

Ghosting by Candidates and New Hires: Causes, Impacts and Strategies for Modern Recruitment

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Peer Review Information	Abstract
Type: Article Received: 26 March 2026 Revised: 23 April 2026 Accepted: 09 May 2026 Published: 01 June 2026	Ghosting — a phenomenon where candidates or newly hired employees abruptly cease communication during the hiring process — has become a critical and growing concern for Human Resource (HR) professionals and organizations worldwide. This research study systematically examines the causes, frequency, and organizational impact of ghosting behaviour across multiple stages of the recruitment lifecycle. Primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire administered to 100 respondents comprising HR professionals, recruiters, hiring managers, and job seekers. The findings reveal that ghosting occurs most frequently after interview rounds and post-offer acceptance, with silent offer rejection (45%) and accepting an offer without joining (42%) identified as the most disruptive forms. Key contributing causes include poor recruiter communication (48.6%), slow hiring processes (50%), candidates changing their minds (54.1%), and a broader decline in professional accountability in digital hiring environments. Statistical analysis using the Chi-square Test of Independence confirmed a highly significant association between poor communication and candidate disengagement ($\chi^2 = 25.96$, $p = 3.456 \times 10^{-7}$). The study concludes that timely communication, a respectful candidate experience, and streamlined recruitment workflows are the most effective organizational strategies to reduce ghosting. Evidence-based recommendations are provided for HR teams seeking to enhance hiring efficiency, strengthen employer branding, and build more accountable recruitment ecosystems. Keywords: Ghosting; Candidate Behaviour; Recruitment; Employer Branding; HR Management; Talent Acquisition; Candidate Experience; Modern Recruitment Strategies.

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Introduction

Recruitment has been significantly transformed by digitalization, with multiple online platforms giving candidates greater flexibility and bargaining power. This shift has given rise to ghosting — where candidates or newly hired employees abruptly cease communication without formal notice, at any stage from application through post-joining. Each instance disrupts hiring timelines, forces full recruitment restarts, raises cost-per-hire, and strains workforce planning. For startups and resource-constrained businesses, even a single post-offer ghost can derail critical operations.

Ghosting reflects deeper cultural shifts: digital norms, abundant job options, and reduced interpersonal accountability have collectively lowered the social cost of disengagement. Post-pandemic growth in remote work and gig platforms has intensified this further, creating a candidate-driven market where professional courtesy is no longer guaranteed. This study systematically examines the root causes and organizational impact of ghosting, and proposes practical, evidence-based strategies for HR professionals to mitigate it.

Research Problem and Objectives

Problem Identification

Candidate and new hire ghosting has emerged as one of the most complex and consequential challenges in modern HR management. Despite significant investments in advanced hiring technologies — including Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS), AI-driven recruitment platforms, and virtual assessment tools — organizations continue to experience candidates dropping out at critical touchpoints within the recruitment lifecycle without explanation or warning. This sudden withdrawal disrupts the entire talent acquisition pipeline. Organizations that have invested time, effort, and financial resources in sourcing, screening, multiple interview rounds, and offer negotiations find themselves restarting the process, bearing repeated recruitment costs and losing valuable time. HR teams struggle to maintain consistent hiring metrics, workforce stability, and productivity levels when candidate behaviour becomes unpredictable.

The problem has intensified in the post-pandemic environment. The rise of hybrid and remote work models, gig economy platforms, and multiple concurrent job offers has created a hyper-competitive talent market where candidates simultaneously evaluate numerous opportunities and disengage from processes that fail to meet their evolving expectations. This environment makes it increasingly difficult for HR professionals to forecast manpower availability and plan onboarding effectively. Additionally, repeated ghosting incidents negatively impact employer branding, signalling a disconnect between organizational recruitment practices and candidate expectations. Addressing this issue requires understanding not just the behavioural tendencies of candidates, but also the organizational process failures that inadvertently encourage disengagement. This study seeks to identify these factors and develop strategic responses.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design to understand the causes, patterns, and impact of ghosting behaviour in recruitment. This design enables a comprehensive description of the phenomenon as it currently exists, while also facilitating analytical examination of the relationships between key variables such as communication quality, recruitment experience, and candidate disengagement. Both quantitative and limited qualitative data were collected to enrich the findings.

