Displaying Employee Testimonials on Recruitment Web Sites: Effects of Communication Media, Employee Race, and Job Seeker Race on Organizational Attraction and Information Credibility

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This study investigated participants’ reactions to employee testimonials presented on recruitment Web sites. The authors manipulated the presence of employee testimonials, richness of media communicating testimonials (video with audio vs. picture with text), and representation of racial minorities in employee testimonials. Participants were more attracted to organizations and perceived information as more credible when testimonials were included on recruitment Web sites. Testimonials delivered via video with audio had higher attractiveness and information credibility ratings than those given via picture with text. Results also showed that Blacks responded more favorably, whereas Whites responded more negatively, to the recruiting organization as the proportion of minorities shown giving testimonials on the recruitment Web site increased. However, post hoc analyses revealed that use of a richer medium (video with audio vs. picture with text) to communicate employee testimonials tended to attenuate these racial effects.

Keywords: employee testimonials, organizational attraction, credibility, media richness

Several scholars have suggested that using the World Wide Web for recruitment purposes provides benefits to organizations over traditional recruitment practices, such as employment brochures or newspaper advertisements (Cober, Brown, Blumental, Doverspike, & Levy, 2000; Cober, Brown, Keeping, & Levy, 2004; Lievens & Harris, 2003). Among these benefits is the capacity to communicate a greater amount of information and reach more potential job seekers. Displaying employee testimonials on corporate recruitment Web sites is one tactic that might further enhance the recruitment capacity of organizations. Marketing researchers have long contended that customer testimonials positively influence the persuasive power of advertising (e.g., Mittelstaedt, Riesz, & Burns, 2000) because consumers prefer to consider the experiences of “ordinary people” when making purchasing decisions (Westphal, 2000). From a recruitment perspective, organizations incorporating employee testimonials on recruitment Web sites might combine the benefits of controlling information presented to job seekers with the positive effects job seekers often attribute to more interpersonal sources of information (i.e., enhanced credibility; Van Hovy & Lievens, 2007). Additionally, displaying employee testimonials might encourage job seekers to identify with organizations because job seekers see “the more human side of the organization” (Cober et al., 2000, p. 487).

Despite the potential positive outcomes associated with employee testimonials, very little research has examined these information sources (see Braddy, Meade, & Kroustalis, 2006; Highhouse, Hoffman, Greve, & Collins, 2002; and Van Hovy & Lievens, 2007, for exceptions). Further, some researchers have suggested that employee testimonials might have little or no effect on job seekers (Highhouse et al., 2002; Van Hoye & Lievens, 2007). Considering the scarcity of pertinent studies in the recruitment literature and calls for more research addressing Web-based recruitment (Highhouse & Hoffman, 2001; Rynes & Cable, 2003), we designed the present study with two objectives in mind. First, we assessed job seekers’ reactions to organizations either including or excluding employee testimonials on recruitment Web sites. Second, we investigated job seekers’ reactions to different characteristics of these employee testimonials.

In light of several persuasive communication (Hovland, Janis, & Kelly, 1953) and recruitment (Barber, 1998; Breauh & Starke, 2000) models, we manipulated the representation of racial minorities in employee testimonials and the richness of media used to communicate these messages on recruitment Web sites. We theorized that job seekers will use employee testimonials as information sources about potential future coworkers (Van Hovy & Lievens, 2007) and that race of organizational representatives is

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Presence of Employee Testimonials on Recruitment Web Sites

Marketing researchers have found that inclusion of endorsers in advertisements often leads to more favorable attitudes toward products (Raju, Rajagopal, & Unnava, 2002) and increased credibility perceptions of advertisements (Feick & Higie, 1992; Mittelstaedt et al., 2000). Others’ firsthand experiences (Fazio & Zanna, 1981) apparently influence consumers, especially when personal outcomes (e.g., evaluating an organization as a potential employer) are at stake (Sivacek & Crano, 1982). In a similar vein, management researchers have found that job incumbents often represent credible information sources because these individuals are closer to the work situation and hence are seen as having greater expertise (Fisher, Ilgen, & Hoyer, 1979).

Employee testimonials might also play an important role in engaging job seekers accessing recruitment Web sites (Cober et al., 2000). These information sources should be effective in communicating information about quality of work life issues and allow job seekers to better assess important person–organization fit issues (Cober et al., 2000). Moreover, employee testimonials might serve as an additional information source for job seekers, and research suggests that more information in job advertisements increases organizational attractiveness (Yuce & Highhouse, 1998).

