

RECRUITMENT BRAND EQUITY FOR UNKNOWN EMPLOYERS: EXAMINING THE
EFFECTS OF RECRUITMENT MESSAGE CLAIM VERIFIABILITY AND CREDIBILITY
ON JOB PURSUIT INTENTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Prior research on recruitment and employer brand equity has primarily drawn on the cognitive psychology perspective from the marketing brand equity literature to examine how recruitment practices and job seekers' perceptions of employer brand image impact recruitment outcomes. This perspective, however, provides little guidance for how unknown organizations can use recruitment messages to influence job seekers. This study draws from research on the search-experience framework, which uses an information economics approach to brand equity, to identify how recruitment claims from companies with no employer brand image shape job seekers' job pursuit intentions. Results from a within-subjects study with 197 participants showed that job seekers perceive differences in claim verifiability depending on the job or company attribute in the message. Further, job seekers' perceptions of claim verifiability are indirectly related to intentions to pursue the recruiting organization through perceived claim credibility. I discuss the theoretical and practical implications of these findings.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Julian E. Martinez-Moreno is an MS/PhD student in Human Resource Studies at the School of Industrial and Labor Relations at Cornell University. He earned an MBA from the Gies College of Business and a Master of Human Resources and Industrial Relations from the School of Labor and Employment Relations at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. His research interests include how recruitment outcomes are affected by job seekers' skepticism, beliefs about employment relationships, and beliefs about the recruitment process.

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Introduction

The initial stage of recruitment, in which companies look to attract job seekers and encourage them to submit applications, may be the most important stage of recruitment because success at this stage enables firms to build larger, more qualified applicant pools from which to select eventual employees (Baum, Schäfer, & Kabst, 2016; Collins & Han, 2004). In contrast, when job seekers do not develop an initial attraction to a recruiting organization, they essentially self-select out of the recruitment process before any formal interactions can occur (Allen, Mahto, & Otondo, 2007; Harold, Uggerslev, & Kraichy, 2013). Companies use recruitment messages to share information about job and company attributes that job seekers might find valuable in order to differentiate themselves from labor market competitors (Dineen, Van Hoye, Lievens, & Rosokha, 2019; Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). Thus, it is critical for researchers to identify how job seekers process recruitment messages during this initial stage and how these messages influence job seekers (Dineen & Williamson, 2012; Yu, 2019).

In the past decade, scholars have increasingly turned to theory and research from the field of marketing brand equity to identify the underlying psychological processes through which recruitment claims influence individual perceptions, behaviors, and choices (Baum & Kabst, 2014; Cable & Turban, 2001; Swider & Steed, 2021). While initial research on employer brand equity has enhanced our understanding of the role of early-stage recruitment practices and attribute perceptions, these studies have largely assumed that job seekers have some preexisting knowledge of the recruiting companies (Collins, 2007; Collins & Kanar, 2013). Further, prior studies have largely ignored the question of whether job seekers *believe* the content in a company's messages (Dineen et al., 2019; Gupta & Saini, 2020). These research gaps are surprising given that, during the initial stage of recruitment, job seekers frequently have limited

or no personal knowledge about job or company attributes for the majority of firms that may be recruiting them (Barber, 1998; Collins, 2007). This information gap is compounded by the fact that organizations may be incentivized to make claims that exaggerate or overemphasize positive job and company attributes in order to develop unique, desirable employment brands (Furnham & Palaïou, 2017; Yu, 2019). Combined, this leaves job seekers in the quandary of relying on recruitment message claims to evaluate interest in an employer while at the same time knowing that the company is potentially not sharing complete or accurate information with them.

This paper addresses this information asymmetry challenge by drawing from consumer brand marketing research on the search-experience framework that has examined how consumers process signals from product advertisement claims to narrow their consideration set for purchase decisions. Following the search-experience framework, scholars have argued that consumers rely on their perceptions of the extent to which an advertisement claim is verifiable to determine the extent to which they see the claim as credible (Ford, Smith, & Swasy, 1988; Jain & Posavac, 2001). Further, consumers develop stronger positive beliefs about a product and have higher purchase intentions when they believe that the marketing claim in an advertisement is credible (Erdem & Swait, 1998; Ford et al., 1988). Perceptions of verifiability and credibility developed based on advertising claims are particularly important factors for consumers when they know few actual product attributes and when there are potential incentives for advertisers to present overly positive messages about products' real attributes (Erdem & Swait, 1998).

I argue that the search-experience framework can enhance our understanding of how job seekers may evaluate recruitment message claims during the earliest stage of recruitment. Specifically, I draw on the search-experience framework to develop theoretical arguments regarding (1) the extent to which company claims about employment attributes can be verified,

(2) the relationship between recruitment message verifiability and credibility, and (3) the relationship between recruitment message verifiability and credibility and applicants' application intentions. I test these hypotheses using a within-subjects research design in which participants evaluated nine recruitment claims from unknown organizations.

Insert Figure 1 About Here

My theory development and findings make several practical and theoretical contributions to the literature on the first stage of recruitment. First, I draw on the search-experience framework to develop a theoretical model for how job seekers process information in recruitment messages in a context where they are experiencing the greatest level of information asymmetry – when they are evaluating unknown companies. Importantly, prior employer brand research has largely assumed job seekers are making comparisons between organizations where job and company attributes are known or has largely assumed that job seekers believe the content provided in recruitment claims. Second, my research is important because it reconceives job seekers not just as passive receivers of information, evaluating only the intended content of a given recruitment message claim (i.e., if they perceived the advertised attribute as valuable or attractive), but as actively making inferences about that information's quality (i.e., the extent to which the content is verifiable and can be trusted). This study suggests job seekers likely use perceptions of verifiability and resulting perceptions of credibility as signals regarding whether an unknown company presents an attractive job opportunity and to help them make decisions to invest effort in further pursuing employment at this organization. While prior recruitment research would suggest that job seekers are likely to ignore claims about specific job attributes

and be disinterested in companies that lack existing brand images (e.g., Collins, 2007), my findings suggest that unknown firms can influence job seekers' job pursuit intentions through recruitment message claims about attributes that are seen as more verifiable and credible.

Theory and Hypotheses

In response to calls for new theory to explain how job seekers make decisions during the first stage of recruitment, recruitment scholars turned to the marketing literature on consumer brand equity (i.e., the value of a brand to consumers) to develop an understanding of the cognitive processes that affect job seekers' job pursuit intentions (e.g., Cable & Turban, 2001; Collins & Stevens, 2002; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). Marketing brand equity research has frequently used a cognitive psychology lens to identify the cognitions and processes that consumers use to compare brands and determine relative attractiveness of different brands to which they are exposed (e.g., Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993). Importantly, consumers rely on cognitions regarding brand awareness and brand attributes to develop an overall brand image, which in turn influences their attraction to the company and purchase decisions (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993). Following this perspective, recruitment scholars have found evidence that job seekers' cognitions regarding brand awareness and brand attributes are significantly related to their attraction to organizations and job pursuit intentions (e.g., Baum & Kabst, 2014; Tumasjan, Kunze, Bruch & Welp, 2020; Yu, 2019).

