

Ingratiation and Self-Promotion in the Selection Interview: The Effects of Using Single Tactics or a Combination of Tactics on Interviewer Judgments

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This paper investigates the relative effectiveness of the use of 2 impression-management tactics—ingratiation and self-promotion—on interviewers' evaluations of an applicant in a laboratory setting. It was suggested that the use of a single tactic would be better than the use of no tactic; that the use of self-promotion would be more successful than the use of ingratiation; and, finally, that the use of a combination of tactics would lead to the best evaluations. Results were largely in line with our hypotheses. Interviewer ratings and action recommendations were more positive in the combination condition, followed by the self-promotion condition, the ingratiation condition, and the neutral condition. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

Over 50 years ago, Goffman (1955) drew attention to the fact that people consciously manage the impressions they convey to others in interpersonal interactions. Especially in high-stakes situations, people will try to convey a positive self-image by employing impression-management behaviors. This also applies to the selection interview, which, unlike some other selection devices (e.g., cognitive ability test, personality inventory), is characterized by these social dynamics (Judge, Higgins, & Cable, 2000). Both the interviewer and the applicant will attempt to create positive images relative to each other, for the applicant to get the best job and for the organization to attract the best applicant (Gilmore & Ferris, 1989).

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Past research has investigated applicants' use of impression-management (IM) tactics and how these tactics influence interviewer decisions. It was found that IM tactics, and more specifically ingratiation and self-promotion, were frequently used by applicants (Stevens & Kristof, 1995) and that these tactics can be employed successfully in employment interviews (for a review, see Higgins, Judge, & Ferris, 2003).

In current research on IM, however, IM tactics are often studied in isolation, without considering the relative effectiveness of different tactics. Therefore, the present study examines the relative effectiveness of the two most frequently used tactics; namely, ingratiation and self-promotion (Stevens & Kristof, 1995), with respect to personnel selection outcomes. Although Kacmar and colleagues (Kacmar & Carlson, 1999; Kacmar, Delery, & Ferris, 1992) already found that ingratiation was more effective than self-promotion, these studies did not compare the use of a single tactic to a neutral condition in which the applicant uses no IM tactics. Therefore, the present study extends this research by comparing the effectiveness of these tactics with a neutral condition, in which no IM tactics are employed.

The effects of combining different tactics have largely been ignored (Higgins et al., 2003). Therefore, the current study also investigates the effect of combining ingratiation and self-promotion tactics on personnel selection outcomes. More specifically, it is investigated whether the combination of these tactics will lead to more positive selection outcomes than the use of a single tactic or no use of IM tactics at all.

Types of Impression-Management Tactics

Impression management refers to the activity of controlling information in an attempt to steer the impression others form of oneself in the service of personal or social goals (Schlenker & Pontari, 2000). IM tactics were classified by Tedeschi and Melburg (1984) as either assertive or defensive. Whereas assertive IM tactics are used to bolster one's image (e.g., self-enhancement, other-enhancement), defensive tactics are employed to protect or repair one's image (e.g., accounts, excuses, apologies). Tactical assertive behaviors, contrary to defensive behaviors, seem particularly salient for applicants to use in an employment interview (Gilmore & Ferris, 1989) and, therefore, are the focus of the current study.

The two most frequently used assertive IM tactics in employment interviews are ingratiation and self-promotion (Stevens & Kristof, 1995). *Ingratiation tactics* are used to evoke interpersonal attraction or liking, while *self-promotion tactics* are intended to draw attention to the positive qualities of oneself, one's future plans, or one's past accomplishments.

Although both IM tactics can be classified as assertive tactics, they differ in where they focus the conversation (i.e., on the applicant or on the interviewer). Where ingratiation is other-focused, used to increase interpersonal attraction or liking by employing subtle mechanisms of influence (i.e., verbally praising the other person, conforming with the opinion of the other person), self-promotion is self-focused, used to highlight one's positive qualities or to draw attention to past accomplishments (Kacmar et al., 1992; Stevens & Kristof, 1995).