Research Approach and Data Collection

A quantitative research approach was used as the primary method, supported by descriptive and inferential statistical analysis. Primary data was collected using a structured Google Forms questionnaire distributed to respondents involved in recruitment or job search activities. The questionnaire comprised four sections: Section 1 — demographic information; Section 2 — recruitment experience (Likert-scale 1–5, for HR professionals); Section 3 — recruitment behaviour (multi-response); and Section 4 — open-ended qualitative responses. Likert-scale questions used a five-point scale where 1 = Strongly Disagree / Never and 5 = Strongly Agree / Always.

Sample Design

Table 1. Sample Distribution of Respondents by Professional Category

Sample Parameter	Details	Count / %
Total Sample Size	Primary Survey – Google Forms	100 Respondents
Job Seekers / Candidates	25%	25
HR Professionals	25%	25

Recruiters / Talent Acquisition Specialists	20%	20
Hiring Managers	10%	10
Other Professionals	20%	20

Statistical Tools

Two principal statistical tools were employed. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze frequency distributions, percentage representations, and Likert-scale response patterns across the sample. The Chi-square Test of Independence was used to assess the relationship between two categorical variables — poor recruiter communication and candidate change of mind about the role — to test the study’s core hypothesis.

Research Objectives

1. To understand the factors that contribute to ghosting by candidates and new hires.
2. To analyse the impact of ghosting on recruitment and organizational outcomes.

Research Hypotheses

H₀ (Null Hypothesis): There is no significant association between poor communication during hiring and candidates changing their mind about the role.

H₁ (Alternative Hypothesis): There is a significant association between poor communication during hiring and candidates changing their mind about the role.

Literature Review

A growing body of academic and practitioner research examines the causes, patterns, and organizational consequences of candidate ghosting. The following review synthesizes key findings from both Indian and global literature to provide the theoretical and empirical foundation for this study.

Ghosting in the Indian Context

Kumar and Narayana (2019) conducted one of the earliest empirical investigations into job-applicant ghosting in India, surveying recruitment personnel across multiple business sectors in Bengaluru including IT, retail, education, and manufacturing. Their findings confirmed that ghosting is a visible and cross-sectoral phenomenon in the Indian labour market, appearing most frequently in entry-level roles. Critically, the study noted that most recruiting organizations were ill-prepared to predict or prevent such behaviour, lacking formal processes to manage candidate disengagement. These findings established the baseline for Indian ghosting research and underscore the continued relevance of empirical, sector-diverse studies such as this one.

Kumar and Avidra (2025), writing from the Indian Institute of Management, Indore, extended the discussion to employer-side ghosting, reporting that approximately 73% of job applicants in Indian private and academic sectors received no response to their applications — a finding that reframes ghosting as a bidirectional professional failing. Their proposed ‘Informed Rejection’ framework advocates for transparent, weightage-based candidate evaluation systems and structured feedback loops, providing a normative model for organizational reform.

Organizational Impact and Recruitment Experience

Sharma and Patel (2023) examined the relationship between recruitment experience quality and ghosting propensity among 200 HR professionals from IT, e-commerce, and services firms across Mumbai, Pune, and Bengaluru. Using correlation and regression analysis, they established a significant negative correlation between transparent recruiter communication and candidate ghosting intent, and a positive correlation between perceived recruiter neglect and withdrawal likelihood. Employer branding strength was found to moderate this relationship, with stronger brands experiencing lower ghosting rates — a finding that directly informs the strategic recommendations of this study.

Raghavan and Mehta (2024) quantified the organizational consequences of ghosting through a semi-structured survey of 120 HR managers across retail, technology, and hospitality sectors. Their regression analysis confirmed that higher ghosting frequencies lead to measurably increased cost-per-hire, longer time-to-fill, reduced HR team morale, and declining employer brand perception. These findings provide critical empirical grounding for understanding the downstream operational costs of ghosting.

Global Perspectives

A 2025 systematic review published in the Global Journal of Management and Business Research consolidated international research on candidate ghosting, confirming its rising prevalence across geographies and organizational types. The review identified communication deficits, misaligned job expectations, and the availability of multiple competing offers as the most consistently cited antecedents. Importantly, it noted significant heterogeneity in research approaches and a relative scarcity of large-scale, empirically rigorous Indian studies — a gap this research directly addresses.

