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To cite this article: Jean Pfiffelmann & Alexander Pfeuffer (2022) Understanding Personalized Recruitment Ads' Effectiveness: The Role of Personalization Type and Message Involvement, Journal of Interactive Advertising, 22:3, 311-326, DOI: [10.1080/15252019.2022.2132124](https://doi.org/10.1080/15252019.2022.2132124)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15252019.2022.2132124>



Published online: 27 Oct 2022.



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Understanding Personalized Recruitment Ads' Effectiveness: The Role of Personalization Type and Message Involvement

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ABSTRACT

In response to the challenge of replacing retiring workers with new talent, recruitment ads on recruitment platforms are becoming increasingly sophisticated and personalized. On some platforms, recruiters can now integrate users' names and photographs into recruitment ads. Previous research has frequently found that ad personalization improves advertising effectiveness; however, personalization is not always an effective tactic, as personalization effects can be nuanced depending on the consumer and the ad's personalized elements. A between-subjects experiment ($N = 196$) tested the effects of different types of recruitment ad personalization (integration of the recipient's name only or of both the recipient's name and photograph). This research found recruitment ads that were personalized with potential applicants' names and photographs increased organizational attractiveness for potential applicants who exhibited low involvement in the ad's message. In turn, their intentions to click on the ad and pursue the advertised job opportunity also increased.

KEYWORDS

Message involvement;
online advertising;
organizational attractiveness;
personalization;
recruitment advertising



Organizations are facing the challenge of replacing experienced workers as the baby boomer generation retires (Oladapo 2014). As rapid globalization and technological change have shaped the world's job market, skill shortages have become a growing problem for employers (ManPowerGroup 2018). Consequently, more and more organizations are applying marketing techniques to their recruitment strategies to attract potential future employees and persuade them to join their organizations (Wei et al. 2016). The attractiveness of organizations as employers has become a major concern for organizations and human resources marketing scholars (Viot and Benraiss-Noailles 2019).

To increase an organization's recruitment ads' effectiveness, online platforms (e.g., Indeed, Monster, LinkedIn, Facebook) have been offering increasingly sophisticated and personalized advertising solutions. Personalization generally refers to the integration of recognizable aspects of an individual in the message (Dijkstra 2008). Contrary to targeting, personalization does not adapt the offer of the ad to an audience member but integrates personally recognizable elements into the ad (e.g., an audience member's name

or photograph) to increase its effectiveness (Dijkstra 2008; Maslowska, Smit, and van den Putte 2016; Pfiffelmann and Soulez 2021). LinkedIn, for example, dynamically integrates information from a user's profile (e.g., name or profile picture) in some employers' targeted job ads.

While ad personalization may serve as an important tool for an organization's branding strategy to appear more attractive to prospective employees, little is currently known about how recruitment ad personalization, particularly different types of personalization, and recipients' involvement with the message may affect organizational attractiveness and the behavior of potential applicants. Thus, employers and managers of recruitment and social media platforms may benefit from research insights on ad personalization effects to improve their advertising approach.

In the academic context, personalization has been broadly studied in a variety of contexts (e.g., Dijkstra 2008; Maslowska, Smit, and van den Putte 2016; Sahni, Wheeler, and Chintagunta 2018; Pfiffelmann, Dens, and Soulez 2020), and a consistent finding in marketing research is that, generally, personalization

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increases advertising effectiveness (e.g., Ahn, Phua, and Shan 2017; De Keyzer, Dens, and De Pelsmacker 2015; Pfiffelmann and Soulez 2021; Liu-Thompkins 2019). Research insights on the effects of personalization of commercial advertising of a product or service, however, may not translate readily into the recruitment advertising context, as recruitment ads are conceptually different from commercial ads. In recruitment ads, persuasive intent is less pronounced than in commercial ads (Pfiffelmann, Dens, and Soulez 2020), making it more likely that consumers would favorably respond to the ad. In addition, consumer responses to commercial ads and recruitment ads are different, as consumers may experience a positive reaction to an advertised brand because the product is relevant, the price is attractive, or the message is visually pleasing, while they may believe that the same organization is not desirable as an employer due to their reputation, the expected salary, or the nature of the work. These unique characteristics of recruitment ads illustrate the need for additional research on personalization in the recruitment advertising context.

Although recruiters are increasingly using personalization in their recruitment ads to improve their organization's attractiveness to potential applicants to remain competitive (Pfiffelmann and Soulez 2021), research on personalized recruitment advertising remains limited. Most research on this topic has focused on the integration of recipients' names in online ads (Maslowska, Smit, and van den Putte 2016) or e-mail marketing (Sahni, Wheeler, and Chintagunta 2018); however, research on the effects of other types of ad personalization, for example, including a potential applicant's photograph, has been slow to develop (e.g., Pfiffelmann, Dens, and Soulez 2020). No previous research, furthermore, has investigated whether the personalization of recruitment ads would be beneficial for employer branding, namely in terms of organizational attractiveness; such research has mainly focused on outcomes including click intentions or job-pursuit intentions (Pfiffelmann, Dens, and Soulez 2020; Pfiffelmann and Soulez 2021).

The present work aims to address the dearth of research on personalized recruitment advertising by investigating the effects of personalized recruitment ads on potential employees' click intentions and job-pursuit intentions over nonpersonalized ads, considering organizational attractiveness and ad irritation as potential mediating factors in this relationship. This research employs an online experiment to examine the effects of different types of ad personalization, that is to say, the inclusion of either the name only or the

name and photograph of a potential future employee as personalized items. In addition, this study explores a proposed moderating role of potential employee's message involvement to better understand conditions under which personalization may be most effective and provide a potential explanation for mixed results in the existing literature on personalized recruitment advertising effects. Existing research on personalized advertising effects, as well as signaling theory, which guides this research, are reviewed in the following literature review section.

