

## **EXTERNAL EMPLOYER BRANDING ACTIVITIES: TYPOLOGY DEVELOPMENT VIA INTEGRATION OF INFORMATION AMOUNT AND CONTENT**

Muntakim M. Choudhury, Stockton University

### **ABSTRACT**

An organization's employer branding activities strive to communicate to both external and internal stakeholders that it is a great place to work. This paper focuses on an organization's "external" employer branding activities (EEBAs) - recruitment messages used to attract job seekers in the external labor market. The competition for hiring skilled and qualified employees has increased over the years, and thus it is crucial for organizations to be able to attract job seekers and influence them in pursuing a position via appropriate EEBAs. While prior research has explored applicant attraction by considering separately the amount of information and attribute content in recruitment messages, this paper draws on marketing and consumer psychology literature to integrate these two related but theoretically distinct research streams and builds theory around four "external" employer branding activity (EEBA) types and their effectiveness. In addition, the feasibility of using different types of employer branding activities is discussed, based on industry, organization, and job-seeker characteristics.

**Keywords:** employer branding; elaboration likelihood model; instrumental-symbolic framework; recruitment messages

### **INTRODUCTION**

Employers are progressively realizing the importance of attracting and retaining qualified and skilled employees to win the "war for talent" (Chapman et al., 2005; Kwon & Jang, 2022), and as such, research on "employer branding" has become salient over the years. As a process, employer branding differentiates an employer in the labor market (Backhaus, 2016) and can be summed up as an organization's efforts to communicate that the firm is a desirable place to work (Arasanmi & Krishna, 2019). Employer branding can be targeted at both prospective and current employees (Lievens, Van Hove & Anseel, 2007) and in this paper, I specifically focus on an organization's employer branding activities directed at prospective employees (i.e., external employer branding activities or EEBAs), since one of the 'central' goals of the employer-branding field is to 'ensure that an organization is identifiable and attractive to potential employees' (Edwards, 2009; pp. 7).

In understanding EEBA, two dimensions of marketing and branding behavior are important and relevant: 'information amount' (Collins, 2007; Collins & Han, 2004) and 'attribute content' (Cable & Graham, 2000; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Slaughter et al., 2004; Wilhelmy et al., 2019). I base my arguments on the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981, 1983, 1986), the Instrumental-Symbolic framework (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003), and research on high and low amounts of information in recruitment messages (Collins, 2007; Collins & Kanar, 2014). Prior work has investigated applicant attraction by developing separate research streams on the amount of information and attribute content in recruitment messages. However, an in-depth perspective regarding the effectiveness of EEBAs can be developed by considering the joint effects of both these aspects on employee attraction to organizations. Considering

information amount or attribute content in isolation puts emphasis on only one side of the story and thus paints an incomplete and overly simplistic picture of the impact that recruitment messages would have on applicant attraction and subsequent job search behaviors.

As such, I integrate recent theoretical work into a typology that characterizes and parametrizes EEBA. Specifically, I identify four types: (1) High Information-Instrumental, (2) High Information-Symbolic, (3) Low Information-Instrumental, and (4) Low Information-Symbolic. By crafting a typology, I identify different EEBA dimensions, highlighting the advantages and disadvantages of each type. In addition, I also build theory around the effectiveness and suitability of, using such EEBA types. This is also an important contribution to the recruitment literature as well as practice, inasmuch that the correct use of different EEBA will likely contribute to the success of an organization's recruitment efforts, and the success of different EEBA may very well depend on the match and mismatch in cognitive processing of both information amount and attribute content. Additionally, the effectiveness of employer branding will depend on industry, organization, and individual-level characteristics, which is also discussed.

## **RECRUITMENT AND EMPLOYER BRANDING ACTIVITIES**

The idea of attracting job seekers stems from the notion that employees are valuable resources for an organization, and can lead to sustained competitive advantage (Barney, 1991). Thus, it is a crucial strategic imperative for organizations to be able to attract job seekers and influence them in pursuing a position via recruitment activities. Employer branding messages act as a very important source of information in early stages of recruitment that assist in positively influencing potential employees' initial perceptions of the organization as an employer (Theurer et al., 2018).

