

Changing Job Seekers' Image Perceptions During Recruitment Visits: The Moderating Role of Belief Confidence

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The purpose of this study was to understand how an important construct in social psychology—confidence in one's beliefs—could both (a) influence the effectiveness of organizations' recruiting processes and (b) be changed during recruitment. Using a sample of recruits to a branch of the United States military, the authors studied belief confidence before and after recruits' formal visits to the organization's recruiting stations. Personal sources of information had a stronger influence on recruits' belief confidence than impersonal sources. Moreover, recruits' confidence in their initial beliefs affected how perceptions of the recruiter changed their employer images. Among participants with low-initial confidence, the relation between recruitment experiences and employer images was positive and linear across the whole range of recruitment experiences. Among recruits with high-initial confidence, however, the recruitment experience–image relationship was *curvilinear*, such that recruitment experiences were related to images only at more positive recruitment experiences. The relationship between recruitment experiences and *changes* in belief confidence was also curvilinear, such that only more positive recruitment experiences led to changes in confidence. These results indicate not only that belief confidence influences the effectiveness of recruiting efforts but also that recruiting efforts can influence belief confidence.

Keywords: recruitment, belief confidence, organizational image, curvilinear relationships

Marketing scholars have long recognized the importance of brand images to help customers differentiate an organization from competitors and develop feelings of attachment to the firm (Keller, 1993). More recently, researchers have applied brand image principles to the recruitment context, highlighting the importance of employer image for differentiation in the labor market. Defined as “the content of the beliefs held by a job seeker about an employer” (Cable & Turban, 2001, p. 125), *employer images* contain both instrumental and symbolic elements (e.g., Highhouse, Thornbury, & Little, 2007; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003) and are important during recruitment because they are used by job seekers to decide whether to pursue and accept a job (e.g., Highhouse, Zickar, Thorsteinson, Stierwalt, & Slaughter, 1999).

To date, most recruitment research examining employer images has focused on the earliest stages of recruitment, which Barber (1998) called the “attraction phase” (see also Collins, 2007). Unfortunately, we know relatively little about how job seekers' initial images about employers are influenced by later stages in the recruitment process (Cable & Yu, 2006), such as site visits. This is an important gap in knowledge, because site visits represent the possibility for confirmation or disconfirmation of an applicant's initial image of an employer, as the recruit experiences a physical setting that is full of artifacts, recruiters, and employees.

In this article, we examine whether recruitment visits alter recruits' image beliefs, and how confidence in their existing beliefs plays an important role in the process. Specifically, we theorize that job seekers' presite visit confidence about their beliefs influences the way that they are influenced by recruitment experiences. On the one hand, site visits should cause applicants to modify their employer images because job seekers rely on attributes witnessed during such visits to make inferences about unobservable organizational characteristics (Barber, 1998; Rynes, Bretz, & Gerhart, 1991). As job seekers are motivated to obtain accurate information about potential jobs and employers, they are likely to use the information encountered during such visits to alter their previsit perceptions. On the other hand, the extensive confirmation bias literature indicates that people tend to preserve their established beliefs when confronted with new information (Festinger, 1957; Klayman, 1995). In fact, some research indicates that employer images become entrenched in job seekers' minds long before

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recruitment occurs (Barber, 1998; Cable & Yu, 2006), suggesting that formal recruitment visits may have a limited influence on applicants' employer images, once previsit images are controlled.

By examining these issues, our study contributes to the recruitment literature in three important ways. First, we explicitly focus on how formal recruitment visits can alter previsit employer images, which is an important but neglected aspect of recruitment. Second, we introduce the construct of applicants' belief confidence (e.g., Petty, Briñol, & Tormala, 2002). Theoretically, we propose that knowing the confidence of recruits' previsit beliefs provides insight into understanding the effects of the visit on subsequent image beliefs. Finally, we examine how applicants' belief confidence changes as a result of recruitment experiences. This is important because belief confidence may not only affect applicants' reactions to site visits but also continue to influence people's postrecruitment interactions with employers (e.g., job acceptance and postentry expectations).

The Role of Belief Confidence

A key goal for employers during a site visit is to increase recruits' positive beliefs about the organization. As such, the process of improving organizational image beliefs is analogous to persuasive communication (Tormala & Petty, 2002, 2004). We theorize that the *belief confidence* of recruits' previsit images influences attempts to improve these images. Following Petty et al. (2002), we define belief confidence as a sense of conviction or validity regarding one's beliefs—in this case, preencounter beliefs about the employer. Despite the importance of belief confidence for understanding persuasion, scholars have not examined whether and how this construct influences the relationship of recruitment experiences with changes in organizational perceptions. More importantly, research has not considered how applicants' confidence in their beliefs may cause nonlinear effects on the way recruitment interventions affect their beliefs.

In the following sections, we first consider what causes applicants' confidence in their organizational beliefs. Then, we theorize about how recruiters' behaviors during site visits should affect applicants' organization image perceptions, depending on applicants' confidence in their beliefs. Finally, we describe why we expect a curvilinear relationship between recruiter behaviors and changes in belief confidence.

What Influences Confidence in Beliefs About Organizational Image?

Individuals obtain information about employers from various sources, which can be categorized as personal or impersonal. Research indicates that source credibility, which is based on expertise and trustworthiness, positively influences persuasion (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Petty & Wegener, 1998; Pornpitakpan, 2004). We theorize that information about a potential employer gathered from personal sources (e.g., friends or family with direct ties to the organization) should have more credibility and thus create stronger belief confidence than information gathered from impersonal sources (e.g., web pages, news media). Personal sources of information, such as word-of-mouth (Van Hoye & Lievens, 2009), also are seen as more trustworthy because they can provide both positive and negative information

(Cable & Turban, 2001). Furthermore, personal sources of information are experiential and thus are more likely to provide information that is salient, detailed, and personally relevant (Keller, 1993).

Hypothesis 1: Personal sources of organizational information will be stronger predictors of belief confidence than impersonal sources of organizational information.

