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## **Web-based recruitment in the Millennial generation: Work–life balance, website usability, and organizational attraction**

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In this digital era, traditional recruitment efforts have increasingly been supplemented with or replaced by recruiting applicants on the Web. Concurrently, organizations are increasingly adapting to younger individuals from the Millennial generation as they enter the workforce. We combine these salient issues to examine Web-based recruitment of the Millennial generation by assessing predictors of organizational attraction. Using a sample of Millennials ( $N = 493$ ), we found that perceptions of both work–life balance and website usability incrementally predicted attraction, when controlling for perceptions of other organization characteristics. In addition, person–organization fit mediated these relationships. These findings speak to the importance of examining how aspects of Web-based recruitment influence Millennial applicants.

**Keywords:** Attraction; Millennials; Recruitment; Web; Work–life balance.

As the first stage of the staffing process, the recruitment of quality applicants is vital to an organization’s success (Ployhart, 2006). In short, “the ultimate

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cost of failure to attract applicants may be organizational failure” (Barber & Roehling, 1993, p. 845). Technological advances have played an influential role on the practice of recruitment in recent years, with an increasing number of organizations and applicants turning to the Internet as part of the recruitment process. Monster.com (n.d.), for example, boasts that over seven million job searches are conducted each day using its United States website, and CareerBuilder.com (n.d.) reports over 25.5 million unique visitors to its United States website each month. The growing reliance on Web-based recruitment practices has been accompanied by increasing attention from researchers of applicant attraction (see Breaugh, 2008, for a review).

Another influence on recruitment practices involves the unique characteristics of the Millennial generation. Howe and Strauss (1992, 2000) originally defined this cohort as including those born between 1982 and 2000; the term has also been used to refer to individuals born between 1978 and 1995 (Deloitte, 2008). Also known as Generation Y, this group comprises over 14% of the workforce in the United States and is increasing as its youngest members begin to enter the workforce (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008). Research on job seeking is particularly critical for this group given its relatively high unemployment rate (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008) and thus the likelihood that young workers are particularly involving in job searching. Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that Millennials have unique values and expectations with regard to organizations and job seeking, particularly involving the importance of work–life balance (Twenge, Campbell, Hoffmann, & Lance, 2010).

Although popular press articles and books about Millennial workers are abundant (e.g., Alsop, 2008; Hira, 2007; Lancaster & Stillman, 2002), empirical research on this group is in its infancy (Terjensen, Vinnicombe, & Freeman, 2007; Twenge, 2010). Thus, the purpose of the current study is to contribute to the burgeoning literatures on Web-based recruitment and the Millennial generation by assessing predictors of organizational attraction. We focus on attraction because it “represents that point in the recruitment process where the maximum potential value of recruitment processes is determined” (Carlson, Connerley, & Mecham, 2002, p. 483). Members of the Millennial generation tend to have particular competencies that can enhance organizational competitive advantage, in terms of experience and skills related to the Internet and electronic media (Gorman, Nelson, & Glassman, 2004). In light of Millennials’ computer-related skills and interests, Web-based recruitment is particularly appropriate for this group (Alsop, 2008).

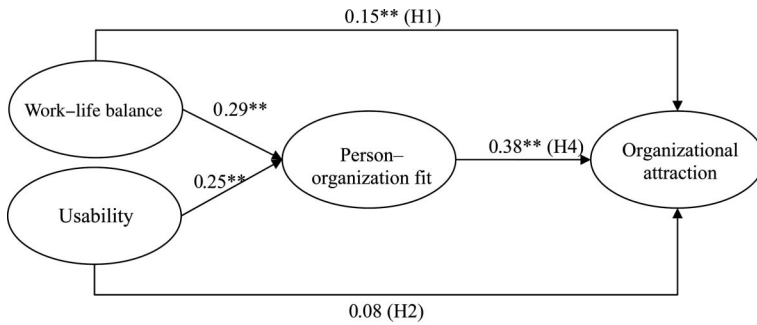
In the present study we focus on two predictors of attraction that are relevant to Millennials: website content related to work–life balance and website design related to usability. Research on Web-based recruitment has

tended to investigate usability and other facets of website *style* but these issues have received little attention in the traditional applicant attraction literature. In contrast, traditional studies of attraction tend to investigate the attractiveness of job and organizational characteristics, but research on Web-based recruitment has less frequently incorporated the *substance* of websites. Work–life balance in particular has yet to be studied in the context of Web-based recruitment despite its importance, especially to Millennials (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008; Cummins, 2007; Gerdes, 2008; Hira, 2007; McDonald & Hite, 2008; Twenge et al., 2010). In the present study we thus add to the literature by uniting the focus on website style (i.e., usability) of Web-based attraction research with the organizational attributes of traditional attraction research (i.e., work–life balance). Moreover, as we combine these in one study, we test the incremental contribution of work–life balance beyond usability, and vice versa, in predicting attraction in order to understand their unique effects. We investigate these relationships while controlling for four organizational characteristics that are studied in typical attraction research, to strengthen our case for the important role of work–life balance and usability in attraction.

The present research applies a number of theoretical perspectives to investigate several areas that have yet to be sufficiently addressed in the literature on recruitment and applicant attraction. First, consistent with the trend for more organizations to incorporate Web-based recruitment, we examine how work–life balance and website usability can serve as signals (Connelly, Certo, Ireland, & Reutzel, 2011; Rynes, 1991; Spence, 1973) that contribute to attraction. Second, we draw on the Elaboration Likelihood model (ELM; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) to examine the contributions of work–life balance and website usability to organizational attraction. Whereas past research on Web-based recruitment has primarily focused on website style, we discuss the relative influence of both substance and style in predicting perceptions of attraction based on the ELM. Third, in line with the Attraction–Selection–Attrition model (Schneider, 1987), we examine person–organization fit as a mediator of the relationship between work–life balance and website usability on attraction (see Figure 1).