Literature Review and Hypotheses

Personalized Ad Effects and Mechanisms

Ad personalization has been found to increase advertising effectiveness, specifically by generating more favorable attitudes toward the ad (Bang et al. 2019; Li and Liu 2017; Maslowska, Smit, and van den Putte 2016; Pfiffelmann, Dens, and Soulez 2020) and advertised brand (Ahn, Phua, and Shan 2017; Bang et al. 2019; De Keyzer, Dens, and De Pelsmacker 2015; Maslowska, Smit, and van den Putte 2016), and by increasing purchase intentions (Li and Liu 2017; Maslowska, Smit, and van den Putte 2016) or click intentions (De Keyzer, Dens, and De Pelsmacker 2015). The majority of empirical research on personalized advertising effects has demonstrated the increased effectiveness of personalized messages over nonpersonalized messages (Liu-Thompkins 2019) by testing different personalized items and configurations, such as recipients' personality traits (Winter, Maslowska, and Vos 2021), gender (De Keyzer, Dens, and De Pelsmacker 2015), name (Bang and Wojdyski 2016; Dijkstra 2008; Li and Liu 2017; Maslowska, Smit, and van den Putte 2016; Pfiffelmann 2020; Sahni, Wheeler, and Chintagunta 2018), photograph (Ahn, Phua, and Shan 2017), or the combination of both name and photograph (Ahn, Phua, and Shan 2017; Bang et al. 2019; Pfiffelmann, Dens, and Soulez 2020; Pfiffelmann and Soulez 2021).

Favorable personalization effects can be explained by personalization tactics establishing a link between the message and some aspect of the self (Petty, Barden, and Wheeler 2002). Perloff and Brock (1980), for example, argued that the psychological mechanism behind personalization is a self-positivity bias that explains favorable attitudes and behavior changes. In general, people appreciate objects or ideas that are associated with themselves more than those that are not (Petty, Barden, and Wheeler 2002). Previous research has already identified self-positivity bias as

an underlying mechanism of personalization effects. For instance, personalization has been shown to induce self-referencing (Ahn, Phua, and Shan 2017; Maslowska, Smit, and van den Putte 2016; Pfiffelmann and Soulez 2021). Self-referencing denotes a cognitive process in which an individual relates the information within a message to the self (Burnkrant and Unnava 1989). In this process, individuals encode information with the help of self-schemata to easily assess self-relevance and store information for later recall (Hong and Zinkhan 1995). Personalization can elicit such self-referencing during message processing (Bombe and Gierl 2013) and, in turn, generate more favorable outcomes for the message (Hawkins et al. 2008). Such effects have been observed with personalization using an individual's name, which has been shown to increase self-referencing in message processing and subsequently lead to higher perceived familiarity (Lee and LaRose 2011) and more thorough processing (Dijkstra 2008; Howard and Kerin 2011; Maslowska, Smit, and van den Putte 2016). Furthermore, personalization that used a combination of individuals' names and visual representations, such as virtual selves (Ahn, Phua, and Shan 2017) or photographs (Pfiffelmann and Soulez 2021), has been shown to prompt self-referencing and lead to more favorable brand attitudes (Ahn, Phua, and Shan 2017) or increased click and job-pursuit intentions (Pfiffelmann and Soulez 2021).

Although there is evidence for the potential of personalization tactics to generate favorable advertising outcomes, it is important to note that personalization is not universally effective and dependent on contextual and individual factors. Personalization using an individual's name, for example, has been found to be no more effective than nonpersonalized messaging when recipients were aware that they had provided the information used in the personalization (e.g., Webb, Simmons, and Brandon 2005). In a few studies, ad personalization has also been found to exert detrimental effects, such as perceived intrusiveness of the ad or distraction from other online tasks (e.g., visiting social media sites to read information or build relationships) (Bang and Wojdyski 2016; Pfiffelmann, Dens, and Soulez 2020; Van Doorn and Hoekstra 2013). Personalization may also be perceived as an invasion to privacy (Van Doorn and Hoekstra 2013) or an attempt to manipulate consumers (De Keyzer, Dens, and De Pelsmacker 2022), which may subsequently lead to ad avoidance (Ham 2017; Youn and Kim 2019) or foster unfavorable attitudes toward an ad (Tsang, Ho, and Liang 2004) and decrease

intentions to click on the ad or purchase the featured product (Van Doorn and Hoekstra 2013; White et al. 2008).

The ostensibly mixed findings on personalized advertising effects suggest that other factors may influence and facilitate its effects and lead to more nuanced outcomes. The following sections review the concept of organizational attractiveness and ad irritation as potential mediators and message involvement as a potential moderator of personalized advertising effects.

Ad Personalization and Organizational Attractiveness

Organizational attractiveness constitutes an important consumer attitude toward an organization (Gomes and Neves 2010). Specifically, it describes potential employees' general perceived desirability of a potential work relationship with an organization (Aiman-Smith, Bauer, and Cable 2001) based on evaluative reactions to organizations (Cable and Turban 2001). Although the authors are not aware of any existing research on the role of organizational attractiveness in the context of personalized advertising, conceptually related research may hold valuable clues to make predictions about antecedents and consequences of organizational attractiveness.

Personalization has been shown to favorably influence consumers' brand attitudes (Ahn, Phua, and Shan 2017; Bang et al. 2019; De Keyzer, Dens, and De Pelsmacker 2015). This insight may be predictive of personalized ad effects on organizational attractiveness, as organizational attractiveness is conceptually similar to positive brand attitude. Both positive brand attitude and organizational attractiveness describe an individual's positive disposition or affective reaction toward the advertised brand (MacKenzie and Lutz 1989) or employer (Gomes and Neves 2010), respectively, and both are predictive of favorable behavioral outcomes, including the intention to apply to a job vacancy (Gomes and Neves 2010) or accept a job offer (Chapman et al. 2005).

While consumers may be attracted to a company commercially (i.e., positive brand attitude), they may not necessarily be attracted to a company as an employer (i.e., low organizational attractiveness). However, given the conceptual similarity between organizational attractiveness and positive brand attitude, it is conceivable that ad personalization, which has been shown to positively influence consumers' brand attitudes, could also positively affect potential

employees' feelings about organizational attractiveness. Furthermore, insights from signaling theory literature support this prediction.

Signaling theory (Spence 1974) is an economic theory that describes and predicts the interactional relationship between a buyer and a seller. In this relationship, there is often information asymmetry in which the seller holds more information than the buyer, placing the buyer in a position of uncertainty or vulnerability, potentially making the buyer reluctant to complete a purchase. In this situation, a seller may intentionally provide additional relevant information that may otherwise be inaccessible to the buyer (Wells, Valacich, and Hess 2011). Such information would, in turn, reduce information asymmetry, as it would allow buyers to make inferences about sellers and the validity of their statements (Kirmani and Rao 2000).

