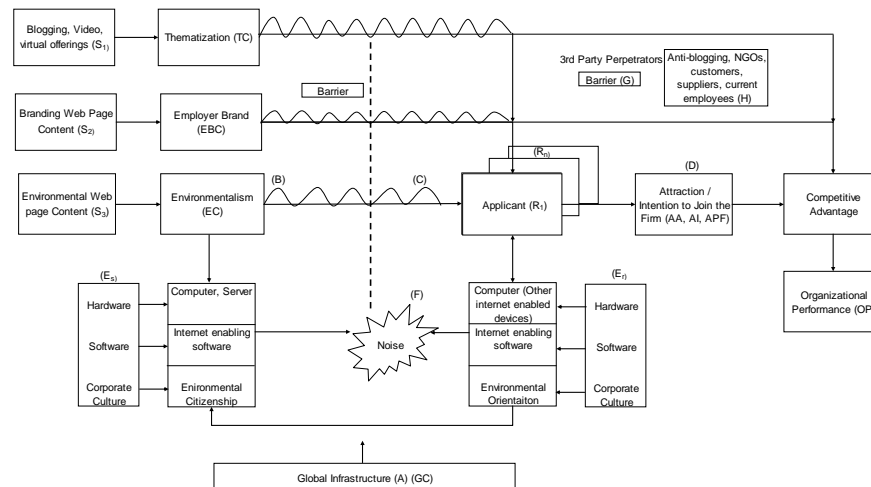


Figure 1: Multi-perspective, Multi-criteria (MPMC) Model of Organizational Attraction.

infrastructure that can be utilized at either a regional or global level (A). This infrastructure supports a relationship between a sender (the firm) and a receiver (the potential applicant) (B). The media used to transmit information between the sender and receiver is the corporate internet web page, environmental orientation web page, and career web page (C). The outcome of this transfer of information from sender to receiver results in the applicant's attraction / intention to apply for a position at the firm (D). The elements that feed into both the sender and receiver channels are hardware, software, and elements of corporate culture (E_s and E_r).

The hardware required for both the sender and the receiver are access to the internet via a computer (or other internet enabled hardware). The software required for both the sender and receiver is software that allows for the hardware utilized to access to the internet. The elements of corporate culture by the sender are in the form of its employer brand as evidenced by its corporate career website. The model allows for multiple perspectives (firm, applicant, and developer) and multiple criteria (senders). Each sender has raw data intelligence that is provided as an input. For purposes of this research there are three criteria (senders of the message) S_1 , S_2 , and S_3 . Sender S_1 has as raw data input intelligence from the blogging, video, and/or virtual activities. Sender S_2 has as raw data input intelligence from the content of the career web page. Sender S_3 has as raw data input intelligence from the environmental orientation content of the corporate and/or career web page.

In this model the multiple receivers are represented as individual applicants (R_1 to R_n) that are accessing the corporate career web page to evaluate a particular firm. The expected decision to be made by each receiver is whether or not they are attracted to the firm as a result of viewing the web page (D_1), whether or not they have an intention to apply for a position (D_2), and whether or not there is a perceived fit (D_3).

There is noise in the system that is created by the software, hardware, and corporate culture. These aspects of noise impact the signal that is sent from the sender to the receiver (F). If this noise is insignificant (≤ 0) then the noise is negligible. If this noise is significant (≥ 1), then there will be issues with interference.

The final elements of the model are barriers (G) and third party perpetrators (TPPs) (H). TPP elements need to be on the radar of the developer. The developer needs to make a determination to integrate or negate information from TPPs into the firm's website message. TPPs affecting the relationship between sender and receiver include unhappy ex-employees, external stakeholders such as the government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the community. Artificial barriers or boundaries between the sender – receiver involve elements of the relationship that could potentially cause a breakdown in the movement of the message from one to the other.

Validation

The key dependent variables in this relationship are applicant attraction (AA) which consists of applicant intention (AI) to apply for a position, Competitive Advantage, and organizational performance (OP). The independent variables that will be utilized to evaluate this relationship are the number of content elements addressing environmentalism (EC – Environmental Content), thematization (TC – Thematized Content) of the firm, employer brand (EBC – Employer Brand Content), and globalization (GC – Global Content). The key

organizational functional areas most likely affected are Human Resources, Marketing, and Information Technology / Information Systems.

