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Can green human resource management attract young talent? An empirical analysis

Green human
resource
management

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine the effect of perceived green human resource management (GHRM) on job pursuit intention (JPI) of prospective employees. In addition, an attempt was made to unfurl the underlying psychological mechanisms and illuminate the boundary conditions of the aforementioned relationship by proposing organizational prestige (OP) as mediator and environmental orientation (EO) and gender as moderators.

Design/methodology/approach – In total, 172 undergraduate engineering students of a reputed engineering institute in India constituted the sample for this scenario-based study. Direct, mediation, moderation and moderated mediation hypotheses were tested using hierarchical linear regression analysis and bootstrapping procedures in SPSS.

Findings – GHRM was found to relate significantly with JPI of prospective applicants and OP mediated the above linkage. EO was found to significantly moderate the association of GHRM with JPI. However, gender failed to add to the understanding of the above relationship.

Practical implications – By providing evidence on the psychological processes which the applicants engage in during employer selection, organizations will be able to form appropriate strategies for attracting talent to their organizations.

Originality/value – The study addresses the call for research to integrate the diverse disciplines of environmental management and human resource management and provides additional insights into human aspect of environmental sustainability. It advances the sustainable HRM literature by providing comprehensive understanding of how and when GHRM influences prospective employee outcomes.

Keywords Gender, Moderated mediation, Environmental orientation, Green human resource management, Job pursuit intention, Organizational prestige

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

People are the key to success of any organization. In this highly competitive business landscape, recruiting and retaining talent can provide distinct competitive advantage to the organizations. Although a developing country like India has an advantage of having a large fraction of young people in the population, most of them lack employability skills and too few are fit for hiring (Anand, 2011). Workplace dynamics are greatly affected by the changing demographics of the workforce. With more and more millennials entering the workforce, organizations are forced to re-think their talent attraction and retention strategies. The millennials expect much more than salary and material rewards from their employer. They aspire to work for an organization that aligns with their values and personal brands. They like to feel good about their employment choices by associating themselves with the employers who inspire them. Thus, it becomes imperative for the organizations to understand the expectations of millennials when it comes to employer selection. In this regard, it has been found that socially responsible firms are preferred over others by the job aspirants (Albinger and Freeman, 2000). A number of studies have established the benefits of corporate social performance for attracting quality candidates to



apply for vacancies (Story *et al.*, 2016; Rupp *et al.*, 2013; Greening and Turban, 2000). However, environment as an important component of corporate social responsibility (CSR) has received little attention in the recruitment literature. Additionally, there exists a great deal of inconsistency in the findings of available studies where some highlighted the positive outcomes of an organization's environmental involvement for prospective employees (Behrend *et al.*, 2009; Gully *et al.*, 2013), while others failed to find any significant association (Lis, 2012; Turban and Greening, 1997).

Against this backdrop, the present study focuses on the environmental aspect of corporate social performance by examining the impact of perceived green human resource management (GHRM) on job pursuit intentions (JPIs) of prospective employees. GHRM reflects the HRM aspect of environmental management and is defined as the use of HRM practices to achieve organizational green goals (Jackson and Seo, 2010). It refers to the use of HRM policies to encourage the sustainable use of business resources and promote the cause of environmentalism. GHRM through the human resource management processes of recruitment, selection, training, performance and reward management aims to create a green workforce that understands, appreciates and practices green initiatives that help in the achievement of green goals of the organization (Mathapati, 2013). It aims at enhancing employee commitment to strive for environmental sustainability and reduce their carbon footprints (Masri and Jaroon, 2017). GHRM practices may include taking into account environmental values of candidates in the recruitment and selection process, providing environmental awareness and management trainings, involving and encouraging employee participation in environmental management, and considering green performance and behaviors while appraising and rewarding employees (Shen *et al.*, 2018; Tang *et al.*, 2018). Organizational green activities and initiatives form an important aspect of CSR. GHRM is linked to the concept of CSR, but is different from it in the sense that it is mainly an organizational tool to implement CSR directed toward environment (Shen *et al.*, 2018).

