Social Influences on Organizational Attractiveness:
Word-of-Mouth Communication as a Recruitment Source

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PREFACE

"*There are two mistakes one can make along the road to truth ... not going all the way and not starting*" (Buddha, 563-483 B.C.). In fact, choosing the right subject and never giving up were probably the most difficult tasks in completing this doctoral dissertation. A number of people have helped me to avoid making these two mistakes, for which I would like to thank them.

First of all, I want to thank my advisor, Prof. Dr. Filip Lievens, for his outstanding guidance. He was always available for sharing thoughts, discussing proposals, and reviewing papers. He introduced me to the wonderful world of science and has inspired me to search for excellence. It was both an honour and a pleasure to work with such a great mind!

I am also grateful to the other members of my guidance committee, Prof. Dr. Johnny Fontaine, Prof. Dr. Maggie Geuens, and Prof. Dr. Alain Van Hiel, for their encouragement and constructive comments on various proposals and papers. Furthermore, I would like to thank Prof. Dr. Daniel Cable (University of North Carolina), Prof. Dr. Brian Dineen (University of Kentucky), Prof. Dr. Daniel Turban (University of Missouri), Prof. Dr. Edwin van Hooft (Erasmus University Rotterdam), and Prof. Dr. Annelies van Vianen (University of Amsterdam) for reviewing my proposals or papers. Special thanks go to Prof. Dr. Michael Harris (University of Missouri) for stimulating me to pursue an academic career, for inviting me as a co-author, and for reviewing my papers.

I am thankful to all people who participated in the empirical studies. I would also like to thank the employees of the Belgian Defense and the Flemish Public Employment Service for their help in collecting the data. Special thanks go to Bert Schreurs, Dominiek Saelens, Liliane Heylen, and Francois Lescreve of the Belgian Defense and to Liesbeth Cael, Peggy Van Den Steen, Dorine Samyn, Mieke Loomans, and Theo Leyman of the Flemish Public Employment Service

for making the field studies possible. Finally, I wish to thank Ilse, Isabel, and Maarten for being such fine "stimulus materials" in the experimental studies.

I would like to thank my current and former colleagues at the Department of Personnel Management, Work and Organizational Psychology of the Ghent University for their support. As head of the department, Prof. Dr. Rita Claes provided the ideal conditions for completing this dissertation. I also want to thank Prof. Dr. Pol Coetsier for stimulating my academic interests and for sharing his great expertise. Special thanks go to my "cohort members", Liesbet and Helga, for sharing laughs and worries, for their continuous support, and for reviewing my papers. I want to thank Bart for being my administrative helpdesk, Hans for being my computer helpdesk, Frederik for reviewing my papers, and Mieke for her help in conducting one of my prestudies. Thanks also go to Katrien, Koen, Stefaan, and Tine for editing my papers and to Evelyn, Ilse, Paul, and Prof. Dr. Peter Vlerick for the moral support.

Finally, I want to thank my family and friends for their love and support. Very special thanks go to my parents who always stimulated me to do the best I could, but at the same time reassured me that I could not do more than that. I am also grateful to Kurt, Isabel, Veerle, Caroline, Elke, and Wenche for being such good friends, supporting and encouraging me. My cats Polly and Lola proved to be very good stress fighters, but most of all it was Roald who was always there for me. So, thank you for everything and more …

Greet Van Hoye, Ghent, January 25, 2006

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous recruitment research has not paid enough attention to organizational attraction in the first recruitment phase and has largely ignored the existence of external recruitment sources and social influences. This doctoral dissertation examines the impact of word-of-mouth communication as a recruitment source on organizational attractiveness for potential applicants. An introduction to the domain of recruitment is provided, reviewing relevant previous research. Five overarching research questions are identified that have guided the empirical studies presented in the following chapters.

INTRODUCTION

In today's business environment, human capital is one of the most valuable assets a company can have and recruitment serves the important function of bringing the necessary talent into the organization (Barber, 1998). As recruitment influences the quantity and quality of the applicant pool, it has implications for all other human resources practices, such as the utility of selection (Murphy, 1986; Saks, 2005). Despite economic upturns and downturns, recruitment remains a crucial human resources function for at least three reasons. First, there will always be hard-to-fill vacancies for which organizations must compete fiercely to attract potential applicants, even in an otherwise loose labor market. Second, the most talented job seekers continue to have enough options to critically investigate and compare potential employers. Therefore, organizations that wish to attract these highly desired applicants have no choice but to participate in the "war for talent". Third, demographic trends such as a smaller supply of younger workers and retirements among baby boomers indicate that recruitment will be even more important in the future (Rynes & Barber, 1990; Saks, 2005).

Accordingly, there has been a dramatic increase of research interest in recruitment over the last thirty years. In the first edition of the *Handbook of Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, a single page was sufficient to describe the status of recruitment research at that time (Guion, 1976). By the time of the second edition, the increased volume of recruitment research already required an entire chapter (Rynes, 1991). In 1998, there had even been enough recruitment studies to devote a complete book to the subject (Barber, 1998). In recent years, there have been several other excellent reviews and critiques of recruitment research (Breaugh & Starke, 2000; Cable & Turban, 2001; Chapman, Uggerslev, Carroll, Piasentin, & Jones, 2005; Ehrhart & Ziegert, 2005; Highhouse & Hoffman, 2001; Rynes & Barber, 1990; Rynes & Cable, 2003; Saks, 2005; Taylor & Collins, 2000).

Nevertheless, considerable gaps and unanswered research questions can be identified in the recruitment literature (Barber, 1998; Breaugh & Starke, 2000; Saks, 2005; Taylor & Collins, 2000). As much of the existing research has focused on post-hire outcomes such as the satisfaction and performance of new employees, surprisingly little is known about what influences organizational attractiveness for potential applicants, a more immediate recruitment outcome (Barber, 1998; Rynes, 1991; Turban, 2001). However, it is imperative to understand why potential applicants decide to apply to an organization because if they do not, they disappear from the recruitment process and cannot be reached by later recruitment or selection activities. Therefore, there have been numerous calls for more research about organizational attraction in the first recruitment phase (Barber, 1998; Breaugh & Starke, 2000; Collins & Han, 2004; Collins & Stevens, 2002; Rynes, 1991; Rynes & Barber, 1990; Rynes & Cable, 2003; Saks, 2005; Taylor & Collins, 2000; Turban, 2001). For instance, Rynes (1991) stated that "the principal recommendation with respect to dependent variables would be to accord the immediate objective of recruitment - applicant attraction - higher priority in future research" (p. 435).

The source through which potential applicants receive employment information (e.g., job advertisement) is one of the factors that might influence their attraction to the organization, but unfortunately most studies have examined the effects of recruitment sources on post-hire outcomes only (Barber, 1998; Breaugh & Starke, 2000; Rynes, 1991; Rynes & Barber, 1990; Rynes & Cable, 2003; Zottoli & Wanous, 2000). In addition, previous research has largely ignored the existence of external or company-independent recruitment sources such as publicity and word-of-mouth (Cable & Turban, 2001; Collins & Stevens, 2002). In fact, Cable and Turban (2001) suggested that:

> Any information source, ranging from company's brand advertisement to friends' word-of-mouth, has the potential to affect job seekers' employer knowledge (Cable et al., 2000). Unfortunately, several sources of organizational information suggested by the marketing literature have been relatively ignored in past recruitment research. (p. 132)

The lack of research about the impact of word-of-mouth on organizational attractiveness is especially startling. Even though it is generally recognized that potential applicants often consult family or friends about jobs and organizations, most studies have treated potential applicants as individual decision-makers in social isolation (Barber, 1998; Cable & Turban, 2001; Highhouse & Hoffman, 2001; Kilduff, 1990, 1992; Ryan, Sacco, McFarland, & Kriska, 2000; Rynes, Bretz, & Gerhart, 1991). Kilduff (1990) asserted that "a good example of scholarly neglect of social influences on behavior occurs in the area of organizational choice" (p. 271). Ryan et al. (2000) stated that "several streams of research suggest the importance of considering the influence of others in examining behavior during a hiring process, yet little research has been conducted in this area" (p. 166). Indeed, on the basis of their review of the recruitment literature, Highhouse and Hoffman (2001) concluded that "although it has been over 30 years since Soelberg (1967, p. 23) referred to social influence as the 'single most promising direction' for job-choice research, very little attention has been given to this topic" (p.47).

Therefore, the main objective of this doctoral dissertation is to examine the impact of word-of-mouth as an external recruitment source on organizational attractiveness for potential applicants. This chapter provides an introduction to the domain of recruitment and an overview of relevant previous research. On the basis of this literature review, the research questions guiding the present dissertation are identified at the end of the chapter. In addition, an outline of the empirical studies in this dissertation is presented and their relation to the research objectives is discussed.

RECRUITMENT

Recruitment consists of "those practices and activities carried on by the organization with the primary purpose of identifying and attracting potential employees" (Barber, 1998, p. 5). Three phases can be delineated within the recruitment process as potential applicants turn into actual applicants and finally become selectees. In the first phase, recruitment is aimed at the applicant

population or "the group from which the organization can recruit given the choices it has made regarding recruitment (e.g., decisions to target a particular segment of the labor market or to use a particular source)" (Barber, 1998, p. 13). During this phase, both organizations and potential applicants look for limited information about numerous possibilities and there is little interpersonal contact. The objective of the first phase is not a final choice, but a screening to reduce the number of possible applicants or jobs. The second phase focuses on the applicant pool or "those individuals from the applicant population who choose to apply to the organization" (Barber, 1998, p. 13). Both organizations and applicants search for in-depth information about the remaining possibilities and there is more interpersonal contact. The second phase results in a final choice made by the organization about whom to hire. In the last phase, the selectees or "those individuals from the applicant pool who are actually offered employment" (Barber, 1998, p. 13) decide whether to accept or reject job offers. Recruitment has a distinct function in each of these phases. In the first phase, recruitment aims to identify potential applicants and persuade them to apply to the organization. In the second phase, recruitment tries to persuade applicants to remain interested until the organization makes its final choice. Finally, in the third phase, recruitment wants to persuade selectees to accept job offers and become new employees.

It follows from the description of the different recruitment phases that recruitment by organizations and job search by individuals are inextricably connected. Surprisingly, these two research domains have developed relatively independent from each other, in spite of the obvious similarities. The job search process is generally conceptualized as consisting of two distinct phases (Blau, 1994). In the preparatory job search phase, individuals (i.e., potential applicants) gather information about potential job leads through various sources. In the active job search phase, individuals (i.e., applicants) contact and apply to prospective employers.

The first recruitment phase is of crucial importance because if potential applicants decide not to apply, they never enter the subsequent recruitment

phases. Organizational attractiveness represents an attitudinal construct that can already be measured in the first phase of recruitment and that has been found to be related to actual application and job choice decisions in later stages (Chapman et al., 2005; Collins & Stevens, 2002; Highhouse, Lievens, & Sinar, 2003; Judge & Cable, 1997; Powell & Goulet, 1996; Turban, Campion, & Eyring, 1995). Despite numerous calls for more research, many interesting questions about the effects of initial recruitment activities on organizational attractiveness remain unaddressed (Barber, 1998; Breaugh & Starke, 2000; Collins & Han, 2004; Collins & Stevens, 2002; Rynes, 1991; Rynes & Barber, 1990; Rynes & Cable, 2003; Saks, 2005; Taylor & Collins, 2000; Turban, 2001).

ORGANIZATIONAL ATTRACTIVENESS

In the narrow sense, organizational attractiveness refers to an individual's attitude towards an organization as an employer, as expressed by a typical item "I would like to work for this organization" (Highhouse et al., 2003). In a broader sense, organizational attractiveness can also encompass an individual's intentions towards an organization as an employer, exemplified by items such as "I would exert a great deal of effort to work for this organization". Most previous recruitment studies have used a single measure of organizational attractiveness combining attitude and intention items (e.g., Turban & Keon, 1993).

In the broadest sense, organizational prestige or perceived reputation could be considered as a component of organizational attractiveness as well. Prestige refers to a perceived social consensus on the degree to which an organization's characteristics are regarded as either positive or negative, which is illustrated by items such as "This organization probably has a reputation as being an excellent employer" (Highhouse et al., 2003). Previous research has typically studied prestige as a distinct construct, measured separately from organizational attractiveness (e.g., Cable & Turban, 2003).

PERSPECTIVES ON ORGANIZATIONAL ATTRACTIVENESS

DECISION MAKING PERSPECTIVE

Organizational attraction research from a decision making perspective studies how job seekers make application and job choice decisions. One stream of research has focused on the content of job choice to discover which specific attributes influence job choice. Another research stream emphasizes the process of job choice to find out how these attributes are combined into an ultimate choice. Highhouse and Hoffman (2001) provide an excellent review of previous research about both these aspects of the decision making perspective on organizational attractiveness.

