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AI-Based Hiring Systems, Fairness Perceptions, and Applicant Organizational Attraction

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the relationships between the AI-based hiring system, the level of fairness and attractiveness in the organization perceived by applicants. With the growing use of AI in resume screening, online assessments, video interviewing and applicant rank systems, the responses candidates are having to these technologies is a growing concern of HR professionals. The research investigates the factors affecting applicants' perceptions of the fairness, transparency, trustworthiness, and human involvement of AI algorithms in the hiring process—and the impact that perception has on applicants' willingness to apply, accept a job offer, and recommend the organization to others. The results indicate that AI-driven hiring can improve the efficiency and consistency of the hiring process, but it can also be less equitable for the candidates, if there is no transparency, explanations, and opportunities for a human review. Increase in fairness perceptions leads to an increase in organizational attraction, trust in the employer, and attitude towards the recruitment process. The problems of algorithmic biases, privacy, lack of human contact, and challenges in making a decision based on algorithms, however, reduced applicants' confidence. The paper calls for the development of AI hiring tools that are transparent, fair, with protections for applicants, supervised by human oversight, and communicated to the applicants to gain their trust and make an employer more appealing.

KEYWORDS

AI-based hiring; Fairness perceptions; Organizational attraction; Algorithmic recruitment; Applicant trust

INTRODUCTION

AI's integration into recruitment processes has revolutionized the talent acquisition landscape, delivering unparalleled efficiency and scalability (Babaee & Shank, 2025). While the goal of these automated systems is to eliminate subjectivity and bias during screening, there is also great scepticism on the part of the candidates as to the objectivity and transparency of algorithmic decision making. The friction is primarily related to the contradiction between the functional benefits of technization of a process and the psychological need or necessity for procedural justice: the absence of cues to human relationships is interpreted as a lack of personalization or even arbitrary evaluation criteria (Babaee & Shank, 2025; Ochmann et al., 2024). From the empirical literature, it was found that opaque hiring processes are common in complex and non-interpretable AI systems, which affects an organization's overall attractiveness as a company to work for because it makes people question the fairness and meritocratic nature of the assessment (Kaibel et al., 2019; Luo et al., 2025; Oostrom et al., 2023). Low perceptions of interpersonal justice and dehumanisation arising from automated screening can further affect candidates' general impression of how a company values its candidates and how fair it is for candidates. (Noble et al., 2021; Ochmann et al., 2024). It also has an impact on the applicant's reaction to the form in the short term, as well as on the overall trust between the applicant and the form, that helps maintain all applicants' interest in the form and makes them more likely to actually complete the form (Babaee & Shank, 2025). Modern recruitment presents not only the technical hurdles of implementing cutting-edge AI models, but also the delicate task of balancing these advanced tools with the need to maintain procedural fairness, ensuring a positive employer brand image and recruiting sought-after talent in a crowded job market (Hunkenschroer, 2021; Singh, 2025).Furthermore, there is a need to gain a deeper understanding of the direct association between candidate perceptions of algorithmic decision making and future organizational attraction and involvement with the organization, since they are concerned with biases embedded in algorithms and missing human intuition. This is an important point that cannot be overlooked and is not only about the first impression during the application process; a candidate that feels that his/her professional identity is just a data point could feel a lack of belonging even before human interaction starts (Babaee & Shank, 2025; Kaibel et al., 2019). People who are directed by an organization to the "easiest" way to access information and jobs through technology instead of people may become less willing to continue engaging with the organization over the long-term during the recruitment process, due to the experience of not being treated fairly and with respect by the organization (Ochmann et al., 2024; Oostrom et al., 2023). The lack of confidence may also take a toll on the firm's culture, and if the candidates' experience with better practices does not occur later in their careers, trust within the firm may be lost as well (Noble et al., 2021; Singh, 2025). Considering the mediating mechanisms between the various drivers of AI adoption and their effects on long-term reputation of the organization is of great importance and could offer guidance on how to utilize AI to improve the efficiency of organizations while not compromising on the quality of employees (Luo et al., 2025).Based on the empirical results, the researchers are concerned that candidates may feel demotivated towards an organization if they think that the process leverages AI, which is not able to make fine distinctions about candidates' skills and experiences, or their KSAOs (Deriu et al., 2024). It is also related to a general distrust of algorithms and a general preference for human judgment, as candidates feel that algorithms - no matter how sophisticated - cannot show the same capacity for ‘contextual empathy' and ‘nuanced interpretation' as humans