In contrast to these positive effects, other research has suggested that employee testimonials are counterproductive because job seekers likely question the authenticity of anecdotal information presented in organizationally controlled sources (Highhouse et al., 2002). Van Hoye and Lievens (2007) found that, for information focusing on organizational issues, transmission by company-independent sources resulted in higher organizational attractiveness and more organizational pursuit behavior as compared with identical information presented through company-dependent sources (i.e., employee testimonials). However, when testimonials presented information about individual employees, applicants exhibited higher levels of attraction to the organization. Given the differing perspectives in the literature regarding the effectiveness of employee testimonials, we attempted to extend this research by determining whether the presence of Web-based employee testimonials influences job seekers’ reactions to organizations displaying these testimonials. Although the literature does not clearly point toward the prediction of positive or negative job seeker reactions, we expected that job seekers would exhibit greater attraction to organizations and view the information presented as more credible when employee testimonials are included on recruitment Web sites. We make this prediction because the media richness potential of recruitment Web sites (an issue described more fully in relation to Hypotheses 2a and 2b) provides the opportunity to communicate a more persuasive message. Therefore, we posit that:

Hypothesis 1a. Job seekers will have higher levels of attraction to organizations that include employee testimonials on recruitment Web sites.

Hypothesis 1b. Job seekers will perceive information presented on recruitment Web sites as more credible when employee testimonials are included.

Employee Testimonial Characteristics

Employee Testimonial Communication Media

Media richness theory posits that communication effectiveness depends on finding a match between communication requirements and media capacities (Daft & Lengel, 1984, 1986). In organizational settings, richer media (e.g., video with audio) are often preferred over leaner media (e.g., text alone) because richer media are more effective in communicating complex material that might have multiple interpretations (Daft, Lengel, & Trevino, 1987). Richer media might also be advantageous because of the ability to communicate affect and a personal focus through cues that are interesting and engaging (Chaiken & Eagly, 1976; Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976). Further, richer media communicate messages viewed as more accurate (Cable, Aiman-Smith, Mulvey, & Edwards, 2000), seen as more credible (Cable & Yu, 2006), and perceived as attracting more attention (Chaiken & Stangor, 1987; Tybout & Artz, 1994). We expected that job seekers would rate organizations higher in terms of organizational attractiveness and credibility of information presented when richer media (e.g., video with audio), as compared with leaner media (e.g., picture with text), communicate employee testimonials. Thus, we hypothesized the following:

Hypothesis 2a. Job seekers will have higher levels of attraction to organizations that use richer media (video with audio vs. picture with text) to communicate employee testimonials.

Hypothesis 2b. Job seekers will perceive information presented on recruitment Web sites as more credible when richer media (video with audio vs. picture with text) communicate employee testimonials.

Race of Testimonial Providers (Message Source) and Job Seekers

The similarity-attraction paradigm (Byrne, 1971) states that similar individuals are interpersonally attracted to one another because they see themselves as possessing similar values, principles, and beliefs (McGrath, 1998; Milliken & Martins, 1996). Similarly, social identity theory suggests that individuals classify themselves into groups on the basis of characteristics such as demographics (Harrison, Price, & Bell, 1998; Pelled, 1996). In an attempt to maintain high levels of self-esteem and have a positive self-identity, individuals evaluate categories that include the self more positively and judge out-group members more negatively (Brockner, 1988; Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).
Consistent with predictions made by these theories, research has established that racial minorities' organizational attractiveness perceptions are more favorable when they share demographic characteristics with organizational representatives (Avery, 2003; Avery et al., 2004; Perkins, Thomas, & Taylor, 2000). Similarly, researchers have concluded that racial minorities see demographically similar individuals as more credible sources of information (Clark & Maass, 1988; Perloff, 1993). When manipulating the racial representation of recruitment advertisements, racial congruence effects for Whites are not as intuitive. It appears that racial cues are less salient among White job seekers as long as Whites' representation remains in the majority (Avery et al., 2004; Mehra, Kilduff, & Brass, 1998; Perkins et al., 2000). Therefore, we predicted the following:

**Hypothesis 3a.** Organizational attractiveness will increase for Black job seekers and remain the same for White job seekers as the proportion of racial minorities giving employee testimonials on recruitment Web sites increases.

**Hypothesis 3b.** Information credibility perceptions will increase for Black job seekers and remain the same for White job seekers as the proportion of racial minorities giving employee testimonials on recruitment Web sites increases.

**Method**

**Participants**

We invited students ($N = 1,010$) enrolled in 7 upper level management courses at a large, predominantly White university ($N = 562$) and those enrolled in 12 upper level management courses at three historically Black universities ($N = 448$) to participate in the study. A total of $469$ participants (83%) from the predominantly White university and $359$ participants (80%) from the historically Black universities completed the first phase of the study (Time 1). Of these, $453$ (97%) from the predominantly White university and $323$ (90%) from the historically Black universities completed the second phase (Time 2).