With respect to the content of job choice, both job and organizational characteristics and recruitment activities have been found to influence organizational attractiveness and job choice (Barber, 1998; Boswell, Roehling, LePine, & Moynihan, 2003; Breaugh & Starke, 2000; Chapman et al., 2005; Highhouse & Hoffman, 2001; Rynes, 1991; Rynes & Barber, 1990; Rynes & Cable, 2003; Saks, 2005; Taylor & Collins, 2000). Although changing job and organizational characteristics might be a more effective strategy for increasing organizational attraction, altering recruitment activities may be more efficient because it is easier and less costly to achieve (Rynes & Barber, 1990). Signaling theory postulates that decision makers faced with uncertainty and incomplete information use the information that they do have as the basis for making inferences about missing information (Barber, 1998; Spence, 1973). This implies that recruitment activities are likely to have a greater effect on application decisions than on final job choice because job seekers in the first phase of recruitment typically possess only limited information about the job opportunity. Therefore, they may use recruitment activities as signals of important job and organizational characteristics. Rynes et al. (1991) and Barber and Roehling (1993) found strong empirical support for the premises of signaling theory. The impact of recruitment activities on organizational attractiveness is discussed in more detail later in this literature review.

Process-oriented studies have focused more on final job choice than on initial application decisions (Barber, 1998). One of the more popular process models of job choice has been Vroom's (1966) application of expectancy theory. Basically, this model asserts that job attractiveness is based on the attractiveness of attributes (i.e., valence) and the likelihood that these attributes will be present in the job (i.e., instrumentality). The valence of each attribute is multiplied by its instrumentality and these products are summed to generate an overall attractiveness score. Job seekers will exert the most effort to obtain jobs that maximize the product of this attractiveness score and the perceived probability that effort will lead to the desired job (i.e., expectancy). Reviews of research about expectancy theory suggest that it is fairly successful in predicting job choice (Highhouse & Hoffman, 2001; Wanous, Keon, & Latack, 1983). However, it might be less useful to predict application decisions (Barber, 1998; Highhouse & Hoffman, 2001). On the one hand, the first recruitment phase is characterized by screening instead of final choice (Barber, 1998). On the other hand, not all job attributes seem to be considered in a compensatory way, as suggested by expectancy theory (Barber & Roehling, 1993; Osborn, 1990). Potential applicants seem to use some attributes as noncompensatory screening variables (i.e., jobs are rejected if they do not meet minimum requirements) and allow for trade-offs among other attributes (Highhouse & Hoffman, 2001). An alternative model that takes these considerations into account is Soelberg's (1967) generalizable decision processing theory. This theory suggests that the initial screening of jobs occurs on the basis of a few noncompensatory attributes. In later decision stages, more information is sought about the "implicit favorites" to rationalize these initial choices. However, there has not been sufficient empirical research to validate this model (Highhouse & Hoffman, 2001; Power & Aldag, 1985).

PERSON-ORGANIZATION FIT PERSPECTIVE

The person-organization fit perspective postulates that potential applicants are more likely to be attracted to organizations with characteristics compatible with their own characteristics (for reviews, see Kristof, 1996; Kristof-Brown,

Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005; Van Vianen, 2005; Verquer, Beehr, & Wagner, 2002). This is in line with Schneider's (1987) attraction-selection-attrition framework, which proposes that different kinds of organizations attract, select, and retain different kinds of people (see also Schneider, Goldstein, & Smith, 1995). More specifically, job seekers are attracted to organizations that match their own personal attributes, organizations select people who match the attributes of the people already working for the organization, and employees who do not fit well are expected to leave the organization. Therefore, the person-organization fit perspective represents an extension of the content-oriented decision making perspective in that the attributes influencing organizational attractiveness are not assumed to be the same for all job seekers. This implies that potential applicants will react differently to an organization's recruitment activities depending on their personal characteristics such as their personality, needs, values, preferences, and goals. There has been considerable empirical support indicating that the effects of job and organizational characteristics and recruitment activities on organizational attractiveness are indeed moderated by individual difference variables (Cable & Judge, 1994, 1996; Dineen, Ash, & Noe, 2002; Honeycutt & Rosen, 1997; Judge & Bretz, 1992; Judge & Cable, 1997; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Lievens, Decaesteker, Coetsier, & Geirnaert, 2001; Moss & Frieze, 1993; Ng & Burke, 2005; Ramamoorthy & Carroll, 1998; Rau & Hyland, 2002, 2003; Rentsch & McEwen, 2002; Schein & Diamante, 1988; Tom, 1971; Trank, Rynes, & Bretz, 2002; Turban & Keon, 1993; Turban, Lau, Ngo, Chow, & Si, 2001). For instance, Judge and Cable (1997) found that potential applicants scoring high on extraversion were more attracted to organizations with a team-oriented culture than potential applicants scoring low on extraversion.

Two different kinds of fit can be distinguished: objective person-organization fit or the actual congruence between individual and organizational characteristics and subjective person-organization fit or the individual's own perception of the degree of fit with the organization (Kristof, 1996). Judge and Cable (1997) found that both objective and subjective fit were related to organizational attractiveness and more specifically, that subjective fit mediated the effect of

objective fit on attractiveness. On the basis of a meta-analytic review, Verquer et al. (2003) concluded that subjective fit had better predictive validity for work attitudes than objective fit, leading them to suggest that it might be more efficient to use measures of subjective fit in future studies.

MARKETING PERSPECTIVE

One of the recruitment strategies suggested by the American Management Association's Executive Forum on Solutions to the Labor Shortage Crisis was to use marketing concepts in recruitment and to view potential applicants as a key customer group (Capowski, 1997). Applying a marketing metaphor to recruitment research (for a review of the recruitment literature from a marketing perspective, see Cable & Turban, 2001) is based on the conceptual parallels between the two disciplines. In both marketing and recruitment, organizations compete to attract a limited number of individuals. These individuals expend resources to gather and process ambiguous information, and invest resources in a chosen alternative. Communication and persuasion are inherent in both processes (Cable & Turban, 2001). Therefore, potential applicants and application decisions can be compared to consumers and buying decisions (Maurer, Howe, & Lee, 1992).

A number of studies have fruitfully applied marketing concepts to recruitment issues, demonstrating that a marketing metaphor can provide an innovative and theory-driven approach to understanding organizational attractiveness (Cable, Aiman-Smith, Mulvey, & Edwards, 2000; Cable & Turban, 2003; Collins & Han, 2004; Collins & Stevens, 2002; Hanssens & Levien, 1983; Highhouse, Beadle, Gallo, & Miller, 1998; Larsen & Phillips, 2002; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Maurer et al., 1992; Perkins, Thomas, & Taylor, 2000; Roberson, Collins, & Oreg, 2005; Slaughter, Zickar, Highhouse, & Mohr, 2004). For example, borrowing from research on low and high involvement marketing strategies, Collins and Han (2004) demonstrated that low involvement recruitment practices (e.g., sponsorship) resulted in higher applicant pool quantity and quality for organizations with lower levels of corporate advertising and reputation, whereas high involvement recruitment practices (e.g., detailed

recruitment advertisements) were more effective for organizations with higher levels of corporate advertising and reputation.

RECRUITMENT ACTIVITIES

In order to enhance organizational attractiveness, recruitment typically involves that a particular message about the organization as an employer is communicated to a target group of potential applicants through a specific channel or source (Rynes & Barber, 1990). Therefore, choosing a recruitment message and choosing a recruitment source represent two important recruitment activities.

RECRUITMENT MESSAGE

A crucial aspect of the recruitment message concerns the job and organizational characteristics that are being described. Previous research has demonstrated that information about attributes such as location, industry, size, salary and benefits, type of work, work environment, advancement and educational opportunities, diversity management, human resource systems, social consciousness, culture, image, reputation, and position scarcity, influences organizational attractiveness (Barber & Roehling, 1993; Boswell et al., 2003; Chapman et al., 2005; Highhouse & Hoffman, 2001; Rynes & Cable, 2003).

In addition, informational characteristics seem to affect organizational attractiveness as well. More specifically, previous research found that the amount, specificity, and uniqueness of the provided information were positively related to organizational attractiveness (Barber, 1998; Barber & Roehling, 1993; Highhouse & Hoffman, 2001).

Finally, a lot of research attention has been paid to the realism of the recruitment message. The underlying concern is that providing overly favorable information to potential applicants leads to unrealistic expectations among new employees that cannot be met, causing them to leave the organization (Breaugh & Starke, 2000). The general conclusion from empirical research is that presenting a

realistic job preview (i.e., both favorable and unfavorable information) to potential applicants can result in lower initial expectations, lower turnover, higher performance, and higher satisfaction; although these effects are rather modest (Hom, Griffeth, Palich, & Bracker, 1998; Meglino, Ravlin, & DeNisi, 2000; Phillips, 1998; Premack & Wanous, 1985). Even though the research focus has been on post-hire outcomes, there is some evidence that realistic job previews can have a negative effect on organizational attractiveness, especially for higher quality potential applicants (Bretz & Judge, 1998; Meglino et al., 2000; for a divergent view see Thorsteinson, Palmer, Wulff, & Anderson, 2004).

RECRUITMENT SOURCE

Organizations can choose from a wide range of information sources to communicate their message to the applicant population such as advertising, websites, employee referrals, employment agencies, campus recruitment, and job fairs. Although the effectiveness of recruitment sources is one of the most intensely researched aspects of recruitment, the focus has been on post-hire instead of pre-hire outcomes (Barber, 1998; Rynes & Cable, 2003). For the past thirty years, the main finding has been that employees recruited through informal sources such as employee referrals and direct applications show higher job satisfaction, better job performance, and lower turnover than employees recruited through formal sources such as newspaper advertisements and employment agencies (Breaugh, 1981; Breaugh & Starke, 2000; Saks, 2005; Ullman, 1966; Zottoli & Wanous, 2000). Two major theoretical explanations for these source differences have been investigated, both of which have received some empirical support (Blau, 1990; Breaugh & Mann, 1984; Griffeth, Hom, Fink & Cohen, 1997; Moser, 2005; Saks, 1994; Taylor & Schmidt, 1983; Werbel & Landau, 1996; Williams, Labig, & Stone, 1993; Zottoli & Wanous, 2000). The realistic information hypothesis states that informal sources might provide more accurate and specific information about what the job entails than formal sources. Not only does the more realistic information allow applicants to apply for jobs that better fit their interests and skills, it also tempers their expectations avoiding disappointment upon hiring. The individual differences

hypothesis proposes that informal sources might reach other types of applicants than formal sources. These pre-existing differences would then explain the later differences between new employees recruited through different sources.

Even though the relationships between recruitment sources and post-hire outcomes have received the most research attention, some studies indicate that recruitment sources can also have differential effects on pre-hire outcomes such as organizational attractiveness, application decisions, job choice decisions, and quantity and quality of the applicant pool, with informal sources generally outperforming formal sources (Allen, Van Scotter, & Otondo, 2004; Breaugh, Greising, Taggart, & Chen, 2003; Collins & Han, 2004; Collins & Stevens, 2002; Kirnan, Farley, & Geisinger, 1989; Williams et al., 1993).

In addition to the focus on post-hire outcomes, the study of recruitment sources has suffered from a number of other methodological weaknesses, on the basis of which Zottoli and Wanous (2000) formulated some important suggestions for future research. First of all, other effectiveness criteria that have often been ignored in the past should be considered, such as organizational attractiveness (Barber, 1998; Breaugh & Starke, 2000). This implies that the effect of recruitment sources should be studied among potential applicants instead of applicants, selectees, or new employees. Second, additional theoretical explanations or mediating process variables should be considered for expected source effects, especially on organizational attractiveness (Breaugh & Starke, 2000). Next, differences between recruitment sources have to be investigated at three levels of specificity: between theoretically relevant categories, but also between individual sources across and within categories, and even within sources (e.g., newspaper versus radio advertisements). Fourth, future studies need to take into account that individuals can use more than one source to obtain job and organizational information and that they can vary in the extent to which they use a particular source (Rynes & Cable, 2003; Saks & Ashforth, 1997). Finally, a wider variety of recruitment sources has to be examined including web-based recruitment (Saks, 2005; Taylor & Collins, 2000). In line with these

suggestions, the next section introduces three new perspectives that can guide future research on recruitment sources and organizational attractiveness.

