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Do green employer labels matter? A study of the impact of advertising environmental responsibility on recruitment

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ABSTRACT

Organizations increasingly advertise their environmental track record using green employer labels—certifications granted by external entities to recognize employers for their pro-environmental policies or practices for employer branding. Through the lens of Signalling Theory and Self-Congruity Theory, an eye-tracking experiment followed by a questionnaire was conducted with 142 young adults. Visual attention was measured for 11 areas of interest on a fictitious LinkedIn page on which different versions of a recruitment advertisement were shown. Individuals pay more visual attention to the LinkedIn search bar and less to the employer logo and right headband when a green employer label is shown. A green employer label has a positive effect on person-organization fit, thereby enhancing employer attractiveness. Especially individuals highly concerned about the environment perceive a fit between themselves and the employer when recruitment ads feature a green employer label. This increased fit leads to greater ad credibility and employer attractiveness.

1. Introduction

Increasingly, both consumers and prospective employees expect more than just profit-driven motives from companies. They expect organizations to adopt a corporate purpose that contributes positively to society (Hayes and Duff 2022), a criterion valued not only in purchasing decisions but also in career choices (Waples and Brachle 2020). Corporate social responsibility (CSR) holds significant value for potential candidates, particularly among the younger generations, as they find it motivating and rewarding (Jones et al. 2014; Klimkiewicz and Oltra 2017; Van den Bergh et al. 2024). A global report reveals that 57% of young individuals are more attracted to companies that

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engage in societal causes, and 53% actively seek credible 'green' credentials (Accenture 2021). Following this trend, organizations are increasingly spotlighting their environmental commitment in advertising campaigns, aiming to enhance their appeal to both consumers (Hartmann et al. 2023; Taylor 2018) and potential employees (Guillot-Soulez et al. 2022; Waples and Brachle 2020). Previous research generally indicates a positive impact of CSR appeals on brand attitude (Lecuyer et al. 2017; Luo and Bhattacharya 2006; Nan and Heo 2007; Page and Brown 2005) and organizational attractiveness (Greening and Turban 2000; Jones et al. 2014; Klimkiewicz and Oltra 2017; Yasin et al. 2023).

One of the ways employers communicate their environmental performance to enhance their attractiveness is by showing employer labels obtained from independent third parties in recruitment ads (Baum and Überschaer 2018; Dineen and Allen 2016; Lievens et al. 2023). These labels are third-party quality signals represented as a seal or logo that third-party formal entities organizing these competitions or rankings use to certify employers (eg Top Employer, Great Place to Work, Fortune Great Places to Work) (Baum and Überschaer 2018; Lievens et al. 2023). We propose to define green employer labels as awards or certifications delivered by external formal entities that certify that the labelled employers have been recognized for their pro-environmental policies or practices, for internal or external employer branding. In contrast, when no independent third-party certifying organization is involved, a green employer seal or logo is considered a company-generated claim rather than a formal employer label resulting from branding competitions or rankings (Dineen, 2019); Guillot-Soulez et al. 2022; Lievens et al. 2023). Examples of green employer competitions or rankings include 'Canada's Greenest Employers' by Canada's Top 100 Employers, the 'Top Employer Impact Award' by ECO Canada, the 'World's Most Sustainable Companies' by TIME Magazine, the '100 Best Green Workplaces in Oregon' by Oregon Business, and 'UK Green Business Awards' by BusinessGreen. Nevertheless, little is known about how individuals visually attend recruitment ads with third-party green employer labels and the mechanism that leads to the effect of these labels on employer attractiveness.

The current study uses a combination of eye tracking and a questionnaire set in a social media context to explore these questions. Our eye-tracking experiment measures which components of a recruitment ad on a LinkedIn page draw the attention of the viewer and the effect of adding a green employer label to a recruitment ad on visual attention to the other components of the LinkedIn page and the ad. Attracting attention is paramount for advertising effectiveness in a social media landscape filled with multiple ads and distractions (Koslow and Stewart 2022). Eye tracking offers insights into the allocation of visual attention, such as the frequency or duration of attention, to stimulus elements (Orquin and Holmqvist 2018; Pieters and Wedel 2004). Eye-tracking measures are also assumed to reveal individuals' interest and cognitive processing of the stimuli (Hartmann et al. 2013; Just and Carpenter 1980; Orquin and Mueller Loose 2013), making it possible to determine which elements of a recruitment ad, including a green employer label, raise interest, and if the presence of a green employer label in the ad impacts the processing of other ad and context elements. Despite the importance of paying visual attention to ads for cognitive message elaboration (Hartmann et al. 2013), to the best of our knowledge,

only scant previous research has used eye tracking to investigate how individuals attend recruitment content (Allen et al. 2013; Pfiffelmann et al. 2020; Yu et al. 2022) and none have been conducted in the context of employer labels, making it mute about the attentional proprieties of employer labels.

In the eye tracking part of the study we use Signalling Theory (Spence 1973) as a theoretical lens. Employers can express their dedication to CSR principles and the results of their CSR efforts by showing employer labels in their recruitment ads (Guillot-Soulez et al. 2022; Kleiss and Waiguny 2021). While previous research posits that an employer label is beneficial to employers' attractiveness (Baum and Überschaer 2018; Dineen and Allen 2016), only a few studies have investigated whether presenting a green employer label in recruitment advertising influences individuals' evaluation of employers (Guillot-Soulez et al. 2022; Kleiss and Waiguny 2021), and the psychological reasons underlying this potential effect remain unclear. In the second part of the study, we use Self-Congruity Theory (Sirgy 1985, 2018) to explore the mechanisms that explain how including an independent (third-party) green employer label in a recruitment ad results in greater employer attractiveness, by investigating the mediating role of perceived fit between the individual and the organization and of ad credibility. We shed light on how a green employer label signals shared values (a fit) between the individual and an employer and test to what extent an individual's environmental concern moderates the effect of a green employer label on perceived individual-employer fit. Additionally, we examine how this fit can lead to greater ad credibility and the extent to which individual-employer fit and credibility lead to more employer attractiveness.

We offer several contributions to knowledge. First, we expand the literature on corporate social responsibility and employer labels in recruitment advertising by examining how third-party green employer labels impact individuals' visual attention and processing of recruitment ads. Second, we explore the mechanisms through which employers presenting a green employer label in their ads increase their attractiveness by investigating the role of person-organization fit and ad credibility. Third, we test the moderating effect of environmental concern. Considering the substantial investments organizations make in entering employer labelling programs (Dineen and Allen 2016), our insights also provide practical implications for organizations in decision-making regarding using a third-party green employer label in their recruitment ads and how to target relevant segments of individuals.

2. Theoretical background, research questions and hypotheses

2.1. Green employer labels: a signalling theory perspective

Signalling Theory (Spence 1973) describes situations of information asymmetry and predicts the interactional relationship between a principal and an agent. In this relationship, there is often information asymmetry in which, for instance, potential candidates for a job and recruiting organizations have specific qualities that are difficult for others to observe directly (Rynes et al. 1991), leaving potential candidates feeling uncertain, potentially dissuading them from applying for job positions (Celani and Singh 2011; Pfiffelmann and Pfeuffer 2022). In this situation, organizations can convey

positive signals through advertising, making them appealing places to work (Collins and Han 2004). Amongst others, they can use employer labels as quality signals in their recruitment advertising campaigns (Guillot-Soulez et al. 2022; Kleiss and Waiguny 2021; Saini et al. 2014). For instance, organizations certified as 'best employers' have been shown to obtain a better quality and quantity of applicants, lower turnover, and better performance (Collins and Han 2004; Dineen and Allen 2016). As potential candidates select employers based on uncertain and incomplete information, including employer labels in recruitment advertising act as positive signals, reducing information asymmetry and benefiting individuals' responses to the advertisement and employer attractiveness (Überschaer and Baum 2020).

Third-party organizations have started delivering CSR employer labels, such as ethical labels (Osburg et al. 2020), diversity labels (Jonsen et al. 2021; Kleiss and Waiguny 2021), or green labels (Guillot-Soulez et al. 2022; Kleiss and Waiguny 2021). A CSR employer label refers to a certification or symbol used in recruitment communications that highlights an employer's commitment to corporate social responsibility activities (eg environmental or social practices) (Kleiss and Waiguny 2025). CSR appeals tend to yield positive influences on individuals' attitude towards the company (Lecuyer et al. 2017; Luo and Bhattacharya 2006; Nan and Heo 2007; Page and Brown 2005; Sander et al. 2021), purchase intentions (Jiang and Park 2021), and job-pursuit intentions (Baum and Überschaer 2018). In recruitment, CSR initiatives are one of many competitive appeals by organizations to attract potential candidates (Jones et al. 2014), given that they act as a positive signal about organization commitments (Greening and Turban 2000; Jonsen et al. 2021), contributing to their reputation and image (Osburg et al. 2020). According to Signalling Theory (Spence 1973) and, together with findings from past research (eg Guillot-Soulez et al. 2022; Überschaer and Baum 2020), there are solid reasons to believe that potential candidates for a job are more attracted by employers holding and communicating a green employer label, compared to employers that do not advertise such a label.