In terms of job search activities, $665$ (88%) participants indicated that they were actively searching for employment or would do so in the next 6 months; $575$ (76%) reported having previously interviewed for a full-time job; $620$ (82%) had sent their resume to an organization seeking full-time employment; and $687$ (91%) indicated that they had visited an organization's recruitment Web site to explore job opportunities and gather information about an organization. Thus, the sample appeared typical of young professionals seeking entry-level employment and those sought by organizations through campus recruiting efforts (cf. Rynes & Bou- dreau, 1986).

Even though 756 participants provided complete data for both study phases, we included 546 of these for hypotheses testing. Of these, $299$ (55%) were White, and $247$ (45%) were Black; $286$ (52%) were men, and $260$ (48%) were women. Participants averaged $22.89$ ($SD = 1.74$) years of age.

**Procedure**

**Time 1 data collection.** Instructors of the targeted classes informed students that they had the opportunity to participate in a study intended to assess individual differences among college students for which they would receive extra course credit. Participants created a unique user name to ensure participant anonymity and to match responses between Time 1 and Time 2 data collection efforts. After logging in, participants accessed an online survey that included demographic items as well as several measures collected for future research but not included in this study.

**Time 2 data collection.** Approximately 3 weeks after Time 1 data collection, the instructors told students in the targeted classes that a *Fortune 500* organization (referred to as HBA Corporation, a hypothetical company) wanted their assistance in evaluating the company’s recruitment Web page. The instructors told the students to take the role of an active job seeker, evaluate the recruitment Web site, and then answer a series of questions regarding their reactions to the Web page and HBA Corporation as a potential employer.

**Recruitment Web Sites and Web Site Content Manipulations**

**Research design.** We patterned the study Web sites after those used by actual firms (e.g., www.Wachovia.com, www.Target.com). Each Web site consisted of five information links (i.e., Career Development, Pay and Benefits, Meet Our People, Company Information, and Our Plan for Growth). All versions contained identical information with the exception of the Meet Our People link. We manipulated this link by varying (a) the representation of racial minorities in employee testimonials and (b) media richness used to communicate the testimonials. All Web site racial representation conditions (except for the control condition) contained the same testimonial content and gender representation (2 men and 2 women) of those giving testimonials. The control condition did not include the Meet Our People link, as participants randomly assigned to this site saw only the other four links. We used the control condition to examine the presence versus absence of employee testimonials on recruitment Web sites.

For the study manipulations involving employee testimonials on recruitment Web sites, we used a 2 (participant race: Black vs. White) $\times$ 3 (representation of racial minorities in employee testi-

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1 We eliminated 6 respondents (4 from the historically Black universities and 2 from the predominantly White university) because of incomplete information. Additionally, our analyses only included responses from individuals who identified themselves as either Black or White. Consistent with Avery (2003), we permitted non-Black minorities to participate in the study so as not to alert participants to the racial nature of the study, but we eliminated these respondents ($N = 12$: 5 from the historically Black universities, 7 from the predominantly White university) from the analyses.

2 The final sample used for our analyses consisted of 546 participants. This number differs from the total number of participants that completed Time 1 and Time 2 surveys because 175 participants saw a Web site condition in which only Whites gave employee testimonials. At the suggestion of an anonymous reviewer, we removed these participants to be consistent with the absence of an all-Black employee testimonial condition. We also eliminated 35 participants from the study because they failed to accurately recognize the study’s manipulations. Participants unable to see or hear ($N = 7$) the video testimonials and those unable to correctly identify the racial representation of employees delivering employee testimonials ($N = 28$) were removed from the sample used for hypotheses testing.
monials: low vs. medium vs. high) × 2 (communication medium: picture with written text vs. video with audio) quasi-experimental design in which all cells were fully crossed. Representation of racial minorities in employee testimonials was presented as either low (25%: depicting 1 Black and 3 White employees), medium (50%: depicting 2 Black and 2 White employees), or high (75%: depicting 3 Black and 1 White employee). We manipulated communication media richness by displaying either (a) a picture of an employee with text testimonial or (b) a video of an employee giving an audio testimonial. Table 1 summarizes the number of participants exposed to each study manipulation condition.

**Representation of racial minorities in employee testimonials.**
To depict racial minority representation in the testimonials, we hired Black and White actors from a university theatre department. For the actors chosen to appear in the testimonials, we undertook a pilot test with a separate sample of 86 upper level management students to determine whether there were differences among the actors’ mean physical attractiveness ratings (Haugtvedt, Petty, & Cacioppo, 1992). Mean physical attractiveness ratings among the actors did not differ.3

**Employee testimonial content.** Actors memorized scripts (ranging from 355 to 371 words) modeled after actual employee testimonials on Fortune 500 corporate recruitment Web sites. Each script involved the actors responding to four questions: (a) Why did you choose HBA? (b) What do you enjoy most about working at HBA? (c) How would you describe HBA’s culture? (d) How do you like to spend your free time? (See the Appendix for an example employee testimonial.)