Table 2. Summary of Literature Review on Candidate Ghosting and Recruitment Challenges

Study	Focus	Methodology	Key Finding	Relevance
Kumar & Narayana (2019)	Indian candidate ghosting	Survey, Bengaluru, multi-sector	Ghosting prevalent in entry-level roles; recruiters unprepared	Primary Indian empirical baseline
Kumar & Avidra (2025)	Employer-side ghosting	Theoretical/conceptual	73% of applicants receive no employer response	Bidirectional ghosting dynamics
Global Journals (2025)	Global ghosting synthesis	Systematic literature review	Rising global trend; communication gaps and multiple offers are key antecedents	International research context
Sharma & Patel (2023)	Recruitment experience and ghosting in India	Quantitative study; 200 HRs; regression analysis	Poor communication and recruiter neglect significantly increase ghosting	Validates H ₁ hypothesis
Raghavan & Mehta (2024)	Organizational impact of candidate ghosting	Semi-structured survey; 120 HRs	Ghosting increases cost-per-hire, delays hiring, and damages employer branding	Quantifies organizational costs

Causes of Ghosting in Modern Recruitment

Ghosting does not arise from a single factor but from a confluence of behavioural, organizational, and market-level influences. Based on primary survey data and supporting literature, causes are categorized across three dimensions:

Table 3. Major Causes of Candidate and Recruitment Ghosting

Category	Cause & Explanation	Survey Evidence
Candidate-Driven	Changed mind about the role — preferences shift rapidly as candidates simultaneously evaluate multiple offers and conduct deeper research into role fit.	54.1% of respondents
Candidate-Driven	Lack of professionalism — the social cost of disengagement is diminished in digital hiring, where impersonal communication norms reduce accountability.	51.4%
Candidate-Driven	Accepted a better offer — superior compensation, role designation, or cultural fit elsewhere; especially prevalent in IT, e-commerce, and finance.	32.4%
Candidate-Driven	Personal and emotional burnout — prolonged multi-round processes cause fatigue; ghosting becomes a passive coping strategy rather than deliberate disrespect.	13.5%
Organization-Driven	Slow recruitment process — extended timelines erode candidate confidence and push them toward faster-moving employers.	50.0%
Organization-Driven	Poor recruiter communication — absence of timely status updates is interpreted as rejection or disinterest, triggering preemptive disengagement.	48.6%
Organization-Driven	Misaligned expectations — vague job descriptions and non-transparent compensation structures create post-interview disillusionment.	Qualitative findings

Organization-Driven	Absence of candidate experience focus — transactional, impersonal hiring practices reduce candidate emotional investment in the process.	Qualitative findings
Environmental	Hyper-competitive job market — post-pandemic flexibility, gig options, and multiple offers lower the perceived cost of ghosting in a candidate-driven market.	Literature supported
Environmental	Digital communication norms — automated, impersonal hiring channels reduce relational depth, making disengagement psychologically easier.	Literature supported

Data Interpretation and Analysis

Demographic Profile

The respondent pool reflects a diverse and representative cross-section of professionals engaged in recruitment or job-seeking activities. The majority of respondents (40%) belong to the 21–30 age group, followed by 31–40 years (35%), indicating that most participants are early to mid-career professionals with direct, active experience of the hiring process. Only 5% of respondents fall outside the 20–50 age range, suggesting underrepresentation of the youngest and most senior professionals.

Gender distribution is near-balanced: 54% male, 44% female, and 2% preferring not to disclose. This proportional representation across genders strengthens the credibility and generalizability of findings, ensuring that responses are not biased toward a single gender's experience. Employment status diversity — spanning full-time employees (majority), students, part-time workers, freelancers, and unemployed individuals — provides a comprehensive view of ghosting behaviour from both the employer and candidate perspectives.

Respondent Role Distribution and Exposure to Ghosting

Among the 100 respondents, 25% identified as HR professionals and 25% as job seekers/candidates, followed by recruiters/talent acquisition specialists (20%) and hiring managers (10%). This balanced multi-role composition enables the study to capture insights from both sides of the hiring transaction. A notable 8% came from non-HR professional backgrounds, and a small proportion represented public sector departments and internship roles, broadening the sectoral scope of findings.