Influence of Recruiter on Changes in Employer Image Perceptions

We examined both symbolic organizational attributes and instrumental job attributes (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). In terms of symbolic attributes, we examined *trustworthiness*, derived from Slaughter, Zickar, Highhouse, and Mohr (2004). Instrumental job attributes, which are tangible benefits that can be attained through employment, were developed by working with the marketing team that creates recruitment advertisements for the employer. These attributes are the opportunities to (a) develop job-relevant skills and (b) provide early leadership experiences.¹

In terms of dimensions of on-site recruitment experiences that influence recruits' images, we examined recruiter warmth (i.e., personableness) and competence (i.e., having high ability and being well prepared), which are the most studied recruiter behaviors (Chapman et al., 2005). Warmth and competence are two core dimensions people use when making judgments about other people, groups, and cultures (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002; Judd, James-Hawkins, Yzerbyt, & Kashima (2005). Below, we develop hypotheses about how recruiter warmth and competence lead to changes in applicants' images depending on previsit belief confidence.

Influence of Recruiter Warmth and Competence

When recruits decide to join a new organization, they have limited information about actual working conditions in the organization and often fear the possibility of exploitation (Lind, 2001). Considerable evidence indicates that applicants interpret recruiter behaviors as providing signals about working conditions in a potential employer (Rynes et al., 1991). Thus, we expect that recruiter behaviors will influence changes in applicants' employer image perceptions. First, recruiters' warmth/personableness has been linked to perceptions of job and organizational attributes as well as organizational attraction and job choice (e.g., Harris & Fink, 1987; Kohn & Dipboye, 1998). Second, recruiter competence indicates the domain-specific ability of recruiters to do their jobs—being prepared, asking good questions, and being able to answer questions—and should also influence recruits' perceptions of potential employers. Research suggests that the recruiter's competence serves as a signal of the organization's competence (Rynes et al., 1991).

We expect that the degree to which recruiters are seen as warm and competent should not only provide signals of working conditions in the organization but also influence the persuasiveness of the message they deliver about the benefits of jobs. Logically,

¹ Full details on the development of these outcomes and measures are available from Jerel E. Slaughter.

recruits should be less likely to believe they will receive valuable skills if the communicator of that message is dull and impersonal. For example, Rynes et al. (1991, p. 500) quoted one applicant who said: “[the recruiter] was talking about the great presentational skills that [company name] teaches you, and the woman was barely literate. She was embarrassing. If that was the best they could do, I did not want any part of them.” Thus, following past research, we expect that recruiter perceptions are related to organizational image perceptions, although we predict a more specific pattern of relationships than previously examined.

The Tipping Point of Applicants’ Confidence

Conceptually, the effects of recruiters’ warmth and competence on recruits’ beliefs depend on the confidence with which recruits held their initial beliefs. Research indicates that confidence in one’s beliefs influences how new information is processed such that individuals are less likely to observe, process, or recall information that refutes that belief (Klayman, 1995). Extending those ideas to the recruitment process suggests that job recruits’ initial (previsit) confidence in their beliefs about the organization moderates the way that a recruitment visit changes their employer image beliefs. When initial belief confidence is low, the relationship between recruitment experiences and employer image change should be linear, because when recruits feel less confident in their beliefs, they should be more motivated to process the information they receive during the site visit (Chaiken et al., 1989). When recruits’ initial belief confidence is high, however, we predict a *curvilinear* relationship between recruitment visit experiences and subsequent organizational images.

We theorize that when recruits are highly confident about their organizational image beliefs, they are less motivated to carefully process information during the recruitment visit and more likely to interpret new information to fit with their existing beliefs. Thus, a recruitment visit should not affect recruits’ organizational image beliefs until their reactions to the visit reach a critical level, or inflection point (Le et al., 2011), at which point beliefs will be influenced. This form of curvilinear relationship has been described as a “tipping point,” a term popularized by Gladwell (2000) that has also been used to describe various social phenomena such as workplace incivility (Andersson & Pearson, 1999), the effects of gender mix on conflict in working groups (Allmendinger & Hackman, 1995), and adoption of innovative practices (Rogers, 2003). The specific curvilinear relationship we propose differs from the classic inverted-U relationship (e.g., Pierce & Aguinis, 2013) and is consistent with a U-shaped curve. That is, a tipping point effect describes a process in which a predictor has a small effect on an outcome until the predictor reaches a critical level, after which the effect becomes much stronger. For example, incivility at work may be somewhat detrimental and have a small linear influence on behavior until it reaches a certain level (i.e., the proverbial “straw that breaks the camel’s back”). After this tipping point is reached, incivility can produce coercive, retaliatory actions (Andersson & Pearson, 1999).

To summarize, when recruits have high levels of belief confidence, it is only after a site visit experience reaches a critical level that the visit will change recruits’ organization images.² In contrast, for recruits with low confidence who will be more motivated to seek new information about the employer, we expect linear

relationships between recruitment experiences and organizational image perceptions. We therefore predict the following:

Hypotheses 2–4: Applicants’ perceptions of recruiter (a) warmth and (b) competence will be related to changes in their perceptions of organizational trustworthiness (Hypothesis 2), their expectations of receiving skill development (Hypothesis 3), and their expectations of receiving leadership development (Hypothesis 4), moderated by initial belief confidence. For applicants with low-belief confidence, the relationship between recruiter behaviors and trustworthiness, skills development, and leadership development will be positive and linear, whereas these relationships will be curvilinear and U-shaped for those with high confidence.

Influence of Recruiter on Changes in Belief Confidence

So far, we have developed predictions about how belief confidence changes the effects of recruitment interventions on applicants’ beliefs. However, it also is important to consider how recruitment interventions, such as site visits, modify applicants’ confidence in their initial organizational image beliefs. Because recruitment is ongoing and continues after the site visit, applicants’ confidence in their beliefs may continue to affect their reactions to an organization’s communications, their decisions about accepting a job, and their expectations after joining.

We expect that the relationship between recruitment experiences and changes in belief confidence will follow a pattern similar to that discussed above. Specifically, the effects of a site visit on applicants’ confidence will be relatively small unless the recruitment experience is very positive. We theorize that, on average, applicants expect to interact with a recruiter with at least average competence and warmth. Because people selectively process information that is congruent with their prior beliefs while discounting incongruent information (Klayman, 1995; Stevens, 1997), we expect that only strong disconfirmation will lead to changes in confidence. Thus, when expectations are more or less met, we predict relatively small changes in applicant belief confidence. However, we expect that very high levels of interviewer competence and warmth surprises and unfreezes applicants from their beliefs (Lewin, 1951). In other words, experiencing a recruiter who is unexpectedly high on warmth or competence should shake applicants’ confidence in their organizational image beliefs and force them to critically reevaluate their assumptions about the organization. As such, we predict that applicants’ experiences with recruiters will have a curvilinear relationship—with small changes in applicants’

² It is also quite possible that very negative recruitment experiences (e.g., a recruiter who is perceived as incompetent and/or who is very low on warmth) could have strongly negative effects on image perceptions (i.e., cause a tipping point at the low end of recruiter perceptions). Although this certainly occurs, we suspect that the base rate of such experiences is rather low. For example, in our sample, less than 7% of the sample rated the recruiter lower than a 4 (the scale midpoint) on competence, and the same was true for ratings of warmth. This is not meant to diminish the importance or the effect of negative experiences, but simply to note that they may be difficult to capture. Most organizations likely make an effort to train recruiters so that they engender moderately positive reactions, at a minimum.

belief confidence until perceptions of recruiters are positive enough to reach an inflection or tipping point (Andersson & Pearson, 1999).