To the best of our knowledge, only two studies have examined the impact of green employer labels, both of which reported a positive effect on employer attractiveness (Guillot-Soulez et al. 2022; Kleiss and Waiguny 2021). While these studies are informative, they fail to explain the reasons behind this favourable outcome. For instance, Kleiss and Waiguny (2021) found that an organization showing a green employer label is perceived as having higher moral standards and caring more for its staff but did not investigate if these are the reasons why green employer labels improve employer attractiveness. Also, while Guillot-Soulez et al. (2022) found that a green employer label increases employer attractiveness through person-organization fit, they did not explore the mechanism through which this effect occurs. Previous research suggested that employer labels act as credible signals (Dineen and Allen 2016; Osburg et al. 2020), surprisingly without this claim ever having been empirically verified.

While initial findings suggest a positive impact of green employer labels on employer attractiveness, several gaps remain in our understanding of how and why this effect occurs—particularly in the context of social media. Social media recruitment ads and the platform on which they are shown contain many content elements. Individuals will devote attention to the information in these content elements that

raises their interest (Orquin and Mueller Loose 2013). The elements they attend to are contingent upon their significance in the decision-making process (Maslowska et al. 2020). However, our comprehension of how individuals visually engage with the different elements within social media recruitment ads remains incomplete. Employer labels are incorporated in recruitment ads as pictorial images. While no research has formally tested the attention-grabbing properties of employer labels, there are indications that they attract attention. For instance, previous research has demonstrated that pictorial stimuli such as green employer labels have a great ability to capture visual attention (Pieters and Wedel 2004), the latter contributing to brand recall (Childers and Houston 1984; Myers et al. 2020).

One might expect that a green employer label attracts more attention compared to a pictorial element with similar characteristics but not related to green information because it is assumed to be an interesting stimulus conveying symbolic meanings of the organization (Dineen and Allen 2016). On the other hand, such a label might not necessarily lead to more visual attention to the green employer label itself. The cognitive processing of a green employer label may not be more demanding than that of a non-green pictorial element because both types of visual stimuli can be processed with relative ease. In other words, a green claim, whether it conveys an award, certification, or other endorsement, does not inherently require more effortful cognitive processing than a non-green pictorial element of similar complexity. It may, however, have an impact on the visual attention to the whole recruitment ad and/or to increased attention for certain parts of the ad or the context of the ad that relate to the recruiting employer. For instance, there may be increased attention to search for elements in the ad or the LinkedIn page elements that provide extra information about the job or the company. Currently, we do not know if including a green employer label would result in more visual attention to all elements of the stimulus taken together, or in more or less visual attention to (some of) the other elements in the ad (such as the employer's logo or the job description text) or on the social media page. Therefore, we formulate an exploratory research question:

> **RQ:** Compared to a recruitment ad with non-green imagery, in what way does the presence of a green employer label change the visual attention to the ad or other social media page and advertising elements?

2.2. The effect of a green employer label on person-organization fit and employer attractiveness: the role of self-congruity

In general, previous research predicts a positive effect of employer labels on employer attractiveness. We argue that this will specifically be the case if the label is congruent with a person's self-identity. Building self-identity is one of the major drivers of behaviour (Villarino and Font 2015). Self-Congruity Theory defines self-congruity as the match, the similarity, between a consumer's self-concept (identity) and the perception of a given item, brand or organization (Sirgy 1985, 2018). The theory proposes that people aspire to harmony and conformity among their values, thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. People thus value consumption items, brands or organizations for self-expression and appreciate, use and associate with items, brands and organizations

that are congruent with their self-identity. At the core of Self-Congruity Theory lies the idea that preexisting self-identity perceptions and values influence people's interpretation and evaluation of information. Hence, individuals tend to react more positively to a message or cue that aligns with their preexisting self-identity regarding a specific object.

We test our model in a sample of 20–35 years old individuals, i.e. junior-level potential job applicants (Kleiss and Waiguny 2021) who are an important target group for recruitment ads. The sample thus consists of members of the younger part of the Generation Y generational cohort and the older part of the Generation Z cohort (Beresford Research 2024). Both cohorts share a preference for socially responsible organizations (Greening and Turban 2000; Ling et al. 2024; Ng et al. 2010; Rank and Contreras 2021). More particularly, they attach a lot of importance to the environmental consciousness of organizations. They believe that organizations should have a positive effect on or generate green values, and they are attracted to companies that act on environmental causes.

Previous research revealed that an employer's reputation and image are positively influenced by the potential employees' awareness of their CSR performance (Osburg et al. 2020; Sander et al. 2021), and thus also their environmental commitment. This can be attributed to the fact that employers communicating their green employer label can foster a higher fit (congruity) between these individuals' green self-identity and employer's efforts to act in an environment-friendly way. Person-organization fit refers to the perceived congruity by individuals with organizations on characteristics, values, goals, or missions that are important to both (Kristof 1996). We argue that especially potential Gen Y and Gen Z job candidates are more attracted to organizations that emphasize CSR initiatives and, more particularly, that they perceive as environmentally responsible (Greening and Turban 2000; Jones et al. 2014; Klimkiewicz and Oltra 2017; Waples and Brachle 2020; Yasin et al. 2023) because a recruitment advertisement connected to an environmental cause fits with the pre-existing green values of the ad recipient (De Pelsmacker et al. 2022). Therefore, potential employees are likely to perceive a fit with organizations that hold a green employer label (Guillot-Soulez et al. 2022) because they consider the label as congruent with their existing self-identity.

Additionally, we posit that the impact of a green employer label on the perceived fit between the individual and the employer is contingent upon individuals' environmental concern—the extent to which individuals are concerned with the compliance and/or proactive measures organizations undertake to mitigate their detrimental environmental impact (Rahman and Post 2012). More specifically, we expect that the effect of a green employer label on the perceived individual-employer fit will be stronger the more environmentally concerned the individual is (Lecuyer et al. 2017). Indeed, green signals are more likely to be effective when they resonate with individuals' intrinsic motivations and pre-existing pro-environmental values (Lima et al. 2024). Accordingly, we propose the following moderation hypothesis:

> **H1:** Including a green employer label in recruitment advertising will have a positive effect on person-organization fit that will be stronger for potential employees with higher environmental concern.

Additionally, individuals are more likely to be attracted by organizations that match their sense of who they are (Bhattacharya and Sen 2003). When potential candidates seek positions at organizations that align with their actual self-image, their behaviour helps them to preserve their self-consistency (Aguirre-Rodriguez et al. 2012). Conversely, aligning with an organization that reflects the person they aspire to become gives them a sense of progressing towards their ideal self-image, enhancing their self-esteem (Kim 2015). Therefore, potential candidates may not only seek organizations where they can express who they are but also ones that support their personal growth into who they wish to become (Wille et al. 2018). Previous research found that both actual and ideal self-congruity are positively related to employer attractiveness and job-pursuit intention (Nolan and Harold 2010; Wille et al. 2018). In the context of the current study, individuals would experience a consistent or enhanced self-concept from the potential of being part of an organization that engages in environmentally responsible actions that fit their values, which positively affects their attractiveness to the employer (Bhattacharya and Sen 2003; Greening and Turban 2000).

In addition, according to the similarity-attraction paradigm (Byrne 1969), individuals are attracted to other individuals and groups who share similarities with them because they favour stimuli that reinforce the logic and consistency of their world (Montoya and Horton 2013). Similar people or organizations are reinforcing and thus are associated with positive feelings, which in turn lead to attraction (Byrne 1969). Employers can thus increase their attractiveness by increasing the degree to which the information about their values aligns with those of potential employees (Judge and Cable 1997; Kristof-Brown et al. 2014). Person-organization value congruence, as a specific form of person-organization fit, has been found to be an important determinant of job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and attraction (Kristof 1996; Kristof-Brown et al. 2023; Meglino et al. 1989). In line with Self-Congruity Theory and the Person-Organization fit literature, we expect:

> **H2:** A stronger perceived person-organization fit will lead to a higher employer attractiveness.

2.3. The effect of a green employer label on advertising credibility and employer attractiveness

Ad credibility refers to how truthful or believable the audience perceives claims made about the company or the brand in the ad (MacKenzie and Lutz 1989; Yu et al. 2022). When recipients of recruitment ads perceive them as credible, they will hold a favourable attitude towards them (Pfiffelmann et al. 2020).