Relative Effectiveness of IM Tactics

Both ingratiation and self-promotion tactics have been positively related to interviewer evaluations (Ellis, West, Ryan, & DeShon, 2002) and hiring recommendations (Gilmore & Ferris, 1989; Kacmar et al., 1992) and have been found to significantly predict whether applicants later obtained onsite visits from the organization in a real personnel selection context (Stevens & Kristof, 1995). However, ingratiation (belonging to the category of other-focused tactics) and self-promotion (belonging to the category of self-focused tactics) have been shown to have differential effectiveness with respect to different outcomes. In general, it has been found that self-focused IM tactics are more effective in employment interviews than are other-focused IM tactics (Dipboye & Wiley, 1977; Kacmar & Carlson, 1999; Tullar, 1989). More specifically, Kacmar et al. found that applicants who used self-focused tactics received higher ratings and were given more job offers and fewer rejections, but were not given more second interview offers.

Ferris and Judge (1991) developed a framework on political influence in personnel/human resources management in which they proposed three mediating processes by which applicant behaviors can influence employment interview outcomes; namely, affect or liking, perceived fit, and assessment of competence. Ingratiation is mainly focused on increasing liking and affect through stimulating perceived similarity between the applicant and the interviewer, leading to higher levels of perceived person-organization (P-O) fit (Chen, Lee, & Yeh, 2008) and overall fit (Higgins & Judge, 2004). Self-promotion, on the other hand, is mainly directed toward increasing the assessment of competence (Jones & Pittman, 1982; Rudman, 1998), which has been found to lead to higher levels of perceived person-job fit (Kristof-Brown, Barrick, & Franke, 2002), but to lower levels of perceived similarity (Howard & Ferris, 1996). As such, the differential orientation of ingratiation and self-promotion, and the related outcomes, might explain why ingratiation has been found to be more effective in employment interviews than self-promotion.

However, research on IM tactics has not allowed us to make any statements on the extent to which the use of IM tactics (i.e., ingratiation, self-promotion) improves interviewer decisions, compared to a neutral condition in which applicants use no IM tactics. Therefore, the current study compares a neutral condition in which no IM tactics are employed to two IM conditions: one in which the applicant employs ingratiation tactics and one in which the applicant employs self-promotion tactics.

Further, this study includes a combination condition in which applicants use both tactics together. Although Baron (1986) found that the combination of two nonverbal IM tactics in the employment interview induced a “too-much-of-a-good-thing” effect, and thus led to lower interviewer evaluations. Higgins et al. (2003) suggested that certain combinations of tactics may be particularly successful in obtaining desirable outcomes. Evidence for this idea was provided in a study by Falbe and Yukl (1992), who found that influence attempts in which a pair of tactics was used had more favorable outcomes than when a single tactic was used. Bolino and Turnley (2003) suggested more specifically that the combination of self-promotion with ingratiation might be an especially successful recipe. If ingratiation leads to higher perceived similarity between the applicant and the interviewer (Chen et al., 2008), while self-promotion increases the perception of competence (Jones & Pittman, 1982; Rudman, 1998), combining both tactics might, indeed, be a good strategy to influence interviewer evaluations.

In line with this stream of research, the following hypotheses are formulated:

Hypothesis 1. Participants in the combination condition will rate the applicant most positively, followed by participants in the self-promotion condition, the ingratiation condition, and the neutral condition.

Hypothesis 2. Participants in the combination condition will be the most likely to offer a job, followed by participants in the self-promotion condition, the ingratiation condition, and the neutral condition.

Hypothesis 3. Participants in the combination condition will be the least likely to reject the applicant, followed by participants in the self-promotion condition, the ingratiation condition, and the neutral condition.

Hypothesis 4. Participants in the combination condition will be the most likely to invite the applicant for a second interview, followed by participants in the self-promotion condition, the ingratiation condition, and the neutral condition.

Method

Participants

Data were collected from 160 psychology students (76 men, 84 women) at a large public university. Students were randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions. Participants' average age was 19.0 years ($SD = 1.0$). The students participated in the study to receive credit points.