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON RECRUITMENT SOURCES

CABLE AND TURBAN'S (2001) CLASSIFICATION OF RECRUITMENT SOURCES

Cable and Turban (2001) borrowed from the marketing literature to develop a new conceptual framework of the sources of potential applicants' employer knowledge. One of the most important premises of their model is that organizational attractiveness can be influenced by job and organizational information from a broad array of sources, not restricted to the ones organizations intentionally incorporate in their recruitment activities. Their classification of recruitment sources consists of two major dimensions, resulting in four distinct categories (see Table 1 for an example of a typical source in each category). The internal-external dimension refers to the degree of control the organization has of the information source. Internal or company-dependent sources are part of the organization's recruitment activities and can be directly managed to communicate a positive message to potential applicants. On the contrary, external or company-independent sources can only be influenced indirectly through other recruitment activities and can contain positive as well as negative information. Although both kinds of sources can influence organizational attractiveness, very little research has investigated the effects of external sources such as publicity and word-of-mouth (Cable & Turban, 2001; Collins & Stevens, 2002). The experiential-informational dimension represents the degree to which the source allows potential applicants to acquire information through personal, vivid media versus impersonal, pallid media.

Table 1. Classification of Recruitment Sources (Cable & Turban, 2001).

	Internal	External
Informational	Recruitment advertising	Publicity
Experiential	Recruiter	Word-of-mouth

THE ACCESSIBILITY-DIAGNOSTICITY MODEL

The accessibility-diagnosticity model (Feldman & Lynch, 1988; Herr, Kardes, & Kim, 1991) can serve as a new theoretical framework to formulate predictions about the effects of recruitment sources on organizational attractiveness. This model posits that the likelihood that information is used to form an evaluation is determined by the accessibility of that information in memory, the diagnosticity of that information, and by the accessibility and diagnosticity of other information. The vividness of the information provided by the source is an important determinant of its accessibility. An information source is perceived as diagnostic if it helps to discriminate between alternative hypotheses, interpretations, or categorizations. In other words, a recruitment source is diagnostic if it helps potential applicants to decide whether a specific organization would be a good or bad employer for them.

One of the predictions that can be derived from the accessibility-diagnosticity model is that experiential sources are likely to have a greater impact on organizational attractiveness than informational sources because they are more easily accessible in memory due to their more personal and vivid nature (Herr et al., 1991). The model also offers explanations for the effects of multiple recruitment sources, an area in need of further research attention (Cable & Turban, 2001; Collins & Han, 2004; Collins & Stevens, 2002). For instance, the order in which potential applicants are exposed to recruitment sources is expected to moderate their effect on organizational attractiveness. The accessibility-diagnosticity model proposes that earlier information is more diagnostic than later information and therefore has a greater impact on final judgments. People often overestimate the validity of prior impressions and interpret subsequent information in light of earlier evaluations (Herr et al., 1991; Smith & Vogt, 1995; Wooten & Reed, 1998). Finally, the model can take into account that the information provided by external sources can be positive as well as negative. In this respect, the accessibility-diagnosticity model posits that negative information is more diagnostic and therefore more influential than

positive or neutral information, especially in a marketing or recruitment environment that is predominantly positive (Herr et al., 1991).

THE SOURCE CREDIBILITY FRAMEWORK

An alternative theoretical explanation for the effects of recruitment sources is provided by the source credibility framework, which postulates that more credible sources of information are more persuasive in both changing attitudes and gaining behavioral compliance (Eisend, 2004; Pornpitakpan, 2004). Perceived credibility is based on perceptions of accuracy, appropriateness, and believability of the information received from the source (Allen et al., 2004; Eisend, 2004). This theory implies that recruitment sources vary in the degree to which potential applicants perceive them as providing credible employment information, which in turn might explain their different effects on recruitment outcomes (Allen et al., 2004; Breaugh & Starke, 2000; Cable & Turban, 2001; Fisher, Ilgen, & Hoyer, 1979). Compared to internal recruitment sources, external sources might be perceived as providing more credible information because they do not have the explicit purpose to promote the organization (Cable & Turban, 2001; Fisher et al., 1979).

A NEW RECRUITMENT SOURCE: WORD-OF-MOUTH COMMUNICATION

SOCIAL INFLUENCES ON ORGANIZATIONAL ATTRACTIVENESS

Although several studies have indicated that social influences on organizational attractiveness are potentially large, little systematic research has been conducted in this area (Barber, 1998; Cable & Turban, 2001; Highhouse & Hoffman, 2001; Kilduff, 1990, 1992; Ryan et al., 2000; Rynes et al., 1991). Moreover, it is hard to find an unequivocal definition of what exactly is meant by "social influences" and normative and informational social influences are often intertwined (Higgins, 2001).

Normative social influences result from a pressure to conform to certain expectations held by another person or group and are motivated by desires for self-maintenance or external rewards. The internal processes operating here are identification and compliance (Cohen & Golden, 1972; Wooten & Reed, 1998). Informational social influences refer to accepting information provided by others as evidence about reality and are motivated by desires for problem-solving or coping with one's environment. This type of influence operates through internalization (Cohen & Golden, 1972; Wooten & Reed, 1998).

Even though recruitment research typically does not distinguish between these different kinds of social influences, it is sometimes possible to discern the major focus of the study. For instance, Liden and Parsons' finding (1986) that parental and peer pressure on young applicants to accept a job was significantly related to job acceptance intentions, provides evidence for normative social influences on organizational attractiveness. The theories that are most often used to examine normative social influences in a recruitment context are the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) and the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991) (e.g., van Hooft, Born, Taris, & van der Flier, 2004). According to these theories, beliefs about the normative expectations of others and the motivation to comply with these expectations result in perceived social pressure or subjective norm.

Less recruitment studies are found that clearly focus on informational social influences. For instance, Fisher et al. (1979) explicitly studied other people as a source of information about jobs and organizations, using the source credibility framework as a conceptual background. They found that friends were perceived as more credible and more influential sources than recruiters. Another example is provided by the finding of Rynes et al. (1991) that a quarter of interviewed job seekers based their initial perception of a positive fit with the organization on information they got from friends or acquaintances already working for that organization. They proposed signaling theory as an explanation for these results, stating that job seekers used this social information as the basis for making inferences about unknown organizational characteristics.

However, most studies in this area have examined only the outcomes and not the antecedents of social influences, which makes it difficult to establish what kind of social processes were involved to produce those outcomes. For instance, Kilduff (1990) reported that MBA students who perceived each other as similar or as personal friends, tended to interview with the same employing organizations. Yet, this finding could have resulted from normative social influences (e.g., complying with the dominant employer choice of the peer group for desire of belonging to it) just as well as from informational social influences (e.g., accepting peer evaluations of these organizations as reality). The same is true for Turban's (2001) conclusion that perceptions of an organization by university personnel were related to students' attraction to that organization.

Conversely, the marketing literature has since long recognized the importance of social influences on consumer behavior and makes a clear distinction between normative and informational social influences. With respect to informational social influences, the concept of word-of-mouth communication plays a key role (Dichter, 1966). Word-of-mouth is commonly defined as an interpersonal communication, independent of the organization's marketing activities, about an organization or its products (Bone, 1995). Generally, research has found a large influence of word-of-mouth on consumer attitudes and behavior, usually larger than the impact of marketing communication (Bone, 1995; Herr et al., 1991; Hogan, Lemon, & Libai, 2004; Smith & Vogt, 1995).

WORD-OF-MOUTH COMMUNICATION AS A RECRUITMENT SOURCE

Word-of-mouth communication as a recruitment source can be defined as an interpersonal communication, independent of the organization's recruitment activities, about an organization as an employer or about specific jobs (Bone, 1995; Cable et al., 2000; Collins & Stevens, 2002). Examples include conversations with friends and advice from independent experts.

The definition identifies the three key characteristics of word-of-mouth. First, word-of-mouth is clearly a social phenomenon as it occurs between people, in

an informal manner (Bone, 1995). Therefore, it represents an experiential recruitment source. Second, given that the focus is on transferring information, word-of-mouth represents a particular type of informational social influence. Finally, word-of-mouth is an external or company-independent information source that is not under the direct control of the organization (Cable & Turban, 2001). It can only be influenced indirectly through other recruitment activities such as campus recruitment, building relationships with key influentials and opinion leaders (e.g., career counselor or class president), employee referral programs (e.g., providing referral bonuses), employee testimonials, or internships.

In addition to these defining characteristics, word-of-mouth can vary across at least four other dimensions that are likely to influence its effects. First, even though word-of-mouth is typically associated with face-to-face communication, it can be provided through all sorts of media such as the telephone or the internet (Dellarocas, 2003; Herr et al., 1991; Smith & Vogt, 1995). Second, as long as they are operating independently of the organization, everyone can provide word-of-mouth information including friends, family, and even complete strangers (Brown & Reingen, 1987; Smith & Vogt, 1995). Third, word-of-mouth can be based on motives of the source as well as the recipient, and even on coincidence (Mangold, Miller, & Brockway, 1999). Finally, as word-of-mouth is an external source that does not have the explicit purpose to promote the organization, it can contain both positive and negative information (Bone, 1995; Cable & Turban, 2001; Herr et al., 1991; Smith & Vogt, 1995). Therefore, it is important to take the valence of word-of-mouth into account when measuring its effects on organizational attractiveness (Collins & Stevens, 2002). Both positive and negative word-of-mouth have been found to influence consumers' attraction to products in marketing research (Bone, 1995; Herr et al., 1991; Smith & Vogt, 1995).

These dimensions clarify how word-of-mouth relates to two other concepts that have been used in previous research. In fact, employee referrals and networking represent particular types of word-of-mouth. Whereas everyone can provide

word-of-mouth, employee referrals are restricted to information provided by an employee of the organization (Zottoli & Wanous, 2000). Moreover, employee referrals typically contain only positive information as the organization is recommended to potential applicants. Similarly, networking refers to one specific kind of word-of-mouth. While word-of-mouth can be initiated by the source as well as the recipient or can even occur coincidentally, networking consists of word-of-mouth initiated by job seekers with the explicit intention to gather information about potential jobs (Wanberg, Kanfer, & Banas, 2000).

Research about word-of-mouth as a recruitment source is scarce. Cable et al. (2000) found that using word-of-mouth as an information source did not influence the accuracy of applicants' beliefs about organizational culture. However, the effects on organizational attractiveness were not measured. Collins and Stevens (2002) found a strong effect of positive word-of-mouth on organizational attractiveness. However, negative word-of-mouth was not considered.

The next sections introduce a number of individual differences and situational variables that could be incorporated in future research to gain a better understanding of word-of-mouth communication as a recruitment source.

WORD-OF-MOUTH AND INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES

Some potential applicants may be more likely than others to rely on word-of-mouth for obtaining employment information. The most prevalent taxonomy of individual differences identifies five broad personality factors, namely extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness to experience (Digman, 1990; Goldberg, 1990). Two of these Big Five personality factors seem conceptually most useful for predicting the use of word-of-mouth as a recruitment source, namely extraversion and conscientiousness. Extraversion refers to the extent to which a person is sociable, gregarious, assertive, talkative, and active (Barrick & Mount, 1991). People with high levels of extraversion prefer social situations in which they can interact with others. Potential applicants higher in extraversion probably make

more use of word-of-mouth for two reasons. First, given their characteristics, extraverts are likely to have larger social networks through which word-of-mouth information might be provided (cf., Russell, Booth, Reed, & Laughlin, 1997). Second, even if their networks would be equally large, extraverts would still interact more frequently with other people increasing the likelihood of employment-related word-of-mouth to occur (cf., Caldwell & Burger, 1998).

Conscientiousness reflects dependability (i.e., being careful, thorough, responsible, organized, and planful) and having a high will to achieve (i.e., being hardworking, achievement-oriented, and persevering) (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Digman, 1990). Potential applicants higher in conscientiousness are likely to make more use of word-of-mouth because they tend to be more motivated and more persistent. Therefore, they will probably try harder to obtain word-of-mouth information in addition to internal recruitment sources such as advertising to get a more complete and balanced picture of the organization (cf., Caldwell & Burger, 1998). In support of these theoretical assumptions, Wanberg et al. (2000) found that of all Big Five personality factors only extraversion and conscientiousness were significant predictors of the intentional use of word-of-mouth as a job search method (i.e., networking).