HRM literature suggests that HR practices influence employee attitudes and behaviors through different social, psychological and motivational processes. However, with GHRM research being in its infancy, the underlying processes through which GHRM perceptions influence existing and potential employee attitudes and behaviors toward the organization are not clearly understood. The limited research available on GHRM mainly links it to the existing employee outcomes (Shen *et al.*, 2018; Dumont *et al.*, 2017). For example, Shen *et al.* (2018) demonstrated that perceived GHRM affects various employee outcomes such as task performance, organizational citizenship behavior and intention to quit through organizational identification. Likewise, Dumont *et al.* (2017) established that GHRM influences employees' in-role and extra-role green behavior through the mediation of psychological green climate. However, information around the role of perceived GHRM in determining prospective employee outcomes is almost absent. To bridge this gap in the literature, building on the theoretical framework of signaling theory and social identity theory, this study aims to understand the effect of GHRM perceptions on prospective employees' JPIs. In addition to studying the direct effect of GHRM perceptions on JPIs, the study aims to advance the understanding of the underlying psychological mechanisms by exploring the role of organizational prestige (OP) as a mediator. This study focuses on perceived GHRM rather than objective GHRM practices, as perceptions have been reported to more closely determine employee attitudes and behaviors than the actual firm behaviors (Rupp *et al.*, 2013).

Further, the literature establishes the role of individual values and orientations in influencing their attitudes and behaviors (Low, 2013). Accordingly, individuals' attitudes and behaviors toward the organization are likely to be determined by their personal stance, values and orientations. On the same lines, individuals with strong environmental orientation (EO) and belief in environmental responsibility of business may get more

attracted to the organizations practicing GHRM. Furthermore, environmental management literature suggests that women show greater concern for the environment (Xiao and Hong, 2010; Chen *et al.*, 2011; Xiao and McCright, 2014) than men. Relative to men, women have been identified to possess stronger pro-environmental values, beliefs and attitudes (Xiao and Hong, 2017; Xiao and Dunlap, 2007; Zelezny *et al.*, 2000). Therefore, to get additional insights on the nuances of GHRM–JPI relationship, EO and gender were proposed as moderators of the aforementioned relationship.

This research advances the existing literature in several ways. First, the study contributes to the scarce GHRM literature by examining its association with prospective employee outcomes (JPI). Second, by investigating the role of OP as a mediator, the study provides novel insights on complex psychological processes underlying GHRM–JPI relationship. Third, the study illuminates the boundary conditions of the relationship between GHRM and JPI by examining EO and gender as moderators. Fourth, this study extends the existing CSR literature where need for more micro-level studies has been emphasized. Given the great deal of confusion that exists with regard to the impact of corporate environmental responsibility on prospective employee outcomes, this study advances the knowledge concerning the role of CSR in the recruitment process. Fifth, by focusing on GHRM, the study addresses the demand for more research to integrate HRM with environmental management (Renwick *et al.*, 2013). The added value of this study lies in its explicit focus on the human aspect of environmental management, which is in its very early stages of exploration. In doing so, it also contributes to the sustainable HRM literature. By providing evidence on the relationship between GHRM practices and employee outcomes from the emerging economy of India, this investigation advances the sustainable HRM literature which is largely dominated by studies from west (Ehnert *et al.*, 2016; Guerri and Carollo, 2016). India provides a unique context to examine the above set of relationships as CSR is less formalized in India and the environmental rules, regulations and standards here differ considerably from other western nations. These differences may have an influence on employees' perceptions of and their attitudes toward GHRM practices of the organization.

Theoretical framework and research hypotheses

To build the conceptual framework of the paper, the study buys arguments from signaling theory (Rynes, 1991) and social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). Insights were also drawn from person–organization fit perspective, attraction–attrition–selection theory (Schneider, 1987) and gender socialization approach to propose moderation hypotheses. Signaling theory (Rynes, 1991) posits that the information encountered by the individuals during the job search process is interpreted by them as symbolic of broader organizational characteristics. As a result, informational cues received during the recruitment experience with the organization are likely to be used by the individuals in making inferences about the employing organization. Similarly, it can be argued that organizations practicing GHRM are likely to signal prospective applicants about the unknown characteristics and traits of the organization. They may see such proactive organizations committed to natural environment favorably as a good corporate citizen. Applicants may perceive that if an organization can be concerned about the third party (i.e. natural environment), it may offer good treatment to its employees as well. Thus, by providing a signal of working environment in the organization, GHRM can be expected to enhance external prestige of the organization. According to social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1986), individuals' self-concept is tied to their group membership. To enhance their self-esteem, individuals tend to associate themselves with high status groups. In line with social identity theory, the enhanced prestige of the organization is likely to induce prospective employees to obtain membership in such organizations to boost their self-esteem and hence, self-concept. Thus, positive perceptions of the organization

positively influence applicants' organizational identity and higher organizational identification, in turn, may have a positive impact on employee attraction. As a consequence, stronger JPI may arise (Celani and Singh, 2011).