## WORK–LIFE BALANCE AND USABILITY PREDICTING ORGANIZATIONAL ATTRACTION

Prior research on applicant attraction has tended to investigate face-to-face interactions with recruiters and paper-based advertisements, but we extend this research to the emerging trend of using websites as a recruitment tool (Allen, Mahto, & Otondo, 2007; Breaugh, 2008). The theoretical basis for our first two hypotheses is the premise that applicants use available information as signals to make judgements about organizational



**Figure 1.** Hypotheses and estimated path coefficients for the structural model. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ . Fit indices include CFI = .971, SRMR = .040, RMSEA = .054.

characteristics (Connelly et al., 2011; Rynes, 1991; Spence, 1973). That is, during the job search and application process, individuals usually do not have complete information about jobs and organizations, so they interpret the information they do have as signals of organizational characteristics, which, in turn, contribute to attraction (Highhouse & Hoffman, 2001; Turban, 2001). Research has provided support for the influence of various types of information that could be considered as signals, including information about organizational characteristics or policies (e.g., Aiman-Smith, Bauer, & Cable, 2001; Lievens, Decaestecker, Coetsier, & Geirnaert, 2001), recruiter characteristics or behaviour (e.g., Rynes, 1991; Turban, Forret, & Hendrickson, 1998), and recruitment activities (e.g., Turban, 2001). In what follows, we consider work–life balance and usability separately, then their incremental contributions in predicting attraction.

### Work–life balance

We chose to focus on work–life balance in the present study for several reasons. One is the increased attention it has received of late due to shifts in the composition of the workforce. Work–life balance is particularly salient given its importance to younger individuals such as those in the Millennial generation (e.g., Armour, 2005; Cummins, 2007; Families and Work Institute, n.d.; Gerdes, 2008; Hira, 2007; McDonald & Hite, 2008). Studies of generational differences in work values have highlighted the increased importance that younger workers place on balancing work and personal goals (Smola & Sutton, 2002), freedom-related values (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008), and leisure and work–life balance (Twenge et al., 2010). Similarly, a study of over 37,000 undergraduates reported that the students' number one career goal involved the balance between personal and professional life (Gerdes, 2006). Moreover, in his book on the Millennial

generation and the workplace, Alsop (2008) extensively discussed the importance of work–life balance to these individuals. In the present study, we focus on work–life balance rather than the more narrow idea of work–family balance, because of the importance of work–life balance to a variety of individuals, especially Millennials. Indeed, Twenge et al.'s (2010) results showed that “the desire for leisure and a better work–life balance starts long before young workers have families” (pp. 1135–1136).

A critical reason for our inclusion of work–life balance in the present study is that it is often portrayed in organizational recruitment websites and has been included in traditional studies of recruitment. Consistent with this, 47% of the organizations in Bond, Galinsky, Kim, and Brownfield's (2005) study indicated that their primary reason for implementing work–life balance policies was to recruit and retain workers. Empirical studies in the traditional attraction literature have supported the relationship between work–life balance and attraction (Bretz & Judge, 1994; Carless & Wintle, 2007; Casper & Buffardi, 2004; Honeycutt & Rosen, 1997; Rau & Hyland, 2002), illustrating the importance of the construct across jobs and organizations.

Website content regarding work–life balance could not only contribute to attraction on its own, but this material could also be interpreted by viewers as signalling other desirable organizational characteristics that are not displayed on the website, as well as provide a basis for assessments of organization's personality (Slaughter, Zickar, Highhouse, & Mohr, 2004), which could contribute to judgements of attraction. For instance, Carless and Wintle (2007) suggested that work–life balance policies should signal an organization's support for employees' needs, as well as enhance the likelihood of perceptions of justice, which in turn should predict attraction. Thus, with regard to Millennials in particular, website signals that an organization cares about its employees' needs for work–life balance and is concerned with what Millennial employees value should yield perceptions of attraction.

It is unfortunate that practice has outpaced research with regard to website content in general and work–life balance content in particular. Indeed, only a couple of studies have researched the role of specific website content variables in predicting attraction. Cober, Brown, Levy, Keeping, and Cober (2003), for example, found that website content related to culture, compensation, and development predicted attraction to an organization. We could not locate any published studies of Web-based recruitment that incorporated work–life balance, despite Cober, Brown, and Levy's (2004) finding that 50% of the websites of organizations on Fortune's 2002 “Best Companies” list included work–life content. Based primarily on theory, then, we propose the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 1:* Perceptions of work–life balance as conveyed on an organizational website are positively related to organizational attraction.

## Usability

Similar to our rationale for selecting the website content variable of work–life balance, we selected a website style characteristic that is often represented in organizational recruitment websites and supported by empirical research on attraction. Cober, Brown, Keeping, and Levy (2004) noted that, compared to traditional recruitment methods, websites tend to provide more vivid and dynamic experiences for the viewer. Based on the marketing and human–computer interaction literatures, they developed a theoretical model including aesthetics, playfulness, usability, and system features (e.g., navigation) as contributing to applicant attraction. Indeed, such features of Web-based recruitment allow for information to be conveyed with a high level of richness (e.g., Daft & Lengel, 1986).