In the context of job recruitment, applicants construe many recruitment-related activities as signals of organizational characteristics (Collins and Stevens 2002; Turban and Cable 2003) and recruiter characteristics and behavior (Turban, Forret, and Hendrickson 1998). Personalization via integration of recipients' names and photographs into ads may be perceived as a positive signal about how an organization values potential candidates because it addresses them individually with these personalized ads (Pffiffelmann, Dens, and Soulez 2020). This rationale may also be supported by ad personalization research that has suggested personalization can be perceived as considerate treatment from the employer (e.g., Pffiffelmann and Soulez 2021; Pffiffelmann, Soulez, and Dens 2019). If ad personalization is able to signal favorable practices of an employer by directly addressing potential candidates in ads and making them feel considered and valued, it is conceivable that ad personalization would reduce information asymmetry by providing positive recruitment-related information about the employer to potential candidates. Of course, these perceptions may be the result of a biased processing of such ads, which arises from self-positivity bias triggered by the personalization items in the ads (Perloff and Brock 1980; Petty, Barden, and Wheeler 2002).

Personalization may also lead to more favorable attitudes toward the employer and positive behavioral outcomes. The connection between ad personalization and attitudes has been identified by research that found personalized ads are perceived as more credible and trustworthy (Pffiffelmann, Dens, and Soulez 2020) and exert a positive effect on brand attitude via identification or connection with a brand (Ahn, Phua, and

Shan 2017; De Keyzer, Dens, and De Pelsmacker 2022; Tran et al. 2020). In addition, positive signals about employers positively impact applicant attraction to the organization, such as job-pursuit or job-acceptance intentions (Celani and Singh 2011).

Applying the insights from ad personalization and organizational attractiveness literature, as well as signaling theory, we would anticipate an analogous influence in the context of recruitment advertising. Specifically, we expect that ad personalization would improve organizational attractiveness as well as subsequent potential employees' intentions. Thus, we posit the following hypotheses:

H1: Compared to nonpersonalized ads, personalized recruitment ads will increase organizational attractiveness, click intentions, and job-pursuit intentions.

H2: The positive effects of personalization on click and job-pursuit intentions will be mediated by organizational attractiveness.

While it appears conceivable that personalization could lead to positive evaluative judgments and favorable behaviors in potential applicants, past research has also identified potential negative reactions to personalized advertising (e.g., Pffiffelmann, Dens, and Soulez 2020), as such ads may be perceived as distracting, intrusive, or manipulative. Thus, it is possible that behavioral responses such as click or job-pursuit intentions could also be affected by any irritation felt in response to ad personalization.

Ad Personalization As a Source of Irritation

Ad irritation denotes feelings of negativity, impatience, and displeasure in recipients of an ad message caused by various advertising stimuli (Aaker and Bruzzone 1985). Several factors and characteristics of ad stimuli have been identified as sources of ad irritation, such as advertised products (Aaker and Bruzzone 1985), advertising channels (Morimoto and Chang 2006), ad formats (Jeon et al. 2019), ad misplacements, targeting the wrong audience, manipulative intent, excessive repetition, or forced exposures (Edwards, Li, and Lee 2002; Li, Edwards, and Lee 2002; Rotzoll, Haefner, and Hall 1996). Some of these characteristics (e.g., forced exposure and manipulative intent) apply to personalized ads.

Because personalized ads more easily attract the visual attention of recipients (Bang and Wojdyski 2016; Pffiffelmann, Dens, and Soulez 2020), they may interfere with exposure to editorial content and may

be perceived as intrusive (Pfiffelmann, Dens, and Soulez 2020). Persuasive communication research also supports the idea that recipients are more likely to process advertisements in depth when they contain a visual appeal (Campbell 1995), which increases negative processing consequences and leads recipients to perceive manipulative intent (Campbell and Kirmani 2000). Perceived irritation is related to ad intrusiveness (Edwards, Li, and Lee 2002) and persuasion knowledge activation (Tutaj and Van Reijmersdal 2012).

According to psychological reactance theory (Brehm 1966), recipients tend to react negatively to persuasive ads they perceive as dissatisfying their need for self-determination and control. Recipients of personalized ads may feel a lack of control over their personal information caused by personalization. They may also feel manipulated by the use of their personal information (i.e., name, photograph) integrated into the ad and, thus, may experience irritation. This negative feeling of ad irritation can lead to ad resistance and negative behavioral outcomes, such as ad skepticism (Baek and Morimoto 2012), ad avoidance (Edwards, Li, and Lee 2002; Niu, Wang, and Liu 2021), or ad skipping (Jeon et al. 2019). In other words, perceived irritation may mediate the relationship between ad personalization and behavioral consequences. As a result, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: The negative effects of personalization on click and job-pursuit intentions will be mediated by ad irritation.

Types of Advertising Personalization

Although the presence of ad personalization is likely to lead to increased organizational attractiveness, it is important for recruiters and recruitment platform managers to know which type of personalization—for example, inclusion of name or photograph—may attract more potential employees, improve click-through rates on recruitment ads, or increase job-pursuit intentions.

On one hand, previous research suggests that even a minimal cue, such as someone's name, may be enough to increase advertising effectiveness (Maslowska, Smit, and van den Putte 2016; Sahni, Wheeler, and Chintagunta 2018) and that the integration of a name and photograph does not generate more self-referencing (Ahn, Phua, and Shan 2017) or attention to the ad (Bang et al. 2019). These results suggest that adding recipients' photographs next to

their names would not induce more visual attention and self-referent encoding of the ad. According to these findings, recruiters may not benefit from incorporating potential employees' photographs in their recruitment ads in terms of organizational attractiveness and advertising effectiveness.

On the other hand, the picture-superiority effect (Childers and Houston 1984) highlights the superiority of visual information (i.e., pictures) over verbal information (i.e., text) in information processing. According to this effect, pictures are more easily recalled or recognized than their textual counterparts. In addition, some studies have demonstrated that people respond faster and more accurately to visuals of their own faces than other known faces because of the familiarity effect, which is the result of frequent exposure to their own likenesses (e.g., Bortolon, Lorieux, and Raffard 2018). Furthermore, in the recruitment advertising space, individuals have been found to be more visually attracted by their self-face than their names personalized with recipients' names and photographs (Pfiffelmann, Dens, and Soulez 2020). These results highlight the capacity of the photograph (i.e., self-face) to draw visual attention. Importantly, in terms of personalization persuasiveness for attitude formation, previous research has shown that personalization with the integration of recipients' names and photographs positively influences the attitude toward the brand directly (Bang et al. 2019) or indirectly through self-referencing (Ahn, Phua, and Shan 2017). These relationships tend to suggest that more extensive personalization (i.e., the name and photograph) has a particular capacity to generate a positive attitude toward the brand. Thus, we posit the following hypothesis:

H4: Recruitment ads will exert stronger positive effects on organizational attractiveness, click intentions, and job-pursuit intentions when the ads integrate potential employees' names and photographs than when the ads incorporate their names only.

