Fishing for Talent

An Exploration of the Influence of Metaphor and Processing Depth on Organizational Attractiveness in Recruitment Advertising

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Abstract

This study explores the impact of metaphors and processing depth on organizational attractiveness in recruitment advertisements. In light of the competitive nature of the labor market, attracting skilled employees is crucial for organizations. This research explores whether metaphors, a common persuasive tool in mainstream advertising, may enhance perceptions of organizational attractiveness when incorporated into job ads under different conditions: central and peripheral processing. A 2x2 mixed factorial design is employed, with 151 participants evaluating job ads containing either metaphorical or literal language. Contrary to expectations, results indicated no significant difference in organizational attractiveness between metaphorical and literal ads, and processing style did not significantly influence these perceptions. However, pleasure, a component of affect, significantly impacted organizational attractiveness, indicating that positive emotional engagement plays a crucial role in how job ads are perceived. These findings imply that although metaphors may not enhance organizational attractiveness, the role of emotions in the early stages of job-seeking may be critical. Future research could delve deeper into the role of affect in recruitment and the effectiveness of advertising techniques in the context of job ads.

Challenges in Recruitment Advertising

Attracting skilled employees is crucial for organizations to succeed, especially in the current labor market (Styvén et al., 2022). However, as of 2018, 45% of employers globally found it challenging to fill their vacancies (ManpowerGroup, 2018). This statistic illustrates the growing "war for talent": the high level of competition for high-quality employees in the labor market (Sharma & Tanwar, 2023). While applicants previously sought a job, there are now other considerations in the job search. For example, applicants seek organizations with compatible values and a suitable work environment, which also enable them to advance their careers and gain new skills (Younis & Hammad, 2020).

Building Organizational Attractiveness

To compete, companies may use employer branding, a concept from marketing that involves diverse recruitment activities to attract high-quality applicants (Verma & Ahmad, 2016). Employer branding aims to present organizations as attractive employers with unique identities (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). This builds perceptions of organizational attractiveness, referring to how favorably someone views a company as a workplace (Rynes et al., 1991) or its desirability as a workplace (Aiman-Smith et al., 2001). Organizational attractiveness is crucial as it influences applicant impressions, essential for attracting candidates (Albinger & Freeman, 2000; Carless, 2003).

The Role of Job Ads

Job advertisements are a key employer branding activity aimed at enhancing organizational attractiveness. They can powerfully position companies as desirable employers, crucial in the talent war (Elving et al., 2013). Often, job ads are the first interaction between an organization and potential job seekers (Bullinger & Treisch, 2015). For job seekers to apply, they

must develop positive attitudes, with job ads playing a critical role in this phase (Barber & Roehling, 1993; Rynes et al., 1991). Job seekers use cues in ads to gather information about the organization and the position, influencing their attitudes (Walker & Hinojosa, 2013). This paper explores an under-researched cue in the literature: figurative language, such as metaphor.

Job ads remain crucial for attracting applicants, especially at the start of the application process, making the study of job-seeker responses important (Horvath, 2015). Research has examined how potential applicants respond to job ads (Yockey, 2019). For instance, Gaucher, Friesen, and Kay (2011) found that gendered wording in ads can deter women from applying for male-dominated roles. Visuals in job ads significantly shape applicant perceptions (Highhouse, Brooks, & Greguras, 2009). Affirmative action statements positively influence perceptions, particularly among minority applicants (Williams & Bauer, 1994). Additionally, the clarity of job requirements and offered benefits impact job attractiveness (Chapman et al., 2005). Signaling organizational culture and values in ads also enhances applicant attraction (Cable and Turban, 2001).

However, compared to other types of advertising, recruitment advertising is relatively neglected in the literature (Lacka-Badura, 2015a). In fact, Asprey (2005: 268) expresses that "recruitment advertising has always been seen as the poor relation to 'mainstream' advertising". This may still be the case, especially in relation to job advertisements specifically; as of 2023, some researchers believe that studies on job advertisements remain scarce (Burn et al., 2023).

Comparing and Contrasting Recruitment and Mainstream Advertising

Recruitment advertising shares several similarities with mainstream advertising, suggesting crossover strategies for effectiveness and potential to bridge gaps in the literature. Both forms of advertising involve persuasion, with the employer as the sender and the applicant

as the receiver (Breaugh, 2013). Lacka-Badura (2015b) notes that both share a promotional nature, aim to create a positive organizational image, are part of other discourse (e.g., a newspaper), and seek to pique interest, elicit a response, and build credibility. Some studies on recruitment advertising have used mainstream advertising research due to the scarcity of specific recruitment advertising studies (Oikarinen & Magnus, 2016).

While mainstream and recruitment advertising share similarities, there are notable differences. Both aim to attract potential buyers or applicants and create a positive image of the employer or seller. However, recruitment advertising also seeks to reduce the number of "unsuitable" applicants, a function not found in mainstream advertising (Lacka-Badura, 2015b). Additionally, job ads aim to clearly convey job specifics, such as responsibilities and required skills, which has no clear equivalent in mainstream ads (Lacka-Badura, 2015b). Therefore, findings from one field may not generalize to the other, necessitating separate studies of job advertisements.

Exploring the Role of Metaphors in Advertising

The word “metaphor” is derived from the Greek words, “meta” and “pherein”, which mean “over” and “to carry” respectively (Knowles, 2006). This is reflective of the function of a metaphor since it carries over the properties of one concept to another. Essentially, a metaphor constitutes a conceptual mechanism through which two distinct entities are compared (Sopory & Dillard, 2002). Metaphors are literally false; therefore, the processing of a metaphor entails an attempt to relate the two entities (Hitchon, 1997).

Metaphors are common in mainstream advertising (e.g., Jeong, 2008; Septianto, 2021) and have established persuasive power, as confirmed by meta-analyses (Van Stee, 2018; Sopory & Dillard, 2002). Sopory & Dillard (2002) measured persuasion by attitude change, while Van

Stee (2018) included attitude change, behavior, and behavioral intention. Metaphors also enhance ad recall (McQuarrie & Mick, 2003). Metaphors are prevalent in job ads too, with Lacka-Badura (2015a) calling them a "universal persuasive strategy," citing examples like employers describing themselves with phrases such as an “elite portfolio of service-based clientele” or being “at the heart of big cities or big events."

Despite their use for persuasion in job ads, no studies have confirmed their effectiveness in increasing organizational attractiveness or extended research on metaphor persuasiveness to recruitment advertising. While the similarities between advertising genres suggest metaphors may be persuasive in job ads, the differences call this generalization into question. Therefore, exploring the effectiveness of metaphors in job ads in fostering organizational attractiveness is worthwhile.

The Role of Processing Depth

Studying the interaction between metaphors and processing styles is important for understanding persuasive communication through the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM; Petty & Cacioppo, 1981) and its application to recruitment advertising. The ELM identifies two routes to persuasion: the central route, involving deep engagement with the message, and the peripheral route, involving superficial cues due to low motivation or ability to process information (Cacioppo et al., 1986). Metaphors, which require cognitive resources to interpret, are more persuasive via the central route (Van Stee, 2018). This is relevant to recruitment advertising as job-seekers both skim and read ads carefully, engaging in varying depths of processing (Jones et al., 2006). Understanding these dynamics helps ensure recruitment ads appeal to both processing conditions, maximizing their impact.

This brings about the question central to this paper: How does the presence of metaphors in job advertisements influence organizational attractiveness, and how does this effect vary between central and peripheral processing conditions?

Theoretical framework

Job Advertisements Through the Lens of Signaling Theory

The importance of job ads has been studied through multiple frameworks, including signaling theory (Spence, 1973). Originally based on economics, signaling theory can be applied to recruitment (Rynes, 1991). Typically, existing employees at a company may assess the organization's culture, brand, and identity from the inside (Lievens et al., 2007). However, job seekers have more limited information about potential employers, which means they make decisions under high uncertainty. Therefore, they rely on "signals" such as attributes in job advertisements. These signals provide some insight into unknown organizational characteristics, such as company philosophy, culture, or overall treatment of employees (Verwaeren et al., 2017). The characteristics shown in job advertisements can significantly influence perceived organizational attractiveness (Bullinger & Treisch, 2015; Lohaus & Rietz, 2015). Therefore, employers aim to communicate information in job ads that positively shapes the perceptions and actions of potential applicants (Cable & Turban, 2001).

Metaphors and Organizational Attractiveness

Considering the importance of building perceptions of organizational attractiveness through employer branding (Carless, 2003), a metaphor's persuasiveness in a job ad would be linked to its ability to enhance these perceptions. While no direct evidence shows the effect of metaphors in job ads on organizational attractiveness, other linguistic elements have been shown to impact job ad attractiveness and employer perceptions. For instance, ads framed to emphasize

gains from applying are viewed as more attractive than those highlighting losses (Breaugh, 2013). English words in Dutch job ads can signal organizational attractiveness but also suggest a lower salary (van Meurs et al., 2015). Describing candidate profiles with stereotypically male traits results in fewer female applicants, but not when worded in behaviors rather than traits (Born & Taris, 2010).

There is a general preference for vivid and specific language in job ads (Breaugh and Starke, 2000). However, metaphors, being more abstract and open to interpretation, might be counterproductive if they obscure details (Wilhoit, 2021). Despite this, there is no consensus on the ideal linguistic style for job ads (Elving et al., 2013).

Paired with the parallels between recruitment and mainstream advertising as well as the persuasive power of metaphors in mainstream ads, the influence of linguistic aspects of job ads on organizational attractiveness suggests that the use of metaphors in job ads may lead to heightened organizational attractiveness.

H1: The presence of a metaphor in a recruitment ad will lead to higher organizational attractiveness than an ad with only literal language.

The Interaction of Metaphor with Processing Style

To explain the persuasive effects of metaphor compared to literal language, especially in advertising contexts, Van Stee (2018) finds support for the resource-matching explanation. The resource-matching explanation posits that metaphors lead to more persuasion when the person has the cognitive resources they need to process the metaphor (Jaffe, 1988). Van Stee (2018) links this to the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM; Petty & Cacioppo, 1981). From the perspective of the ELM (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981), van Stee (2018) finds that when an

individual has the cognitive resources to process a metaphor, the presence of a metaphor will lead to more persuasion; alternatively, a literal message would take fewer cognitive resources to process, and thereby leave the ability to create counter-arguments or irrelevant thoughts.

In a recruitment advertising context, a metaphor presented in a central processing situation—when an applicant has the motivation and ability to evaluate an ad—may be more persuasive than in a peripheral processing situation, such as when a candidate is skimming ads or not actively seeking employment. This is relevant because job-seekers report both skimming and carefully reading job ads (Jones et al., 2006). Peripheral processing can occur for several reasons. Redman and Mathews (1992) note that employed individuals may casually skim recruitment ads due to a lack of motivation to carefully process them. Additionally, Van Hoye and Lievens (2005) suggest that job ads may be perceived as less credible than other recruitment sources, leading job-seekers to skim them. Ryan et al. (2000) speculate that many job ads are overlooked due to the volume of surrounding ads, a situation still relevant today as job openings continue to rise, with NBC reporting in 2021 that there were more job vacancies in the US than ever before (White, 2021).

In recruitment advertising, metaphors are more persuasive in central processing situations, where applicants are motivated to evaluate an ad, compared to peripheral processing situations, like skimming or not actively seeking employment. This is relevant since job-seekers both skim and read ads carefully (Jones et al., 2006). Peripheral processing occurs for various reasons: employed individuals may lack motivation (Redman & Mathews, 1992), job ads may seem less credible (Van Hoye & Lievens, 2005), and the sheer volume of ads can lead to them being overlooked (Ryan et al., 2000; White, 2021). Online job boards, with more ads, also promote peripheral processing (Mahadi et al., 2022).

However, central processing can be driven by factors like financial need (Larsen & Phillips, 2002). Applicants' elaboration likelihood varies and may not reflect their quality. Understanding what appeals to both processing conditions helps avoid excluding qualified candidates. Including elements for both central and peripheral processors maximizes the applicant pool.

While the application of the ELM to metaphors has primarily been studied in the context of mainstream advertising, there is substantial evidence suggesting that the processing of recruitment ads can be similar to mainstream ads under different elaboration likelihood conditions. For instance, Jones et al. (2006) found that recruitment ads are processed similarly to mainstream ads when evaluated under the same conditions. This implies that elaboration likelihood might influence how metaphors are processed in job ads in a manner that is similar to the mainstream ad context.

This leads to the following hypotheses about the interaction between metaphors and processing style:

> *H2: The presence of metaphors in job ads has a greater positive impact on organizational attractiveness in the central processing condition compared to the peripheral processing condition, while the absence of metaphors has a greater positive impact on organizational attractiveness in the peripheral processing condition compared to the central processing condition*

Exploratory Analyses

Application Intention

According to the theory of planned behavior, the intention to perform a behavior is a causal antecedent of this behavior, which implies that the intention to apply for a job causes application behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Furthermore, application intention has been shown to correlate strongly with organizational attractiveness (Coelho et al., 2022). However, it is a distinct concept, often considered to result from factors including organizational attractiveness (Elbendary et al., 2023). Practically, HR departments seek not only to present themselves as attractive employers but to convert this attractiveness into applications (Elbendary et al., 2023). Therefore, intention to apply has also been included in this study.