Critically, every single HR respondent confirmed having experienced candidate ghosting to some degree, with over 55% strongly agreeing that it occurs frequently in their recruitment processes. This near-universal experience among hiring professionals validates ghosting as a systemic, sector-wide challenge rather than an isolated incident. Both HR and non-HR respondents similarly agreed that the frequency of ghosting has increased in recent years, reflecting broader shifts in professional communication norms.

Common Forms of Ghosting Behaviour

Table 4. Types of Ghosting Behaviour Reported by Respondents

Type of Ghosting Behaviour	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Ignored or declined offer silently	45	45%
Accepted offer but did not join	42	42%
Ignored follow-up messages post-interview	33	33%
Left the job without formal communication	30	30%
Personal reasons (burnout or stress)	21	21%
Skipped or cancelled interview without notice	19	19%

Primary Reasons for Ghosting

Table 5. Major Reasons for Candidate Ghosting During the Recruitment Process

Reason for Ghosting	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Changed their mind about the role	40	54.1%
Lack of professionalism	38	51.4%

Recruitment process is too slow	37	50.0%
Poor communication from recruiter/company	36	48.6%
Received a better offer	24	32.4%
Personal/emotional burnout	10	13.5%

Factors That Reduce the Likelihood of Ghosting

When asked what factors would reduce their likelihood of ghosting, respondents from both HR and non-HR backgrounds consistently prioritized interpersonal and process-related factors over financial incentives:

- Timely feedback throughout the hiring process — 44% (non-HR), ~45% (HR)
- Respectful and friendly recruitment experience — 40% (non-HR), 52–55% (HR)
- Better overall candidate experience — 32%
- Competitive salary and benefits — 31%
- Shorter hiring process — 30%
- Clear and transparent application requirements — 24%

These results confirm that the quality of human interaction during recruitment — respect, responsiveness, and clarity — is a more powerful retention lever than compensation alone. Organizations that invest in improving the interpersonal dimensions of their hiring processes stand to achieve significantly lower ghosting rates.

Statistical Highlights – Visual Summary

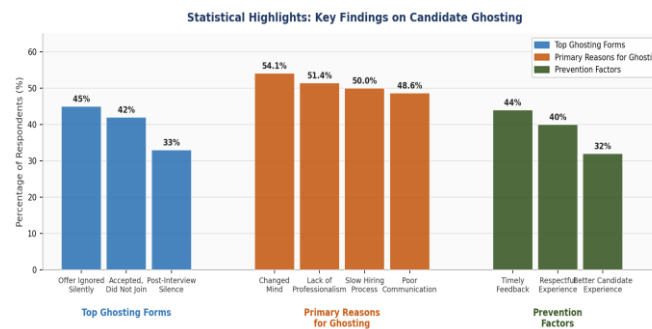


Fig. 1. Key statistical findings on ghosting forms, primary causes, and prevention factors (% of respondents)

Hypothesis Testing

Chi-Square Test Test Rationale and Design

A Chi-Square Test of Independence was selected because both variables under investigation are categorical: (1) whether respondents experienced poor communication during hiring (Yes/No), and (2) whether candidates changed their mind about the role (Yes/No). The test was applied to assess whether a statistically significant association exists between these two variables, using a significance threshold of $\alpha = 0.05$.

Observed and Expected Frequency Tables

Table 6. Observed Frequency

Poor Communication	Changed Mind: Yes	Changed Mind: No
Yes	29	15
No	9	47
Total	38	62

Table 7. Expected Frequency

Poor Communication	Expected Yes	Expected No
Yes	16.72	27.28
No	21.28	34.72

Chi-Square Computation and Results

The chi-square statistic was computed using the formula $\chi^2 = \sum[(O - E)^2 / E]$. The four component values were: $9.0190 + 5.5278 + 7.0684 + 4.3433$, yielding a total chi-square value of 25.96. The p-value was computed using Excel's CHISQ.TEST() function.