Hypothesis 5: Applicants' perceptions of (a) warmth and (b) competence will be curvilinearly related to changes in belief confidence (i.e., a U-shaped curve).

Method

Overview, Procedure, and Sample

This study focused on meetings at recruitment stations between a representative of one branch of the U. S. Armed Forces and an individual who responded to the organization's Internet recruiting efforts. During a 1-year period, anyone who clicked on a hyperlink on the organization's website received our initial survey. For those who completed this survey ($N = 4,857$), 55% were men, 86% were single, 61% were Caucasian, 14% were African American, and 14% were Hispanic. Participants who visited a recruiting station were sent a link to a second electronic survey that measured their perceptions of the recruitment encounter and reassessed their employer image and belief confidence. For testing hypotheses, we included only participants who completed both pre- and postencounter surveys (sample size ranged from 474 to 525, depending on missing data). The mean time between pre- and postencounter surveys was 17 days ($SD = 10$ days) and did not influence the pattern of results or conclusions when included as a control variable. Of these respondents, 57% were men, 61% were Caucasian, 17% were African American, and 14% Hispanic. Approximately 90% of the respondents were single.

It is difficult to estimate an accurate response rate, because organization representatives indicated that less than 50% of their initial online contacts are valid leads, and of the valid leads, less than 25% who request information actually visit a recruiting station. In this sense, the attrition is aligned with the natural process of recruitment at this organization. Looking at Time 1 (T1)-only respondents versus those who responded at both time periods, there was no difference for gender or minority status, but there was a difference for marital status ($F = 6.82, p < .05, d = .10$) such that both time period respondents were more likely to have never been married. In addition, individuals who responded to both surveys had stronger Time 1 belief confidence ($M = 5.00, SD = 1.27$) than those who did not ($M = 4.74, SD = 1.29; F = 21.08, p < .05, d = .19$). This is also consistent with natural attrition in a recruitment process.

Measures

Belief confidence. Belief confidence was measured with three items (T1 $\alpha = .80$; Time 2 [T2] $\alpha = .71$): "How certain are you about the beliefs you have about the (organization)?" (1 = *extremely uncertain*; 7 = *extremely certain*); "How much do you know about the (organization) relative to your friends and acquaintances?" (1 = *much less*; 7 = *much more*); "In general, I know a lot about the (organization)" (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*).

To assess the construct validity of our measure, we conducted a separate study with 199 undergraduates (52% male, mean age = 21.55; 60% active job seekers). Participants rated three organizations (the branch of the military that we examined, their most preferred organization, and one of four well-known organizations) with our three items and three belief confidence items drawn from Petty et al. (2002). Across the six organizations, the two sets of three items (our items and the Petty et al. items) were strongly correlated (mean $r = .84$). In addition, a comparative factor analysis (CFA) indicated that a one-factor model with the six items as manifest indicators fit the data very well, mean $\chi^2(9) = 19.33$; mean comparative fit index = .991; mean standardized root-mean-square residual = .014; mean root-mean-square error of approximation = .084. Such results indicate that our measure taps the same construct as the belief confidence measure used by Petty and colleagues.³

Information sources. The use of information sources for knowledge about the employer was measured at T1 with 14 items, seven personal and seven impersonal sources, on a 7-point scale (1 = *very little*; 7 = *a great deal*). We also created formative scales for the sources, which were reasonably reliable ($\alpha = .67$ and $.76$ for personal and impersonal sources, respectively), though formative scales are not expected to be internally consistent (Law, Wong, & Mobley, 1998).

Organizational image. We measured trustworthiness (T1 $\alpha = .87$; T2 $\alpha = .92$) with nine trait adjectives (e.g., "helpful," "sincere," "honest") from Slaughter et al.'s (2004) scale, using a 7-point scale of descriptiveness (1 = *not at all descriptive*; 7 = *very descriptive*).

Instrumental job attributes. We developed the instrumental attribute scales by collaborating with a marketing team that creates the organization's advertisements to understand what attributes recruits used to evaluate the job opportunities. Leadership development (T1 $\alpha = .85$; T2 $\alpha = .89$) was measured with three items (e.g., "the [organization] gives opportunities to be a leader early in life"). Skill development (T1 $\alpha = .93$; T2 $\alpha = .94$) was measured with four items (e.g., "the [organization] offers great training that can help people get jobs"). Each of the items was measured using a 7-point scale of agreement (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*).

Recruiter characteristics. Recruiter characteristics were measured at T2 using items from Turban, Forret, and Hendrickson (1998). Participants indicated the extent (on a 7-point scale of agreement) the recruiter demonstrated warmth (five items, $\alpha = .93$) (e.g., "had a warm personality") and competence (three items, $\alpha = .91$) (e.g., "was able to answer my questions").

³ These fit indices were obtained after correlating the error terms for these two items: "How much do you know about the (organization) relative to your friends and acquaintances?" (1 = *much less*; 7 = *much more*) and "In general, I know a lot about the (organization)." We viewed this correlation of error terms as justifiable given the similarity in item content, because these items were adjacent to one another on the surveys (Rubio & Gillespie, 1995) and because correlating the error terms did not substantially change the factor loadings for the items (Gerbing & Anderson, 1984). Complete information about the analyses of the supplemental data may be obtained by contacting Jerel E. Slaughter.

Results

Descriptive Statistics and Measurement Models

Means, standard deviations, and correlations are presented in Table 1. To assess the validity of our measures, we conducted two CFAs: for the Time 1 measures and for the Time 2 measures. For Time 1, we specified a four-factor model, representing belief confidence, trustworthiness, skill development, and leadership development. For Time 2, we specified a six-factor model, representing belief confidence, trustworthiness, skill development, leadership development, recruiter warmth, and recruiter competence. As shown in Table 2, the hypothesized models fit the data well, and significantly better than a number of alternative models.

