THE PRIDE FACTOR: THE INFLUENCE OF INTERVIEW EXPERIENCES ON EMPLOYER BRANDING

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Abstract

Interviews allow organizations to evaluate candidates' capabilities while candidates simultaneously form impressions of the organization's culture and reputation. Yet research rarely examines how candidates' emotions during the interview process shape these perceptions. Drawing on Achievement Emotion Theory, this study investigates how specific aspects of interview design - particularly the level of difficulty and the number of interview rounds - influence candidates' feelings of pride during the hiring process. A survey was conducted with 283 students who had completed multiple interviews. Regression analysis tested how perceived difficulty and the number of rounds affected pride. Candidates felt more pride during challenging interviews, but too many rounds weakened this effect. This study shows that pride matters in recruitment and employer branding. For scholars, it highlights an overlooked emotion. For practitioners, it suggests that fair, challenging interviews can enhance candidate pride and strengthen the company's image.

Keywords: Pride, Emotions, Employer Branding, Perception, Interview, Interview rounds, Student.

INTRODUCTION

Hiring is a significant investment for organizations (Sreeja et al., 2023), with average recruitment costs steadily rising and total costs, including onboarding and training, reaching up to three to four times a position's salary. In this context, employer branding has become a vital strategy to attract and retain talent (Nanjundeswaraswamy et al., 2025), as it signals organizational culture, reputation, and values that shape candidate decisions. The interview process plays a pivotal role in this, as candidates form impressions about the organization (Tholen, 2024) based on how fair, challenging, and engaging the experience feels (Mukherjee' & Sharma, 2020). Research shows that positive interview experiences can double the likelihood of candidates recommending the company, even if they are not hired (Dimakopoulou et al., 2017).

However, while much of the existing literature focuses on interview performance and anxiety (Dimakopoulou et al., 2017; McCarthy et al., 2021), there is a lack of research exploring how positive candidate emotions- specifically pride- emerge during interviews and influence perceptions of the employer brand. This study addresses this gap by applying Achievement Emotion Theory (Pekrun, 2006) to examine aspects of interview design- particularly the level of difficulty and the number of interview rounds-affect candidates' feelings of pride during the hiring process.

The findings offer valuable insights for practitioners by highlighting how thoughtful interview design can enhance candidate experience and employer reputation. For academics, this study extends achievement emotion research into recruitment, bridging organizational psychology and HRM while suggesting

directions for future research on emotions and hiring outcomes.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

Achievement Emotion Theory (AET), developed by Pekrun (2006), explains how emotions arise and shape behavior in performance contexts like learning and recruitment. Unlike other theories that focused mainly on anxiety or simple success/failure, AET highlights how people's appraisals of control (their sense of influence and competence) and value (how important the task is) generate distinct emotions. High control and high value often lead to pride and joy, while low control can cause anxiety or hopelessness (Pekrun, 2024). Pride is especially important as it comes from attributing success to one's effort or ability, strengthening self-worth and motivation for future tasks.

AET distinguishes between activity emotions (e.g., enjoyment during an interview) and outcome emotions (e.g., pride after completing it) (Kirkpatrick et al., 2025). This is highly relevant for recruitment, where the interview is both an evaluation and an experience that shapes candidates' impressions of themselves and the company.

Originally used in education to understand how emotions like hope or boredom affect learning (Amiri, 2024), AET now informs organizational research, too. Studies show pride can improve candidates' engagement and perceptions of employer prestige (Damoah, 2025). Models like the broader work on well-being further stress the value of regulating achievement emotions (Saritha & Mukherjee, 2021).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Interview Difficulty and Candidate Pride

Modern recruitment increasingly employs diverse and often challenging assessment methods-aptitude tests, personality profiling, and structured behavioral interviews- to identify top talent. Research shows that how candidates perceive the rigor of an interview can significantly affect their motivation and engagement (Charbonneau et al., 2021).

In performance contexts, moderate challenge fosters positive achievement emotions such as pride and joy by enhancing perceived self-efficacy (Ferris et al., 2002). Similarly, in recruitment settings, well-designed interviews that balance challenge with fairness can signal organizational prestige and generate pride in candidates. However, excessive difficulty or unrealistic expectations may have the opposite effect, leading to anxiety or disengagement.

Therefore, based on AET and supporting literature, this study proposes the following (refer figure 1):

Hypothesis 1: A higher perceived level of interview difficulty will positively influence a candidate's sense of pride.