As another possible determinant of using word-of-mouth, core self-evaluations refer to the fundamental evaluations that people make about themselves and their functioning in their environment (Judge, Van Vianen, & De Pater, 2004). It represents a broad, latent, higher order concept indicated by four traits: self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy, emotional stability, and locus of control (Judge, Erez, Bono, & Thoresen, 2003). People with positive core self-evaluations appraise themselves in a consistently positive manner across situations and view themselves as capable, worthy, and in control of their lives (Judge et al., 2004). As a result, they perform better, are more motivated, persist more, and strive harder to achieve goals than individuals with negative core self-evaluations (Erez & Judge, 2001; Judge & Bono, 2001; Judge et al., 2004). Therefore, potential applicants with positive core self-evaluations are likely to make more use of word-of-mouth as a means to achieve their goal of finding a

job. Even though the relationship between core self-evaluations and word-of-mouth has not yet been investigated, Wanberg, Glomb, Song, and Sorenson (2005) found that more positive core self-evaluations were associated with higher intensity and persistence of general job search behavior over time.

In addition to these broad personality factors, a more specific personality trait such as self-monitoring might also be related to the use of word-of-mouth as a recruitment source. People differ in the extent to which they monitor their self-presentation in social settings and interpersonal relationships (Day, Schleicher, Unckless, & Hiller, 2002). Individuals high in self-monitoring regulate their expressive self-presentation for the sake of desired public appearances (Snyder & Gangestad, 1986). Conversely, the expressive self-presentation of low self-monitors is not controlled by deliberate attempts to appear situationally appropriate but reflects their own inner attitudes, emotions, and dispositions (Gangestad & Snyder, 2000). Given that high self-monitors are more responsive to social and interpersonal cues of situationally appropriate performances, they are more likely to seek out social information through word-of-mouth than low self-monitors (Gangestad & Snyder, 2000; Snyder & Gangestad, 1986). Furthermore, given that they are more susceptible to social information, the effect of word-of-mouth on organizational attractiveness might be greater for potential applicants high in self-monitoring (Gangestad & Snyder, 2000; Snyder & Gangestad, 1986). In support of these theoretical arguments, Kilduff (1992) found that high self-monitors were more similar to their friends in their application decisions than low self-monitors.

WORD-OF-MOUTH AND SITUATIONAL VARIABLES

The use of word-of-mouth is not only determined by the characteristics of the recipient (i.e., individual differences) but also by the characteristics of the source (i.e., situational variables) (Bansal & Voyer, 2000; Bone, 1995; Mangold et al., 1999). More specifically, word-of-mouth information can come from a lot of different sources. Instead of investigating a long list of possible sources (e.g., neighbor, friend, father, coworker, employee, and so forth), it makes more sense

to conceptually distinguish the characteristics of those sources that are likely to influence the extent to which potential applicants rely on them for obtaining employment information. Social network theory suggests that both the structure and the composition of potential applicants' social network might influence their use of word-of-mouth (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Mouw, 2003). A first key component of network structure is network size or the total number of people to whom an individual is tied (Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001). All else being equal, as potential applicants know more people, there is a greater likelihood of employment-related word-of-mouth to occur. A second important aspect of social network structure consists of the strength of the ties in the network (Granovetter, 1973). Tie strength can be defined as the closeness of the social relationship between the source and the recipient of word-of-mouth information (Brown & Reingen, 1987). Close friends are an example of strong ties, whereas seldom-contacted acquaintances represent weak ties. Word-of-mouth coming from a stronger tie is likely to be used more often because stronger ties are more readily available and result in more frequent interaction through which word-of-mouth information can be provided (Reingen & Kernan, 1986). In addition, given that strong ties are usually perceived as more credible than weak ties, the effect of word-of-mouth on organizational attractiveness might be greater for stronger ties (Bansal & Voyer, 2000; Brown & Reingen, 1987; Pornpitakpan, 2004).

Network composition refers to the characteristics of the other people in an individual's social network (Adler & Kwon, 2002). It reflects the quality of the information that can be provided by the word-of-mouth source and is often operationalized in terms of socio-economic and occupational status (Reingold, 1999; Seibert et al., 2001). Another important characteristic of word-of-mouth sources is their expertise with respect to the organization. Potential applicants will probably rely more on word-of-mouth sources who work for the organization or have personal experiences with the organization because they are perceived as more knowledgeable and thus more likely to provide accurate employment information (cf., Bansal & Voyer, 2000; Bone, 1995; Fisher et al., 1979). Even though the effects of social network components on word-of-mouth

have not yet been examined, previous research has indicated that both the structure and composition of job seekers' social network are associated with the likelihood of finding a job (Brass, Galaskiewicz, Greve, & Tsai, 2004).

In addition to source characteristics, the use and impact of word-of-mouth might also be affected by other context variables such as the content of the recruitment message and the presence of other recruitment sources. First, the source credibility framework (Eisend, 2004; Pornpitakpan, 2004) postulates that the communicated message will moderate the effect of source credibility on persuasion. Specifically, word-of-mouth should have a greater impact if it provides a more credible recruitment message. Second, the accessibility-diagnosticity model predicts that the order of exposure to different recruitment sources moderates their effects on organizational attractiveness, implying that word-of-mouth might have a greater influence when it is provided earlier rather than later in the job seeking process (Herr et al., 1991; Smith & Vogt, 1995; Wooten & Reed, 1998).

THE PRESENT DISSERTATION

Previous recruitment research has typically examined individual potential applicants in social isolation. The present dissertation addresses this gap in the recruitment literature by investigating the impact of word-of-mouth communication as an external recruitment source on organizational attractiveness in the applicant population. Five empirical studies were carried out to provide an answer to five general research questions.

Research question 1: What is the influence of positive and negative word-of-mouth on organizational attractiveness (and other relevant outcomes)?

Research question 2: How do other recruitment sources relate to the effects of word-of-mouth?

Research question 3: What mediators explain the effects of word-of-mouth?

Research question 4: What individual difference variables are related to the use and impact of word-of-mouth?

Research question 5: What situational variables are related to the use and impact of word-of-mouth?

These research questions have guided the empirical work that is presented in the five following chapters. Each chapter presents a separate study and can be read independently from the other chapters. Consequently, some overlap exists across the chapters, mainly in the description of the theoretical background. Furthermore, each chapter does not address each of the five research questions outlined above. However, all chapters address more than one research question and all research questions are addressed in more than one chapter. Table 2 provides an overview of which empirical studies have been guided by which research questions.

Chapter 2 presents an experimental study that examines if and when word-of-mouth matters as a recruitment source. The recruitment literature is extended by studying both positive and negative word-of-mouth and by examining under which conditions word-of-mouth has the strongest effect. Specifically, this study investigates if word-of-mouth can influence organizational attractiveness perceived by potential applicants (RQ1) and if it can interfere with the effect of recruitment advertising (RQ2). The credibility of word-of-mouth and recruitment advertising are proposed as mediators of the effect of word-of-mouth (RQ3). This study also examines if the individual difference variable self-monitoring (RQ4) and the situational variables tie strength and order of information sources (RQ5) can moderate the impact of word-of-mouth.

The experimental study described in Chapter 3 focuses on the effect of positive word-of-mouth on organizational attractiveness (RQ1). Despite the increasing occurrence of negative media attention about companies, no research has investigated if the effects of negative publicity on organizational attractiveness can be repaired. Therefore, this study examines if positive word-of-mouth can enhance organizational attractiveness for potential applicants after negative publicity (RQ2). In addition, the effect of word-of-mouth is compared to the

effect of recruitment advertising (RQ2). Finally, this study investigates if the differential impact of word-of-mouth and recruitment advertising is mediated by their credibility (RQ3) and moderated by potential applicants' self-monitoring (RQ4).

The field study described in Chapter 4 contributes to the recruitment literature by developing and testing a comprehensive model of word-of-mouth used by potential applicants as a source of employment information. First, the hypothesized model distinguishes between positive and negative word-of-mouth. Furthermore, the model proposes three individual difference variables (i.e., extraversion, conscientiousness, and self-monitoring; RQ4) and two situational variables (i.e., tie strength and source expertise; RQ5) as antecedents of using word-of-mouth as a recruitment source. With respect to consequences, the model suggests that positive (negative) word-of-mouth has a positive (negative) effect on organizational attractiveness and prestige (RQ1). Finally, the model incorporates two different theories that might explain the effects of word-of-mouth, namely the accessibility-diagnosticity model and the source credibility framework (RQ3). This conceptual model was tested in a military setting to examine the use of word-of-mouth by potential applicants to gain employment information about the Belgian Defense.

The experimental study in Chapter 5 aims to find out if organizations can successfully imitate positive word-of-mouth by using employee testimonials on their recruitment website. Although the internet has dramatically changed recruitment practices, many web-based recruitment sources have not yet been investigated. This study starts to fill these gaps in recruitment research by examining the effects of web-based word-of-mouth (i.e., "word-of-mouse") and web-based employee testimonials (RQ2) on subjective fit, organizational attractiveness, and organizational pursuit behavior (RQ1) in a sample of potential applicants for a head nurse position. A person-environment fit perspective is applied to investigate if the content of the recruitment message can moderate these effects (RQ5). Finally, this study investigates if perceptions of source credibility can explain all of these effects (RQ3).

Table 2. Overview of Research Questions and Empirical Studies in the Present Dissertation.

Chapter	Outcomes (RQ1)	Sources (RQ2)	Mediators (RQ3)	Individual differences (RQ4)	Situational variables (RQ5)
Chapter 2	Organizational attractiveness	Positive word-of-mouth Negative word-of-mouth Recruitment advertising	Credibility	Self-monitoring	Order of sources Tie strength
Chapter 3	Organizational attractiveness	Positive word-of-mouth Recruitment advertising Negative publicity	Credibility	Self-monitoring	-
Chapter 4	Organizational attractiveness Organizational prestige	Positive word-of-mouth Negative word-of-mouth	Credibility Accessibility Diagnosticity	Self-monitoring Extraversion Conscientiousness	Tie strength Source expertise
Chapter 5	Organizational attractiveness Subjective fit Organizational pursuit behavior	Positive word-of-mouth Employee testimonial	Credibility	-	Recruitment message
Chapter 6	Active job search behavior Number of job offers Employment status Job-organization fit	Networking Print advertising Internet Public employment service	-	Extraversion Conscientiousness Core self-evaluations	Network size Network tie strength Network composition

The field study in Chapter 6 focuses on networking or the intentional use of word-of-mouth as a job search method, integrating the recruitment and job search literatures. Although job seekers often find a new job through contacting people they know, there has been little research about networking as a job search behavior. On the basis of social network theory, this study examines if social network structure (i.e., size and tie strength) and composition (RQ5) explain incremental variance in Flemish job seekers' networking behavior beyond individual differences in personality (i.e., extraversion, conscientiousness, and core self-evaluations; RQ4). In addition, the usefulness of networking as a job search behavior is assessed in two ways. First, this study examines the relationships between networking and several job search and employment outcomes such as active job search behavior, number of job offers, employment status, and job-organization fit (RQ1). Second, it is investigated if networking accounts for incremental variance in predicting these outcomes beyond other prevalent job search behaviors, namely making use of print advertising, internet, and public employment service (RQ2).

Finally, Chapter 7 discusses the general conclusions that can be drawn from the preceding chapters with respect to the guiding research questions. In addition, implications for future research and practice are provided.

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CHAPTER 2

SOCIAL INFLUENCES ON ORGANIZATIONAL ATTRACTIVENESS:

INVESTIGATING IF AND WHEN WORD-OF-MOUTH MATTERS[1]

Most previous recruitment studies have treated potential applicants as individual decision-makers, neglecting informational social influences on organizational attractiveness. To investigate if and when word-of-mouth communication matters as a recruitment source, this study applied a 2 × 2 × 2 between-subjects factorial design, with word-of-mouth (positive or negative), order of information sources (word-of-mouth presented prior to or after recruitment advertising), and tie strength (weak or strong) as experimental variables. In addition, a control group was only exposed to recruitment advertising. Results (N = 171) indicated that word-of-mouth had a strong impact on organizational attractiveness and that negative word-of-mouth interfered with the effect of recruitment advertising. Word-of-mouth from a strong tie was perceived as more credible and had a more positive effect on organizational attractiveness. For potential applicants high in self-monitoring, word-of-mouth had a stronger effect when it was presented after recruitment advertising. Finally, the effect of word-of-mouth on organizational attractiveness was partially mediated by the perceived credibility of recruitment advertising.

INTRODUCTION

In today's business environment, human capital is one of the most valuable assets a company can have and recruitment serves the important function of bringing the necessary talent into the organization (Barber, 1998). Despite economic upturns and downturns, recruitment remains a crucial human resources function for at least three reasons. First, there will always be certain hard-to-fill vacancies for which organizations must compete fiercely to attract potential applicants, even in an otherwise loose labor market. Second, the most talented job seekers continue to have enough options to critically investigate and compare potential employers. Therefore, organizations that wish to attract these highly desired applicants have no choice but to participate in the "war for talent". Third, demographic trends such as a smaller supply of younger workers and retirements among baby boomers indicate that recruitment will be even more important in the future (Collins & Stevens, 2002).

