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The Influence of Attraction Effect on Hiring Decisions: Does Experience Matters?

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ABSTRACT

Evidence suggests that the contextual factor of attraction effects such as decoy and phantom candidates affect the task of choosing a single job candidate from a small set of comparable finalists. Nevertheless, the number of studies of the attraction effect on the job-finalist choice is relatively small and bound to methodological gaps (i.e., vulnerable to invariant sample and individuals' differences). The present study examined the influence of decoy and phantom candidates on job-finalist choice as well as differences of such influence based on participants' background. By using a within-subject, experimental design, 98 participants of different backgrounds (i.e., personnel selection workers and personnel selection students) were recruited to play the roles of hiring managers in three simulated employee selection scenarios. Results from McNemar's chi-square revealed the following: (i) participants tend to choose the target candidate in decoy condition over control condition, (ii) participants tend to choose the target candidate in phantom condition over control condition and (iii) no difference in the number of participants who chose the target candidate in decoy and phantom conditions. Besides, results from further analysis on participants' backgrounds showed: (i) the effect of a decoy candidate is significant among students but not among workers (ii) the effect of phantom candidate is not significant among both workers and students, and (iii) the difference between the effects of decoy and phantom candidates is significant among workers but not among students. The implications of these findings were discussed, and recommendations for future research are provided.

Keywords: Attraction Effect; Decoy Candidate; Phantom Candidate; Hiring Decision; Job-Finalist Choice

1. INTRODUCTION

Hiring managers are required to make reliable and valid hiring decisions. However, contextual factors can adversely influence their hiring decisions (Rosati & Stevens 2009). These contextual factors can lead to a decision bias when hiring managers' decision-

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making process is influenced by irrelevant information (Kahneman et al. 1982). During the final stage of personnel selection, attraction effect can influence hiring managers through the composition of the job-finalists (i.e. shortlisted applicants for the final stage of selection) thus leads to making mistakes when making their choice (Slaughter et al. 1999). Poor job-finalist choice can lead to hiring incompetent employees who in turns less productive, poor morale, and more likely to turnover (Wang & Kleiner 2004).

When assessing the attraction effect on job-finalist choice, decoy and phantom candidates have been demonstrated to have a powerful effect on job-finalist choice (e.g. Highhouse 1996; Slaughter et al. 1999; Slaughter et al. 2006). Attraction effect is a phenomenon where the attractiveness of a target candidate increases relative to a competing candidate when a third alternative is introduced. In other words, while a target candidate and competing candidate are opposing each other on multiple attributes (e.g. structured interview scores, general mental ability test scores) and both have comparable strengths and weaknesses, a third alternative may elevate the attractiveness of the target candidate. Decoy candidate is the alternative option that appears symmetrical to the target candidate in one attribute but weaker in another while phantom candidate is the alternative option that looks symmetrical to the target candidate in one attribute and stronger in another but unavailable at the time of choosing (Sivakumar 2016).

Attraction effect on job-finalist choice represents a form of bias in the hiring decision. The effect changes the rank-ordering of candidates based on their composition rather than their individual attributes, which subsequently lead organisations to make bad hire (Highhouse 1997). Bad hire negatively impacts organisations in terms of morale, productivity, client relationships, sales and finances (Maurer 2015). Given the negative impact of attraction effect on job-finalist choice, research on the subject ought to be plenteous and well-documented. However, the number of papers published for attraction effect on job-finalist choice remains limited, estimated to be only around six studies (i.e. Connolly et al. 2013; Highhouse 1996; Keck & Tang 2015; Slaughter 2007; Slaughter et al. 2006; Slaughter et al. 1999). This is in stark contrast to the numerous attraction effect researches in general which has advanced further, for example, utilising brain activity scanning (Mohr et al. 2017).

As a result of limited publications, there is a lack of sample and methodological variation shown by previous research. The present study found that most of the research had used convenient samples consisting of American university students. However, in the real world, hiring decision is not made by university students, making their findings hardly generalisable. It is also important to note that the use of homogenous samples might contribute to the consistent findings and hindered previous research from actually examining the effect. This is supported in a marketing study by Banerjee et al. (2020) which found that Eastern people are more resilient to the effect as compared to non-Eastern people due to their different way of thinking, and as commented by Koscielniak et al. (2018) on the superior performance of older adults when it comes to decision making. Highhouse

(1996) mentioned the need to examine attraction effect on experienced hiring decision-makers, which has yet to be addressed.