The key theory that will be utilized to support this research is signaling theory. Signaling theory in the context of recruitment suggests that recruitment messages (information) that provide information about job and organization characteristics should positively influence organizational attraction (Allen, Mahto, & Otondo, 2007). Xiang, Chen, & Ye (2005) use signaling theory, which they call organizational signaling to send three types of images that lead to applicant attraction. The three images identified are organizational social image, organizational work image, and organizational website image.

In the model offered by Xiang, Chen, & Ye (2005) they propose that organizational image and individual difference are moderators between organizational work image and organizational attractiveness. The direct relationship offered in their model is one where organizational social image positively affects organizational attractiveness. In research by Braddy, Meade, & Kroustalis (2008) they utilize signaling theory as well to suggest that in the absence of all other information the corporate website signals the applicant about the organization based on cues from that website. Turban & Cable (2003) utilized signaling theory in their research to understand how a firm's reputation could influence applicant choice.

Assessment

In order to assess the competitive worthiness of environmentalism, thematization, and branding of website content two assessment techniques will be utilized. Multi-criteria Decision Making (MCDM) will be utilized in conjunction with correspondence analysis (CA). MCDM is the assessment of choice (Ragsdale, 1998) because in the context of this research there are multiple website content elements (environmentalism, thematization, and branding) and criteria under each element that need to be evaluated by the firm, potential applicant, and web developer. Definitions of each criterion from each perspective can be found in the Appendix A (Table 1(applicant), Table 2 (firm), and Table 3(web developer)).

Because the objective is to utilize the website content elements of environmentalism, thematization, and employer branding to determine if this content provides a competitive advantage to the firm the researcher has chosen to utilize MCDM in conjunction with the multivariate technique Correspondence Analysis (CA). Research by Stewart (1981) and Cheung (1992) utilized MCDM in conjunction with CA. Both Stewart (1981) and Cheung (1992) utilized these two methods in combination to offer a mechanism (visual map) to the decision maker that identified the relationship between the criteria and the alternatives. Cheung (1992) felt that this approach was attractive because it "simplified understanding of the structure of the problem before a decision is made (p. 155)." This combination MCDM / Correspondence Analysis approach is utilized on all three perspectives under consideration in this research. For purposes of this condensed version only the firm perspective (See Figure 2a – MCDM results and 2b – CA) results will be assessed in detail. The remaining perspective assessments can be acquired by contacting the author of this paper.

MCDM - Firm Selecting Content to Attract							
	Applicant 1	Applicant 2	Applicant 3	Applicant 4	Applicant 5	Criterion Weight	Weighted Average
Environmentalism	9	11	11	9	9	0.20	1.96
Dual Linkage	1	1	1	1	1	0.05	0.05
Representative Visuals	3	5	5	3	3	0.05	0.19
Products / Process / Services / Projects	5	5	5	5	5	0.10	0.50
Thematization	9	13	11	11	7	0.20	2.04
Blogging	1	3	1	1	1	0.05	0.07
Videos	3	5	5	5	3	0.05	0.21
Virtual Offerings	5	5	5	5	3	0.10	0.46
Employer Brand	11	13	15	11	13	0.20	2.52
Globalization	1	3	5	1	5	0.05	0.15
Benefits	5	5	5	5	5	0.10	0.50
Culture	5	5	5	5	3	0.05	0.23
Performance	11	15	15	11	13	0.40	5.20
Sales Growth	3	5	5	3	3	0.10	0.38
Market Growth	3	5	5	3	5	0.10	0.42
Profit Growth	5	5	5	5	5	0.20	1.00
						1	

Figure 2a: MCDM – Firm Selecting Content for Attraction.

The use of MCDM to evaluate the attractiveness of a firm's web content is valuable, because firms can use this information to make decisions about which content to emphasize and maintain and which content is less important and can be removed to make the web page more cost and user effective. The data input into the MCDM table in Figure 2a can be collected automatically as applicants complete the online application process. The firm can capture data relative to the above theorized variables (environmentalism, thematization, and employer brand) or other variables of their strategic emphasis. As a candidate completes the application they can be prompted to weight the importance of these elements and actually provide a 1, 3, or 5 score. At the point where an adequate sample size of applicants has responded, this information can be utilized to complete the MCDM table and subsequently drive the CA results.