Number of Interview Rounds as a Moderator

While interview difficulty can inspire pride, the number of interview rounds may alter this relationship. Structured, multi-stage interviews can reinforce feelings of accomplishment by providing repeated opportunities to demonstrate competence. However, beyond a certain point, too many rounds can cause fatigue, erode motivation, and diminish positive emotions such as pride.

Using the AET's control-value framework, we can suggest a candidates' emotions depend on their sense of control over the process and the value they attach to the outcome. Multiple interview rounds may signal high organizational standards

and prestige, intensifying pride when the process is perceived as fair and manageable. But when rounds feel excessive or redundant, they may reduce perceived control, fostering frustration or anxiety instead of pride.

Additionally, research shows that perceived fairness, transparency, and structured onboarding can mitigate fatigue effects (Hartley, 2024). In this sense, the number of interview rounds is a potential moderator that shapes how interview difficulty influences candidates' pride and perceptions of the employer.

Hence, the study proposes:

Hypothesis 2: The number of interview rounds will moderate the positive relationship between perceived interview difficulty and candidates' sense of pride, such that a reasonable number of rounds will strengthen this relationship, whereas excessive rounds will weaken it.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional survey.

Participants

The target population comprised undergraduate and postgraduate students who had recently participated in interviews for campus placements or entry-level jobs. A total of 283 respondents from various colleges participated, which helps improve the generalizability of the findings. The sample included participants with experiences of more than one interview process, ensuring variation in interview difficulty and rounds.

Instrumentation and Measures

An online questionnaire was created using Google Forms. The instrument was adapted based on the works of Tracy and Robins (2007) and Jeon et al. (2020). The survey contained 16 items designed. Respondents rated statements on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The questionnaire measured eight core parameters that reflect dimensions of pride and related achievement emotions: Accomplishment, Achievement, Confidence, Productivity, Motivation, Self-worth, Fulfillment, and Success.

Data Collection Procedure

The survey link was circulated via email and social media platforms to reach a broad base of students.

Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed of the study's purpose. Data was collected over a two-week period to allow for sufficient participation and to capture responses soon after interview experiences, minimizing recall bias.

FINDINGS

The regression analysis confirmed that the perceived difficulty level of the interview has a significant positive effect on candidates' sense of pride ($\beta = 0.46$, $p < 0.001$) (refer table 1 for descriptive analysis). Additionally, the number of interview rounds was found to significantly moderate this relationship ($\beta = -0.14$, $p = 0.034$), showing that while moderate rounds amplify pride, excessive rounds may reduce it. Both results support the proposed relationships.

The graph (figure 2) shows that the number of interview rounds moderates how interview difficulty affects candidate pride. When candidates face a reasonable number of rounds, higher interview difficulty enhances their sense of pride, as they perceive the challenge as a signal of their competence. However, when the number of rounds becomes excessive, this positive effect diminishes. According to

Achievement Emotion Theory (Pekrun, 2006), excessive demands can undermine control appraisals and lead to fatigue, shifting emotions from pride to frustration or anxiety. This suggests that while a challenging interview can strengthen feelings of achievement, too many rounds may erode candidates' sense of control and reduce the motivational benefits of pride.

DISCUSSION

This study sets out to examine aspects of interview design- specifically the perceived level of difficulty and the number of interview rounds- shape candidates' feelings of pride during the hiring process, using Achievement Emotion Theory (AET) as its guiding framework. The findings confirm that a moderately challenging interview process positively influences candidates' pride, consistent with AET's premise that pride arises when individuals perceive high control over, and high value in, their accomplishments (Pekrun, 2006, 2024). This aligns with educational research (Pekrun, 2006) and emerging organizational studies (Niet al., 2022) showing that overcoming challenge reinforces self-worth and motivation.

However, this study extends these insights by demonstrating that the number of interview rounds significantly moderates this effect. While moderate rounds amplify the pride generated by challenging interviews, excessive rounds diminish this benefit, likely due to candidate fatigue and reduced perceived control (Pekrun, 2006; Radbruch & Schiprowski, 2025). This nuance contrasts with the assumption that more stages always signal greater organizational prestige (Alshathry et al., 2017). Instead, efficient, transparent hiring processes may protect candidates' positive emotions, thereby strengthening employer branding.

In practical terms, these findings highlight the importance for organizations of balancing challenges with fairness and clarity. Interviews designed with thoughtful difficulty levels and reasonable stages can transform hiring into a branding opportunity, enhancing engagement, reputation, and long-term talent retention.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA

This study, while offering important insights, has limitations that provide fertile ground for further investigation. First, the cross-sectional design captures candidates' pride immediately after interviews but does not examine whether these emotions endure or evolve once candidates join the organization and face real workplace dynamics. This limits our ability to infer long-term behavioral outcomes such as job acceptance, early performance, and sustained commitment.