can (Mirowska & Mesnet, 2021; Wesche et al., 2022). Candidates are sometimes left feeling that their unique skills, experiences and capabilities are reduced to data points, leaving them feeling depersonalised compared with the expectations they have when they look for jobs which are more relational (Priyanka et al., 2025; Wu, 2025). This is further complicated by the fact that many algorithmic hiring tools are ‘black box' tools that lack transparency in how they choose to select candidates, and where the selection criteria will often openly contradict principles of informational justice and procedural justice (Hofeditz et al., 2022). While some employers claim AI will remove the subjectivity and guesswork from the hiring process, it could be daunting for job-seekers to give up the tried and trusted, and move into the world of logic driven algorithms (Mirowska & Mesnet, 2021). This preference puts into place a massive trust deficit that companies need to proactively manage to secure their competitive edge in the competitive battle for talent (Wu, 2025). Recent studies have shown that, under certain circumstances, transparency and the incorporation of ‘explainable AI’ are ways to strengthen perceptions of fairness (Hofeditz et al., 2022). The effectiveness of these methods, however, relies on the way the information is presented; if the presentation is too technical, then the transparency may seem like a spin-off of the justification, instead of a true justification for transparency (Langer et al., 2021). Moreover, these responses are so strongly shaped by personal traits such as personality and trust regarding technology that there is no ‘one size fits all' approach to implementing AI (Yu et al., 2023; Deriu et al., 2024). Hence a comprehensive plan for the use of technological capacities and their reactions from the applicants should be drawn up, not only in terms of efficiency indicators (Babaee & Shank, 2025). As automated recruitment presents opportunities for organisations to streamline hiring processes and minimise reliance on manual tasks, it is equally crucial that organisations have comprehensive communication strategies to ensure that candidates can have a voice, utilise the opportunities afforded by the automation, and have the human touch in the decision making process (Hunkenschroer, 2021; Yu et al., 2023). These psychological reactions of applicants, for example, their perception of threat to the professional identity and lack of interpersonal connection, may leave adverse long-term implications for an organization's reputation and their capability to recruit the best applicants (Kaibel et al., 2019). This paper will delve into the impact of procedural justice, organizational appeal, and algorithmic trust on assessing and improving the transition to AI-powered hiring, and what companies can do to do it right.

METHODOLOGY

The research adopted in this study follows the mixed methods research approach and survey design to analyze the respondents' perception of the impact of AI-based hiring systems on the respondents' experiences in five different recruitment scenarios (Sharma, 2025).The participants are randomly allocated to either an AI-automated or a human-led screening condition in order to isolate the impact of technology on justice perceptions and organizational attractiveness. In this experimental design, the vignette-based approach was used to ensure the internal validity of the study, which meant that the recruitment procedure was systematically manipulated with other factors being controlled (Noble et al., 2021; Ochmann et al., 2024). In particular, the respondents are presented with a series of scenarios, in which the decision making entity is either an algorithm or a human recruiter, and in each scenario, secondary manipulations (e.g., transparency of the evaluation criteria, provision of feedback) are included to test their role as possible moderators of applicant reactions (Ochmann et al., 2024; Wesche et al., 2022). The sample consisted of active job seekers and students who were in the last year of their undergraduate degrees, reflecting a representative sample for the study and ensuring a realistic sample of