While this body of research has enhanced our understanding of the cognitive processes that job seekers use to differentiate between recruiting organizations, these studies often treat job seekers as having awareness of most recruiting organizations and some level of understanding of important job and company attributes when developing alternative sets of employers to pursue for employment (Collins, 2007). However, job seekers typically have limited preexisting

perceptions about organizational or job attributes for most recruiting organizations during the first stage of recruitment and job search (Barber, 1998; Collins & Kanar, 2013), making them overly reliant on company-provided information to develop initial beliefs about and interest in recruiting organizations (Breugh, 2012; Collins, 2007). Because companies are incentivized to convey only positive information in order to attract applicants (Darnold & Rynes, 2013), job seekers face a dilemma in trying to decide which recruitment messages and information they can trust. This dilemma is particularly acute for individuals evaluating companies that are unknown – or have low employer brand awareness – because job seekers are unlikely to exert the effort to seek out or process detailed information about these organizations (Collins, 2007; Collins & Kanar, 2013).

Below, I draw on the search-experience framework from brand equity research to bring a new theoretical perspective to understanding how job seekers may process information in recruitment messages from unknown companies to develop initial job pursuit intentions. Unlike marketing brand equity theories, which are consumer-centric, the search-experience framework looks at both consumers and firms and emphasizes the information asymmetries created by their interactions (Erdem & Swait, 1998, 2016).

The Search-Experience Framework and Message Verifiability

Although the search-experience framework (Nelson, 1970, 1974) has been used and built upon by marketing scholars, it was developed in the economics of information literature—a subset of the economic theory of uncertainty focused on how information “possessors” and “seekers” cope with their informationally asymmetric relationship (Calfee & Ford, 1988; Hirshleifer, 1973). Information economists treat information much like a tangible commodity in that it can be produced, disseminated, and manipulated by market actors. More specifically, they

view information as something that has value and that can influence market actors' beliefs about engaging in market activity (e.g., "Buying this product is worthwhile because it is high quality"). As such, the field is concerned with how market actors determine what types of market information (e.g., quality, quantity, price) are valid and useful when making buying or selling decisions in various market contexts (e.g., conflicts of interest between shareholders and managers, the role of patents in technological markets).

The information economics perspective on marketing attempts to understand how consumers can gather credible information about firms and their offerings (Calfee & Ford, 1988) and views credibility as the main determinant of brand equity (Erdem & Swait, 2016). In line with this, the search-experience framework focuses on advertising contexts and looks at how consumers can gather credible information from signals in firms' advertisements. Consumers are routinely barraged by advertising claims about product attributes and quality from firms trying to convince them to buy their products (Aaker, 1991; Batra & Keller, 2016). However, consumers face considerable uncertainty because, unlike firms, they often lack direct, detailed knowledge on an advertised product's specific attributes (Swait & Erdem, 2007). Additionally, though advertising can inform consumers about product quality, firms are more interested in using advertising messages to generate sales (Nelson, 1974). Firms are thus incentivized to make advertising claims that only provide positive information about certain product attributes and at times may even stretch the truth about these attributes to boost sales (Swait & Erdem, 2007; Tirole, 1990). These issues leave consumers reliant on advertising claims as signals of unknown product attributes under conditions where they lack detailed information and are unsure of the extent to which they can believe claims made by different brands that are ostensibly offering identical products (Boulding & Kirmani, 1993; Colicev, Kumar, & O'Connor, 2019; Erdem &

Swait, 1998). This uncertainty is particularly high for unknown companies or companies with low brand awareness as consumers are unlikely to have personal experience with these companies that confirm or contradict the claims in the advertisement (Erdem & Swait, 1998).

The search-experience framework maintains consumers can potentially reduce this uncertainty by attempting to verify advertising claims about products and their attributes. Some claims, known as search claims, are about attributes that can be easily or quickly verified through additional sources without having to buy the product. For example, a claim about a car's price would be a search claim because the car's price can easily be verified by going to a car dealership and looking at the price of the car on the lot. Other claims, known as experience claims, are about attributes that are difficult to verify and may only be verified through personal purchase and use of the product (Ford, Smith, & Swasy, 1990; Jain, Buchanan, & Maheswaran, 2000; Swait & Erdem, 2007). For example, a claim about a car having good gas mileage would be an experience claim because verifying the claim may involve driving the car over long distances or even buying the car to see how it performs over several months or years.

When developing beliefs about whether a claim is search- or experience-oriented, consumers' draw on their perceptions of whether a claim can be verified (Erdem & Swait, 2016; Swait & Erdem, 2007). The extent to which a claim is perceived as verifiable can be influenced by the perceived costs a consumer associates with gathering and processing information to reduce uncertainty (Erdem & Swait, 1998; Ford et al., 1990; Weathers, Sharma & Wood, 2007). For example, costs associated with gathering or processing information can include time, money, and cognitive or psychological costs, and can be affected by the extent to which confirming information can be found in the marketplace without having to directly use the product (Erdem & Swait, 2016; Klein & Ford, 2003). Thus, claims that are easy to verify (i.e., search claims) are

those where consumers perceive that they can easily, or with relatively low investment in time and effort, find information that confirms or contradicts the claim (Jain et al., 2000; Klein & Ford, 2003). In contrast, claims that are difficult to verify (i.e., experience claims) are those where consumers believe that it would be difficult or too costly to confirm or refute the claim without actually purchasing and using the product for themselves (Jain et al., 2000; Klein & Ford, 2003). For example, an advertising claim about the price of a truck would be easy to verify (i.e., a search claim) by looking at a dealership's website, but a claim about the truck's offroading performance would be difficult to verify without using or owning the truck (i.e., an experience claim) because performance might vary based on offroad conditions or consumers may have different performance demands.

Similarly, I argue that recruitment message claims can be thought of as search- or experience-oriented, such that recruitment claims about some job or company attributes could be easily verified and others would be difficult to verify before actually accepting a job offer and starting to work for the organization. For example, recruitment message claims about attributes such as location or starting pay would be easy to verify based on market information or a quick web search. In contrast, message claims about attributes like leadership style or the extent to which work is interesting are likely to be difficult to verify before starting work, as these attributes are likely to vary considerably even within the same company because of the idiosyncratic nature of managers, team members, the work completed in a specific role, or even personal preferences or subjective evaluations of the job or company. While job seekers might find some general information about this latter set of attributes, it would be hard to confirm that they would exist for a specific role. Therefore, I argue that job seekers are likely to perceive differences in the extent to which attribute claims can be verified.

Further, as is the case with consumers, job seekers' perceptions of the verifiability of a recruitment claim are influenced by the perceived costs that they associate with gathering and processing information to reduce uncertainty. Recruitment claims about some job and company attributes are likely perceived as easier to verify because job seekers believe they can easily, or with relatively low investment in time and effort, find information that confirms or contradicts those claims. Recruitment claims about other attributes are likely perceived as harder to verify because job seekers believe doing so cannot be done without incurring greater information-gathering costs, such as engaging more directly with the organization (e.g., interviewing with the company, visiting the workplace). As such, I argue that job seekers will perceive that recruitment message claims vary from high-to-low in terms of verifiability.

Hypothesis 1: Recruitment message claims will vary in their level of perceived verifiability.