Additionally, the literature finds that the majority of research used a between-subjects design. This design, however, is vulnerable to the confounding variable of individual differences. Participants' job-finalist choices might have been confounded by participants' personal preferences on specific candidates based on the attribute scores provided, rather than the effects of decoy and phantom candidates themselves. As such, the present study aims to mitigate these gaps by addressing those sample invariant and methodological limitations.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. DECOY-ONLY ATTRACTION EFFECT

A classic study by Highhouse (1996) examined the effect of decoy candidate on job-finalist choice among 218 university students. Results showed that participants chose the target candidate when there was a decoy candidate. A study was conducted by Slaughter et al. (1999) on 208 university psychology students using a 9-minute video vignette of work sample exercises of candidates constructing plastic car models. Results indicated that the participants chose the target candidate when the decoy candidate was present. It is worth mentioning that Slaughter et al. also found that the effect of decoy candidate was not as strong as in previous research due to participants having a strong preference for one attribute over the other.

Slaughter et al. (2006) conducted a study to examine the effect of decoy candidate on group-based job-finalist choice among 605 university students. Results showed that participants chose the target candidate when there was a decoy candidate. Ir study was conducted by Slaughter (2007) to examine the influence of selection batteries on the effect of decoy candidate among 299 university students. Logistic regression analysis reported that, except for the one condition where competing candidates ranked higher than the target candidate in the previous stage, participants chose target candidate when decoy candidate was present in other three conditions.

Connolly et al. (2013) conducted a study to investigate the effect of regret salience strategy on the effect of decoy candidate in job-finalist choice among 242 university students. Results showed that unless participants were primed with regret salience strategy, most of them chose the target candidate when a decoy candidate was present. Perhaps the latest addition to the body of literature in this context is Keck and Tang (2015) who investigated the role of decoy candidate on gender bias in job-finalist choice. A total of 586 university students and 436 individuals sourced online were presented with personnel selection scenario for both stereotypical male and female positions. Results showed that participants chose the target candidate according to gender stereotype for the position when a decoy candidate was present.

Besides the research mentioned above, there are related studies in the area of consumer choice. The first study on decoy-only attraction effect was conducted by Huber et al. (1982) where a total of 153 university students were presented with six consumer purchase scenarios. Results showed that participants chose the target product when there was a decoy product. They also noted that the effect of the decoy product was more substantial in between-subjects design when compared to within-subjects design. Meanwhile, Bhatia (2014) increased the number of attributes of products when examining the effect of decoy product. A total of 74 college student were presented with a scenario where they need to choose between hypothetical vacation resorts with numerous features. Results showed that participants chose the target resort when there was a decoy resort.

Based on the research reviewed, there are consistent findings with regards to the effect of decoy on choice. However, most of the research in both job-finalist and consumer choices used homogeneous samples of American university students Ih may explain the similar findings, limiting the generalisability of research findings. Highhouse (1996) mentioned the need to examine the attraction effect among led hiring decision-makers, Ih has yet to be addressed. It is also important to note that all of the research in job-finalist choice setting used a between-subjects design Ih is vulnerable to the confounding effect of individual differences. In contrast, research design used by research in consumer choice setting led both between-subjects design and within-subjects design, with the latter is safe from the confounding effect of individual differences. Additionally, it is worth mentioning Huber et al. (1982) found that the effect of decoy was more substantial in between-subjects design as compared to within-subjects design. The literature has shown that the presence of a decoy affects the selection decision in a way that the decoy candidates increase the chance to pick the target candidate over the competitor.

Hypothesis 1: There is a significantly higher number of participants who choose the target candidate in decoy condition as compared to the control condition.