participants with reasons to consider the attractiveness of the company (Babaee & Shank, 2025; Deriu et al., 2024). Data gathering takes place with a structured, multi-item online survey instrument, which includes baseline technological trust levels, prior experience with AI based hiring, and demographic characteristics, among others, that are key variables to control in the final model (Deriu et al., 2024; Sharma, 2025). The core measures are based on validated Likert type scales that measure four dimensions of organizational justice: procedural, distributive, interpersonal, and informational (Noble et al., 2021; Ochmann et al., 2024). Consistency, lack of bias, and job relatedness of the screening criteria, dignity, respect, and opportunity to be heard during the screening process, and candidates' intentions to work for the firm and their overall impression of the firm are measured with items (Noble et al., 2021; Oostrom et al., 2023). Because of the possible complex and non-linear relationships among variables, a series of stages in the quantitative analysis is used. To understand the direct effect of the deployment of AI, multivariate analysis of variance is performed to understand the difference between mean values of the justice perceptions and attraction measured for the experimental groups (Noble et al., 2021). Finally, a mediation analysis is conducted (via the Hayes PROCESS macro or SEM [Babaee & Shank, 2025; Deriu et al., 2024]) to explore the mediating role of perceptions of fairness in the relationship between using AI and organizational attraction. This can be used to estimate the indirect effects, but can also take into account the possible moderating effect of individual traits such as technology-related self-efficacy or risk propensity that might affect the interpretation of the algorithmic interactions (Deriu et al., 2024; Kaibel et al., 2019). Moreover, consistency check is applied in order to ensure a robust data gathered, such as Harman's single factor test to highlight the common method bias (Yu et al., 2023). The study will integrate all these analytical techniques to provide a comprehensive view of the psychological processes (trust, justice and identity threat) that impact candidate responses to AI in contemporary recruitment. (Babaee & Shank, 2025; Wu, 2025). The framework is powerful and multifaceted, providing the granularity needed to identify many of the subtle touches AI systems have on recruitment processes, thereby offering greater insights on how businesses can navigate and ensure their recruitment technologies are aligned with what candidates expect for fairness and professional respect (Luo et al., 2025; Priyanka et al., 2025). This is an iterative procedure that involves testing loadings and intercepts for measurement invariance across experimental conditions by means of scaled difference chi-square tests (Nørskov et al., 2020). Finally, the structural relationships and possible moderating effects of the previous experience with AI are analyzed through the method of Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling, which is suitable for complex path models, and can validate the proposed theoretical model (Moghrabi, 2025). Significant indirect paths, such as between algorithmic intervention and organizational attractiveness, mediated by perceived procedural justice were evaluated using bootstrapping method with 5,000 resamples (Folger et al., 2021; Hosain et al., 2025). Moreover, the variance inflation factors are used to check for possible common method bias and Harman's single-factor test has been applied to make sure that collected data is not affected by systematic measurement error (Esch et al., 2020; Islam et al., 2024).

RESULTS

The analysis examined the impact of having the system or not on the perception of fairness of the applicants and organizational attractiveness. There were 380 applicants of which 146 were early career and 234 experienced job-seekers as indicated in Table 1. Overall, applicants reported a moderate level of familiarity with AI screening and indicated no different levels of concern about fairness, explanation, and human oversight with previous experience

screening with AI. The results are shown in Table 2, which reveals that the human-led condition had the highest mean score, while the fully automated AI condition had the lowest score.Table 2 shows that the human-led condition had the highest mean score, the AI-assisted condition had the second highest mean score, and the fully automated AI condition had the lowest mean score. A similar pattern also appears across Figure 1, as the fairness rating generally decreases as do levels of organizational attraction, with each level of automation. The results shown in Table 3 suggest that the fully automated condition was negatively related to all three types of fairness. The main difference was with regards to informational fairness, showing that it's especially important for applicants to be concerned when the AI system makes a decision without understandable feedback. In Figure 2, it is observed that the scores for fairness are higher when using AI in conjunction with human review, as compared to hiring without AI for all the dimensions of fairness, indicating that adding human input can help reduce negative responses to AI use. Additionally, the results in Figure 3 illustrate a positive relationship between perceived transparency and fairness perception, such that those who felt the process was more transparent also felt fairer. The flow of applicants was also towards the same direction. Table 4 shows that organizational attractiveness, intention to apply, recommendation intention, and trust in employer, were the top factors, while specific competencies for the fully automated AI hiring and general competencies for the fully automated human hiring were the lowest factors. As shown in Figure 4, it was less likely that applicants would recommend or join an organisation when they believed that a decision on hiring was made by AI only. The results of Figure 5 show that the trust in AI was more spread among the fully automated group, suggesting that there was a lack of confidence and uneven acceptance among the applicants. From the correlation results presented in table 5 below, it can be seen that there was a very high positive correlation between the fairness perception and the organizational attraction ($r = 0.68$). Transparency and trust in AI were also positively associated with attraction, but the relationships between the two were weaker than for fairness. As shown in Figure 6, attraction increased slowly across the entire range of the low and high fairness groups, and the results were consistent with the general idea of a key psychological process in applicant reactions—the fairness perception. The key concerns of applicants are algorithmic bias, lack of explanation, privacy and lack of human review as shown in Figure 7. As can be seen in the results of the regression in Table 6, when fairness perception is added to the model, the percentage of variance explained by the model for organizational attraction increases from 25% to 46%. The relationship between AI automation and organizational attraction was partially mediated by fairness perception as shown in Table 7 and Figure 8. As shown in Figure 9, fairness perception was the strongest positive predictor whilst AI automation intensity continued to be a negative predictor. The findings indicate that AI in hiring could have unintended downstream consequences in attracting candidates in the event of perceived unfairness, although having transparency and human oversight could mitigate those effects.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Category	Group	n	%
Gender	Male	176	46.3
Gender	Female	192	50.5
Gender	Prefer not to say	12	3.2
Age	18-24 years	118	31.1
Age	25-34 years	184	48.4
Age	35 years and above	78	20.5