Table 8. Chi-Square Test Results for the Relationship Between Recruitment Experience and Candidate Ghosting

Statistical Measure	Value	Outcome
Chi-Square Value (χ^2)	25.96	—
p-value	3.456×10^{-7}	< 0.05
Degrees of Freedom	1	—
Significance Level (α)	0.05	—
Decision	H₀ Rejected	H₁ Accepted

Interpretation

Since the p-value (0.0000003456) is far below the 0.05 significance threshold, the null hypothesis is decisively rejected. There is a statistically significant association between poor recruiter communication during the hiring process and candidates changing their decision about the role. The observed frequencies reveal that candidates who experienced poor communication were substantially more likely to disengage: 29 out of 44 respondents who experienced poor communication changed their minds, compared to just 9 out of 56 who did not.

This finding validates H₁ and confirms that communication quality is not merely a courtesy issue — it is a statistically demonstrable determinant of candidate retention in the recruitment process. Improving the timeliness, transparency, and responsiveness of recruiter communication should therefore be treated as a primary strategic priority for organizations seeking to reduce ghosting.

Findings

Demographic Insights

The sample is predominantly composed of early-to-mid career professionals (21–30 years: 40%; 31–40 years: 35%) with near-balanced gender representation (54% male, 44% female, 2% undisclosed). The diversity in employment status — spanning full-time employees, students, freelancers, and part-time workers — ensures a comprehensive understanding of ghosting from both the employer and candidate vantage points.

Prevalence and Frequency

Ghosting is a near-universal experience among HR professionals: 100% of HR respondents had experienced it, and 55% reported it as frequent. Both HR and non-HR groups agree that ghosting has increased in recent years. This consensus across professional backgrounds underscores ghosting as a structural challenge embedded in current recruitment systems, not a marginal or isolated trend.

Key Findings Summary

- Ghosting occurs across all recruitment stages; the most organizationally disruptive forms are silent offer rejection (45%) and offer acceptance without joining (42%).
- Organizational factors — poor communication (48.6%) and slow hiring processes (50%) — are major contributors, equally as significant as candidate-side factors.
- Candidates who receive timely feedback and respectful engagement are substantially less likely to ghost, confirming the primacy of candidate experience management.

- Strong employer branding moderates ghosting rates: organizations with recognized, positive employer brands experience fewer drop-offs.
- Chi-square analysis ($\chi^2 = 25.96$, $p < 0.05$) statistically confirms that poor communication is a direct, measurable driver of candidate disengagement.
- Timely feedback (44–55%) and respectful recruiter behaviour (40–52%) are the most cited preventive measures — consistently ranked above competitive compensation.
- Open-ended responses highlighted three recurring improvement themes: limiting interview rounds, ensuring timely HR follow-up, and providing early transparency about company culture and role expectations.

Strategies to Reduce Candidate Ghosting

The following evidence-based strategies are recommended for organizations seeking to systematically reduce ghosting and build more resilient recruitment processes:

1. Transform Communication Practices

Implement automated yet personalized status updates via ATS at every hiring stage. Establish internal Service Level Agreements (SLAs) for recruitment responses: acknowledge applications within 48 hours, communicate interview outcomes within 3–5 business days. Assign a dedicated recruiter as the single point of contact throughout each candidate's journey. Provide constructive, structured feedback to unsuccessful candidates — this builds goodwill, strengthens employer brand, and reduces disengagement.

2. Streamline and Accelerate Hiring Processes

Audit existing recruitment timelines to identify and eliminate bottlenecks. Limit interview rounds to 2–3 structured, competency-based sessions. Empower hiring managers with pre-defined selection criteria to accelerate decision-making. Utilize panel interviews to assess candidates simultaneously, reducing scheduling delays and respecting candidate time. Deploy digital tools such as asynchronous video interviews and online assessments to compress timelines without compromising quality.

3. Strengthen Employer Branding and Candidate Experience

Communicate company culture, team dynamics, and growth opportunities proactively through careers pages, social media, and employee testimonials. Collect post-interview candidate feedback via short surveys and use this data for continuous process improvement. Respond transparently to reviews on Glassdoor and LinkedIn — publicly demonstrating responsiveness signals organizational integrity to prospective candidates.