Affect

Largely, affect may influence persuasion through processing style. The heuristic/systematic processing model (HSM) of persuasion suggests that individuals in a positive mood tend to process information heuristically, while those in a negative mood engage in substantive processing (Schwarz, Bless, & Bohner 1991; Wegener & Petty, 2013). Therefore, it's possible that affect alone influences feelings of organizational attractiveness by altering the processing style. Furthermore, according to the Affect Infusion Model (Forgas, 2013), processing style may influence the extent to which affect is used as a heuristic. Therefore, the degree to which affect influences judgments may depend on the processing strategy. When individuals engage in central processing, their affective state can significantly influence their perceptions and evaluations. In contrast, during heuristic processing, affect may serve as a simple cue or heuristic. (Forgas, 2013).

Beyond the role of affect in persuasion, affect also plays a significant role in the job application process. Job-seekers report lower mood the longer their search goes on (Krueger et al., 2011). In turn, strong negative emotions influence job-seekers' perceptions of employer

attractiveness (Auer et al., 2019). It is then plausible that the effectiveness of metaphors in job advertisements varies with the job-seekers emotional state, which may be consistent with the stage of the job-seeking process. In the early stages, metaphors may enhance positive impressions, but as the job search progresses, job-seekers may begin to prefer clear and detailed information. The influence of affect is therefore worth exploring.

Method

Design

The current study employed a 2x2 mixed factorial design to investigate how the processing condition–central or peripheral–moderates the effect of the presence of metaphor in a job ad on perceptions of employer attractiveness.

The between-subjects factor in this study is the processing condition, which consists of two groups: peripheral processing and central processing. Participants were randomly assigned to one of these two groups, which helps control for individual differences that may affect the results.

The within-subjects factor in this study comprised two conditions: the metaphor condition and the non-metaphor condition (see Appendix A for the metaphor and literal versions of each ad). The participants in both processing groups were exposed to recruitment ads with and without metaphors in order to control for intra-personal variability. The ads were presented in a counterbalanced order; this serves to mitigate any order effects.

Participants

This experiment was conducted through Qualtrics. Participants were collected via two means: convenience sampling and non-probability sampling. Convenience sampling has been shown to produce comparable outcomes to those of population-based samples (Krupnikov &

Levine, 2014). For convenience sampling, the questionnaire was disseminated on social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook, and it was emailed and sent via Whatsapp to different groups. The non-probability sample was recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk, which provides researchers with the ability to have a varied pool of participants, relatively easily and affordably. It is generally suitable for research (Valli & Nai, 2023).

Participants who did not pass the attention check (N = 49) were excluded from the analysis. The final sample consisted of 151 participants, of whom 51% were male, 47.7% female, and 1.3% other. The majority of participants (72.3%) were between 25 and 34 years old, with 5.2% being above 18 but below 24, 12.9% between 35 and 44, 5.8% between 45 and 54, and 3.9% between 55 and 64. Most participants where highly educated, with 69.7 having a bachelor's degree and 22.6% having a graduate degree. On the other hand, 39% had some university experience but without a degree, 0.6% had a vocational degree, and the rest completed secondary school or less. Most (82.6%) participants worked full-time, 9% worked part-time, with the rest being unemployed (0.6%), homemakers (2.6%), students (3.9%), or other (1.3%). Almost half of the participants (48.4%) had between 2 and 5 years of work experience. Additionally, 4.5% had up to 1 year, 14.8% had between 1 and 2 years, 18.1% had between 5 and 10 years, and 14.2% had over 10 years of experience. Finally, regarding fluency, 30.3% were native English speakers, 23.9% described themselves as proficient, 23.2 as advanced, 12.9% as intermediate, and 9.7% as basic.

The participants who were recruited through social media (N = 47) received no remuneration while the participants recruited through MTurk (N=108) received $0.70 for completing the questionnaire. The $0.70 fee was chosen because it translates to an hourly wage

of $7, which falls above the average wage but still meets budgetary constraints considering this project is self-funded on a student budget (Hara et al., 2017).

Materials

Between-Subjects Factor: Processing Conditions

Central Processing Conditioon. The manipulation in this condition was adapted from several similar manipulations in other studies. Similar to what was done in a study by van Meurs et al. (2015), participants were instructed to read the ad very carefully and had access to the ad the entire time while answering questions, as it was repeated at the top of the question list. Furthermore, similar to the central processing manipulation by Jones et al. (2006), these participants were additionally told they will create a ranking of their choices, including an explanation of why they made these choices. In a pilot, participants indicated that 20 seconds was enough time to read the excerpt carefully. Therefore, the appearance of the "next" button was delayed for 20 seconds.

Peripheral Processing Condition. Participants in the peripheral processing condition were simply asked to glance at the ads (Jones et al., 2006). In a pilot, participants indicated that 12 seconds was enough time to skim through the excerpt but not read it carefully. Therefore, the participants had access to the ad for 12 seconds including a visible timer, after which it auto-progressed to the questions. Similar to what was done in van Meurs et al. (2015) to elicit peripheral processing, participants did not have access to the ad while answering the questions.

Within-Subjects Factor: Presence of Metaphors

The within-subjects factor in this study comprised two conditions: the metaphor condition and the non-metaphor condition. The participants in both processing groups were exposed to recruitment ads with and without metaphors in order to control for intrapersonal

variability. The ads were presented in a counterbalanced order; this serves to mitigate any order effects.

Based on the recommendation of O'Keefe (2015), two ads were presented per condition. This multi-message design ensures generalizability in studies about message characteristics (O'Keefe, 2015).

Metaphor Condition. In the metaphor condition, participants were exposed to recruitment ads with a metaphor. While designing the metaphor stimuli for this study, the findings of two meta-analyses on the persuasiveness of metaphors in mainstream advertising were considered (Sopory & Dillard, 2002; van Stee, 2018). In both meta-analyses, target familiarity moderated a metaphor's persuasive power, which is consistent with the resource-matching metaphor. However, the company names in this study are all fabricated in order to control for familiarity with the company. This is because it may be a confounding variable when determining organizational attractiveness, but also because communication with potential applicants through job advertisements is especially crucial for lesser-known companies, which encounter an 'awareness hurdle' in attracting applicants (Cable & Turban, 2001) and are often neglected in recruitment research (Mölk & Auer, 2018; Russell & Brannan, 2016). Therefore, target familiarity was relatively low for all messages.

Metaphor position, novelty, and extendedness were determined by Sopory and Dillard (2002) to also influence a metaphor's persuasiveness, although van Stee (2018) did not find significant differences according to those three variables. Position and extendedness were taken into account while designing the stimuli, since there is some supporting evidence and they are relatively simple to execute. Therefore, the metaphors were unextended and the sentence containing the metaphor was placed at the beginning of each text, consistent with Sopory and

Dillard's (2002) findings. The novelty factor was not implemented due to the presence of mixed evidence as well as the practical difficulties of determining a metaphor's novelty, especially since current methods for doing so are not fully developed (Reimann & Scheffler, 2024).

Non-Metaphor Condition. In contrast, the literal condition contains recruitment ads that are identical barring one difference: instead of beginning with a metaphor, they begin with a literal sentence that is identical in content to the metaphor. This provides a baseline to assess the impact of metaphors.

Manipulation Checks

Processing Condition Check. To assess whether the processing condition manipulation was successful (i.e. that the participants were more engaged and motivated to read the advertisement carefully in the central processing condition than in the peripheral processing condition), a manipulation check was conducted. On a 5-point scale, participants were asked about their level of motivation to read the ad and complete the questionnaire, how motivated they felt to read the ad carefully, and how involved they felt while completing the questionnaire (adapted from van Meurs et al., 2015).

Ad Realism Check. Another manipulation check, also adapted from Jones et al. (2006), was conducted to ensure that the participants' responses would generalize to job-seekers outside a laboratory setting. This comprises requesting participants to state their agreement with the statements, "The job advertisements looked like those that appear on a job board" (adapted from the original, which stated "newspaper" instead of job board) and ''If I were looking for a job, I would consider applying for some of the jobs that I selected" (Jones et al., 2006).

Pretest

To verify the equivalence of the meaning of the first sentence of an ad in both metaphorical and literal conditions, a pilot test was conducted. In order to ensure that this study mimics real-world ads, 12 ads were extracted from the job board Jooble.org. All 12 ads began with a metaphor. The company name was removed and replaced with a name that was fabricated using ChatGPT, by replacing the name with X and entering the prompt, “Replace X with a made-up company name”. Another version of the ad was then created, with a literal version instead of a metaphorical one. The purpose of the pretest was to determine whether the two versions were perceived as having roughly the same meaning regardless of the style being metaphorical or literal, in order to control for the effects of meaning differences in the study.

Participants were shown both versions of an introductory sentence and, and asked to rate their agreement with 4 statements, adapted from Kim et al. (2012):

> "A (metaphorical headline) and B (literal headline) are saying exactly the same thing," "A and B are saying almost the same thing," "A and B are not quite saying the same thing," and "A and B are not saying the same thing at all" (Kim et al., 2012).

The 4 ads with the lowest mean scores were selected, since a low mean score indicates high similarity in perceived meaning between the metaphor and literal versions. The first chosen ad (Ad 1) has the lowest mean (1.53) with a standard deviation (SD) of 0.63, followed by Ad 3 (M = 1.87, SD = 0.82), Ad 4 (M = 1.83, SD = 0.75), and Ad 2 (M = 1.97, SD = 0.85) statements. These low mean scores, along with relatively low standard deviations, demonstrate consistent agreement among respondents regarding the similarity of these statement pairs. (See Appendix A for the 4 ads).

Measures

Dependent Variable: Organizational Attractiveness

Organizational attractiveness,the main dependent variable, was measured using the scale for Organizational Attractiveness (Bauer and Aiman-Smith, 1996), also used by Aiman-Smith et al. (2001) and Highhouse et al. (2003). It includes 5 items such as, “This would be a good company to work for”, rated on a 7-point Likert scale. The average Cronbach's Alpha was 0.89, indicating high reliability.

Covariate: Affect

In light of the influence of strong negative emotions of job-seekers’ perceptions of employer attractiveness (Auer et al., 2019), affect is a potential covariate. Therefore, the analysis includes as a covariate affect as measured by the Affective Slider (AS) (Betella & Verschure, 2016), a validated instrument where individuals move two sliders to indicate their current valence (pleasure) and arousal.

Control measures

Text evaluation

In this study, the same text evaluation measures used in the study by van Meurs et al. (2015)—attractiveness, clarity, and naturalness—were included as control measures to ensure that the means do not differ significantly between the stimuli. This approach helps prevent potential confounding variables related to stimuli construction. The following scales developed by van Meurs et al. (2015) were used to measure participants’ evaluations of the text of each job ad.

Attractiveness of the Text. Participants rated their agreement with the statement, “I thought the text was attractive” on a 5-point Likert item scale.

Clarity of the Text. Participants rated their agreement with the statement, "I thought the text was clear" on a 5-point scale.

Naturalness of the Text. On a 5-point scale, participants indicated the extent of their agreement with the following statements: "I consider this job advertisement realistic" and "I believe this job advertisement is a good example of a job advertisement". Cronbach's Alpha (α) was 0.69, indicating a moderate level of reliability.

Procedure

Participants accessed the study through an online survey on Qualtrics. After receiving a consent form, they received a demographic questionnaire that obtained information on variables that could influence participants' responses to job ads and their evaluation of the company, namely age, gender, education level, employment status, and years of work experience. Following the approach of similar previous studies (e.g. Highhouse et al., 1998; Jones et al., 2006), participants were instructed to behave and think as if they were seeking a job, even if they were not currently job seekers. Participants were randomly assigned to either the central processing or the peripheral processing group. This survey presented job ads that resemble an ad on the job board Indeed. After viewing each job ad, participants were asked to fill out the listed scales measuring various dependent variables related to their perceptions of the ads and the employer.

Statistical Analysis

Normality Tests

All variables were checked for normality using The Kolmogorov–Smirnov test, which is the recommended test since the sample size exceeds 50 (Mishra et al., 2019). On the Komogorov-Smirnov test, both the organizational attractiveness in the metaphor condition ($p <$

0.01) and in the literal condition ($p < 0.05$) showed significant results, indicating that neither variable follows a normal distribution. Despite this, the Q-Q plots indicated a roughly normal distribution with minor deviations. The data wasbootstrapped in further analyses in order to address the non-normality indicated by the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and ensure the robustness of the analyses. (See Appendix B for the normality tests and Q-Q plots).

Data Transformation To analyze the impact of the inclusion of a metaphor on organizational attractiveness and other variables, separate variables were created to capture the effects on these dependent variables. Participants rated two ads per metaphor condition within their assigned processing condition. To facilitate the mixed ANOVA analysis, the ratings per metaphor condition were grouped and averaged, resulting in one column for organizational attractiveness in the metaphor condition and another for the literal condition. The same approach was applied to the other variables: ad realism, attractiveness of the text, and clarity of the text. For each dependent variable, scores were averaged across participants for both the metaphor and non-metaphor conditions to ensure a reliable measure of each variable's effect. This transformation allowed for a direct comparison of the mean values of the dependent variables for each condition within the same participant. Furthermore, to control for potential confounding effects, affect (measured as pleasure and arousal) was included as a covariate in the analysis.