Credibility can be divided into message credibility and source credibility. Previous studies show that message credibility and source credibility are issues that are intrinsically linked to each other, as individuals attach importance to information provided by trustworthy or expert sources (Giffin 1967; Hovland and Weiss 1951). Munnukka et al. (2016) posit that one of the components of source credibility is the similarity between the source and the receiver. Similarity is an often overlooked dimension of source credibility (Morimoto and La Ferle 2008; Yuan and Lou 2020), which refers to mutual characteristics that audiences share with message sources (Schiappa et al. 2007). A higher degree of similarity leads to more positive attitudes towards the

advertised brand because the message is perceived as more credible (Morimoto and La Ferle 2008). While no previous research has investigated the relationship between person-organization fit and ad credibility, there are thus reasons to believe that ad recipients should perceive the advertisement as more credible when their self-image aligns with that of the employer. Hence:

> **H3:** A stronger perceived person-organization fit will lead to higher ad credibility.

While it has been shown that CSR appeals decrease individuals' critical ad evaluations (Jiang and Park 2021) and lead to increased ad credibility (Sander et al. 2021), individuals also demonstrate a lack of trust and skepticism towards organizations' motives for advertising on their CSR initiatives (Lecuyer et al. 2017; Mohr et al. 2001). This is reinforced by the fact that advertising on (green) CSR performance has become mainstream in employer branding (Jonsen et al. 2021), resulting in increased perceptions of more perceived greenwashing that negatively affect ad and brand evaluations (Rathee and Milfeld 2024; Schmuck et al. 2018). In fact, recent content analyses reveal that despite corporations' increased use of green advertising, a significant portion of green claims are misleading (Kwon et al. 2024), further fuelling scepticism towards such advertising (Kwon et al. 2024) and lowering ad credibility (Rathee and Milfeld 2024).

An essential feature of third-party employer labels is their perceived independence and thus trustworthiness, another important component of credibility (Baum and Überschaer 2018; Lievens et al. 2023). Third parties deliver employer labels after comparing and evaluating several employers. These employer labels thus hold a strong reputation for credibility because third parties bestow them, and these labels exist outside the organization's communication control (Dineen and Allen 2016). When the source of information about an organization's CSR activity is a non-organization source, the advertisement is perceived as more credible (Fernández et al. 2022). Indeed, previous research shows that third-party ethical employer labels generate more favourable ad attitudes than company-generated ethical claims (Osburg et al. 2020). Therefore, by being external and independent (Baum and Überschaer 2018), third-party employer labels convey a sense of consistency, indicating that organizations' CSR engagements are systematic rather than idiosyncratic (Dineen and Allen 2016), which is thought to benefit ad credibility (Osburg et al. 2020). Accordingly:

> **H4:** Potential employees will perceive a recruitment ad as more credible when it contains a third-party green employer label than when no employer label is communicated.

Credibility is critically important in persuasive communication and attitude change (Perloff 1993), and is also an important variable in the recruitment process (Breaugh and Starke 2000). Potential candidates view some message sources as more credible than others (Cable et al. 2000; Fisher et al. 1979), and more credible messages are more effective at engendering positive brand attitudes (Morimoto and La Ferle 2008) or organization attitudes (Allen et al. 2013). In the context of recruitment, when organizations try to 'sell' organizational merits to potential candidates, more credible messages should be important for employer attractiveness. Previous research revealed that the evaluation of message credibility is an important determinant of employer attractiveness, as has been shown for the credibility of recruitment websites (Allen et al. 2013), word-of-mouth communication (Van Hoye and Lievens 2007), or CSR
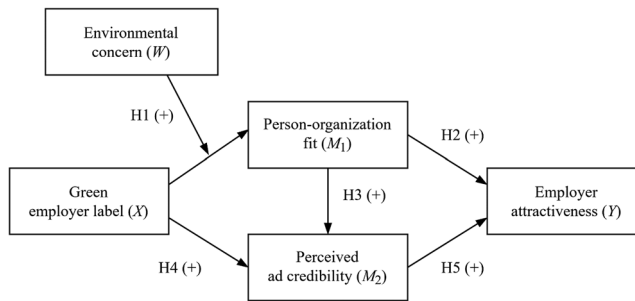
Figure 1. Conceptual model. *Note:* Signs (+) represent hypothesized positive relationships, not empirical results.

information in job advertisements (Agnihotri and Bhattacharya 2022). Hence, we hypothesize that an advertisement perceived to communicate more credible signals will positively impact employer attractiveness.

H5: The more an ad is perceived as credible, the more the employer will be perceived as attractive.

Combining all five hypotheses, we thus predict that third-party green employer labels will have a positive effect on employer attractiveness because they directly and indirectly (through person-organization fit) lead to more credibility, and consequently to more employer attractiveness. Figure 1 presents the conceptual model.

3. Research method

3.1. Pretest

In a pretest, a sample of 75 French Prolific panel participants (M_{age} = 27.61, SD=4.37, 46.7% women) were randomly exposed to one fictitious green employer label among three that were designed for the main experiment. We measured perceived environmental responsibility using a seven-point Likert scale with three items ('This company develops actions in favor of the environment', 'This company manages to limit its negative effects on the environment', 'This company involves its employees in environmental initiatives', M=5.13, SD=0.82, α = .699), perceived label credibility with two seven-point semantic differential items (How would you describe this employer label? – 'Dishonest/ Honest', 'Insincere/Sincere', M=4.38, SD=1.15, α = .809), and perceived label realism with a seven-point Likert scale with two items ('I find this employer label realistic', 'This employer label could probably exist in real life', M=4.96, SD=1.24, α = .850). No significant difference between the three labels was found in terms of perceived environmental responsibility ($F(2)$ = 0.083, p = .921), perceived label credibility ($F(2)$ = 0.188, p = .829), and perceived label realism ($F(2)$ = .972, p = .383). For the main experiment, we selected the label that scored the highest on perceived environmental responsibility (M=5.17) and perceived label credibility (M=4.48). Although the mean score of perceived label realism (M=4.78) is lower than that of the two other conditions, the difference is not significant, and participants perceive the label as being realistic enough.

3.2. Research design of the main study

In a between-subjects eye-tracking experiment, participants were exposed to a static mock LinkedIn page containing the classical elements of a LinkedIn home page (eg search bar, menu, left headband with network management, right headband with news) and a recruitment ad posted in the newsfeed to ensure stimulus realism. Today, 92% of employers use social media to find talent (EnterpriseAppsToday 2023). LinkedIn is one of the most important recruitment platforms today, with a global audience reaching 14.6% of the world's population (Qureos 2024). Ninety percent of job seekers use LinkedIn for job search (EnterpriseAppsToday 2023), and 62% of Gen Z have discovered job opportunities on social media (Zippia 2023). We used a fictitious hiring organization and the green employer label selected in the pretest to avoid potential bias due to familiarity with the employer and existing employer labels. Participants were randomly exposed to a recruitment ad without an employer label (control condition, $n = 77$) or a recruitment ad with a third-party green employer label (treatment condition, $n = 65$) (Appendix A); the ads were otherwise identical between experimental conditions. To avoid inappropriate comparisons between stimuli in the eye-tracking analysis (see Orquin and Holmqvist 2018), the control condition featured a visual element containing neutral (non-green) information in the same format as the green employer label—an image stating 'We are hiring, join us'—to mirror the green employer label in size, colour, placement, and text length, but without any environmental or third-party content.

3.3. Participants

We recruited individuals ($n = 142$, $M_{age} = 23.60$, $SD = 3.36$; 80.3% women) in France to participate in the experiment in exchange for a lottery to win one of ten 30€ gift cards that could be used online on various e-commerce sites. Similar to Kleiss and Waiguny (2021), we used a convenience sample of junior-level potential applicants aged between 20 and 35 years old, which is relevant for representing the members of the younger part of the Gen Y cohort and the older part of the Gen Z cohort. A post-hoc power analysis using G*Power confirmed that the sample size was sufficient for the statistical model ($f^2 = 0.15$, $p < .05$, statistical power = 0.97) (Cohen 1988). More than 66% of the participants completed at least a bachelor's degree and more than 50% had more than two years of professional experience, making it a relevant sample for recruitment ads on LinkedIn (Table 1). No significant differences were observed among the sample across the conditions in terms of participants' gender, age, level of education, professional status, and duration of professional experience.

3.4. Procedure

The experiment took place in a University laboratory dedicated to eye-tracking research and was conducted over a period of three months in early spring 2022. Students from different educational programs in a French University were randomly invited by email to participate in the study by the heads of the programs. We preregistered participants based on the exclusion criterion of insufficient data quality (eg strong corrective lenses or glasses) and proposed a set of different time slots for coming to

Table 1. Sample characteristics.