2.2. PHANTOM-ONLY ATTRACTION EFFECT

The same classic research by Highhouse (1996) also examined the effect of the phantom candidate on job-finalist choice. The results showed that participants chose the target candidate when a phantom candidate was present. Besides this research, not much has been conducted on phantom-only attraction effect in job-finalist choice. However, there is related research in areas of consumer and perceptual choices. Guney and Richter (2015) investigated the effect of a phantom product on consumer choice. A total of 198 university students were presented with a computer-based experiment on consumer choice. Logistic regression analysis found that a majority of participants chose the target product when the phantom product was present.

Meanwhile, Pettibone and Wedell (2007) tested numerous explanations for the effect of a phantom product on consumer choice. A total of 429 undergraduate students were

presented with consumer choice scenarios with varied attribute scores on the phantom product. Results showed that, except for one scenario, participants chose the target product when there was a phantom product in the remaining four other scenarios. Scarpi and Pizzi (2013) conducted an almost similar study where they investigated the effect of phantom product on 750 individuals recruited online who are presented with online purchase scenarios. Logistic regression analysis reported that except for one scenario, participants chose the target product when the phantom product was present in three other scenarios. Meanwhile, Trueblood and Pettibone (2015) examined the effect of phantom stimuli on perceptual choice among 84 university students. In contrast to other findings, the results showed that participants chose competing stimuli when there were phantom stimuli.

Based on the research reviewed, there are mixed findings with regards to the effect of the phantom on choice. Furthermore, most of them used homogeneous samples of American university students Ih limit the generalisability of research findings. It is also important to note that, besides Highhouse (1996) Ih used between-subjects design, most of the research used a within-subjects design Ih is safe from the confounding effect of individual differences. Still, to be cautious, findings from consumer and perceptual choices might have limited generalisability for job-finalist choice.

Hypothesis 2: There is a significantly higher number of participants who choose the target candidate in phantom condition as compared to the control condition.

2.3. DECOY-AND-PHANTOM ATTRACTION EFFECT

Highhouse (1996) also examined the difference between the effects of decoy and phantom candidates on job-finalist choice. Results showed that there was no difference in participants' job-finalist choice when presented with either the decoy candidate or the phantom candidate. Besides this research, there is no other research that has been conducted on decoy-and-phantom attraction effect in job-finalist choice. However, there are related research in consumer choice. Pettibone and Wedell (2000) conducted a study to examine the effects of decoy and phantom products on consumer choice among 176 university students. Results indicated that participants were more likely to choose the target product regardless of the presence of either a decoy or phantom product. These findings demonstrated that there was no difference in participants' choice when being presented with a decoy product or a phantom product.

Doyle et al. (1999) also examined the effects of decoy and phantom products in consumer choice among 246 university students. The log-linear analysis showed that participants chose the target product when being presented with either a decoy product or a phantom product. The results also indicated that there was no difference between the effects of decoy and phantom products on consumer choice. It is essential to note that the effect was stronger for the decoy product as compared to the phantom product. Doyle et

al. had also further extended their research on real in-store purchases using records of purchase. It was found that there was no difference in the sales of the target product when there was a decoy product or a phantom product.

Hedgcock et al. (2016) investigated the effect of the decoy and phantom products on consumer choice among 734 undergraduate marketing students who were presented with consumer choice scenarios. Multinomial logistic regression analysis showed that participants were more likely to choose the target product when there was a decoy product. However, they were less likely to choose the target product when there was a phantom product. These findings showed that there was a difference between the effects of decoy and phantom products on consumer choice, which was in contrast to the previous research.

Based on the research reviewed, there are mixed findings with regards to the difference between the effects of decoy and phantom on choice. The majority of these research used homogeneous samples of American university students which limit the generalisability of research findings. Additionally, besides Highhouse (1996) which used between-subjects design, most of the researches used within-subjects design which is safe from the confounding effect of individual differences. Additionally, it needs to be mentioned that the research from the different setting (i.e. consumer choice) might have limited generalisability in terms of their research findings.

Hypothesis 3: There is a significant difference in the number of participants who choose the target candidate in decoy and phantom scenarios.