In order to increase organizational attractiveness, recruitment often involves that information about the organization as an employer is communicated to a target group of (potential) applicants through a specific channel or source (Barber, 1998). This implies that recruitment-related information sources and their characteristics can be important antecedents of organizational attractiveness. In addition to internal recruitment sources (e.g., recruitment advertising), which are largely under the control of the organization, job seekers also receive information from external sources (e.g., publicity), which are mostly *not* under the control of the organization. However, research on the effects of these external information sources on organizational attractiveness is still scarce (Cable & Turban, 2001; Collins & Stevens, 2002).

Another example of such an underresearched external source is word-of-mouth about an organization as an employer. On the basis of their review of the recruitment literature, Highhouse and Hoffman (2001) concluded that "although it has been over 30 years since Soelberg (1967, p. 23) referred to social influence as the 'single most promising direction' for job-choice research, very

little attention has been given to this topic" (p.47). While it is generally recognized that potential applicants often consult other people such as family, friends, or acquaintances about jobs and organizations, most studies have treated the potential applicant as an individual decision-maker, i.e. in social isolation (Barber, 1998; Cable & Turban, 2001; Highhouse & Hoffman, 2001; Kilduff, 1990, 1992; Ryan, Sacco, McFarland, & Kriska, 2000; Rynes, Bretz, & Gerhart, 1991).

Furthermore, most recruitment studies have examined the effects of only one information source at a time, so little is known about the combined effects of multiple sources on organizational attractiveness. In addition, it has not yet been studied if the order in which various information sources are presented influences their effects (Cable & Turban, 2001; Collins & Stevens, 2002). Finally, very few studies have examined if individual differences moderate the effects of information sources on organizational attractiveness (Zottoli & Wanous, 2000).

These gaps in the recruitment literature contrast sharply with the reality of job seeking where potential applicants rely on both internal and external sources of information, where other people are often consulted about potential jobs and organizations, where mostly more than one information source is used, and where considerable individual differences in job search exist.

Therefore, the general purpose of the present study was to investigate word-of-mouth as a particular type of informational social influence. As a first specific objective, we wanted to find out *if* word-of-mouth would influence organizational attractiveness perceived by potential applicants and if it would interfere with the effect of recruitment advertising. Second, we were interested in knowing under which *conditions* word-of-mouth would have the strongest effect. Hence, we examined if the impact of word-of-mouth would be moderated by the individual difference variable self-monitoring and by the situational variables tie strength and order of information sources. In addition, we investigated if credibility perceptions would mediate the effect of word-of-mouth.

SOCIAL INFLUENCES ON ORGANIZATIONAL ATTRACTIVENESS

Although several studies have indicated that social influences on organizational attractiveness are potentially large, little systematic research has been conducted in this area (Barber, 1998; Cable & Turban, 2001; Highhouse & Hoffman, 2001; Kilduff, 1990, 1992; Ryan et al., 2000; Rynes et al., 1991). Moreover, it is hard to find an unequivocal definition of what exactly is meant by "social influences" and normative and informational social influences are often intertwined (Higgins, 2001).

Normative social influences result from a pressure to conform to certain expectations held by another person or group and are motivated by desires for self-maintenance or external rewards. The internal processes operating here are identification and compliance (Cohen & Golden, 1972; Wooten & Reed, 1998). Informational social influences refer to accepting information provided by others as evidence about reality and are motivated by desires for problem-solving or coping with one's environment. This type of influence operates through internalization (Cohen & Golden, 1972; Wooten & Reed, 1998).

Even though recruitment studies typically do not distinguish between these different kinds of social influences, it is sometimes possible to discern the major focus of the study. For instance, Liden and Parsons' finding (1986) that parental and peer pressure on young applicants to accept a job was significantly related to job acceptance intentions, provides evidence for normative social influences on organizational attractiveness. The theories that are most often used to examine normative social influences in a recruitment context are the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) and the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991) (e.g., van Hooft, Born, Taris, & van der Flier, 2004). According to these theories, beliefs about the normative expectations of others and the motivation to comply with these expectations result in perceived social pressure or subjective norm.

Less recruitment studies are found that clearly focus on informational social influences. For instance, Fisher, Ilgen, and Hoyer (1979) explicitly studied other people as a source of information about jobs and organizations, using the

credibility of information sources as a conceptual background. They found that friends were perceived as more credible and more influential sources than recruiters. Another example is provided by the finding of Rynes et al. (1991) that a quarter of interviewed job seekers based their initial perception of a positive fit with the organization on information they got from friends or acquaintances already working for that organization. They proposed signaling theory as an explanation for these results, stating that job seekers used this social information as the basis for making inferences about unknown organizational characteristics.

However, most studies in this area have examined only the outcomes and not the antecedents of social influences, which makes it almost impossible to establish what kind of social processes were involved to produce those outcomes. For instance, Kilduff (1990) reported that MBA students who perceived each other as similar or as personal friends, tended to interview with the same employing organizations. Yet, this finding could have resulted from normative social influences (e.g., complying with the dominant employer choice of the peer group for desire of belonging to it) just as well as from informational social influences (e.g., accepting peer evaluations of these organizations as reality). The same is true for Turban's (2001) conclusion that perceptions of an organization by university personnel were related to students' attraction to that organization.

Conversely, the marketing literature has since long recognized the importance of social influences on consumer behavior and makes a clear distinction between normative and informational social influences. With respect to informational social influences, the concept of word-of-mouth plays a key role (Dichter, 1966). Word-of-mouth is commonly defined as an interpersonal communication, independent of the organization's marketing activities, about an organization or its products (Bone, 1995). Generally, research has found a large influence of word-of-mouth on consumer attitudes and behavior, usually larger than the impact of marketing communication (Bone, 1995; Herr, Kardes, & Kim, 1991; Smith & Vogt, 1995).

WORD-OF-MOUTH AS A RECRUITMENT SOURCE

Applied to a recruitment context, word-of-mouth can be conceptualized as an interpersonal communication, independent of the organization's recruitment activities, about an organization as an employer or about specific jobs (Bone, 1995; Cable, Aiman-Smith, Mulvey, & Edwards, 2000; Collins & Stevens, 2002; Van Hoye & Lievens, 2005). Examples are conversations with friends and advice from college professors. It follows from the definition that word-of-mouth represents a particular type of informational social influence in which the "influencer" is perceived to be independent of the organization. Therefore, information from recruiters is not considered to be word-of-mouth. This further implies that word-of-mouth is an external information source (Cable & Turban, 2001), which means that companies can only attempt to manage it indirectly, for instance through campus recruitment, building relationships with key influentials and opinion leaders (e.g., career counselor, class president), or internships. Finally, as word-of-mouth does not have the explicit purpose to promote the organization, it can contain both positive and negative information. Therefore, it is important to take the valence of word-of-mouth into account when measuring its effects on organizational attractiveness (Collins & Stevens, 2002).

Only a few studies have examined word-of-mouth as a recruitment-related information source. Cable et al. (2000) found that using word-of-mouth as an information source did not influence the accuracy of applicants' beliefs about organizational culture. However, the effects on organizational attractiveness were not measured. Collins and Stevens (2002) found a strong effect of positive word-of-mouth on organizational attractiveness. Furthermore, Van Hoye and Lievens (2005) found that positive word-of-mouth could enhance organizational attractiveness after negative publicity. However, both studies did not consider negative word-of-mouth even though both positive and negative word-of-mouth have been found to influence consumers' attraction to products in marketing research (Bone, 1995; Herr et al., 1991; Smith & Vogt, 1995). Therefore, the following hypothesis was formulated.

Hypothesis 1: Word-of-mouth will influence organizational attractiveness: Positive word-of-mouth will have a more positive effect on organizational attractiveness than negative word-of-mouth.

To advance our understanding of the effects of multiple recruitment-related information sources on organizational attractiveness, the current study investigated the impact of word-of-mouth in the presence of recruitment advertising. Recruitment advertising was chosen as a second information source for two reasons. First, it is the most frequently used internal recruitment source (Barber, 1998). Second, previous research has typically studied its effects in isolation (Cable & Turban, 2001). Contrary to word-of-mouth, recruitment advertising can be directly managed by organizations to communicate a positive message to potential applicants; therefore only positive recruitment advertising was considered in the present study.

In light of the scarcity of previous research about the effects of multiple recruitment-related information sources (Cable & Turban, 2001; Collins & Stevens, 2002), we used the accessibility-diagnosticity model as a theoretical framework to formulate specific hypotheses. The accessibility-diagnosticity model (Feldman & Lynch, 1988; Herr et al., 1991) posits that the likelihood that information is used to form an evaluation is determined by the accessibility of that information in memory, the diagnosticity of that information, and by the accessibility and diagnosticity of other information. An information source is perceived to be diagnostic if it helps to discriminate between alternative hypotheses, interpretations, or categorizations. In other words, a recruitment-related internal or external information source is diagnostic if it helps potential applicants to decide whether a specific organization would be a good or bad employer for them.

To investigate if word-of-mouth would interfere with the impact of recruitment advertising on organizational attractiveness, the effects of word-of-mouth together with recruitment advertising were compared to the singular effect of recruitment advertising in a control group. On the one hand, we wanted to find out if adding equally positive word-of-mouth to recruitment advertising would

increase its impact on organizational attractiveness. Although the two information sources might be evenly diagnostic, word-of-mouth is more easily accessible in memory than recruitment advertising due to its interpersonal and more vivid nature and therefore more likely to influence the perceptions of potential applicants (Feldman & Lynch, 1988; Herr et al., 1991). On the other hand, we were interested in knowing if adding negative word-of-mouth to recruitment advertising would decrease its effect on organizational attractiveness. The accessibility-diagnosticity model posits that negative information is more diagnostic than positive or neutral information, especially in a marketing or recruitment environment that is predominantly positive (Feldman & Lynch, 1988; Herr et al., 1991). This also explains the finding that negative word-of-mouth usually has a larger impact than positive word-of-mouth (Herr et al., 1991).

> *Hypothesis 2a: Positive word-of-mouth will increase the effect of recruitment advertising on organizational attractiveness.*

> *Hypothesis 2b: Negative word-of-mouth will decrease the effect of recruitment advertising on organizational attractiveness.*

> *Hypothesis 2c: Negative word-of-mouth will affect the impact of recruitment advertising on organizational attractiveness to a greater extent than positive word-of-mouth.*

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE EFFECT OF WORD-OF-MOUTH

In addition to examining the effect of word-of-mouth on organizational attractiveness, a second objective of the current study was to investigate which factors would influence this effect. First, we expected that the order in which word-of-mouth and recruitment advertising were presented would moderate the effect of word-of-mouth on organizational attractiveness. The accessibility-diagnosticity model proposes that earlier information is more diagnostic than later information and therefore has a greater impact on final judgments. People often overestimate the validity of prior impressions and interpret subsequent

information in light of earlier evaluations (Herr et al., 1991; Smith & Vogt, 1995; Wooten & Reed, 1998). Therefore, word-of-mouth presented prior to recruitment advertising should have a stronger effect on organizational attractiveness than word-of-mouth presented after recruitment advertising.

> *Hypothesis 3: Order of information sources will moderate the effect of word-of-mouth on organizational attractiveness: Positive (negative) word-of-mouth presented prior to recruitment advertising will have a stronger positive (negative) effect on organizational attractiveness than word-of-mouth presented after recruitment advertising.*

Second, it should be noted that word-of-mouth can come from a lot of different sources, such as friends, family, acquaintances, neighbors, job incumbents, university personnel, and so forth. Therefore, the characteristics of these sources are likely to influence their effects on organizational attractiveness. One such characteristic is tie strength, which can be defined as the closeness of the social relationship between the source and the recipient of word-of-mouth information (Brown & Reingen, 1987). Friends and family are examples of strong ties, whereas acquaintances are considered to be weak ties. Previous marketing research suggests that stronger ties have a greater influence on consumers' attraction to products (Bansal & Voyer, 2000; Brown & Reingen, 1987). Hence, we expected that the impact of word-of-mouth from a friend on organizational attractiveness would be greater than the impact of word-of-mouth from an acquaintance.