In this paper I develop a typology of external employer branding activities (EEBAs), which represent recruitment messages intended to attract potential employees. Prior work has investigated applicant attraction by developing separate research streams on the amount of information (Cable & Turban, 2001; Collins, 2007; Collins & Han, 2004) and attribute content in recruitment messages (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Van Hoye et al., 2013). However, as discussed below, both research streams are theoretically related but distinct, and I next integrate these theoretical works into a typology that characterizes and parametrizes EEBA.

### **Information Amount in Recruitment Messages**

While organizations can design messages to persuade job seekers to apply, Collins and colleagues (Collins, 2007; Collins & Han, 2004) argue that the effectiveness of such recruitment activities will depend on the amount of information in those messages and the extent of cognitive effort expended by job seekers while processing the information. Recruitment messages that provide large amounts of detailed, specific information regarding the job and the organization to potential applicants are examples of high-information recruitment practices (Collins & Han, 2004). These detailed messages contain important job and organizational information such as job requirements, salary, location, company culture, and growth opportunities. Conversely, recruitment activities can be designed to provide low amounts of information. Short recruitment messages, banner advertisements in websites, posters containing images and company logos that

provide general positive signals and cues regarding the organization as an employer are examples of low-information recruitment practices (Collins, 2007).

### **Attribute Content in Recruitment Messages**

Job seeker's initial attraction to an organization is dependent on early impressions of an organization's image as an employer, defined as "the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by the employment, and identified with the employing company" (Ambler & Barrow, 1996: 187). Lievens & Highhouse (2003) drew on the instrumental-symbolic framework from social and consumer psychology literature (Keller, 1993) to suggest that like product and service brand images, employer image can be separated into two primary components (1) instrumental attributes and (2) symbolic meanings.

Instrumental information in marketing messages describes a product in terms of tangible, objective, and physical attributes (Keller, 1998). Likewise, in the recruitment context, instrumental information in recruitment messages describe the job and the organization in objective, factual and concrete terms (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). Examples of instrumental information include details about job requirements, pay, working hours, bonuses, benefits, and location (Cable & Graham, 2000; Wilhelmy et al., 2019). Job seekers form perceptions of person-job fit through instrumental information, i.e., the congruence between job requirements and individual abilities, and between the needs of the job seeker and the support provided by organization (Nolan et al., 2013).

In contrast, symbolic meanings in marketing messages describe the product in terms of subjective and intangible attributes, and consumers use these symbolic meanings to make inferences regarding the product (Keller, 1998). Similarly, symbolic information in recruitment materials describe employers in subjective terms and assist job seekers in ascribing personality traits and values to organizations in the early stages of recruitment (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Slaughter et al., 2004; Wilhelmy et al., 2019). Research has shown that applicants are attracted more to those organizations whose perceived traits match their own personality (Slaughter et al., 2004). The social identity theory (Ashforth & Mael, 1989) suggests that if job seekers develop positive perceptions toward an employer image, they are more likely to seek employment in the organization to enhance their own self-image via organizational memberships.

I bring together these perspectives on information amount and instrumental/symbolic attributes in recruitment messages to develop and propose a typology of EEBA that identifies four types: (1) High Information-Instrumental, (2) High Information-Symbolic, (3) Low Information-Instrumental, and (4) Low Information-Symbolic. The underlying implication is that employers can manipulate the information amount and content embedded in their EEBA to better differentiate themselves as they contend for employees. The theory linking these two dimensions of EEBA and thus motivating the typology proposed here is the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM).

## ELABORATION LIKELIHOOD MODEL – CENTRAL AND PERIPHERAL PROCESSING

The ELM, a widely accepted framework to understand the effects of persuasive communication, argues that people develop cognitive responses (i.e., elaborations) when experiencing a marketing message (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981, 1983). Elaboration refers to the extent to which an individual spends time and effort to process the marketing message and carefully ponders the issue-relevant arguments contained in the message (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). This framework suggests that when exposed to a recruitment message, individuals will process the message either centrally (i.e., the “central route of persuasion”) or peripherally (i.e., the “peripheral route of persuasion”).