Variance and Covariance Analysis

To study whether the presence of a metaphor at the beginning of a job ad leads to more positive evaluations of a company and how this presence interacts with processing style, a 2x2 mixed factorial ANOVA was conducted with processing condition (central vs. peripheral) as the between-subjects factor and the presence or absence of a metaphor as the within-subjects factor.

Since we were mainly interested in the effect of metaphor in job ads on employer branding efforts, the main dependent variable was organizational attractiveness.

Therefore, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) were conducted. Using a mixed factorial Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), H1 and H2 were tested, which relate to the effect of metaphor on organizational attractiveness and the interaction effect of metaphor and processing condition respectively. An ANCOVA was also conducted to assess the influence of affect, comprising pleasure and arousal, as a covariate in the model. This served to control for the potential confounding effects of these covariates, helping determine whether the presence of metaphors in job ads affects organizational attractiveness while controlling for participants' emotional states.

The mean differences in clarity, text attractiveness, and ad realism between the metaphor and literal conditions were compared using paired samples t-tests. Correlations between the ratings of the metaphor and literal conditions were calculated to assess the consistency of participants' perceptions across these measures. Since the processing manipulation was unsuccessful, a linear regression was also performed to assess whether affect influences processing style.

Finally, separate regression analyses were performed for the metaphor and literal conditions to determine the specific impact of pleasure and arousal on organizational attractiveness. This allowed for a detailed investigation of affective contributions to the overall model.

Furthermore, all analyses were conducted using SPSS, at a significance level of $\alpha = .05$.

Results

Main Effects and Interaction Effects

This section presents the results of the analyses conducted to test H1 and H2.

Organizational Attractiveness in the Metaphor versus Literal Language Condition

This section presents the results of the analyses conducted to test H1. The overall mean for the metaphor condition was 5.2 (SD = 1.04) across 155 participants, while the total mean for the literal condition was also 5.2 (SD = 1.01). These results indicate that organizational attractiveness is perceived highly similarly under both the metaphor and literal conditions, with only slight variations in mean ratings and standard deviations. The main effect of ad type was not significant, $F(1, 151) = 0.15$, $p = 0.7$. This suggests that there was no significant difference in organizational attractiveness ratings between metaphorical and literal ads. Therefore, H1 is rejected.

Metaphor versus Literal Language Under Two Processing Conditions

For the metaphor condition, the mean organizational attractiveness rating was 5.26 (SD = 1.08) for the central processing condition, and 5.13 (SD = 1.02) for the peripheral processing condition. In the literal condition, the mean organizational attractiveness rating was 5.25 (SD = 1.06) for the central processing condition, and 5.15 (SD = 0.97) for the peripheral processing condition.

The interaction effect between ad type and processing condition was not significant, $F(1, 151) = 0.06$, $p = .812$. This shows that the impact of ad type on organizational attractiveness ratings did not differ based on whether the processing was central or peripheral. Therefore, H2 is not supported. Additionally, the main effect of the processing condition was also not significant,

F(1, 151) = 0.19, p = .765, indicating that the type of processing (central vs. peripheral) did not significantly affect perceptions of organizational attractiveness.

The Influence of Affect on Organizational Attractiveness

The Impact of Pleasure and Arousal on the Model. Using an affective slider, the participants rated their levels of pleasure and arousal. The histograms in figures X and Y illustrate pleasure and arousal levels, demonstrating a skew towards higher arousal and pleasure levels among the participants. The distribution suggests that most participants reported higher levels of arousal and pleasure, with pleasure ratings slightly exceeding arousal ratings on average.

Figure 1

Distribution of Self-Reported Arousal Ratings in the Sample Population

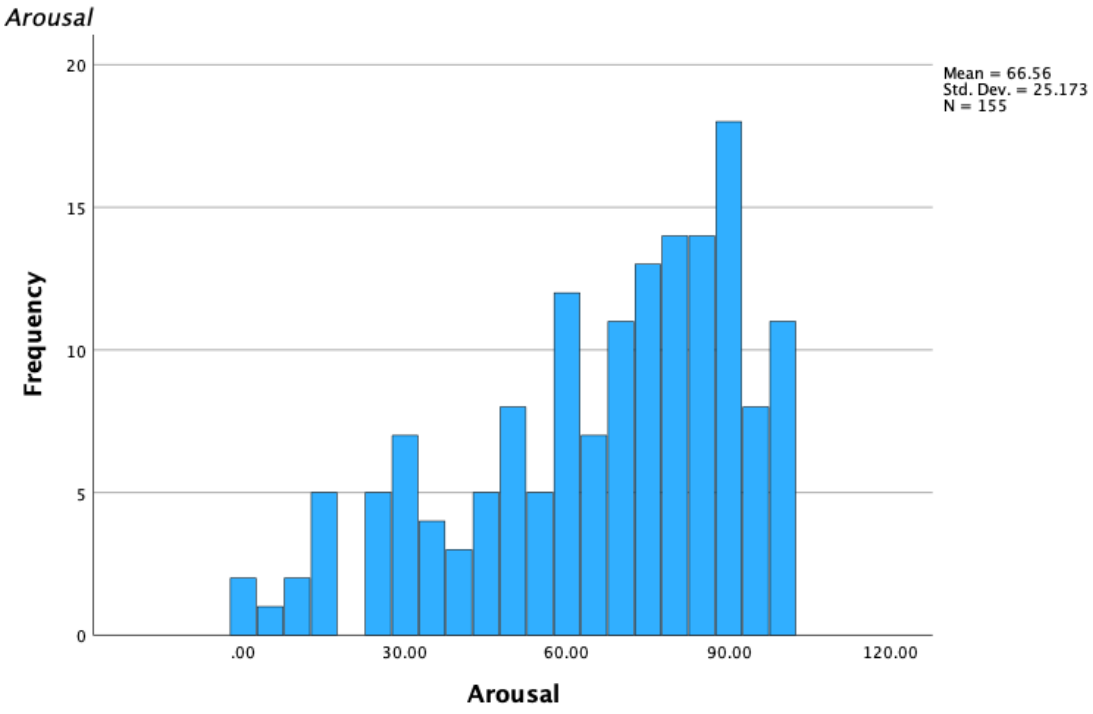
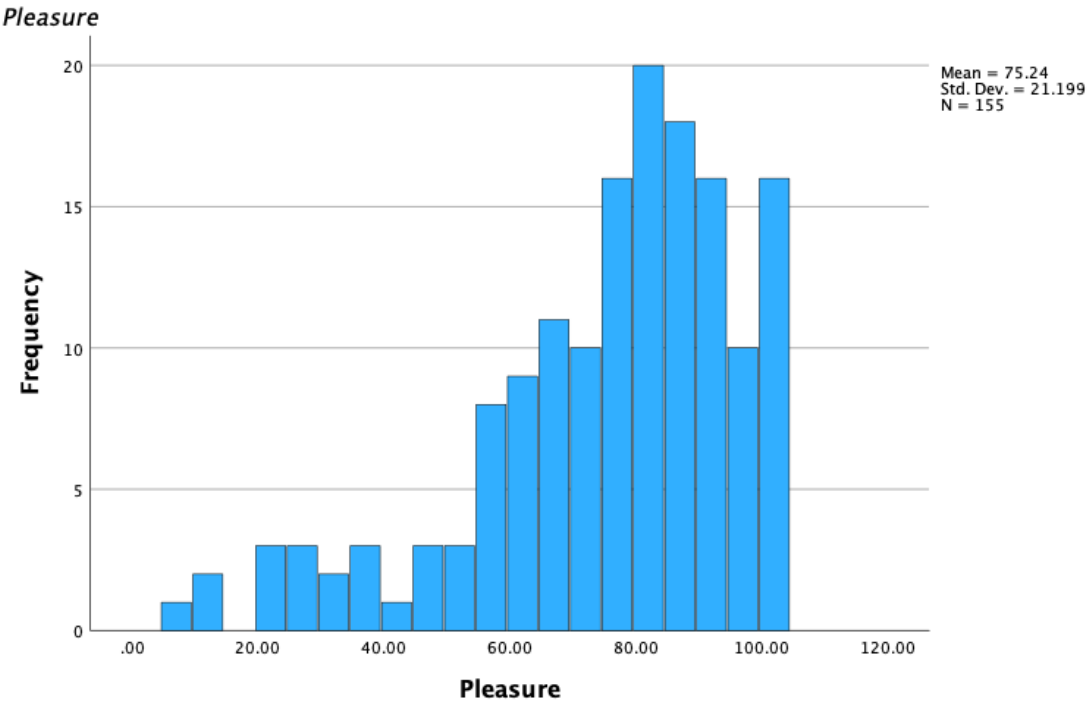


Figure 2

Distribution of Self-Reported Pleasure Ratings in the Sample Population



The ANCOVA results for the influence of affect as a covariate on organizational attractiveness under different processing conditions reveal significant overall models, for the literal ads [$F(3, 151) = 4.324$, $p = .006$] as well as the metaphoric ads [$F(3, 151) = 5.263$, $p = .002$]. For the organizational attractiveness associated with the literal ads, significant predictors included the intercept ($p < .001$) and pleasure ($p = .003$), with arousal ($p = .876$) and processing condition ($p = .850$) being non-significant. Similarly, for the metaphoric ads, the intercept ($p < .001$) and pleasure ($p < .001$) were significant, while arousal ($p = .821$) and condition ($p = .717$) were not. Both models indicated strong baseline levels of attractiveness, with pleasure being a

consistent significant predictor of organizational attractiveness for both metaphoric and literal ads.

Affect in the Metaphor versus Literal Condition. To determine the specific impact of pleasure and arousal on organizational attractiveness in both metaphor and literal ad conditions, a regression analysis was conducted. This allows for a more detailed investigation of the contribution of affect and pleasure to the overall model.

Metaphor condition. The regression analysis for the metaphor condition indicated that pleasure significantly influenced organizational attractiveness ($B = 0.016$, $p < 0.001$), while arousal did not have a significant effect ($B = -0.001$, $p = 0.810$). The model explained approximately 9.4% of the variance in organizational attractiveness ($R^2 = 0.094$), which is statistically significant ($F(2, 152) = 7.874$, $p < 0.001$). The intercept of the model was4.083 ($p < 0.001$). These results suggest that higher levels of pleasure are associated with increased organizational attractiveness in the metaphor condition, whereas arousal does not significantly impact it.

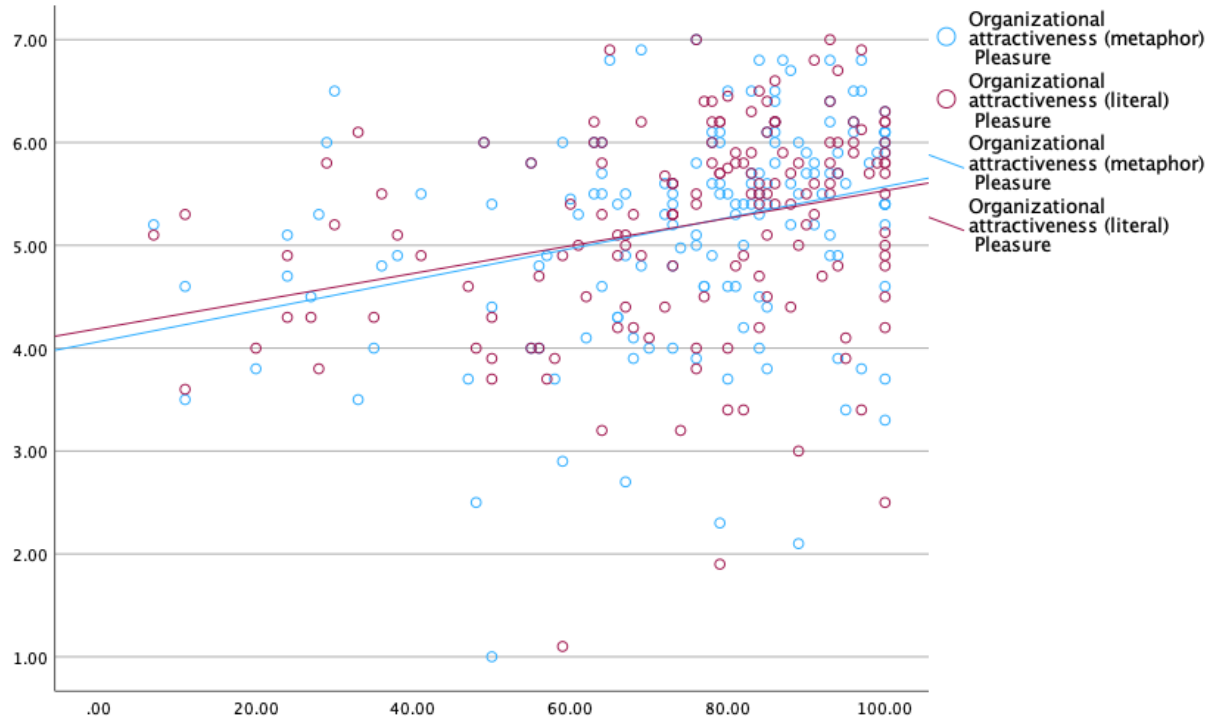
Literal condition. A regression analysis indicated that pleasure significantly influenced organizational attractiveness ($B = 0.013$, $p = 0.003$), while arousal did not have a significant effect ($B = 0.001$, $p = 0.881$). The model explained approximately 7.9% of the variance in organizational attractiveness ($R^2 = 0.079$), which is statistically significant ($F(2, 152) = 6.510$, $p = 0.002$). The intercept of the model was4.178 ($p < 0.001$). These results suggest that higher levels of pleasure are associated with increased organizational attractiveness, whereas arousal does not significantly impact it.