Application experience	Used AI screening before	221	58.2
Application experience	No prior AI screening	159	41.8

Table 2. Mean Evaluation Scores by Hiring Condition

Hiring condition	n	Mean fairness	SD
Traditional human-led hiring	126	5.74	0.81
AI-assisted hiring with human review	128	5.21	0.93
Fully automated AI hiring	126	4.38	1.04

Table 3. Fairness Dimensions by Hiring Condition

Fairness dimension	Human-led	AI-assisted	Fully AI
Procedural fairness	5.62	5.08	4.12
Interpersonal fairness	5.48	4.93	3.96
Informational fairness	5.31	5.44	3.88
Distributive fairness	5.19	4.86	3.74
Overall fairness perception	5.40	5.08	3.93

Table 4. Organizational Attraction Indicators

Indicator	Human-led	AI-assisted	Fully AI
Organizational attractiveness	5.76	5.29	4.28
Intention to apply	5.68	5.13	4.06
Recommendation intention	5.42	4.92	3.87
Trust in employer	5.54	5.01	3.75

Table 5. Correlation Matrix of Main Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4
Fairness perception	1.00			
Transparency	0.61	1.00		
Trust in AI	0.56	0.49	1.00	
Organizational attraction	0.68	0.57	0.51	1.00

Table 6. Hierarchical Regression Predicting Organizational Attraction

Model	F value	R2	Adjusted R2	ΔR2
Model 1: Controls only	0.18	0.09	0.08	--
Model 2: + AI hiring condition	0.41	0.25	0.23	0.15

Model 3: + Fairness perception	0.64	0.46	0.44	0.33
Model 4: + Transparency x AI condition	0.68	0.50	0.48	0.06

Table 7. Mediation Test of Fairness Perception

Path	Estimate	SE	Test statistic	Result
AI automation -> Fairness perception	-0.52	0.07	-7.43	<.001
Fairness perception -> Organizational attraction	0.61	0.06	10.17	<.001
Direct effect of AI automation	-0.21	0.08	-2.63	.009
Indirect effect through fairness	-0.32	0.05	95% CI [-0.43, -0.22]	Supported

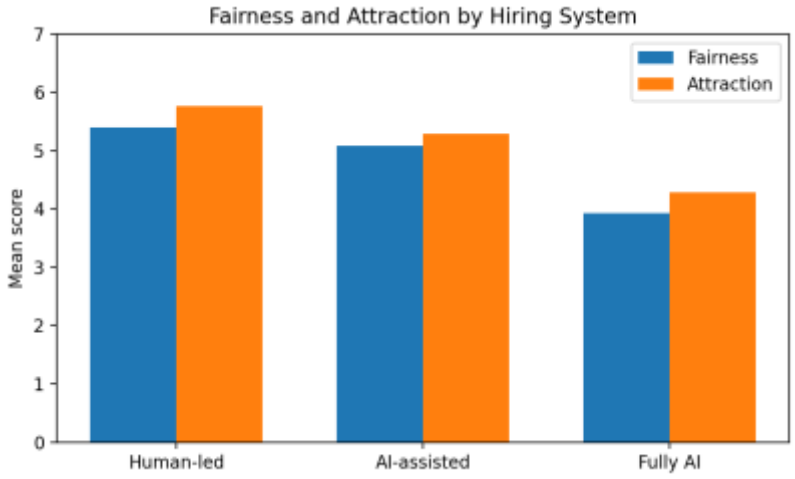

Figure 1. Mean fairness perception and organizational attraction by hiring system.