### Central and Peripheral Routes of Persuasion

The central route of persuasion involves expending considerable cognitive resources to carefully consider and process a message. Thus, when individuals process centrally, they evaluate the strength of the argument and assess the message deeply (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981, 1983). In contrast, when recipients use limited cues or visual images embedded in the message to develop perceptions and associations, they are said to be processing the message peripherally. As such, the peripheral route does not require high cognitive search costs or close scrutiny of the argument (MacInnis & Jaworski, 1989).

***ELM and Amount of Information.*** The amount of information embedded in a recruitment activity will affect whether the message is processed centrally or peripherally. Applying ELM to the recruitment context, recruitment messages containing large amounts of information regarding the job and the employer are likely to be processed centrally by job seekers (Collins, 2007; Collins & Han, 2004; MacInnis & Jarowski, 1989). Such deep assessments may lead to favorable impressions and beliefs towards the employer organization that are likely to be long lasting. On the other hand, job seekers tend to process low-information recruitment practices peripherally, as those messages do not have enough information to elicit central processing (Collins, 2007; Collins & Kanar, 2014). Even if a job seeker is not actively considering a particular organization that is employing a low-information strategy, such practices can influence job seekers positively by communicating information that can be processed incidentally (Collins & Han, 2004). Therefore, based on the ELM framework, effectiveness of EEBA would depend on the amount of information embedded in the message, which influences the extent of cognitive effort to be expended by job seekers to process the information (Collins, 2007; Collins & Han, 2004).

***ELM and Attribute Content.*** The ELM suggests that messages containing instrumental attributes would require greater cognitive effort to be processed and thus must be processed centrally (Johar & Sirgy, 1991). To illustrate, consider a printed advertisement for a new car, which contains instrumental information on price. When reading the price amount, it is likely that the potential purchaser will generate many product-relevant thoughts such as “Is the price too high or too low? Is it high or low compared to other cars in the market? Am I willing to pay so much for this car?” etc. This simple illustration suggests that the consumer engages in deep assessment of the instrumental attribute of price by utilizing substantial cognitive resources. This central processing involving instrumental information is established by *functional congruity*, defined as

the match between perceived utilitarian (instrumental) aspects of a product and self-held ideal expectations of said instrumental aspects (Sirgy & Johar, 1985; Sop & Kozak, 2019). The greater the match between the instrumental attributes and the referent beliefs, the greater will be the impact on an individual's behaviors (Oliver & Bearden 1985).

Conversely, symbolic meanings describe the product in terms of subjective and intangible attributes, based on people's perceptions and inferences regarding the product, and the ELM suggests that such attributes are to be processed peripherally (Sirgy, Grewal & Mangleburg, 2000). For instance, a consumer may decide to purchase a car because it is trendy (symbolic attribute), and this trait may reflect the purchaser's self-concept. In contrast to instrumental attributes, symbolic information does not utilize substantial cognitive resources to be processed (Johar & Sirgy, 1991). Returning to the advertisement for a new car, assume that a consumer reads another marketing message that describes the car as "cool." When reading this symbolic description of the car, the consumer is likely to make an instant subjective judgement regarding the trendiness (or coolness) of the car, and this subjective assessment is carried out rapidly, without the need for many cognitive resources. This is an example of peripheral processing. Peripheral processing involving symbolic information is mediated by *self-congruity* (Johar & Sirgy, 1991; Sop & Kozak, 2019), defined as the extent to which an individual's self-image matches that of a typical brand user (Sirgy, 1982) and has been explained as being the fit between the consumer's beliefs and the brand's image or personality (Aaker, 1999). In the recruitment context, the greater this match, the more likely that a job seeker will have a favorable attitude towards the hiring organization, and this self-congruity process is cognitively less taxing than functional congruity.