3. METHOD

3.1. PARTICIPANTS

A total of 98 individuals consisting of 49 personnel selection workers and 49 personnel selection students, were selected using purposive sampling and virtual snowball sampling. These participants played the roles of hiring managers in three simulated personnel selection scenarios. The inclusion criteria for participation was based on the following criteria: (i) people who have experience working in personnel selection/hiring decision (*personnel selection workers*) and (ii) people who have studied personnel selection/hiring decision in a human resource management course or industrial and organisational psychology course (*personnel selection students*). The present study recruited the participants via social media (i.e. Facebook, WhatsApp) and emails. At the same time, these participants also helped to recruit other participants for the present study.

3.2. MEASURE

Attraction effect. Attraction effect served as the independent variable of the present study. It was measured by comparing three conditions: (i) decoy vs control, (ii) phantom vs

control and (iii) decoy vs phantom. Participants played the roles of hiring managers and were presented with three simulated personnel selection scenarios: (i) control scenario, (ii) decoy scenario, and (iii) phantom scenario.

In the control scenario, participants were given two job-finalists: target candidate and competing candidate. Hypothetical assessment scores for the candidates are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Control Scenario Candidate Assessment Scores

Candidates	Test scores	Interview ratings
Target Candidate	79	61
Competing Candidate	62	78

In decoy scenario, participants were given three job-finalists: target candidate, competing candidate and decoy candidate. The decoy candidate targeted the target candidate through the latter's similar test score and lower interview rating. Hypothetical assessment scores for the candidates are presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2. Decoy Scenario Candidate Assessment Scores

Candidates	Test scores	Interview ratings
Target Candidate	77	61
Competing Candidate	60	78
Decoy Candidate	77	52

In phantom scenario, participants were given three job-finalists: target candidate, competing candidate and phantom candidate. The phantom candidate targeted the target candidate via the latter's higher test score and a similar interview rating. Participants were also presented with additional information which entailed that the phantom candidate had accepted a job offer from another company. Under such circumstances, the phantom candidate was no longer available for participants to choose. Hypothetical assessment scores for the candidates are presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3. Phantom Scenario Candidate Assessment Scores

Candidates	Test scores	Interview ratings
Target Candidate	76	62
Competing Candidate	61	77
Phantom Candidate	88	62

Job-finalist choice. Job-finalist choice served as the dependent variable of the present study. It was measured by examining participants' job-finalist choices in control, decoy, and phantom scenarios using a multiple-choice question format. In the control scenario, there were target and competing candidates. In the decoy condition, there were target, competing, and decoy candidates. In the phantom condition, there were target, competing and phantom candidates, albeit the phantom candidate was 'strikethrough' and could not be chosen. Participants in this study were asked to choose one candidate of their choice from each scenario.

3.3. RESEARCH DESIGN

The present study is an experimental study utilising within-subjects design with incomplete counterbalancing where each participant was presented with all three conditions once. This design caters to the issue of not having to worry about balancing participants' differences across each condition associated with a between-subjects design. At the same time, it helped to balance the practice effect associated with the within-subjects design (Keren & Raaijmakers 1988). There were six different sequences in the presentation of scenarios in the present study. The sequences are illustrated in Table 4.

TABLE 4. Sequences in the Presentation of Scenarios

Sequence	First scenario	Second scenario	Third scenario
1	Control	Decoy	Phantom
2	Control	Phantom	Decoy
3	Decoy	Control	Phantom
4	Decoy	Phantom	Control
5	Phantom	Control	Decoy
6	Phantom	Decoy	Control

Each participant was assigned to either one of the six sequences according to their participation order. These arrangements are illustrated in Table 5.

TABLE 5. Sequence Assignment based on Participation Order of Participants

Sequence	Participation Order											
1	1st	7th	13th	19th	25th	31st	37th	43rd	49th	55th	61st	67th
	73rd	79th	85th	91st	97th							
2	2nd	8th	14th	20th	26th	32nd	38th	44th	50th	56th	62nd	
	68th	74th	80th	86th	92nd	98th						
3	3rd	9th	15th	21st	27th	33rd	39th	45th	51st	57th	63rd	
	69th	75th	81st	87th	93rd							
4	4th	10th	16th	22nd	28th	34th	40th	46th	52nd	58th	64th	
	70th	76th	82nd	88th	94th							
5	5th	11th	17th	23rd	29th	35th	41st	47th	53rd	59th	65th	
	71st	77th	83rd	89th	95th							
6	6th	12th	18th	24th	30th	36th	42nd	48th	54th	60th	66th	
	72nd	78th	84th	90th	96th							