The style characteristics of an organization’s website could be seen as signals of other organizational characteristics. For instance, website usability could lead individuals to infer that the company and its workforce are technologically advanced (Ehrhart & Ziegert, 2005), which is likely an important consideration for Millennials. Usability could also reflect that a company is interested enough in employee recruitment and attraction to invest resources in creating an accessible website. That is, it could suggest an organization’s concern for providing information in a user-friendly way to all types of viewers of its website, including those who are technologically savvy as well as those with weaker technological skills and backgrounds. In line with this theoretical justification, empirical studies have shown that website navigational ease or usability significantly predicts individuals’ impressions of an organization (Braddy, Thompson, Wuensch, & Grossnickle, 2003; Cober et al., 2003). We expect that this finding should particularly be the case for Millennial individuals, given their generally high technological competencies and experience (Gorman et al., 2004). We therefore propose the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 2:* Perceptions of website usability are positively related to organizational attraction.

## Incremental contributions of work–life balance and usability

A primary goal of our research was to test the unique contributions of website substance and website style in predicting organizational attraction for Millennials. In framing this hypothesis, we draw on the Elaboration Likelihood model (ELM), which proposes that persuasion can occur through both central and peripheral routes (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Petty & Wegener, 1999). The central route to attitude formation is based on individuals’ effortful processing of information in order to evaluate and

scrutinize the merits of the message or issue. In contrast, the peripheral route is a result of relatively low effort processes based on cues other than the message content. The ELM is not only a well-supported theory of persuasion in general, but it has also recently been applied to recruitment contexts (e.g., Cable & Turban, 2001; Cable & Yu, 2006; Dineen, Ling, Ash, & DelVecchio, 2007; Jones, Shultz, & Chapman, 2006; Roberson, Collins, & Oreg, 2005).

The ELM provides a useful framework from which to understand multiple mechanisms by which websites influence attraction. Rather than focusing on either substance (as with traditional recruitment studies) or style (as with Web-based recruitment studies) in isolation, the ELM framework facilitates the study and understanding of both, in conjunction with one another. Indeed, Dineen et al. (2007, p. 358) noted that “the tendency for past recruitment research to focus on content or style issues in isolation has failed to recognize the possibility that messages contain elements that encourage both central and peripheral processing”.

We consider website content such as work–life balance to be in line with the central processing route, whereas style characteristics such as usability fall along the peripheral processing route. That is, website material illustrating the characteristics of the organization in terms of work–life balance policies and practices should engender individuals to more deeply process aspects of the website and the organization. In other words, information describing salient aspects of the organization, such as work–life balance for Millennials, should lead individuals to expend effort to consider and evaluate this information in forming perceptions of attraction. In contrast, the usability of the website should result in the peripheral form of processing. With this less effortful peripheral processing, the style of the website serves as a cue, unrelated to the message content, through which individuals either make positive or negative impressions about the organization in general and their attraction to it.

Given the dearth of empirical research on website content such as work–life balance in the Web-based recruitment literature, it is not surprising that very little research has incorporated both substance and style variables in a single study (see Cober et al., 2003, for an exception). Although theory and research have separately illustrated the importance of work–life balance and usability in predicting attraction, we expect both to demonstrate unique effects on attraction. Thus, we expect both the central route (work–life balance) and peripheral route (usability) to have unique effects. Moreover, we predict that substance will have a larger effect over style than vice versa, because the ELM postulates that attitude change is stronger via central processing than peripheral processing. When individuals engage in effortful scrutiny of the message content, the resulting attitudes that are formed are more resistant to change and less temporary than attitudes formed based on



cues or heuristics associated with the peripheral processing (Cable & Turban, 2001; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Thus, work–life balance content should result in stronger attraction and therefore account for more variance over website usability.

*Hypothesis 3:* Perceptions of work–life balance and perceptions of website usability will account for unique variance over and above each other in predicting organizational attraction. Further, perceptions of work–life balance will account for more unique variance over perceptions of usability than usability over work–life balance.

### The mediating role of person–organization fit

In the present study, the outcome variable of interest is attraction, and our hypotheses are framed accordingly. This follows the literature on Web-based recruitment; however, the traditional recruitment literature is less consistent as both person–environment fit and attraction have been considered as outcomes. We thus aimed to disentangle the roles of fit and attraction by incorporating both in our study. In line with Breugh's (2008) call for more research on recruitment that incorporates mediating variables, we posit that person–organization fit mediates the relationship between website characteristics and attraction.

Gorman et al. (2004) indicated that person–organization fit is particularly important to Millennial generation employees. To the extent that Millennials value work–life balance (Alsop, 2008), increased perceptions that an organization shares this value (i.e., by providing website content related to work–life balance) should yield greater person–organization fit. Similarly, to the extent that Millennials value technology and website usability (Gorman et al., 2004), increased perceptions that an organization shares these values (i.e., by providing a usable website) should yield greater person–organization fit. In turn, the more that individuals feel their values are in line with the organization's values, these perceptions of person–organization fit should yield greater organizational attraction (Cable & Judge, 1996; Dineen, Ash, & Noe, 2002).

