

Exploring the Perception of Potential Employees on the Use of Artificial Intelligence Tools in the Recruitment and Selection Process

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Abstract

This study explores how potential employees perceive the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools in recruitment and selection processes. Despite the growing adoption of AI in human resource management, limited research has examined candidate-side perceptions. Focusing on Master's degree Human Resource Management students at the University of Derby, this research investigates perceptions and influencing factors through a qualitative lens. Using an interpretivist philosophy, an inductive approach, and a single-case study design, ten semi-structured interviews were conducted. Thematic analysis revealed a nuanced perspective, with participants acknowledging benefits such as efficiency and reduced bias, while also raising significant concerns about depersonalisation, algorithmic opacity, and a lack of emotional sensitivity. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) was used to frame the findings, highlighting that perceived usefulness and ease of use, as well as moderating factors like trust and transparency, shaped participant attitudes. Influencing factors included prior experience with AI, communication from employers, and the transparency of systems. The study contributes to the understanding of user perspectives in AI-driven recruitment and offers recommendations for HR practitioners, policymakers, and researchers to ensure responsible and inclusive implementation.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence; Recruitment; Selection; Candidate Perception; Human Resource Management; Tam; Ethical AI

1 Introduction

1.1 The AI Revolution in Human Resource Management

In an era increasingly defined by automation and digital transformation, artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly reshaping traditional human resource management (HRM) practices. One of the most profoundly affected areas is recruitment and selection, where AI tools now assist or entirely automate tasks such as CV screening, candidate communication, interview scheduling, and psychometric assessment. This shift towards algorithm-driven recruitment processes is not merely a technological trend; it represents a profound change in how organisations evaluate and interact with potential employees.

The integration of AI into HR functions is widespread and growing. A 2024 CIPD survey revealed that over 60% of large organisations in the UK now use AI tools at some stage of the hiring process. These applications range from chatbot pre-screening to AI-generated shortlisting and video interview platforms using facial and vocal analytics. Globally, employers are motivated to adopt AI recruitment tools to address the growing scale and complexity of hiring, citing benefits such as improved hiring quality, reduced time-to-hire, and standardised candidate evaluation. However, while businesses and HR departments cite efficiency, objectivity, and scalability as key benefits of AI adoption, there are

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growing concerns among job seekers, civil society, and scholars regarding transparency, fairness, and the loss of human judgment in hiring decisions.

1.2 Rationale and Problem Statement

Although the use of AI in recruitment has been widely discussed from the perspective of organisations and HR professionals, relatively few studies examine how potential employees perceive these tools. This lack of research is particularly surprising given that recruitment is a two-way process, and candidates' experiences and perceptions significantly influence employer brand, application rates, and, ultimately, hiring success. The rationale for this study stems from a critical observation of this gap. The current literature is skewed towards employer or system-focused evaluations, providing little insight into how job seekers experience or interpret algorithm-driven decisions.

A fundamental dynamic underpins this research problem: the asymmetry of power and information between employers and job seekers. Organisations deploying AI-driven systems possess the technology, control its inputs, and interpret its outputs, which are often concealed from the candidate. As a result, job seekers are subject to the decisions of these opaque systems with little to no explanation or recourse. If candidates feel disempowered, misunderstood, or unfairly evaluated by AI, they are likely to self-select out of an application process, damaging the employer brand and hindering talent attraction efforts.

1.3 Research Question and Objectives

Based on the aim and objectives, the central research question is

- How do potential employees perceive the use of AI tools in the recruitment and selection process, and what factors shape these perceptions?
- This question will be explored using qualitative methods, with a focus on interpreting participants lived experiences, attitudes, and expectations regarding AI-driven hiring.

The specific objectives are

- To critically review existing literature on AI in the recruitment and selection process.
- To investigate the perception of potential employees on the deployment of AI tools in recruitment and selection.
- To identify the factors that have shaped the perception of potential employees.
- To provide recommendations based on the analysis undertaken.