The integration of signaling theory and social identity theory suggests a probable link between GHRM and JPI. However, none of the existing studies in the literature provide direct empirical evidence for the relationship between overall GHRM and prospective employee outcomes. Though not explicitly focusing on GHRM, some related evidence is available in this direction from the field of CSR. For example, Behrend *et al.* (2009) in an experimental study among US undergraduate and postgraduate students demonstrated the positive influence of pro-environmental recruitment messages on JPIs via mediation effects of OP. Gully *et al.* (2013) found that recruitment messages communicating high levels of social and environmental responsibility resulted in higher JPI for the individuals with strong desire to make an impact through work. They also reported that the moderating effect of desire to have an impact through work on the relationship of social and environmental recruitment messages with JPI was fully mediated by perceived person–organization fit and organizational attractiveness. Dögl and Holtbrügge (2014) in an empirical study on firms from China, India, Germany and the USA established the positive effect of corporate environmental responsibility, measured through discrete practices such as green strategy and culture, green recruitment and evaluation, and green communication, on environmental reputation of an employer and employee commitment. Further, Bauer and Aiman-Smith (1996) showed that proactive company stance on the environment positively influences company attractiveness, intention to pursue employment and likelihood of acceptance of job offer. Similarly, Rupp *et al.* (2013) reported a positive relationship between CSR (community relations and environment) and JPI. On the same lines, Moorthy *et al.* (2017) found a positive relationship between environmental responsibility dimension of CSR and JPIs among prospective employees in Malaysia. Also, Guerci *et al.* (2016) in a study among MBA students in three universities in Northern Italy found a direct positive effect of green reputation on applicant attraction. However, they failed to find any association between green information provided on a company website and applicant attraction.

Based on the above theoretical framework and related literature support, we propose:

- H1. GHRM relates positively to JPI.
- H2. OP mediates the relationship between GHRM and JPI.

EO as moderator

According to social identity theory, the extent to which individuals identify with an organization depends on the perceived degree of similarity between themselves and the organization. Thus, the greater the similarity applicants perceive they share with the organization, as evaluated during the recruitment experience with the organization, the stronger will be their organizational identification. Thus, it can be expected that the individuals who value environment will identify and get attracted toward such pro-environment organizations practicing GHRM more strongly than the others.

Person–organization fit argument which is based on attraction–selection–attrition theory (Schneider, 1987) also offers valuable insights to support the above argument. According to this perspective, people are attracted to the organizations that are similar to them in qualities and characteristics and which provide them with what they need (Kristof, 1996). Therefore, individuals with values and orientation congruent with the culture of the organization will feel more attraction toward it than others due to better person–organization fit. Similarly, organizations with strong environmental values as reflected in their GHRM practices are likely to appeal more to the prospective applicants who value environment and show strong EO.

Related empirical evidence from the CSR literature provides support for the above proposition. For example, Bauer and Aiman-Smith (1996) found that the relationship of pro-environmental recruitment messages with JPIs was stronger for ecologically oriented applicants. Tsai *et al.* (2014) in a related study among graduating students in Taiwan reported the moderating influence of socio-environmental consciousness in the relationship between ethical and philanthropic citizenship and JPI. Likewise, the relationship of psychological green climate with employee extra-role behavior was found to be stronger for the employees with high green values as reported by Dumont *et al.* (2017). Contrarily, Behrend *et al.* (2009) failed to establish the moderating influence of personal environmental stance in the relationship between environmental messages on the organization's recruitment website and JPI. Similarly, Greening and Turban (2000) in a study among students enrolled in strategic management course at a large Midwestern university reported that the relationship between corporate social performance and JPI was not contingent upon the individuals' value toward environment. These contradictory findings justify further investigation to confirm the role of environmental values in the proposed set of relationships.

Based on the above arguments, we propose that individuals with high EO will find organizations practicing GHRM as more prestigious and display stronger JPI toward such organizations. Thus, we hypothesize:

- H3. EO moderates the relation between GHRM and OP such that the relationship will be stronger for individuals with high EO than others.
- H4. EO moderates the indirect effect of GHRM on JPI through OP such that the indirect effect of GHRM on JPI will be stronger for environmentally oriented individuals than others.

