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## Relationships between Negative Feedback on Companies and Gen Y Job Applicants' Employment Willingness

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Recruiting and retaining Gen Y employees has recently been one of the most important tasks performed by companies. As Ehrhart, Mayer, and Ziegart (2012) describe, attracting the right applicants is crucial to the success of a company. Currently, Gen Y, people born in or after 1980, represents 35.6% of workforce in the United States (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015), and they hold unique expectations from their potential employers. Gen Y employees are known to seek conditions beyond paychecks, such as a satisfactory job and organization characteristics, work-life balance, and business ethics, for their employment choices (Ehrhart, et. al., 2012). For such information, Gen Y often uses others' feedback via online company review platforms or media reports (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008).

The theory of Person-Organization (P-O) fit explains that job applicants try to perceive a potential compatibility between a company and their own characteristics while searching jobs (Chatman 1991). During this process, others' feedback plays an important role in influencing job applicants' perceptions about that company (Carver & Scheier, 1981). Further, applicants' perceptions toward the company were found to be more affected with negative feedback than positive feedback (Yin, Mitra, & Zhang, 2015). How such feedback about that potential company affects applicants' willingness to apply for those companies is not known. Thus, this study was designed to assess how online feedback made by others, mostly former and current employees, affect Gen Y job applicants' willingness to apply for those companies. Given that fashion retail businesses are often being targeted for unethical business activities and/or work environments (Diamond, Diamond & Litt, 2015), the findings were expected to offer insights into the relationship between company reputation and job applicants' willingness to apply.

Quantitative research was conducted via an online survey in spring 2016 to know about people's likelihood of applying for companies based on feedback. Survey items were created by reviewing anonymous feedback from an online company review site called, glassdoor. Given the stronger impact of negative impact on job applicants, keywords, such as lie, dishonest, and inconsistent, were used to identify 62 negative feedback posted by full-time employees with managerial experiences as of January 2016. Narratives were analyzed for content, resulting in 29 distinct phrases. After Institutional Review Board's approval, the 29 items were translated into a survey via Qualtrics, and was distributed to 302 undergraduate students in two major universities in the United States. Overall, the survey asked their likelihood of applying for the company, on the scale of 1 (least likely) to 5 (most likely), if they saw each of the 29 phrases listed on the survey. A total of 254 usable responses (effective response rate of 84%) were collected. Participants were 18 years to 25 years old, with 90% being female and 10% being male.

An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with an oblique rotation was performed to find an underlying structure. Nine items were eliminated based on communalities, factor loadings, and cross loadings. The final factor analysis solution, with a total of 20 items measuring three dimensions, accounted for approximately 62% of the total variance. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.93 and all EFA loadings ranged from 0.62 to 0.91. The first dimension, *Dishonest Recruitment Activities* (46.96% of variance; Cronbach alpha = 0.934; Mean=1.65), represented companies' dishonest activities during the recruitment processes, such as "They mislead me entirely during the interview process" and "It's not true that time worked is equal to time paid." The second dimension, *Untrustworthy Leadership* (8.47% of variance; Cronbach alpha = 0.83; Mean=1.74), represented executives' dishonest leadership activities, such as "Corporate people are uneducated", "Fake promises made by CEO" and "They lie about being a faith-based company." The final dimension, *Dishonest Core-business Activities* (6.89% of variance; Cronbach alpha = 0.81; Mean=2.26), represented companies' dishonest everyday activities, such as "This company needs to stop asking employees to write positive reviews and hide scathing reality" and "When they fire you they will tell your peers that you decided to pursue other opportunities."

Research results have suggested that when job applicants received negative feedback from former and current employees, they were less willing to apply for positions in those companies. Particularly, considering that the participants are students, dishonest recruitment activities have had the highest impact on their willingness to apply. Companies might need to consider presenting an accurate picture of what the organization is about, its expectations, and its exact policies. At the same time, leaders might need to ensure consistency in their statements and actions to avoid being interpreted as untrustworthy. Finally, feedback from their employees about job and organization characteristics does seem to affect Gen Y's willingness to apply, and therefore, better managing employee separation is recommended.

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