Recruitment Message Claim Verifiability and Credibility

Following the search-experience framework, marketing scholars have argued that variations in consumers' perceptions of advertising claim verifiability impact their evaluations of advertisement credibility (Erdem & Swait, 2016; Jain & Posavac, 2001). Credibility has been broadly defined as the extent to which individuals perceive a communicator as having both the willingness and ability to tell the truth (Schlosser, 2011; Pornpitakpan, 2004). Prior marketing research has found that consumers' perceptions of the trustworthiness of a claim (i.e., motivation of the company to be truthful about the claim) is more important than expertise (i.e., the company's ability to deliver on the claim) for brand consideration and choice (e.g., Erdem & Swait, 2016). Thus, researchers have pointed to the believability or trustworthiness of the information communicated in an advertising claim as the key aspect of credibility (Swait &

Erdem, 2007; Schlosser, 2011). Particularly when they have little prior exposure to a company or its products, consumers rely on signals from advertising messages to decide the extent to which they can believe the content of the claim (Ford et al., 1990; Jain & Posovac, 2001). However, consumers are often skeptical of advertising claims because they are aware that advertising companies have an incentive to stretch the truth or potentially present untrue information (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Sen & Lerman, 2007). Consumers are more likely to distrust advertising claims if they believe that the company is motivated or incentivized to stretch the truth in their claims (Franke, Huhmann, & Mothersbaugh, 2004; Kirmani & Wright, 1989). In contrast, consumers are likely to believe that a message is credible when they believe that the advertising organization has little incentive to lie (Franke et al., 2004).

Importantly, consumers' perceptions of the verifiability of an attribute claim serve as a key signal that can be interpreted to inform their beliefs about the credibility of the claim (Erdem & Swait, 2004; Jain et al., 2000). From the consumer's perspective, the costs associated with verifying a search claim are so low that the claim can be easily verified prior to purchase (Jain & Posovac, 2001). Perceptions of claim verifiability reduce uncertainty about the attribute's existence and remove incentives for the company to lie or exaggerate claims given that consumers could easily disprove false search claims (Jain & Posovac, 2001). Since claims about search attributes are seen as easily verified, consumers see these types of claims as highly credible because the company has little incentive to lie about the claim (Jain et al., 2000). In contrast, consumer skepticism is greater when pre-purchase information is harder and costlier to evaluate (Franke et al., 2004; Jain & Posovac, 2001). Additionally, the inability to verify claims about experience attributes creates an incentive for companies to exaggerate in order to generate

positive attitudes and sales, leading consumers to view difficult to verify claims as less credible relative to claims that are more easily verified (Ford et al., 1990; Jain et al., 2000).

As is the case with products, employers are concerned with generating positive attitudes and applications and may be incentivized to make exaggerated or false claims because job seekers cannot verify them prior to employment (Barber, 1998). Indeed, job seekers are likely aware of recruitment advertising's persuasive intent and organizational hiring incentives, so they are unlikely to view experience attribute claims as particularly trustworthy (Cable et al., 2000; Fisher, Ilgen, & Hoyer, 1979). Following arguments from the search-experience framework, I argue that job seekers are likely to believe that recruiting companies have a lower incentive to stretch the truth on claims when those claims can be verified with little to no effort. Because companies could easily be caught providing false information about attributes that are easily verified through a quick search of available market information, job seekers are more likely to believe that companies are compelled to provide fully accurate information about these attributes. Thus, job seekers are likely to perceive claims as more credible when they perceive those claims as highly verifiable. In contrast, following the search-experience framework, job seekers are likely to see recruitment message claims as having low credibility when it would be difficult or costly for job seekers to verify the attributes in the recruitment claim.

Hypothesis 2: The perceived verifiability of recruitment message claims will be positively associated with their perceived credibility.

Credibility and Job Pursuit Intentions

In product markets with many potential purchase options, consumers are seeking to reduce the total number of options to choose from and to reduce risk associated with a bad purchase decision (Dowling & Staelin, 1994; Robertson, Zielinski, & Ward, 1984). To reduce

the cognitive load required to evaluate many potential options, consumers use perceptions of claim credibility as a signal of overall product quality and to determine which products to move along to a final consideration set (Erdem & Swait, 2016; Swait & Erdem, 2007). Specifically, perceptions of credibility reinforce consumers' belief that the valued attribute being advertised will exist, making them believe that the brand is of a higher value relative to other products in the market with less credible advertising claims (Hauser & Wernerfelt, 1990). In addition, consumers rely on their perceptions of advertising's credibility as a signal of the presence of other potentially valuable product attributes that were not conveyed via advertising (Erdem & Swait, 2004, 2016). In combination, positive perceptions of advertising claim credibility lead to lower perceptions of risks occurring after purchase, increase consumer confidence that a purchase will be worthwhile, and increase the likelihood it will be placed in the final consideration set (Srinivasan & Ratchford, 1991).

Job seekers also look to narrow down the vast number of potential employers to a smaller set of organizations worth actively pursuing (Barber, 1998). Because of the cognitive effort required to fully evaluate all potential outcomes, job seekers use heuristics to quickly eliminate potential employers and to limit risk associated with pursuing employment opportunities based on incorrect information (Collins & Stevens, 2002; Rynes, 1991). Following research on the search-experience framework, job seekers are more likely to believe that the attribute in a recruitment message claim exists when they see the claim as being credible. Thus, perceived credibility of a recruitment message claim should increase job seekers' attraction to the recruiting organization. Further, job seekers are likely to draw on their perceptions of recruitment message claim credibility as a signal of the potential presence of other valued job or company attributes. Thus, credibility should increase job seekers' overall perceptions of the quality of the

job opportunity (i.e., beliefs that more positive attributes exist) and should decrease their perceived risk in pursuing the opportunity. In contrast, if they believe that the claim is not credible, they will believe the attribute being advertised does not exist and likely see this as a signal that other valued attributes also do not exist, leading them to see the recruiting organization as risky and not worth pursuing further.

There is some existing research in the field of recruitment that supports a relationship between message credibility and job search and recruitment outcomes. For example, Baum et al. (2016) found that perceptions of recruitment message credibility were positively related to job seeker attraction to the recruiting organizations. Similarly, Gupta and Saini (2020) found that potential job seekers had more positive employer brand beliefs and higher intentions to apply when they saw a recruitment source as more credible. While these studies did not draw on the search-experience framework, their findings support my argument that job seekers use their perceptions of a recruitment message claim's credibility as a heuristic to help them quickly make decisions about which companies to potentially pursue during the first stage of recruitment.

Hypothesis 3: The perceived credibility of recruitment message claims will be positively associated with job pursuit intentions.

Indirect Effects of Verifiability

As previously detailed, product advertising claims perceived as more verifiable are seen as more credible than claims that are seen as not easily verified. Further, when consumers see a product advertising claim as being more credible, they are likely to keep the product in their final consideration set, perceive the overall brand as more attractive, and be more likely to see the brand as lower in risk and higher in quality. Thus, product advertising claim verifiability is indirectly related to brand attraction, perceptions of quality, and purchase intentions through its

effect on consumers' perceptions of the credibility of the message. Following this, I argue job seekers' perceptions of the verifiability of a recruitment message claim will be positively related to job pursuit intentions through its positive relationship with perceived claim credibility.

Hypothesis 4: The perceived credibility of recruitment message claims will mediate the relationship between recruitment message claim verifiability and job pursuit intentions.