3.4. PROCEDURE

Participants were presented with an informed consent form, demographic information form, attraction effect scenarios and job-finalist choice through online administration. The data gained were analysed by using IBM SPSS version 22. McNemar's chi-square was used to test the three research hypotheses by measuring the difference in number and percentage of participants' job-finalist choices between each scenario. After hypothesis-testing, the existing data were split into two subgroups, namely personnel selection workers and personnel selection students to explore further the research findings. The data from the two subgroups were also analysed using McNemar's chi-square, and the influence of attraction effect on the two subgroups' job-finalist choices was compared.

4. RESULTS

4.1. THE EFFECT OF THE DECOY CANDIDATE ON JOB-FINALIST CHOICE

To examine the effect of a decoy candidate, participants' job-finalist choices in the control and the decoy scenarios were compared. Results revealed that there was a significant difference in the number of participants who chose the target candidate in control and decoy scenarios at $p < .001$. Therefore, H1 was supported. Participants were more likely to choose target candidate in decoy scenario (41.84%) than in control scenario (27.55%). Participants' job-finalist choice percentages are summarised in Table 6.

TABLE 6. Choice Percentages by Control-Decoy Scenario

Samples	Scenario	Percentage choosing target candidate (%)
All participants	Control	27.55 (n = 27)
	Decoy	41.84 (n = 41)

Note. For all participants, $p < .001$.

4.2. THE EFFECT OF THE PHANTOM CANDIDATE ON JOB-FINALIST CHOICE

To examine the effect of the phantom candidate, participants' job-finalist choices in control and phantom conditions were compared. Results revealed that there was no significant difference in the number of participants who chose the target candidate in control and phantom scenarios at $p > .05$. Therefore, H2 was rejected. There was only a small increment in the number of participants who chose target candidate in phantom scenario (30.61%) as compared to control scenario (27.55%). Participants' job-finalist choice percentages are summarised in Table 7.

TABLE 7. Choice Percentages by Control-Phantom Scenario

Samples	Scenario	Percentage choosing target candidate (%)
All participants	Control	27.55 (n = 27)
	Phantom	30.61 (n = 30)

Note. For all participants, $p > .05$

4.3. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE EFFECTS OF DECOY AND PHANTOM CANDIDATES ON JOB-FINALIST CHOICE

To examine the difference between the effects of decoy and phantom candidates, participants' job-finalist choices in decoy and phantom scenarios were compared. Results revealed that there was no significant difference in the number of participants who chose the target candidate in decoy and phantom scenarios at $p < .05$. Therefore, H3 was rejected. There was only a small difference in the number of participants who chose target candidate in decoy scenario (41.84) than in phantom scenario (36.73%). Participants' job-finalist choice percentages are summarised in Table 8.

TABLE 8. Choice Percentages by Decoy-Phantom Scenario

Samples	Scenario	Percentage choosing target candidate (%)
All participants	Decoy	41.84 (n = 41)
	Phantom	36.73 (n = 36)

Note. For all participants, $p > .05$.

4.4. FURTHER ANALYSIS OF PARTICIPANTS WITH DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS

The existing data were split into two subgroups based on participants' backgrounds for further analysis considering different participants' backgrounds might influence attraction effect on job-finalist choice.

To explore the differences between the two subgroups with regards to the effect of decoy candidate, their job-finalist choices in control and decoy scenarios were compared. Results revealed that job-finalist choice changed significantly for personnel selection students with the presence of decoy candidate at $p < .05$, but not for personnel selection workers at $p > .05$. Participants' job-finalist choice percentages according to their subgroups are presented in Table 9.

TABLE 9. Choice Percentages by Subgroup on Control-Decoy Scenario

Subgroup		Scenario	Percentage choosing target candidate (%)
Personnel selection workers		Control	30.60 (n = 15)
		Decoy	40.80 (n = 20)
Personnel selection students		Control	24.50 (n = 12)
		Decoy	42.90 (n = 21)

Note. For personnel selection workers, $p > .05$. For personnel selection students, $p < .05$

To explore the possible differences between the two subgroups with regards to the effect of the phantom candidate, their job-finalist choices in control and phantom scenarios were compared. Results revealed that job-finalist choice of personnel selection workers and personnel selection students did not change significantly with the presence of phantom candidate at $p > .05$. Participants' job-finalist choice percentages according to their subgroups, are presented in Table 10.