Procedure

Participants in each experimental condition were asked to imagine themselves working in a company's human resources department. After receiving a short introduction on the experiment and some oral information about the company, the participants were assigned the task of hiring an assistant IT manager, who specializes in the design of Internet and Intranet software. The participants were told that applicants for the job had already been attracted and now were invited for a brief selection interview. They received a short job description and a curriculum vitae (CV) of one fictive applicant.

The experiment consisted of rating the applicant on the basis of a videotaped selection interview. A between-persons design was used such that each participant viewed only one condition. After having seen the videotape, participants were asked to rate the applicant by completing a questionnaire.

Development of Videotapes

Videotaped interviews of an applicant for the job of assistant IT manager and an interviewer were constructed to be approximately 5 min long. The interviewer was near the camera, so it appeared that the applicant was speaking to the research participants, or looking toward the camera. The research participants could hear the interviewer ask the questions, but did not see him on the video. The fictive applicant was sitting behind a table and was visible from his waist up.

The fictive applicant was an assistant in the university's Department of Personnel Psychology, who had experience with conducting selection interviews. Before starting, the fictive applicant carefully studied the different experimental conditions so that his answers would appear to be fluent and natural.

Experimental Conditions

Every interview consisted of eight questions of which two questions—and, more specifically, their answers—were kept constant across the experimental conditions. Answers on the other six questions differed between the experimental conditions, but only with respect to the IM tactic(s) employed. This means that the answers only differed in one or two sentences that were added, depending on the experimental condition.

In the first, neutral condition, the applicant answered in a neutral way, without employing IM tactics. The second condition was the ingratiation condition in which the applicant used verbal tactics to make the interviewer feel good about himself or herself. For example, in this condition, the applicant complimented the interviewer on the way he conducted the selection interview. The third condition was the self-promotion condition, in which the applicant directed attention to his positive qualities. For example, the applicant emphasized different extracurricular activities in which he participated and that could benefit him in this job. The fourth condition was the high IM condition and combined the IM tactics used in the ingratiation condition and self-promotion condition.

Job description, CV, content and structure of the interview were kept constant across the four experimental conditions. Also, nonverbal behavior was controlled for by having the same male person playing the four conditions, dressed identically and being interviewed in the same office setting. If, during the taping, the interviewer or the fictive applicant had the feeling that the nonverbal behavior was not kept constant, the experimental condition was redone. Finally, three independent judges from the department looked at all videotapes in order to evaluate the standardized use of nonverbal behavior across conditions.

Measures

Interviewer rating. In line with Kacmar et al.'s (1992) study, participants were asked to rate the applicant on 12 qualities. These qualities are *flexibility, motivation, enthusiasm, initiative, presence, past experience, communication skills, confidence, technical skills, analytical ability, conceptual ability, and knowledge of Internet and Intranet applications*. The items were rated on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). Cronbach's alpha for the scale was .84.

Action recommendation. In line with Kacmar et al. (1992), three items were formulated with respect to action recommendation and were used separately in the analyses. The three questions are "Would you invite the

applicant for a second interview?"; "Would you offer the applicant a job?"; and "Would you send the applicant a rejection letter?". All items were rated on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*).

Manipulation check. In order to verify whether IM had been manipulated adequately, three items were added to the questionnaire. Items questioned the degree to which the participants felt that the applicant had answered in a neutral way, used ingratiation tactics, and used self-promotion tactics. All items were rated on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*).

In order to ensure that the four conditions were constant with respect to job-relevant information and in line with Kacmar et al.'s (1992) study, participants were asked to indicate when during the interview they arrived at their decision (i.e., after reading the CV, after the interview; 0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*) and which characteristics, based on the 12 qualities on which they rated the applicant, were important in their decisions. The items were framed as "The following qualities of the applicant have led to my decision . . ." and were answered on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (*totally disagree*) to 4 (*totally agree*).