Method

Study Design and Procedure

In this study, I used a within-subjects design in which participants reacted to nine different recruitment message claims about various job and company attributes. Unlike between-person designs in which participants only react to one of several conditions, within-person designs expose participants to all study conditions. As such, any biases or individual differences that participants may have (e.g., the propensity to see all claims as more verifiable) are held constant across all conditions. This design is also advantageous because it allows researchers to control for individual-level effects, reducing the likelihood that individual differences will confound the observed relationships between variables of interest (Montoya, 2019; Sun, Song, & Lim, 2013). Within-subjects designs enable researchers to statistically separate within- and between-person effects which is important because these effects are often conflated in between-person designs, resulting in biased effect estimates (Rockwood, 2017; Zhang, Zyphur, & Preacher, 2009). Further, prior research has argued that within-subjects designs, in which job seekers evaluate multiple companies, more closely represent the actual decision-making process of the first stage of recruitment (Collins & Stevens, 2002; Collins, 2007).

Following prior recruitment research that has used within-subjects designs (e.g., Collins & Stevens, 2002; Collins, 2007), I limited the total number of claims that participants evaluated

to reduce fatigue and increase participant focus. I started the process of identifying potential attributes by reviewing seminal works on employer brand equity and the initial phase of recruitment that identified job and company attributes that match with brand image dimensions seen as key for driving job pursuit intentions (e.g., Cable & Turban, 2001; Collins & Stevens, 2002, Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). I ultimately chose nine attributes that have been found to be related to recruitment outcomes during the first phase of recruitment and job search, including: compensation (e.g., Cable & Graham, 2000), location (e.g., Rynes & Lawler, 1983), corporate social responsibility practices (e.g., Jones, Willness, & Madey, 2014), career advancement opportunities (e.g., Aiman-Smith, Bauer, & Cable, 2001), training opportunities (e.g., Cable & Graham, 2000), treatment from supervisor (e.g., Breaugh, 2017), inclusive work environment (e.g., Darnold & Rynes, 2013), work-life balance (e.g., Firfiray & Mayo, 2017), and interesting work (e.g., Trank, Rynes, & Bretz, 2002).

Importantly, I also chose this set of nine job or company attributes because they would likely vary in the extent to which it would be easy or difficult for job seekers to verify them. For example, some of the attributes (e.g., compensation, company location) could be easily verified through a quick online search of company, recruitment, or social media websites. In contrast, other attributes (e.g., treatment from supervisor, interesting work) would be difficult to verify until actually starting work for the company, as these attributes are likely to vary significantly given the idiosyncratic nature of work for different jobs within a company. That is, job seekers might find some general information on these attributes, but it would be challenging to verify the extent to which these attributes would exist for a specific role before starting in a specific job at the organization because these attributes are likely to differ based on the manager, work team, specific tasks, or other idiosyncrasies for the role.

Participants were asked to complete an online survey about how people react to the claims made in advertised job opportunities. Participants were told they would be shown a single, real claim made in a real company's job advertisement, describing either the job opportunity being advertised or the company itself. They were then told that they would be asked to answer questions about their reactions to that claim and be asked to do this nine times in total, for nine different companies. Upon starting the survey, participants were told, "The following is a real claim made in a job advertisement by a real company currently recruiting on campus. The company name was changed to protect its identity. Please read it carefully, then answer the questions once they appear." Claims (e.g., "At Alpha Co., we provide employees with a total compensation package that is well above the industry average.") were presented one at a time in a randomized order (see Appendix A for specific wording). Each claim was shown by itself for a total of 10 seconds before measures for recruitment message claim verifiability, claim credibility, and job pursuit intentions appeared on screen. I chose to use fictitious names to create a context where participants would have no prior knowledge or brand perceptions of the recruiting company, enabling me to examine the potential effects of recruitment message claim verifiability and credibility on job seekers' evaluations of companies to which they had no prior exposure or awareness of as an employer.

Sample

I recruited juniors, seniors, and graduate students at a large northeastern university through online advertisements and in-class presentations. A total of 215 respondents participated in the study. Participants were screened to ensure they were actively in the process of looking for a job ("Are you currently looking for a full-time job?"; "Are you currently looking for an internship?"). Eighteen individuals indicated they were not actively searching for a full-time job

or internship, so I excluded their responses from the analyses. The final sample consisted of 197 participants. The majority of respondents identified as female (78%) and Asian, South Asian, or Pacific Islander (51%). 57% of participants were undergraduates, and 42% were graduate students in various programs (e.g., MBA, PhD, assorted professional Masters). The average age of respondents was 23.2 (SD=4.87).

Measures

Recruitment message claim verifiability. Claim verifiability has not been measured in prior studies on recruitment, so I turned to research in marketing to help me develop a new measure of recruitment message claim verifiability. Prior studies on the search-experience framework have conceptualized search/experience claims as ranging from low to high on a continuum of difficulty in confirming the message claim prior to buying the product. Measures of verifiability of product claims have focused on the extent to which they can be evaluated pre- or post- purchase (e.g., Ford et al., 1990; Jain et al., 2000) or the ease/difficulty and potential cost of verifying claims prior to actual purchase and use (e.g., Franke et al., 2004; Rao & Bergen, 1992). Drawing on these theoretical arguments and measures, I argue that a measure of recruitment message verifiability should be continuous and needs to assess ease/difficulty of confirming the message content and the ability to evaluate prior to working for the organization. Following this logic, I developed a new four-item measure to assess job seekers' perceptions of recruitment message claim verifiability ("It would be easy for me to verify this claim", 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree; "How easy or difficult would it be to verify this claim?", 1 = very difficult, 5 = very easy; "There is no way I could verify this claim unless I worked at the company (reverse coded)", 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree; "How much effort would it take to verify this claim?", 1 = very much effort, 5 = very little effort). The scale showed good

reliability ($\alpha = .89$). Further, as discussed below, confirmatory factor analyses provided additional support of construct validity.

Recruitment message claim credibility. I measured recruitment message claim credibility with three items that I adapted from prior studies (Fisher et al., 1979; Coleman & Irving, 1997). Participants evaluated the three items (See Appendix B) based on a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The measure showed good reliability ($\alpha = .81$).

Job pursuit intentions. I measured job pursuit intentions with a four-item scale from Aiman-Smith et al. (2001). A sample item includes “I would attempt to gain an interview with this company.” Items were rated on a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) and can be found in Appendix B. The measure showed good reliability ($\alpha = .90$).

Factor Structure

To assess the fit of my proposed model and establish discriminant validity among my four theoretical constructs, I conducted a series of confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) using *jamovi* version 1.63. The hypothesized three-factor model – including verifiability, credibility, and job pursuit intentions – yielded good fit to the data (CFI = .97, RMSEA = .08, SRMR = .04). All items loaded ($>.55$) significantly onto their respective factors. As an additional test to ensure that verifiability and credibility items were measuring distinct constructs, I conducted a two-factor model loading them onto the same factor. I found this model to have worse fit than the proposed three-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2(2) = 1085.3, p < .001$; CFI = .88, RMSEA = .14, SRMR = .07), with the credibility items demonstrating weak correlations with the combined factor ($<.55$). This indicates that the verifiability and credibility items are in fact measuring distinct constructs. Finally, since data were collected from a single source, I also tested for the effects of common method variance by conducting a CFA with all items loaded onto one factor. This one-factor fit

the data poorly (CFI = .54, RMSEA = .23, SRMR = .19) and demonstrated significantly worse fit than the hypothesized three-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2(3) = 5345, p < .001$). As an additional test for possible multicollinearity due to a single rater, I computed VIF values and found that none fell above 2, indicating no issues with multicollinearity in the data.

