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Women in leadership: Examining individuals’ perceptions of algorithms that aim to balance gender ratios in management

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Abstract

Using gender stereotypes in management often leads human decision makers to prefer men to women for leadership roles. To overcome these issues, we propose using algorithms as a promising approach to promote gender equality in management. Given that algorithms are appropriately designed, they can remove gender discrimination by maximizing the predefined outcome of balanced gender ratios. However, using algorithms in the sensitive application field of personnel selection might lead to employee fairness concerns. We extend prior research on women in IT by investigating the perceptions regarding IT applications aiming to balance management staffing across all industries. In an online experiment with HR experts from a multinational science and technology company, we find that maximization perceptions increase fairness perceptions in the context of algorithms that balance gender ratios in management. In addition, we examine how the disclosure of an algorithmic (versus human) decision maker’s underlying maximization strategy affects maximization perceptions and show that perceptions depend on whether purpose or process explanations are communicated.

Keywords: Gender ratio, women in leadership, algorithm, fairness, maximization