Although the picture-superiority effect suggests that ads integrating names and photographs for personalization would result in a more favorable reception among potential employees, recruitment ads personalized with names and photographs have also been found to generate more intrusiveness (Pfiffelmann, Soulez, and Dens 2019), while no such effect has been identified for commercial ads integrating recipients' names only (Bang and Wojdyski 2016). These findings suggest that integrating the combination of name and photograph into the ad may lead to greater

perceptions of intrusiveness than integration of the name only. In addition, a more extensive form of personalization, such as including recipients' photographs, may be more likely to be processed in depth (Campbell 1995; Childers and Houston 1984), activating persuasion knowledge (Tutaj and Van Reijmersdal 2012) and increasing the perception of a manipulative intent (Campbell and Kirmani 2000), leading to more irritation. Therefore, the following hypothesis is posed:

H5: Recruitment ads will exert stronger negative effects on ad irritation when the ads integrate potential employees' names and photographs than when the ads incorporate their names only.

The extent to which ad personalization may foster the development of either organizational attractiveness or irritation and result in behavioral responses is likely dependent upon the relevance of the recruitment ad to a potential applicant. This dynamic can be explained by the message involvement literature.

Message Involvement

Involvement has been defined as "a person's perceived relevance of the object based on inherent needs, values, and interests" (Zaichkowsky 1985, p. 342). In advertising research, recipients are motivated to respond to relevant ads that personally affect them (Taylor and Thompson 1982). Involvement with recruitment ads could be due to various personal situations (e.g., current employment situation, well-being at work).

According to the heuristic-systematic model (HSM; Chen and Chaiken 1999), individuals may engage in one or two modes of processing an ad—systematic or heuristic processing—depending on different levels of cognitive ability and capacity. In systematic processing, individuals are likely to scrutinize the ad analytically and form their attitudes based on the actual content (Chen and Chaiken 1999; Eagly and Chaiken 1993). In heuristic processing, individuals make less cognitive effort to process the information and form their attitudes based on heuristic cues (Chen and Chaiken 1999). The HSM's sufficiency principle suggests that individuals will spend the minimum amount of cognitive effort to reach their goal of accuracy and confidence (Chen and Chaiken 1999). According to this principle, we predict that personalization will exert stronger persuasive effects in a low-involvement condition because the heuristic cues (e.g., personalized elements) override the ad content (e.g., argument

quality) to form an evaluative judgment of an organization. Thus, we posit the following:

H6: Message involvement will moderate the relationship between ad personalization and organizational attractiveness: The positive effects of personalization on organizational attractiveness will be stronger for potential employees who exhibit lower message involvement.

In addition, the development and activation of persuasion knowledge are typically considered processes requiring attention or cognitive capacity. More active processing could lead consumers to think about what an advertiser is doing in the ad and why the ad is in a certain form, increasing the probability of negative processing consequences, such as inferences of manipulative intent (Campbell and Kirmani 2000). Thus, negative responses to ad personalization would be more likely to emerge during high-processing states (analogous to high involvement):

H7: Message involvement will moderate the relationship between ad personalization and ad irritation: The negative effects of personalization on ad irritation will be weaker for potential employees who exhibit lower message involvement.

Given the proposed moderating role of message involvement and the link between organizational attractiveness and potential employees' intentions (Chapman et al. 2005; Gomes and Neves 2010), we expect that, for potential employees who exhibit low involvement with the message, the personalized recruitment ads will increase organizational attractiveness and consequently positively affect their job-pursuit intentions and intentions to click on the ads. By contrast, when potential employees are highly involved with the message, the personalized items may persuade them less and increase ad irritation. Figure 1 presents the conceptual model that illustrates our hypotheses.

Research Methodology

To assess the effects of personalized recruitment ads on organizational attractiveness, click intentions, and job-pursuit intentions, an online experiment was conducted. For the study, 196 participants were recruited at a university in eastern France. The sampling frame of university students was chosen because of employers' interest in recruiting this demographic (Soulez and Guillot-Soulez 2011).

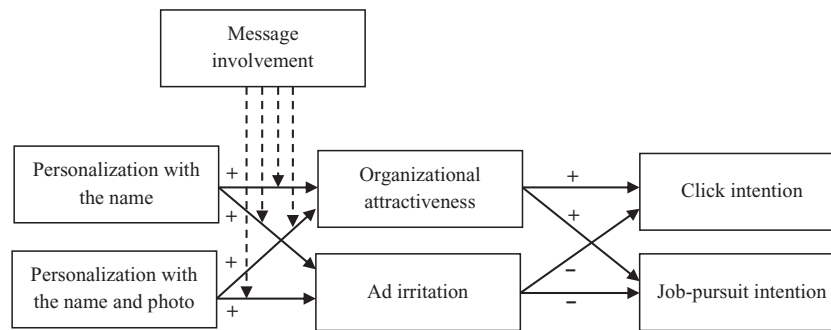


Figure 1. Conceptual framework.

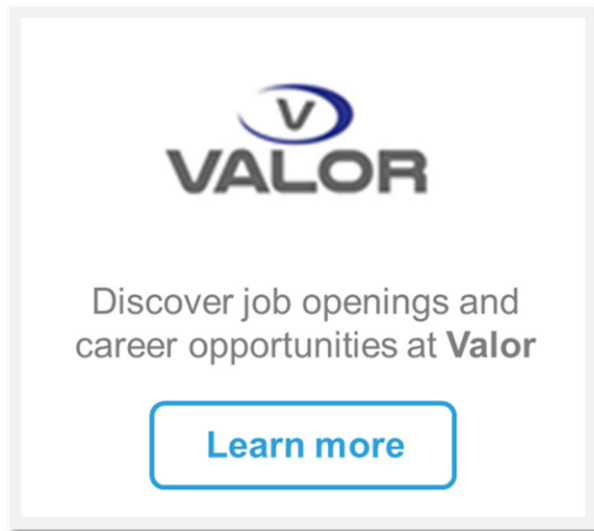


Figure 2. Nonpersonalized ad.