Analyses and Results

Means, standard deviations, and correlations are presented in Table 1.

Insert Tables 1 & 2 About Here

In Hypothesis 1, I predicted that recruitment message claims would vary in their perceived verifiability. To test this hypothesis, I conducted a repeated measures ANOVA with claim as the within-subjects factor. Using the Huynh-Feldt correction, I found support for my hypothesis that participants perceive differences in verifiability across recruitment claims [$F(7.161, 1303.348) = 110.739, p < .01, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .378$]. To further analyze the variation between claims, I conducted a set of planned deviation contrasts to identify claims that were much more or much less verifiable than others. As shown in Table 2, I found that seven of the nine claims significantly diverged from the grand mean of verifiability ($M=2.94$). Recruitment message claims related to location ($M=4.29$), compensation ($M=3.20$), and training opportunities ($M=3.05$) demonstrated significantly higher verifiability than average (for location: $F(1, 182) = 668.675, p < .01, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .786$; for compensation: $F(1, 182) = 16.253, p < .01, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .082$; for training opportunities, $F(1, 182) = 4.068, p < .05, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .022$). Conversely, the recruitment message claims about CSR practices ($M=2.83$), interesting work ($M=2.58$), inclusive work environment ($M=2.32$), and treatment from supervisor ($M=2.31$) were perceived as

significantly less verifiable than average (for CSR practices: $F(1, 182) = 4.038, p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .022$; for interesting work: $F(1, 182) = 75.052, p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .292$; for inclusive work environment: $F(1, 182) = 144.138, p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .442$; for treatment from supervisor: $F(1, 182) = 188.43, p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .509$). Claims about work-life balance ($M=2.97$) and advancement opportunities ($M=2.93$) did not differ significantly from the grand mean of verifiability. Overall, I found strong support for my hypothesis that job seekers will perceive significant differences in the verifiability of different recruitment messages.

In order to partial out bias created by my research design, I conducted multilevel analyses using the *MLmed* macro in SPSS to test Hypotheses 2-4 (Rockwood, 2017; Rockwood & Hayes, 2017). As noted above, study participants rated nine recruitment message claims; thus, the data is multi-level in nature with ratings of individual-level variables for each of the nine conditions nested within each participant (i.e., a 1-1-1 multilevel model). Multilevel analysis decomposes the examined relationships into within-person and between-person components and thus eliminates bias in effect estimates from the conflation of within- and between-effects (Rockwood, 2017; Zhang, Zyphur, & Preacher, 2009). Additionally, *MLmed* tests all indirect effects with Monte Carlo simulations generating 95% confidence intervals (CIs) using 10,000 resamples, which helps further reduce error rate and bias in multilevel mediation estimates (Rockwood & Hayes, 2017). I also included all random intercepts and slopes that were identified as a best fit to the data based on AIC and BIC values in order to increase the precision of my estimates (Barr, Levy, Scheepers, & Tily, 2013). I employed restricted maximum likelihood (REML) estimation to estimate model parameters.

In a 1-1-1 multilevel model, the within-person effects provide insight on the Level 1 relationships (i.e., the extent to which variables within a condition are related to one another). To

estimate within-person effects, *MLmed* person-mean centers Level 1 independent variables and mediators – in this case verifiability and credibility – by subtracting the participants’ personal mean (e.g., the mean verifiability each participant perceives across the nine recruitment claims) from their rating for each specific claim (e.g., the verifiability they perceive for any single claim). The within-person effects specify the extent to which participants’ person-centered evaluation of an independent variable (e.g., perception of verifiability for condition 1 minus their overall mean for verifiability across conditions) is related to their person-centered evaluation of another variable of interest (e.g., perception of credibility for condition 1 minus their overall mean for credibility across conditions). Thus, this within-person centering technique allows for controlling bias in effect sizes created by individual differences (e.g., propensity to see all recruitment messages as more verifiable) and offers the best test of the proposed hypotheses.

In contrast, between-person effects provide insight on Level 2 relationships (i.e., the extent to which persistent differences across variables between participants are related to outcomes of interest). To estimate between-person effects, *MLmed* enters person-means (e.g., a job seeker’s mean perceived verifiability across all nine claims) at Level 2. Thus, this study’s between-person effects specify the extent to which a job seeker’s mean evaluation of all nine claims deviates from the grand mean (i.e., mean across all participants in the study). Importantly, by controlling for the between-person effects in the analyses, it becomes possible to account for variance that may be the result of common method variance issues related to respondents assessing variables of interest in a single survey (e.g., positive affectivity, social desirability, acquiescent participant response style). In effect, the underlying issues from having a single respondent evaluate all of the measures at a single point in time are captured in the between-person effects, helping to reduce concerns about common method variance issues for the within-

person results. Results at both levels of analysis are reported in the tables; however, within-person results are discussed in this section as they more accurately reflect my hypotheses.

Between-person results are discussed in the supplementary analyses section.

Insert Figure 2 & Table 3 About Here

Table 3 shows the direct and indirect effects of verifiability and credibility on job seeker attraction and job pursuit intentions. In support of Hypothesis 2, I found the perceived verifiability of recruitment message claims was positively associated with perceived credibility (within: $B = .44$, $SE = .02$, $p < .01$, $LLCI = .41$, $ULCI = .48$). This suggests that when a job seeker perceives a particular claim as more verifiable than they typically perceive claims, they will also perceive that claim as being especially credible.

In support of Hypothesis 3, I found the perceived credibility of recruitment message claims was positively associated with job pursuit intentions (within: $B = .22$, $SE = .03$, $p < .01$, $LLCI = .16$, $ULCI = .29$). This suggests that when a job seeker perceives a particular claim as more credible than they typically perceive claims, they will be more likely to be attracted to and pursue the job associated with that claim.

In support of Hypothesis 4, I found the perceived credibility of recruitment message claims fully mediated the relationship between verifiability and job pursuit intentions (within: $B = .10$, $SE = .02$, $p < .01$, $LLCI = .07$, $ULCI = .13$). These results suggest full support for the proposed mediation model and indicate that verifiability influences job pursuit intentions through credibility, such that individuals are more likely to pursue jobs associated with claims they view as especially verifiable (and thus especially credible).

Supplementary Analyses

As noted previously, *MLmed* estimates between-person effects by entering person-means (e.g., a job seeker's mean perceived verifiability across all nine claims) at Level 2. As such, this study's between-person effects specify the extent to which a job seeker's mean evaluation of all nine claims deviates from the grand mean (i.e., mean across all participants in the study). Results indicated the perceived verifiability of recruitment message claims was positively associated with perceived credibility at the between-person level (between: $B = .45$, $SE = .05$, $p < .01$, $LLCI = .35$, $ULCI = .56$). This suggests that when a job seeker tends to perceive claims as more verifiable than other job seekers do, they will also tend to perceive claims as being more credible. The perceived credibility of recruitment message claims was also positively associated with job pursuit intentions at the between-level (between: $B = .30$, $SE = .11$, $p < .01$, $LLCI = .09$, $ULCI = .51$). This suggests that when a job seeker tends to perceive claims as more credible than other job seekers typically perceive claims, they will be more likely to pursue jobs associated with those claims. Finally, between-level results indicated the perceived credibility of recruitment message claims fully mediated the relationship between verifiability and job pursuit intentions (between: $B = .14$, $SE = .05$, $p < .01$, $LLCI = .04$, $ULCI = .24$). These results suggest full support for the proposed mediation model at the between-person level and indicate that verifiability influences job pursuit intentions through credibility, such that when a job seeker tends to view claims as more verifiable (and thus more credible) than others do, they will be more likely to pursue jobs associated with those claims.