Demographic variable	Category	*n*	%	Chi-square test
Gender	Female	114	80.3	*p* = .442
	Male	28	19.7	
Age	20–21	39	27.5	*p* = .277
	22–23	54	38.0	
	24–25	24	16.9	
	26–27	5	3.5	
	27–35	20	14.1	
Level of education	Higher national diploma	4	2.8	*p* = .489
	Bachelor's degree	37	26.1	
	First year of master's degree	46	32.4	
	Master's degree	49	34.5	
	Other	6	4.2	
Professional status	Student in initial education	59	41.5	*p* = .081
	Student in apprenticeship	60	42.3	
	Student in continuing education	9	6.3	
	Employee on a fixed-term contract	3	2.1	
	Employee on a permanent contract	11	7.7	
Cumulative duration of professional experience	<6 Months	8	5.6	*p* = .267
	6 Months–1 year	20	14.1	
	1 Year–2 years	42	29.6	
	2 Years–5 years	51	35.9	
	5 Years–10 years	16	11.3	
	>10 Years	5	3.5	

Note: Chi-square tests were conducted to assess the association between the labelling condition (0 = no employer label, 1 = green employer label) and the demographic variables.

the laboratory. Data was collected using a 17-inch screen laptop with the eye tracker Tobii Pro Nano (60 Hz) and Tobii Pro Lab (v1.181) software. Participants enrolled in a session lasting 20 min and were positioned at a distance of 23–32 inches from the laptop. A research assistant explained the procedure to the participants and calibrated the eye-tracking recording by adjusting the chair positions and the screen distance. Then, participants viewed an instruction to look at a LinkedIn page for as long as they liked to avoid time pressure (Orquin and Holmqvist 2018). Finally, they filled in the self-reported measures in the questionnaire after being exposed to the experimental stimulus.

3.5. Measures

In the questionnaire, all constructs were assessed using existing seven-point Likert-type or semantic differential measurement scales (Appendix B). We assessed employer attractiveness with five items from Highhouse et al. (2003) (*M* = 4.76, *SD* = 0.91, α = .80), perceived ad credibility with six items from Sarofim and Cabano (2018) (*M* = 4.39, *SD* = 1.04, α = .86), person-organization fit with five items from Resick et al. (2007) (*M* = 4.44, *SD* = 0.93, α = .92), and environmental concern with five items from Han et al. (2020) (*M* = 5.88, *SD* = 0.85, α = .87).

As control variables, we measured perceived label credibility with four items from Moussa and Touzani (2008) (*M* = 4.56, *SD* = 1.15, α = .90), self-perceived employability with three items from Rothwell and Arnold (2007) (*M* = 4.34, *SD* = 1.11, α = .76), and job search probability with one item (i.e. 'How likely are you to be looking for a job

(including an internship) in the next 12 months?' Very unlikely/Very likely) ($M = 5.92$, $SD = 1.89$).

Additionally, employer familiarity was measured with a scale from Cable and Turban (2003) ($M = 1.28$, $SD = 0.59$, α = .77) and serves as a screening variable, ensuring that participants had no prior knowledge of the employer.

Finally, we used three items as a manipulation check for perceptions of environmental responsibility (eg 'In my opinion, this company develops actions in favor of the environment') ($M = 4.70$, $SD = 1.05$, α = .82). The only difference between the two conditions is a neutral visual imagery vs. a third-party green employer label. This justifies the manipulation check variable we used to assess the manipulation's effectiveness, since the company with the green employer label is supposed to be perceived as being more engaged in the environment than the company without the employer label.

3.6. Quality controls and manipulation check

Initially, 149 participants took part in the experiment. We discarded three eye-tracking recordings due to low data quality. Following existing procedures (Broniarczyk and Gershoff 2003; Pfiffelmann et al. 2020), we excluded two participants who scored more than mid-point on the 1–7 employer familiarity scale, because the employer used in the study was a nonexistent organization. Finally, we screened out two participants who failed to select an obvious correct response to an attention check question, resulting in a final sample of 142 participants.

For participants exposed to the green employer label condition, a one-sample t-test shows that perceived label credibility ($M = 4.56$, $SD = 1.15$) was significantly higher than the mid-point 4 on the 1–7 scale ($t = 3.89$, $p < 001$), indicating that respondents exposed to the green employer label perceived the label as credible and coming from a third-party organization. Results of t-tests for independent samples revealed that the mean scores of self-perceived employability ($t = -1.25$, $p = .212$) and job search probability ($t = 0.68$, $p = .095$) did not significantly differ between experimental conditions, ruling them out to be confounding variables. Finally, participants showed higher scores on environmental responsibility of the employer when the ad contains a green employer label ($M = 5.17$) in comparison with no employer label ($M = 4.31$, $t = -5.32$, $p < .001$), indicating that our experimental manipulation was successful.

4. Eye-tracking analysis

To conduct the eye-tracking analysis, we considered 11 areas of interest (AOIs) for each important element in the social media page (Appendix C). More specifically, the areas in the recruitment ad post included the employer logo, the follow button, the employer label area, the text headline, the text link, the main text, and the post buttons, while the areas in the remainder of the LinkedIn page were the search bar, the menu, and the left and the right headbands. This made it possible to analyse the eye-tracking measures by AOIs. To balance the ratio of true and false positive fixations due to noise in eye-tracking data (Purucker et al. 2013), we kept small margins of the actual area for the AOIs (Orquin et al. 2016).

We used the number of visits to the AIOs to count the total number of times a participant visually visited a particular AOI during the recording time. In addition, we used the total duration of visits to calculate the total time spent on each AOI. It represents the sum of all the times a participant visited an AOI between the start of the first fixation on the AOI and the end of the last fixation on the AOI during the recording time. Higher numbers of visits and total duration of visits to an AOI indicate participants' interest in the AOI (Bojko 2013; Maslowska et al. 2020). Finally, we also used the average duration of fixations on each AOI. This is a measure of information processing that indicates the AOIs' ability to maintain the participant's attention (Bojko 2013; Maslowska et al. 2020). Finally, heat maps were created using fixations for all participants assigned to the recruitment ad without an employer label (Appendix D1) and with the green employer label (Appendix D2). Heat maps provide a qualitative understanding of participants' visual attention distribution across a stimulus (Maslowska et al. 2020). Red indicates the longest fixation times, whereas yellow indicates shorter fixations, and green indicates the shortest fixations.

To answer the RQ regarding the differences in attention to the social media page elements between labelling conditions, we observe that there are only small differences between the two conditions (green employer label and control) when comparing the mean scores of the eye-tracking measures (Table 2). The heat maps further evidence that the distribution of visual attention seems relatively similar across stimuli between conditions. Nevertheless, we observe that while participants seemed to have looked at the employer label area more when the green employer label was presented in the ad, their attention to the employer's logo diminished.

We ran Mann-Whitney U-tests to check whether there were statistically significant differences ($p < .10$) between the two labelling conditions in the number of visits, total duration of visits, and average duration of fixations on each AOI. Prior to that, we conducted a post-hoc power analysis using G*Power for non-parametric t-tests for independent samples with medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.5$), $p < .10$, sample size group 1 = 65, sample size group 2 = 77). The power analysis revealed that the power of the statistical tests is 0.89 ($t = 1.65$, $df = 133.6$) for the eye-tracking analysis. We tested the total time spent watching the stimulus. No significant differences between the two experimental conditions were observed (no employer label: 175 445.60 ms, green employer label: 186 575.10 ms, $U = 2287.00$, $p = .378$), meaning that participants spent a similar amount of time attending to all the AOIs when a green label was present or absent. The results further show that there is a significant difference between the number of visits for the employer logo (no employer label: 3.36, green employer label: 2.71, $U = 2044.00$, $p = .057$) and the right headband (no employer label: 2.48, green employer label: 1.92, $U = 1990.50$, $p = .031$). Participants who were exposed to the recruitment ad showing the green employer label visited these AOIs less often than those who were exposed to the ad without the green employer label. We did not find significant differences in the total duration of visits for any of the AOIs between labelling conditions. Finally, the only significant difference in the average duration of fixations is for the search bar (no employer label: 200.79 ms, green employer label: 243.77 ms, $U = 304.00$, $p = .006$). Participants who were exposed to the recruitment ad showing the green employer label showed a longer average

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and significance tests for no employer label and green employer label conditions.