Experimental Design and Procedure

Upon giving consent, participants were asked to complete a preregistration form asking them to provide the links to their social media profiles (i.e., LinkedIn or Facebook) and e-mail addresses. Participants' names and photographs were sourced from these publicly accessible social media profiles to automatically create personalized stimuli corresponding to each participant's randomly assigned experimental condition. Subsequently, participants were contacted individually via e-mail containing a personalized link to participate in the online experiment.

The study assessed participants' involvement with recruitment ads in general and then exposed each participant to the stimulus corresponding to the randomly assigned experimental condition (see Figures 2 and 3). The individual links dynamically embedded each participant's personal information in the study stimuli to create personalized stimuli with the participants' names and photographs. All stimuli were designed to reflect social media ads and alerted participants of a job vacancy at a fictitious employer, Valor.

A fictitious employer, rather than a real employer, was chosen to avoid participants' preexisting notions of an organization skewing the results (Geuens and De Pelsmacker 2017). The stimuli differed only across conditions in terms of the ad personalization in accordance with the assigned condition.

The ads were presented without the context of a real or mock recruitment platform or social network to avoid bias related to perceptions of these platforms (e.g., privacy concerns) and to increase the generalizability of the results.

Measures

All constructs were assessed using measures in the French language. Please see Appendix A for a complete listing of measures in the original language, along with their translation and scale item factor loadings.

Click intentions was measured with a single-item, 7-point Likert-type scale by asking participants to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the statement that they wished to click on the ad to learn more ($M = 3.69$, $SD = 2.01$).

Job-pursuit intentions ($M = 3.21$, $SD = 1.31$, $\alpha = 0.87$) was quantified on a three-item, 7-point Likert scale based on the scale from Cable and Turban (2003).

Organizational attractiveness was evaluated using Gomes and Neves's (2010) three-item Likert scale ($M = 3.61$, $SD = 1.06$, $\alpha = 0.92$).

Ad irritation was measured using Edwards and colleagues' (2002) five-item Likert scale ($M = 2.55$, $SD = 1.28$, $\alpha = 0.95$).

Message involvement was assessed by asking participants to indicate their involvement with the job ad using a four-item 7-point semantic differential measurement adapted from product involvement scales (Wang, Yu, and Wei 2012; Zaichkowsky 1985; $M = 3.83$, $SD = 1.39$, $\alpha = 0.90$).

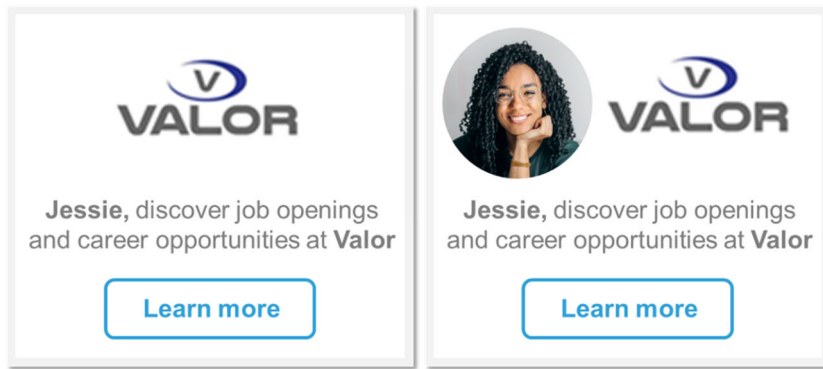


Figure 3. Personalized ad with name only (left) and with name and photo (right).

Employer familiarity was evaluated as a potential confounding factor to verify that respondents were not familiar with the fictitious employer. It was measured with a three-item, 7-point Likert scale based on Cable and Turban (2003; $M = 1.36$, $SD = 0.80$, $\alpha = 0.87$).

Participants were also asked questions about their demographics by asking about their biological sex, age, education level, occupation, and current job or internship search.

Finally, as a manipulation check, participants were asked whether the ad they had seen contained some of their personal information (1 = *No personal information*, 2 = *My name only*, 3 = *My name and photograph*).

Results

Manipulation Check, Participant Characteristics, and Randomization Check

Initially, 240 participants were recruited for participation in the study. Participants who did not correctly answer the manipulation-check question were excluded from the analysis, as an incorrect response to the question of whether they had seen their name or photograph in the stimulus would indicate that they likely did not pay attention to the stimulus. The resulting sample consisted of 196 participants (control: no ad personalization [$n = 71$] versus personalized ad integrating recipient's name [$n = 35$] versus personalized ad integrating both recipient's name and photograph [$n = 90$]). Participant ages ranged from 18 to 63 years ($M = 24.14$; $SD = 5.83$). The majority of participants identified as female ($n = 132$, 67.3%), had completed at least a bachelor's degree ($n = 122$, 62.2%), were currently students (64.8%), and were looking for a job (65.3%).

Randomization checks were conducted using two one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) and a series

of chi-square tests. Overall, no statistically significant differences were found between the study's conditions in terms of demographics and perceived familiarity with the fictitious employer. Thus, randomization was considered successful, and these variables were not entered as covariates in hypotheses testing.

Method of Analysis

The data analysis was performed with the PROCESS macro v3.5 Model 7 (Hayes 2018). The type of personalization was defined as an independent multicategorical variable (X) with sequential coding. Although sequential coding applies when the multicategorical variable codes have an ordinal dimension, it can also be used for a nominal multicategorical variable if the groups are strategically ordered during the coding process to generate comparisons of interest (Hayes and Montoya 2017). Furthermore, from a managerial standpoint, it is less meaningful to personalize an ad with a recipient's photograph without including the name. Consequently, this research considers three ad personalization conditions: (1) the absence of personalization, (2) a simple personalization with an individual's name only, and (3) an extensive personalization with an individual's name and photograph. The sequential coding system generates regression coefficients that estimate the difference in the variables in the model between those in the condition of personalization with name only ($X_1 = 1$, $X_2 = 0$) and the absence of personalization condition ($X_1 = 0$, $X_2 = 0$), and between those in the condition of personalization with name and photograph ($X_1 = 1$, $X_2 = 1$) and the condition of personalization with name only. Furthermore, organizational attractiveness was defined as a continuous parallel mediator variable (M_1), ad irritation as a continuous parallel mediator variable (M_2), and click intentions or job-pursuit intentions as a continuous dependent variable (Y). Message

involvement was defined as a continuous moderator (*W*) of the effects of the type of personalization on organizational attractiveness and ad irritation. Because the demographics and control variables did not significantly differ among experimental conditions (all *ps* > .05), they were not entered as covariates in the model. Finally, 5,000 bootstrap samples were defined with a 95% confidence interval (CI).