Second, the sample consisted mainly of students and early-career job seekers from a single cultural context, which may constrain the generalizability of findings across diverse industries, job levels, and cultural settings where expectations about interview difficulty and prestige differ significantly. Moreover, this study focused solely on pride as an outcome emotion, without exploring how pride co-exists or interacts with other achievement emotions such as anxiety, hope, or shame during multi-stage interviews.

Third, our reliance on self-reported survey data, while appropriate for capturing subjective experiences, could be complemented by future studies using behavioral observations, qualitative diaries, or physiological measures to validate emotional states more robustly. Finally, while we tested the moderating role of interview rounds, other structural and social factors such as the quality of

feedback, transparency, and interviewer behavior were not explored.

These limitations highlight a broad, promising research agenda for scholars at the intersection of achievement emotions, interview design, and employer branding. One key opportunity is to conduct cross-cultural and cross-industry comparative studies to test how Achievement Emotion Theory applies in diverse labor markets. For example, researchers could examine whether candidates in collectivistic cultures or prestige-driven sectors respond differently to challenging interviews, refining theoretical frameworks in varying contexts.

Longitudinal research is equally critical to explore whether pride experienced during the hiring process predicts longer-term outcomes such as onboarding experiences, job satisfaction, early tenure performance, retention, and advocacy behaviors. Tracking candidates across time would clarify how initial pride is sustained or altered by organizational realities.

Future research should also investigate the interplay of pride with other achievement emotions, analyzing how multiple emotions co-occur and evolve during complex, multi-stage hiring processes. This line of inquiry should consider individual differences- such as personality traits, mindsets, or self-efficacy beliefs- as potential moderators that shape how candidates experience pride under varying interview conditions.

To develop actionable design principles, experimental and design science research could test how different interview structures- such as varying rounds, structured feedback, or gamified challenges- foster or undermine pride while maintaining fairness and psychological safety. Here too, mediators such as perceived fairness, sense of competence,

and organizational prestige could be explicitly tested to clarify the mechanisms linking interview design to downstream outcomes.

Additionally, future research should expand literature toward more multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches (Mukherjee, 2025; Mukherjee & Saritha, 2024) that bridge organizational psychology, HRM, technology studies, and ethics. Given the rise of AI-driven and digital interviews, researchers could investigate how algorithmic transparency, hybrid human–AI interactions, and virtual formats shape candidates' sense of control, competence, and pride. This line of inquiry would extend Achievement Emotion Theory into the ethics of technology in recruitment, advancing understanding of digital hiring practices and their impact on employer branding in an increasingly virtual labor market.

Moreover, future studies could expand beyond individual emotions to examine collective dynamics, such as how "shared pride" among cohorts of applicants or interviewer behaviors shape word-of-mouth employer branding and organizational reputation on social media.

Methodologically, this research stream can benefit from mixed-method and longitudinal designs, combining large-scale surveys with qualitative diaries, experimental vignettes, and even physiological or behavioral measures. Advanced analytics such as multilevel modeling or structural equation modeling could test complex pathways, where pride acts as a mediator between interview design elements and key outcomes like engagement, commitment, and retention while controlling for contextual moderators like culture, demographic factors, and technological adoption.

Pursuing these directions will help scholars advance Achievement Emotion

Theory within recruitment contexts, bridge it with related frameworks such as self-determination theory and organizational justice, and generate empirically grounded insights for emotionally intelligent, equitable, and strategically effective hiring practices. Such work will not only push theoretical boundaries but also provide organizations with actionable guidance to strengthen their employer brands and talent pipelines in an increasingly competitive and technology-driven landscape.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that thoughtfully structured interviews play a pivotal role in shaping how candidates feel about themselves and the organizations they engage with. By applying Achievement Emotion Theory to the recruitment context, the findings show that when interview difficulty is balanced and rounds are reasonable, candidates experience pride - an emotion that strengthens their sense of accomplishment, motivation, and self-worth. This not only influences their immediate perceptions but also has the potential to impact longer-term outcomes like engagement, retention, and advocacy.

