Too Available to Be Desired? Digital Availability Signals and the Paradox of Employability in Creative Advertising Hiring

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Abstract
Digital platforms encourage professionals to publicly signal their availability for employment. In prestige-driven creative industries such as advertising such signals may produce unintended consequences. This study examines how advertising hiring decision-makers interpret digital visibility cues, focusing on LinkedIn's "Open to Work" badge. Based on 21 in-depth interviews with creative directors and chief creative officers in major U.S. advertising markets, the findings show that generic declarations of availability are frequently interpreted as signals of weak demand rather than professional readiness. Instead, hiring managers expect availability to be communicated through culturally legitimate signals such as creative self-presentation, portfolio storytelling, and peer endorsement. The analysis identifies two cultural logics that affect these interpretations: the stigmatization of the available and the glorification of the busy. By integrating signaling theory with Bourdieu's concepts of social and symbolic capital, this study demonstrates how employability signals in creative labor markets must be strategically performed rather than openly declared.

Keywords:
Advertising creatives, availability, signaling theory, social capital, symbolic capital, creative industries.