Discussion

Theoretical and Practical Implications

In this study, I drew on the search-experience framework from the information economics approach on marketing brand equity to investigate how recruitment message claim verifiability and credibility are related to job seekers' job pursuit intentions. Prior recruitment research that has drawn on marketing brand equity has predominantly drawn from psychology to identify the role of recruitment practices in building job seekers' beliefs about job and company attributes but has mostly ignored the information asymmetry that exists at this stage of recruitment. During the first phase of recruitment, job seekers have limited knowledge about recruiting companies and understand that these organizations potentially have incentives to mislead them about job or company attributes in recruitment messages (Barber, 1998). The issue of information asymmetry is particularly pronounced for organizations with low or no brand awareness in the minds of job seekers. Importantly, job seekers see organizations with unknown employer brands as risky, less likely to have positive job attributes, and less attractive job opportunities (e.g., Cable & Turban, 2001; Collins & Stevens, 2002). Further, job seekers are unlikely to exert effort to actively search for information about organizations for which they have no prior awareness (Collins, 2007). Given these challenges, new theoretical perspectives may help us to identify what types of recruitment message claims might be effective in building initial job pursuit intentions that would lead job seekers to potentially seek additional information and potentially apply to organizations for which they were previously unaware.

In line with theory and findings from the marketing literature on information asymmetry and the search-experience framework, I found that job seekers perceive recruitment message claims as varying in the extent to which they can be verified. My findings suggest that job seekers see some recruitment message claims as being search-oriented (i.e., requiring little effort or cost to verify) and other claims as experience-oriented (i.e., difficult or requiring extensive

effort to verify). Thus, as is the case with consumers evaluating product claims, job seekers seem to differentiate claims based on the extent to which they feel the claim is verifiable. Prior recruitment research has argued and found that companies with low or no prior brand awareness in the minds of job seekers can enhance applicant job pursuit intentions through low involvement recruitment practices – messaging techniques that provide information about valued job and company attributes in ways that require low processing and search effort on the part of job seekers (e.g., Collins & Han, 2004; Collins, 2007). This prior research, however, did not directly examine the specific content of recruitment messages or the extent to which this information was verifiable. Given that job seekers see differences in the verifiability of a message depending on the job or company attributes that are mentioned, future research should examine if low involvement recruitment practices vary in effectiveness depending on what attributes are mentioned in the message.

To that point, my findings suggest that recruitment claim verifiability matters because it is related to job seekers' perceptions of claim credibility and resulting levels of initial intentions to pursue employment with the recruiting organization. When job seekers perceive a specific claim as more (or less) verifiable than they see the average recruitment claim, they will also perceive it as being more (or less) credible. Following the logic of the search-experience framework, this finding suggests that job seekers rely on their perceptions of the verifiability of a claim as a signal as to whether the claim can be trusted. Potentially, job seekers are more likely to see easily verifiable claims as more credible because these types of search-oriented claims could be easily tested, reducing the incentive for firms to lie or stretch the truth. In contrast, job seekers seem less willing to believe experience-oriented claims because organizations may be

more likely to exaggerate or lie about claims that are difficult or nearly impossible to verify without extensive interactions.

I also found that recruitment message claim credibility mediates the relationship between a claim's perceived verifiability and job seekers' job pursuit intentions. In line with the search-experience framework, this suggests that job seekers use their perceptions of the credibility of a claim as a signal about the overall quality of the job opportunity at the recruiting organization. That is, claim credibility may serve as a signal that the attribute highlighted in the claim exists and potentially that other valued attributes exist. Through this process, credible recruitment claims increase job seekers' motivation to further pursue information about employment opportunities at the recruiting organization. As such, unknown employers should focus on promoting verifiable attributes (e.g., location, compensation practices, and training opportunities) instead of attributes that are less verifiable and may be seen as less believable.

Interestingly, unhypothesized findings at the between-person level showed that job seekers that tend to perceive all claims as more verifiable than other job seekers also tend to perceive them as more credible. This points towards the possibility that job seekers have different baselines for how verifiable they tend to evaluate all claims on average and suggests these differences are driven by individual difference characteristics. This would be consistent with the basic logic of the search experience framework which suggests perceptions of claim verifiability may be affected by individual differences such as prior knowledge or access to particular channels of information (Ford et al., 1990). In product contexts, consumers who consider themselves knowledgeable or effective at information search may not think verification is particularly costly and, compared to less knowledgeable consumers, may tend to search more efficiently (Johnson & Russo, 1984), process new information more easily (Brucks, 1985), and

thus interpret more advertising claims as verifiable (Ford et al., 1988). Future research should investigate whether similar relationships exist in job search contexts. It may be that prior knowledge or job search self-efficacy (i.e., beliefs about one's capacity for performing the required behaviors for attaining employment; Kanfer & Hulin, 1985) affect perceptions of claim verifiability for job seekers. For example, job seekers that consider themselves particularly efficacious at job search might qualify salary information as a search claim given the plethora of salary databases available over the internet. However, job seekers low in job search self-efficacy may believe that verifying salary information is considerably more difficult for a number of reasons. A lack of job-, firm-, industry-, or region-specific salary data might make verifying a salary-based claim impossible. Alternatively, they may lack the skill or knowledge necessary for personally engaging in information search. Thus, they might interpret salary claims as experience claims because they are unable to personally verify the claim prior to entering an employment relationship.

Between-person findings also revealed that when a job seeker tends to perceive all claims as more credible than other job seekers do, they will be more likely to pursue the jobs associated with those claims. Future research might look at why some job seekers tend to perceive all claims as being more credible. It may be that less experienced workers, for example, have less reason to doubt what employers say so accept all recruitment message claims as more credible. In contrast, their more experienced counterparts may be more skeptical because they can draw on more examples from throughout their work history of job attributes being misrepresented or employers not being entirely truthful. If such relationships are driven by individual differences like these, future research might also look at what companies can do to overcome increased skepticism.

One variable that might explain differing baselines in verifiability and credibility perceptions is persuasion knowledge, or one's knowledge about how others try to influence their attitudes and behaviors and how to respond to persuasion attempts (Campbell & Kirmani, 2008). Persuasion knowledge is thought to be an individual difference variable that can be updated and refined over time, but it can also be "activated" by or accessed during persuasion attempts and either help individuals extract information relevant to their goals or lead to greater skepticism (Bearden, Hardesty, & Rose, 2001; Friestad & Wright, 1994). If recruitment message claims are enough to activate job seekers' persuasion knowledge, then differences in job seekers' proclivity to interpret claims as helpful or deceitful could account for differing baselines in verifiability and credibility perceptions.