Comparison between the conditions. In comparing the two models, the effect of self-reported pleasure on the ratings of organizational attractiveness under the metaphor versus non-

metaphor condition revealed modest differences. In the first model, where the dependent variable is the organizational attractiveness in the metaphor conditions, the unstandardized coefficient for pleasure was 0.02, which is slightly higher than the 0.01 in the second model with the organizational attractiveness of the literal stimuli as the dependent variable. Similarly, the standardized coefficient (Beta) for pleasure was.32 in the first model, indicating a stronger effect compared to the .27 in the second model. The t-statistic also reflected this, with a value of 3.58 in the first model versus 3.07 in the second model, highlighting a slightly stronger effect in the first model. Therefore, while models show pleasure as a significant predictor, with p-values of <.001 and p = 0.003 respectively, for both metaphor and literal ads, there is a somewhat stronger relationship between pleasure and organizational attractiveness measures for metaphor versions compared to that of literal versions.

Figure 2

Pleasure as a Predictor for Organizational Attractiveness (Metaphorical)



Manipulation checks

Processing Check. For the processing check, 3 statements were rated on a 5-point scale, indicating motivation to read the ads, motivation to complete the questionnaire, and feeling involved while completing the questionnaire. For the statement "I felt motivated to read these ads," the results showed a difference between the peripheral (M = 3.7, SD = 1.04, N = 79) and central (M = 3.99, SD = 1.02, N = 75) conditions [t (152) =1.75, p = 0.041 (one-sided)] with a mean difference of 0.29. However, the 95% confidence interval (CI) was [-0.04, 0.62], which includes zero. Therefore, the result should be interpreted with caution as it suggests that the true mean difference could be zero. Additionally, the effect size measured by Cohen's d was d = 0.28 with a standardizer of 1.03, which suggests low practical significance. The 95% confidence interval for Cohen's d ranged from -0.04 to 0.6.

Similarly, no significant difference was found for motivation to complete the questionnaire (M = 4.13, SD = 0.8) [t (150) = 1.17, p=0.123 (one-sided)] or feeling involved while completing this questionnaire (M = 4.01, SD = .81, N = 78) [t (152) = 1.61, p = 0.055 (one-sided)]. (See Appendix C for the corresponding tables).

Ad Realism Check. Participants rated the realism of job advertisements through rating their agreement with two sentences on a 5-point scale. For the sentence “The job advertisements looked like those that appear on a job board", both the peripheral (M = 4.19, SD = 0.80, N = 75) and central (M = 4.13, SD = 0.81, N = 79) conditions had high mean scores, indicating the ads were perceived as realistic in both conditions. No significant difference was found between the groups, t(152) = 0.464, p = 0.322, with a mean difference of 0.06 (95% CI: -0.196 to 0.316). The

effect size was small (Cohen's d = 0.075). For the sentence ‘‘If I were looking for a job, I would consider applying for some of the jobs that I selected", high mean scores were observed in both the peripheral (M = 4.01, SD = 0.99, N = 75) and central (M = 4.05, SD = 0.78, N = 79) conditions. The difference between groups was not significant, t(152) = -0.260, p = 0.398, with a mean difference of -0.04 (95% CI: -0.321 to 0.247). The effect size was negligible (Cohen's d = -0.042). These results indicate that job ads were perceived as realistic, with no significant differences between the metaphorical and literal ad conditions. (See Appendix D for the corresponding tables).

Baseline Comparison of the Four Ads

To ensure that any detected differences in the main analyses can be attributed to the metaphor and processing condition manipulations rather than an inherent aspect of the ad, the four ads were compared to determine whether they are evaluated similarly. To determine this, the ads were compared based on the control variables, which are related to text evaluation: clarity, text attractiveness, and realism. For clarity, the mean ratings ranged from 3.83 (Ad 3) to 4.013 (Ad 1) on a 5-point Likert scale, with standard deviations ranging from 0.86 (Ad 1) to 1.03 (Ad 3). For attractiveness, the mean ratings ranged from 3.748 (Ad 3) to 3.987 (Ad 1), with standard deviations from 0.94 (Ad 1) to 1.1 (Ad 3). For naturalness, the ratings ranged from 3.79 (Ad 3) to 3.92 (Ad 1), with standard deviations from 0.77 (Ad 1) to 0.93 (Ad 3). These results indicate that all ads were perceived as fairly clear, moderately attractive, and moderately natural. For all three control variables, there was a moderate level of variability in responses. Considering there are no significant outliers, all four ads were perceived as similarly clear, attractive, and natural by participants. (See Appendix E for the corresponding tables)

The perceived organizational attractiveness, which is the main dependent variable, was also compared across the ads. The mean organizational attractiveness of the four ads used, including both versions, showed a high degree of similarity, ranging from 4.99 to 5.38 on a 7-point Likert scale. This indicates that all ads were perceived fairly positively and closely in terms of organizational attractiveness. Furthermore, the Pearson correlation coefficients between the ratings of the four ads substantiated this similarity. All correlations were statistically significant ($p<.001$), with coefficients ranging from 0.53 to 0.66. This indicates a strong positive relationship between the organizational attractiveness ratings of different ads, indicating that there were no significant outliers in terms of perceived organizational attractiveness, and respondents who rated one ad highly also tended to rate the others highly.

The similar ratings attributed to the original four ads across the aforementioned variables confirm the homogeneity of the ads and create a baseline for evaluating the impact of the inclusion of metaphors. This consistency strengthens the experimental design.

Exploratory Analyses

Control Measures: Clarity, Text Attractiveness, and Ad Realism

The mean differences and relationships between the metaphor and literal versions of the ads were compared regarding clarity, attractiveness, and realism. For clarity, the mean score for the metaphor condition was 3.94 (SD = .77) and for the literal condition was 3.93 (SD = .75). For attractiveness, the metaphor condition had a mean score of 3.87 (SD = 0.8), while the literal condition had a mean score of 3.85 (SD = .79). Regarding naturalness, the metaphor condition scored a mean of 3.86 (SD = 0.72) and the literal condition scored a mean of 3.89 (SD = .71). Additionally, paired samples correlations indicated strong positive relationships between the

metaphor and literal conditions for all variables. The correlation for clarity was 0.67 ($p < .001$), that for attractiveness was 0.58 ($p < .001$), and that for naturalness was 0.63 ($p < .001$). These significant correlations suggest that participants' perceptions were consistent regardless of the presence or absence of metaphor. (See Appendix F for the corresponding tables).

Affect and Motivation

Considering the processing manipulation was unsuccessful, an additional analysis was performed to assess whether affect had an influence on processing style. Interestingly, a linear regression indicated that the scales of the affective slider–valence and arousal–accounted for approximately 14.3% of the variance in motivation to read the ads ($R^2 = .143$). The overall regression model was statistically significant, $F(2, 151) = 12.56$, $p < .001$. However, only pleasure was a significant positive predictor of motivation ($B = 0.02$, $SE = 0$, $\beta = 0.37$, $t = 4.31$, $p < .001$), suggesting that higher pleasure ratings had a moderately positive effect on motivation to read the ads ($\beta = 0.37$). On the other hand, the effect of arousal was not significant ($B = 0$, $SE = 0$, $\beta = 0.01$, $t = 0.14$, $p = 0.89$), indicating that arousal did not significantly predict motivation. (See Appendix G for the corresponding tables).

Discussion & Conclusion

Summary of Findings

The main research question of this study is: "How do metaphors in recruitment advertisements and the processing style (central vs. peripheral) influence perceptions of organizational attractiveness?" To address this research question, a 2x2 mixed factorial design was employed, with processing condition (central vs. peripheral) as the between-subjects factor and the presence of metaphors (metaphor vs. literal) as the within-subjects factor. Affect was

also analyzed as a covariate. It was hypothesized that the presence of a metaphor in an ad would lead to higher organizational attractiveness than an ad with only literal language (H1) and that the presence of metaphors in job ads would have a greater positive impact on organizational attractiveness in the central processing condition compared to the peripheral processing condition (H2).

However, contrary to H1 and H2, the study found that there was no significant difference in organizational attractiveness ratings between job ads with metaphors and those with literal language, which suggests that the presence of metaphors alone does not inherently enhance the attractiveness of an organization. Similarly, the interaction effect between ad type and processing condition was also not significant, indicating that the impact of metaphors on organizational attractiveness ratings did not differ based on the processing style. The induced processing condition alone also did not significantly affect perceptions of organizational attractiveness.

Interestingly, the exploratory analysis revealed that pleasure–the valence component of the affect, as measured by the Affective Slider (Betella & Verschure, 2016)–had a significant effect on organizational attractiveness ratings. This was consistent across all conditions. This indicates that participants who reported higher levels of pleasure found the organizations more attractive, regardless of ad type and processing condition, which implies that a positive emotional state may be a crucial factor in the effect of job ads on perceptions of organizational attractiveness.

Manipulation Checks

The results of the manipulation check based on Petty and Cacioppo (1986) demonstrated that the participants were fairly motivated to engage with the ads, regardless of the processing

instructions. This is reflected in the high overall motivation scores, which ranged from 3.7 to 4.13 on a 5-point scale. These findings present a limitation: the processing manipulation was ineffective, as detailed in the limitation section.

Interpretation of Main Findings

Metaphor and Organizational Attractiveness

Considering that recruitment advertising is relatively neglected in the literature (Lacka-Badura, 2015a), the effects of different ad types and processing conditions are not well understood. However, considering the persuasive effects of metaphor in mainstream advertising (Van Stee, 2018; Sopory & Dillard, 2002), it was expected that metaphors would be persuasive in this context as well. One potential explanation is that the lack of a significant main effect of metaphor on organizational attractiveness may be consistent with Wilhoit (2021)'s suggestion that abstract language could potentially obscure the specific details necessary in job advertisements. Breaugh and Starke (2000) also suggest a need for clarity in job ads. This may be attributed to the function of job ads; unlike mainstream ads, job ads serve the dual function of attracting applicants and clearly conveying job specifics (Lacka-Badura, 2015b). It is possible that this renders metaphors less effective compared to mainstream advertising, since the focus may be less on persuasion and more on conveying specific information. A complementary explanation may be that metaphors do have some positive effect like in mainstream advertising, consistent with Van Stee (2018) and Sopory and Dillard (2002), but this effect may then be undermined by this need for clarity in job ads.

Interestingly, however, participants in this study rated the ads as relatively clear, regardless of the use of metaphors. This suggests that the inclusion of metaphors may not have obscured the necessary details of the job advertisements, contrary to the concerns raised by Wilhoit (2021) and Breaugh and Starke (2000). Therefore, the aforementioned explanation falls short. A possible explanation for the lack of significant effect on organizational attractiveness, despite the perceived clarity, might be that the type or complexity of the metaphors used did not enhance the appeal of the ads similarly to in mainstream advertising contexts (Van Stee, 2018; Sopory & Dillard, 2002), and there may be a reason unrelated to clarity. Further research may explore text-related factors other than clarity which may be effective in a mainstream ad context but not in a recruitment ad context, and therefore potentially explain the lack of effect of metaphor.

Therefore, the absence of a significant effect could be due to the metaphors not strongly enhancing the persuasive appeal needed in the recruitment context, even though they were clear. Further research is needed to explore the types and complexity of metaphors that might balance both clarity and attractiveness in job ads, and to better understand the nuanced ways in which metaphors can influence perceptions of organizational attractiveness in recruitment advertising.

The Interaction Between Metaphor and Processing Style

The finding that the presence of metaphors do not lead to an increased perception of organizational attractiveness under central processing conditions compared to peripheral processing diverges from the resource-matching hypothesis, which posit that metaphors should be more persuasive under conditions of high elaboration (Van Stee, 2018). This may also be attributed to the unique nature of job ads that blend both informational and persuasive elements.

The Role of Affect

Further exploratory analyses revealed that the pleasure, part of the covariate affect, accounted for a significant portion of the variance in motivation to read the ads. This link between pleasure and motivation is at odds with research showing that positive moods tend to induce peripheral processing (Bless & Fiedler, 2012). This discrepancy is due to the fact that these studies are typically in the context of a mood induction, which was not performed in this study. Naturally occurring positive mood, as experienced by participants in this study, may enhance overall engagement and motivation, leading to more central processing (Isen, 2001; Wegener & Petty, 1994). In contrast, experimentally induced positive mood may signal a lack of need for critical engagement, thereby leading peripheral processing (Bless & Fiedler, 2012).

Pleasure also positively influenced organizational attractiveness across all conditions, which highlights the influence of emotion in recruitment communication on employer branding. This relationship was stronger in the metaphor condition compared to the literal condition. Considering that positive mood is typically linked to peripheral processing, a plausible explanation may be that metaphors act as a peripheral cue that signals an attractive organization. However, considering that pleasure was linked to increased motivation to read the ad rather than the opposite, this explanation may fall short.

Exploratory Analyses: Participants' Evaluation of the Ads

In the exploratory analyses, the clarity, text attractiveness, and realism of these ads served as control measures. Since the ads were rated moderately well, they were neither exceptionally attractive nor unattractive. This suggests that while metaphors did not significantly enhance attractiveness, they also did not harm it.

