The Influence of Emotions in Online Job Reviews on Causal Attribution, Corporate Image, Perceived Usefulness, and Intention to Apply

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Submitted to Marion Garaus, PhD

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ABSTRACT

Organizations worldwide face the challenge of finding the best-suiting employees, as the quality of the workforce has directly been linked to the level of success within a company. This is especially relevant in current times, as the labor market is still in recovery after the global COVID-19 pandemic. While companies are increasingly hunting for skilled workers, employers are focusing their attention on job seekers' intentions to apply for an open position. With the rise of the internet, the applicants' opportunities to gain information about the job market have comprehensively changed. Job candidates are provided with massive electronic word-of-mouth platforms, that allow individuals to share their experiences with a company they have previously worked for or are currently employed at. Studies have suggested that these online reviews play a critical role in employees' willingness to apply to an organization. The topic of electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM), as well as its link to employee's job application intention, has extensively been researched, however, few studies have investigated the role of specific emotions utilized within these online job reviews. Moreover, as the effect of the negativity bias within online job reviews could further be developed, this research paper will specifically focus on the expression of negative emotions.

To address the currently existing research gap, this thesis quantitatively investigates how the three negative emotions anger (1), sadness (2), and fear (3) in online job reviews influence an individual's evaluation of a review, their causal attributions, the perceived usefulness, corporate image, and intention to apply for an advertised position. A one-factor between-subjects experiment with 256 participants was implemented, in which respondents were exposed to one of three online job reviews, which included emotional keywords representing either anger (1), sadness (2), or fear (3). The results of the experiment revealed that anger promotes a stronger negative evaluation of an online job review than sadness and fear. Moreover, it was found that the more negative an online job review is, the stronger the causal attribution toward the company is. Additionally, causal attribution negatively affects corporate image, while positively impacting the perceived usefulness of a review. Furthermore, it was revealed that corporate image has a statistically significant impact on an individual's intention to apply to a job, while the perceived usefulness of an online job review does not have a significant effect on an individual's intention to apply. Overall, the results of the experimental study denote the significance of negative online job reviews, corroborating various previous findings within this field.