Gender as moderator

We also anticipate gender differences in GHRM and JPI relationship as men and women differ in their ethical and moral orientations due to differences in their value system and psychological makeup (Calabrese *et al.*, 2016). Gender roles and socialization approach offer most valid explanation for gender differences in environmentalism (Zelezny *et al.*, 2000). Gender roles are shaped by gender expectations based on cultural norms and standards of a society. Patriarchal Indian society socializes women to be interdependent and cooperative and men to be independent and competitive. Women in India are socialized to value and keep the interest of others over theirs. As the process of socialization determines individuals' attitudes and behaviors, this care giving attitude is likely to be shown when it comes to caring for environment as well.

Literature also provides evidence on gender differences in individuals' pro-environmental attitudes and behaviors. Women have consistently been reported to exhibit more concern for the environment across the cultures than men (Xiao and Hong, 2010; Chen *et al.*, 2011; Xiao and McCright, 2014). Also, women have been found to exhibit strong pro-environmental values, beliefs and attitudes and engage in pro-environmental behaviors more than men (Xiao and Hong, 2017; Xiao and Dunlap, 2007; Zelezny *et al.*, 2000). On the contrary, men have been reported to be concerned more with economic and career development activities of the organization (Brammer *et al.*, 2007).

Based on the above arguments, we propose that women will find organizations practicing GHRM as more prestigious and display stronger JPI toward such organizations than men. Thus, we hypothesize:

- H5. Gender moderates the relation between GHRM and OP such that the relationship between the two will be stronger for women than men.
- H6. Gender moderates the indirect effect of GHRM on JPI through OP such that the indirect effect of GHRM on JPI will be stronger for women than men.

Research methodology

Participants and procedures

The sample consisted of final year undergraduate engineering students from various departments of a reputed engineering institute in India. The authors exercised judgment in choosing final year undergraduate students, who do not form part of the labor force currently but will soon be in market for jobs, as a representative of prospective employees. This was an experimental study where two scenarios were created using separate vignettes depicting hypothetical fast moving consumer goods company practicing various GHRM practices in one category and not practicing GHRM in the other category. GHRM practices covered included green recruitment and selection, green training and development, green performance management, green reward management and green involvement. Except GHRM every other information about the organization was kept identical in both the scenarios. For example, factors such as salary, perks, working conditions, quality of life, work culture and community responsibility which may have an influence on employer choice decision of prospective employees were held common in both the manipulated categories. Data were collected through an online questionnaire survey and participants were assigned to these two scenarios randomly. First, the complete list of final year undergraduate students was obtained from the academic office of the institute. From the list, Scenario A (firm practicing GHRM, 1) was sent to every second (2nd, 4th, 6th, 8th, etc.) student through his/her institute e-mail id. While Scenario B (firm not practicing GHRM, 0) was assigned to 1st, 3rd, 5th, etc., students in the list. They were then asked to complete the standardized instruments on OP, EO and JPI, assuming themselves as active job seekers in the job market. The questionnaire was sent to the final year engineering students of the institute using their institute e-mail id in the month of April 2017. As a follow up, a reminder e-mail was sent after a week. A total of 172 responses were received from the final year student population of around 200, resulting in a response rate of 86 percent. With respect to sample characteristics, approximately 87 percent of the participants were males and the average age of the respondents was 22. With 13 percent females, women were slightly overrepresented in the sample as only 8 and 9.3 percent of women were found to register in top engineering institutes in India in the year 2016 and 2017, respectively (Pandey, 2017).

Measures

GHRM was coded as 1 for the scenario where the hypothetical company was shown to practice GHRM and 0 for the second scenario where the company was shown as not engaging in GHRM.

OP was measured using five items focusing on reputation, popularity and status adopted from Highhouse *et al.* (2003). Typical response items were: "I would find this company a prestigious place to work" and "There are probably many who would like to work at this company." The items were rated on a five-point Likert scale with responses varying from "strongly disagree (1)" to "strongly agree (5)." Cronbach's α value of the scale was found to be 0.91.

JPI was assessed with a five item scale adopted from Highhouse *et al.* (2003). The scale included questions such as "I would accept a job offer from this company" and "If this company invited me for a job interview, I would go." The responses were anchored from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The scale was found to be highly reliable with a Cronbach's α value of 0.92.

EO was measured using five items adapted from Etheredge's (1999) perceived role of ethics and social responsibility scale. Typical response items were: "Being environment friendly is the most important thing a firm can do" and "Environmental responsibility of a firm is essential for its long-term sustainability." The items were rated on a five-point Likert scale with responses varying from "strongly disagree (1)" to "strongly agree (5)." Cronbach's α value of the scale was found to be 0.75.