Limitations and Future Research

The first limitation of this study is the failure of the manipulation check. In retrospect, this is not unsurprising. As described in the previous sections, the central and peripheral processing conditions in this study were adapted from established manipulations in previous research, incorporating elements from both van Meurs et al. (2015) and Jones et al. (2006). While the manipulation by Jones et al. (2006) was successful, that implemented by van Meurs et al. (2015) was not, aside from the question about motivation to read the ad carefully, in which there was a small significant difference between the two conditions.

The ineffectiveness of the manipulation in this study may be attributed to the elements adapted from van Meurs et al. (2015), or perhaps the choice to integrate procedural elements from two different studies. While this approach aimed to merge the strengths of both manipulations, it is possible that the combination of the chosen elements was less effective in creating clear distinctions between processing conditions. Reflecting on the design, it may have been more effective to replicate the manipulation of Jones et al. (2006) without incorporating elements from van Meurs et al. (2015). Future research should consider the potential complexities that may be caused by the combination of procedural elements from distinct studies.

Additionally, the failure of the manipulation check may be attributed to the nature of the study, as it involves a self-administered questionnaire. In the case of the non-probability sample (MTurk), the monetary incentive likely increased motivation to complete the questionnaire. For the convenience sample (social media), there was no monetary incentive to complete it. However, the fact that the participants completed the questionnaire voluntarily leads to self-selection bias; it indicates a level of motivation that is inherent to them, regardless of the

instructions (Elston, 2021). The recruitment of participants in this sample also targeted friends, family, and other individuals who have a personal connection with the thesis researcher, and while the anonymization does not make it possible to directly detect the effect of this, it is plausible that this connection led to higher feelings of motivation and involvement due to personal relevance. According to Petty and Cacioppo's Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM; 1981), central processing requires both the motivation and the ability to scrutinize a message. Therefore, if all participants tended to be motivated to complete the survey, this could explain the lack of differentiation between the processing conditions despite the different instructions.

Finally, the use of self-reports to determine the processing depth is inherently limited. Carpenter (2015) posits that there is a need for superior measures of depth of processing, such as reading time.

Aside from the ineffective manipulation, there were other limitations in this study. Namely, constructing the job ad excerpts presented many challenges, some of which may have undermined the validity of the findings. First, there was limited consideration of the novelty of the metaphors used in this study. Research by Sopory and Dillard (2002) indicates that novelty can influence a metaphor's persuasiveness. However, this effect was not found by van Stee (2018), and there was a practical challenge with determining a metaphor's novelty (Reimann & Scheffler, 2024). For that reason, it was excluded from this paper. Nonetheless, it is plausible that the metaphors used in this study were perceived as low novelty by the participants, which could have led to them being processed similarly to literal language. Indeed, there is evidence that metaphors with very low novelty that have become easily understood due to widespread usage—"dead" metaphors—may be processed similarly to literal language, and therefore no longer elicit the elaborations that contribute to the metaphor's effectiveness (Kim et al., 2012).

For example, one of the ads utilizes the word “backbone” metaphorically, which in retrospect may be too commonly understood to be effective. If the metaphors were not novel enough to stand out or create a significant cognitive impact, it could explain why there was no significant difference in organizational attractiveness between metaphorical and literal ads. While the analysis of novelty of metaphors was beyond the scope of this paper, future research that incorporates this factor may reach different results.

Furthermore, although the metaphors were pre-tested, their appropriateness for the specific context was not thoroughly examined. It is worth noting my professional background in copywriting and recruitment, including experience in writing job advertisements. However, my experience in this area is somewhat limited, and these advertisements were not reviewed by other professionals for feedback or validation. This may be problematic in light of research highlighting that certain aspects of the way metaphors are written can significantly impact their effectiveness in advertising, such as the level of complexity (van Mulken et al., 2014). This underscores the importance of carefully crafting and contextually testing metaphors in advertisements.

In addition to the content of the metaphor, the position and function of the metaphor within the excerpt may play a role. This study draws from similar studies in mainstream advertising, where the persuasiveness of metaphors has been established (van Stee, 2018). However, in most of these studies, the metaphor is embedded into the core persuasive message, while in this study, the metaphor is merely positioned in the introductory sentence, describing the company rather than conveying a key persuasive point. For example, in one study (Kim et al., 2012), a Gateway computer ad contains the metaphor "More Muscle"; this is not merely descriptive but integral to the core message, prompting specific thoughts like "fast CPU" which

relate directly to the benefit for the computer, which is the core of the persuasive message.. In contrast, the metaphors in this study simply describe the company favorably, such as calling it "the backbone of senior care" or "a pillar of support for its customers". This type of metaphor, while complimentary, fails to highlight why the company is an attractive employer. It praises the company's role in the industry or the benefits it brings to its clients, but it does not pertain to the core persuasive message when it comes to organizational attractiveness: the benefits for potential employees. Future research could explore the impact of integrating metaphors into more strategic parts of the recruitment message, such as the call-to-action (i.e. the invitation to apply for the vacancy) or important selling points, such as company culture. This approach may then be more likely to reveal an effect on metaphor on perceptions of organizational attractiveness.

Moreover, all company names in this study were unknown. Given that research points to metaphors with a high familiarity target being more persuasive (Sopory & Dillard, 2002; van Stee, 2018), the metaphors in this study were likely inherently less persuasive than they otherwise would have been. It's possible that, had the company names been well-known, the metaphors would have been met with increased persuasion. For future research, it may be interesting to explore this with names of real companies and assess familiarity with the company in question, in order to determine whether metaphor use may be more advantageous for well-known companies.

Another significant limitation of this study is the exclusion of the main aspects of job ads: the responsibilities and benefits. Essentially, only the "about the employer" section was included in this study to assess potential applicants' responses to that section, as well as ensure attention is paid to the sentence that is manipulated. However, the excerpts presented in this study are only a fraction of the ads on job boards in natural job-seeking environments,

Another limitation is an underrepresentation of students. Less than 4% of participants are students and only 4.5% have less than 1 year of experience. Therefore, this study does not provide insight into how new job-seekers experience metaphors, since more experienced job-seekers were more represented. Therefore, it would be interesting to explore whether these effects apply for more junior members of the job market, since these insights could inform the construction of job ads for internships or entry-level positions aimed at fresh graduates.

Finally, while MTurk is generally suitable for research (Valli & Nai, 2023), there are several concerns related to its use. According to a review by Aguinis et al. (2020), MTurk provides more room for self-selection bias, self-misrepresentation, and inattention due to completing tasks in a less-than-ideal environment and too quickly in order to maximize profit. This may limit the generalizability of the results.Overall, these findings reveal a critical insight: the effectiveness of advertising techniques may be context-dependent. Findings in the realm of mainstream advertising may not be directly generalized to recruitment advertising. In the realm of job advertisements, methods those effectiveness has been established in a mainstream advertising context may not always be the right approach.

This study contributes to the literature of recruitment advertising by exploring the impact of metaphorical language and processing depth on organizational attractiveness. While metaphors did not significantly enhance attractiveness, the role of affect, particularly pleasure, was found to be crucial. These findings indicate that while figurative language may not be essential, engaging potential applicants emotionally is critical in crafting effective job advertisements. Future research should continue to explore the complex interplay between language, emotion, and perception in the context of recruitment advertising. More specifically, it

could further explore the nuances of mood and its interaction with different ad elements, specifically in a recruitment context.

Practically, the findings from this study provide several implications for the design of recruitment ads. While the presence of metaphors alone does not significantly enhance organizational attractiveness, the overall emotional engagement, particularly pleasure, plays a crucial role. Organizations may therefore benefit from adjusting their recruitment ads to evoke positive emotional responses, thereby enhancing their attractiveness.

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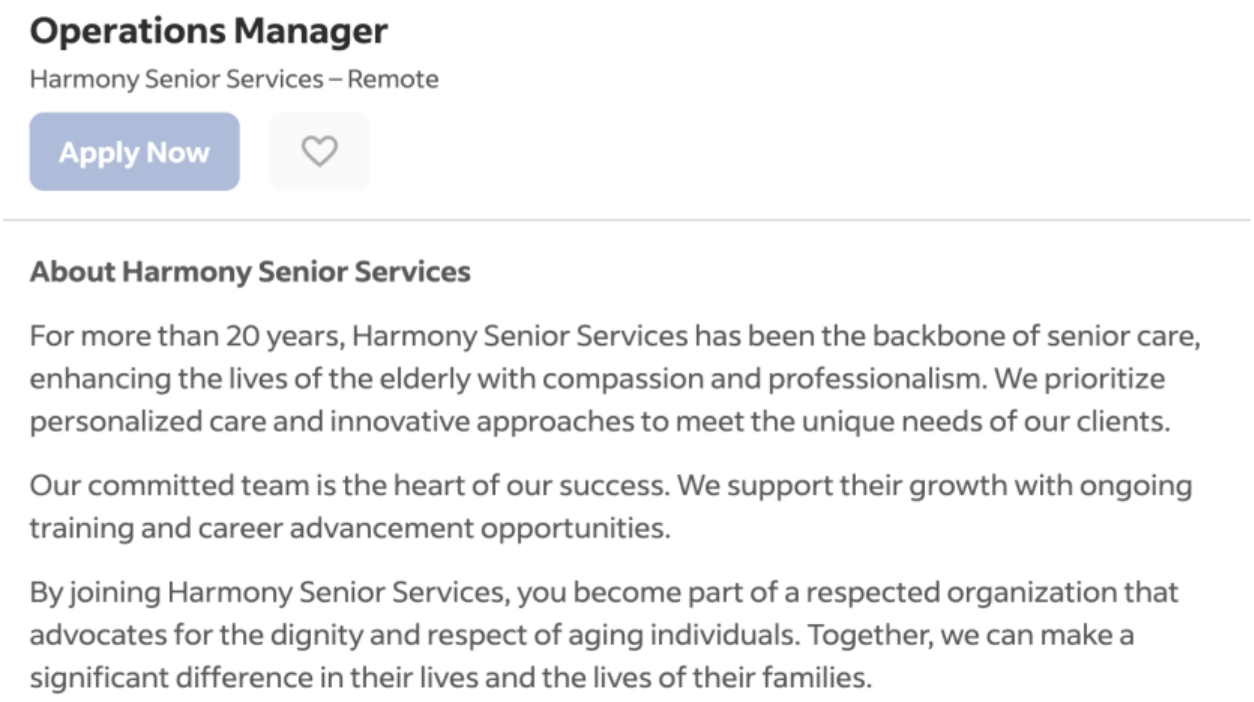
Appendix A

The Ad Excerpts

Ad 1

Metaphoric version



Operations Manager

Harmony Senior Services – Remote

Apply Now

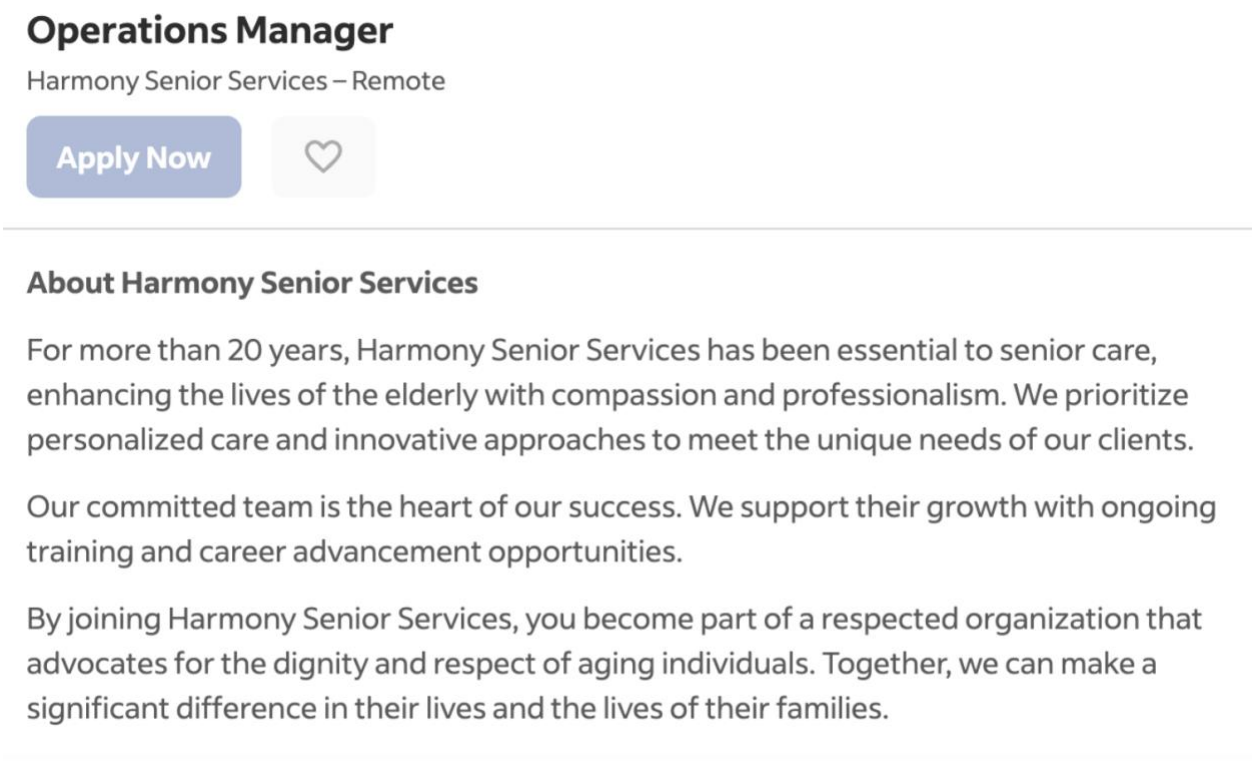
About Harmony Senior Services

For more than 20 years, Harmony Senior Services has been the backbone of senior care, enhancing the lives of the elderly with compassion and professionalism. We prioritize personalized care and innovative approaches to meet the unique needs of our clients.