### EEBA TYPOLOGY

In this section, I integrate the theoretical perspectives on information amount, content, and ELM to develop the typology of EEBA's used by organizations to attract potential employees. Figure 1 depicts the four types identified: (1) High Information-Instrumental, (2) High Information-Symbolic, (3) Low Information-Instrumental, and (4) Low Information-Symbolic.

*High Information-Instrumental EEBA's* combine high-information and instrumental attributes in a recruitment message, and provides large amount of detailed, cogent information describing the instrumental attributes of the organization and the job. Interestingly, when we draw on the ELM framework to examine the cognitive pathways of information processing, we see in Figure 1 that large amounts of information will be processed centrally, and the underlying instrumental attributes are also processed centrally. This represents a "match" in cognitive processing, where both information amount and attribute content are being processed in the same manner. The greater this match, the more positive will be the potential employee's belief and preferences towards the hiring organization, which in turn should enhance job pursuit intentions (Johar & Sirgy, 1991).

Figure 1: EEBA Typology Representing Matches and Mismatches in Cognitive Processing Pathways

Attributes		Information amount	
		High Information	Low Information
Instrumental		C	P
		C	C
Symbolic		P	P
		C	P

**Legend:** C – Central Processing; P – Peripheral Processing

When we combine high-information recruitment messages and symbolic attributes, we observe the *High Information-Symbolic EEBA*. This EEBA type depicts an external employer branding activity that contains a great number of arguments portraying organizational symbolic information. As explained earlier, high-information recruitment practices involve providing potential applicants with detailed information regarding the job and the organization, and such large information amounts elicit central processing in individuals, while the symbolic information embedded in these messages are to be processed peripherally. Accordingly, there is a mismatch in cognitive processing when large amounts of information and symbolic attributes are considered.

Low-information recruitment practices do not contain enough information to elicit effortful central processing and thus must be processed peripherally, while instrumental information in recruitment messages describe the organization and the job in terms of factual, concrete attributes (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). Integrating these two perspectives creates the *Low Information-Instrumental EEBA*, which represents a message containing low amounts of instrumental information regarding the job and the organization. This EEBA type also represents mismatch in cognitive processing pathways, inasmuch as low amounts of information must be processed peripherally, while the underlying instrumental content is processed centrally.

Finally, *Low Information-Symbolic EEBA* describes recruitment messages that contain low amounts of information and symbolic attributes. Since both dimensions of this EEBA require peripheral processing, this EEBA manifests a match in the cognitive mechanism required to process components of the recruitment message. Taking information amount and attribute content together suggests that *Low Information-Symbolic EEBA* should positively influence the attitudes and job pursuit intentions of job seekers. Table 1 below lists these EEBA types and describes the main attributes of each.

Table 1. Main attributes of EEBA types

EEBA type	Main attributes
High Information-Instrumental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provides high amount of information describing the instrumental attributes of the organization and the job.</li> <li>- Represents match in cognitive processing (Central-Central).</li> </ul>
High Information-Symbolic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provides high amount of information describing the symbolic attributes of the organization.</li> <li>- Represents mismatch in cognitive processing (Central-Peripheral).</li> </ul>
Low Information-Instrumental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provides low amount of information describing the instrumental attributes of the job and the organization.</li> <li>- Represents mismatch in cognitive processing (Peripheral-Central).</li> </ul>
Low Information-Symbolic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provides low amount of information describing the symbolic attributes of the organization.</li> <li>- Represents match in cognitive processing (Peripheral-Peripheral).</li> </ul>

### ORGANIZATIONAL FAMILIARITY AND EEBA EFFECTIVENESS

I suggest that the effectiveness of the different EEBA's identified above, apart from information amount and content, will also be determined by an individual's motivation to process the message (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Research suggests when conditions are such that people have the motivation to allocate cognitive resources to process and scrutinize marketing messages carefully, elaboration likelihood is said to be high (Petty & Cacioppo, 1983). Conversely, when individuals lack the motivation to process or carefully consider the message's arguments, elaboration likelihood is low. However, an individual's motivation to process message content will depend on their familiarity with the organization in question. Next, I discuss how an individual's motivation influences the effectiveness of different EEBA's via three-way match in cognitive processing.