Theoretically, these insights bridge achievement motivation, self-determination, and attribution theories within organizational psychology and HRM, advancing AET into the underexplored realm of hiring. By positioning pride as a key emotion that connects interview structure to downstream behaviors, this work encourages scholars to investigate how pride interacts with other achievement emotions like hope or anxiety, and how individual or cultural factors moderate these dynamics. Future research should build on this by exploring pride's role in virtual or AI-driven interviews, examining cross-cultural differences, and testing integrated models with mediators and moderators to deepen understanding of how emotions shape employer branding and talent pipelines.

For practitioners, this study highlights the need for interviews that are challenging yet fair, paired with clear feedback and transparent processes. Such practices strengthen an employer's brand and reputation, turning candidates - even those not selected - into positive ambassadors who may speak favorably about the organization. In highly competitive talent markets, this emotional connection can be a crucial differentiator in attracting and retaining skilled employees.

Socially, these insights remind job seekers that challenging interviews can be reframed as opportunities for growth, resilience, and self-efficacy. Educational institutions and career services can use this understanding to design realistic mock interviews that build students' capacity to manage achievement emotions under pressure. Finally, inclusive and well-structured interviews that avoid excessive or redundant rounds help ensure that all candidates, regardless of background, have equitable access to demonstrate their capabilities supporting broader goals of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging while contributing to SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) (United Nations, 2016).

In conclusion, this study emphasizes that pride is a meaningful yet often overlooked factor in employer branding and recruitment. By showing how interview design can strategically foster pride, it provides both scholars and practitioners with fresh insights to build emotionally intelligent, fair, and effective hiring processes that benefit organizations and candidates alike.

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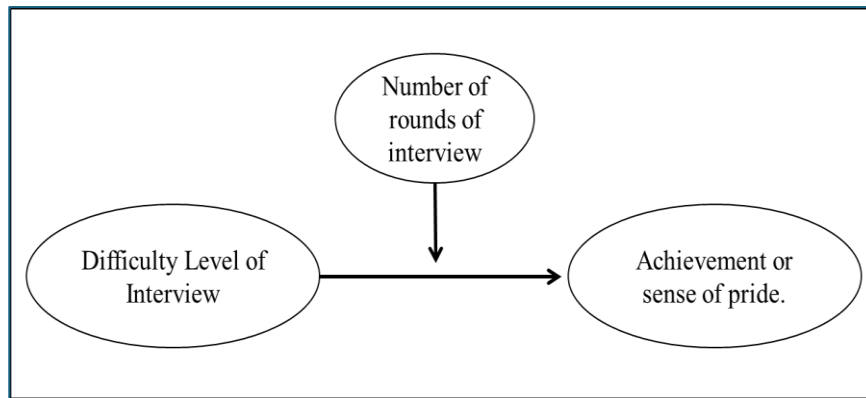
Figure 1: Conceptual model to be tested. Source: Author compiled based on the Literature

Table 2: Result of descriptive statistics. Source: Author compiled based on the Literature

Parameters	No. of interviews attended	Age	Gender	Last qualification	Pride
No. of interviews attended	1				
Age	0.3343088	1			
Gender	-0.040145	0.0392	1		
Last qualification	0.0999785	0.2324	-0.052759	1	
Pride	0.1260828	0.097	0.033519	-0.05852	1
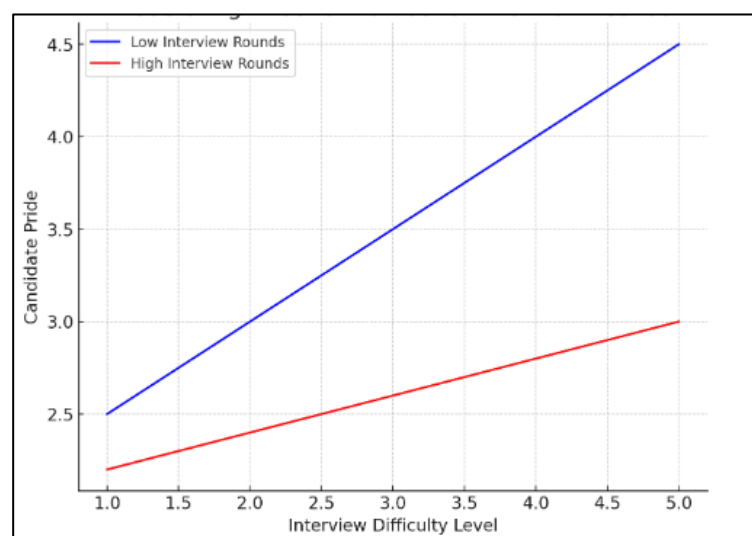
Figure 2: Moderating effect of the number of interviews. Source: Author compiled by the authors based on the analysis.