> *Hypothesis 4: Tie strength will moderate the effect of word-of-mouth on organizational attractiveness: Positive (negative) word-of-mouth from a strong tie will have a stronger positive (negative) effect on organizational attractiveness than word-of-mouth from a weak tie.*

Third, in accordance with a person-organization fit perspective (Kristof, 1996) and with the individual differences hypothesis in recruitment source research (Zottoli & Wanous, 2000), we hypothesized that the effect of word-of-mouth on organizational attractiveness would also be moderated by individual differences. As word-of-mouth represents a social information source, we anticipated that its

effect on organizational attractiveness would be greater for potential applicants high in self-monitoring, because they are more susceptible to social information (Snyder & Gangestad, 1986). Along these lines, Kilduff (1992) found that self-monitoring moderated the relationship between friendship ties and similarity of interview bidding patterns of MBA students, so that high self-monitors were more similar to their friends in their bidding behavior than low self-monitors.

> *Hypothesis 5: Self-monitoring will moderate the effect of word-of-mouth on organizational attractiveness: Positive (negative) word-of-mouth will have a stronger positive (negative) effect on organizational attractiveness for potential applicants high in self-monitoring than for potential applicants low in self-monitoring.*

Finally, we examined if credibility perceptions would mediate the effect of word-of-mouth on organizational attractiveness. Recruitment sources vary in the degree to which potential applicants perceive them as providing credible information about the organization (Cable & Turban, 2001; Fisher et al., 1979). Perceived credibility is based on perceptions of accuracy, appropriateness, and believability of the information source (Allen, Van Scotter, & Otondo, 2004). In general, potential applicants seem to prefer obtaining information from credible sources (Allen et al., 2004; Fisher et al., 1979). In their model of the organizational recruitment process, Breaugh and Starke (2000) posit that credibility is an intervening process variable explaining the relationships between recruitment sources and their outcomes. As the present study did not investigate the impact of word-of-mouth in isolation, but in the presence of recruitment advertising, it is likely that word-of-mouth would also affect the perceived credibility of recruitment advertising. Consequently, the credibilities of both information sources were considered as possible mediators.

> *Hypothesis 6: Credibility of word-of-mouth and recruitment advertising will mediate the effect of word-of-mouth on organizational attractiveness.*

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

Participants were 171 graduate students in I/O psychology from a Belgian university, who were given extra course credit for their participation. The majority of the sample (72%) was female and the average age was 22 years (*SD* = 1.80). Nearly all of the participants (98%) had part-time work experience and 89% had experience in applying for a job (with an average of eight previous applications), so the task of evaluating organizational attractiveness was realistic and relevant for them. As most participants would be looking for a job similar to the position used in this study (Human Resources Coordinator) within the next few months (either for an internship or for a full-time job), we considered them to be potential applicants or a sample from the applicant population (Barber, 1998).

DESIGN AND PROCEDURE

A 2 × 2 × 2 between-subjects factorial design was applied, with word-of-mouth (positive or negative), order of information sources (word-of-mouth presented prior to or after recruitment advertising), and tie strength (weak or strong) as experimental variables. In these eight conditions, participants were exposed to both word-of-mouth and recruitment advertising. A ninth condition consisted of a control group that was exposed only to recruitment advertising and not to any word-of-mouth. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the nine conditions.

In order to allow possible order effects to occur, processing goals were established to prevent participants from postponing their judgment until being exposed to both information sources (Smith & Vogt, 1995). Therefore, before each information source was presented, participants were told (a) to process the information carefully, (b) to form an impression about the organization, and (c) to answer questions about it later on.

After the second information source, a questionnaire was distributed that measured organizational attractiveness, credibility of word-of-mouth and recruitment advertising, self-monitoring, and some demographical variables. In the control group, only recruitment advertising was presented, thus credibility of word-of-mouth was not measured.

Several precautions were taken to minimize demand characteristics (Orne, 1962). First, the study's purpose was described as "examining how people form impressions about organizations and which organizational characteristics are important in this process". In line with this stated purpose, our questionnaire contained 16 filler items assessing perceptions of organizational characteristics (e.g., "How likely is it that the organization offers opportunities for rapid advancement?"). Second, participants were instructed to answer honestly, that there were no right or wrong answers, and that participation was anonymous. Third, we used a between-subjects factorial design and each of the nine groups was assigned to a different room, rendering the study's hypotheses less transparent. Finally, we explored participants' perceptions of the study's purpose and hypotheses. To this end, a subgroup of 63 participants completed a short postexperimental questionnaire measuring these perceptions (Allen & Madden, 1985). Most answers reflected the stated purpose and no-one was able to guess any of the specific hypotheses.

MATERIALS

Materials consisted of three recruitment-related information sources about a position of Human Resources Coordinator in a fictitious company Geropress, namely positive word-of-mouth, negative word-of-mouth, and recruitment advertising. The position was tailored to the interests and skills of our sample of graduate I/O psychology students.

Word-of-mouth was operationalized as a casual conversation between two persons about the company as an employer. To resemble the personal and vivid nature of word-of-mouth while still maintaining control of the content of the information source, the conversation was presented in a video format (Allen et

al., 2004; Fisher et al., 1979; Herr et al., 1991). Participants were instructed that this video represented a conversation they had about the company with another person. One person in the video, a graduate student in I/O psychology looking for a job, asked the other person, who worked as an I/O psychologist for another company, questions about Geropress. The camera zoomed in on the person providing information about the company. In the weak tie condition participants were told that this person was an acquaintance to whom they were weakly tied whereas in the strong tie condition the same person was presented as a friend to whom they were strongly tied. Positive and negative word-of-mouth differed only in valence and content of answers; questions and word counts of answers were held constant.

Recruitment advertising was the same in all conditions and was presented as a printed job advertisement providing positive information about Geropress. Its layout resembled the typical structure found in real job ads, consisting of the description of the company, job title, job content, company offer, candidate requirements, and contact information.

All three sources were designed to provide information about the same job and organizational attributes. This was done to avoid confound effects due to differences in amount or type of information. Recruitment advertising and positive word-of-mouth were designed to be equally positive and attractive, and significantly different from negative word-of-mouth that was designed to be negative and unattractive. Job and organizational attributes were identified that typically appear in recruitment-related information sources and have been found to influence organizational attractiveness, namely location, industry, size, salary and benefits, career opportunities, educational prospects, and job content (Barber, 1998; Barber & Roehling, 1993; Bretz & Judge, 1994; Chapman, Uggerslev, Carroll, Piasentin, & Jones, 2005; Feldman & Arnold, 1978; Fisher et al., 1979; Highhouse & Hoffman, 2001). Information about each of these attributes was presented in every information source, based on descriptions of actual Human Resources positions. For instance, with respect to career opportunities, the job advertisement stated that "We offer you a dynamic growth

company with career opportunities for result-driven employees". In the condition of positive word-of-mouth, the question "Could I build a nice career there?" was answered by "It seems like a job in which you can really prove yourself and in a growing company there are bound to be promotion opportunities.". In the condition of negative word-of-mouth, the same question was answered by "Eventually there will probably be some promotion opportunities, but you will first have to prove yourself. So, it is not likely to happen quickly.".

The design of the materials was evaluated in a *prestudy* among 51 graduate I/O psychology students (15 men, 36 women; mean age = 22 years), who were randomly assigned to one of the three information sources. Word-of-mouth was presented as a written scenario so that adjustments could be made before the video would be recorded. Participants were asked to judge the valence, attractiveness, and realism of the information source. Table 1 shows that recruitment advertising and positive word-of-mouth did not differ in valence and attractiveness. As expected, negative word-of-mouth was evaluated significantly more negative and less attractive than the two other sources. Finally, no differences were observed in perceptions of realism across the three information sources.

Table 1. Evaluation of Materials in Prestudy ($N = 51$).

	Recruitment advertising ($n = 19$)		Positive word-of-mouth ($n = 16$)		Negative word-of-mouth ($n = 16$)	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Valence	5.49 $_a$	.46	5.63 $_a$	.56	3.40 $_b$	.72
Attractiveness	5.47 $_a$	.66	5.21 $_a$	.91	2.95 $_b$	.81
Realism	5.25 $_a$	.94	4.88 $_a$	1.12	4.90 $_a$	.66

Note. Valence and realism were rated on a 7-point bipolar scale, with higher scores indicating more positive and more realistic evaluations. Attractiveness was rated on a 7-point scale, ranging from 1 = *completely disagree* to 7 = *completely agree*. Means in the same row that do not share subscripts differ at $p < .05$ in the Tukey honestly significant difference comparison.

MEASURES

Organizational attractiveness. Perceived attractiveness of the organization as an employer was measured using a five-item scale from Turban and Keon (1993). An example item is "I would like to work for Geropress". These items were rated on a 7-point rating scale, ranging from 1 = *completely disagree* to 7 = *completely agree*. The internal consistency of this scale was .94.

Credibility. On the basis of previous research (Coleman & Irving, 1997; Fisher et al., 1979; Highhouse, Hoffman, Greve, & Collins, 2002), we developed five items for measuring the perceived credibility of an information source. The formulation of the items was adapted to ensure that the same scale could be used to measure the credibility of both word-of-mouth and recruitment advertising. An example item is "I think [the job advertisement] was telling the truth". All items were rated on a 7-point rating scale, ranging from 1 = *completely disagree* to 7 = *completely agree*. The internal consistency of the scale was .92 for word-of-mouth and .88 for recruitment advertising.

Self-monitoring. Self-monitoring was assessed with the revised 18-item form of the Self-Monitoring Scale (Snyder & Gangestad, 1986). An example item is "I would probably make a good actor". Items were rated on a 4-point rating scale, ranging from 1 = *completely false* to 4 = *completely true*. As self-monitoring is essentially a dichotomous variable (Gangestad & Snyder, 1985), we followed guidelines to recode items into two categories (0 = *false*; 1 = *true*), and to apply a median split to identify high and low self-monitors (< 9 = *low*; ≥ 9 = *high*). The internal consistency of the scale was .75.

RESULTS

The means, standard deviations, and correlations among all variables are presented in Table 2. Positive word-of-mouth was associated with higher organizational attractiveness (*M* = 5.71, *SD* = .84) and with higher credibility of recruitment advertising (*M* = 4.98, *SD* = .89) than negative word-of-mouth (*M* = 4.03, *SD* = 1.11, and *M* = 4.03, *SD* = .87, respectively). Furthermore, word-of-

mouth from a strong tie (M = 4.83, SD = 1.25) was perceived as more credible than word-of-mouth from a weak tie (M = 3.97, SD = .89). Finally, credibility of recruitment advertising was positively related to organizational attractiveness and to credibility of word-of-mouth.

To examine if word-of-mouth interfered with the effect of recruitment advertising, the experimental conditions were compared with the control group. Contrary to Hypothesis 2a, an independent-samples t-test indicated that adding positive word-of-mouth to recruitment advertising (M = 5.71, SD = .84) did not significantly increase organizational attractiveness as compared to the control group (M = 5.40, SD = 1.06), $t(102)$ = -1.48, p = .07, η^2 = .02. A second independent-samples t-test indicated that adding negative word-of-mouth to recruitment advertising (M = 4.03, SD = 1.11) significantly decreased organizational attractiveness, $t(88)$ = 5.17, p < .01, η^2 = .23, supporting Hypothesis 2b. Inspection of these effect sizes revealed that negative word-of-mouth (η^2 = .23) affected the impact of recruitment advertising on organizational attractiveness to a much greater extent than positive word-of-mouth (η^2 = .02), supporting Hypothesis 2c.

A four-way ANOVA was conducted to further analyze the effects of word-of-mouth, order of information sources, tie strength, and self-monitoring on organizational attractiveness. Word-of-mouth had a strong main effect, $F(1, 132)$ = 107.60, p < .01, partial η^2 = .45. In support of Hypothesis 1, positive word-of-mouth (M = 5.71, SD = .84) influenced organizational attractiveness significantly more positively than negative word-of-mouth (M = 4.03, SD = 1.11). The interactions of word-of-mouth with order of information sources, $F(1, 132)$ = 1.33, p = .25, partial η^2 = .01, with tie strength, $F(1, 132)$ = .07, p = .79, partial η^2 = .00, and with self-monitoring, $F(1, 132)$ = 1.36, p = .25, partial η^2 = .01, were not significant. Therefore, order of information sources, tie strength, and self-monitoring did not moderate the effect of word-of-mouth on organizational attractiveness, lending no support to Hypotheses 3, 4, and 5.

Table 2. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Between Study Variables.

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Word-of-mouth[a]	.45	.50	-					
2. Order of information sources[b]	.50	.50	.01	-				
3. Tie strength[c]	.57	.50	.04	-.04	-			
4. Self-monitoring[d]	.44	.50	-.01	-.04	-.01	-		
5. Organizational attractiveness	4.95	1.28	-.66***	.11	.08	.05	-	
6. Credibility of word-of-mouth	4.46	1.19	-.10	-.07	.36***	-.05	.16	-
7. Credibility of recruitment advertising	4.55	1.00	-.47***	.01	.10	.04	.55***	.27**

Note. *N* = 148 (control group not included).