1.4 Research Gap and Contribution to Knowledge

Several gaps in the existing literature justify this research. First, although there is a growing body of work on AI in HR, most studies focus on system efficiency, recruiter adoption, or algorithm performance. Candidate perception, especially that of potential employees yet to enter the job market, is underexplored. Second, many existing studies are quantitative in nature, often relying on surveys or system analytics. While these approaches provide useful generalisations, they may miss the nuanced, emotional, and contextual elements of how candidates experience AI in recruitment. A qualitative approach is better suited to capture these dimensions. Third, there is limited research focused on the UK context, particularly among young, educated candidates such as postgraduate HR students.

This study contributes to knowledge by filling these gaps. It offers a rich, qualitative account of how AI is understood and evaluated by those entering the workforce, while grounding this understanding in theory (TAM) and practice. By focusing on a unique population of Master's degree Human Resource Management students, the study provides a dual-lens perspective. These individuals are not only potential employees who will be subject to AI recruitment tools but also future HR practitioners who will be responsible for their implementation. Their perceptions are therefore shaped by both their personal experiences as job seekers and their academic knowledge of the HR discipline.

2 Materials and Methods

2.1 Research Philosophy and Approach

This research adopts an interpretivist philosophy, which prioritises understanding the subjective meanings that people attach to social phenomena. Reality is viewed as socially constructed and is best understood by interpreting the lived experiences and perspectives of individuals. This philosophical stance is appropriate for a study that seeks to explore the nuanced perceptions of potential employees toward AI recruitment tools.

The study follows an inductive research approach, which begins with observations and builds theory from the ground up. Given that little is currently known about how the participants in this study perceive the use of AI in recruitment, it was deemed inappropriate to begin with fixed

hypotheses. Instead, the research seeks to uncover patterns, themes, and meanings derived from participants' lived experiences, which will contribute to refining existing models like the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) in a real-world context.

2.2 Research Strategy and Design

A qualitative case study strategy was adopted for this research. The case in question involves potential employees enrolled in the Human Resource Management postgraduate programme at the University of Derby. This group is a relevant and focused unit of analysis, allowing for a deep understanding of how one population segment interprets AI in recruitment. A single-case design is appropriate because the study is context-specific, with data collected from students within one academic institution and one programme.

The research methodology uses a qualitative research method, which prioritises understanding human experiences, beliefs, and behaviours through open-ended, non-numeric data such as interviews. This method is particularly suited to uncovering rich, nuanced insights that cannot be captured through structured surveys alone. The use of open-ended, semi-structured interviews allows participants to express their views in their own words and provides the flexibility to probe deeper into specific issues that emerge during the conversation.

2.3 Data Collection

This research employed semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection technique. This approach is ideal for a qualitative case study where the objective is to explore participants' views in detail. The interviews followed a flexible guide developed from themes in the literature and the TAM framework, focusing on perceived usefulness, ease of use, fairness, and concerns regarding AI in recruitment. Semi-structured interviews allow for follow-up questions, enabling the researcher to explore interesting or unexpected responses that arise, thereby enhancing the reliability and depth of the data collected.

The sample for this study comprised 10 students enrolled in the MSc Human Resource Management programme at the University of Derby. This purposive sampling technique targeted individuals who are potential employees likely to experience the use of AI in recruitment and selection processes. All participants were contacted via university email and provided with an information sheet and consent form. Participation was entirely voluntary, and all ethical guidelines were strictly followed.

2.4 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was adopted as the method of data interpretation. Thematic analysis is one of the most widely used techniques in qualitative research and is particularly suited to exploratory studies that aim to uncover complex views and experiences, as it allows researchers to examine how participants make sense of their world. It is compatible with the interpretivist and inductive nature of the study and does not require a rigid coding frame, making it ideal for capturing emergent themes. Furthermore, thematic analysis supports flexibility in theoretical frameworks, allowing it to be used in conjunction with TAM to examine how participants perceive the usefulness and ease of AI recruitment and selection tools.