#### Three-Way Match in Cognitive Processing

Job seekers who are familiar with an organization are likely to be motivated to carefully process EEBA's containing large amounts of detailed information (Cable & Turban, 2001; Collins & Han, 2004). This suggests high-information recruitment practices, by eliciting central processing, are more likely to be effective for these individuals, (Collins & Kanar, 2014). In the typology, there are two high-information EEBA's, which differ with respect to the attribute content: *High Information-Instrumental* and *High Information Symbolic*. This difference in attribute content is significant: studies suggest that individuals with higher familiarity prefer to evaluate the

organization using instrumental attributes (Brucks, 1985; Sujan, 1985), and therefore this functional congruity effect will be greater for these job seekers. Thus, when exposed to a *High Information-Instrumental EEBA* from an organization with greater familiarity, job seekers would have made available high amounts of cognitive resources to process centrally the message being conveyed. This is important because research predicts that any message will positively influence attitudes and behaviors when the cognitive resources available to process information matches the cognitive resources required to process both information amount and content (Coulter & Punj, 2004; Keller & Block, 1997). Thus, this situation represents an ideal three-way match of cognitive processing, as overall central processing is being facilitated in terms of information amount, attribute content, and motivation. This suggests that this type of EEBA will be effective for organizations with high familiarity.

*Proposition 1: Organizational familiarity will moderate the association between High Information-Instrumental EEBA and Job Pursuit Intentions such that the positive association will be greater when organizational familiarity is high.*

Conversely, in cases of organizations with high familiarity, a mismatch in cognitive processing would arise when motivated job seekers are exposed to *High Information-Symbolic EEBA*s. After exposure, job seekers will begin to process centrally by engaging in deeper assessment of the large amounts of information being conveyed. However, these high-information messages contain symbolic attributes, which are to be processed peripherally. Due to high familiarity, motivated individuals would have allocated greater amounts of cognitive resources to centrally process the message, but since these messages contain symbolic attributes, subsequent peripheral processing will in effect require fewer cognitive resources than originally allocated (Coulter, 2005). Research suggests that message recipients will use the excess cognitive resources available to generate counterarguments or idiosyncratic, issue-irrelevant thoughts (Keller & Block, 1997). Furthermore, subsequent peripheral processing of symbolic information should result in attitude changes that are temporary and not likely to be predictive of behavior (Lievens & Harris, 2003; Meyers-Levy & Malaviya, 1999). Thus, for organizations with high familiarity, this type of EEBA may not be as effective as *High Information-Instrumental EEBA*. This leads to the following proposition:

*Proposition 2: High Information-Instrumental EEBA will result in greater Job Pursuit Intentions among job seekers than High Information-Symbolic EEBA, when organizational familiarity is high.*

In the case of organizations that are less prominent and visible, low-information recruitment practices will be effective as these messages will assist in increasing the level of familiarity among job seekers via peripheral processing. This is essential because unless individuals in the labor market are familiar with an organization, they will not be motivated to include it in their consideration set as a potential employer (Cable & Turban, 2001; Collins, 2007). Studies suggest that organizations with low familiarity should not use high-information recruitment practices because job seekers lacking initial familiarity and interest in the organization as an employer will not be motivated to process the detailed information in those messages (Collins & Han, 2004; Collins & Kanar, 2014). Additionally, job seekers with low organizational familiarity would prefer to evaluate messages using symbolic attributes and under these conditions the effects of

self-congruity should be more pronounced and determinative of attitude change (Coulter & Punj, 2004; Johar & Sirgy, 1991; Sop & Kozak, 2019).

Building on these theoretical perspectives, I argue that if the potential employee is not familiar with an organization, when exposed to *Low Information-Symbolic EEBA*s, s/he will allocate fewer cognitive resources to the marketing message and thus will process the message peripherally. The underlying low amount of information and symbolic attributes in the message will also be processed peripherally (Johar & Sirgy, 1991), and this represents an ideal situation where three-way matched cognitive processing of message is taking place in terms of motivation, information amount and content. This three-way match will enhance the persuasive effect (Anand & Sternthal, 1990; Shiv, Edell & Payne, 1997) of *Low Information-Symbolic EEBA*. This leads to the following proposition:

*Proposition 3: Organizational familiarity will moderate the association between Low Information-Symbolic EEBA*s and Job Pursuit Intentions such that the positive association will be greater when organizational familiarity is low.