Because testimonial content can influence participants’ perceptions of organizational attraction (Van Hoye & Lievens, 2007), we conducted a pilot test with another sample of 96 upper level management students to determine whether the employee testimonials differed with respect to organizational attractiveness. Mean organizational attractiveness ratings did not differ after reading the testimonial script content.4

Actors’ photographs and testimonial filming occurred at a university media studio. The actors used similar poses and facial expressions in the testimonials. We filmed the actors’ from their shoulders up and with the same background in each testimonial.

### Table 1
**Number of Black and White Participants Presented With Three Employee Testimonial Conditions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employee testimonial conditions</th>
<th>Minority representation displayed in recruitment Web site employee testimonials(^a)</th>
<th>Low Black</th>
<th>Low White</th>
<th>Medium Black</th>
<th>Medium White</th>
<th>High Black</th>
<th>High White</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No employee testimonial (control condition)(^b)</td>
<td></td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picture with text</td>
<td></td>
<td>35</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video with audio</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** \(N = 546.\)

\(^a\)Low minority representation = 25%; 1 Black employee; 3 White employees; Medium minority representation = 50%; 2 Black employees; 2 White employees; High minority representation = 75%; 3 Black employees; 1 White employee. \(^b\)The control condition displayed all Web site links other than employee testimonials \((N = 70): \text{Blacks} = 28; \text{Whites} = 42).\)

**Measures**

**Control variables.** We attempted to account for possible Web site playfulness effects (Cober et al., 2004) by including measures of recruitment Web site attractiveness (Sicilia, Ruiz, & Munuera, 2005; assessed with four items rated on a 7-point semantic differential scale: unattractive/attractive, unpleasant/pleasant, unfavorable/favorable, useless/useful; coefficient alpha = .72), total time spent on the recruitment Web site (in seconds), and total number of recruitment Web site links visited. These variables served as covariates in analyses of covariance and as control variables in hierarchical regression analyses. In addition, we entered gender and age in Step 1 of the regression analyses to control for any possible confounding effects (cf. Avery, 2003). Finally, we incorporated ethnic identity (Phinney, 1992; assessed with a five-item scale measuring affirmation and belonging; example item: “I am happy that I am a member of the group I belong to”); coefficient alpha = .76 in Step 1 to control for possible ethnicity influences.

**Organizational attractiveness.** We assessed participants’ attraction to HBA Corporation as a place to work using five items from Highhouse, Lievens, and Sinar’s (2003) Organization Attraction Scale. A sample item is, “For me, this company would be a great place to work.” Coefficient alpha for the measure was .86.

**Perceived credibility of recruitment Web site information.** A four-item scale from Johnson and Kaye (2002) assessed participants’ perceptions of HBA’s recruitment Web site as a credible information source. A sample item is, “The information presented on HBA’s Web site was believable.” Coefficient alpha for the measure was .84.

**Results**

Initially, we determined whether differences existed among participants from the four universities. Multivariate analysis of variance results, Wilk’s \(\lambda = .96, F(18, 1618.35) = 1.32, \text{ns.}\), revealed no differences in participants’ age or gender or in 4 participants’ job search activities (e.g., had previously visited an organization’s recruitment Web site) previously described. Therefore, we combined the data from all participants in the four universities.

\(^3\)Participants \((N = 86)\) were randomly shown 1 of the 11 actors’ pictures and asked to rate it in terms of physical attractiveness on a scale ranging from 1 (unattractive) to 5 (attractive). The mean physical attractiveness ratings for the actors did not differ, F(10, 85) = 1.23, \text{ns.}\)

\(^4\)Participants \((N = 96)\) took the role of a job seeker considering an organization for employment and were told to assume that, in conducting research about an organization, they had the opportunity to speak with a current employee. We randomly assigned one of seven testimonial scripts and told the participants that this transcript summarized their conversation with the current employee. After reading the transcript, the participants responded to Highhouse et al.’s (2003) 15-item scale of organizational attraction. Coefficient alphas for this three-dimensional scale were .78 for general attractiveness, .74 for intentions to pursue employment, and .82 for organizational prestige. Results of a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) indicated no differences among the seven testimonial’s script content for the three organizational attraction dimension ratings, Wilk’s \(\lambda = 1.31, F(18, 246.56) = 1.31, \text{ns.}\).
Hypotheses Tests

Table 2 reports the means, standard deviations, coefficient alphas, and intercorrelations among the study variables. We tested Hypotheses 1 (a–b) and 2 (a–b) using multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) and univariate analysis of covariance (ANCOVA). For the MANCOVA, organizational attractiveness and information credibility perceptions were the dependent variables, and employee testimonial communication condition (i.e., no employee testimonial used, picture with text, and video with audio) was the independent variable.