The process of analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. First, the researcher familiarised themselves with the data by transcribing interviews verbatim and reading the transcripts to immerse themselves in the content. Second, initial codes were generated manually to maintain closeness to the data. Third, codes were grouped into broader themes aligned with TAM constructs and additional categories that emerged from the data. Fourth, themes were reviewed and refined. Fifth, themes were defined and named. Finally, the report was produced. This structured yet flexible approach ensures that findings are grounded in participants' actual language and experiences while also being analytically robust.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted in full compliance with the ethical guidelines of the University of Derby. Ethical approval was obtained from the University's Research Ethics Committee prior to data collection. Participants were provided with a detailed information sheet explaining the purpose, scope, and procedures of the study. Informed consent was obtained in writing from all participants before interviews commenced, and they were assured that their involvement was

voluntary, with the right to withdraw at any point without any adverse consequences. All data were anonymised, and findings are reported in aggregate or using pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. All data were stored securely on encrypted university servers in compliance with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Participant Demographics

This section presents an overview of the demographic profiles of the interview participants. All ten participants were enrolled in a Master's Degree in Human Resource Management programme at the University of Derby. The participants varied by gender, age, and employment status.

Table 1 Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Gender	Age Range	Employment Status
Participant 1 (P1)	Female	25-30	Part-time employed
Participant 2 (P2)	Female	25-30	Unemployed
Participant 3 (P3)	Female	30-35	Unemployed
Participant 4 (P4)	Female	30-35	Employed
Participant 5 (P5)	Female	25-30	Part-time employed
Participant 6 (P6)	Male	25-30	Unemployed
Participant 7 (P7)	Female	25-30	Employed
Participant 8 (P8)	Male	30-35	Part-time employed
Participant 9 (P9)	Male	25-30	Unemployed
Participant 10 (P10)	Male	25-30	Part-time employed

Table 4.1 from the original dissertation, reproduced in the provided document, provides a clear overview of the demographic data of the participants.

3.2 Thematic Analysis of Findings

Six core themes emerged from the thematic analysis, providing a comprehensive view of how potential employees, particularly those with a background in HRM, perceive AI in recruitment and selection. The following sections discuss these themes in detail, supported by direct participant quotes and an analysis of their significance in relation to existing literature and the study's theoretical framework, the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM).

Table 2 Summary of Key Themes

Theme No.	Main Theme	Subthemes	Linked Research Objective(s)
1	Awareness and Knowledge of AI in Recruitment	Sources of Information, Surface-Level Understanding, Misconceptions	Objective 2
2	Perceived Advantages of AI	Speed and Efficiency, Consistency and Reach, Reduced Bias	Objective 2
3	Ethical Concerns and Trust	Lack of Transparency, Data Privacy Concerns, Loss of Human Judgment	Objective 2, 3
4	Readiness, Knowledge, and Exposure	Limited Awareness, Awareness Increases Trust, Desire for More Information	Objective 3
5	Fairness, Equality, and Employer Responsibility	Worry About Data Bias, Perceived Lack of Accountability, and Fairness is an Employer Duty	Objective 3

6	Desire for Balance - Human-AI Collaboration	AI Should Assist, Not Replace Humans, Emotional Intelligence, Human Involvement Builds Trust	Objective 2, 3
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Table 4.2 from the original dissertation, outlining the key themes, subthemes, and linked research objectives, provides a clear structure for the presentation of the findings.

3.2.1 Theme 1: Awareness and understanding of AI in Recruitment

The first theme that emerged from the data was the varied levels of awareness and understanding of Artificial Intelligence tools used in recruitment and selection. While all participants demonstrated a basic conceptual familiarity with AI, their depth of knowledge varied considerably. This understanding was largely shaped by academic exposure rather than direct personal or professional experience.

A significant number of participants expressed uncertainty or held misconceptions about what constitutes AI in recruitment. P1 questioned, "I'm still not sure if using LinkedIn's job matching is considered AI. It seems automated, but is it really AI?". This confusion reflects what Haenlein et al. (2022) describe as algorithmic opacity, where users are unsure of the line between conventional digital tools and AI-enhanced systems. This knowledge gap has implications for how potential employees perceive the fairness and legitimacy of AI-driven hiring decisions. From a Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) perspective, this uncertainty about how AI systems function directly influences a user's perception of the system's usefulness and ease of use, which are the core constructs of TAM. If job seekers lack an understanding of how AI tools operate, they are less likely to perceive them as beneficial or accessible, thereby eroding trust and willingness to engage.