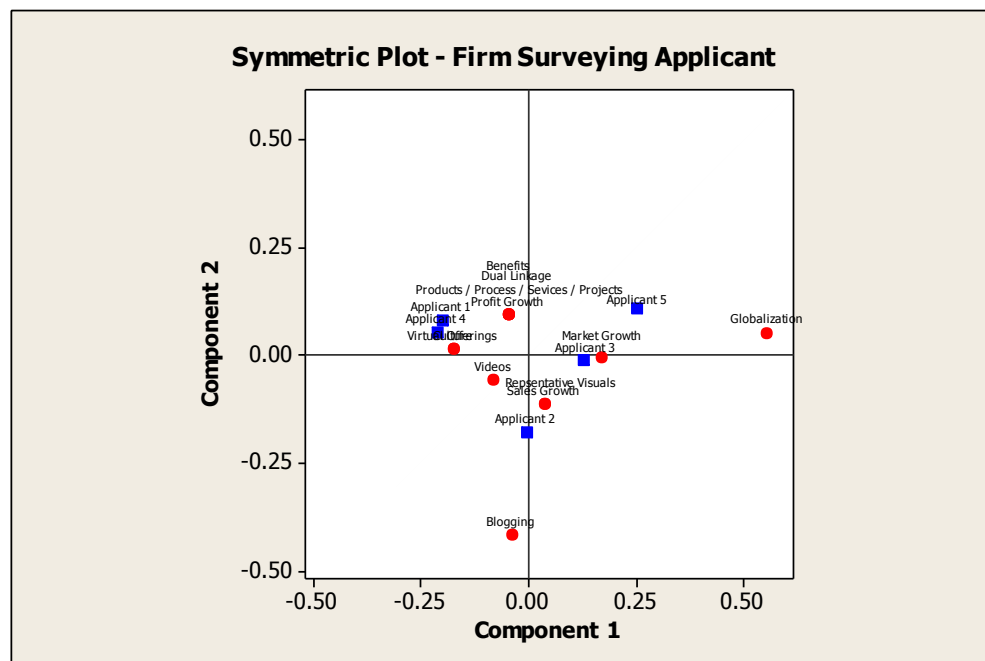


Figure 2b: Correspondence Analysis – Firm Selecting Content for Attraction (Applicant Survey).

The CA analysis of the data of a firm surveying applicants in this example would result in the following conclusions. Of the applicants (five) surveyed, none were attracted to the globalization elements on the web page. This would suggest to the firm that greater emphasis should be placed possibly on regionalization. The firm's web page should provide language links and/or country links that address specific opportunities in a particular region. The lack of applicants close to blogging suggests an applicant's decision to join a firm is not based on other's blogs or the opportunity to blog with a current employee. The closeness of Applicants 1 & 4 to Virtual Offerings suggests that thematized elements on the web page are relevant and important for attracting potential candidates for these two individuals. These same two applicants (1 & 4) are also situated near Profit Growth, Products, Dual Linkage, and Benefits. Applicants 1 & 4 correspond to Profit Growth, Applicant 2 is situated near Sales Growth and Representative Visuals. Whereas Applicants 3 & 5 are located near Market Growth each suggesting a differing (individual) belief in what organizational performance measure is most relevant in the decision-making process. This individual difference is shown to be a moderator between organizational work image and organizational attraction by Xiang, Chen, & Ye (2005).

LIMITATIONS, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

The key limitation in this research is the use of subjective measures in determining the weights in the MCDM technique. The utilization of Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP) facilitates the development of the weights with less subjective results than those used by the present researcher. Buyukozkan & Ruan (2007) take the simplified MCDM and use AHP to determine the weights, but also couple this with TOPSIS to determine a ranking as well.

The use of MCDM partnered with CA allows for the ranking of a best choice given the criteria selected (Cheung, 1992). This approach is useful and it has been demonstrated that a firm can use it to select and/or survey applicants to identify those key elements of the firm's website that make it attractive to a potential applicant. The primary implications are that branding, environmentalism, and thematized attributes of a firm's website do provide a rare, valuable, durable, and non-imitable distinction that can be utilized as a competitive advantage. However, there are individualistic considerations that drive the outcomes. These individual choices need to be evaluated and web content adjusted to simultaneously capture the individual difference and firm strategic initiatives. Areas that were not adequately addressed in this research are the affects of negative blogging on organizational attraction (Kucuk, 2008) and what firms are doing to proactively manage anti-blogging activities.