Results

Manipulation Checks

In order to verify whether IM had been manipulated adequately, a MANOVA was computed, using the three items that measured the extent to which the applicant engaged in IM tactics as the dependent variables, and IM as the independent variable. The MANOVA shows an overall significant effect for the independent variable, $F(9, 353) = 14.52, p < .001$. Also, the three univariate tests show significant effects in line with the IM manipulations in the different experimental conditions. Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1. In the combination condition, respondents rated higher on self-promotion tactics than on ingratiation tactics (i.e., 3 out of 4 paired *t* tests were significant at .01), which makes the experimental condition in line with that of Stevens and Kristof's (1995) field study.

In order to ensure that the four conditions were constant with respect to job-relevant information and in line with Kacmar et al. (1992), a second MANOVA was performed, with the importance of each of the 12 characteristics in the decision-making process and the moment of decision making as dependent variables, and IM as the independent variable. The results show no significant effect for importance of the characteristics in the decision-making process and the moment of decision making, $F(42, 280) = 0.84$,

Table 1

Mean Values on Items Measuring Adequacy of the Experimental Manipulations

Item	Neutral	Ingratiation	Self-promotion	Combination
In general, the applicant responded in a neutral way to my questions.	2.85	2.38	2.66	2.28
The applicant tried to flatter me during the interview.	1.95	3.38	2.17	3.49
The applicant promoted himself during the interview.	3.18	3.35	3.91	3.85

Note. Entries in boldface show that impression management had been manipulated adequately in the different conditions.

$p = .75$. These results suggest that the four experimental conditions were, indeed, equal with respect to job-relevant information.

Hypotheses

A MANOVA was conducted in order to test Hypotheses 1 through 4, with interviewer rating and each of the three action recommendation items as dependent variables, and IM as the independent variable. The results show an overall significant main effect for IM, $F(12, 379) = 2.65$, $p = .002$, $\eta^2 = .07$. Consequently, four univariate ANOVAs were conducted to explore the effects at the level of each dependent variable. Also, follow-up paired comparisons (using Tukey's HSD correction) were performed to explore the mean differences between the conditions.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that participants in the combination condition would give the applicant the highest rating, followed by participants in the self-promotion condition, the ingratiation condition, and finally the neutral condition. A one-way ANOVA was significant for interviewer ratings, $F(3, 146) = 8.79$, $p = .000$, $\eta^2 = .15$. Inspection of the means shows that the highest

rating was given in the combination condition ($M = 35.56$, $SD = 4.50$), followed by the self-promotion condition ($M = 34.08$, $SD = 0.08$), the ingratiation condition ($M = 32.50$, $SD = 6.26$), and finally the neutral condition ($M = 29.36$, $SD = 29.36$). Follow-up paired comparisons, however, only reveal a significant difference between the neutral condition and both the self-promotion condition and the combination condition. The ingratiation condition did not differ significantly from all other conditions.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that participants in the combination condition would be the most likely to offer a job, followed by participants in the self-promotion condition, the ingratiation condition, and finally the neutral condition. A one-way ANOVA was significant for job offers, $F(3, 146) = 3.57$, $p = .02$, $\eta^2 = .07$. Inspection of the means shows that the highest rating was given in the combination condition ($M = 2.82$, $SD = 0.51$), followed by the self-promotion condition ($M = 2.70$, $SD = 0.52$), the ingratiation condition ($M = 2.53$, $SD = 0.76$), and finally the neutral condition ($M = 2.39$, $SD = 0.65$). Follow-up paired comparisons, however, only reveal a significant difference between the neutral condition and the combination condition. The ingratiation condition and the self-promotion conditions did not differ significantly from each other, nor did they differ significantly from the neutral and the combination conditions.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that participants in the combination condition would be the least likely to reject the applicant, followed by participants in the self-promotion condition, the ingratiation condition, and finally the neutral condition. A one-way ANOVA was not significant, $F(3, 146) = 1.64$, $p = .18$; and follow-up paired comparisons show no significant differences between the conditions. Inspection of the means, however, shows that the results were in line with Hypothesis 3. The lowest rating was given in the combination condition ($M = 2.18$, $SD = 0.72$), followed by the self-promotion condition ($M = 2.27$, $SD = 0.56$), the ingratiation condition ($M = 2.45$, $SD = 0.76$), and finally the neutral condition ($M = 2.50$, $SD = 0.81$).