A theoretical basis for the relationship between fit and attraction is provided by the Attraction–Selection–Attrition (ASA) model, which proposes that individuals are attracted to a particular environment based on the degree to which they perceive they fit that context (Schneider, 1987). Numerous studies have supported the attraction component of the ASA model by demonstrating that individuals are attracted to jobs and/or organizations with characteristics that they perceive match their own (e.g., Bretz & Judge, 1994; Cable & Judge, 1996; Dineen et al., 2002; Judge & Bretz, 1992; Lievens et al., 2001; Turban & Keon, 1993). Further, a

meta-analysis by Chapman, Uggerslev, Carroll, Piasentin, and Jones (2005) illustrated the relationship between person–organization fit and attraction across four studies was  $\rho = .46$ . Moreover, a few studies of Web-based recruitment have examined individuals' reactions to "fit feedback" provided by hypothetical recruitment websites, and have found that providing such feedback predicts attraction (Dineen et al., 2002, 2007; Hu, Su, & Chen, 2007).

We therefore propose that perceived person–organization fit serves as a mediator of the relationship between perceptions of website work–life balance content and website usability and attraction. Specifically, perceptions that a website has good usability and content related to work–life balance should contribute to Millennials' perceptions of person–organization fit, which in turn should predict organizational attraction in line with the ASA model.

*Hypothesis 4:* Perceived person–organization fit mediates the relationship between perceptions of work–life balance and website style usability and organizational attraction.

## METHOD

### Sample and procedure

A sample of 493 undergraduate students at a university in the Southwestern United States volunteered to participate in the study for course credit. In line with our focus on the Millennial generation, all participants were born between 1978 and 1987; the mean age was 19.4 years ( $SD = 1.8$  years). The sample was 58.4% male and 41.6% female, and participants included 58.0% White Americans, 16.8% Asian Americans, 13.8% Hispanic Americans, 3.0% African Americans, and the remaining 8.4% reported other ethnic group membership or were missing data. In addition, 91.7% of the participants had held a job before, and 72.4% were planning to apply for a job in the next year.<sup>1</sup>

Consistent with other recruitment studies that have used actual organizational websites (Allen et al., 2004, 2007; Braddy, Meade, & Kroustalis, 2006; Cober et al., 2003), we asked participants to review the website of one of four Fortune 500 organizations matched on industry. Participants were randomly assigned to websites; the specific websites were chosen based on pilot research indicating that they conveyed an adequate

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<sup>1</sup>We also tested the hypotheses after limiting the sample to only those individuals who were planning to apply for a job in the next year. The same results were found as those reported for the full sample.

level of information regarding work–life balance.<sup>2</sup> In order to heighten participants' motivation for the task (see Jones et al., 2006), we instructed them to “assume the role of a potential job applicant who is looking for a job and wants to learn more about the organization and what it would be like to work for the company”. We told them that “a good place [for you] to start might be the Web pages describing the overview of the company or the Web pages regarding careers at the organization”. Similar to Allen et al. (2007), we allowed participants to freely review the website, although we limited the time permitted to 15 minutes. Indeed, when Allen et al. gave their participants unlimited time to review the website, participants spent an average of 7.76 minutes browsing the website. In the present study, participants were instructed that they would be asked about several organizational attributes (e.g., work–life balance, image, advancement opportunities), and once 15 minutes had elapsed, they responded to the study measures.

## Measures

Participants responded to each of the measures using a 7-point scale from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 7 (“strongly agree”). All items are presented in the Appendix. We measured perceptions of website content related to work–life balance with three items ( $\alpha = .94$ ). One item was based on Bretz and Judge (1994) and the other two items were written for the present study. We measured perceived usability with seven items ( $\alpha = .82$ ) from Cober et al. (2003). We measured person–organization fit with three items ( $\alpha = .93$ ) from Cable and DeRue (2002). We measured organization attraction with five items ( $\alpha = .91$ ) adapted from Turban and Keon (1993).

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<sup>2</sup>We conducted pilot testing by asking eight undergraduate and master's students to view the four organizational websites used in the present study. We selected four organizations from the pharmaceutical industry based on their presence on the current version of Fortune's “Most Admired” list. We chose the pharmaceutical industry because participants were not familiar with organizations in this industry (pilot testing yielded ratings of 1 or 2 on a 7-point scale related to familiarity). This lack of familiarity would better allow for individuals' perceptions of attraction to be influenced by the website rather than any previous experiences with the organizations. Second, pilot testing indicated that there was sufficient information available on the organizations' websites with regard to work–life balance. Specifically, across the four organizations' websites, the average rating was 5.3 on a 7-point scale in terms of sufficiency of work–life balance information available on the websites. Taking each organization's website individually, the scores ranged from 3.8 to 6.4 in terms of sufficiency of information available related to work–life balance. Since a one-way analysis of variance revealed a significant difference across the four organizations in terms of the amount of information available on the websites related to work–life balance, we controlled for condition (which website was viewed) in all analyses of the hypotheses.

To assess the effect of work–life balance and usability beyond traditionally studied organizational characteristics, we controlled for perceptions of four organizational characteristics. We selected these particular control variables because they have been found to predict attraction in traditional recruitment research (e.g., Allen et al., 2007; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Turban et al., 1998), and we presumed that they could have an influence in the context of Web-based recruitment as well. We measured organizational image with five items (one based on Turban et al., 1998; four written for the present study) that mentioned the organization’s image, work environment, and reputation. We took a broad approach to conceptualizing image, consistent with work that has characterized image as general impressions of the organization’s attractiveness (Rynes, 1991) and “the public’s perception of a given organization” (Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000, p. 63). We measured image before ( $\alpha = .96$ ) and after ( $\alpha = .90$ ) participants viewed a website, in order to control for the possibility that prior exposure to the organization would influence attraction (as found by Gatewood, Gowan, & Lautenschlager, 1993, and Turban, Lau, Ngo, Chow, & Si, 2001). We measured co-worker relationships with three items ( $\alpha = .87$ ; two based on Turban et al., 1998; one based on Cable & Graham, 2000). We measured job security with three items ( $\alpha = .86$ ; one based on Jurgensen, 1978; one based on Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; one written for the present study). We measured advancement opportunities with four items ( $\alpha = .86$ ; one from Cable & Graham, 2000; one from Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; two written for the present study). We also measured several demographic control variables: sex, age, race/ethnicity, work experience, and plans to apply for jobs in the next year.