AOI	Number of visits (in count)				Total duration of visits (in ms)				Average duration of fixations (in ms)			
	No employer label	Green employer label	Significance test	p Value	No employer label	Green employer label	Significance test	p Value	No employer label	Green employer label	Significance test	p Value
Employer logo	3.36	2.71	$U = 2044.00$	**.057**	2720.79	2262.83	$U = 2218.50$	.245	360.29	395.53	$U = 2179.00$	.881
Follow button	1.04	0.82	$U = 2210.50$	.202	338.83	329.15	$U = 2275.00$	.329	268.04	293.94	$U = 695.50$	.528
Employer label area	2.16	1.85	$U = 2178.00$	.167	1778.29	1806.03	$U = 2357.00$	.551	330.01	298.62	$U = 2042.00$	.503
Left headband	2.30	2.08	$U = 2242.50$	.274	2262.69	1642.71	$U = 2182.00$	.189	261.94	260.98	$U = 2083.50$	.939
LinkedIn menu	1.84	1.35	$U = 2172.50$	.162	1054.04	606.51	$U = 2285.00$	.370	206.02	214.81	$U = 1343.00$	.647
Main text	3.99	3.92	$U = 2431.00$	.766	12,987.25	12,806.65	$U = 2245.00$	.292	235.61	236.32	$U = 2501.00$	.995
Post buttons	1.30	1.18	$U = 2365.50$	.559	500.12	427.89	$U = 2365.50$	.567	203.10	192.95	$U = 1018.50$	.554
Right headband	2.48	1.92	$U = 1990.50$	**.031**	3984.26	2954.00	$U = 2184.50$	.193	280.82	283.98	$U = 2031.50$	.649
Search bar	0.78	0.48	$U = 2155.50$	.112	244.87	133.48	$U = 2190.00$	.163	200.79	243.77	$U = 304.00$	**.006**
Text headline	4.39	4.37	$U = 2367.50$	.574	6477.57	6627.29	$U = 2426.50$	.756	203.57	206.35	$U = 2447.00$	.820
Text link	3.77	3.49	$U = 2315.50$	.438	2176.58	2066.26	$U = 2457.50$	.854	220.45	216.22	$U = 2234.00$	.407

Notes: AOI: area of interest; ms: milliseconds. *p* Values in bold indicate $p < .10$ significance test.

duration of fixation for this AOI than those who were exposed to the ad without the employer label.

The basic conclusion of the eye-tracking study is that the attention paid to the search bar increases and the attention to the employer logo and the right headband decreases when a green employer label is shown, but the green employer label in itself does not particularly attract more visual attention.

5. Hypotheses testing

To test our hypotheses, we analysed the data using a parallel-serial mediation (customized) model[1] in the PROCESS macro v4.2 for SPSS with 5000 bootstrap samples and a 95% confidence interval (A. F. Hayes 2017). The green employer label was used as an independent binary variable (0 = No employer label; 1 = Green employer label). Person-organization fit and perceived ad credibility were the two continuous mediator variables. Employer attractiveness was used as the continuous dependent variable. Finally, environmental concern was used as a continuous moderator variable of the effects of the green employer label on person-organization fit (see Figure 1). The variables were mean-centered.

Table 3 presents the unstandardized regression weights of the PROCESS results. The results indicate that a green employer label has a positive effect on person-organization fit ($b = 0.631$, $SE = 0.147$, $p < .001$). The interaction effect between the green employer label and environmental concern on person-organization fit is significantly positive ($b = 0.378$, $SE = 0.182$, $p < .05$). H1 is supported. Figure 2 offers a graphic representation of the green employer label × environmental concern interaction on person-organization fit. The green employer label exerts a greater effect on person-organization fit when individuals are more concerned about the environment. The intersection point (5.19) along the environmental concern continuous moderator where the relationship between the green employer label and person-organization fit becomes statistically significant is identified by the Johnson-Neyman procedure. For individuals with low environmental concern ($M < 5.19$), the green employer label has no statistically significant effect on person-organization fit because the confidence

Table 3. PROCESS results—unstandardized regression weights.

|	Person-organization fit (M_1)			Perceived ad credibility (M_2)			Employer attractiveness (Y)		
	b	SE	t	b	SE	t	b	SE	t
Constant	4.430	0.073	60.701***	1.748	0.380	4.603***	1.423	0.303	4.701***
Green employer label (X)	0.631	0.147	4.306***	0.156	0.156	1.000	0.014	0.116	0.121
Environmental concern (W)	0.099	0.089	1.119						
XW interaction	0.378	0.182	2.074*						
Person-organization fit (M_1)				0.595	0.084	7.099***	0.413	0.073	5.685***
Perceived ad credibility (M_2)							0.343	0.063	5.453***
R^2	0.150, $F(3, 138) = 8.140$***			0.316, $F(2, 139) = 32.065$***			0.515, $F(3, 138) = 48.910$***		
ΔR^2	0.026, $F(1, 138) = 4.301$*								

Notes: *$p \le .05$, ***$p \le .001$.
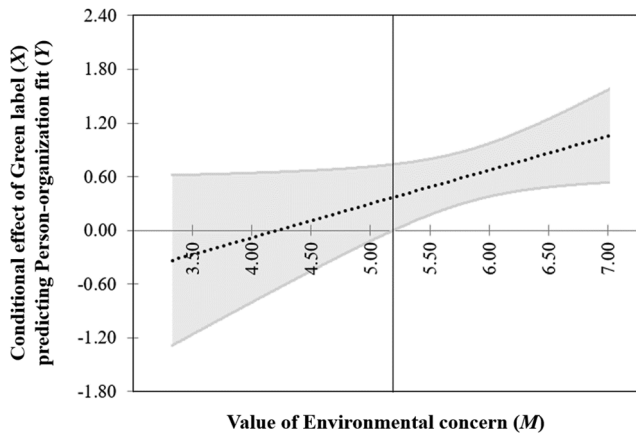
Figure 2. Conditional effect of the green employer label on person-organization fit at different levels of environmental concern.

interval includes zero. For individuals with moderate-to-high environmental concern ($M > 5.19$), the effect of the green employer label becomes statistically significant. This suggests that the green employer label increases perceived person-organization fit only for individuals who have higher environmental concern. Higher person-organization fit leads to more employer attractiveness ($b = 0.413$, $SE = 0.073$, $p < .001$) and perceived ad credibility ($b = .595$, $SE = .084$, $p < .001$), in support of H2 and H3.

The indirect effect of the green employer label on employer attractiveness, mediated by person-organization fit, is positive (Index = 0.156, $SE = 0.079$, 95% CI = [0.019; 0.328]), which provides support for the mediating role of person-organization fit in the relationship between the green employer label and employer attractiveness.

The results further reveal that the green employer label does not exert a significant effect on perceived ad credibility ($b = 0.156$, $SE = 0.156$, $p = .313$), rejecting H4. Perceived ad credibility positively influences employer attractiveness ($b = 0.343$, $SE = 0.063$, $p < .001$), in line with H5. The indirect effect of the green employer label on employer attractiveness, mediated by perceived ad credibility, is not significant (Index = 0.054, $SE = 0.053$, 95% CI = [−0.046; 0.163]), which evidences that perceived ad credibility is not the main psychological mechanism explaining the relationship between the green employer label and employer attractiveness. In contrast, the indirect effect of the green employer label on employer attractiveness, mediated by person-organization fit and perceived ad credibility and moderated by environmental concern, is positive (Index = 0.077, $SE = 0.043$, 95% CI = [0.008; 0.178]), which provides support for the serial mediating roles of person-organization fit and perceived ad credibility in the relationship between the green employer label and employer attractiveness.

Finally, the direct effect of the green employer label on employer attractiveness is not significant ($b = 0.014$, $SE = 0.116$, $p = .904$), implying full mediation. A summary of the model's estimated coefficients (b) and their corresponding p-values is presented in Figure 3.
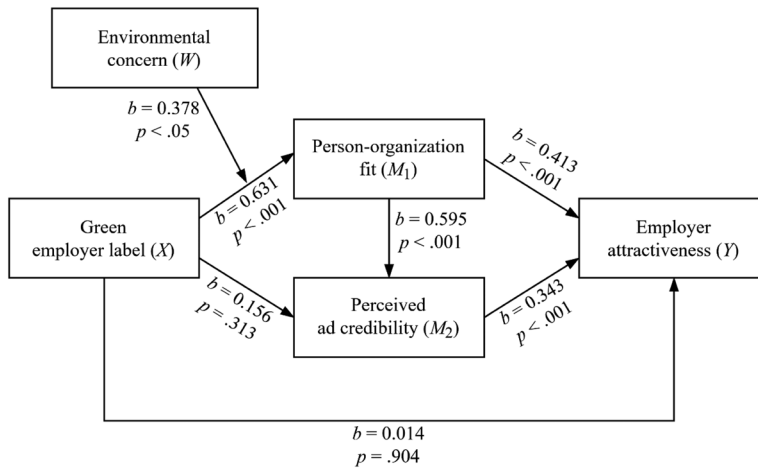
Figure 3. Estimated contribution (*b*) and significance (*p*) of explanatory variables in the model.

