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Physical Attractiveness Or Referrals: Which Matters The Most?

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Abstract

There is a blend of various factors on which the hiring of employee is based upon. This paper investigates and interrogates the contribution of physical attractiveness and referrals in the hiring of employee and further ponders on which matters the most from the above outlined variables when an employee is hired. The findings of the paper clearly confirm that it is the physical attractiveness which matters the most when an organization (hiring manager) goes for hiring on any hierarchical level.

Keywords: *Physical attractiveness, Referrals, Social network, Hiring, Selection process, Recruitment process.*

1. Introduction

In today's society, a great emphasis on a person's physical appearance is given, such that even their personality is judged by the looks they have. These personality traits are also commonly found in organizations too especially at the time of hiring. Similarly, most of the organizations are hiring new employees through more informal resources of recruitment mainly due to referrals [Marsden and Gorman 2001].

There were numerous studies carried out to identify the impact of physical attractiveness and referrals on recruitment process. In the theory 'what is beautiful is good', a perception was developed that physical attractiveness is an attribute that is related to better lives and better personalities [Dion, Berscheid, &Walster, 1972]. More evidence on this stereotype was collected by Tompkins and Boor [1980] when they conducted a study in which students were to evaluate candidates on the basis of the presence of their pictures with their qualifications and experience. It was found out that attractive candidates were evaluated more positively than the unattractive. But some researchers have a different view as well, Alan Feingold [1992] found in his study that there is indeed a very fine line of difference between the personalities of attractive and unattractive people, so it's not necessary that attractive people are always perceived as good.

Recruitment through referrals is mainly strong in smaller firms, firms which are about only half of the labor markets [Bartram, D., P. A. Lindley, L. Marshall, and J. Foster. 1995; Barber, Wesson and Roberson 1999; Mencken and Winfield 1998]. Not only employers are

getting benefits from referral recruitment but it comprises a lot of importance for job-seekers as well. From the research [Granovetter 1995; Marsden and Gorman 2001], it was found that almost half of the recruitment in America is done through informal sources and personal networking.

The central point of this study is to understand the relationship between a candidate's physical appearance, referrals and the hiring decision to determine the impact that the physical attractiveness or referrals stereotype might have on hiring decisions. The overall relationships of the physical attractiveness and referrals on hiring decisions by managers in the corporate world has been empirically analyzed and resulted.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Beauty Premium and Role of Human Resource

Studies are continuously providing us strong evidence that physical appearance matters a lot, people at workplace even actually do consider the facts regarding beauty like beautiful-intelligent, smart-successful and well dressed-valuable. These attributes of beauty work in connection with the success of a person, people relate to the idea that good looking people do perform well, consist more confidence and are able to work more efficiently as compared to not so good looking people. The phenomenon is highly applied in people related sectors like Human Resources and Marketing. Interestingly, this is not restricted to a single place or country, this is effective worldwide.

If we say that the natural urge to give preference to physically attractive people more, then we must also believe that we are in other words giving them more breaks in life. The biasness comes to an unfair position when in hiring process, physical attraction matters more than the relevant qualifications [Gilmore, D.C., Beehr, T.A., & Love, K.G., 1986]. This happens mostly when job is not that highly profiled vacancy but rather a low grade position; physical attraction plays a vital role in these circumstances.

The effect of physical attraction does not end in interview room. One study by Biddle, J.E., and Hamermesh, D.S. [1998] confirms that good looking employees earn 5% more than not so good looking employees. In a similar research, [Harper, B., 2000] it was discovered that tall men earn around 6% more than average height men and below average men are likely to experience a penalty of about -4%.

Beauty Premium in HR is benefitting employers more. According to research, [Pfann, G. A., Biddle, J. E., Hamermesh, D. S., & Bosman, C. M., 2000] specially advertising agencies with good looking executives are growing faster and are more successful in business than firms with less good looking executives. This phenomenon may have come from the power of persuasiveness which implies in sales sector also. In almost every sector of business, attractive people are found to be more successful as compared to unattractive people, they get more salary, they get easily promoted, and they get money if they want to, they can convince their colleagues or people faster, and even they can get out of a trap more easily than unattractive people.

2.2 What is Beautiful is Good

The phenomenon of 'what is beautiful is good' has been detected world widely and almost in every culture. According to this, attractive people must be healthier and compatible to every situation than unattractive people [Dion, Berscheid & Walster, 1972]. Dion also commented in the

study that attractive people have better jobs, better personal lives, and even better personalities. Hiring processes are specially affected by this, greater the attractiveness higher is the chances of getting hired [Watkins & Johnston, 2000]. Nor high qualification nor relevant experience comes under consideration when this effect comes.

In the mid-1960s, first published empirical inquiry into physical attractiveness phenomenon was conducted by Mills and Aronson [Mills and Aronson, 1965]. The study investigated the relationship between the changes of a receiver who has been exposed to a persuasive message and the function of the physical attractiveness of that particular message communicator. In our study, we will use methods to test the bias within males and females both. We will also consider the other beauty related attributes like good dressing styles, physical appearance, gender and appearance of photographs on resumes. Usually previous researches were done on gender preference, showing such results that that males were preferred for managerial positions over females [Schneider, S.L.,Marlowe, C.M., & Nelson C.E. 1996].