## RESULTS

We present means, standard deviations, and correlations in Table 1. We tested Hypotheses 1–3 with multiple regression, controlling for website viewed and the additional organizational characteristics. Results that included the demographic controls were similar to the results without the demographic controls; in order to simplify the presentation of results, we report findings without the demographic controls. We tested Hypothesis 4 with structural equation modelling.

Hypothesis 1 proposed that perceptions of work–life balance would predict organizational attraction. Support for this hypothesis was found using zero-order correlation analysis,  $r = .29$ ,  $p < .01$  (Table 1) as well as regression analysis,  $\beta = .16$ ,  $p < .01$  (Table 2).

Hypothesis 2 proposed that perceptions of usability would predict organizational attraction. Support for this hypothesis was found using

TABLE 1  
Means, standard deviations, and correlations for study variables

|   | Mean  | SD   | 1    | 2    | 3    | 4    | 5    | 6    | 7    | 8   | 9    | 10   | 11   | 12   | 13   |
|---|-------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-----|------|------|------|------|------|
| 1. Work-life balance                        | 5.34  | 1.21 |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |     |      |      |      |      |      |
| 2. Pre-Web image                            | 4.06  | 0.61 | .00  |      |      |      |      |      |      |     |      |      |      |      |      |
| 3. Post-Web image                           | 5.65  | 0.87 | .41  | .04  |      |      |      |      |      |     |      |      |      |      |      |
| 4. Co-workers                               | 5.35  | 0.95 | .34  | .02  | .57  |      |      |      |      |     |      |      |      |      |      |
| 5. Job security                             | 4.81  | 0.94 | .33  | .05  | .46  | .39  |      |      |      |     |      |      |      |      |      |
| 6. Advancement opp.                         | 5.08  | 0.86 | .41  | -.02 | .40  | .44  | .50  |      |      |     |      |      |      |      |      |
| 7. Usability                                | 5.90  | 0.72 | .23  | -.01 | .30  | .22  | .19  | .24  |      |     |      |      |      |      |      |
| 8. P-O fit                                  | 4.98  | 1.13 | .33  | -.03 | .46  | .39  | .29  | .27  | .28  |     |      |      |      |      |      |
| 9. Attraction                               | 4.89  | 1.25 | .29  | .05  | .39  | .23  | .24  | .20  | .24  | .45 |      |      |      |      |      |
| 10. Age                                     | 19.37 | 1.78 | -.02 | .01  | -.04 | -.10 | -.05 | -.01 | -.10 | .00 | .11  |      |      |      |      |
| 11. Sex                                     | 0.58  | 0.49 | .04  | .00  | .03  | .04  | -.01 | -.02 | .10  | .02 | -.05 | -.20 |      |      |      |
| 12. Race                                    | 0.42  | 0.49 | -.09 | .07  | .04  | .04  | -.00 | -.08 | -.06 | .00 | .08  | .02  | .01  |      |      |
| 13. Work experience                         | 0.92  | 0.28 | .04  | .01  | -.06 | -.06 | -.01 | -.02 | -.04 | .03 | .05  | .17  | -.12 | -.16 |      |
| 14. Plan to apply for jobs in the next year | 0.72  | 0.45 | .05  | .02  | .06  | -.02 | .02  | -.05 | -.01 | .04 | .03  | -.06 | -.03 | .01  | -.02 |

*N* = 493 for all variables except for race (*N* = 491). Correlations at or above .09 are significant at *p* < .05; correlations at or above .16 are significant at *p* < .01. Variables 1–9 measured on a 7-point scale; sex: 0 = female, 1 = male; race: 0 = White/Caucasian, 1 = non-White; work experience and plan to apply for jobs in the next year: 0 = no, 1 = yes.

TABLE 2  
 Hierarchical regression analyses: Work-life balance and website usability predicting attraction (Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3)