Data analysis

Hypotheses were tested using hierarchical linear regression with the help of SPSS 24. Bootstrapping procedures using SPSS process macro proposed by Hayes (2013) were used to test the indirect effects. Bootstrapping is a non-parametric approach to effect size estimation and hypothesis testing of the statistic without making any assumption about the distribution of the statistic. It basically examines the hypothesis that the indirect effects are significantly different from 0, which can be concluded on the basis of bootstrap confidence intervals (Preacher and Hayes, 2008).

Results

Manipulation check

In order to see if the participants assigned to different GHRM scenarios differed in their perceptions with respect to the two hypothetical companies, a manipulation check was done using one-way ANOVA. The results suggest that participants assigned randomly to the two scenarios differed significantly in their perceptions of OP and JPI (see Table I).

Descriptive statistics

Means, standard deviations and inter-correlations among study variables are presented in Table II. Mean values for OP, EO and JPI were found to be in the moderate range. Significant correlations were observed between GHRM, OP and JPI.

We also checked for the VIF values to be sure that multicollinearity was not an issue. VIF values for all the variables were found to be below 10 (range = 1.003–1.357), ruling out the concerns of multicollinearity.

Hypotheses testing

Mediation. The results of hierarchical regression analysis reveal that GHRM predicts JPI significantly (Figure 1). However, the effect of GHRM on JPI was found to decrease from 0.98 ($p < 0.001$) to 0.23 ($p < 0.01$), when OP was included in the model. This significant fall in the regression coefficient after inclusion of OP implies partial mediation. The mediation

Dependent variables	GHRM	Mean	SD	F-value	p-value
Organizational prestige	0	3.22	0.99	53.74	0.000
	1	4.14	0.61		
Environmental orientation	0	3.60	0.79	11.81	0.001
	1	3.98	0.65		
Job pursuit intention	0	3.16	0.92	62.36	0.000
	1	4.14	0.69		

Table I.
Manipulation check

S.No.	Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1.	Gender	1.13	0.33	1					
2.	Age	1.86	0.90	0.176*	1				
3.	GHRM	0.50	0.50	-0.035	-0.246**	1			
4.	OP	3.68	0.94	0.021	-0.074	0.490**	(0.91)		
5.	EO	3.60	0.76	0.010	-0.049	0.255**	0.267**	(0.75)	
6.	JPI	3.65	0.95	0.024	-0.111	0.518**	0.853**	0.249**	(0.92)

Table II.
Mean, standard
deviation and inter-
correlations among
study variables

Notes: Figures in the parenthesis represent Cronbach's α values. **,***Correlations are significant at the 0.05 and 0.01 level (two-tailed)

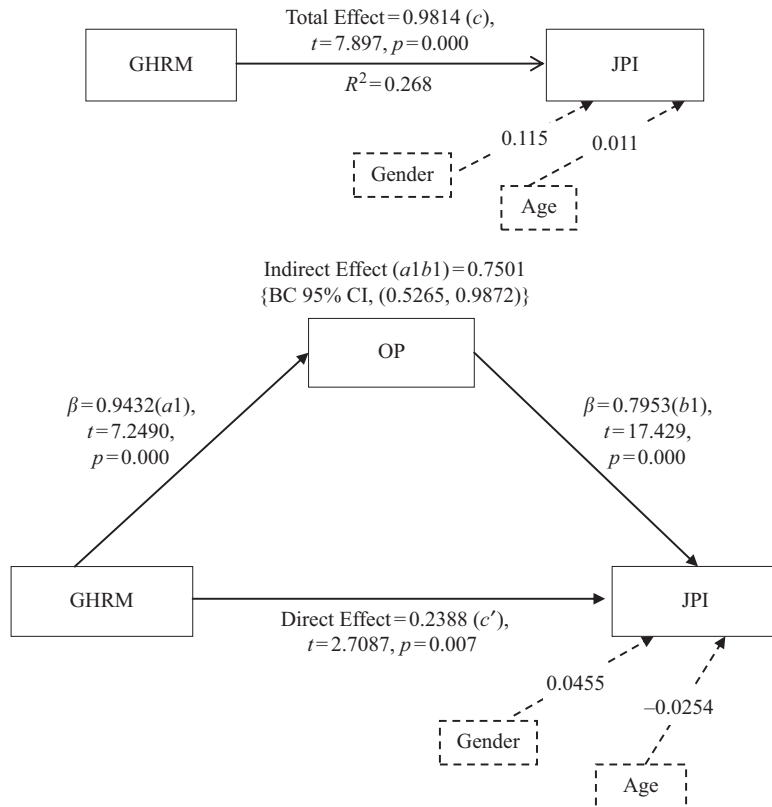


Figure 1.
The mediation model showing total, direct and indirect effects

Notes: $n=172$. Coefficients in the figure represent unstandardized regression coefficients. BC refers to bias corrected; 5,000 bootstrap samples were requested. R^2 value for overall model = 0.7411, $p < 0.001$