6. Discussion, implications, and further research

6.1. Conclusion and discussion

The study investigates the effect of a green employer label on recipients' visual attention to the ad and on employer attractiveness, *via* the mediating role of person-employer fit and ad credibility. The eye-tracking results reveal that, while the total viewing time of the stimuli does not significantly differ between the two conditions, the number of visits to the employer logo and to the right headband is lower for the green employer label condition than for the control condition, while the average viewing duration of the search bar is higher for the green employer label condition than for the control condition. This is an indication that, compared to the control condition, attention shifts from the employer logo and the right headband to the search bar in the green employer label condition.

The results of the moderated mediation analysis show a positive effect of a green employer label on employer attractiveness, *via* its effect on perceived person-employer fit and ad credibility. We found that a green employer label leads to a stronger perception of person-employer fit. This effect is stronger for individuals with higher environmental concern. A green employer label thus has a positive effect on employer attractiveness through the mediating effect of person-organization fit. Additionally, a green employer label does not have a direct significant effect on ad credibility, but it does have an indirect effect on credibility and, ultimately, on employer attractiveness *via* the perceived fit between the person and the organization. The basic conclusion is thus that a green employer label has a strong positive effect on employer attractiveness, and that person-organization fit plays a pivotal role. Not only does it have a direct effect on employer attractiveness, but it also has an indirect effect *via* the strong effect of this fit on ad credibility and the positive effect of credibility on employer attractiveness. In sum, potential job candidates are not simply more likely to be attracted by organizations that are aligned with their self-identity but are also more persuaded in terms of ad credibility by those with which they share similarities.

Our results confirm the findings of previous research that third-party employer labels in recruitment ads have an effect on attitudes or intentions of potential job candidates (eg Baum and Überschaer 2018). We uncover three mechanisms that explain the positive effect of a green employer label on the attractiveness of an employer. First, we demonstrate the mediating role of person-organization fit. Drawing on Self-Congruity Theory (Sirgy 1985, 2018), we explain that this fit results from the congruity between young individuals and the green employer label because organizations certified for their environmentally responsible actions would be in line with the self-identity of Gen Y and Gen Z individuals, as expected based on previous research (Greening and Turban 2000; Guillot-Soulez et al. 2022; Yasin et al. 2023). Additionally, we show that individuals report a higher person-organization fit as a result of being exposed to a green employer label when they are more concerned about the environment, which is consistent with previous research in CSR appeals (Klimkiewicz and Oltra 2017; Lecuyer et al. 2017; Waples and Brachle 2020; Yasin et al. 2023). As indicated by Lima et al. (2024), green signals are more effective when they align with individuals' intrinsic environmental values. Also in line with Self-Congruity Theory (Sirgy 1985, 2018) and previous research (eg Greening and Turban 2000; Guillot-Soulez et al. 2022), we show that this increased perceived person-organization fit leads to higher employer attractiveness because of the shared environmental values by individuals and organizations.

The result with respect to the role of ad credibility in the process is remarkable. Contrary to our expectation, there is no direct effect of viewing a third-party green employer label on ad credibility, leading us to reject H4. This hypothesis was based on the assumption, and as also found in previous research on source credibility, that third-party employer labels are perceived as independent and thus trustworthy, and hence are an important element of source and message credibility (Baum and Überschaer 2018; Dineen and Allen 2016; Lievens et al. 2023). When the information about an organization's CSR activity comes from a non-organization source, the advertisement is expected to be perceived as more credible (Fernández et al. 2022), leading to more favourable ad attitudes than company-generated claims (Osburg et al. 2020). However, this is not what we found. This may reflect broader scepticism towards green advertising, as many corporate green claims are misleading (Kwon et al. 2024), which lowers ad credibility (Rathee and Milfeld 2024). Besides, this is in line with recent findings showing that using an institutional methodology for green claims is not always well understood by recipients and does not necessarily act as a credibility signal (Iovino et al. 2024). Nevertheless, ad credibility plays an important role in the process. It has a significantly positive effect on employer attractiveness, but this effect is indirect in that ad credibility is enhanced by a stronger perceived person-organization fit: the perceived self-congruity of the message source (i.e. the employers) leads to an increased perception of the message credibility. This is consistent with previous research (eg Morimoto and La Ferle 2008; Schiappa et al. 2007; Yuan and Lou 2020). All in all, person-organization fit is a key variable in explaining the mechanism by means of which a green employer label leads to employer attractiveness. Not only has this fit a direct effect on employer attractiveness, but it is a necessary prerequisite to develop more ad credibility which, in turn also leads to a higher employer attractiveness. In other words, just showing a third-party green employer label does not

enhance ad credibility. It only does that when the employer label triggers a feeling of self-congruity with the label. An explanation for this may be that individuals perceive a green claim as consistent with their values, and all the more so when this claim is backed up by an independent and thus trustworthy third party (Agnihotri and Bhattacharya 2022; Allen et al. 2013; Baum and Überschaer 2018; Dineen and Allen 2016; Van Hoye and Lievens 2007).

The results from the eye-tracking study reveal that visual attention is not much different between the green employer label ad and the control ad. Total viewing time is similar, and so is the viewing time of most AOIs. This may as such not be surprising. After all, the stimuli are relatively straightforward. All AOIs attract attention, as illustrated by the heat maps. The only difference between the two conditions lies is the nature of the content displayed in the label area. One condition features a green employer label, while the other presents a visually similar element that does not convey any green claim. Nevertheless, both are equally simple and easy to understand after a short viewing. It is, however, interesting to notice that the number of visits to the green employer label and the right headband areas is lower for the green employer label ad than for the control ad, but the average duration of viewing the search bar is higher in the green employer label condition. This is a relevant result because the visual attention to the search bar may reveal potential applicants' motivation and mindset. For instance, their interest in finding similar job offers or exploring more opportunities within the same company or industry, their desire to compare the job offer with other available positions and to assess if the organization truly meets their expectations, or their proactive approach to job seeking and their increased curious mindset. Thus, apparently, exposure to the green employer label leads to more attention and interest in what companies have to offer in terms of job opportunities, and signals a higher interest in jobs and employers than the ad without the green employer label, which may be more significant than just paying more attention to the employer label itself. Consistent with this, the results of our model clearly show the impact of the green employer label ad on employer attractiveness, despite the fact that the green employer label does not attract more attention than the non-green visual, but maybe also because it triggers more elaboration of what companies have to offer. Consistent with Signalling Theory (Spence 1973), green employer labels by themselves may reduce information asymmetry by signalling corporate environmental responsibility (Guillot-Soulez et al. 2022), regardless of how long they are viewed.

6.2. Theoretical contributions

This current research addresses recent calls to investigate CSR appeals in advertising (Taylor 2018) and the impact of CSR employer labels on organizational attractiveness (Guillot-Soulez et al. 2022; Kleiss and Waiguny, 2021). Complementing past research indicating the positive effect of employer labels on employers' attractiveness (Guillot-Soulez et al. 2022; Überschaer and Baum 2020), the current study used an experiment to investigate the attention-grabbing capacities of recruitment ads with a third-party green employer label, and the psychological mechanisms explaining the effect of green employer labels on employer attractiveness.

Our study extends knowledge in several ways. Previous research has focused on the effect of employer labels in recruitment ads on attitudes or intentions without

considering the process leading to attitude formation and decision-making (eg Dineen and Allen 2016). We expand the literature on corporate social responsibility and employer labels in recruitment advertising by examining in what way third-party green employer labels impact individuals' visual attention and the processing of recruitment ads. As to the former, we found that people do not pay more visual attention to the green employer label itself than to a non-green visual but, interestingly and at least as relevant, is that, when a green employer label is shown, they pay more attention to the LinkedIn search bar that offers more information about job offers. The fact that a green employer label has an effect on company attractiveness despite the fact that the employer label draws not more attention than an image without a green employer label is an important finding and adds to our insight about how signalling works in recruitment ads.

Second, we explore the mechanisms through which employers presenting a green employer label in their recruitment ads increase their attractiveness by investigating the role of person-organization fit and ad credibility. One of the basic results is the pivotal mediating role of person-employer fit. This fit results from the congruency between the values of young individuals and the green employer label because organizations certified for their environmentally responsible actions would be in line with Gen Y and Gen Z's individuals' self-identity, which may thus confirm their expectations (Greening and Turban 2000; Guillot-Soulez et al. 2022; Yasin et al. 2023). A higher fit also has an indirect effect on employer attractiveness because it is a significant predictor of ad credibility, which also leads to a higher employer attractiveness. An important insight is that a third-party green employer label by itself does not lead to higher credibility; it only does so when the ad triggers a perception of person-employer fit. These are novel theoretical insights that extend the relevance of the self-congruity principle and ad credibility in the context of employer attractiveness. Indeed, existing research basically posits higher credibility from employer labels because they are delivered by certified third-party organizations (eg Baum and Überschaer 2018; Dineen and Allen 2016; Lievens et al. 2023) and that it should reflect on ad attitude (Osburg et al. 2020). However, to our knowledge, this assumption has not been empirically tested. Therefore, an important contribution of this research is to evidence that a green employer label does not lead the audience to perceive the recruitment ad as more credible because a third-party employer label is shown. By investigating the effect of a green employer label through the Self-Congruity Theory lens (Sirgy 1985, 2018), we were able to shed light on the role of credibility in explaining the effect of employer labels on employer attractiveness. The influence of a green employer label on ad credibility is explained by the person-employer fit. More specifically, the similarity between the values of potential applicants and the message source explains why they find the ad more credible (Morimoto and La Ferle 2008; Schiappa et al. 2007; Yuan and Lou 2020) and, thus, are more attracted by the employer.