|                   | <i>B</i> | <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> | $\Delta R^2$ |                   | $\beta$ | <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> | $\Delta R^2$ |
|-------------------|----------|-----------------------|--------------|-------------------|---------|-----------------------|--------------|
| Step 1            |          | .01                   | .01          | Step 1            |         | .01                   | .01          |
| Condition 1       | 0.08     |                       |              | Condition 1       | 0.08    |                       |              |
| Condition 2       | 0.06     |                       |              | Condition 2       | 0.06    |                       |              |
| Condition 3       | -0.01    |                       |              | Condition 3       | -0.01   |                       |              |
| Pre-Web image     | 0.05     |                       |              | Pre-Web image     | 0.05    |                       |              |
| Step 2            |          | .19                   | .18**        | Step 2            |         | .07                   | .06**        |
| Condition 1       | -0.06    |                       |              | Condition 1       | 0.09    |                       |              |
| Condition 2       | -0.12*   |                       |              | Condition 2       | 0.06    |                       |              |
| Condition 3       | -0.13*   |                       |              | Condition 3       | -0.01   |                       |              |
| Pre-Web image     | 0.03     |                       |              | Pre-Web image     | 0.05    |                       |              |
| Post-Web image    | 0.34**   |                       |              | Usability         | 0.24**  |                       |              |
| Co-workers        | -0.01    |                       |              |                   |         |                       |              |
| Job security      | 0.06     |                       |              |                   |         |                       |              |
| Advancement opp.  | -0.02    |                       |              |                   |         |                       |              |
| Work-life balance | 0.18**   |                       |              |                   |         |                       |              |
| Step 3            |          | .20                   | .01*         | Step 3            |         | .20                   | .13**        |
| Condition 1       | -0.05    |                       |              | Condition 1       | -0.05   |                       |              |
| Condition 2       | -0.11*   |                       |              | Condition 2       | -0.11*  |                       |              |
| Condition 3       | -0.12*   |                       |              | Condition 3       | -0.12*  |                       |              |
| Pre-Web image     | 0.04     |                       |              | Pre-Web image     | 0.04    |                       |              |
| Post-Web image    | 0.31**   |                       |              | Usability         | 0.11*   |                       |              |
| Co-workers        | -0.01    |                       |              | Post-Web image    | 0.31**  |                       |              |
| Job security      | 0.06     |                       |              | Co-workers        | -0.01   |                       |              |
| Advancement opp.  | -0.03    |                       |              | Job security      | 0.06    |                       |              |
| Work-life balance | 0.16**   |                       |              | Advancement opp.  | -0.03   |                       |              |
| Usability         | 0.11*    |                       |              | Work-life balance | 0.16**  |                       |              |

Condition variables represent dummy codes for website viewed. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ .

zero-order correlation analysis,  $r = .24$ ,  $p < .01$  (Table 1) as well as regression analysis,  $\beta = .11$ ,  $p < .05$  (Table 2).

Hypothesis 3 proposed that work-life balance and website usability would predict attraction over and above each other. The results of a usefulness analysis (Darlington, 1968) involving hierarchical regression are shown in Step 3 of Table 2 and revealed that both variables accounted for unique variance when all variables were included in the regression. Further, the incremental contribution of work-life balance and the other organizational characteristics over and above usability,  $\Delta R^2 = .13$ ,  $p < .01$ , was larger than the incremental contribution of usability over and above work-life balance and the other organizational characteristics predicting attraction,  $\Delta R^2 = .01$ ,  $p < .01$ . We also tested this hypothesis without the additional organizational characteristic control variables, and the pattern of

results was similar: the contribution of work–life balance over and above usability,  $\Delta R^2 = .06$ ,  $p < .01$ , was larger than the contribution of usability over and above work–life balance,  $\Delta R^2 = .03$ ,  $p < .01$ , in predicting attraction. Thus, Hypothesis 3 was supported.

We tested Hypothesis 4, which posited person–organization fit as a mediator of the relationships between perceived work–life balance content and website usability in predicting attraction, using structural equation modeling analyses in EQS 6.1 (Bentler, 2006). We first ran a measurement model which included all items for the four variables involved in this hypothesis (work–life balance, usability, person–organization fit, and attraction) loading on their respective factors and allowing the covariances among the four structural model variables to be freely estimated. Results indicated adequate fit,  $\chi^2(129) = 312.22$ ,  $p < .001$ , CFI = .971, SRMR = .040, RMSEA = .054. The standardized loadings from the indicators to the factors ranged from .62 to .95, with the exception of one usability item that had a loading of .36, and all were significant at  $p < .001$ . As a test of the discriminant validity among the variables, we then compared this model to a single-factor model,  $\chi^2(135) = 3940.61$ ,  $p < .001$ , CFI = .390, SRMR = .199, RMSEA = .239. The fit for this model was significantly worse,  $\Delta\chi^2(6) = 3628.39$ ,  $p < .001$ .

We then tested the structural model shown in Figure 1, which is consistent with the role of fit as a partial mediator of the relationship between work–life balance and usability and attraction. This model demonstrated adequate fit,  $\chi^2(129) = 312.21$ ,  $p < .001$ , CFI = .971, SRMR = .040, RMSEA = .054. We also tested a full mediation model,  $\chi^2(131) = 327.48$ ,  $p < .001$ , CFI = .968, SRMR = .058, RMSEA = .055, which demonstrated significantly worse fit than the partial mediation model,  $\Delta\chi^2(2) = 15.27$ ,  $p < .001$ . Sobel tests (Preacher & Leonardelli, 2001) indicated significant indirect effects of work–life balance,  $z = 5.17$ ,  $p < .01$ , and usability,  $z = 4.39$ ,  $p < .01$ , on attraction through the mediator of person–organization fit. In terms of the specific paths for the partial mediation model, work–life balance,  $\beta = 0.29$ ,  $p < .01$ , and usability,  $\beta = 0.25$ ,  $p < .01$ , were significantly related to fit, and fit was significantly related to attraction,  $\beta = 0.38$ ,  $p < .01$ . Work–life balance,  $\beta = 0.15$ ,  $p < .01$ , had a significant direct path to attraction, consistent with partial mediation. The path from usability to attraction was not significant, however,  $\beta = 0.08$ , *ns*, consistent with full mediation.