Future recruitment research should investigate the impact that job seekers' persuasion knowledge has on perceptions of verifiability and credibility. Such research could help us answer important questions like why some companies have difficulty attracting applicants despite making verifiable claims. For example, one form of persuasion knowledge might be job seekers' beliefs about what recruitment tactics are appropriate (i.e., whether it is right or wrong to use a tactic, even if it works). The growing societal interest in diversity and inclusion may lead some job seekers to believe that companies use diversity-related recruitment messages not because they are committed to equality but because they want to attract as many applicants as possible. Believing this tactic to be inappropriate, these job seekers could possibly view all other recruitment message claims as less credible, even if those claims are perceived as verifiable.

My findings regarding the relationships between verifiability, credibility, and job pursuit intentions differ from much of the early research on recruitment, employer brands, and applicant attraction. Early work on employer branding provided evidence that job seekers are more

attracted to companies for which they have high awareness and that they perceive as having positive attributes. Following from this, researchers have argued that companies can attract more applicants and increase their applicant pools through recruitment practices that convey information about job and company attributes, as these are likely to positively enhance brand image (e.g., Tumasjan et al., 2020; Yu, 2019). My findings, however, suggest that recruitment claims are more likely to positively impact job seekers when they contain information about job or company attributes that are seen as easily verified and more credible. Thus, compared to prior research, my findings suggest that not all attributes are equally useful for swaying job seekers' perceptions during the first phase of recruitment, and companies – particularly those that are unknown or have low brand awareness – might have more success in building their applicant pool by communicating about attributes seen as more easily verified by job seekers.

My findings also differ from past research on the credibility of recruitment practices. While prior research has similarly found that credibility is an important factor that mediates the impact of recruitment messages on applicant job pursuit intentions, these prior studies have examined the credibility of the source of the message claim. For example, prior research has suggested that recruitment messages may be seen as more credible when they come from non-company rather than company sources (Dineen et al., 2019), from employees rather than corporate advertising (Gupta & Saini, 2020), or from hiring managers rather than recruiters (Breugh, 2012). In contrast, I found that job seekers' perceptions of credibility are also dependent on the content of what is communicated. By controlling for communication source (company) and medium (text recruitment ads), I showed that job seekers' perceptions of message credibility are also dependent on their perceptions of the verifiability of the attribute in the recruitment message. Future research examining both source of information and verifiability of

the content of the message could provide more insights regarding what information from what sources might be the best combination for influencing applicants during the first phase of recruitment.

Given prior research and theory on recruitment and job seeker perceptions, it is surprising that job seekers in this study perceived differences in claim credibility and that these differences were related to differing perceptions of job pursuit intentions. For example, relative to information from non-company sources, job seekers tend to discount information provided directly from a company because companies are incentivized to self-promote their employer brand (Dineen et al., 2019). Further, simple text, relative to richer forms of content delivery (e.g., web messages with pictures and graphics), may also be seen as less credible because it contains no additional signaling functions that support the message in the claim (Cable & Yu, 2006; Dineen et al., 2019). In contrast to this previous research, this study indicates that claims made by unknown companies are not uniformly lacking in credibility and that job seekers' perceptions of credibility are, at least in part, dependent on the extent to which the claim is seen as verifiable. Thus, it appears that companies can positively influence job seekers' job pursuit intentions through the use of plain text recruitment advertisements about job or company attribute claims that are seen as credible.

From a practical perspective, my findings provide important insights for unknown or weakly branded companies that are looking to attract applicants. First, because job seekers are likely to already view unknown firms as risky and through a skeptical lens, my findings provide insights to how these firms may increase the perceived credibility of their claims in the eyes of job seekers. To overcome this information asymmetry gap and job seekers' natural skepticism, my findings suggest that unknown companies can increase job seekers' perceptions of the

credibility of a recruitment message by communicating about job and company attributes that are search-oriented (i.e., likely to be perceived by job seekers as easily verified). Importantly, these claims are more likely to be seen as credible and create initial positive brand images in the minds of job seekers. While unknown employers may be tempted to provide information on an array of job and company attributes in order to create employer brand knowledge where none exists, my research suggests that they should initially focus on providing information about attributes that are easily verified. Accordingly, unknown employers should prioritize making credible claims in their recruitment advertising.

Limitations and Additional Research Directions

One limitation of this study is that I used fictitious company names (i.e., told participants that I was masking the name of the actual recruiting company) in order to examine relationships for unknown companies where information asymmetry may be the highest and where the impact of a recruitment message may be particularly critical. While it has some advantages, this study design prevented me from understanding how these relationships may play out for companies that have built prior awareness in the minds of job seekers. Given that job seekers may have positive brand image beliefs that are hard to change for organizations for which they already have high awareness, it would be interesting to explore if prior awareness is an important contextual variable that changes the relationships between message verifiability, credibility, and job pursuit intentions. Further, given the wealth of information available through online searches, job seekers may potentially feel that they could easily verify claims about most job or company attributes if they knew the name of the recruiting organization. Thus, it would be important to verify that my findings hold with a research design using actual companies, where the participants have the ability to use information technology to search for confirming information.

While more research is necessary, prior research has suggested that job seekers are unlikely to exert effort to search for information about organizations for which they have no prior awareness; thus, my findings still add insights because job seekers may be unlikely to conduct an online search for confirming information unless their initial exposure to the company (e.g., company sponsored recruitment message) built initial interest. Further, it is likely that some attributes would be difficult to verify before starting work for the company because of the idiosyncratic nature of jobs within any organization.

Second, I did not measure some of the intervening variables that could lend support for the theoretical pathways between hypothesized relationships. For example, I argued that claim credibility is positively related to job pursuit intentions by impacting job seekers' beliefs that the attribute exists or their perceptions of the overall quality of the job opportunity by serving as a signal that other valued attributes also exist. However, I did not measure participants' beliefs about the attributes in the claim or other valued job or company attributes and could not test these mediating mechanisms. While my findings are consistent with theory, future research should test if credibility does lead to these other inferences or if there are alternative paths to understanding this relationship. In addition, consistent with prior marketing research, I measured the continuum of search-experience claims based on job seekers' perceptions of the verifiability of claims; thus, I was unable to test if the actual verifiability of the claim leads to perceptions of verifiability and credibility. Future research is necessary to confirm that job seekers' perceptions of verifiability are consistent with the actual difficulty or ability to verify the content of a message claim before actually working at the company. For example, job seekers could be asked to verify a randomly assigned recruitment claim, and researchers could measure online search behaviors such as amount of time spent gathering information, the amount of time spent on each

website, the total number of websites visited, and the types of sources sought for verifying recruitment message claims.

Third, I presented participants with information on a single job attribute in each of the nine recruitment messages that they read – fewer than might be encountered in some full-length job advertisements. While I did find that exposure to a single attribute was related to higher levels of attraction and job pursuit intentions when the claim was seen as verifiable and credible, I was not able to assess how the relationships might have been impacted if the message contained information about multiple attributes. It would be interesting for future research to explore potential interaction effects between different claims within the same message. For example, it would be interesting to examine how job seekers might view the overall verifiability and credibility of a message that has a mix of claims that range in verifiability. It would also be interesting to see if job seekers see an overall message as more credible when presented with information attributes seen as easily verified. Further, it would be interesting to explore if order of appearance matters such that presenting verifiable claims first might create a halo effect where less verifiable claims are then seen as more credible or vice versa.