Predictors of Initial Belief Confidence

To test Hypothesis 1, which predicted that belief confidence would be more strongly influenced by personal than impersonal sources, we conducted two regression analyses, varying the order of entry for the sets of sources (see Table 3). Results indicated that the impersonal sources did not add incremental variance beyond the personal sources ($\Delta R^2 = .011$), but the personal sources accounted for significant incremental explanatory variance beyond the impersonal sources ($\Delta R^2 = .114$). In addition, examination of the relative weights of the predictors (Johnson, 2000; Tonidandel & LeBreton, 2011) indicate that the personal sources accounted for 80.0% of the explained variance, whereas the impersonal sources accounted for only 19.8% of the explained variable. On the basis of a reviewer recommendation, we conducted the same set of analyses using the formative scales, with similar results: Personal sources accounted for 87% of the explained variance, and impersonal source accounted for only 13%. Such results provide support for Hypothesis 1.

Influence of Belief Confidence on the Effects of Recruiter and Station Characteristics

Hypotheses 2–4 predicted that for recruits whose confidence in their initial beliefs was lower, the relationship between recruitment experiences and postvisit images would be linear, whereas this relationship would be curvilinear among recruits with higher initial belief confidence. Support for the specific pattern hypothesized would be indicated by an interaction of belief confidence and the squared recruitment-experience term, which is shown in Models 5 and 8 in Tables 4–6, for Hypotheses 2–4, respectively. As shown in Tables 4–6, we entered the control variables in Step 1. These included gender, minority status⁴ (0 = nonminority; 1 = minority), the dependent variable at Time 1, and belief confidence at both time periods. By controlling for the image variables at Time 1, our analysis examined changes in applicant's employer images that covary with the predictors (Cable & Parsons, 2001; Chatman, 1991; Cohen & Cohen, 1983). Model 2 added the recruiter warmth and competence. Model 3 added the linear interaction; Model 4, the recruiter squared term; and Model 5, the quadratic interaction. Finally, Models 6–8 mirrored the steps in Models 3–5.

To depict the form of the interaction, we graphed significant interactions at low (-1 SD) and high ($+1$ SD) levels of belief confidence. We tested the simple linear and quadratic effects at

low and high levels of confidence for the quadratic interactions (see Table 7), using formulas from Dawson and Richter (2006), as presented in the Appendix. Support for the specific form of our hypothesis is evidenced by a significant linear relationship when confidence was low and a significant quadratic relationship *only* when confidence was high. Table 7 also presents the minimum point (also called the *inflection point*) calculated using a formula from Le et al. (2011).

As Table 4 shows, the interaction of applicant belief confidence and recruiter warmth squared in Model 5 ($\beta = .13, p < .05$) and the interaction of applicant belief confidence and recruiter competence squared in Model 8 were significant ($\beta = .14, p < .05$), providing initial support for Hypotheses 2a and 2b. Table 7 indicates that recruitment experiences were linearly related to trustworthiness when confidence was low and had a U-shaped relationship when confidence was high, supporting the hypothesized pattern. As the pattern was identical for both interactions, we present only the Belief Confidence \times Competence Squared interaction (see Figure 1). Such results provide support for Hypothesis 2 and are consistent with the idea that it takes more to “break through” recruits' initial perceptions when they have more strongly held beliefs.

As shown in Table 5, the interaction terms in Models 5 and 8 indicate support for Hypothesis 3a (Model 5) but not 3b (Model 8). Inspection of Table 7 indicates that the quadratic effect was significant only when initial confidence was high, providing support for the pattern hypothesized. Although not presented due to space limitations, the plot of the results confirmed the hypothesized pattern.

The tests of Hypotheses 4a and 4b are presented in Models 5 and 8 in Table 6 and indicate initial support for only 4a. Results presented in Table 7 indicate that there was a quadratic effect for recruits with high-initial confidence, and a linear effect when confidence was low.

To summarize, we found support for our hypothesized higher order quadratic interaction relationships when initial confidence was high for four of the six relationships examined. As such, our results provide insight into how belief confidence moderates the relationships of recruitment experiences with changes in employer image perceptions by showing that when confidence is low, there is a linear positive relationship between recruitment experiences and changes in image perceptions. When initial confidence is high, however, it takes a significantly more positive recruitment experience to positively impact image perceptions.

As noted above, the minimum points on the curve for high-confidence recruits are presented in Table 7. What these points show, for example, is that the minimum point at which the recruiter has no effect on trustworthiness is at -1.35 standard deviations below the mean for recruiter competence. For illustra-

⁴ Gender and minority status have been shown to be related to the relative importance of job and recruiter factors for influencing organizational attractiveness (Konrad, Ritchie, Lieb, & Corrigan, 1999; Thomas & Wise, 2000). Thus, these are important control variables for testing Hypotheses 2–5, but are less relevant for testing Hypothesis 1. Nevertheless, for completeness, we also conducted our tests for Hypothesis 1 while also controlling for gender and minority status. These controls did not substantively influence our results or conclusions for Hypothesis 1. Complete information regarding these analyses may be obtained by contacting Jerel E. Slaughter.