TABLE 10. Choice Percentages by Subgroup on Control-Phantom Scenario

Subgroup		Scenario	Percentage choosing target candidate (%)
Personnel selection workers		Control	30.60 (n = 15)
		Phantom	24.50 (n = 12)
Personnel selection students		Control	24.50 (n = 12)
		Phantom	36.70 (n = 18)

Note. For personnel selection workers, $p > .05$. For personnel selection students, $p > .05$.

To explore the possible differences between the two subgroups with regards to the difference between the effects of decoy and phantom candidates, their job-finalist choices

in decoy and phantom scenarios were compared. McNemar's chi-square revealed that job-finalist choice changed significantly for personnel selection workers at $p < .05$, but not for personnel selection students at $p > .05$. Participants' job-finalist choice percentages according to their subgroups, are presented in Table 11.

TABLE 11. Choice Percentages by Subgroup on Decoy-Phantom Scenario

Subgroup	Scenario	Percentage choosing target candidate (%)
Personnel selection workers	Decoy	40.80 (n = 20)
	Phantom	24.50 (n = 12)
Personnel selection students	Decoy	42.90 (n = 21)
	Phantom	36.70 (n = 18)

Note. For personnel selection workers, $p < .05$. For personnel selection students, $p > .05$.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. THE EFFECT OF DECOY CANDIDATE ON JOB-FINALIST CHOICE

Results on the effect of decoy candidate on job-finalist choice showed that there was a significantly higher number of participants who chose the target candidate in decoy scenario as compared to control scenario. This finding is in line with the body of literature concerning the subject. In other words, the effect of a decoy candidate is replicated in the present study when using different methodologies and samples.

Meanwhile, results from the further analysis of participants with different backgrounds showed that personnel selection students preferred the target candidate when there was a decoy candidate. This finding was highly similar to that of university student samples used in previous research. Possible explanations for the effect of decoy candidate among students included the following; (i) the lack of task meaningfulness and unfamiliarity with the hiring process (Ratneshwar et al. 1987) and; (ii) the lack of experience in making hiring decisions (Highhouse 1996). Students might have the knowledge of personnel selection, but their lack of experience and unfamiliarity with the hiring process might hinder them from making an accurate job-finalist choice. In contrast, personnel selection workers did not change their job-finalist choices despite the presence of a decoy candidate. This finding supports Edwards' (1983) concerns on the importance of using experienced organisational decision-makers as research participants for this type of research. It seems that experienced hiring decision makers are less prone to decision bias such as attraction effect.

5.2. THE EFFECT OF THE PHANTOM CANDIDATE ON JOB-FINALIST CHOICE

Results on the effect of the phantom candidate on job-finalist choice showed that there was no significant difference in the number of participants who chose the target candidate

in the phantom scenario as compared to control scenario. This finding is in contrast to Highhouse (1996) which found that participants preferred the target candidate when there was a phantom candidate. The effect of the phantom candidate in the job-finalist choice was not replicated might be due to the different methodologies and samples used in the present study.

Meanwhile, results from the further analysis of participants with different backgrounds showed that both subgroups did not prefer the target candidate when there was a phantom candidate. Nevertheless, personnel selection students reported the effect of the phantom candidate was not significant at p = .06. There is a possibility that this finding is implicated by a Type 2 error, which can make the result seems insignificant, when in fact it is. Similar explanations as ones from the effect of decoy candidate could be applied here as well. Students' lack of work experience might have made them more susceptible to the effect of a phantom candidate despite having learned the personnel selection processes. Compared to students, some of the personnel selection workers preferred the competing candidate in the presence of a phantom candidate. This finding is similar to the previous research in perceptual choice by Trueblood and Pettibone (2015) which explained the fact that phantom candidate dominated the target candidate but not the competing candidate made the latter seem more attractive. The difference also underpins Edwards' (1983) concerns the use of convenient samples (i.e. university students) as participants for this type of research.