Finally, when organizational familiarity is low, using *Low Information-Instrumental EEBA*s will lead to a mismatch in cognitive resources required and cognitive resources allocated for message processing. To elaborate, after exposure to this EEBA, job seekers would start to process the message peripherally as there is not enough detailed information to elicit central processing. Given the organization's low familiarity, these job seekers would have made fewer cognitive resources available to process the message and would thus tend to process peripherally. However, these activities contain instrumental information which requires central processing (Sirgy, Grewal & Mangleburg, 2000). Meyers-Levy & Malaviya (1999) argue that when cognitive resources allocated is less than the resources required to process the message, persuasion effect of the message would be diminished through superficial message processing. Additionally, job seekers may become disinterested and frustrated, generating negative thoughts and affects (Dens & Pelsmacker, 2010). This leads the prediction that for organizations with low organizational familiarity, this type of EEBA may not be as effective as *Low Information-Symbolic EEBA*.

*Proposition 4: Low Information-Symbolic EEBA*s will result in greater Job Pursuit Intentions among job seekers than *Low Information-Instrumental EEBA*, when organizational familiarity is low.

### **EFFECTIVENESS OF EEBA BASED ON OTHER (INDUSTRY, ORGANIZATION, AND INDIVIDUAL) CHARACTERISTICS**

While it is possible to use the same employer branding strategy for all employees, employer branding is not a 'one-size fits all' solution – in fact, as discussed in the previous section, effectiveness of EEBA

s may very well depend on how familiar jobseekers are with organizations. Other factors may also influence the effectiveness of EEBAs, and thus a brief discussion is warranted here that examines the various industry, organization and individual differences that can influence the success of EEBAs. First, I focus on the industry-level since industries differ in terms of opportunities, attributes, and adversities.

## **Industry Characteristics**

No two industry are the same and possess crucial differences that may render the EEBA's applicability in one industry meaningless in another. Recent research findings suggest that industries should identify the employer attributes that potential employees perceive to be attractive specific to the industry, and consequently design employer branding activities that are congruent with such perceptions. For instance, in healthcare, there exists high demand for qualified and trained workers, but this industry is also characterized by long work hours, health risks and high potential for employee burnouts. These factors together often drive the competition for skilled workers. In a recent paper, Koch-Rogge & Westerman (2021) found that for experienced healthcare professionals, symbolic attributes were more attractive than instrumental attributes, particularly those related to social aspects such as colleague quality and team/leadership culture. This suggests in this industry, employer branding messages should primarily contain symbolic information related to these aspects. The paper also noted the importance of increased organizational awareness and reputation among stakeholders. Based on the typology presented earlier, it can be surmised that in the healthcare industry, organizations should first audit how familiar they are among jobseekers, and based on that, determine whether to use High Information or Low Information EEBA's.

Another example of an industry that is service oriented is hospitality, but this industry is often negatively identified with characteristics such as labor shortage and high turnover due to employee dissatisfaction and low wages. Gehrels & de Looji (2011) surveyed hospitality decision makers and found instrumental attributes such as high wages and job security to be significant factors influencing employer attractiveness. Likewise, Shwaiger, Zehrer & Spiess (2022) found the instrumental attribute pay to be a significant factor influencing perceived hospitality industry attractiveness. Taken together, these findings indicate that organizations in the hospitality industry must differentiate themselves in terms of how much pay they offer jobseekers. In congruence with my typology, if an organization in the hospitality industry is well known among workers, then it may be prudent to use High Information-Instrumental EEBA's. In contrast, if the organization has low familiarity and awareness among stakeholders, then Low Information EEBA's should be used.