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations for Major Study Variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28							
1. Gender	1.43	0.49	—																																		
2. Minority	1.32	0.47	09*	—																																	
3. Ads	4.61	1.85	06*	11*	—																																
4. Web	4.87	2.06	04*	05*	26*	—																															
5. Presentation	3.04	2.20	07*	06*	28*	17*	—																														
6. Direct information	4.23	2.09	07*	09*	40*	40*	40*	—																													
7. TV	3.97	2.09	-02	10*	42*	21*	27*	34*	—																												
8. News	3.57	2.05	-02	08*	37*	21*	30*	35*	55*	—																											
9. Other military	3.34	2.24	08*	08*	24*	11*	34*	28*	28*	32*	—																										
10. Parents	2.18	2.05	-05*	-04*	-01	02	09*	01	03*	08*	07*	—																									
11. Teachers	2.57	1.92	-03*	05*	23*	07*	37*	19*	17*	24*	24*	18*	—																								
12. Siblings	1.55	1.52	03*	05*	03*	02	13*	05*	07*	09*	12*	20*	15*	—																							
13. Counselors	2.49	1.95	02	07*	27*	18*	42*	29*	21*	28*	29*	12*	42*	19*	—																						
14. Family	1.55	1.52	-01	-01	09*	10*	17*	12*	10*	14*	13*	25*	20*	17*	22*	—																					
15. Org. personnel	2.49	1.95	-02	-02	05*	23*	33*	23*	06*	11*	29*	13*	22*	09*	28*	20*	—																				
16. Friends	3.75	2.40	05*	-03*	04*	14*	20*	14*	07*	14*	17*	12*	21*	13*	20*	29*	29*	—																			
17. Impersonal sources	3.89	1.32	06	04	68*	49*	61*	71*	69*	71*	59*	12*	34*	16*	44*	25*	27*	23*	—																		
18. Personal sources	2.74	1.19	03	05	23*	17*	47*	27*	19*	30*	28*	52*	61*	44*	65*	25*	60*	61*	44*	—																	
19. Confidence T1	4.77	1.29	-11*	-07*	00	23*	16*	16*	06*	11*	11*	20*	14*	11*	16*	63*	35*	26*	17*	35*	—																
20. Trustworthiness T1	5.15	1.10	04*	05*	24*	33*	18*	29*	20*	18*	13*	07*	11*	03*	15*	10*	17*	12*	34*	23*	26*	—															
21. Skills T1	6.11	1.13	02	00	20*	26*	11*	23*	15*	12*	09*	06*	07*	-03*	09*	07*	11*	08*	21*	14*	18*	60*	—														
22. Leadership T1	6.05	1.14	03	-01	19*	23*	10*	21*	14*	12*	08*	04*	05*	-04*	07*	07*	11*	10*	17*	11*	19*	57*	76*	—													
23. Confidence T2	5.24	1.16	-09	-02	04	12*	16*	13*	04	10*	00	18*	11*	03*	13*	13*	26*	23*	12*	28*	62*	22*	20*	—													
24. Trustworthiness T2	5.55	1.13	06	01	21*	24*	21*	26*	22*	18*	15*	08	14*	00	19*	10*	20*	14*	33*	21*	26*	56*	35*	28*	22*	—											
25. Skills T2	6.25	1.03	06	-08	14*	14*	14*	17*	11*	13*	11*	10*	07	22	14*	06	17	12	19*	13*	20*	38*	40*	33*	28*	66*	—										
26. Leadership T2	6.18	1.07	06	-07	16*	14*	15*	18*	12*	08*	14*	08	09*	-07	12*	07	15*	13*	21*	13*	23*	31*	32*	37*	30*	63*	78*	—									
27. Warmth	5.82	1.25	08	-04	14*	13*	15*	16*	09*	09*	12*	06	12*	-02	10*	07	19*	12*	19*	16*	22*	34*	30*	28*	34*	64*	55*	55*	—								
28. Competence	6.05	1.24	07	-08	16*	12*	09*	18*	09*	10*	08	07	09*	04	12*	09*	20*	09*	17*	16*	18*	30*	29*	24*	32*	60*	55*	52*	82*	—							

Note. Decimals removed from correlations for clarity. For Variables 1–22, *N* ranges from 4,400–4,737. For Variables 23–28, *N* ranges from 560–606. Org. = Organizational; T1 = Time 1; Confidence = belief confidence; T2 = Time 2.
* *p* < .05.

Table 2
Result of Confirmatory Factor Analyses for Time 1 and Time 2

Time	Model	χ^2	$\Delta\chi^2$ from hypothesized model	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR
1	Four factors	$\chi^2(183) = 3046.85^*$		.945	.059	.060
1	Three factors, combining skill and leadership development	$\chi^2(186) = 4245.02^*$	$\Delta\chi^2(3) = 1198.17^*$	.921	.069	.062
1	Two factors, combining skills, leadership, and trustworthiness	$\chi^2(188) = 10729.80^*$	$\Delta\chi^2(5) = 7682.95^*$	.796	.111	.094
1	One factor	$\chi^2(189) = 13780.32^*$	$\Delta\chi^2(6) = 10733.45^*$	.737	.126	.097
2	Six factors	$\chi^2(390) = 1080.52^*$		.948	.058	.055
2	Five factors, combining (a) skill and (b) leadership development	$\chi^2(395) = 1288.37^*$	$\Delta\chi^2(5) = 207.85^*$	.932	.065	.057
2	Five factors, combining (a) warmth and (b) competence	$\chi^2(395) = 1375.71^*$	$\Delta\chi^2(5) = 295.19^*$	.926	.069	.056
2	Four factors, with both (a) and (b) combinations	$\chi^2(399) = 1582.00^*$	$\Delta\chi^2(9) = 501.48^*$	.910	.075	.058
2	One factor	$\chi^2(406) = 5138.04^*$	$\Delta\chi^2(16) = 4057.52^*$	.641	.148	.152

Note. CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root-mean-square error of approximation; SRMR = standardized root-mean-square residual.
* $p < .05$.

tive purposes, we also calculated minimum points for recruits at very high levels of confidence (+1.5 SD); these are presented in the last column of Table 7. These values are higher (i.e., less negative), which suggests that as belief confidence increases, more positive recruitment experiences are required to affect image perceptions.

Influence of Recruitment Experiences on Changes in Belief Confidence

As shown in Table 8 (Models 3 and 4), results supported Hypotheses 5a and 5b. Recruiter warmth and competence had quadratic relationships, as shown by the squared terms, with Time

2 belief confidence, controlling for belief confidence at Time 1. Figure 2 shows that the influence of the recruiter increases as perceptions of recruiter warmth increases (i.e., an acceleration effect), which is consistent with our predictions. The U-shaped form of the relationship was identical for recruiter competence.