4. Implement Pre-boarding and Post-Offer Engagement

The period between offer acceptance and the joining date is the highest-risk window for ghosting. Initiate structured pre-boarding immediately upon acceptance: send welcome messages from team leads, share orientation materials, facilitate team introductions, and provide access to pre-joining portals. For senior or specialized hires, arrange informal virtual meetups with future colleagues during the notice period. These touchpoints reinforce commitment and reduce the psychological distance that enables ghosting.

5. Ensure Competitive and Transparent Compensation

Benchmark compensation against current market data using platforms such as LinkedIn Salary Insights and Glassdoor. Disclose salary bands, bonus structures, and benefits early in the recruitment process to eliminate late-stage surprises that trigger disengagement. Avoid delays in issuing offer letters — each day of delay increases the risk of a competing offer being accepted.

6. Leverage HR Analytics and Predictive Insights

Track ghosting incidents by stage, role type, department, and time period using HRMS dashboards to identify high-risk patterns. Implement predictive ATS scoring models to flag at-risk candidates based on engagement signals such as response time and interaction frequency. Monitor candidate Net Promoter Scores (NPS) at key touchpoints to identify dissatisfaction before it leads to dropout.

7. Promote Mutual Professional Accountability

Include professional communication standards in campus placement orientations, career portals, and onboarding materials. Train recruiters in empathetic communication and candidate relationship management. Introduce mutual confirmation checkpoints at key milestones — formal offer acceptance, pre-joining acknowledgements — to reinforce two-way commitment and reduce the normalized culture of silent withdrawal.

Discussion

The findings illuminate ghosting as a multifaceted issue at the intersection of candidate psychology, organizational process design, and labour market dynamics — a shared outcome of systemic pressures on both sides of the hiring equation, not a failure attributable to either party alone. The statistical confirmation that poor communication directly drives candidate disengagement ($\chi^2 = 25.96$, $p < 0.05$) is particularly significant. It reframes communication as a measurable strategic variable with direct impact on recruitment outcomes, aligning with Sharma and Patel (2023) and the Informed Rejection Framework of Kumar and Avidra (2025), both of which advocate for structured, transparent, bidirectional recruitment communication.

A consistent finding is the ranking of interpersonal experience — timely feedback, respectful interactions — above compensation as a ghosting deterrent. This challenges the assumption that ghosting is a transactional problem solvable through better offers, and instead points to the emotional and relational dimensions of hiring as the primary leverage points. The 21–30 age group, dominant in active job markets and accustomed to normalized digital disengagement, requires intentional cultural investment from organizations — values-based engagement built on mutual accountability, not just process optimization.

Conclusion

Candidate ghosting represents a growing systemic challenge in modern recruitment, arising from the convergence of shifting candidate attitudes, organizational process failures, and a hyper-competitive, digitally mediated labour market. This study confirms that ghosting occurs across all stages of the hiring lifecycle, with silent offer rejection (45%) and post-acceptance no-shows (42%) constituting the most disruptive forms for organizational planning and workforce management. Empirical evidence from 100 respondents establishes that the phenomenon is widespread, frequently experienced, and increasing in perceived prevalence. The chi-square analysis conclusively demonstrates that poor recruiter communication is a statistically significant driver of candidate disengagement, reinforcing communication as the single most critical lever available to organizations seeking to reduce ghosting. Simultaneously, candidates bear their own accountability — changes of mind (54.1%) and lack of professionalism (51.4%) are the two most cited candidate-driven causes, reflecting the broader cultural normalization of ghosting in digital professional interactions.

While ghosting cannot be entirely eliminated, this study demonstrates that organizations equipped with the right strategies can substantially reduce its frequency and impact. By prioritizing transparent and timely communication, streamlining hiring processes, investing in employer branding, and implementing structured pre-boarding programs, organizations can create recruitment ecosystems built on mutual respect, accountability, and trust.

Future research should extend this analysis through cross-industry and cross-cultural comparisons, longitudinal tracking of ghosting trends as labour market conditions evolve, and investigation of the emerging role of AI-based recruitment tools in both enabling and mitigating candidate disengagement. Building ethical, technology-enhanced, and human-centered hiring processes represents the next frontier for HR management in addressing this modern challenge.

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