Finally, we further extend previous research on green employer labels (Guillot-Soulez et al. 2022; Kleiss and Waiguny 2021) by exploring a boundary condition of the effect of a green employer label on perceived person-employer fit. While previous research revealed that a green employer label improves person-employer fit and employer attractiveness (Guillot-Soulez et al. 2022), we further reveal that environmental concern reinforces this effect, leading to more employer attractiveness. We thus offer new

insights into how personal values condition the effectiveness of CSR appeals in recruit-ment advertising (Greening and Turban 2000; Jones et al. 2014; Klimkiewicz and Oltra 2017; Lima et al. 2024; Yasin et al. 2023) by demonstrating that the inclusion of a green employer label in recruitment advertising enhances the perceived person-employer fit, particularly among potential candidates with high environmental concern.

6.3. Managerial implications

Our insights also have practical implications for organizations that want to use third-party green employer labels in their recruitment ads and how to target relevant segments of individuals.

First of all, adding a green employer label in a recruitment ad is certainly helpful to boost employer attractiveness, not so much because it attracts more visual atten-tion, but because it attracts more attention to the LinkedIn search bar (as shown in the eye-tracking study) which indicates greater implication and motivation for job seeking activities, and leads to a higher employer attractiveness. We recommend that organizations with an environmental policy invest in such green employer labels. If a company does not have such an employer label yet, it should take the necessary initiatives in terms of time and money to obtain one. Moreover, companies have to see to it that their recruitment ads also contain attractive job-related information, because that is what attracts viewers in an ad that shows a green employer label.

Second, developing a person-organization fit in recruitment ads is essential to boost employer attractiveness. Such an ad does not only directly lead to improving person-employer fit but is also an essential driver of ad credibility and, as such, also indirectly leads to improved employer attractiveness. In the current study, the green employer label fits with the self-identity of Gen Y and Gen Z people, which is the main reason why the participants in our study perceive the green employer label as self-congruent and more credible, both leading to more attractiveness. If organizations want to give their recruitment ads with green employer labels an extra boost, they should identify target groups that are environmentally concerned. To reach those individuals, recruiters may advertise on social media by targeting users based on their interests and preferences or by posting recruitment ads in environmentally oriented groups. They may also use demographic targeting options to reach young individuals since they value environmental initiatives (Waples and Brachle 2020). Another way would be to advertise on websites associated with environmental issues. The ability to identify target groups on social media based on their online behaviour that reveals what their interests are, and how this translates into online behaviour, increasingly facilitates fine-grained targeting and positioning.

Creating advertising messages that signal a person-organization fit can be done in many ways, and starts with identifying an organization's target groups and collecting information about what constitutes their self-identity. Besides signalling a green profile, companies that invest in DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) or brand exclusiveness, two other issues that are of great concern to the young generations (Van den Bergh et al. 2024), could capitalize on these efforts by obtaining and using employer labels or information about their efforts in these domains.

Finally, ad credibility is an important driver of employer attractiveness. However, rather surprisingly, in the current study this credibility does not just develop because of the mere fact that there is a green employer label in the ad. Instead, the employer label should reflect how people identify themselves and what people find important in their lives. Only then will an employer label lead to a higher ad credibility and, ultimately, a higher employer attractiveness.

6.4. Limitations and avenues for further research

This research has limitations that provide avenues for further research. We designed a fictitious green employer label for the experiment. However, previous research evidenced that employer attractiveness is lowered when the employer label is not well-known (Baum and Überschaer 2018), lowering the external validity of this research. For this reason, we encourage future research to balance the internal and external validity better to also investigate the influence of existing and well-known green employer labels.

The current study focuses on third-party green employer labels. Organizations could also use their own company labels or information to signal their commitment to CSR. Because a company-generated green claim is more commonly used by organizations, a third-party green employer label could lead to a positive expectancy violation, thus increasing visual attention, and may therefore also increase ad credibility more than a company-generated green claim, as self-serving claims are often perceived as less reliable than third-party certifications (Dineen and Allen 2016). However, our experimental manipulation simultaneously introduced two elements: the presence of a green claim and a third-party label. As a result, the observed effects may stem from either or both the environmental focus and the third-party endorsement. Further research could adopt a 2×2 design to isolate and test the independent and combined effects of the green claim and the type of claim (third-party vs. company-generated) to disentangle the specific contribution of each component.

In our study, we used an employer label to signal the environmental efforts of the company, as is often the case in advertising messages. However, an employer label by itself does not convey a lot of information. In fact, their effectiveness largely depends on how well these employer labels are known by the target group. Future research could test stimuli in which, with or without an accompanying employer label, more specific information is provided about the CSR efforts the organization wants to highlight. Maybe providing specific information is more effective than just showing an employer label.

Future research could test alternative CSR employer labels, both own-company and third-party, such as labels highlighting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), taking care of employers' well-being, or community efforts, and could compare the effectiveness of these employer labels for enhancing employer attractiveness, and which mediators play a role in establishing these effects.

The model could also be tested for different target groups, such as older consumers and job seekers with specific socio-demographic profiles (eg male and female, or ethnicity). Keeping good employees on board is, for many companies, at least as important as attracting new employees. Testing internal communications towards existing staff could provide insights into which CSR efforts (environmental, DEI, etc.) appeal most to them.

Additionally, while our sample includes individuals between the ages of 20 and 35, it is skewed towards the younger part of this range, primarily capturing older Gen Z individuals rather than being fully representative of both younger Gen Z and older Gen Y cohorts. This should be considered when interpreting the generalizability of our findings across broader generational cohorts.

Future research should also explore the role of additional alternative dependent variables (for instance, employee loyalty towards their current employer), mediators (eg employee satisfaction), and boundary conditions (eg sensitivity to CSR-related issues, political orientation).

Our convenience sample was composed of 80.3% women, which may have impacted the generalizability of our findings. However, additional analyses did not find a significant interaction effect between the green employer label and gender on person-organization fit ($p = .813$), perceived ad credibility ($p = .561$), or employer attractiveness ($p = .392$). We also checked for the difference in environmental concerns between men ($M = 5.58$) and women ($M = 5.95$) in our sample. A t-test revealed no significant differences ($t = 1.727$, $p = .09$). While this difference is not statistically significant in our study, it is marginally significant and may be influenced by the relatively small sample size of male participants. Consequently, although our gender-biased sample does not seem to lead to a gender-related bias in the results, we acknowledge that the limited representation of males may contribute to the observed marginally significant effect. Further investigation is required into the moderating role of socio-demographic variables, such as gender, age, and education.

The effect of CSR employer labels on employer attractiveness could also be studied through the lens of other conceptual frameworks or theories. One such lens could be the expectancy violation theory (EVT; Burgoon 1978). EVT might be useful for understanding how green employer labels capture visual attention and influence the processing of other ad elements, as they may present an unexpected deviation from the typical company-generated green claims. Since green employer labels are not commonly used, they may trigger a positive expectancy violation, leading to increased visual attention to the green employer label and deeper advertisement processing. Measuring the extent of the expectancy violation and the valence of this violation could provide insights into how the novelty of a green employer label affects visual attention and perceived ad credibility.

Note

1. PROCESS syntax for the customized model:
   process y = EA/m = POFIT ADCRED/x = LABEL/w = EC/decimals = F10.3/center = 1/.
   bmatrix = 1,1,1,1,1,1/wmatrix = 1,0,0,0,0,0/.

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Data availability statement

Data are available upon request from the first author.