Discussion

Dineen and Soltis (2011) recently noted that little progress had been made in the area of recruiter–recruit interactions since 2003. Moreover, they noted that research had generally neglected site visits, which is unfortunate because they represent substantial investments for organizations, and because applicants’ decisions

Table 3
Regression Analyses and Relative Weights for Predicting Initial Belief Confidence

Personal then Impersonal		Impersonal then Personal		Relative weights	Relative weights % of R^2
Source and step	β	Source and step	β		
Step 1: Personal		Step 1: Impersonal			
Parents	.06	Ads	-.07	Parents	.009
Teachers	-.04	Web	.11*	Teachers	.001
Siblings	.05	Presentation	.09	Siblings	.004
Counselors	.02	Direct info.	.08	Counselors	.007
Family	.10*	Television	-.04	Family	.021
Org. personnel	.21**	News	.12*	Org. personnel	.049
Friends	.19**	Other branch	-.00	Friends	.040
ΔR^2	.153**	ΔR^2	.050**	Source sum	
Step 2: Impersonal		Step 2: Personal			
Ads	-.05	Parents	.06	Ads	.001
Web	.05	Teachers	-.03	Web	.011
Presentation	-.01	Siblings	.05	Presentation	.003
Direct info.	.04	Counselors	.01	Direct info.	.008
Television	-.01	Family	.09*	Television	.001
News	.08	Org. personnel	.20**	News	.008
Other branch	-.04	Friends	.18**	Other branch	.001
ΔR^2	.011	ΔR^2	.114**	Source sum	
R^2	.164**	R^2	.164**		

Note. In Step 1, the regression coefficients presented are from only that step, whereas the regression coefficients from Step 2 are from the full model. For Personal then Impersonal, Step 1, $F(7, 525) = 13.56, p < .05$; Step 2, $F(7, 518) = 0.99, p > .05$. For Impersonal then Personal, Step 1, $F(7, 525) = 3.94, p < .05$; Step 2, $F(7, 518) = 10.13, p < .05$. Org. = Organizational; info. = information.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

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Table 4
Regression Analyses for Predicting Postrecruiting Station Visit Trustworthiness Perceptions

Variable	Model 1 Controls	Model 2 Recruiter	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
Gender	.07	.02	.02	.01	.00	.02	.02	.01
Minority	-.02	-.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	-.00	.00
Trust T1	.52*	.41*	.41*	.40*	.39*	.41*	.40*	.39*
Conf. T1	-.03	-.02	-.02	-.01	-.08	-.02	-.01	-.08
Conf. T2	.25*	.11*	.11*	.09*	.10	.11*	.09*	.09*
Warmth		.30*	.30*	.37*	.34*	.30*	.28*	.28*
Competence		.19*	.20*	.20*	.21*	.20*	.30*	.29*
Warmth × Conf. T1			-.01	-.03	.05			
Warmth ²				.10*	.11*			
Warmth ² × Conf. T1					.13*			
Comp. × Conf. T1						-.02	-.03	.07
Competence ²							.12*	.12*
Comp. ² × Conf. T1								.14*
Variance explained								
ΔR ² step	.378*	.178*	.000	.005*	.006*	.000	.005*	.005*
R ² model		.556*	.5556*	.560*	.566*	.556*	.561*	.566*

Note. N = 483. T1 = Time 1; Conf. = belief confidence; T2 = Time 2; Comp. = recruiter competence.
* p < .05.

about whether to join an organization are often made during these visits. Our results help address these gaps in the literature by introducing belief confidence to help predict when site visits can alter recruits' perceptions.

From a theory perspective, understanding the role of belief confidence in recruitment helps connect the organizational image literature with the literature on attitude certainty and change (e.g., Krosnick & Petty, 1995). Our results show that when recruits have low levels of confidence in their initial beliefs—such as when their sources of information are largely impersonal—they are more impressionable and their beliefs are more strongly affected by moderate changes in recruitment experiences than when recruits have higher confidence. For individuals with lower confidence in their beliefs, the relationships of recruitment experiences to

changes in beliefs are linear such that even a slight increase in recruitment experiences is associated with an increase in changes in image perceptions. However, when recruits have high confidence in their initial beliefs, it takes much more positive recruitment experiences to “unfreeze” them from these beliefs. Likewise, we found that belief confidence itself changes much more following site visits when the experience is very positive.

The moderated quadratic relationships observed here suggest an important theoretical implication: “Tipping point” relationships in organizations may be dependent on other variables (Pierce & Aguinis, 2013). This relationship has been explored empirically in some areas of the literature (Allmendinger & Hackman, 1995; Le et al., 2011) and suggested in others (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Our results suggest that researchers should continue to explore

Table 5
Regression Analyses for Predicting Postrecruiting Station Visit Skill Development Perceptions

Variable	Model 1 controls	Model 2 recruiter	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
Gender	.05	.00	.00	-.01	-.01	-.00	-.01	-.01
Minority	-.07	-.06	-.06	-.06	-.06	-.06	-.06	-.06
Skills T1	.37*	.29*	.29*	.28*	.27*	.29*	.28*	.28*
Conf. T1	-.04	-.04	-.04	-.03	-.12*	-.04	-.02	-.01
Conf. T2	.26*	.12*	.12*	.10*	.11*	.12*	.09*	.09*
Warmth		.22*	.22*	.30*	.26*	.22*	.20*	.20*
Competence		.22*	.23*	.23*	.25*	.22*	.41*	.41*
Warmth × Conf. T1			-.08*	-.10*	.01			
Warmth ²				.11*	.12*			
Warmth ² × Conf. T1					.20*			
Comp. × Conf. T1						-.05	-.08*	-.09
Competence ²							.20*	.20*
Comp. ² × Conf. T1								-.02
Variance explained								
ΔR ² step	.233*	.150*	.007*	.006*	.013*	.003	.015*	.000
R ² model		.382*	.389*	.395*	.408*	.385*	.400*	.401*

Note. N = 490. T1 = Time 1; Conf. = belief confidence; T2 = Time 2; Comp. = recruiter competence.
* p < .05.

Table 6
Regression Analyses for Predicting Postrecruiting Station Visit Leadership Development Perceptions

Variable	Model 1 controls	Model 2 recruiter	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
Gender	.06	.02	.02	.01	.01	.02	.02	.01
Minority	-.03	-.03	-.02	-.02	-.02	-.02	-.02	-.02
Responsibility T1	.34*	.28*	.28*	.28*	.27*	.29*	.28*	.28*
Conf. T1	.04	.03	.03	.04	-.03	.03	.04	.06
Conf. T2	.26*	.14*	.13*	.11*	.12*	.13*	.12*	
Warmth		.24*	.23*	.31*	.28*	.24*	.22*	.24*
Competence		.18*	.19*	.19*	.20*	.18*	.28*	.31*
Warmth × Conf. T1			-.10*	-.11*	-.04			
Warmth ²				.10	.10*			
Warmth ² × Conf. T1					.14*			
Comp. × Conf. T1						-.10*	-.11*	-.05
Competence ²							.11	.14*
Comp. ² × Conf. T1								.09
Variance explained								
ΔR ² step	.248*	.132*	.009*	.005	.006*	.009*	.004	.002
R ² model		.380*	.390*	.394*	.400*	.390*	.394*	.396*

Note. N = 490. T1 = Time 1; Conf. = belief confidence; T2 = Time 2; Comp. = recruiter competence.
* p < .05.

these more complex relationships in order to understand how applicant beliefs are changed.