effect was confirmed by analyzing the indirect effect of GHRM on JPI. With 95% confidence, the analysis revealed that the indirect effect ($ab=0.75$) of GHRM on JPI through OP was significant, as 0 did not lie in the bootstrap bias corrected confidence interval (CI = 0.5265, 0.9872) range (Figure 1). This confirms the partial mediation effect of OP.

Moderation. We proposed EO and gender as moderators of the relationship between GHRM and OP. In order to test the moderation effects, again hierarchical regression analysis was used. The predictor variable (GHRM) and the moderators (EO and Gender) were entered in Step 1. Next, the interaction terms calculated after mean centering the predictor and moderator variables ($GHRM \times EO$ and $GHRM \times Gender$) were entered in Step 2. Together the interaction of GHRM with EO and gender significantly explained 2.5 percent of the variance in OP (R^2 square change = 0.025, $p < 0.01$), over and above the variance accounted by predictor variables included in Step 1. The interaction of GHRM with EO was found to be significant ($\beta = 0.423$, $p < 0.05$) at 95% confidence level and explained significant percentage (R^2 change = 0.025, $p < 0.01$) of the variance in OP (Table III). This confirms the moderation effect of EO. Thus, $H3$ was supported. On the other hand, gender failed to moderate the relation of GHRM with OP as the

Predictor variables	<i>B</i>	SE	OP β	<i>t</i>
<i>Step 1</i>				
GHRM	0.851	0.129	0.453	6.605**
EO	0.192	0.087	0.152	2.216*
Gender	0.100	0.186	0.036	0.538
<i>Step 2</i>				
GHRM \times EO	0.423	0.175	0.918	2.422*
GHRM \times Gender	-0.02	0.37	-0.013	-0.053
R^2	0.288			
EO	Effect	SE	BC 95% CI (lower)	BC 95% CI (upper)
Conditional indirect effect at EO = mean and plus/minus 1 SD				
3.0436 (-1 SD)	0.4092	0.1429	0.1353	0.7075
3.7895 (<i>M</i>)	0.6615	0.114	0.442	0.8933
4.5354 (+1 SD)	0.9139	0.1935	0.5599	1.3149
<i>Moderated mediation index</i>				
OP	0.3383	0.1692	0.0201	0.6728

Notes: EO, environmental orientation; OP, organizational prestige. BC refers to bias corrected; 5,000 bootstrap samples were requested, R^2 = overall variance explained in dependent variable by the variables in the model. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

Table III.
Results of moderation
and moderated
mediation analysis

β coefficient of the interaction term (GHRM \times Gender = -0.020, ns) was insignificant and the interaction did not explain any variance in OP (R^2 change = 0.000). Therefore, $H5$ was not supported.

To gain a better understanding of the moderating influence of EO, the conditional effect of EO on the relation between GHRM and OP is plotted graphically in Figure 2. An analysis of slopes in Figure 2 indicates that the relationship of GHRM with OP was stronger when EO was high than when it was low, as expected.

Moderated mediation. Since gender failed to act as moderator, the moderated mediation analysis was conducted only for EO. Moderated mediation was tested using Model 7 of SPSS process macro (Hayes, 2013). The results provide support for the moderated mediation as the moderated mediation index was significant (see Table III). The conditional indirect

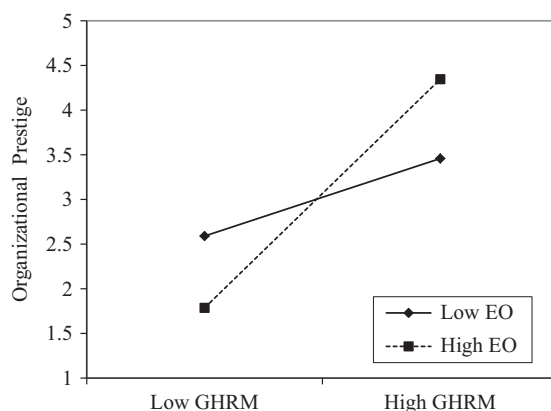


Figure 2.
Moderation effect of
environmental
orientation (EO)

effect of GHRM on JPI through OP was significantly stronger for the individuals with high EO than for those with low or moderate environmental stance. Thus, *H4* was supported while *H6* was rejected.