We also tested Hypothesis 4 while controlling for website viewed and the additional organizational characteristics (by treating them as additional latent predictors). The fit for the partially mediated model,  $\chi^2(740) = 2141.52$ ,  $p < .001$ , CFI = .908, SRMR = .057, RMSEA = .062, was acceptable but not quite as good as the model with no controls; the difference likely reflects additional measurement error introduced by the

control variables. The overall pattern of results was similar to the model without controls in terms of the significance of the paths, although the coefficients were consistently, and not surprisingly, weaker. We thus found support for Hypothesis 4, even when including these control variables.<sup>3</sup>

## DISCUSSION

Our goal was to bring together the attention to organizational attributes of traditional attraction research and the attention to website style of Web-based recruitment research, with an interest in the unique characteristics of members of the Millennial generation. We focused on website work–life balance content and website usability in particular given the relevance of these variables for Millennial generation workers. In line with the theory that available information about organizational characteristics serves as a signal contributing to attraction (Connelly et al., 2011; Rynes, 1991; Spence, 1973), as well as the Elaboration Likelihood model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) and the Attraction–Selection–Attrition model (Schneider, 1987), we found support for each of our hypotheses.

We first found evidence that perceptions of website content related to work–life balance predicted organizational attraction. Although research has supported the role of work–life balance in the context of traditional recruitment, we know of no published studies in the Web-based recruitment literature that have investigated work–life balance. We also found that perceived website usability predicted organizational attraction. Perceptions of website substance and style may at least in part predict attraction because these characteristics indicate unseen characteristics of the organization. Website usability, for instance, may contribute to attraction by serving as a signal of an organization's commitment to technology and innovation (Ehrhart & Ziegert, 2005), its investment in recruitment, or concern for website viewers with a range of technological skills. Website content related to work–life balance could contribute to attraction by signalling unseen organizational or job characteristics (e.g., due process policies, job security, pay policies) or reflecting the organization's personality. We encourage research that more directly tests how perceptions of website characteristics operate as signals, as well as research that extends our initial support for the central processing factor of work–life balance and the peripheral processing factor of usability in predicting attraction.

Beyond the independent effects of work–life balance and usability perceptions on attraction, we included both in a series of analyses, in order to gauge whether each incrementally predicted organizational attraction. Our results indicated that both did contribute incrementally over and above

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<sup>3</sup>More details about these results are available from the first author.



each other, suggesting the importance of both in predicting attraction. Furthermore, perceptions of work–life balance provided a larger incremental contribution to attraction as compared to website usability, which is consistent with the ELM’s proposition of a stronger effect on attitudes for central processing than for peripheral processing. Thus, whereas traditional recruitment research has tended to focus on substance in isolation and Web-based recruitment research has tended to focus on style in isolation, the present results contribute to the literature by highlighting that both are important and should be considered in tandem in future research.

We next examined the role of person–organization fit as a mediator of the relationships between perceived work–life balance and usability and organizational attraction. Although some literature on attraction and recruitment has surmised that fit plays a mediating role in the relationship between job and organizational characteristics and attraction, we were able to directly test this empirically. Consistent with the ASA model (Schneider, 1987), we found support for the role of person–organization fit as a mediator of the relationship between perceptions of work–life balance and usability and attraction. This suggests that perceptions of these two website characteristics that are important to Millennial generation members contribute to perceptions of person–organization fit, which in turn contribute to attraction. We encourage future work on Web-based recruitment to incorporate the role of fit, as some researchers have begun to do by investigating fit feedback (Dineen et al., 2002, 2007; Hu et al., 2007).

### Strengths and limitations

In practice, organizations have been increasingly relying on Web-based recruitment, but the scientific literature has yet to fully explicate a number of issues related to this trend, particularly with regard to website content. Indeed, in Ployhart’s (2006) review of the literature on Internet recruiting, he raised the important questions of how recruitment websites fit into mainstream recruiting research and whether they yield substantive differences from other recruiting mediums. One strength of our study was its grounding in multiple relevant theoretical frameworks—theory regarding signalling (Connelly et al., 2011; Rynes, 1991; Spence, 1973), the ELM (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), and the ASA model (Schneider, 1987)—to examine how work–life balance and usability perceptions contribute to attraction, as mediated by person–organization fit.

Another strength was the use of actual organizational websites to study the role of work–life balance and usability in attraction. This provided a high level of realism for participants; similar to actual job applicants, they explored whichever pages of the website they deemed relevant and/or useful.

Nevertheless, a limitation of our strategy is that since we did not control or track which pages participants viewed; different participants could have visited different pages of the websites, similar to actual applicants' Web browsing. To encourage participants to visit the most relevant pages to our study, we indicated areas, such as the careers section, that would be most useful given our instructions to review the websites as potential job applicants. Although we recognize this could raise the possibility of demand characteristics, we wanted participants to evaluate the websites as if they were actual applicants. Given our instructions to consider a variety of organizational characteristics, we would not expect participants' evaluations of website content, usability, fit, and attraction to be influenced by our instructions.

Our use of a college student sample reflects our interest in the Millennial generation, and it is consistent with a large amount of the research on organizational attraction. Indeed, we focused on work-life balance in this study because it is salient to Millennials in particular (Families and Work Institute, n.d.; Gerdes, 2006, 2008; McDonald & Hite, 2008; Twenge et al., 2010). As noted earlier, over 91% of participants had held a job in the past, and the majority said they were planning to apply for a job in the next year. Accordingly, we believe that this task was realistic for our sample. Nevertheless, as a supplement to our focus on Millennials, we encourage future research on Web-based recruitment to incorporate participants from multiple generational groups as well as to sample from alternative populations, particularly those that might exhibit more variability in terms of internet experience or internet efficacy (e.g., individuals from older generations or lower socioeconomic strata).