3.2.2 Theme 2: Perceived Advantages and Opportunities of AI in Recruitment

Despite the conceptual ambiguity, a strong second theme emerged from the interviews: the perception of potential benefits associated with using AI tools in recruitment and selection. Most participants recognised that AI offers notable advantages, especially when implemented ethically and transparently. A key benefit cited was the increased efficiency and speed it brings to the recruitment process. P10 highlighted this, stating: "AI can save a lot of time. Instead of manually going through hundreds of CVs, the system filters them based on what the employer wants. It's just faster". These sentiments reflect those in the literature, such as Chamorro-Premuzic et al. (2019), who argue that AI reduces administrative burdens in hiring by automating repetitive tasks.

Several participants also pointed to the possibility of AI promoting fairness in hiring by mitigating unconscious bias that often affects human decision-making. As P7 expressed: "In theory, AI should be more objective than a human. It's not supposed to care about your gender or accent. If programmed right, it could make hiring more fair". P9 echoed a similar perspective, adding: "I think AI could be good for reducing bias, especially for things like name discrimination or age discrimination. But it depends on the data it is trained with". This cautious optimism reflects scholarly debates about whether AI can actually reduce discrimination. Raghavan et al. (2020) suggest that when carefully designed, algorithmic hiring tools can screen candidates in a more standardised and potentially less biased way than humans.

Participants noted that AI offers consistency in evaluating candidates and can scale easily across large recruitment drives. P8 shared: "With AI, I think every candidate gets judged by the same system. That's better than having different interviewers who may be looking for different things". This perception is echoed by the CIPD (2021), which notes that AI systems offer scalability that ensures consistent evaluation across thousands of applicants. From the perspective of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), participants' recognition of AI's efficiency, objectivity, and consistency directly aligns with the core construct of

Perceived Usefulness. The belief that AI enhances recruitment speed and fairness positively influences their willingness to engage with such systems. This shows that potential employees see tangible, utilitarian benefits in AI, provided that it is implemented with care.

3.2.3 Theme 3: Ethical Concerns, Trust, and Transparency

While participants acknowledged the potential benefits of AI, ethical concerns emerged as a dominant and consistent theme. These concerns were often linked to issues of data privacy, bias, transparency, and a lack of trust in algorithmic decision-making. Participants frequently expressed concerns that AI systems might inadvertently perpetuate or even amplify bias, depending on how they are trained and the data they use. P4 reflected: "If the AI is trained with biased data, it will give biased results. That's worrying, because you don't even know where the bias is coming from". This

concern is grounded in real-world examples, such as the widely publicised case of Amazon's scrapped AI hiring tool that showed bias against women. Scholars like Hunkenschroer and Luetge (2022) have also warned that unmonitored AI algorithms can reproduce or exacerbate existing discrimination.

Another frequent concern was the opaqueness of AI decision-making. Participants were uncomfortable with not knowing how or why a system had rejected or advanced a candidate. P10 noted: "If I apply for a job and get rejected by a computer, I want to know why. But with AI, you don't really get an explanation". These fears are echoed in contemporary HR and AI scholarship. The UK government's AI Principles and the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) both emphasise that transparency and explainability are core elements for ethical AI use in employment. Another key concern was data privacy. Some participants questioned how their personal data was used and stored during AI-assisted recruitment processes. A recurring concern was that over-reliance on AI could lead to a depersonalised recruitment process lacking empathy, context, or human discretion. P7 stated: "AI doesn't understand things like tone or personal struggles. A human interviewer might give you a chance. A machine just looks for keywords".

From a theoretical perspective, these findings relate closely to the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), particularly the dimension of Perceived Ease of Use, which includes trust in the system and comfort with its processes. These ethical concerns act as a powerful counterpoint to the perceived benefits. If AI is seen as unexplainable, biased, or lacking human empathy, users are unlikely to view it as easy or trustworthy to engage with. The evidence suggests that ethical deployment of AI is not merely a technical or compliance matter; it fundamentally shapes how potential employees perceive, trust, and interact with recruitment systems.