Hypotheses Testing

Table 1 presents the results of the PROCESS analysis. According to the sequential coding of the independent variable, *X*₁ represents the difference between personalization with name and the nonpersonalized condition, and *X*₂ shows the difference between personalization with name and photograph and personalization with name only.

The results show that the personalization with name (*X*₁) did not significantly influence organizational attractiveness (*b* = -0.823, *SE* = 0.567, *p* = .148, 95% CI = [-1.941; 0.295]), click intentions (*b* = .172, *SE* = .363, *p* = .635, 95% CI = [-0.543; 0.887]), or job-pursuit intentions (*b* = 0.316, *SE* = 0.225, *p* = .161, 95% CI = [-0.127; 0.759]). The results also indicate that the personalization with name and photograph (*X*₂) did not exert significant effects on click intentions (*b* = -0.269, *SE* = 0.351, *p* = .444, 95% CI = [-0.961; 0.423]) and job-pursuit intentions (*b* = -0.383, *SE* = 0.217, *p* = .079, 95% CI = [-0.813; 0.045]). However, personalization with name and photograph (*X*₂) positively influenced organizational attractiveness (*b* = 1.571, *SE* = 0.554, *p* < 0.01, 95% CI = [0.478; 2.664]). Organizational attractiveness, in turn, positively influenced click intentions (*b* = 0.831, *SE* = 0.123, *p* < 0.001, 95% CI = [0.588; 1.075]) and job-pursuit intentions (*b* = 0.628, *SE* = 0.076, *p* < .001, 95% CI = [0.477; 0.779]).

Overall, personalization with recipients' names and photographs influenced organizational attractiveness, which, in turn, exerted a positive influence on click intentions and job-pursuit intentions. By contrast, the integration of recipients' names in recruitment did not appear to be a sufficiently persuasive tactic. Hypotheses 1, 2, and 4 were, therefore, partially supported.

Furthermore, the results reveal that the interaction between personalization with name only and message involvement on organizational attractiveness was not significant (*b* = 0.178, *SE* = 0.141, *p* = .209 95% CI = [-0.101; 0.457]). However, the interaction between personalization with both name and photograph and

Table 1. Unstandardized regression weights.

	Organizational Attractiveness (<i>M</i> ₁)			Ad Irritation (<i>M</i> ₂)			Click Intentions (<i>Y</i> ₁)			Job-Pursuit Intentions (<i>Y</i> ₂)		
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>
Constant	2.127	0.318	6.693***	3.892	0.458	8.505***	1.413	0.600	2.354*	1.397	0.372	3.757***
Personalization with the name (<i>X</i> ₁)	-0.823	0.567	-1.453 ^{ns}	0.288	0.738	0.390 ^{ns}	0.172	0.363	0.475 ^{ns}	0.316	0.225	1.406 ^{ns}
Personalization with the name and the photo (<i>X</i> ₂)	1.571	0.554	2.834**	0.144	0.733	0.196 ^{ns}	-0.269	0.351	-0.766 ^{ns}	-0.384	0.217	-1.766 ^{ns}
Message involvement (<i>W</i>)	0.383	0.079	4.825***	-0.193	0.109	-1.777 ^{ns}						
<i>X</i> ₁ <i>W</i> (interaction 1)	0.178	0.141	1.260 ^{ns}	-0.015	0.184	-0.079 ^{ns}						
<i>X</i> ₂ <i>W</i> (interaction 2)	-0.342	0.137	-2.498*	-0.074	0.180	-0.413 ^{ns}						
Organizational attractiveness (<i>M</i> ₁)				-0.181	0.094	-1.925 ^{ns}	0.831	0.123	6.737***	0.628	0.076	8.214***
Ad irritation (<i>M</i> ₂)							-0.278	0.102	-2.732**	-0.186	0.063	-2.956**
<i>R</i> ²	0.236, <i>F</i> (5, 190) = 11.759***			0.128, <i>F</i> (6, 189) = 4.641***			0.259, <i>F</i> (4, 191) = 16.708***			0.334, <i>F</i> (4, 191) = 23.933***		
ΔR^2	0.027, <i>F</i> (2, 190) = 3.382*			0.002, <i>F</i> (2, 189) = 0.225 ^{ns}								

****p* < .001; ***p* < .01; **p* < .05; ^{ns} not significant.

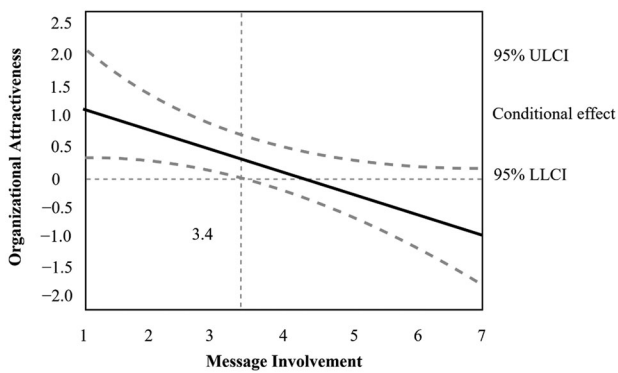


Figure 4. Floodlight analysis: Conditional direct effect of personalization with the name and photograph on organizational attractiveness at different levels of the moderator (message involvement) with Johnson–Neyman point. LLCI=lower limit confidence interval; ULCI=upper limit confidence interval.

message involvement on organizational attractiveness was statistically significant ($b = -0.342$, $SE = 0.137$, $p < .05$, $95\% \text{ CI} = [-0.612; -0.072]$). **Figure 4** offers a graphic representation of the personalization with the name and photograph \times message involvement interaction on organizational attractiveness. As shown in **Figure 4**, results from a floodlight analysis following the Johnson–Neyman procedure demonstrate that personalization exerted a greater effect on organizational attractiveness for recipients who were less involved with recruitment ads. At low levels of message involvement, personalization exerted a stronger positive effect on organizational attractiveness. Those less involved with the message were more likely to be attracted by the organization when the ad was personalized with their name and photograph. Participants with higher message involvement were less likely to perceive the organization as attractive when the ad integrated their name and photograph. However, this effect was not consistently significant for participants with moderate message involvement (the $95\% \text{ CIs}$ contained 0 once respondents' message involvement scores exceeded 3.40). As message involvement only moderated the effects of the more extensive ad personalization on organizational attractiveness, hypothesis 6 was partially supported.