We also recommend continuing examination of belief confidence in future work. Barber (1998) lamented that research has focused too much on the early stages and not enough on later stages. Our results suggest that applicant confidence can affect the ability of organizational agents to persuade recruits at later stages of the recruitment process. Moreover, future research may show that for higher level jobs, or when there is more variability in familiarity, belief confidence plays a different role. For example, many organizations use executive recruiters to “poach” currently employed executives and make offers without using a long, traditional process. Here, belief confidence may interact with belief valence (e.g., Petty et al., 2002) such that when those being poached have high confidence in their beliefs about the poaching organization, they are likely to be guided by the valence of their beliefs in determining whether to seriously consider the offer. However, if they have low confidence in their beliefs, they are likely to be more impressionable, making the messages of the executive recruiters more critical.

Another important issue is to learn more about the mechanisms that allow more positive recruitment experiences to break through the convictions of confident recruits. One potential explanation comes from the heuristic-systematic model (Chaiken et al., 1989). This model holds that people act to ensure that their level of confidence in their attitudes is at a sufficient level. If attitude confidence is above the sufficiency threshold, information is processed heuristically; if below, information is processed systematically. It is possible that more positive recruitment experiences break through to high-belief-confidence recruits by temporarily lowering their confidence and making them more open to information and motivated to process it systematically. Unfortunately, we did not measure this proposed mechanism of whether recruits who are less confident about their beliefs will be more motivated to seek new information. Future research also would benefit from examining the accuracy of applicants’ beliefs (e.g., relative to organizational insiders) and testing whether some information sources lead to larger or smaller changes in beliefs, as a function of belief accuracy.

Next, it would be interesting to learn more about how belief confidence is affected by formal recruitment visits and other

Table 7
Test of Simple Linear and Quadratic Terms for Low- and High-Initial Belief Confidence

Hypothesis	DV	IV	Linear test statistic for -1 SD confidence	Quadratic test statistic for -1 SD confidence	Linear test statistic for +1 SD confidence	Quadratic test statistic for +1 SD confidence	Minimum value on curve for +1 SD confidence	Minimum value on curve for +1.5 SD confidence
2a	Trustworthy	Competence	t = 4.13*	t = .38	t = 5.68*	t = 3.44*	-1.35 (4.44)	-1.17 (4.65)
2b	Trustworthy	Warmth	t = 5.21*	t = .53	t = 5.89*	t = 3.41*	-1.42 (4.11)	-1.19 (4.40)
3a	Skills	Warmth	t = 1.78	t = -.47	t = 4.10*	t = 3.82*	-0.76 (4.92)	-0.58 (5.16)
4a	Leadership	Warmth	t = 1.97*	t = .14	t = 3.60*	t = 3.01*	-0.82 (4.85)	-0.61 (5.11)

Note. Minimum points (also called inflection points) were calculated as follows (see also Le et al., 2011): $-(b1 + b4 * Z)/2(b2 + b5 * Z)$, where Z is the standardized value of the moderator, b1 is the coefficient for the predictor variable, b2 is the coefficient for the squared predictor variable, b4 is the coefficient for the linear interaction term, and b5 is the coefficient for the quadratic interaction term. DV = dependent variable; IV = independent variable.
* p < .05.

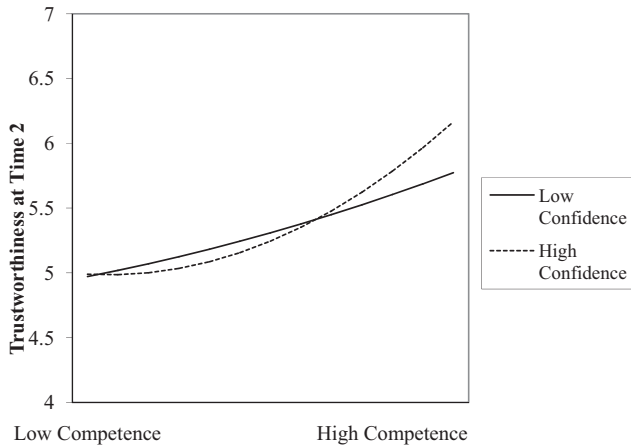


Figure 1. Interaction of belief confidence and recruiter competence influencing trustworthiness perceptions.

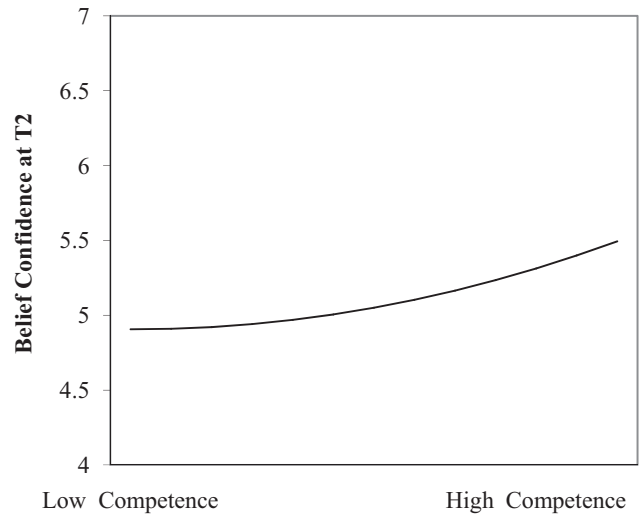


Figure 2. Relationship between recruiter competence and changes in belief confidence. T2 = Time 2.

recruitment experiences. Our results showed that it took more positive recruitment experiences to shake applicants' initial confidence, consistent with hypotheses. However, there may be more to the story. Research in social psychology shows that, under certain conditions, people actually become more confident in their attitudes *after* they resist a persuasive attack (Tormala & Petty, 2002, 2004). It is possible that when experiences confirm initial impressions about the organization, this also increases belief confidence.⁵ It will be interesting to learn how belief confidence ebbs and flows throughout the recruitment process, and how belief confidence affects persuasion in the recruitment context. As we noted in the introduction, belief confidence is likely to continue to influence the effectiveness of organizational practices as recruitment progresses past the site visit.