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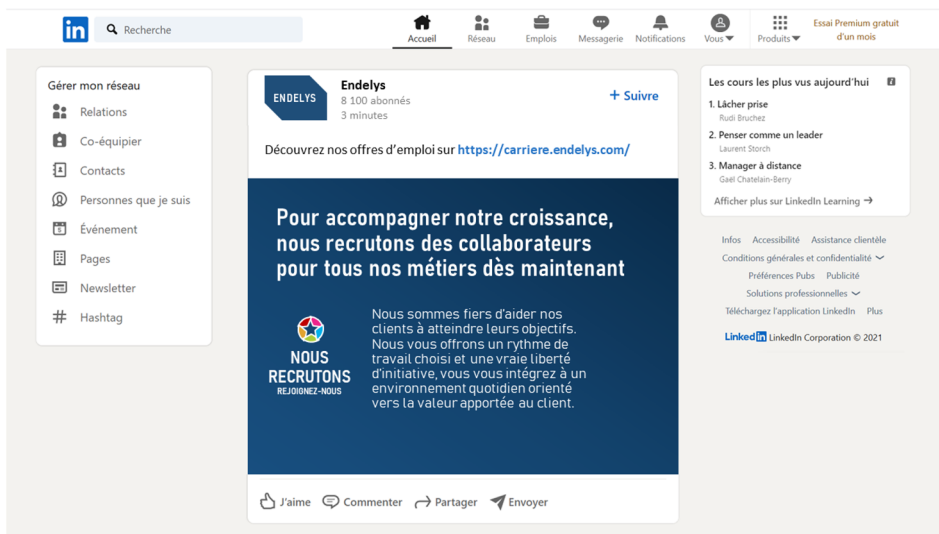
Appendix A

Figure A1. Recruitment ad without employer label.
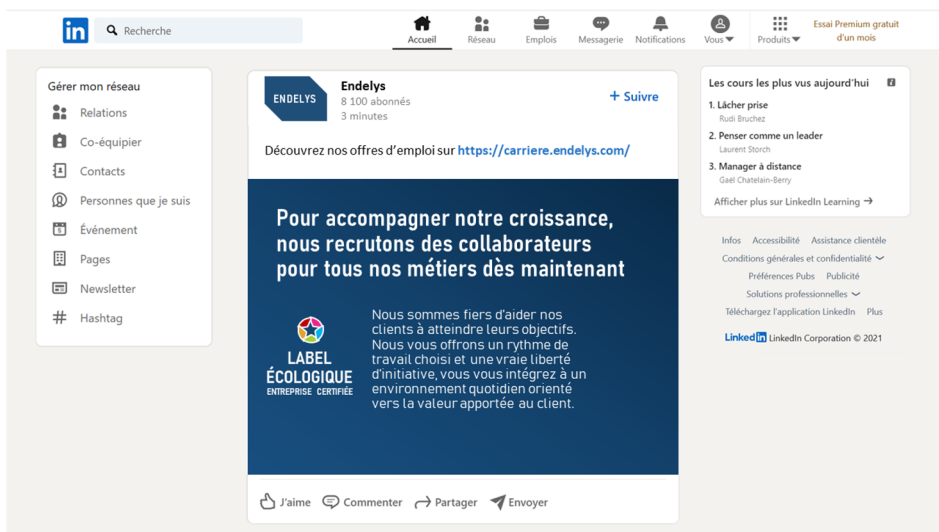

Figure A2. Recruitment ad with the green employer label. *Note:* The translation is the following: 'To support our growth, we are recruiting employees for all our job positions now. We are proud to help our clients achieve their goals. We offer you a chosen work pace and real freedom of initiative, you integrate into a daily environment oriented towards the value brought to the client'.

Appendix B

Table B1. Measurement scales.

Constructs, scale sources, and items	Cronbach's α and factor loadings
Employer attractiveness (Highhouse et al. 2003)	α = .80
For me, this company would be a good place to work.	.820
I would not be interested in this company except as a last resort.[a]	.672
This company is attractive to me as a place for employment.	.675
I am interested in learning more about this company.	.722
A job at this company is very appealing to me.	.861
Perceived ad credibility (Sarofim and Cabano 2018)	α = .86
I think the post is credible.	.793
I think the post is realistic.	.736
I think the post is convincing.	.788
I think the post is persuasive.	.731
I think the post important.	.769
I think the post is relevant.	.823
Person-organization fit (Resick et al. 2007)	α = .92
I feel my values 'match' or fit this organization and the current employees in this organization.	.879
I think the values and personality of this organization reflect my own values and personality.	.892
The values of this organization are similar to my own values.	.790
My values match those of current employees in this organization.	.868
I feel my personality matches the 'personality' or image of this organization.	.906
Environmental (CSR) concern (Han et al. 2020)	α = .87
It is important for a company to perform in a manner that is consistent with protecting the environment.	.902
It is important for a company to comply with the various international, governmental, and local environmental regulations.	.660
It is important for a company to offer environmentally friendly products and services.	.876
It is important for a company to have an environmentally related mission.	.820
It is important for a company to make an all out effort to maintain and preserve the environment.	.864
Employer familiarity (Cable and Turban 2003)	α = .77
Before this survey, I knew quite a bit about the company Endelys.	.885
Before this survey, I was very familiar with the company Endelys.	.738
Before this survey, I was familiar with Endelys's products or services.	.849
Self-perceived employability (Rothwell and Arnold 2007)	α = .76
If I needed to, I could easily get a job in an organization.	.839
I could easily get a job in almost any organization.	.819
People with my profile are really in demand by other organizations.	.834
Perceived environmental responsibility	α = .82
In my opinion, this company develops actions in favour of the environment.	.864
In my opinion, this company manages to limit its negative effects on the environment.	.817
For me, this company involves its employees in environmental initiatives.	.894
Perceived label credibility (Moussa and Touzani 2008)	α = .90
This ecological label inspires confidence in me.	.910
This ecological label comes from a recognized organization.	.746
This ecological label is honest.	.927
I can trust what this ecological label says.	.920

[a]Reserved code.

Appendix C

Figure C1. An example of a stimulus with AOIs.
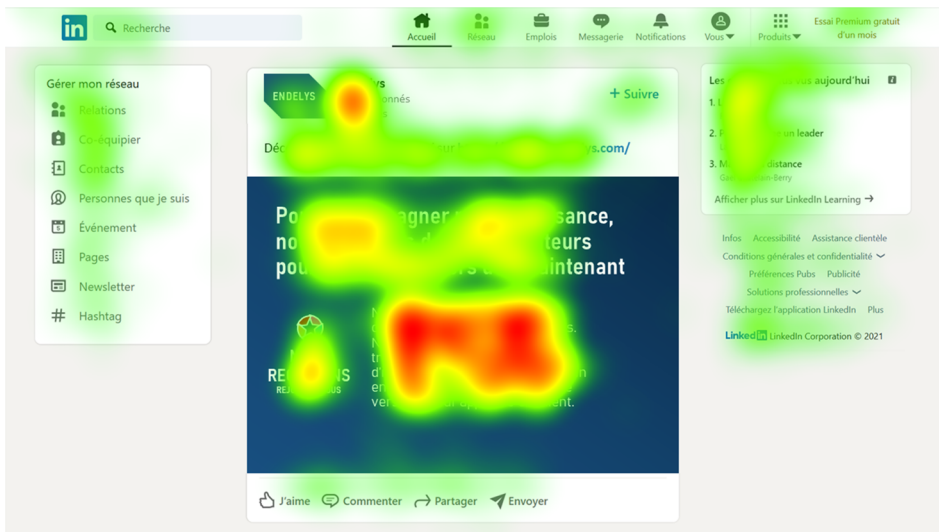
Appendix D

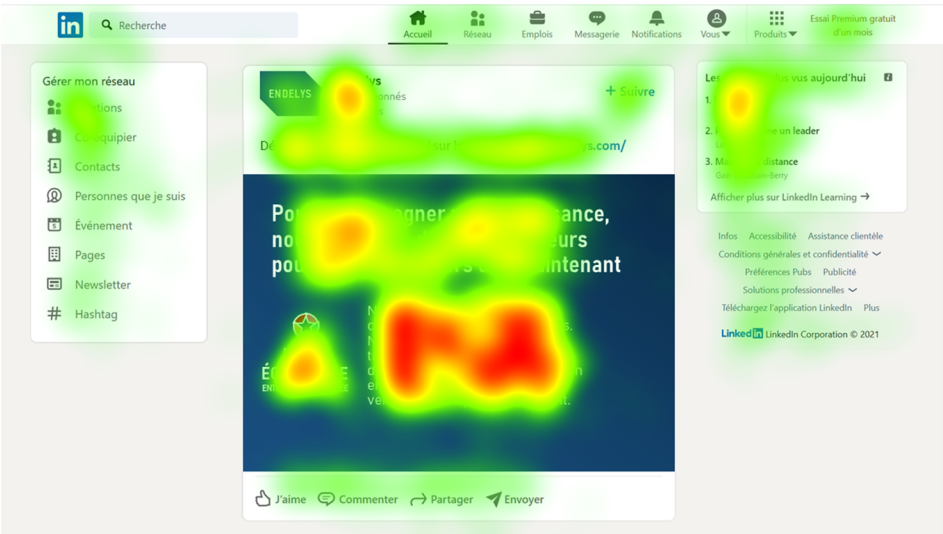**Figure D1.** Visual heat maps of the recruitment ad without employer label.

Figure D2. Visual heat maps of the recruitment ad with a green employer label.