Hypothesis 4 predicted that participants in the combination condition would be the most likely to invite the applicant for a second interview, followed by participants in the self-promotion condition, the ingratiation condition, and finally the neutral condition. A one-way ANOVA was marginally significant, $F(3, 146) = 2.45$, $p = .07$, $\eta^2 = .05$. Inspection of the means again shows that the results were mainly in line with Hypothesis 4. However, the highest rating was given in the self-promotion condition ($M = 3.05$, $SD = 0.62$), followed by the combination condition ($M = 2.92$, $SD = 0.48$), the ingratiation condition ($M = 2.87$, $SD = 0.81$), and finally the neutral condition ($M = 2.64$, $SD = 0.72$). Follow-up paired comparisons only reveal a significant difference between the neutral condition and the self-promotion condition.

Discussion

The aim of the present study was to investigate the relative effectiveness of applicants' use of IM tactics in the selection interview. This study contributes to the current literature in the sense that the effectiveness of ingratiation and self-promotion were studied, relative to each other and relative to a neutral condition in which the applicant used no IM tactics. A combination condition, in which the applicant combined both tactics, was compared to the neutral condition and the single use conditions (i.e., ingratiation and self-promotion).

All results were in the expected direction. In general, interviewers' rating and action recommendations were more positive in the combination condition, followed by the self-promotion condition, the ingratiation condition, and the neutral condition. However, although the results were in line with the Kacmar et al.'s (1992) finding that self-promotion tactics are more effective than ingratiation tactics, the conditions did not differ significantly from each other.

The current design allows us to reach clearer conclusions on the effectiveness of different IM tactics, as a result of the inclusion of a neutral and a combination condition. For example, the ingratiation condition was less effective than was the self-promotion condition in the sense that it did not differ significantly from the neutral condition for any of the dependent variables, while the self-promotion condition and the combination led to higher interviewer ratings. The self-promotion condition was also more effective with respect to being offered a second interview, while the combination condition was more effective with respect to getting a job offer.

The results with respect to inviting the candidate for a second interview are less clear. The highest mean level for this variable was found in the self-promotion condition, with a slight decrease in the combination condition. These results were in line with Kacmar et al. (1992), who found different results with respect to this dependent variable (i.e., second-interview offer), as compared to the other dependent variables in this study (i.e., interviewer ratings, job offer, rejection letter). This finding might be explained by the double message that is included in inviting someone for a second interview. On the one hand, this might mean that the interviewer finds the applicant a good candidate for the job and, therefore, wants the candidate to proceed through the rest of the selection procedure. On the other hand, this might mean that the interviewer was not able to collect enough information from the applicant and wants to be able to elaborate more on certain aspects in a second, follow-up interview, as was the case in Kacmar et al.'s study.

Strengths and Limitations

A key problem with field studies is determining when the applicant uses IM and when the applicant responds in an honest and objective way (Peeters & Lievens, 2006). Conducting a lab study enabled us to manipulate IM use and to disentangle rival explanations for the results. This scenario research methodology has been used effectively in the past and provides several benefits (Fandt & Ferris, 1990; Liden, Ferris, & Dienesch, 1988). Scenarios provide respondents with standardized stimuli, thus eliminating potential sources of interpretation error. Further, great effort was taken to ensure that the job-related information presented was held constant across the four scripts. Therefore, it is reasonable that observed differences between the four conditions are a result of the manipulations in our study (i.e., level of IM).

On the other hand, this methodology limits the external validity of the current study. The fact that interviewers evaluated a videotaped candidate and had no face-to-face contact might have affected our results. For example, Van Iddekinge, Raymark, and Roth (2003) showed that ratings of videotaped interviews are more resistant to interviewee response distortion, which means that the effect sizes in our study might have been an underestimation of the real effect sizes.