Our committed team is the heart of our success. We support their growth with ongoing training and career advancement opportunities.

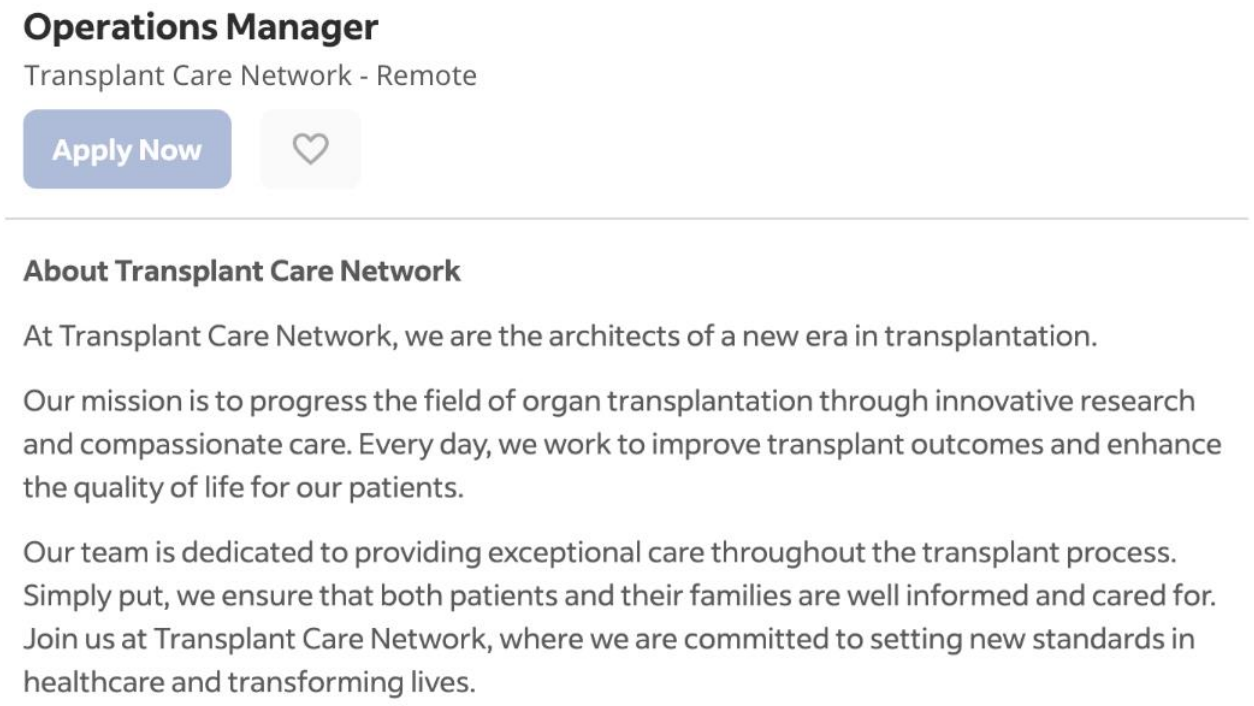
By joining Harmony Senior Services, you become part of a respected organization that advocates for the dignity and respect of aging individuals. Together, we can make a significant difference in their lives and the lives of their families.

Literal version

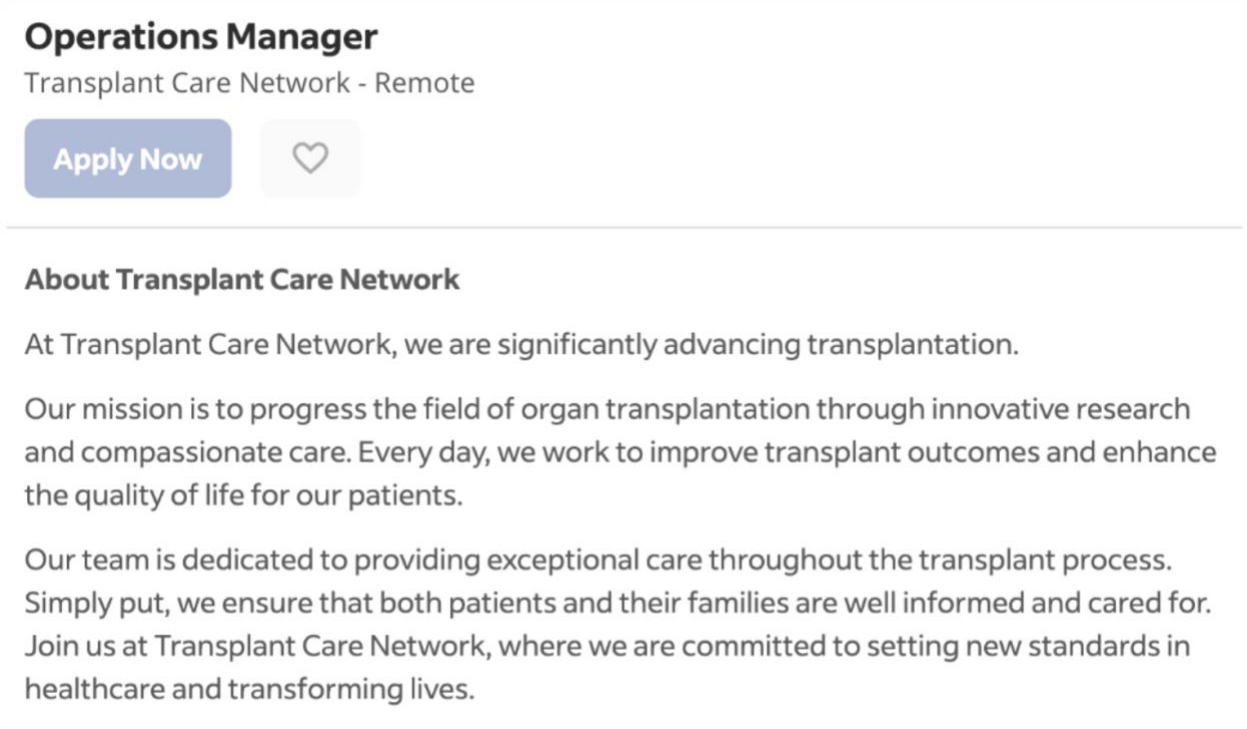


Ad 2

Metaphoric version

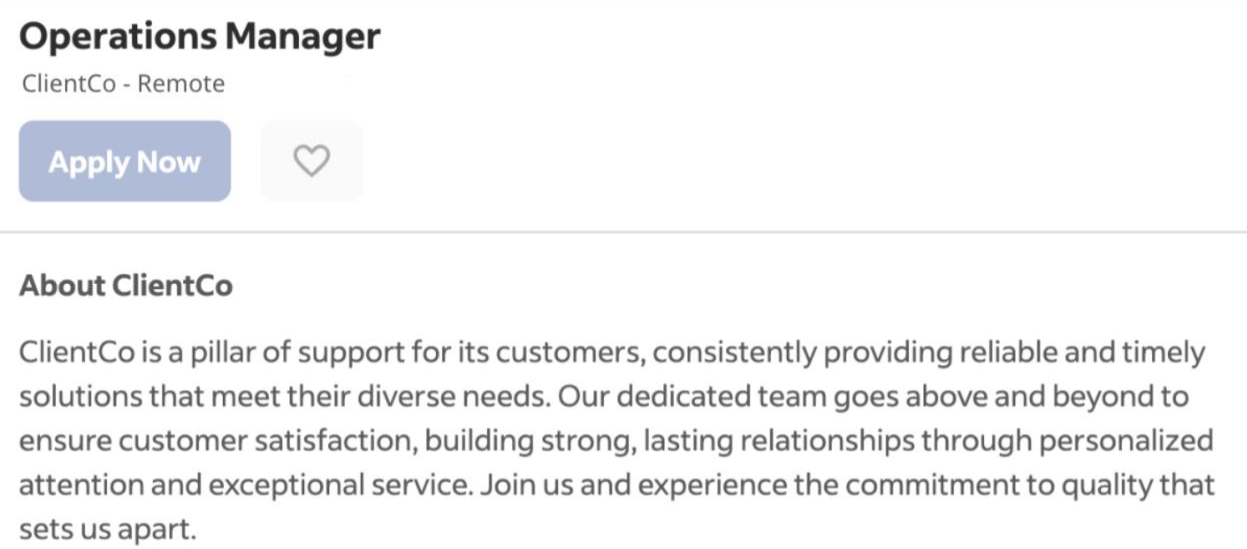


Literal version

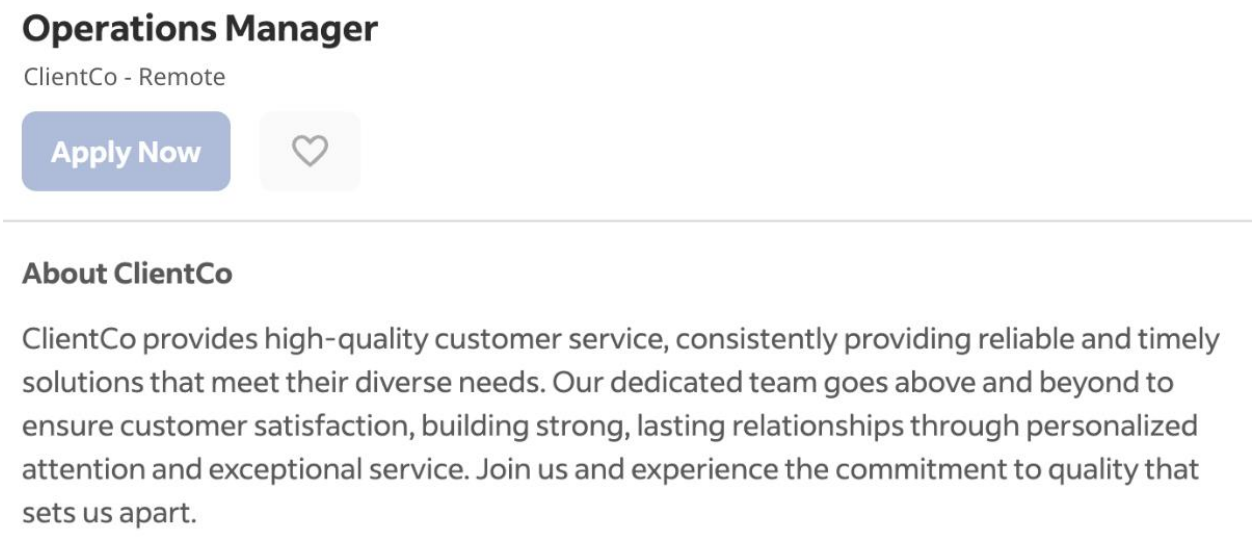


Ad 3

Metaphoric version

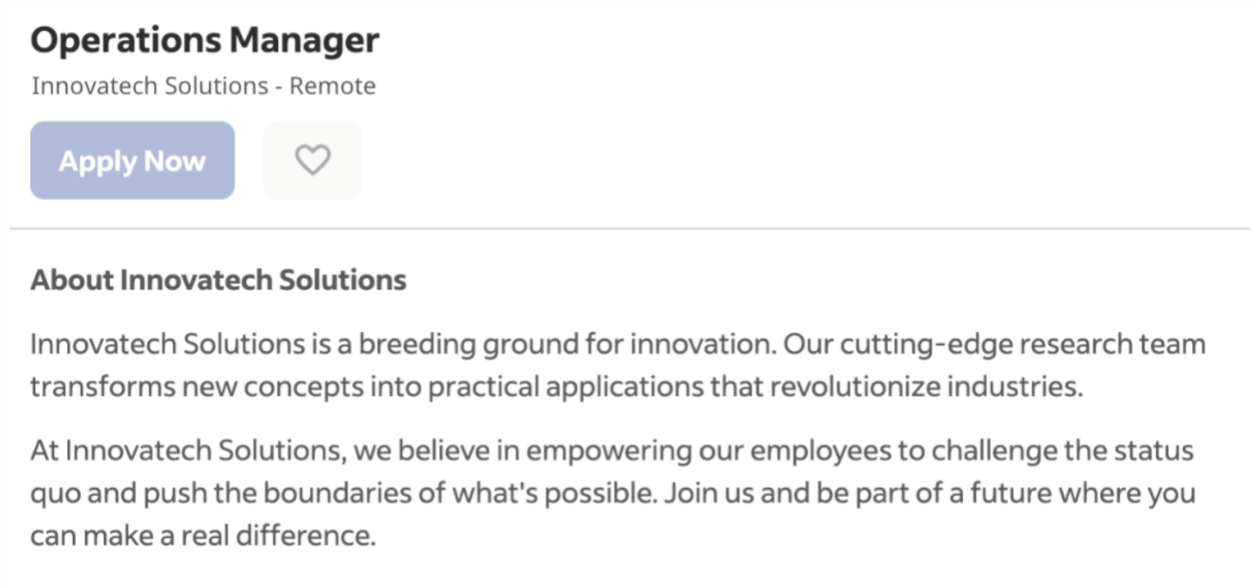


Literal version



Ad 4

Metaphoric version



Literal version

Operations Manager

Innovatech Solutions - Remote

Apply Now

About Innovatech Solutions

Innovatech Solutions is constantly introducing new ideas and approaches. Our cutting-edge research team transforms new concepts into practical applications that revolutionize industries.