2.3 Social Networks in Hiring

Social networks are always considered as an important trait of labor markets [Granovetter 1995]. Estimation is that almost half of all American workers report learning about their job through their social network (friends, acquaintances, relatives etc.) and the other half proportion of employers report using the social networks of their current employees when hiring (extensively surveyed in [Ioannides and Loury, 2006&Topa, 2010]).

Amazingly, however, social networks are usually never included in the equilibrium models that are used to study labor markets. A large literature uses graph theory to study social networks [Jackson, 2008]. It is observed that growing access to referrals lead to faster job-finding for workers. A higher employment rate for the individuals in the network means higher access to referrals. Topa[2001] finds different census tracks in the Chicago area to prove strong evidence of local spillovers in employment rates. It is also noted that the referred applicants are statistically different from non-referred ones. Fernandez and Weinberg [1997] and Castilla[2005] examine all the job applicants (successful and unsuccessful) in their firm level studies, and find that referred applicants are more likely to be hired after controlling for their observable characteristics or behaviors. The finding of Holzer [1987] and Blau& Robbins [1990] using EOPP data also supports that the Fernandez study by adding that referrals have a greater “hire yield” for firms than searching in the market.

3. Research Hypothesis

For this study, perceptions were tested as the mediating variables/other factors to impact physical attractiveness or referrals on hiring decisions. Hence, the prime purpose of the study is to analyze the impact of 'Physical Attractiveness' or 'Referrals' and 'hiring decisions', also to find out which matters the most when the organizations go for hiring.

For testing the proposition of this paper, following hypothesis was formulated and interrogated.

Table 1:Impact of physical attractiveness or referrals on hiring decisions

H1:	Physical Attractiveness is given more priority than Referrals when hiring employees
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4. Methodology

The aim is to determine the relationship and analyze the associations between variable (physical attractiveness/referrals) on the other variable (recruitment process).

To conduct this research, primary data was collected in the form of 'questionnaires-survey' as the research tool from employers of different organizations working in Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United States of America and Bahrain.

The total of 170 questionnaires with cover letters having handy instructions attached were delivered and collected from the respondents. T-test (one sample test) is used to test the impact of physical attractiveness/referrals on recruitment process and which matters the most.

5. Results and Discussions

Table 2: Paired Samples Statistics
Summary Assessment of Research Hypothesis

Hypothesis		Variables	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Empirical Conclusion
H1: Physical Attractiveness is given more priority than Referrals when hiring employees	Pair 1	Physical Attractiveness	3.1669	171	.57580	.04403	Accepted
		Referrals	2.8488	171	1.09508	.08374	

[At $p < 0.05$]

This first table shows the mean value of Physical Attractiveness as 3.1669 and the mean value of Referrals as 2.8488 when the sample size is 171 for both. This shows a difference in the mean values and thus proving that Physical Attractiveness is considered more than Referrals at the time of hiring.

Since $p = 0.000$ which is less than 0.05, this indicates that the result is significant at the 0.05 significance level, thus causing in the rejection of the null hypotheses and the acceptance of alternative hypothesis stated as "H1: Physical Attractiveness is given more priority than Referrals when hiring employees".

In the light of previous research [Umberson, D., & Hughes, M., 1987], if we consider different moods and affection styles, physically attractive and appealing people are known to be more effective than less physically attractive people. This gives us the idea that not only attractive people are more influential when it comes to job related outcomes but they are also very effective in performing different tasks. In our structured questionnaire, several variables related to physical attractiveness were questioned in order to get a proper perspective of the survey replies, we found mostly positive results. Attractive people are considered to be more interactive and good communicators as supported by Feingold, A. [1992] believe that physically attractive people are more social and less lonely due to their level of confidence and relax mood. The present study

strongly supports this theory, during our research; we have actually come across several employers who strongly support this concept.

Jackson, 2008 observed that growing access to referrals lead to faster job-finding for workers. A higher employment rate for the individuals in the network means higher access to referrals. It is seen that with the increased number of impersonators and frauds, it has become hardly difficult to trust someone by sharing the confidentiality of the organization. During this research, employers do agree upon the factor that they give preference to the candidate who comes with a reference; however, its application is somewhat less in practice than physical attractiveness.

The aim of this study was to check whether there is any impact of physical attractiveness and referrals on the hiring decisions by managers or not and which matters the most. The results showed that there is no direct impact of these two on hiring decisions but these factors do have significant influence on the hiring decisions once an organization goes for hiring. Moreover, the results showed that physical attractiveness has more influence on the hiring decisions than the referrals. Internet has completely changed the market; online recruiting through job portals has increased enormously and has positively impacted the hiring decisions as well. Most of the hiring nowadays is done through informal channels such as LinkedIn and Facebook, the hiring managers definitely want to check out these two sources to get a suitable employee before going for formal procedure of proper job advertisement in newspapers or business magazines.

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