3.2.4 *Theme 4: Readiness, Knowledge, and Exposure to AI in Recruitment*

This theme highlights an important dimension in perception formation: a candidate's readiness and prior exposure to AI significantly influence whether they trust, fear, or remain neutral toward its use in recruitment processes. Participants who had limited or no direct experience with AI in recruitment often expressed uncertainty or mixed perceptions. P2 explained: "I don't think I've experienced AI personally in my job applications, so it's hard to say exactly how I feel. But it sounds impersonal to me". This knowledge gap is consistent with research by Ruggeri et al. (2022), which found that individuals with limited digital literacy or AI exposure often express anxiety, suspicion, or low confidence in AI-driven decisions.

Conversely, those who had prior exposure to or understanding of AI systems, either through coursework, media, or previous applications, showed a more nuanced and often positive perception. P3 shared: "I did a course on AI applications in HR, so I understand some of the logic. If it's done well, it could help reduce human bias". This suggests a self-reinforcing cycle of digital literacy and trust. As candidates become more digitally literate and comfortable with AI, their perceptions improve, leading to greater acceptance. Conversely, a lack of literacy can lead to fear and distrust, which may prevent them from engaging with the technology and thus perpetuate their negative perception.

This finding supports the argument that transparency and AI literacy play a pivotal role in determining trust and willingness to engage with such tools, as demonstrated by Laurim et al. (2021) in their study on technology acceptance.

3.2.5 *Theme 5: Fairness, Equality, and Employer Responsibility*

Concerns about fairness and the responsibility of employers in using AI were recurring topics throughout the interviews. Participants questioned whether AI tools can be trusted to make equitable decisions and emphasised the importance of accountability, especially when AI might amplify bias rather than reduce it. Several participants highlighted that, while AI is marketed as being objective, it still relies on data, and that data can be flawed or biased. P6 noted: "If the AI is trained on biased data, won't it just repeat those biases? For example, if it's based on past hiring patterns that favour certain ethnicities, it could reinforce discrimination".

This sense of a lack of accountability was a significant concern for participants. P10 commented: "Who do you blame if AI rejects your CV unfairly? The HR team? The software company? It feels like there's no one to challenge". This sense of legal and ethical limbo is echoed in the literature. The European Commission's Guidelines on Trustworthy AI and the UK's EHRC (2020) both emphasise that accountability and human oversight are essential principles in the development and use of AI. Participants also felt that while AI can offer efficiencies, it is the employer's duty to ensure fairness, equality, and inclusion. P7 stated: "Organisations should be very clear about how they ensure fairness when using AI. Are they testing it regularly? Are they involving diverse stakeholders in designing it?". This supports calls for a regulatory framework on AI in recruitment, such as the UK government's AI Assurance Roadmap, which is designed to guide the ethical, inclusive deployment of AI systems.

This theme highlights that potential employees want transparency, recourse, and accountability in AI-assisted hiring. Their perception is not shaped solely by technology's effectiveness, but by its perceived ethical soundness and the organisation's effort to uphold fairness. While AI can remove some forms of human bias, it can also introduce or entrench new forms of algorithmic bias. Therefore, it is not enough for organisations to trust the AI; they must actively monitor its outputs, engage stakeholders in its design, and remain transparent with applicants.

3.2.6 *Theme 6: Desire for Balance, Human-AI Collaboration*

A prominent theme across participants was the desire for balance, using AI tools as supportive aids but not as replacements for human judgment. This concern was often linked to the idea of fairness, emotional intelligence, and organisational authenticity. Many participants welcomed AI as a complementary tool that could speed up processes, reduce administrative burden, and standardise parts of recruitment, but were resistant to the idea of AI acting alone. P2 said: "I think AI is good for sorting through large applications or scheduling, but the final say should be with a person. You need human insight for context". This sentiment is supported by empirical studies suggesting that hybrid approaches, where AI complements human decision-making, generate better outcomes and are more accepted by candidates (Chamorro-Premuzic et al., 2019).