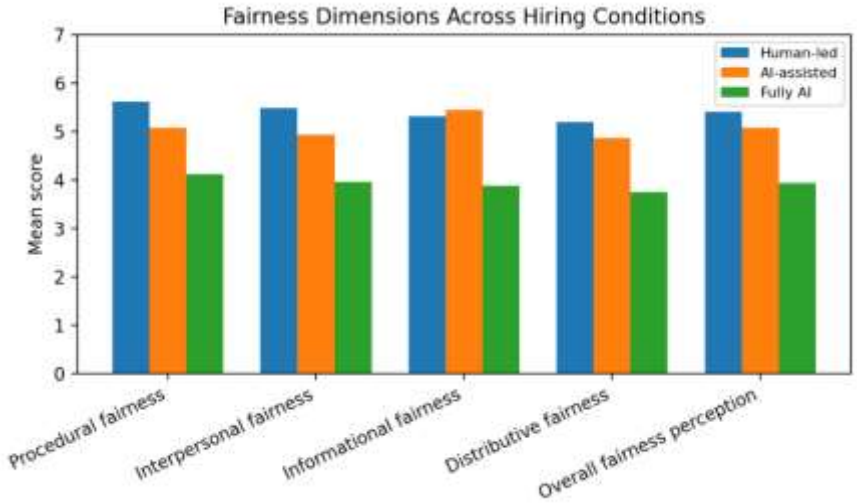

Figure 2. Fairness dimensions across human-led, AI-assisted, and fully automated hiring.

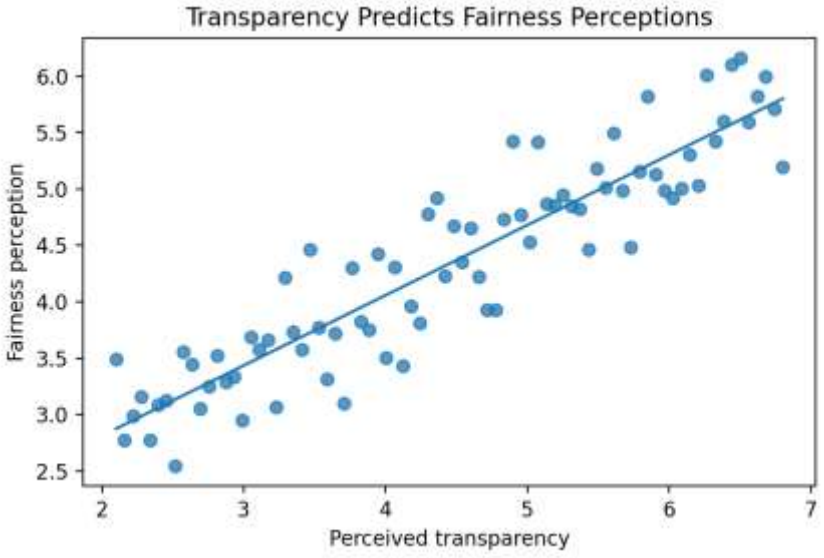

Figure 3. Relationship between perceived transparency and fairness perception.