Practical Implications

First, managers should understand that the same recruitment intervention will affect recruits differently depending on their confidence in their beliefs. For example, a consistent finding was

that moderately warm recruiters lead to more positive organizational images (as compared with low-warmth recruiters) among recruits with low-belief confidence, but did little to influence those with higher belief confidence. Second, managers and recruiters should realize that even recruits with strong beliefs about the organization are still impressionable, as long as the recruitment experience is positive enough.

In terms of what managers should do differently based on our findings, we suggest that they could tailor their recruitment approach based on recruits' belief confidence. Information about belief confidence could be measured directly during the application process, or indirectly, through measuring recruits' sources of organizational information. For example, we suspect recruits' belief confidence would be weak for a new startup, and thus recruits will be relatively reactive to recruitment experiences. However, for companies recruiting applicants who are well connected with current employees, only the most favorable recruitment experiences will positively alter beliefs about the company. As a result, attracting high-quality recruits in the talent war may require heavy investment in selecting and training recruiters. Through the use of more refined recruiting practices that are based on knowledge of recruits' belief confidence, organizations may experience greater efficiency and conversion rates.

Limitations

One potential concern about the current study is the way we assessed belief confidence. We developed our own scale, and it is not known whether these results would be observed with different measures of confidence (e.g., Petty et al., 2002). However, our supplementary data collection showed an average correlation between the two measures of .84, and CFAs showed that the items from the two scales formed a single factor. Future research could assess multiple dimensions of belief confidence, as well as inves-

Table 8
Regression Analyses for Predicting Postrecruiting Station Visit Belief Confidence

Variable	Model 1 controls	Model 2 recruiter	Model 3 recruiter ²	Model 4 recruiter ²
Gender	-.04	-.06	-.08	-.06
Minority	-.05	-.03	-.03	-.04
Conf. T1	.59*	.53*	.52*	.52*
Warmth		.10	.22*	.08
Competence		.18*	.18*	.34*
Warmth ²			.17*	
Competence ²				.18*
Variance explained				
ΔR ² step	.349*	.068*	.014*	.013*
R ² model		.417*	.431*	.430*

Note. N = 503. Conf. = belief confidence; T1 = Time 1.
* p < .05.

⁵ We thank an anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.

tigating how some dimensions (e.g., perceived level of knowledge) may influence others (e.g., sense of conviction).

A second concern is that the lag between the Time 1 and Time 2 surveys suggests there might be a lag between the site visit and the Time 2 survey. It is possible that image perceptions at Time 2 were influenced not only by experiences during the site visit but also by additional information applicants gathered between the site visit and completion of the Time 2 survey. For example, perhaps those who perceived the recruiter as highly competent sought out the opinions of family members with military experience, which contributed to their Time 2 beliefs. Although this would not be inconsistent with our explanations, it does suggest additional mechanisms that were not captured with the methodology we used.

Finally, the effect sizes were small; many of the quadratic interaction terms explained less than 1% of the incremental variance in image perceptions. However, these effect sizes reflect the degree to which the quadratic relationship between recruitment experiences and organizational images vary as a function of belief confidence. Thus, it is not the case that experiences during the recruitment visits had little effect (indeed, the variance explained by recruiters ranged from 13% to 18%). Rather, the effect sizes associated with the difference in the quadratic effects across levels of belief confidence were small, perhaps in part because the organization we studied was very well known and recruits who visited the site had relatively strong belief confidence and very positive impressions of the organization. As one reviewer noted, the fact that the organization studied was very well known probably reduced the variability in scores on the belief confidence measure, as well as the “changeability” of previsit beliefs. With smaller or less well-known organizations, the effect sizes would likely be stronger.

Conclusion

This research was motivated by an important theoretical and practical question: Can later stage recruitment experiences alter job applicants' beliefs about organizations? The answer is yes, although the strength of the influence of recruitment experiences depends on the sense of conviction and validity recruits have in their initial beliefs. An important contribution of the current work is the application of belief confidence to the organizational behavior literature. It is our hope that, in future research, scholars begin to study this construct in areas outside of recruitment. Just as well-known organizations develop reputations among job seekers, employees develop reputations among their peers within and across organizations. It would be interesting to study the effects of people's confidence in their beliefs about other employees with whom they have had limited interaction.

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(Appendix follows)

Appendix

Formulas for Simple Linear and Quadratic Effects at Low and High Levels of Confidence for Quadratic Interactions

The following formulas can be used to calculate the test statistic t to test the significance of the linear and quadratic terms using regression coefficients and their variances and covariances. For all of the equations below, assume the regression equation:

$$Y = b_0 + b_1X + b_2X^2 + b_3Z + b_4XZ + b_4X^2Z,$$

where X is the IV (i.e., recruitment experience) and Z is the moderator (i.e., belief confidence).

When using standardized variables X and Z , the formula for the test statistic t for the quadratic term (X^2) at the high value of the moderator (+1 SD Z) is:

$$t = (b_2 + b_5) / \sqrt{[v_2 + v_5 + (2 * v(2, 5))]}, \quad (1)$$

where v_2 , v_5 and $v(2, 5)$ are the variances of b_2 and b_5 and their covariance, respectively. For -1 SD Z , the equivalent test statistic would be:

$$t = (b_2 - b_5) / \sqrt{[v_2 + v_5 - (2 * v(2, 5))]}. \quad (2)$$

The degrees of freedom for the t test are the same as for the final step of the hierarchical regression, in which the X^2Z term is added.

For calculating the test statistic t for the linear term at the high value of the moderator (+1 SD Z), the formula would be:

$$t = (b_1 + b_2 + b_4 + b_5) / \sqrt{[(v_1 + v_2 + v_4 + v_5 + (2 * v(1, 2)) + (2 * v(1, 4)) + (2 * v(1, 5)) + (2 * v(2, 4)) + (2 * v(2, 5)) + (2 * v(4, 5))]}, \quad (3)$$

where v_1 , v_2 , and $v(1, 2)$ are the variances of b_1 and b_1 and their covariance, respectively.

At -1 SD Z , the formula is:

$$(b_1 - b_2 + b_4 - b_5) / \sqrt{[(v_1 + v_2 + v_4 + v_5 - (2 * v(1, 2)) + (2 * v(1, 4)) - (2 * v(1, 5)) - (2 * v(2, 4)) + (2 * v(2, 5)) - 2 * (v(4, 5))]}]. \quad (4)$$

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