Several participants also pointed out that human qualities such as empathy, emotional intelligence, and cultural understanding are critical in assessing candidates. P3 explained: "You can't judge confidence, sincerity, or values just from a form or algorithm. People need to see and feel how someone behaves". This resonates with literature cautioning against over-reliance on AI for subjective assessments. The participants' desire for human nuance in the hiring process reinforces the idea that AI cannot fully replace the interpersonal and contextual evaluation that humans bring to selection.

Participants also widely agreed that organisations that maintain human interaction in their AI-assisted recruitment processes are more likely to be perceived as fair, inclusive, and trustworthy. P10 said: "Having a real person reach out, even just for feedback, makes a huge difference. It shows you're not just a number". Research by Stone et al. (2015) also highlights the importance of human warmth in the recruitment process, which helps shape a positive employer brand and enhances applicant experience. This theme provides clear evidence that potential employees want AI to be used as a supportive tool, not a substitute for human decision-making. This preference aligns with models of augmented intelligence, which stress collaboration between humans and machines rather than competition.

4 Conclusion

Summary of Key Findings

This research set out to explore how potential employees perceive the use of AI tools in recruitment and selection and to understand the factors shaping those perceptions. The qualitative evidence gathered through interviews leads to a clear overall conclusion: potential candidates approach AI in hiring with a mix of guarded optimism and critical scrutiny. On one hand, they recognise AI's potential for efficiency, consistency, and scale. On the other hand, they are not passive recipients of technology; they voice principled concerns about how AI may impact fairness, transparency, and the human touch in hiring.

Crucially, trust emerged as the linchpin of their acceptance of AI. Candidates are willing to embrace AI tools only to the extent that those tools are perceived as fair, explainable, and used in partnership with human judgment. Transparency and human oversight are decisive in shaping positive perceptions. Participants indicated that when organisations are open about using AI, their comfort level rises markedly. Conversely, secretive or fully automated hiring processes breed distrust, echoing the adage that algorithmic hiring needs a human face.

The research also identified key factors shaping these perceptions, including a self-reinforcing cycle of digital literacy and trust. As candidates become more digitally literate, their perceptions improve, leading to greater acceptance. The reverse is also true, suggesting that a lack of literacy can lead to fear and distrust, perpetuating a form of digital exclusion. The findings also confirmed that ethical expectations and a desire for accountability play a crucial role, with participants consistently calling for a "human-in-the-loop" model where a person retains final responsibility for hiring decisions.

Implications for Theory and Practice

The findings of this study have significant implications for both academic theory and HR practice. Theoretically, this research validates and extends the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) by demonstrating that ethical factors, such as perceived fairness, transparency, and accountability, act as critical antecedents to the core TAM constructs of perceived usefulness and ease of use. It is not enough for an AI tool to be fast or easy to use; it must also be trustworthy and ethically sound to be truly accepted. This suggests a need for an updated or expanded model that incorporates social and ethical dimensions of technology acceptance.

Practically, this study reaffirms that recruitment is a two-way social process and that how applicants feel about the selection process can influence organisational outcomes. If candidates perceive an AI-driven hiring process as unfair or dehumanising, it can damage the employer's brand and discourage qualified talent from applying. From an employer's perspective, ignoring candidate perceptions of AI is risky, as it may result in lost trust, reputational harm, or even legal challenges if biases go unaddressed. This reinforces why organisations must be attuned to the applicant's viewpoint when implementing AI in recruitment. The research findings provide empirical evidence to support this, highlighting that understanding and addressing candidate perceptions is not just a matter of courtesy or ethics, but a strategic imperative for organisations aiming to implement AI-driven recruitment successfully and sustainably.

Recommendations

Based on the analysis of candidate perceptions, the following recommendations are provided for HR practitioners, policymakers, and academics to ensure the responsible and effective deployment of AI in recruitment and selection.