The MANCOVA results indicated that differences existed among the employee testimonial conditions, Wilks’ λ = .84, F(4, 1078) = 24.83, p < .001, multivariate $\eta^2 = .08$. We conducted two ANCOVAs (see Table 3) to investigate the nature of these differences. Results revealed differences in organizational attractiveness, $F(2, 545) = 19.71, p < .001, \eta^2 = .07$, and information credibility, $F(2, 545) = 47.32, p < .001, \eta^2 = .15$, depending on the employee testimonial conditions in recruitment materials. Consistent with predictions made by Hypotheses 1a and 1b, differences (see Table 3) in organizational attractiveness and information credibility existed when comparing the video with audio condition and the no-employee testimonial condition (organizational attractiveness, Cohen’s $d = 1.03$, Bonferroni post hoc 95% confidence intervals = 0.37, 0.85; information credibility, Cohen’s $d = 1.56$, Bonferroni post hoc 95% confidence intervals = 0.73, 1.21) as well as when comparing the picture with text condition and the no-testimonial condition (organizational attractiveness, Cohen’s $d = .59$, Bonferroni post hoc 95% confidence intervals = 0.18, 0.67; information credibility, Cohen’s $d = 1.07$, Bonferroni post hoc 95% confidence intervals = 0.48, 0.97).

Table 3 reports results for Hypotheses 2 (a–b). The results show that participants rated organizations higher in attractiveness and information credibility when comparing employee testimonials presented via video with audio versus testimonials presented via picture with text (organizational attractiveness, Cohen’s $d = .27$, Bonferroni post hoc 95% confidence intervals = 0.04, 0.33; information credibility, Cohen’s $d = .37$, Bonferroni post hoc 95% confidence intervals = 0.10, 0.39). Thus, these results supported Hypotheses 2a and 2b.

Table 4 summarizes hierarchical regression analyses used to test Hypotheses 3 (a–b) and reports the unstandardized coefficients because standardized coefficients are not interpretable when investigating interaction effects (Aiken & West, 1991). In Step 3, addition of the Participant Race × Representation of Racial Minorities in Employee Testimonials interaction was significant (organizational attractiveness, $B = .50, p < .001$; information credibility, $B = .42, p < .001$) and accounted for unique variance in organizational attractiveness ($\Delta R^2 = .09, p < .001$) and information credibility perceptions ($\Delta R^2 = .07, p < .001$). We plotted the interaction effects for each dependent variable to determine the nature of these relationships. Because each plot was similar, we have included one example plot of the interaction effect of Web site viewer race and representation of racial minorities in employee testimonials on organizational attractiveness (see Figure 1). As expected, Black participants’ ratings of organizational attractiveness and information credibility increased as the number of racial minorities giving employee testimonials increased. Contrary to our hypotheses, however, White participants’ ratings of organizational attractiveness and information credibility decreased as the number of minorities giving testimonials increased. Testing for the simple slopes’ significance confirmed that each slope was different from zero: Organizational attractiveness for White participants, $t(466) = −4.94, p < .001$, and for Black participants, $t(466) = −4.65, p < .001$; information credibility for White participants, $t(466) = −4.88, p < .001$, and for Black partici-

Table 2
Means, Standard Deviations, Coefficient Alphas, and Intercorrelations Among Study Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Participant gender$^a$</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>546</td>
<td>—</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Participant race$^b$</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>546</td>
<td>.15**</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Participant age (in years)</td>
<td>22.89</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>546</td>
<td>−17**</td>
<td>.09*</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Ethnic identity</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>546</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.40**</td>
<td>.09*</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Number of Web site links visited</td>
<td>6.65</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>546</td>
<td>−.04</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>—</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Total time spent on Web site (in seconds)</td>
<td>735.35</td>
<td>109.87</td>
<td>546</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>−.03</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Web site attractiveness</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>546</td>
<td>−.02</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>−.01</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>(2.72)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Use of employee testimonials</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>546</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.12**</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.43**</td>
<td>.09*</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Communication media$^d$</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>476</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>−.03</td>
<td>−.05</td>
<td>−.04</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Representation of racial minorities in employee testimonials$^e$</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>476</td>
<td>−.03</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.14**</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>−.02</td>
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<td>−.04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Organizational attractiveness</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>476</td>
<td>.08*</td>
<td>.23**</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.13**</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.09*</td>
<td>.10*</td>
<td>.24**</td>
<td>.14**</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>(0.86)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Recruitment Web site information credibility</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>546</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.14**</td>
<td>.09*</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.11*</td>
<td>.12**</td>
<td>.36**</td>
<td>.18**</td>
<td>−.04</td>
<td>.40**</td>
<td>(0.84)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Parentheses contain coefficient alphas for measures used in the study. All tests are two-tailed.