[a] 0 = *positive*, 1 = *negative*. [b] 0 = *word-of-mouth last*, 1 = *word-of-mouth first*. [c] 0 = *weak*, 1 = *strong*. [d] 0 = *low*, 1 = *high*.

** *p* < .01. *** *p* < .001.

However, we did observe a number of other effects that shed some light on the conditions under which word-of-mouth had the most impact. First, there was a main effect of tie strength on organizational attractiveness, $F(1, 132) = 3.80$, $p = .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$. Regardless of its valence, word-of-mouth from a strong tie ($M = 5.04$, $SD = 1.31$) had a more positive effect on organizational attractiveness than word-of-mouth from a weak tie ($M = 4.83$, $SD = 1.25$). Furthermore, order of information sources had a main effect as well, $F(1, 132) = 4.10$, $p = .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$. Regardless of the valence of word-of-mouth, organizational attractiveness was evaluated more positively when word-of-mouth was presented prior to ($M = 5.09$, $SD = 1.22$) rather than after recruitment advertising ($M = 4.81$, $SD = 1.33$). Given the operationalization of order of information sources, this also means that organizational attractiveness was higher when recruitment advertising, always containing the same positive information, was presented after word-of-mouth. Finally, we found a three-way interaction effect of word-of-mouth, self-monitoring, and order of information sources, $F(1, 132) = 6.05$, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .04$. Therefore, two additional ANOVA's were conducted to analyze the interaction effect of word-of-mouth and order of information sources for high and low self-monitors separately. For low self-monitors, this interaction effect was not significant, $F(1, 75) = .78$, $p = .38$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$. Conversely, the interaction of word-of-mouth and order of information sources had a significant effect on organizational attractiveness for high self-monitors, $F(1, 57) = 8.29$, $p = .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .13$. Contrary to Hypothesis 3, Figure 1 shows that word-of-mouth presented after recruitment advertising had a stronger effect on organizational attractiveness for high self-monitors.

Finally, to test if credibility of word-of-mouth and recruitment advertising mediated the effect of word-of-mouth on organizational attractiveness, we followed the three-step procedure for analyzing mediating effects advocated by Baron and Kenny (1986). To establish mediation, three conditions must be met: (a) the independent variable should influence the mediating variables, (b) the independent variable should influence the dependent variable, and (c) the mediating variables should influence the dependent variable while controlling

for the independent variable, whereas the influence of the independent variable on the dependent variable should be reduced when controlling for the mediating variables.
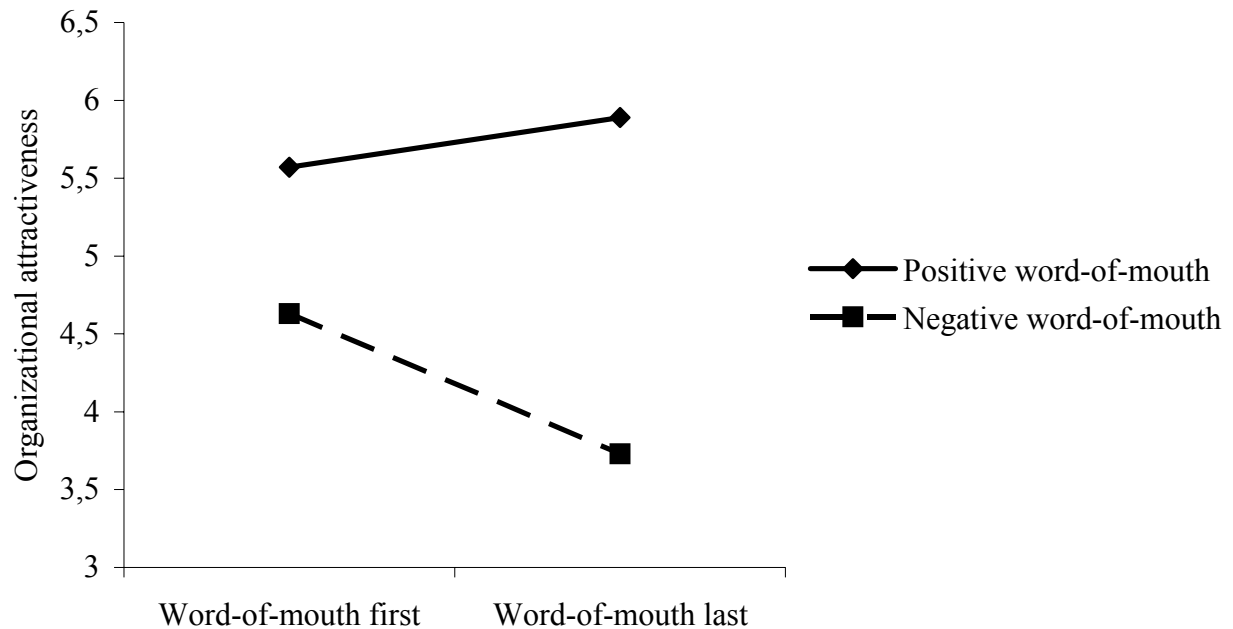
Figure 1. Interaction Effect of Word-of-Mouth and Order of Information Sources on Organizational Attractiveness for High Self-Monitors.

To test for the first condition, two regression analyses were performed with word-of-mouth as independent variable and credibility of word-of-mouth and credibility of recruitment advertising as respective dependent variables. Results indicated that word-of-mouth was not significantly related to credibility of word-of-mouth, $\beta = -.15$, $p = .23$, $R^2 = .02$. The credibility of positive ($M = 4.57$, $SD = 1.22$) and negative word-of-mouth ($M = 4.33$, $SD = 1.13$) did not differ. Therefore, credibility of word-of-mouth could not mediate the effect of word-of-mouth on organizational attractiveness. However, word-of-mouth was a significant predictor of credibility of recruitment advertising, $\beta = -.44$, $p < .01$, $R^2 = .19$. Recruitment advertising was perceived as more credible in combination with positive word-of-mouth ($M = 4.98$, $SD = .89$) than with negative word-of-mouth ($M = 4.03$, $SD = .87$).

To establish the second condition of mediation, organizational attractiveness was regressed on word-of-mouth. As already indicated by testing Hypothesis 1, word-of-mouth significantly predicted organizational attractiveness, $\beta = -.68$, $p < .01$, $R^2 = .47$.

To test for the third condition, we regressed organizational attractiveness on word-of-mouth and credibility of recruitment advertising. Both word-of-mouth, $\beta = -.57$, $p < .01$, and credibility of recruitment advertising, $\beta = .26$, $p = .01$, were significantly related to organizational attractiveness, $R^2 = .52$. A Sobel test indicated that the effect of word-of-mouth on organizational attractiveness was significantly reduced when controlling for credibility of recruitment advertising, $z = -2.12$, $p < .05$ (Preacher & Leonardelli, 2001). However, the effect of word-of-mouth remained significant, suggesting partial mediation.

In sum, partial support was found for Hypothesis 6. The effect of word-of-mouth on organizational attractiveness was partially mediated by credibility of recruitment advertising, but not by credibility of word-of-mouth.

DISCUSSION

Most previous recruitment studies have treated potential applicants as individual decision-makers, neglecting informational social influences (Barber, 1998; Cable & Turban, 2001; Highhouse & Hoffman, 2001). Therefore, the current study examined if and when word-of-mouth matters as a recruitment-related information source. With respect to our first objective, we found that word-of-mouth can have a strong effect on organizational attractiveness, even in the presence of recruitment advertising. Consistent with previous research (Collins & Stevens, 2002; Van Hoye & Lievens, 2005), we found that positive word-of-mouth was associated with positive organizational attractiveness. Furthermore, we extended the recruitment literature by showing that negative word-of-mouth was related to negative organizational attractiveness. Our findings are in line with similar studies in marketing research (Bone, 1995; Herr et al., 1991; Smith & Vogt, 1995), demonstrating the legitimacy of recent calls to integrate the recruitment and marketing literatures (e.g., Cable & Turban, 2001). Our results

imply that word-of-mouth can be an influential external recruitment source meriting further research attention. On a practical level, organizations should try to stimulate positive word-of-mouth and avoid negative word-of-mouth because of their possible impact on organizational attractiveness. As word-of-mouth is an external information source, this can only be achieved through indirect strategies such as campus recruitment or internships. Future research should investigate the relative efficacy of various strategies to influence word-of-mouth about the organization as an employer.

Our results further showed that negative word-of-mouth decreased the effect of recruitment advertising on organizational attractiveness. In line with the accessibility-diagnosticity model (Feldman & Lynch, 1988; Herr et al., 1991), negative word-of-mouth interfered with the impact of recruitment advertising to a much greater extent than positive word-of-mouth. Even though only moderately negative information was provided, it was probably perceived as highly diagnostic in an otherwise positive recruitment environment. In addition, it is likely that more extremely negative word-of-mouth will have an even more damaging impact on organizational attractiveness (Herr et al., 1991). Therefore, organizations might need to pay particular attention to the avoidance, monitoring, and countering of negative word-of-mouth. Conversely, positive word-of-mouth did not significantly increase the effect of recruitment advertising on organizational attractiveness. This might have been a ceiling effect because recruitment advertising alone was already associated with high organizational attractiveness. However, our findings are in line with Collins and Stevens (2002) who observed that positive word-of-mouth and recruitment advertising did not interact. The accessibility-diagnosticity model suggests that the impact of positive word-of-mouth on organizational attractiveness would be greater in the presence of a negative information source instead of another positive one. Along these lines, Van Hoye and Lievens (2005) found that positive word-of-mouth increased organizational attractiveness considerably after negative publicity. Finally, our findings imply that studying the effects of recruitment advertising in isolation might be misleading (Barber, 1998), because in reality job seekers tend to combine information from multiple sources and

interactions between these information sources are likely to occur. These implications are consistent with Collins and Stevens (2002) who found evidence for such interaction effects, namely that positive publicity strengthened the effect of other positive information sources on organizational attractiveness. Therefore, future recruitment research should pay more attention to possible interactions between recruitment sources. It seems particularly interesting to study the interactions between internal and external sources because they tend to differ in content, valence, and credibility.

If we integrate the results of our prestudy and main study, we can examine if recruitment advertising also interfered with the effect of word-of-mouth on organizational attractiveness, because the prestudy measured organizational attractiveness associated with each individual information source. Two independent samples t-tests indicated that recruitment advertising interfered with the impact of word-of-mouth, once more underlining the importance of studying the combined effects of multiple information sources. First, adding recruitment advertising to positive word-of-mouth significantly increased organizational attractiveness (from $M = 5.21$, $SD = .91$ to $M = 5.71$, $SD = .84$), $t(95) = 2.14$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .05$. Second, we found that organizational attractiveness was considerably higher when potential applicants were exposed to both negative word-of-mouth and recruitment advertising ($M = 4.03$, $SD = 1.11$) than when they were only presented with negative word-of-mouth ($M = 2.95$, $SD = .81$), $t(30) = 4.41$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .19$. Of course, this analysis should be interpreted with caution because different cell sizes were used in these two studies and word-of-mouth was not operationalized in video format but as a written scenario in the prestudy. However, this finding would imply that organizations can make use of recruitment advertising to diminish the detrimental effect of negative word-of-mouth on organizational attractiveness.

Our second objective was to investigate the factors influencing the effect of word-of-mouth on organizational attractiveness. First, we found that the situational variable order of information sources did not moderate the effect of word-of-mouth, failing to support a premise underlying the accessibility-

diagnosticity model (Feldman & Lynch, 1988; Herr et al., 1991). More specifically, word-of-mouth did not have a stronger effect on organizational attractiveness when it was presented prior to than after recruitment advertising. Although we did not observe the hypothesized primacy effect, we did find some evidence for recency effects (Haugtvedt & Wegener, 1994; Wooten & Reed, 1998). First, organizational attractiveness was higher when recruitment advertising was presented after word-of-mouth. Given that word-of-mouth was either positive or negative whereas recruitment advertising was always positive, this finding might indicate a recency effect for recruitment advertising. Second, for high self-monitors only, word-of-mouth had a stronger effect on organizational attractiveness when it was presented after recruitment advertising, suggesting a recency effect for word-of-mouth. Therefore, our results suggest that recency effects might be more important in the processing of recruitment-related information sources than primacy effects. However, there was a short time interval between the two sources presented in our study and participants were not required to answer any questions until both sources were processed (Wooten & Reed, 1998). At the very least, our findings imply that the order of recruitment sources seems to matter in some situations for some individuals and therefore, merits further research attention. Future research should examine order effects using more information sources with longer time intervals between them.