Discussion

The objective of this research was to examine the influence of perceived GHRM on JPI of prospective employees. In addition, an attempt was made to dig deeper into the nature of relationships by investigating the underlying psychological mechanisms and contingencies. Perceived OP was examined as mediator and EO and gender were studied as moderators of the aforementioned relationship. The results provided support for the significant relation between GHRM and JPI and established OP as mediator of the relationship among millennials in India. This was in line with the findings of several studies reported in the CSR stream where organizations committed to the environment were reported to generate greater OP and attract higher quality applicants (Behrend *et al.*, 2009; Gully *et al.*, 2013). By identifying OP as the socio-psychological process through which GHRM influences JPI, these results also complement and extend the findings of the previous studies where direct associations between environmental responsibility (Bauer and Aiman-Smith, 1996; Rupp *et al.*, 2013; Moorthy *et al.*, 2017) or discrete green practices of the organization (Dögl and Holtbrügge, 2014; Guerci *et al.*, 2016) and prospective applicant outcomes have been reported. The findings of our study are unique in the sense that instead of studying the direct involvement of organizations in upgrading the quality of natural environment, the study establishes the influence of an indirect approach (GHRM being one of the tools to implement corporate environment responsibility) to sustainability on prospective employee attitudes. The study establishes that an HR approach to sustainability may have significant implications for the organization in terms of influencing its prestige and attracting high-quality prospective applicants to apply for the job openings. The role of OP as a mediator can be explained on the basis of the arguments inherent in the signaling theory (Rynes, 1991). In the absence of access to complete information about the organization, the prospective employees are likely to form the perceptions of how it would be like to work for the organization using informational cues and signals acquired during the job search process. Organizational care and concern for the environment, as reflected in the adoption of GHRM practices of the organization, is likely to make employees associate greater reputation to such organizations. This is also in accordance with the multiple needs model of organizational justice (Rupp *et al.*, 2006) which states that employees' fairness perceptions are influenced not only by the organizational actions directed toward themselves, but also toward the other stakeholders. The perception that if the organization can invest in and care for the natural environment which is not even related to the operations of the organization directly (secondary stakeholder), it is likely to respect and well treat its employees (who are directly linked to the organization as primary stakeholders) as well.

In addition, the indirect effect of GHRM on JPI through OP was conditional upon the level of EO of the prospective applicants. Individuals who value environment and place high importance on it were found to display stronger JPI toward the firms adopting GHRM practices. On the other hand, the strength of the relationship between GHRM and JPI was found to be weaker for the individuals with average and low personal environmental stance. This was in line with our expectations as values and personal stance have been identified to play a role of immense importance in influencing individuals' attitudes and behaviors (Low, 2013). The moderating effect of EO can be interpreted in terms of person–organization fit. Its importance can be explained on the basis of attraction–selection–attrition theory (Schneider, 1987). This finding supports the results of previous studies where personal EO and values of the individuals were found to influence the relation of corporate environmental involvement and individual attitudes and behaviors toward the organization

(Dumont *et al.*, 2017; Tsai *et al.*, 2014; Bauer and Aiman-Smith, 1996). These findings also corroborate the results of all those studies in the CSR stream where individual values have been reported to influence the strength of relation between organizational acts supporting those values and individual attitude and behavior toward the organization (Evans and Davis, 2011; Zhang and Gowan, 2012). However, it contradicts the work of Behrend *et al.* (2009) and Greening and Turban (2000) where personal environmental stance and values of the individuals did not moderate the relationship of corporate environmental messages and CSR with individual attitude and behavior. This could be explained in terms of different cultural context in which the studies were conducted. In developed western nations where CSR is standardized in the form of formal codes, standards and appeal system, individuals may value pro-environmental stance on the part of organization and get attracted toward its proactive characteristics, irrespective of their personal take on environment. On the other hand, in developing countries where CSR is less formalized and is guided largely by socio-economic priorities of the nation, individuals may consider proactive environmental behavior on the part of organization as secondary to the more direct factors (such as salary, perks, work environment, development culture, etc.) bearing an influence on job choice. Thus, the relationship of GHRM and JPI is probably stronger for the individuals who place more importance on environment and value it more than others.