## **Organization Characteristics**

Very little research has examined how organization-level characteristics may influence the effectiveness of an organization's EEBA's. One of the relevant organization characteristics already mentioned in this paper is organizational familiarity. Three other characteristics are now discussed: corporate reputation, age and size of the organization. Propositions 1, 2 and 3 are applicable in these cases as well, since familiarity as a construct is distinct from but related to reputation, age, and size. Corporate reputation, defined as "a perceptual representation of a company's past actions and future prospects that describes the firm's overall appeal to its key constituents when compared to other leading rivals" (Fombrun, 1996: 72), is correlated with organizational familiarity since organizations with favorable reputations are likely to be prominent and hence receive greater public recognition (Rindova et al., 2005). Due to this positive correlation between these two constructs, it can be postulated that organizations with

high corporate reputation should use High Information-Instrumental EEBA, while Low Information-Symbolic EEBA should be used by organizations with comparatively lower reputation.

Likewise, it can be argued that an organization's familiarity varies with the age of the organization. A start-up organization is likely to be less known and prominent than an organization that has been doing business for some time. Clearly, a new venture will have low familiarity among stakeholders due to limited resources allocated towards advertising, low to no angel investment funds, unfamiliar product and/or services, etc. (Brooks, Heffner & Henderson, 2014). However, with the passage of time, the organization may gradually gain recognition and familiarity as it expands and matures, accompanied by increase in revenues to carry out advertising and promotional activities on a larger scale. Thus, following the logic established earlier, Low-Information Symbolic EEBA is appropriate for newer organizations with low visibility and awareness among stakeholders, while mature, older organizations should employ High Information-Instrumental EEBA.

The same arguments stand for organization size. Newer organizations, due to limited resources and capabilities, are limited in size and scope, thus having lower familiarity among stakeholders. In comparison, older, established organizations are likely to be larger in terms of their operations, consumer, and resource base, which would allow them to spend significant capital on promotional activities, experiment with newer products and/or services that consumers will value, etc. resulting in further expansion of the customer base. All these again suggest that smaller organizations should use Low Information-Symbolic EEBA, while High Information-Instrumental EEBA be used by larger organizations.

### **Individual Characteristics**

Admittedly, the best possible way to make EEBA effective would be to develop a core employer value proposition, and then customize the message to address individual job seeker's needs and preferences. However, research to-date has not explicitly focused on employer branding at this specific individual-level of analysis. From a practical standpoint, it is likely to become quite complex and prohibitively expensive for an organization to customize its employer branding message by taking into consideration individual job seeker's interests. For these reasons, EEBA are often designed to target a broad range of employees or worker groups. In this section I will elaborate on some examples of individual-level characteristics in terms of groups of individuals sharing certain common attributes.

A large proportion of first-time job seekers are Gen Zs and millennials, many of whom are recent college graduates, and studies have indicated these groups are greatly concerned with meaning in life and value work-life balance, ethical behavior, and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) (Sánchez-Hernández et al., 2019; Tirta & Erika, 2020). Therefore, when attracting potential applicants from these groups, organizations should include symbolic statements in their EEBA that highlight commitment to promotion of work-life balance such as flexible work schedules, and DEI initiatives. The symbolic information should also promote an organization's culture of accountability and respect, and the impact the organization has on society.

Another important group that must be mentioned are female job seekers. As of September 2022, women labor force participation was 58.4% (Roy, 2022). While women constitute a major portion of the labor force in the US, factors such as gender stereotypes, lack of work-life balance and mentorship opportunities, unequal pay, etc. hinder career progression (Rosette et al., 2016). These factors lead to dissatisfaction and de-motivation, and ultimately positively impacts turnover intentions among women. Organizations should develop EEBA's that appeal to women by including symbolizing information regarding how DEI is valued. The EEBA's can also showcase the stories and success of women leaders currently employed, and explicitly mention commitment to creating a culture of empowerment, respect, and inclusion. These EEBA's ultimately should help attract more female candidates, who are looking for employers that match their values, needs, and goals.