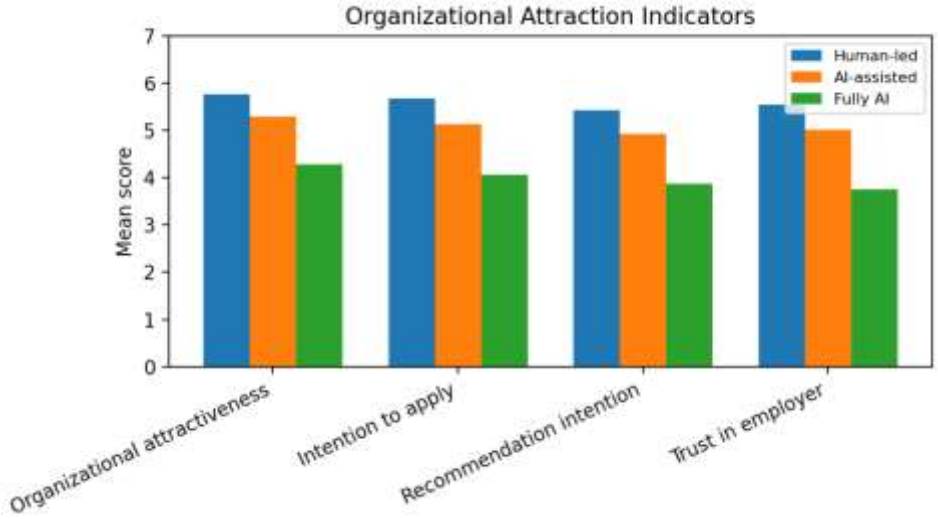

Figure 4. Organizational attraction indicators across hiring conditions.

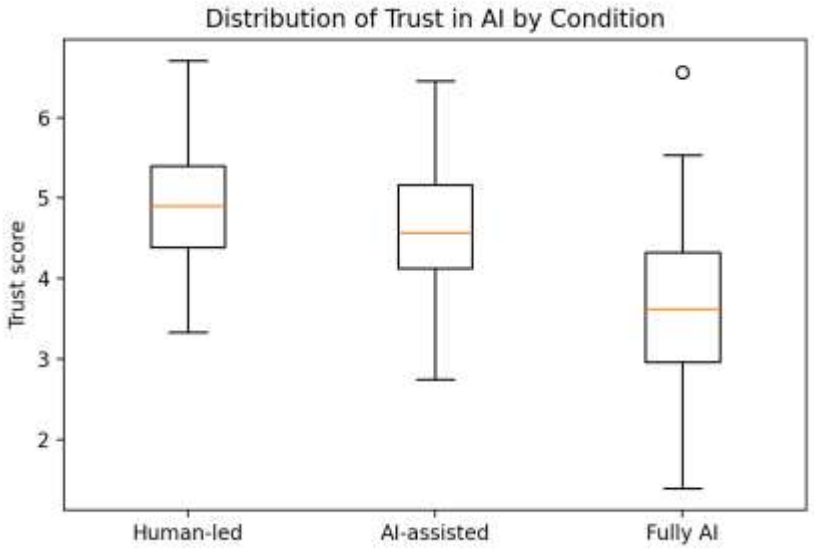

Figure 5. Trust in AI-based hiring across experimental conditions.

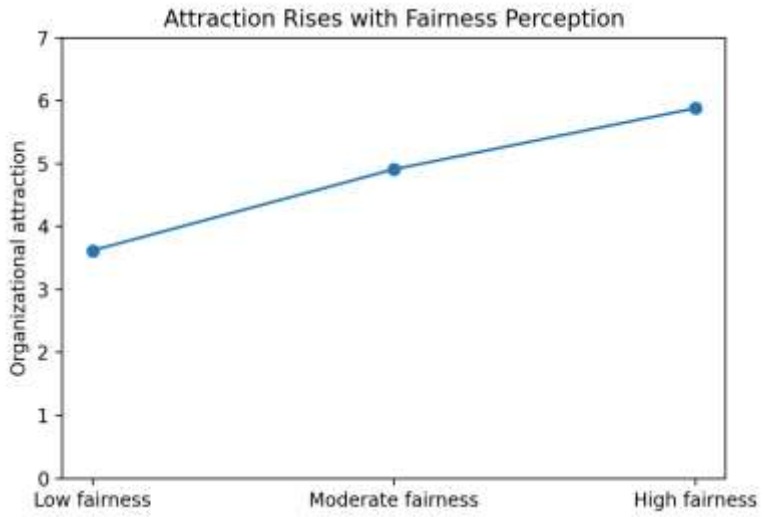

Figure 6. Organizational attraction across low, moderate, and high fairness groups.