At Innovatech Solutions, we believe in empowering our employees to challenge the status quo and push the boundaries of what's possible. Join us and be part of a future where you can make a real difference.

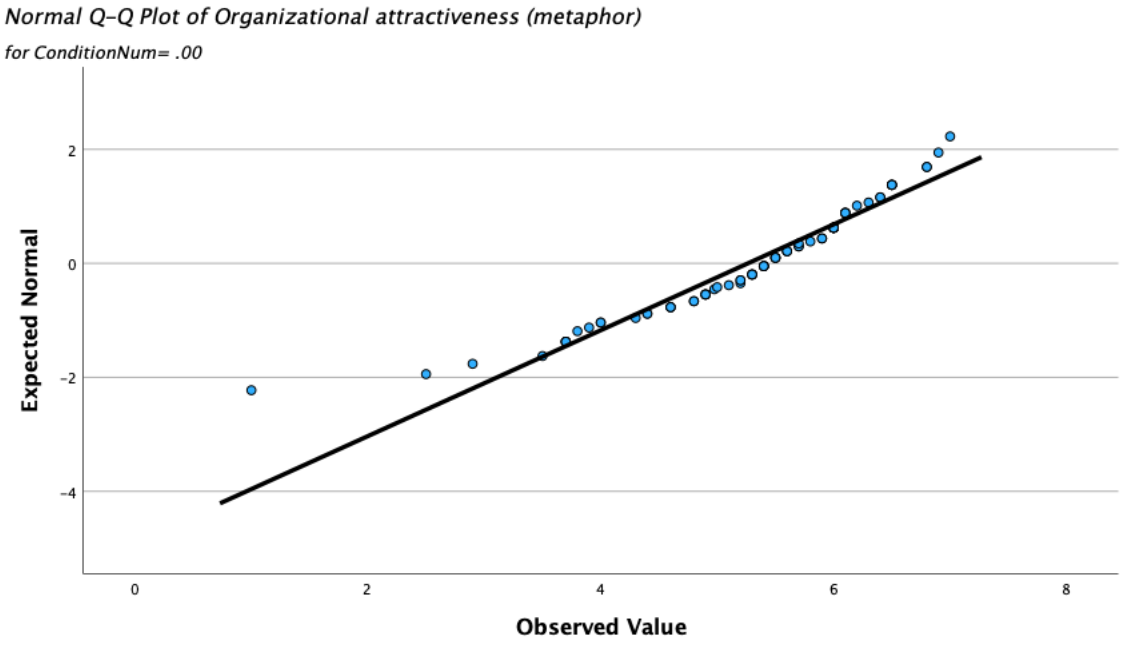
Appendix B

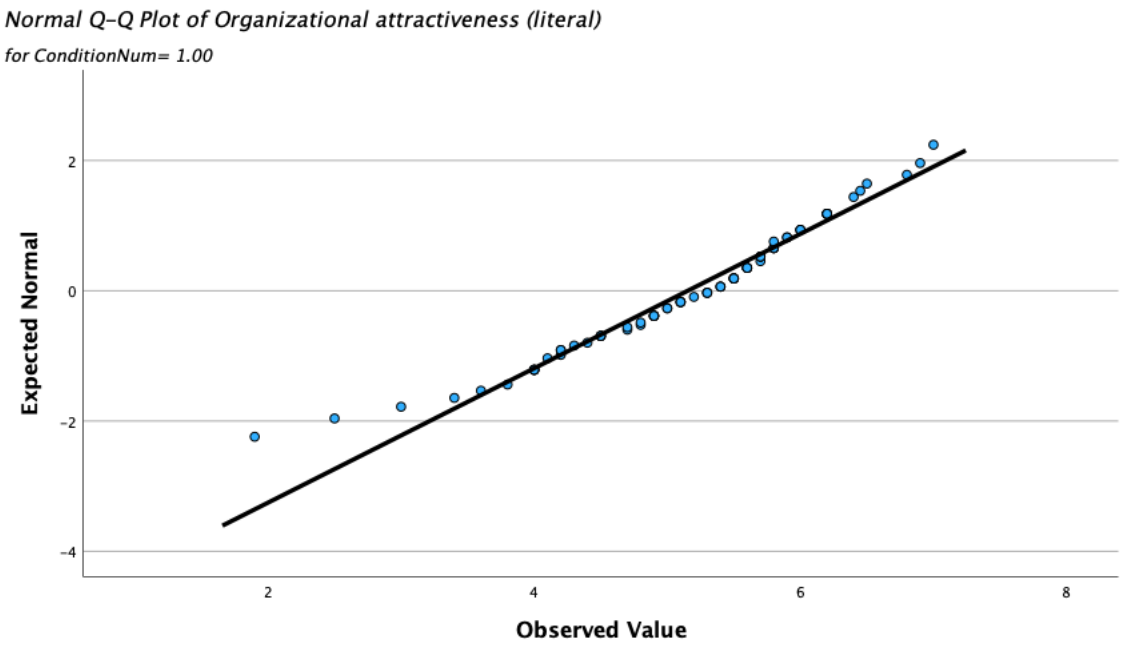
Normality Tests

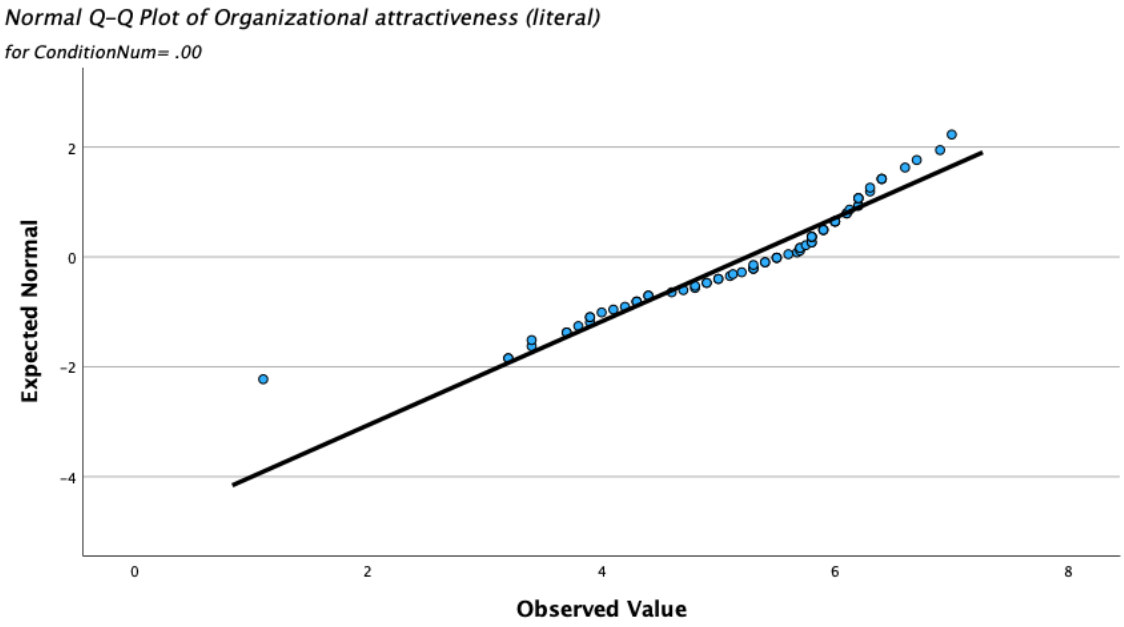
Tests of Normality

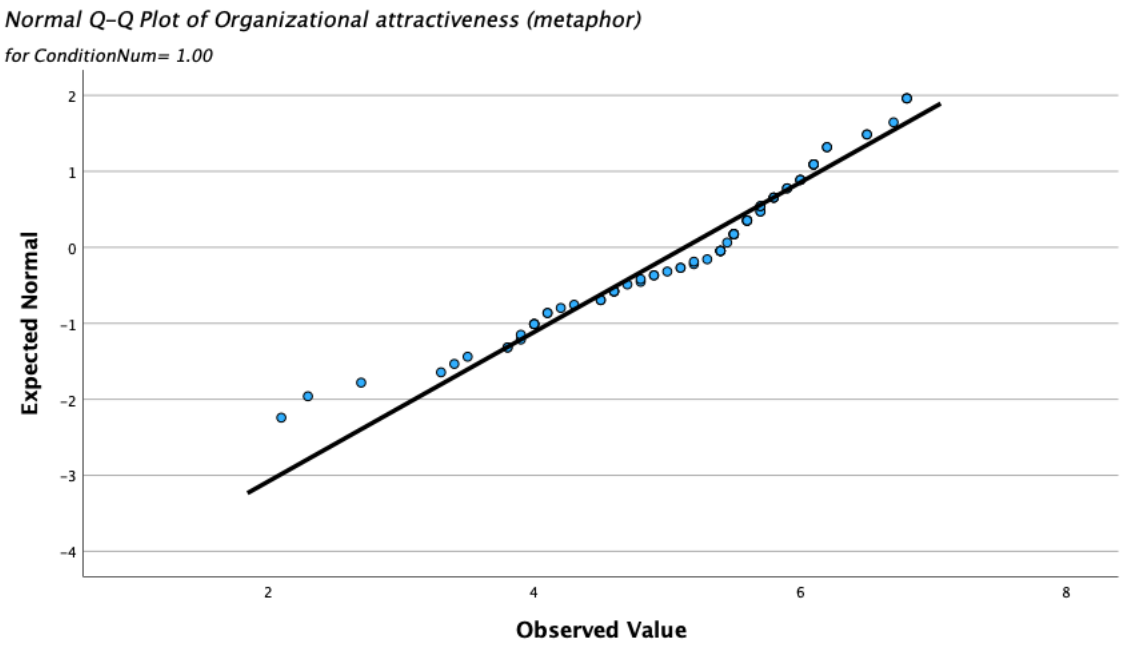
	ConditionNum	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Organizational attractiveness (metaphor)	.00	.121	76	.008	.926	76	<.001
	1.00	.161	79	<.001	.946	79	.002
Organizational attractiveness (literal)	.00	.130	76	.003	.925	76	<.001
	1.00	.095	79	.074	.963	79	.020

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction




Normal Q-Q Plot of Organizational attractiveness (literal)
for ConditionNum= 1.00
Expected Normal
Observed Value
2
0
-2
-4
2
4
6
8


Normal Q-Q Plot of Organizational attractiveness (literal)
for ConditionNum= .00
Expected Normal
Observed Value
2
0
-2
-4
0
2
4
6
8


Normal Q-Q Plot of Organizational attractiveness (metaphor)
for ConditionNum= 1.00
Expected Normal
2
1
0
-1
-2
-3
-4
2
4
6
8
Observed Value

Appendix C

Processing Manipulation Check

Group Statistics

				Bootstrap[a]			
						BCa 95% Confidence Interval	
	ConditionNum		Statistic	Bias	Std. Error	Lower	Upper
I felt motivated to read these ads.	.00	N	74				
		Mean	3.97	.00	.12	3.73	4.20
		Std. Deviation	1.020	-.011	.089	.857	1.164
		Std. Error Mean	.119				
	1.00	N	77				
		Mean	3.69	.00	.11	3.43	3.91
		Std. Deviation	1.055	-.010	.076	.904	1.167
		Std. Error Mean	.120				
I feel motivated to complete this questionnaire.	.00	N	74				
		Mean	4.27	.00	.09	4.10	4.43
		Std. Deviation	.816	-.005	.074	.667	.942

		Std. Error Mean	.095			
	1.00	N	77			
		Mean	4.12	.00	.09	3.93	4.29
		Std. Deviation	.794	-.013	.111	.599	.973
		Std. Error Mean	.091			
I felt involved while completing this questionnaire.	.00	N	74			
		Mean	4.20	.00	.10	4.01	4.39
		Std. Deviation	.811	-.011	.073	.677	.922
		Std. Error Mean	.094			
	1.00	N	77			
		Mean	4.01	.00	.09	3.83	4.20
		Std. Deviation	.819	-.008	.066	.707	.923
		Std. Error Mean	.093			

a. Unless otherwise noted, bootstrap results are based on 1000 bootstrap samples

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means							
						Significance				95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	One-Sided p	Two-Sided p	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
I felt motivated to read these ads.	Equal variances assumed	.687	.409	1.685	149	.047	.094	.285	.169	-.049	.618
	Equal variances not assumed			1.686	148.993	.047	.094	.285	.169	-.049	.618
I feel motivated to complete this questionnaire.	Equal variances assumed	2.748	.099	1.171	149	.122	.244	.153	.131	-.106	.412
	Equal variances not assumed			1.170	148.338	.122	.244	.153	.131	-.106	.412
I felt involved while completing this questionnaire.	Equal variances assumed	.878	.350	1.430	149	.077	.155	.190	.133	-.072	.452
	Equal variances not assumed			1.430	148.870	.077	.155	.190	.133	-.072	.452

Bootstrap for Independent Samples Test

			Bootstrap[a]				
						BCa 95% Confidence Interval	
		Mean Difference	Bias	Std. Error	Sig. (2-tailed)	Lower	Upper
I felt motivated to read these ads.	Equal variances assumed	.285	.011	.163	.085	-.053	.624
	Equal variances not assumed	.285	.011	.163	.085	-.053	.624
I feel motivated to complete this questionnaire.	Equal variances assumed	.153	.008	.131	.240	-.135	.454
	Equal variances not assumed	.153	.008	.131	.243	-.135	.454

I felt involved while completing this questionnaire.	Equal variances assumed	.190	.005	.130	-.042	.470
	Equal variances not assumed	.190	.005	.130	-.042	.470

a. Unless otherwise noted, bootstrap results are based on 1000 bootstrap samples

Independent Samples Effect Sizes

				95% Confidence Interval	
		Standardizer[a]	Point Estimate	Lower	Upper
I felt motivated to read these ads.	Cohen's d	1.038	.274	-.047	.594
	Hedges' correction	1.043	.273	-.046	.591
	Glass's delta	1.055	.270	-.053	.591
I feel motivated to complete this questionnaire.	Cohen's d	.805	.191	-.130	.510
	Hedges' correction	.809	.190	-.129	.507
	Glass's delta	.794	.193	-.128	.513
I felt involved while completing this questionnaire.	Cohen's d	.815	.233	-.088	.553
	Hedges' correction	.819	.232	-.087	.550
	Glass's delta	.819	.232	-.090	.552

a. The denominator used in estimating the effect sizes.