The results also indicated that neither the personalization with the name (X_1) nor the personalization with the name and photograph (X_2) significantly influenced ad irritation (X_1 : $b = 0.288$, $SE = 0.738$, $p = .697$, $95\% \text{ CI} = [-1.168; 1.745]$; X_2 : $b = 0.144$, $SE = 0.733$, $p = .845$, $95\% \text{ CI} = [-1.302; 1.589]$). Hypotheses 3 and 4 were, thus, not supported. In addition, the interactions between X_1 and message involvement and between X_2 and message involvement were not significant for ad irritation (X_1 : $b =$

-0.015 , $SE = 0.184$, $p = .937$, $95\% \text{ CI} = [-0.378; 0.348]$; X_2 : $b = -0.074$, $SE = 0.180$, $p = .680$, $95\% \text{ CI} = [-0.430; 0.281]$). Hypothesis 7 was, therefore, not supported. Perceived ad irritation, in turn, exerted a negative effect on click intentions ($b = -0.278$, $SE = 0.102$, $p < .01$, $95\% \text{ CI} = [-0.478; -0.077]$) and job-pursuit intentions ($b = -0.186$, $SE = 0.063$, $p < .01$, $95\% \text{ CI} = [-0.310; -0.062]$).

Finally, the index of moderated mediation revealed that the indirect effects of personalization with name only via organizational attractiveness were not significant on click intentions (index = 0.148, $SE = 0.149$, $95\% \text{ CI} = [-0.120; 0.465]$) and job-pursuit intentions (index = 0.112, $SE = 0.112$, $95\% \text{ CI} = [-0.096; 0.344]$). Nevertheless, the index of moderated mediation indicated that the indirect effects of personalization with name and photograph via organizational attractiveness were significant for click intentions (index = -0.285 , $SE = 0.139$, $95\% \text{ CI} = [-0.586; -0.043]$) and job-pursuit intentions (index = -0.215 , $SE = 0.104$, $95\% \text{ CI} = [-0.439; -0.031]$). These results support the proposed moderated mediation mechanism but only when the recruitment ads integrate recipients' names and photographs.

Discussion

The online experimental study testing the effects of recruitment ad personalization found nuanced effects of ad personalization, which were affected by potential applicants' message involvement and facilitated by organizational attractiveness. Specifically, recruitment ads that were personalized with a potential applicant's name and photograph were found to increase organizational attractiveness for potential applicants who exhibited low involvement in the ad's message. In turn, their intentions to click on the ad and pursue the advertised job also increased. These findings contribute to the understanding of personalized advertising effects and, therefore, hold a variety of theoretical and practical implications.

Theoretical Implications

While most research on personalized advertising examines consumer perceptions, this research's originality lies in investigating the impacts of recruitment ad personalization on potential applicants' decision making under consideration of potential factors and mechanisms. Previous research mostly reported on the effectiveness of the presence of ad personalization (Liu-Thompkins 2019) in a variety of advertising

contexts (e.g., Ahn, Phua, and Shan 2017; Bang and Wojdyski 2016; Maslowska, Smit, and van den Putte 2016).

The current study, however, showed that ad personalization effects, particularly in the context of recruitment advertising, are nuanced. The integration of recipients' names in the ad did not directly increase organizational attractiveness or click and job-pursuit intentions. Although this form of personalization has been shown to be effective in various contexts (e.g., Sahni, Wheeler, and Chintagunta 2018; Bang and Wojdyski 2016; Ahn, Phua, and Shan 2017; Dijkstra 2008), the current study's findings suggest that using individuals' names alone may not be universally effective. It is possible that individuals have become accustomed to the increasingly common practice of personalizing ads with individuals' names (Sahni, Wheeler, and Chintagunta 2018) and that familiarity with this practice is reducing its potential persuasive effects.

This research instead shows that, consistent with the picture-superiority effect (Childers and Houston 1984), a higher level of personalization, including the potential applicant's photograph, is more likely to be effective. Specifically, this study demonstrated that, consistent with the HSM sufficiency principle (Chen and Chaiken 1999), the personalized ad with recipients' names and photographs increases organizational attractiveness only for those individuals who exhibit low involvement with the message. In line with signaling theory (Spence 1974), these individuals may perceive this type of personalization as a positive signal that allows them to make inferences about what it would be like to work for the advertised company (Breugh 1992; Rynes 1991). Incorporating potential employees' names and photographs, thus, may be seen as a positive signal that improves organizational attractiveness and, in turn, positively influences potential employees' intention to click on an ad or pursue a job if they initially exhibited low involvement with the message.

Contrary to some previous research (e.g., Baek and Morimoto 2012; Morimoto and Chang 2006; Pfiffelmann, Dens, and Soulez 2020), the present study did not find that personalization using recipients' names or photographs signaled manipulative intent or caused feelings of irritation. Rather, this study's findings are consistent with recent research in the context of personalized commercial ads, which has shown that the personalization of commercial ads on Facebook can lead to lower perceived intrusiveness (De Keyser, Dens, and De Pelsmacker 2022). This phenomenon

has been attributed to a trade-off between ad relevance and intrusiveness; the more the ad is relevant due to personalization, the less intrusive it is perceived. In the current study's context of personalized recruitment advertising, it is possible that recipients are used to seeing personalized messages and that individuals in the sampling frame, university students, are less sensitive to advertisers using their personal information for ad purposes. In this specific context, it is also conceivable that the positive feeling of seeing one's name or face in a recruitment ad may have translated into a perception of considerate treatment from the employer (Pfiffelmann and Soulez 2021), which could have counteracted perceptions of ad irritation.

Practical Implications

Although additional research is necessary to increase confidence in this study's findings, its results suggest that recruiters may benefit from integrating potential applicants' names and photographs in personalized recruitment ads rather than incorporating names only. Adopting this strategy could help recruiters increase their advertising performance, reach their recruitment goal more easily, and increase their attractiveness to potential employees.