$^a$ 0 = male; 1 = female. $^b$ 0 = White; 1 = Black. $^c$ 0 = not used; 1 = used. $^d$ 0 = picture with text; 1 = video with audio. $^e$ 1 = low; 2 = medium; 3 = high.

*p < .05. **p < .01.
Taking into account the results for both Black and White participants, we found partial support for Hypotheses 3a and 3b.

Post Hoc Analyses

Because video with audio employee testimonials might allow job seekers to better identify with organizational representatives (Allen et al., 2004; Perloff, 1993), we expected that under such conditions, job seekers would focus more on message content, even if a demographically dissimilar individual delivered it. Accordingly, we investigated a three-way interaction among communication media, minority representation in testimonials, and participant race (see Table 5). The three-way interaction terms were significant for both organizational attractiveness (β = 0.63, p < .001) and information credibility (β = 0.39, p < .001) and explained unique variance in the dependent variables (organizational attractiveness: η² = 0.08; information credibility: η² = 0.08). The means reported are unadjusted for any effects due to the covariates.

Table 3
Analysis of Covariance Results for Three Employee Testimonial Conditions and Ratings of Organizational Attractiveness and Recruitment Web Site Information Credibility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Organizational attractiveness</th>
<th>Recruitment Web site information credibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covariates</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Web site links visited</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total time on Web site (in seconds)</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web site attractiveness</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee testimonial conditionsa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No employee testimonial (control)</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee picture with text testimonial</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee video with audio testimonial</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>.55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. N = 546. Overall multivariate analyses of covariance included total number of Web site links visited, total time spent on Web site (in seconds), and Web site attractiveness as covariates, Wilks’s Λ = .84, F(4, 1078) = 24.83, p < .001, multivariate η² = .08. The means reported are unadjusted for any effects due to the covariates.

a All employee testimonial condition means for the organizational attractiveness and recruitment Web site information credibility ratings are significantly different (p < .001).

Table 4
Summary of Moderated Hierarchical Multiple Regression for Organizational Attractiveness and Recruitment Web site Information Credibility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Organizational attractiveness</th>
<th>Recruitment Web site information credibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>ΔR²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>.07***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Control variables</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant gendera</td>
<td>.13*</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant age (in years)</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic identity</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication media</td>
<td>.19***</td>
<td>.25***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Web site links visited</td>
<td>−.03</td>
<td>−.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total time spent on Web site (in seconds)</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web site attractiveness</td>
<td>.09*</td>
<td>.11*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Main effects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant racec</td>
<td>−.68***</td>
<td>−.53***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representation of racial minorities in employee testimonialsd</td>
<td>−.24***</td>
<td>−.24***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Interaction effects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Race × Racial Minority Representation</td>
<td>.50***</td>
<td>.42***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall R²</td>
<td>.20***</td>
<td>.17***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R²</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. N = 476. The sample does not include the 70 participants viewing the control condition that involved no employee testimonials. The unstandardized regression coefficients are those derived in Step 3 of the model. All tests are two-tailed.

a 0 = male; 1 = female. b 0 = picture with text; 1 = video with audio. c 0 = White; 1 = Black. d 1 = low; 2 = medium; 3 = high.

p < .05. ** p < .01. *** p < .001.
tional attractiveness, $\Delta R^2 = .05, p < .001$; information credibility, $\Delta R^2 = .03, p < .001$). Interaction effect plots revealed that the crossover effects between participant race and racial minority representation in employee testimonials were much smaller when video with audio, versus picture with text, was the communication medium (see Figure 2 for an example plot). That is, use of a richer medium to communicate employee testimonials tended to attenuate the effects of race on recruitment Web site viewers’ organizational attractiveness and information credibility perceptions.

**Discussion**

This study investigated recruitment Web site features that have received only limited attention in past research. Participants experienced higher levels of organizational attraction and perceived higher information credibility when viewing employee testimonials on recruitment Web sites. In addition, study participants attributed higher levels of organizational attraction and credibility to recruiting organizations when employees delivered the testimonials orally (with accompanying video) rather than textually (with an accompanying photograph). These findings are consistent with recent research concluding that richer media produce higher information credibility perceptions (Cable & Yu, 2006). Our results also suggest that job seekers consider the richness of media used to communicate organizational information when evaluating potential employers’ attractiveness.