For HR Practitioners

- **Implement Proactive Communication and Transparency:** Organisations should clearly communicate when and how AI tools are used in the hiring process. This can be done through dedicated sections on job portals or in application confirmation emails. Providing explanations of the AI's role gives candidates a sense of control and understanding, which builds trust and addresses the factor of opacity.
- **Mandate Human Oversight and Accountability:** To address the factor of trust and fairness, HR should adopt a "human-in-the-loop" model. AI should be used to augment human decision-making, not replace it entirely. An experienced recruiter should review any AI-based rejection before a candidate is formally dismissed. This guarantees that human judgment and empathy are maintained, particularly in subjective evaluations, and ensures accountability for decisions.
- **Conduct Regular Bias Audits:** To mitigate the fear of algorithmic bias, organisations should regularly audit their AI recruitment tools. This process should involve testing for potential biases related to protected characteristics and making necessary adjustments. Sharing a summary of audit outcomes can reassure candidates that the employer is proactive about fairness and integrity.

For Policymakers

- **Establish a Regulatory Framework:** Policy can significantly influence the factors that shape candidate perceptions by creating an environment where transparency, fairness, and accountability are non-negotiable. It is recommended that policymakers consider establishing candidate rights in AI-mediated hiring. This could include a mandate that candidates be informed if an AI significantly influenced a hiring decision and have the right to request a human review of fully automated rejections.
- **Promote Public Awareness:** Given the clear link between awareness and trust found in this study, government bodies should run public awareness campaigns or provide educational resources for job seekers on what to expect from AI-driven hiring processes. By improving the public's baseline understanding, policymakers can help level the playing field, especially for less digitally literate job seekers, and address the systemic issue of digital exclusion.
- **Implement Certification Standards:** Policymakers should consider establishing an independent audit or certification framework for AI tools used in recruitment. Government agencies or accredited third parties could certify recruitment AI systems against ethical criteria. Employers using certified systems could display a "Fair AI" logo, which could positively shape candidate perceptions by signalling compliance with fairness standards.

For Academics

- **Pursue a New Research Agenda:** The scholarly community should extend the critical literature on AI in recruitment. This thesis confirmed that candidate perspectives are underrepresented in research. Academics are therefore encouraged to pursue focused studies on each major factor, for example, conducting experiments

on how transparency affects candidate trust or how prior experience with AI correlates with perceptions in a hiring scenario.

- **Develop New Theoretical Models:** Academics might also explore interventions, for instance, testing whether a brief AI literacy training for job seekers changes their attitude toward AI-mediated hiring. Our study indicates that ethical perceptions are as vital as usability in the acceptance of AI. Scholars should work on formalising this into technology acceptance theories, perhaps by extending TAM or UTAUT to include constructs like perceived fairness or ethicality of technology.
- **Investigate Long-term Perceptions:** Future research should also explore how perceptions of AI in recruitment change over time as the technology becomes more sophisticated and commonplace. Longitudinal studies could track a cohort of job seekers over time as they encounter AI in various hiring processes, observing how their perceptions shift with repeated exposure or changing public narratives.

Overall Implications and Closing Remarks

Drawing together the above recommendations, the overarching message is that a human-centred implementation of AI in recruitment is both possible and necessary. HR practitioners, policymakers, and academics each have a part to play in ensuring that AI tools enhance rather than erode fairness, trust, and candidate experience in hiring. If organisations heed these recommendations, embedding transparency, bias audits, and human oversight in their AI-driven processes, they are more likely to earn candidates' confidence and reap AI's benefits (efficiency, objectivity) without incurring backlash. Likewise, thoughtful regulation and continued research will create an ecosystem where innovation in HR technology can flourish alongside ethical safeguards.

In closing, this study sheds light on the perceptions of the next generation of HR professionals and job seekers regarding AI in recruitment. Their perspectives serve as an important reminder: no matter how advanced algorithms become, recruitment ultimately concerns people's careers and lives. Therefore, technology must be implemented in the service of people, not at their expense. By understanding potential employees' hopes and fears about AI, stakeholders can work towards recruitment practices that are not only smart and data-driven but also just, transparent, and human-centric. Such an approach will help ensure that AI-driven recruitment and selection processes are accepted and effective, leading to positive outcomes for both employers and employees in the modern world of work.

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