Another limitation with respect to the external validity of this study is the use of one applicant and one job. Using a male applicant—being evaluated by both male and female interviewers—did not allow us to check for differences in evaluating applicants of the same sex/different sexes. For example, Graves and Powell (1995) found that interviewers give higher ratings to applicants of the opposite sex. Therefore, further research could be conducted with both a male and a female applicant in each condition. Van Vianen and Willemssen (1992) found that for higher level technical jobs, the ideal candidate is described by job interviewers as having more masculine traits than feminine traits. Since the job that was used in the present study could be categorized as a higher level technical job and a male applicant was used, this might have inflated ratings on the dependent variables. Therefore, future research with other job descriptions and with male and female applicants is warranted.

The use of one job also limits the generalizability of the results. Previous research has shown that IM tactics can detract from, improve, or have no impact on the image observers have of an individual, depending on the characteristics of the situation in which the tactic was demonstrated (Giacalone, 1985; Kacmar & Carlson, 1999; Tedeschi & Melburg, 1984). In this study, a back-office job was used, whereas the use of a more commercial job with the same applicant could have shown very different results.

Directions for Future Research

Further research is necessary to develop a deeper understanding of the underlying processes that cause IM tactics to have an impact on interviewers' evaluations. For example, little is known about how individual-difference variables (e.g., interviewer experience, personality characteristics, gender) moderate the way IM tactics are evaluated. For example, Baron (1986) suggested that men base their evaluation more on external related factors than do women and are less adapted to ignore certain aspects than are women. Therefore, men would need more time to decide whether behavior is either situational or dispositional than would women, leading to a more negative evaluation when there are many external, distracting factors (e.g., IM behavior). Research on antecedents of the frequency and types of IM tactics applicants use is rather scarce and has rarely considered the joint influence of situational and dispositional variables (Van Iddekinge, McFarland, & Raymark, 2007).

One meaningful way to move forward with this research is to develop and test more comprehensive models of decision making in the employment interview, considering simultaneously the influence of interviewer characteristics, applicant behaviors, and situational characteristics, as well as mediating processes (see Gilmore, Stevens, Harrell-Cook, & Ferris, 1999). Several studies have already considered the influence of mediating variables, such as applicant similarity to the interviewer and interviewer affect toward the applicant (e.g., Gallois, Callan, & Palmer, 1992; Howard & Ferris, 1996). An even broader model of decision making was tested by Van Iddekinge et al. (2007), who showed that interviewee personality affects the use of IM tactics, which in turn affects interview performance, depending on the situational strength of the context (i.e., getting a performance incentive or not). Further research should continue in this direction since the study of mediating and moderating influences is important in order to discover explanatory mechanisms through which IM tactics influence interview outcomes.

Other selection tools besides the selection interview deserve additional attention. For example, Varma, Toh, and Pichler (2006) considered how these same IM tactics may be used in job applicant letters, and their results were in line with the results on the selection interview, in the sense that self-focused tactics were more effective than were other-focused tactics. Further research could be conducted in order to deepen our understanding of how IM tactics may influence the decisions of recruiters who rely on written applications, or a combination of written applications and selection interviews.

Practical Implications

The results of the current study suggest that it is better to use any type of IM tactics in the interview than use no tactic at all. However, using only ingratiation was not effective enough to differentiate oneself from the applicant using no IM tactics. Using self-promotion or a combination of self-promotion and ingratiation led to higher interviewer ratings. Using self-promotion alone also led to more second-interview offers, whereas using a combination of tactics also led to more job offers.

The current results were obtained with respect to selection interview outcomes. One should be careful, however, in translating the results to other contexts. In line with Higgins et al.'s (2003) meta-analytic review, it was found that ingratiation—especially self-promotion—works well in an interview. These results must be somewhat differentiated, since self-promotion in particular appears to backfire in performance evaluations provided by supervisors (Gordon, 1996). Jones and Pittman (1982) suggested that self-promotion may be less successful when claims of competence can be verified.

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