Race also played an important role in our results. Job seekers’ race interacted with the representation of racial minorities in employee testimonials, and this interaction influenced job seekers’ reactions to employee testimonials. Consistent with prior relational demography research (e.g., Avery, 2003; Avery et al., 2004) and our hypothesis, Blacks’ perceptions of organizational attractiveness and information credibility increased as the proportion of minorities giving testimonials increased. However, in contrast to our prediction, Whites’ organizational attraction and credibility perceptions of recruitment Web site information decreased when minority representation in employee testimonials increased.

The social psychology literature offers a possible explanation for our unexpected findings concerning Whites’ reactions to changes in the racial diversity of organizational representatives. McGuire and colleagues (McGuire & McGuire, 1981; McGuire, McGuire, Child, & Fujioka, 1978) concluded that individuals spontaneously evaluate the external environment and define themselves in terms of characteristics that distinguish them as individuals from the majority. Demographic characteristics such as gender (Cota & Dion, 1986) and ethnicity (McGuire et al., 1978) are especially salient characteristics when making these self-concept evaluations. With regard to the aforementioned recruitment studies investigating the effect of organizational representatives’ race (e.g., Avery, 2003; Avery et al., 2004), none included a condition in which Whites were in minority representation. Because race was not distinctive for the White majority, race was not salient for Whites. It appears that when presented with a condition in which Whites are in the minority, race becomes salient in defining Whites’ identity.

Our post hoc analyses suggested an interesting caveat to the findings described above concerning the interaction between job seeker race and representation of racial minorities in employee testimonials. The richness of media used to communicate employee testimonials influenced both Blacks’ and Whites’ reactions to changes in the representation of racial minorities in employee testimonials. Whites’ lower ratings and Blacks’ higher ratings of organization attractiveness and information credibility as the racial minority representation on the Web site increased were more pronounced when picture with text served as the communication medium.
medium versus video with audio. These findings are consistent with predictions from media richness theory. The ability of video with audio media to communicate affect (Allen et al., 2004) as well as other nonverbal cues, such as facial expression and tone of voice (Daft et al., 1987), apparently provided more information to participants when evaluating organizations. As a result, these cues communicated in video with audio testimonials could have allowed participants to more closely identify with employees and focus more on what employees said rather than the race of the employees making the statements.

Implications for Organizations

Our findings suggest issues that organizations should contemplate as they weigh the desirability of using Web-based employee testimonials. First, designers of recruitment Web sites should consider using employee testimonials. Second, organizations should consider the medium used to communicate company information. Because job seekers use testimonials to assess their fit with potential coworkers, and richer media are likely to provide additional cues when making these evaluations, organizations should consider video with audio as the medium to deliver employee testimonials. Third, our post hoc analyses suggest that organizations that use rich media to communicate Web-based employee testimonials have considerable flexibility as to the racial representation of those employees providing testimonials. In our study, as long as the Black representation of testimonial providers varied from 25% to 75%, there were no significant racial differences in organizational attraction and information credibility.

Study Limitations and Future Research

Incorporating participants from historically Black universities presented a possible limitation to our study. Students from these universities likely experience many situations in which Blacks are the majority in terms of racial representation. Therefore, participants might have responded more negatively to the conditions in which Blacks were the minority. Although we attempted to account for this possibility by controlling for ethnic identity in our analyses, future research should examine possible effects of racial context. Also associated with our study design were possible confounding effects of audio with visual cues in our employee testimonial manipulations. That is, we did not include an experimental condition that combined picture with audio or video with text. Thus, our results are limited to just two media conditions and do not necessarily generalize to other communication methods.

Another potential limitation involved our positing media richness as a sole determinant of job seeker reactions. Cober et al. (2004) proposed that Web site playfulness (i.e., the presence of...
sound, video, animation, etc.) might positively influence participants’ reactions. As such, one might argue that participants’ positive organizational reactions to employee testimonials presented via video with audio were simply a result of Web site playfulness versus the richness of the media with which testimonial information was communicated. Although we cannot completely rule out this possibility, we attempted to account for these effects by controlling for the number of recruitment Web site links visited, total time spent on Web site (in seconds), and Web site attractiveness. We also conducted post hoc analyses to examine differences in these variables for the three employee testimonial communication conditions (i.e., no testimonial, picture with text, and video with audio). Because the results showed that total time spent on the Web site was significantly higher when comparing both the video with audio and picture with text conditions with the no-testimonial condition, Web site playfulness effects might have influenced our results. Accordingly, future research on Web site employee testimonials should assess the relative influence of media richness and Web site playfulness on relevant criteria.