We acknowledge the possible issue of same-source response bias in the present study. However, our interest in studying participants' perceptions of and reactions to websites necessitated the collection of data from participants themselves, and our study was designed to realistically mirror the process by which individuals consider organizational websites. Because we focused on an early stage of recruitment (i.e., attraction) based on the critical role that early experiences with an organization play in recruitment (Carlson et al., 2002), we did not measure application or acceptance behaviours. Consistent with the theories of reasoned action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977) and planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), we would expect attitudes regarding attraction to lead to behavioural intentions to apply to an organization, which in turn would predict application and acceptance behaviour. Chapman et al.'s (2005) meta-analysis showed that the relationships with attraction were sizeable for job pursuit intentions ( $\rho = .67$ ) and acceptance intentions ( $\rho = .78$ ) but lower for job choice ( $\rho = .19$ ). Thus, although our results are an important and early step in understanding the implications of website substance and style, we encourage further research

on application and acceptance behaviours in a Web-based recruitment context. In particular, longitudinal research could reveal possible changes in effects at different stages of the recruitment process. Furthermore, we encourage future research to examine the specific signals sent by website features that in turn predict perceptions of fit and attraction throughout the recruitment process, particularly in light of the likelihood that individual differences play a role in which signals are attractive to applicants or other viewers of recruitment materials such as organizational websites (Ehrhart & Ziegert, 2005).

Because we focused on work–life balance and website usability, we certainly do not claim to have represented the entire domain of website substance and style. We strategically selected these variables because they had received support in the traditional and Web-based recruitment literatures and are increasingly relevant for current job seekers, particularly those of the Millennial generation. Moreover, we included several additional organizational characteristics as control variables, in order to demonstrate the incremental contribution of our variables of interest. Nevertheless, we encourage research that builds from our results by examining other substance and style characteristics and incorporating both types of characteristics in a single study.

### Practical implications

Our findings suggest that perceived work–life balance and usability uniquely contribute to Millennials' reactions to organizational websites in terms of attraction. We would thus advise organizations to attend to both in designing recruitment websites—especially those companies who seek to hire the brightest talent of the Millennial generation. Given that millions of job seekers turn to the Internet as part of their job search (Monster, n.d.), it is critical to understand what potential applicants consider as they evaluate their attraction and make application decisions. Indeed, websites are judged not only by applicants but by casual observers who may not even be considering applying for a job, consistent with recruitment research that has included marketing concepts such as brand equity (e.g., Cable & Turban, 2003; Collins & Stevens, 2002; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). Thus, organizations that focus solely on creating usable websites (style) or providing a great deal of information on topics such as work–life balance (substance) will forego the incremental benefits of including both in terms of increasing attraction. Our findings suggest, however, that website content (at least in terms of the characteristics included in our study) could potentially provide a larger incremental contribution to attraction; so, if resources are limited, content could be a better investment than style.

We do offer a cautionary note that enhancing the substance and style of recruitment websites might create too much of a good thing in terms of organizational attraction. Indeed, Dineen et al. (2007, p. 356) have discussed “the ‘dark side’ of Web recruitment that occurs when organizations receive too many applications from poorly fitting applicants”. In line with our findings that suggest person–organization fit mediates the relationship between work–life balance and website usability and attraction, we would therefore encourage organizations to anticipate the implications of attracting large numbers of applicants, and perhaps provide fit feedback or other information that could encourage more accurate self-selection in the recruitment process.

## CONCLUSION

The present study represents an advancement of previous work on attraction and recruitment that is not only theoretically grounded but also practically relevant. As the job market is filled with Web-savvy Millennial applicants who often visit websites as an initial introduction to an organization, it is critical to examine the contributions of website substance and style so that organizations can understand how to manage resources and attract this valuable human capital accordingly. We thus encourage future research on Web-based recruitment given the prevalence of this recruitment method in organizations and the need to balance its opportunities and threats.

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## APPENDIX: STUDY MEASURES

### Work–life balance

1. This organization has policies or practices that allow employees to balance work and family responsibilities.
2. The organization cares about the balance between an employee's work and personal life.
3. This organization has implemented policies that promote a balance between work and family life (e.g., day care, parental leave, flexitime, etc.).

### Usability

1. The content presented on this site was well organized.
2. It was easy to navigate through this site.
3. When I surfed to a new page, I easily found the information I was looking for.
4. The menu bar effectively helped my movement through the site.
5. This site contained too much information.
6. I found it difficult to navigate through this site.
7. I could quickly find the information I was looking for.



### Person–organization fit

1. The things that I value in life are very similar to the things that this organization values.
2. My personal values match this organization’s values and culture.
3. This organization’s values and culture provide a good fit with the things that I value in life.

### Organizational attraction

1. I would exert a great deal of effort to work for this company.
2. I would be interested in submitting an application to this company.
3. I would like to work for this company.
4. I would accept a job offer from this company.
5. I would not be interested in this company except as a last resort.

### Organizational image

1. The organization has a reputation as being an excellent employer.
2. The organization has a positive work environment.
3. The organization has a positive organizational image.
4. This organization has been recognized for its good reputation.
5. The organization has a reputation for being a good company.

### Co-worker relationships

1. There is a supportive work environment.
2. There are warm, friendly co-workers.
3. This organization seems to have a friendly “culture” or atmosphere where people enjoy working with each other.

### Job security

1. The organization offers steady work, with little chance of lay-offs.
2. The organization offers a great deal of job security.
3. People who work here have a “solid” job.

### Advancement opportunities

1. There seems to be a vast array of opportunities for employees in this organization (in terms of promotions, training, etc.).

2. Employees in this organization are frequently promoted.
3. There are many possible opportunities for advancement.
4. The organization considers it a priority to provide employees with many opportunities to grow and develop their skills.