5.3. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE EFFECTS OF DECOY AND PHANTOM CANDIDATES ON JOB-FINALIST CHOICE

Results on the difference between the effects of decoy and phantom candidates on job-finalist choice indicated that there is no significant difference in the number of participants who chose target candidate in decoy scenario and phantom scenario. This finding is similar to Highhouse (1996) who found that there was no difference in the number of participants who chose the target candidate when there was a decoy candidate or a phantom candidate. Therefore, the similar effect that decoy and phantom candidates had on job-finalist choice was replicated in the present study.

Meanwhile, results from the further analysis of participants with different backgrounds showed that findings on personnel selection students were highly similar to university student samples used by Highhouse (1996). Students preferred the target candidate regardless of whether there was a decoy candidate or a phantom candidate. Upon closer inspection, they were more likely to choose the target candidate when there was a decoy candidate as compared to when there was a phantom candidate. This finding supports Pettibone and Wedell's (2000) study, which stated that decoy has a similar but more significant effect on choice as compared to phantom.

On the other hand, personnel selection workers showed that there was a difference between the effects of decoy and phantom candidates. The difference between the effects of decoy and phantom candidates among workers can be attributed to workers preferring the target candidate when there was a decoy candidate yet refusing the target candidate when there was a phantom candidate. This finding is highly similar to Hedgcock et al. (2016) in consumer choice setting. Nevertheless, their study had another option for the participants to choose from, which was to defer their choices. Again, the value-shift theory by Wedell and Pettibone (1999) seems to be the most suitable to explain this scenario. The gain from choosing the target candidate in decoy scenario stemmed from its dominance over the decoy candidate. Meanwhile, the loss aversed by choosing the competing candidate instead of the target candidate in phantom scenario came from the fact that the phantom candidate dominated the target candidate while the competing candidate did not.

6. CONCLUSION

In general, the present study has shown that the presence of a decoy candidate influenced participants' preferences towards the target candidate. On the other hand, the presence of a phantom candidate did not have any impact on their job-finalist choice. Additionally, when the effects of decoy and phantom candidates were compared, it was found that there was no difference between the two. Meanwhile, results from the further analysis of participants with different backgrounds showed that the two subgroups were affected differently by the presence of decoy and phantom candidates. Personnel selection students produced broadly similar findings to that of university student samples used in previous research. Students preferred the target candidate when there was a decoy candidate, and they reported similar effects of decoy and phantom candidates. There is also a possibility that the effect of the phantom candidate was significant but implicated by a Type 2 error. In contrast, worker samples produced different findings. In particular, personnel selection workers did not prefer the target candidate regardless when there was a decoy candidate or a phantom candidate. Besides, workers reported the effects of decoy and phantom candidates to be different. To summarise, the present study showed the difference regarding the influence of attraction effect on the job-finalist choice among participants with different backgrounds. Additionally, this study managed to give new insights with regards to the influence of attraction effect on the job-finalist choice among hiring decision-makers.

The overall and personnel selection students' findings, in particular, favoured certain theoretical explanations over the others. Specifically, Highhouse and Johnson (1996) found that the effects of both decoy and phantom candidates can be explained simultaneously through loss aversion, which stated that the target candidate in decoy condition is chosen to avoid loss in one attribute if the competing candidate is chosen. Meanwhile, the target

candidate in the phantom condition is chosen to avoid a more significant loss in one attribute if the competing candidate is chosen.

Meanwhile, findings on personnel selection workers showed otherwise, with no significant effects of decoy and phantom candidates on job-finalist choice, yet a significant difference in the effect of decoy and phantom candidates. The significant difference in the effect of decoy and phantom is down to the fact that workers preferred the target candidate when there was a decoy candidate, but they chose the competing candidate when there was a phantom candidate. The most suitable explanation for this finding is the value-shift model (Wedell & Pettibone, 1999), which stated that the gain from choosing the target candidate in decoy scenario stemmed from its dominance over the decoy candidate. Meanwhile, loss was averted by choosing the competing candidate instead of the target candidate in the phantom scenario since the phantom candidate dominated the target candidate while the competing candidate was not.