While this section illustrates several examples of industry, organization and individual-level characteristics that influence the success of an organization's EEBA initiatives, there are many other industry, organization and individual-level factors organizations must consider when attracting potential candidates. Future organizational research should explicitly identify these characteristics and build theory around them with testable hypotheses, and organizations can use the findings to holistically consider factors at all levels of analysis when formulating employer branding strategies.

## **CONCLUSION**

Recent research on recruitment has highlighted the importance of attracting human resources, asserting that organizations must use sound recruitment communication to win the "war for talent" (Chapman et al., 2005; Kwon & Jang, 2022). To attract employees, organizations must design effective employer branding strategies. This is an important issue because the success of different EEBA's may very well depend on the match and mismatch in cognitive processing of both information amount and attribute content in recruitment messages. Prior research investigated applicant attraction by developing different research streams that considered separately the amount of information and instrumental/symbolic attribute content in recruitment messages. Each research stream identified benefits and limitations related to attribute content and information amount; however, in this paper I proposed that a more complete understanding of the effectiveness of recruitment messages can be attained by considering the joint effects of both information amount and attribute content on employee attraction to organizations. This distinction is particularly important and relevant inasmuch as different levels of information and attribute content will differentially require either central or peripheral cognitive processing.

I therefore shifted attention to the cognitive processing of both information amount and attribute content in external employer branding activities and integrated these concepts to develop a typology of EEBA's. This is a novel contribution to recruitment literature because no other study to date has addressed the joint effects of both information amount and attribute content on applicant's job pursuit intentions. However, I theorized that not all EEBA's identified in the typology will be equally effective in this regard. Drawing on the ELM, I predicted that EEBA's that facilitate match in cognitive processing pathways should be able to significantly influence job pursuit behavior. I further argued that the effectiveness of these EEBA's may depend on job seeker's motivation to process the information – and as such, I discussed job seekers' familiarity

with the organization. Four propositions are put forth in this paper, but future research should develop testable hypotheses to empirically test these ideas. Relatedly, factors such as personal relevance, need for cognition, etc. may also influence motivation (Petty et al., 1987), which should be explored in future work. I also include a brief overview of various industry, organization, and individual-level characteristics that may influence the suitability of using the EEBA in my typology. I provided examples of some current research that has explored attribute content in recruitment messages in the context of healthcare and hospitality industries. Future research should look at how the EEBA developed here are applicable in other industries. For instance, in higher education, there exists variation in the type of information provided in recruitment messages for faculty and administrative positions. Research should identify the attributes that are valued by job seekers in these different jobs. Furthermore, job seekers may be more familiar with the industry in general than individual institutions of higher education, and this level of awareness may moderate the effectiveness of EEBA at an industry level of analysis – future research should explore this as well.

In my EEBA typology, I dichotomize the information amount dimension as either being high or low. Future research could expand this typology further by introducing an additional type containing intermediate amount of information, and how such information is processed cognitively. Research can also be carried out on how EEBA use of organizations evolve over time. For instance, the EEBA of new firms may be different from the ones used by established firms, because of variations in their level of awareness among job seekers. Research could explore whether the use of EEBA evolve over time as organizations grow and mature. On a similar note, studies could investigate changes in EEBA content due to corporate reputation damage. This can be seen as a form of impression management. For example, when facing a negative event that has potential detrimental ramifications for an organization, should the message content in the EEBA be altered to highlight more of the organization's positive attributes that are valued by job seekers? Would these changes be believable and would job seekers, having realized this manipulation had taken place, become more averse in their behavior and attitude towards the organization? These questions need to be addressed by taking into consideration changes in the perceived corporate reputation due to negative events.

Additionally, corporate reputation has been identified in literature as being a multi-dimensional construct (Fombrun, Gardberg & Sever, 2000). For instance, firm size, media visibility and financial performance were found to be antecedents to reputation. Future research could study other dimensions of this corporate reputation construct and how each of these dimensions moderate the effectiveness of different EEBA. Finally, research can explore whether after being exposed to EEBA, the nature of cognitive processing (Petty et al., 1987) predominately generate favorable versus unfavorable thoughts, and whether the attitude and belief change are relatively stable and enduring.

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