This study provided a MPMC approach to evaluate web page content for organizational attraction. In particular, web page content that makes a firm more attractive should result in a higher quantity and quality of talent in the selection pool. The strength of the proposed model is its simplicity in identifying relevant criteria and the relationships that exist between the criteria and varying perspectives. The other strength of this framework is the ease with which one is able to interchange whatever combination of criteria and perspectives are relevant to the particular business problem and decision-making process of the firm.

APPENDIX A

Table 1. Applicant Attraction Website Evaluation Criteria

Dimension	Evaluation Criteria	Definition
Environmentalism	Dual Linkage	The site provides reference links to social or environmental responsibility on both the corporate home page and corporate career page
	Representative Environmental Visuals	The site provides visual images, symbols, or logos representing a focus on the environment are found at either linkage location
	Products / Process	The site provides reference to products, processes, and/or services that are environmental based, developed, or promoted by the firm
Thematization	Blogging	The site provides a link to allow potential applicants to communicate via blogging with current employees
	Video	The site provides links to video of current employees, what it is like to work at the company, or video content that provide signals about the organizational culture
	Virtual Offerings	The site provides information or links to allow candidates to participate in virtual events at the firm (interviews, webinars, etc.)
Employer Brand	Globalization	The site has a link on the home page that directs you to select a language, select from a list of global locations, and/or identifies itself as a global firm.
	Benefits	The site provides explicit linkage and/or content about benefits offered such as on site restaurants, exercise facilities, training & development competitive salaries, etc.
	Culture	The site provides explicit linkage and/or content about elements of the organizational culture such as work/life balance, teamwork, open door policy, etc.

Table 2. Firm Competitive Advantage Website Evaluation Criteria

Dimension	Evaluation Criteria	Definition
Environmentalism	Dual Linkage, Representative Environmental Visuals, and Products / Process	The identified criteria provide the firm with a distinct and unique competitive advantage – Dual linkage accessed on equal basis, representative visuals found to be attractive, environmental products / processes are competitive advantage
Thematization	Blogging, Video, & Virtual Offerings	The identified criteria provide the firm with a distinct and unique competitive advantage. Access to thematized elements are found to be more attractive to selected applicants. Selected applicants have lower turnover.
Employer Brand	Globalization, Benefits, & Culture	The identified criteria provide the firm with a distinct and unique competitive advantage. Applicants access information on multiple global locations or in multiple languages. Applicants are attracted to benefits offered, and fill there is a cultural fit. Selected applicants with best fit have lower turnover.

APPENDIX A

Table 3. Web Developer Website Evaluation Criteria

Dimension	Evaluation Criteria	Definition
Environmentalism	Dual Linkage	Link is necessary on both the corporate and career page or one link is more effective
	Representative Environmental Visuals	Environmental visuals are of interest to the applicant and are considered an aspect that is attractive – place more of these on the website
	Products / Process	The applicant is attracted to the products / processes that are “green” – promote more of this type of content
Thematization	Blogging	The site provides a link to allow potential applicants to communicate via blogging with current employees. Anti-blogging is addressed and a plan of action is put in place to counter
	Video	The site provides links to video of current employees, what it is like to work at the company, or video content that provide signals about the organizational culture – monitor and promote the most accessed formats
	Virtual Offerings	The site provides information or links to allow candidates to participate in virtual events at the firm (interviews, webinars, etc.) – monitor and promote the most accessed offerings
Employer Brand	Globalization	The site has a link on the home page that directs you to select a language, select from a list of global locations, and/or identifies itself as a global firm – monitor and promote the most accessed format.
	Benefits	The site provides explicit linkage and/or content about benefits offered such as on site restaurants, exercise facilities, training & development competitive salaries, etc. – monitor and promote the most accessed links
	Culture	The site provides explicit linkage and/or content about elements of the organizational culture such as work/life balance, teamwork, open door policy, etc. – monitor and promote the most accessed links

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