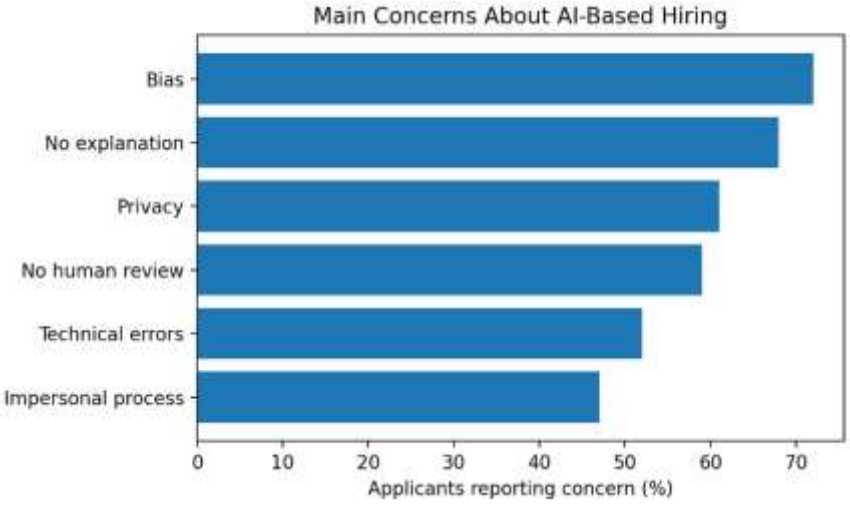

Figure 7. Main applicant concerns about AI-based hiring systems.

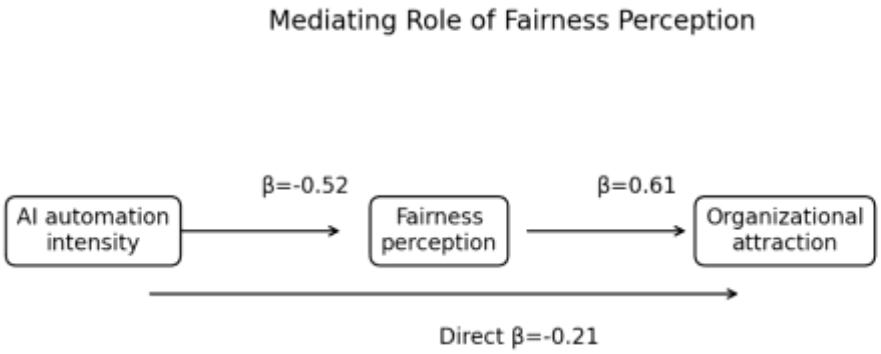

Figure 8. Mediation model showing the role of fairness perception.

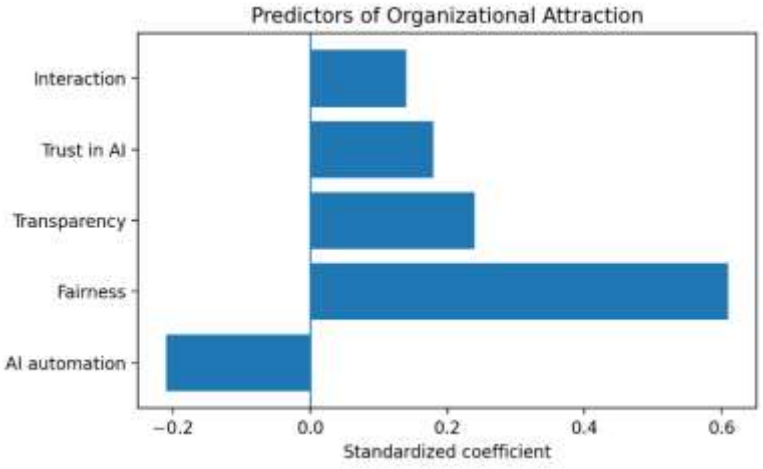

Figure 9. Standardized predictors of organizational attraction.