Recruiters must be aware that using more extensive personalization tactics does not guarantee their recruitment advertising campaigns' success with all potential candidates. In the current study context, only recipients who exhibited low involvement with recruitment ads were more likely to be positively influenced by personalized items. This may have been because these individuals were less likely to process the ads and form their attitudes based on heuristic cues (Chen and Chaiken 1999), that is to say, personalized items in the ad which served as positive signals about the employer. Overall, the study's findings seem to suggest that personalization holds the potential to increase organizational attractiveness to individuals who may not actively be looking for a job with the advertising organization and increase their click intentions and job-pursuit intentions, thus increasing their likelihood of applying and potentially increasing the applicant pool for recruiters. As most advertising platforms online charge an advertising fee per click, recruiters may also consider employing appropriate advertising targeting to avoid engaging individuals who would not be a good fit for the position.

The managerial implications may also be relevant for managers who implement advertising systems on

social media and recruitment platforms. The current findings suggest that recruitment ad personalization may be an effective marketing tactic for recruiters, and may, therefore, encourage platform managers to consider implementing personalization advertising systems to offer recruiters the possibility to choose the desired personalization level. Improving current advertising solutions may be a major competitive advantage in attracting more advertisers (i.e., recruiters) who invest in recruitment campaigns.

Nevertheless, online platforms rarely offer advertisers personalization with user photographs (e.g., LinkedIn); the recipients of these recruitment ads are, therefore, not yet accustomed to these advertising formats. It is possible that in the future, with the sophistication of advertising systems and given the picture effectiveness, photographs will be used more regularly and, therefore, such positive effects will diminish. Other personalization elements could be used in ads in the future, such as user avatars that are already popular on certain social networks (e.g., Snapchat) or the real-time image of a user in augmented reality with the advent of the metaverse.

Limitations and Future Research

Limitations of this study include threats to ecological and external validity. The stimuli ads were shown in an experimental setting rather than on a real online platform; the lack of contextualization and interactivity may have influenced the results of this study. Findings from this research may also not extend to other social media platforms, as users may have different perceptions and expectations regarding different platforms (Voorveld et al. 2018). To address these threats to ecological and external validity, future research may consider placing the ad in a variety of existing online platforms, such as recruitment platforms (e.g., Indeed) or social media platforms (e.g., LinkedIn, Facebook). Such research could investigate the role of platform type to explore whether personalization yields similar results in different online platform contexts.

Generalization of findings may have also been limited by sampling bias and self-report. Though student samples are often used in marketing research (Bartikowski, Walsh, and Beatty 2011), and the student demographic is of particular interest to job recruiters, findings should not be generalized to a larger population, particularly in terms of age, occupation, or professional experience. It is also important to note that individuals' real-world decision making may


differ from self-report, as measuring intent does not necessarily predict behaviors (Morwitz, Johnson, and Schmittlein 1993). Future research could address these limitations by using a more diverse sample of participants and tracking online behaviors.

Finally, the present study examined the effects of ad personalization on recruitment ads' effectiveness but did not discuss the ethics of employing such practices. Because ad personalization, such as integrating recipients' names and photographs, is considered non-informative advertising content (Sahni, Wheeler, and Chintagunta 2018), this personalization tactic may be questionable from an ethical standpoint. Ethical concerns include but may not be limited to unfair manipulation as well as the violation of privacy. Personalization constitutes a display of personally identifiable information for the purpose of increasing the effectiveness of ads, often with limited oversight of organizations placing such ads and consideration for the protection of potential applicants. Advertising scholars and practitioners should therefore be encouraged to engage in a systematic discussion of the costs (e.g., reduced individual privacy) and benefits (e.g., increased organizational attractiveness) of the practice of advertising personalization in general and in the specific context of recruitment advertising.

Overall, this study makes a strong case that recruitment ad personalization effects are intricate and dependent on personalization type as well as organizational attractiveness as a mechanism and message involvement as a moderating factor. Future research is encouraged to build upon these findings by replicating this study with a more diverse sample while manipulating participants' message involvement, assessing additional attitudinal and behavioral recipients' responses, and considering ethical aspects of the practice of ad personalization.

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Appendix A. Measurement scales.

Construct, and Scale Items	Factor Loading
Message involvement	
In my current situation, I am uninterested/interested in this job advertisement. (<i>Dans ma situation actuelle, recevoir une offre d'emploi ne m'intéresse pas/m'intéresse.</i>)	0.889
In my current situation, I am not involved/involved with this job advertisement. (<i>Dans ma situation actuelle, recevoir une offre d'emploi ne m'importe pas/m'importe.</i>)	0.920
In my current situation, job advertisements are of no concern/of concern to me. (<i>Dans ma situation actuelle, recevoir une offre d'emploi ne me concerne pas/me concerne.</i>)	0.897
In my current situation, job advertisements are unimportant/important to me. (<i>Dans ma situation actuelle, recevoir une offre d'emploi n'est pas important/est important.</i>)	0.823
Job-pursuit intentions	
I would exert a great deal of effort to work for this company. (<i>Je ferais des efforts pour travailler pour cette entreprise.</i>)	0.854
I would like to work for this company. (<i>Je voudrais travailler pour cette entreprise.</i>)	0.868
I would be interested in gathering more information about this job opening. (<i>Cela m'intéresserait d'obtenir plus d'informations sur leurs offres d'emploi.</i>)	0.855
I would be willing to attend an information session about this job. (<i>Je serais prêt(e) à assister à une séance d'information sur leurs offres d'emploi.</i>)	0.837
Organizational attractiveness	
I find Valor a very attractive company. (<i>Je trouve que Valor est une entreprise attractive.</i>)	0.940
Valor would be a good company to work for. (<i>L'entreprise Valor me semble être une "great place to work."</i>)	0.902
A job at Valor would be very attractive to me. (<i>L'entreprise Valor me semble attractive pour y occuper un emploi.</i>)	0.938
Perceived ad irritation	
The advertisement was irritating. (<i>La publicité était irritante.</i>)	0.864
The advertisement was phony. (<i>La publicité était aberrante.</i>)	0.924
The advertisement was ridiculous. (<i>La publicité était absurde.</i>)	0.923
The advertisement was stupid. (<i>La publicité était stupide.</i>)	0.923
The advertisement was terrible. (<i>La publicité était désolante.</i>)	0.923
Employer familiarity	
Before this survey, I knew quite a bit about the company Valor. (<i>Avant ce questionnaire, je connaissais bien l'entreprise Valor.</i>)	0.899
Before this survey, I was very familiar with the company Valor. (<i>Avant ce questionnaire, j'étais très familier(-ère) avec l'entreprise Valor.</i>)	0.857
Before this survey, I was familiar with Valor's products or services. (<i>Avant ce questionnaire, je connaissais bien les produits et les services de l'entreprise Valor.</i>)	0.926