Cohen's d uses the pooled standard deviation.

Hedges' correction uses the pooled standard deviation, plus a correction factor.

Glass's delta uses the sample standard deviation of the control group.

Appendix D

Ad Realism Manipulation Check

Group Statistics

				Bootstrap[a]			
						BCa 95% Confidence Interval	
	ConditionNum		Statistic	Bias	Std. Error	Lower	Upper
These excerpts look like parts of job advertisements that appear on a job board.	.00	N	75				
		Mean	4.19	.00	.09	4.01	4.37
		Std. Deviation	.800	-.007	.073	.662	.919
		Std. Error Mean	.092				
	1.00	N	79				
		Mean	4.13	.00	.09	3.94	4.29
		Std. Deviation	.806	-.006	.091	.643	.965
		Std. Error Mean	.091				
If I were looking for a job, I would consider applying for some of the jobs that I selected.	.00	N	75				
		Mean	4.01	.00	.11	3.77	4.23
		Std. Deviation	.993	-.014	.110	.794	1.165

	Std. Error Mean	.115				
1.00	N	79				
	Mean	4.05	.00	.09	3.88	4.21
	Std. Deviation	.783	-.006	.063	.659	.885
	Std. Error Mean	.088				

a. Unless otherwise noted, bootstrap results are based on 1000 bootstrap samples

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means							
						Significance				95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	One-Sided p	Two-Sided p	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
These excerpts look like parts of job advertisements that appear on a job board.	Equal variances assumed	.404	.526	.464	152	.322	.643	.060	.130	-.196	.316
	Equal variances not assumed			.464	151.700	.322	.643	.060	.130	-.196	.316
If I were looking for a job, I would consider applying for some of the jobs that I selected.	Equal variances assumed	1.004	.318	-.260	152	.398	.796	-.037	.144	-.321	.247
	Equal variances not assumed			-.258	140.625	.398	.797	-.037	.145	-.323	.249

Bootstrap for Independent Samples Test

	Bootstrap[a]

		Mean Difference	Bias	Std. Error	BCa 95% Confidence Interval Lower	BCa 95% Confidence Interval Upper
These excerpts look like parts of job advertisements that appear on a job board.	Equal variances assumed	.060	.002	.127	-.182	.315
	Equal variances not assumed	.060	.002	.127	-.182	.315
If I were looking for a job, I would consider applying for some of the jobs that I selected.	Equal variances assumed	-.037	.003	.144	-.356	.297
	Equal variances not assumed	-.037	.003	.144	-.356	.297

a. Unless otherwise noted, bootstrap results are based on 1000 bootstrap samples

Independent Samples Effect Sizes

		Standardizer[a]	Point Estimate	95% Confidence Interval Lower	95% Confidence Interval Upper
These excerpts look like parts of job advertisements that appear on a job board.	Cohen's d	.803	.075	-.241	.391
	Hedges' correction	.807	.074	-.240	.389
	Glass's delta	.806	.075	-.242	.390
	Cohen's d	.891	-.042	-.358	.274

If I were looking for a job, I would consider applying for some of the jobs that I selected.	Hedges' correction	.896	-.042	-.356	.273
	Glass's delta	.783	-.048	-.364	.269

a. The denominator used in estimating the effect sizes.

Cohen's d uses the pooled standard deviation.

Hedges' correction uses the pooled standard deviation, plus a correction factor.

Glass's delta uses the sample standard deviation of the control group.

Appendix E

Baseline Ad Comparisons

Descriptive Statistics

			Bootstrap[a]			
					BCa 95% Confidence Interval	
		Statistic	Bias	Std. Error	Lower	Upper
clarity_1	N	146	0	0	.	.
	Minimum	1.00				
	Maximum	5.00				
	Mean	4.0205	.0028	.0697	3.8699	4.1644
	Std. Deviation	.86678	-.00776	.06935	.74266	.97568
clarity_2	N	146	0	0	.	.
	Minimum	1.00				
	Maximum	5.00				
	Mean	3.9521	-.0006	.0773	3.8014	4.1087
	Std. Deviation	.95652	-.00488	.06675	.82616	1.07217
clarity_3	N	146	0	0	.	.
	Minimum	1.00				

	Maximum	5.00				
	Mean	3.8356	.0034	.0831	3.6781	4.0068
	Std. Deviation	1.01048	-.00875	.06732	.89462	1.11493
clarity_4	N	146	0	0	.	.
	Minimum	1.00				
	Maximum	5.00				
	Mean	3.9247	-.0002	.0798	3.7603	4.0753
	Std. Deviation	.98321	-.00462	.06311	.85906	1.09399
attractiveness_1	N	146	0	0	.	.
	Minimum	1.00				
	Maximum	5.00				
	Mean	3.9795	-.0022	.0781	3.8219	4.1284
	Std. Deviation	.94299	-.00625	.07644	.78994	1.08489
attractiveness_2	N	146	0	0	.	.
	Minimum	1.00				
	Maximum	5.00				
	Mean	3.8082	.0003	.0838	3.6370	3.9726
	Std. Deviation	.99179	-.00505	.05963	.88169	1.09033

attractiveness_3	N	146	0	0	.	.
	Minimum	1.00				
	Maximum	5.00				
	Mean	3.7466	.0036	.0916	3.5753	3.9247
	Std. Deviation	1.09426	-.00800	.05942	.98246	1.18878
attractiveness_4	N	146	0	0	.	.
	Minimum	1.00				
	Maximum	5.00				
	Mean	3.9041	-.0005	.0807	3.7466	4.0479
	Std. Deviation	.96368	-.00574	.05945	.85006	1.06373
avg_natur_1	N	146	0	0	.	.
	Minimum	1.00				
	Maximum	5.00				
	Mean	3.9315	-.0005	.0591	3.8082	4.0479
	Std. Deviation	.76029	-.00482	.06433	.64792	.87017
avg_natur_2	N	146	0	0	.	.
	Minimum	1.50				
	Maximum	5.00				
	Mean	3.8938	-.0005	.0648	3.7466	4.0274

	Std. Deviation	.78391	-.00621	.05703	.67597	.87235
avg_natur_3	N	146	0	0	.	.
	Minimum	1.00				
	Maximum	5.00				
	Mean	3.7945	.0006	.0761	3.6473	3.9418
	Std. Deviation	.94809	-.00796	.05672	.84720	1.03378
avg_natur_4	N	146	0	0	.	.
	Minimum	1.00				
	Maximum	5.00				
	Mean	3.8904	-.0002	.0713	3.7371	4.0308
	Std. Deviation	.87591	-.00635	.06242	.74981	.98184
avg_orgatt_1	N	146	0	0	.	.
	Minimum	1.00				
	Maximum	7.00				
	Mean	5.4024	.0005	.0779	5.2447	5.5586
	Std. Deviation	.97613	-.00800	.08267	.83505	1.11763
avg_orgatt_2	N	146	0	0	.	.
	Minimum	1.20				

	Maximum	7.00				
	Mean	5.1774	.0034	.0906	4.9953	5.3630
	Std. Deviation	1.09348	-.01104	.07847	.94848	1.21376
avg_orgatt_3	N	146	0	0	.	.
	Minimum	1.00				
	Maximum	7.00				
	Mean	4.9483	.0052	.1068	4.7288	5.1689
	Std. Deviation	1.32338	-.01082	.07935	1.17503	1.45453
avg_orgatt_4	N	146	0	0	.	.
	Minimum	1.00				
	Maximum	7.00				
	Mean	5.2541	.0056	.0937	5.0589	5.4442
	Std. Deviation	1.16602	-.01070	.08253	1.00719	1.30380
Valid N (listwise)	N	146	0	0	.	.

a. Unless otherwise noted, bootstrap results are based on 1000 bootstrap samples

Appendix F

Control Measures

Paired Samples Statistics

				Bootstrap[a]			
						BCa 95% Confidence Interval	
			Statistic	Bias	Std. Error	Lower	Upper
Pair 1	avg_clarity_M	Mean	3.9349	-.0025	.0645	3.8116	4.0514
		N	146				
		Std. Deviation	.77072	-.00359	.05367	.67331	.86773
		Std. Error Mean	.06379				
	avg_clarity_L	Mean	3.9315	-.0030	.0624	3.8151	4.0411
		N	146				
		Std. Deviation	.75116	-.00461	.05155	.66162	.83722
		Std. Error Mean	.06217				
Pair 2	avg_attractiveness_M	Mean	3.8699	-.0033	.0691	3.7432	3.9897
		N	146				
		Std. Deviation	.80527	-.00234	.05012	.70040	.90191

		Std. Error Mean	.06664				
	avg_attractiveness_L	Mean	3.8493	-.0043	.0675	3.7226	3.9658
		N	146				
		Std. Deviation	.79301	-.00147	.05294	.69489	.88873
		Std. Error Mean	.06563				
Pair 3	avg_natur_M	Mean	3.8613	-.0028	.0594	3.7483	3.9623
		N	146				
		Std. Deviation	.71501	-.00233	.05295	.61735	.80578
		Std. Error Mean	.05917				
	avg_natur_L	Mean	3.8938	-.0036	.0599	3.7671	4.0024
		N	146				
		Std. Deviation	.71187	-.00423	.05604	.61078	.80848
		Std. Error Mean	.05891				
Pair 4	Organizational attractiveness (metaphor)	Mean	5.2063	-.0027	.0860	5.0396	5.3686
		N	146				
		Std. Deviation	1.00721	-.00351	.07785	.86788	1.15621

	Std. Error Mean	.08336				
Organizational attractiveness (literal)	Mean	5.1848	-.0048	.0877	5.0190	5.3375
	N	146				
	Std. Deviation	1.00504	-.00149	.07820	.85857	1.15442
	Std. Error Mean	.08318				

a. Unless otherwise noted, bootstrap results are based on 1000 bootstrap samples

Paired Samples Correlations

				Significance		Bootstrap for Correlation[a]			
								BCa 95% Confidence Interval	
		N	Correlation	One-Sided p	Two-Sided p	Bias	Std. Error	Lower	Upper
Pair 1	avg_clarity_M & avg_clarity_L	146	.671	<.001	<.001	-.003	.058	.540	.775
Pair 2	avg_attractiveness_M & avg_attractiveness_L	146	.579	<.001	<.001	.002	.060	.441	.691
Pair 3	avg_natur_M & avg_natur_L	146	.625	<.001	<.001	-.004	.076	.458	.750
Pair 4	Organizational attractiveness (metaphor) & Organizational attractiveness (literal)	146	.727	<.001	<.001	.001	.047	.619	.823

a. Unless otherwise noted, bootstrap results are based on 1000 bootstrap samples

Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences					t	df	Significance	
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference					
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper			One-Sided p	Two-Sided p
Pair 1	avg_clarity_M - avg_clarity_L	.00342	.61727	.05109	-.09754	.10439	.067	145	.473	.947
Pair 2	avg_attractiveness_M - avg_attractiveness_L	.02055	.73315	.06068	-.09938	.14047	.339	145	.368	.735
Pair 3	avg_natur_M - avg_natur_L	-.03253	.61816	.05116	-.13365	.06858	-.636	145	.263	.526
Pair 4	Organizational attractiveness (metaphor) - Organizational attractiveness (literal)	.02158	.74360	.06154	-.10006	.14321	.351	145	.363	.726

Appendix G

Motivation and Affect

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.377[a]	.142	.137	.965

a. Predictors: (Constant), Pleasure

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	23.499	1	23.499	25.253	<.001[b]
	Residual	141.442	152	.931		
	Total	164.942	153			

a. Dependent Variable: I felt motivated to read these ads.

b. Predictors: (Constant), Pleasure

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.451	.287		8.553	<.001
	Pleasure	.018	.004	.377	5.025	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: I felt motivated to read these ads.