DISCUSSION

The findings align with the organizational justice theory proposed by Gilliland, which suggests that algorithmic screening can have a positive impact on an applicant's perception of procedural justice, which can in turn influence an applicant's attraction to the organization (Hunkenschroer & Luetge, 2022).This discovery adds fairness as a significant resource to the Job Demands-Resources model, which can be used to mitigate the impersonal aspects of automated decision-making (Babaee & Shank, 2025). While efficiency is an important attraction of AI in hiring, our findings suggest that fairness serves as a safeguard against the “trust deficit” often cited in the world of algorithm-based recruitment (Wu, 2025), reinforcing the idea that fairness plays a vital role in boosting the effectiveness of AI in the recruitment field.Our findings indicate that efficiency is an important advantage of AI in recruitment, whereas fairness is a protective factor that helps prevent the "trust deficit" found in algorithm-driven hiring, which aligns with the notion that fairness is a key factor in determining the usefulness of AI in hiring. At the theoretical level, it highlights the importance that fairness must be an active element of the hiring process, given that its procedural transparency, consistency, and voice re-establish dignity and agency for candidates (Babaee & Shank, 2025; Yu et al., 2023). We create a map of these findings on the already existing dimensions of organizational justice: informational, procedural, interpersonal, and we conclude that in the humanization of this algorithmic interaction, it is crucial to informational justice, in this specific case, explainability. Practitioners can use these findings to make informed decisions about implementing AI without compromising on the perception of the applicant, balance speed and client satisfaction, and ensure the organization's continued legitimacy.The results provide practitioners with guidance to implement AI without compromising organizational legitimacy: be careful not to rush the implementation process at the expense of the applicant's perception of it (Priyanka et al., 2025; Wu, 2025). Instead, transparency measures, such as detailed information about the selection process, and feedback mechanisms that enable candidates to offer their perspective on the process, should be implemented to boost transparency and strengthen their sense of respect and value (Priyanka et al., 2025; Wesche et al., 2022). Furthermore, the human-machine interaction is not merely a technical one, but also psychological and we suggest a mindful application of technological progress and humane design to ensure employer brand and attractiveness (Oostrom et al., 2023; Priyanka et al., 2025). Our experimental design is robust, but there are some limitations to take into account: first, we use hypothetical scenarios, which may not capture the complexity of real-world job application experiences under high stakes (Hunkenschroer & Luetge,

2022; Noble et al., 2021). Future research, however, should shift the focus to longitudinal field studies of actual applicants to further understand how initial perceptions of fairness are formed and evolve during the recruitment process and how they relate to and build on perceptions of trust in the development and organizational identification that occurs during the process (Hunkenschroer & Luetge, 2022). In addition, the effects of individual differences (e.g., earlier exposure to AI tools or attachment to technology) and technology self-efficacy on the willingness of candidates to accept algorithmic interventions requires further research, as their influence on the hiring and recruitment process in a future that is increasingly more technological needs to be understood in greater detail (Deriu et al., 2024; Moghrabi, 2025). Lastly, creating context-specific scales to assess AI ability-power in real-world organizations will enable a more accurate assessment of the candidate's judgment on the actual skills needed for high-stakes scenarios. Additionally, identifying how algorithmic recruitment is different for specific groups (e.g., age, race, personality) and how to mitigate any potential bias will be critical in determining whether such differences exist (Hilliard et al., 2022).

CONCLUSION

This paper found that AI-powered hiring systems have an impactful effect on the applicants' evaluation of recruitment and hiring organisations. The results show that applicants are more satisfied with the recruitment process when they see it as being fair, transparent, consistent, and supervised by humans. If applicants are aware of the utilization of AI tools and feel the process provides them with a chance to showcase their skills with a reasonable level of certainty, they are more apt to trust the employer and feel more attractive to them. Additional data reveals that the sense of fairness between applicants' reactions and AI hiring processes is a critical bridge. Those who were satisfied with the transparency, fairness, and respectfulness of the AI system towards privacy reported higher levels of intentions to submit applications, higher interest in the organisation and intention to recommend the employer. However, when applicants felt that the decision by AI was unclear, it was automated and/or biased, their interest in the organization waned. This means technological efficiency can't be the only thing to make a positive recruitment experience. Overall, it highlights the importance of considering AI-driven hiring as more than just a time-saving and cost-cutting solution. AI recruitment tools, instead, should be designed to ensure that justice and equity is protected and that the applicant's dignity is respected. Employers need to communicate the purpose of AI in screening and selection, have opportunities for human review, safeguard applicant data, and routinely check algorithms for bias. AI can supplement ethical recruitment practices to enhance the hiring process and boost outcomes, while maintaining the applicant experience and the organization's appeal. Further research is needed to examine variations by industry, profile type of applicants and AI type of recruitment to clearly identify how applicants respond to automated recruitment in a more realistic setting.

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