Overall, the influence of the attraction effect on job-finalist choice had been partially demonstrated in the present study. As such, several ways to reduce decision bias caused by the attraction effect have been identified. Keck and Tang (2015) stated that an organisation could arrange the composition of job-finalists in a way that attraction effect will not occur. In this case, a job-finalist who is not a good choice, such as one that conforms to the characteristics of a decoy candidate, should be screened out from the choice set before being given to the hiring managers. Similarly, a candidate who is not available for hiring (i.e. phantom candidate) should also be screened out from the choice set. Such an arrangement will help hiring managers to focus on job-finalists that matter and avoid being affected by attraction effect. Alternatively, hiring managers can be assigned to a training program that helps to instil awareness on the presence of attraction effect during the hiring process. This type of training should be able to help hiring managers to identify whether the composition of job-finalists can have an attraction effect or not. From there, hiring managers can take suitable actions to reduce the effect by using strategies as highlighted below.

Highhouse (1997) suggested hiring managers can devise a formula with a pre-determined weight on each attribute before making a hiring decision. The formula can be made based on the attribute's importance or decision-makers' preferences. This method can reduce the likelihood of hiring managers making a job-finalist choice under the contextual influence of attraction effect. On the other hand, Connolly et al. (2013) suggested hiring managers to use regret salience strategy by asking themselves to anticipate regret they might experience if their job-finalist choices turn out to be reduced. This method encourages hiring managers to examine their choices more critically. Through such a method, they would become aware that decoy and phantom candidates are irrelevant in their decision-making process; hence, both candidates would not have any effect on their job-finalist choices. Similarly, it is vital to avoid one strategy which is not only ineffective but also exacerbates the attraction effect in job-finalist choice. Slaughter et al. (2006) and

Connolly et al. (2013) found that holding hiring managers accountable for their job-finalist choices made them more susceptible to attraction effect. As counter intuitive as it sounds, hiring managers should not be requested to give justification for their choices. This kind of request will only direct their attention towards decoy and phantom candidates, which can be used as somewhat reasonable justification. By not requesting justification for their job-finalist choices, the influence of the attraction effect can be reduced.

All these cautionary steps can help to remove decision bias and improve the reliability and validity of job-finalist choice. However, the present study showed that personnel selection workers' job-finalist choices were not affected by both decoy and phantom candidates. It is possible that workers had already received ample training and had vast experience in decision biases when making a hiring decision. Besides, devising a formula with pre-determined weightages on each attribute before making a hiring decision could be their standard practice. On the other hand, personnel selection students' job-finalist choices were affected by both decoy and phantom candidates. This finding highlights the needs of organisations to send fresh graduates for training and teach them how to use the strategies mentioned above before they are allowed to be involved in any hiring decision-making activity.

The present study had selected, among others, personnel selection workers who are experienced hiring decision-makers. Workers selected not only consisted of hiring managers but also included often-used hiring decision-makers such as small business owners and entrepreneurs, as suggested by Huber et al. (1987). The use of experienced hiring decision-makers improved the external validity of this research and the generalisability of its findings over past research that used convenient samples of university students. However, it is important to note that although the present study managed to increase its external validity through the use of experienced hiring decision-makers, the scenario used was still hypothetical. This study used a simulated personnel selection scenario, which limited the generalisability of its findings. It is possible that in a real-world scenario, hiring managers' job-finalist choices would be different since they are held accountable for their hiring decisions. There is, however, research that examined the effect of accountability on attraction effect in job-finalist choice (i.e. Slaughter et al. 2006; Connolly et al., 2013). Nevertheless, the scenarios used were also hypothetical. It is still not clear whether their findings can extend beyond simulated scenarios. Therefore, future studies can address this issue by examining the attraction effect on job-finalist choice based on real hiring decision data.

The present study has provided empirical evidence on the attraction effect in the job-finalist choice among participants and their respective subgroups. This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by examining the replicability of attraction effect on job-finalist choice using different samples and methodologies. Also, new insights are gained regarding the different influence of attraction effect on the two subgroups of participants

with different backgrounds. The present study should have provided a further understanding on the theory of attraction effect in job-finalist choice.

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