Finally, my study's generalizability is also limited in that I relied on data from job-seeking students at a single university. While I attracted participants from a number of disciplinary programs and different experience levels, it is possible that students from other disciplines or individuals who are currently working would be influenced differently by their perceptions of recruitment claim verifiability and credibility. I encourage researchers to explore these relationships with other samples of participants to confirm my findings. On a related point, I did find strong between-subjects effects suggesting that there are individual differences between participants in my sample that lead some participants to see, on average, all claims as

more verifiable and credible relative to other participants. Future studies should examine individual differences that might explain the propensity to see recruitment message claims as more or less verifiable and credible. For example, it would be interesting to explore the role of personality, job search self-efficacy, or job search experience in explaining the propensity to see claims as more or less verifiable.

Conclusion

To date, much of the recruitment literature on employer branding has explored what content job seekers find attractive rather than what they believe to be real. My paper diverges from this tradition and adds to the literature in two key ways. First, this study is, to my knowledge, the first to build theory around why recruitment messages about some job and organization attributes are more believable than others. Unknown employers' claims about more verifiable attributes are more credible because they can be quickly and easily evaluated against available market information. Second, my mediation model shows that in order for recruitment claims about valued job and company attributes to generate positive attitudes and potentially motivate behavior, unknown employers must make claims about attributes that are seen by job seekers as verifiable and thus believable. Claims about attributes that are hard to verify are likely not to be trusted, leading job seekers to discount this information and see these recruiting companies as unattractive. Thus, my findings suggest that not all that is said is equal; unknown companies must keep in mind that job seekers are active information recipients who, in addition to being concerned about attractive attributes, evaluate whether company-provided information can be verified and trusted.

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TABLE 1
Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Matrix

	Mean	SD	1	2	3
1. Verifiability	2.94	0.98	---		
2. Credibility	3.26	0.72	0.62**	---	
3. Job pursuit intentions	3.60	0.70	0.16**	0.25**	---

n = 1,773

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

TABLE 2
Descriptive Statistics and Planned Deviation Contrasts for
Employment Attribute Claim Verifiability ^a

Employment Attribute Claim	Verifiability	
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Location	4.29**	0.65
Compensation	3.20**	0.92
Training opportunities	3.05*	0.87
Work-life balance	2.97	0.83
Advancement opportunities	2.93	0.90
CSR practices	2.83*	0.84
Interesting work	2.58**	0.71
Inclusive environment	2.32**	0.82
Supervisor treatment	2.31**	0.74
Grand mean	2.94	0.03

^a Deviation contrast comparisons are against grand mean

n = 197

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

TABLE 3
Multilevel Mediation Models

	<i>Within-person</i>		<i>Between-person</i>	
	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>SE</i>
<i>Job pursuit intentions</i>				
verifiability → credibility	.44**	.02	.45**	.05
credibility → job pursuit intentions	.22**	.03	.30**	.11
verifiability → job pursuit intentions	-.01	.02	.07	.09
Indirect effect of verifiability → job pursuit intentions	.10**	.02	.14**	.05

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

FIGURE 1
Summary of Hypothesized Relationships

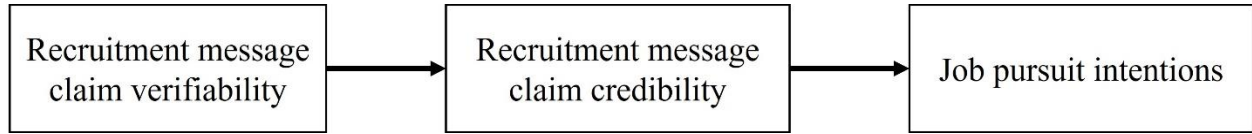
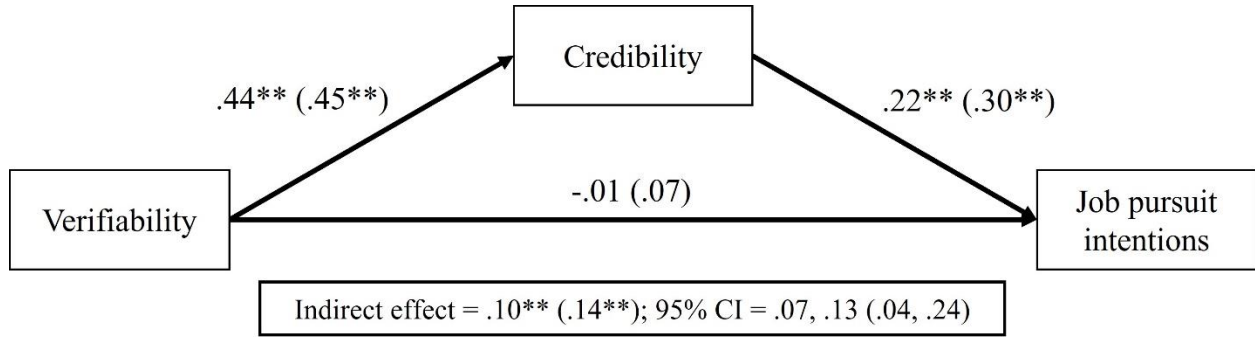


FIGURE 2
Multilevel Mediation with Job Pursuit Intentions Outcome



Within-person (and between-person) analysis of credibility mediating the link between verifiability and job pursuit intentions. Between-person analysis shown in parentheses.
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

APPENDIX A
Job and Organization Attributes and Job Advertisement Claims

Attribute	Claim
Compensation	<i>At Alpha Co., we provide new employees with a total compensation package that is well above the industry average.</i>
Location	<i>Gamma, Inc. is a global organization with locations and job opportunities in over 70 countries.</i>
Corporate social responsibility	<i>As a truly global corporate citizen, Omega, LLC works hard to create a sustainable future for people and the planet.</i>
Advancement opportunities	<i>Epsilon Partners offers multiple career paths so you can grow within the company.</i>
Training opportunities	<i>Omicron, LLP provides training and experiences that help you build skills and knowledge.</i>
Treatment from supervisor	<i>Zeta Corp.'s managers and senior leaders strive to create a supportive atmosphere in which you can thrive.</i>
Inclusive work environment	<i>The Iota Group's diverse and inclusive work environment allows every one of our employees to leverage their unique skills and talents.</i>
Work-life balance	<i>At Theta Co., employees can maintain a healthy work/life balance by setting their daily schedule on their own terms.</i>
Interesting work	<i>At Lambda Corp., employees are encouraged to work on projects they personally find interesting and engaging.</i>

APPENDIX B

Measures

Verifiability

1. It would be easy for me to verify this claim.
2. How easy or difficult would it be to verify this claim?
3. There is no way I could verify this claim unless I worked at the company. *
4. How much effort would it take to verify this claim?

Credibility

1. I feel this job advertisement claim is extremely trustworthy.
2. I believe this claim is telling the truth.
3. I feel this claim is not honest. *

Job pursuit intentions

1. I would request more information about this company.
 2. If this company visited campus I would want to speak with a representative.
 3. I would attempt to gain an interview with this company.
 4. If this company was at a job fair, I would seek out their booth.
-

* reverse coded