In contrast to the expectations, gender failed to show any effect on strength of the relationship between GHRM and JPI. This contradicts the prior literature where women have been consistently reported to be more concerned with the organizational activities contributing to environmental sustainability (Zelezny *et al.*, 2000). This deviant finding could be explained in terms of small number of females in the sample which could have led to the non-detection of gender differences in the relationship between GHRM and JPI. Studying gender effects over a large sample may show its significance. However, this requires further investigation.

Further, the study extends the theories of signaling and social identity by applying them to an entirely different context of GHRM. Integration of these theories offered an improved understanding of the linkage between GHRM and JPI by providing answers to “how” and “why” GHRM influences applicant attraction and their intentions to pursue employment. The study established OP as the prime socio-psychological motivational process that carries the influence of GHRM on JPI. In addition, the study illuminates the boundary conditions of GHRM–JPI relationship by providing support for the moderated mediation model. This has significant implications for setting organizational priorities in terms of directing their attention, and investment.

Managerial implications

The study establishes GHRM as a tool in the hands of organization to attract young talent. Since the millennial population expects organizations to be proactive toward protection of environment, practicing GHRM may provide organizations with the much needed differentiation and hence, distinct competitive advantage over other players in the market in attracting quality workforce. As GHRM was found to significantly influence JPI of prospective job applicants, the study offers important implications for organizational recruitment process. Emphasizing upon their green quotient in the recruitment messages is likely to help organizations in attracting young applicants to apply for job positions in the organization. Since the sample for this study consisted of final year engineering students, highlighting their green involvement and achievements during campus recruitment process may assist the employers in enticing these applicants to apply for the job vacancies in their organization. Thus, the study carries significant implications for corporate communication and recruitment advertising.

By providing evidence on the psychological processes which the applicants engage in during employer selection, organizations will be able to form appropriate strategies for

attracting talent to their organizations. Since OP was found to mediate the relationship of GHRM with JPI, adoption of GHRM practices will establish the organizations as an employer of choice in the eyes of outside applicants with little information about the organization. This will enhance the perceived prestige of the organizations and help them win the war for talent in this era of cut-throat competition. Thus, the study results encourage the organizations to adopt and practice GHRM by framing appropriate policies and implementing programs to create an image of good corporate citizen and attract potential applicants. Further, as the relation of GHRM with JPI through OP was found to be same for both men and women in the present study, GHRM can be used as tool for talent attraction by the organizations, irrespective of gender. Thus, both men and women with high EO should be given preference during employee selection.

Conclusions, limitations and scope for future research

This study has certain limitations which open the avenues for future research. First, it uses cross-sectional research design which puts restriction on the limits to which causality can be established among the variables investigated in the study. Therefore, we encourage future researchers to conduct longitudinal studies to gain better insights into the dynamics of relationship among predictor and outcome variables. Second, the study utilizes experimental research design where prospective employees, who were presented with hypothetical company scenarios, were in the best position to provide ratings on their organizational reputation, environmental values and JPIs. However, the use of self-report measures and single source data collection could artificially inflate or deflate the relationship among the study variables due to common method bias (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2012). Yet, common method variance is less likely to have affected the study results. The common latent factor test performed using confirmatory factor analysis in AMOS 24 also showed lower probability of common method variance as the common latent factor model showed poor fit to the data ($\chi^2/df = 3.46$, GFI = 0.625, NFI = 0.631, TLI = 0.641, CFI = 0.657) and explained only 24 percent of the variance. Additionally, we took a number of precautionary measures such as keeping the survey anonymous and introducing proximal separation between the measures via inter-mixing the items of each of the study constructs (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2012). Though this study was conducted in an economic environment full of job opportunities for the engineering graduates, we recommend future work to examine the relationship among study variables in different job conditions characterized by varying combination of demand and supply in the labor market. The dynamics of the investigated set of relationships may change in adverse job market where there are few job opportunities for the fresh engineering graduates. Although final year undergraduate students may soon be in the labor market for jobs, future studies may replicate the above studies with actual labor pool available in the market for better generalization of the study findings. Future studies may also look for alternative mechanisms which may throw additional light on the linkage among study variables. Although we examined gender and value that individuals place on environment as moderators, future studies should look for other individual difference variables such as age, education, personality factors as moderators to delve deeper into the nature of relationships.

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