Future research also needs to extend our study. For example, the similarity-attraction paradigm suggests that Black men, as compared with White men, respond more negatively to White women giving a testimonial (Byrne, 1971). Moreover, future investigations might manipulate actual message content of employee testimonials to determine possible racial differences in job seeker attitudes (Van Huyse & Lievens, 2007). For example, previous research found that Blacks possessed a more communal orientation than Whites (Cox, Lobel, & McLeod, 1991; Oyserman, Gant, & Ager, 1995). Therefore, Black applicants might respond more favorably to Web site testimonial content representing a supportive, team-oriented culture (Braddy et al., 2006).

In addition, future research should further examine the communication capacity of the Internet to identify ways of influencing job seekers’ attitudes. Our post hoc findings suggest that richer media diminishes differences in Black and White participants’ reactions to changes in the racial representation of employees giving testimonials. Might using richer media also affect reactions to other organizational information? For example, would video of the organization’s geographic location and physical facilities (e.g., offices) influence job seekers more than reading the same information presented via text?

Conclusion

The current study sheds additional light on job seekers’ responses to employee testimonials on recruitment Web sites. Identifying such relationships is vital because job seekers often use recruitment Web site information to form initial organizational attitudes (Barber, 1998; Rynes, 1991). Our results indicated that job seekers consider organizations’ use of employee testimonials, racial representation of employees giving these testimonials, and the communication media used to present them when viewing the representation of racial minorities in employee testimonials.

\[ F(2, 545) = 2.93, ns, \text{ or Web site attractiveness}, F(2, 545) = 2.87, ns, \text{ according to communication media.} \]

However, communication media did influence the total time spent on the Web sites, \( F(2, 545) = 67.34, p < .001, \eta^2 = .17 \).

Participants spent significantly more time on Web sites that included video with audio \( (M = 748.93, SD = 99.19) \) and picture with text \( (M = 758.96, SD = 105.75) \) testimonials as compared with Web sites not including employee testimonials \( (M = 607.27, SD = 89.85) \). Time spent on the Web sites did not differ between the video with audio and picture with text conditions.

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5 MANOVA results indicated that differences in the number of recruitment Web site links visited, total time spent on the Web site, and Web site attractiveness, Wilks’s \( \lambda = 0.79, F(6, 1082) = 23.13, p < .001, \) existed among the media used to communicate employee testimonials (i.e., no employee testimonial, picture with text, or video with audio). We conducted three analyses of variance to determine the nature of these differences. No differences were found for the number of Web site links visited, \( F(2, 545) = 2.93, ns, \) or Web site attractiveness, \( F(2, 545) = 2.87, ns, \) according to communication media. However, communication media did influence the total time spent on the Web sites, \( F(2, 545) = 67.34, p < .001, \eta^2 = .17 \).

Participants spent significantly more time on Web sites that included video with audio \( (M = 748.93, SD = 99.19) \) and picture with text \( (M = 758.96, SD = 105.75) \) testimonials as compared with Web sites not including employee testimonials \( (M = 607.27, SD = 89.85) \). Time spent on the Web sites did not differ between the video with audio and picture with text conditions.
organizations' recruitment Web sites. These findings emphasize the importance for organizations of carefully considering the communication capabilities of the World Wide Web when planning and developing corporate recruitment strategies.

References


**Appendix**

**Sample Employee Testimonial**

**Why did you choose HBA?**

“HBA appeared to be the most exciting and supportive culture of any of the organizations that I considered. I was impressed by the analyst program that they offered to recent college graduates. Every employee whom I met during the recruiting process was interesting and consistently delivered similar messages about being delighted with his or her experience at HBA. There was no hesitation or roundabout answer when I asked them about advancement opportunities, which they stressed to be very achievable and likely.”

**What do you enjoy most about working at HBA?**

“I like the dynamic work environment where every day presents a new challenge. My manager and other team members are fun to work with, and they are very helpful in furthering my understanding of the role and overall industry. I enjoy being able to relate to the companies and products that we cover. We do joint research as a team, and I have exposure to many different aspects of our business, which helps me understand trends and global strategy. It is also energizing to gain exposure to top-level management at the companies we cover, and exciting to be able to question them about their progress and new changes.”

**How would you describe HBA’s culture?**

“There are so many different opportunities within this company. There really is a culture that allows you to succeed and achieve your personal goals. If I should reach a point in life where I want to do something different, I don’t have to leave HBA. The most common thing that I’ve heard from people at HBA is that they’ve held anywhere from four to eight different positions and never left the company! I can explore almost every career path I desire from now until retirement, and still enjoy all the benefits of working for HBA.”

**How do you like to spend your free time?**

“For the past three months, I have been training for a half-marathon. One of my coworkers has gotten me involved in a local running club and we have long runs every Saturday morning. I really enjoy the challenge of pushing myself to be faster and faster. I also enjoy spending time with my coworkers outside of the office. We enjoy going to museums, many of which, we get into free with our HBA ID and can usually bring four guests for free as well.”

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