With respect to the situational variable tie strength, we found that word-of-mouth from a friend was perceived as more credible and had a more positive effect on organizational attractiveness than word-of-mouth from an acquaintance, regardless of whether positive or negative information was provided. Given that the information in our study was only moderately negative, it might be that simply talking about the organization with a friend was sufficient to increase its attractiveness apart from the specific content of the conversation. Our findings are in line with Fisher et al. (1979) who observed that friends were perceived as a highly credible information source and had a positive effect on organizational attractiveness, regardless of the valence of the provided information. On a practical level, the importance of friends as sources

of word-of-mouth is evidenced by the growing number of "Refer a Friend" programs installed by job sites. Together, these findings imply that future research needs to take the specific source of word-of-mouth into account when examining its effects on organizational attractiveness. In addition, future research should investigate other situational variables that might influence the impact of word-of-mouth, such as its specific content and medium (Herr et al., 1991).

Overall, the effect of word-of-mouth was not moderated by the individual difference variable self-monitoring. Perhaps Kilduff's (1992) finding that high self-monitors were more similar to their friends in their interview patterns than low self-monitors can be attributed more to normative social influences than to informational social influences such as word-of-mouth. This is in line with Bone (1995) who found that susceptibility to interpersonal influences did not moderate the effect of word-of-mouth on product evaluations. However, as noted above, self-monitoring did moderate the observed recency effect for word-of-mouth, indicating that this individual difference variable might somehow be related to the processing of word-of-mouth. Given that self-monitoring involves the adaptation of self-presentation to social cues about appropriate behavior, it might be that the order of such cues is more salient for high than for low self-monitors (Snyder & Gangestad, 1986). Future research should test this assumption as well as investigate if other individual differences can moderate the effect of word-of-mouth on organizational attractiveness.

Finally, we observed that the effect of word-of-mouth on organizational attractiveness in the presence of recruitment advertising was partially mediated by the credibility of recruitment advertising, but not by the credibility of word-of-mouth. In other words, whereas the credibility of word-of-mouth remained relatively stable, the credibility of recruitment advertising varied as a function of word-of-mouth. More specifically, if the positive message of recruitment advertising was backed up by positive word-of-mouth, ad credibility remained high. If, on the contrary, recruitment advertising was contradicted by negative word-of-mouth, ad credibility fell significantly lower, allowing word-of-mouth

to have a larger impact on organizational attractiveness. This would suggest that in case of conflicting information, credibility can help to explain which source is believed and has a greater impact on organizational attractiveness. In the current study, the external source word-of-mouth seemed to be preferred over the internal source recruitment advertising in case of contradictory information, which is consistent with Fisher et al.'s (1979) finding that information from friends was perceived as more credible and had a larger impact on organizational choice than information provided by a recruiter. Moreover, marketing research has found that word-of-mouth effects are stronger in ambiguous situations (Bone, 1995). Future research should further test these assumptions and include perceptions of credibility in the study of interactions between multiple recruitment sources.

This study has a number of limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the generalizability of the results may be restricted by the experimental design of our study. However, this experimental control enabled us to carefully manipulate the content and timing of information sources and to examine causal effects of these sources on organizational attractiveness. Moreover, it might be that word-of-mouth is even more powerful in actual job seeking situations, because information from a real person, especially a friend, presumably has an even stronger effect on organizational attractiveness than the video operationalization used in the present study. In addition, a recent meta-analysis of recruitment outcomes indicated that differences between experimental and real applicants were small, especially in early recruitment stages in which the current study is situated (Chapman et al., 2005). Nevertheless, future research should examine if our results can be replicated in a field setting. Second, our study investigated the impact of word-of-mouth from a friend or acquaintance together with a printed job advertisement. Zottoli and Wanous (2000) suggested that not only differences between categories of recruitment sources should be considered, but also between and even within specific sources. Therefore, future research is needed to examine whether our results can be generalized to other forms of word-of-mouth (e.g., parental advice) and recruitment advertising (e.g., TV commercial) as well as to other internal (e.g., recruitment website) and

external (e.g., publicity) information sources. In addition, we did not compare word-of-mouth to another type of information source with the same content. Therefore, the observed effects might be attributed to the mere provision of additional positive or negative information instead of to word-of-mouth. However, the effect of tie strength indicates that the source of the information did matter to potential applicants. Moreover, previous research suggests that the same information can have different effects depending on the source through which it is provided (Allen et al., 2004; Herr et al., 1991). Future research should compare the effects of word-of-mouth to the effects of other recruitment sources. Finally, although our sample of graduate students possessed considerable work and application experience, further research should investigate the effects of word-of-mouth in other applicant populations, such as job losers or re-entrants.

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CHAPTER 3

RECRUITMENT-RELATED INFORMATION SOURCES AND ORGANIZATIONAL ATTRACTIVENESS: CAN SOMETHING BE DONE ABOUT NEGATIVE PUBLICITY?[1]

The present study begins to fill a gap in recruitment literature by investigating whether the effects of negative publicity on organizational attractiveness can be mitigated by recruitment advertising and positive word-of-mouth. The accessibility-diagnosticity model was used as a theoretical framework to formulate predictions about the effects of these recruitment-related information sources. A mixed 2 × 2 experimental design was applied to examine if initial assessments of organizational attractiveness based on negative publicity would enhance at a second evaluation after exposure to a second more positive information source. We found that both recruitment advertising and word-of-mouth improved organizational attractiveness, but word-of-mouth was perceived as a more credible information source. Self-monitoring did not moderate the impact of information source on organizational attractiveness.

INTRODUCTION

Negative publicity about companies has become rather common in this media era and is likely to have pervasive effects on company sales and stock prices (Abowd, Milkovich, & Hannon, 1990; Fombrun & Shanley, 1990). In addition, negative media attention might also scare off potential applicants. Who would want to work for a company that has gotten extensive press coverage on its accounting blunders (e.g., Enron), environmental disasters (e.g., Exxon), or massive lay-offs (e.g., Ford)? However, no research has yet studied the effects of negative publicity on organizational attractiveness. Furthermore, it is not known whether these effects are irreparable or not: can companies mitigate the impact of negative publicity by influencing potential applicants' perceptions of organizational attractiveness through other information sources?

The present study begins to fill this gap in recruitment literature by advancing our understanding of negative publicity and investigating whether its effects on organizational attractiveness can be reduced by two very different kinds of recruitment-related information sources: recruitment advertising and word-of-mouth. The accessibility-diagnosticity model (Feldman & Lynch, 1988; Herr, Kardes, & Kim, 1991) was used as a theoretical framework to formulate predictions about the effects of these information sources. At a practical level, our findings might be helpful for recruiters trying to decrease the impact of negative publicity on their company's attractiveness as an employer.

RECRUITMENT-RELATED INFORMATION SOURCES

In order to enhance organizational attractiveness, recruitment often involves that a particular message about the organization as an employer is communicated to a target group of (potential) applicants through a specific channel or source (Barber, 1998). This implies that recruitment-related information sources and their characteristics can be important antecedents of organizational attractiveness. In addition to internal recruitment sources (e.g., recruitment advertising), which are largely under the control of the organization, job seekers

also receive information from external sources (e.g., publicity and word-of-mouth), which are not under the direct control of the organization. However, research on the effects of these external information sources on organizational attractiveness is still scarce. Furthermore, most recruitment studies have examined the effects of only one information source at a time, so little is known about the effects of multiple information sources on organizational attractiveness (Cable & Turban, 2001; Collins & Han, 2004; Collins & Stevens, 2002). This contrasts sharply with the reality of job seeking where potential applicants frequently consult external sources and get their information from more than one source. Similarly, companies are likely to monitor and try to influence external sources and include a mixture of information sources in their recruitment strategy. Therefore, the present study examines the effects of two external information sources (i.e., publicity and word-of-mouth) and one internal source (i.e., recruitment advertising) on organizational attractiveness. We now turn to a discussion of these three recruitment-related information sources, which is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Main Characteristics of Recruitment-Related Information Sources.

	Publicity	Recruitment advertising	Word-of-mouth
Control	External	Internal	External
Focus	Non-personal	Non-personal	Personal
Valence	Positive/negative	Positive	Positive/negative
Costs	Inexpensive	Expensive	Inexpensive
Research	Scarce	Moderate amount	Scarce

PUBLICITY

Publicity as a recruitment-related information source involves information about an organization as an employer disseminated through editorial media not paid for by the organization (Collins & Stevens, 2002). It typically consists of non-personal mass communication such as newspaper articles and TV news items

and can contain both positive and negative information. Publicity is an external source, which means that companies can only try to manage it indirectly through public relations efforts, press releases, press conferences, media interviews, public-service activities, or special events. Almost no research has studied publicity as a recruitment-related information source. Collins and Stevens (2002) found that positive publicity was positively related to organizational attractiveness and strengthened the effects of other recruitment sources. However, negative publicity was not examined.

RECRUITMENT ADVERTISING

Recruitment advertising can be defined as any paid form of non-personal presentation and promotion of an organization as an employer by the organization itself (Highhouse & Hoffman, 2001; Kotler & Keller, 2005). Examples include job postings and recruitment brochures. The definition implies that advertising is an internal source that can be directly managed by the organization to communicate a positive message to potential applicants. However, recruitment advertising is usually rather expensive, because advertising space (e.g., in newspapers) must be purchased. In contrast to external sources, recruitment advertising has received a considerable amount of research attention, demonstrating that physical ad attributes, salary and benefits, location, human resource systems, social consciousness, value statements, and position scarcity influence organizational attractiveness (Barber & Roehling, 1993; Bretz & Judge, 1994; Highhouse, Beadle, Gallo, & Miller, 1998; Highhouse & Hoffman, 2001; Highhouse, Hoffman, Greve, & Collins, 2002). However, most of these studies have investigated recruitment advertising as a single recruitment source. Therefore, it is not known whether advertising can serve as a tool to mitigate the effects of negative external sources. Along these lines, Van Hoye and Lievens (2004) found that organizational attractiveness increased significantly when negative word-of-mouth was followed by recruitment advertising.

WORD-OF-MOUTH

In a recruitment context, word-of-mouth involves an interpersonal communication, independent of the organization's recruitment activities, about an organization as an employer or about specific jobs (Bone, 1995; Cable, Aiman-Smith, Mulvey, & Edwards, 2000; Collins & Stevens, 2002). Examples are conversations with friends and advice from college professors. Word-of-mouth can contain both positive and negative information and represents an external source. Like publicity, companies can only attempt to control it indirectly through campus recruitment, building relationships with key influentials and opinion leaders (e.g., career counselor, class president), employee referral programs (e.g., providing referral bonuses), testimonials, or internships. Only a few studies have examined word-of-mouth as a recruitment-related information source. Collins and Stevens (2002) found a strong effect of positive word-of-mouth on organizational attractiveness. The effect of word-of-mouth was strengthened by positive publicity, but word-of-mouth did not interact with recruitment advertising or sponsorship. Van Hoye and Lievens (2004) found that both positive and negative word-of-mouth influenced organizational attractiveness and interfered with the effectiveness of recruitment advertising. However, negative word-of-mouth had a larger impact than positive word-of-mouth. So far, no research has examined if positive word-of-mouth can be used to reduce the impact of negative external information sources.

THE ACCESSIBILITY-DIAGNOSTICITY MODEL

On the basis of the main characteristics of publicity, recruitment advertising, and word-of-mouth (see Table 1), we use the accessibility-diagnosticity model as a theoretical framework to formulate specific predictions about the effects of these recruitment-related information sources on organizational attractiveness.

The accessibility-diagnosticity model (Feldman & Lynch, 1988; Herr et al., 1991) posits that the likelihood that information is used to form an evaluation is determined by the accessibility of that information in memory, the diagnosticity of that information, and by the accessibility and diagnosticity of other

information. An information source is perceived as diagnostic if it helps to discriminate between alternative hypotheses, interpretations, or categorizations. In other words, a recruitment-related information source is diagnostic if it helps potential applicants to decide whether a specific organization would be a good or bad employer for them.

In the present study, we wanted to investigate if recruitment advertising and positive word-of-mouth could mitigate the effects of negative publicity on organizational attractiveness. On the basis of the accessibility-diagnosticity model, we expected both recruitment advertising and word-of-mouth to be sufficiently diagnostic as a second information source after negative publicity to be able to enhance perceptions of organizational attractiveness. First, publicity usually provides rather general information about an organization as an employer due to its external and non-personal nature (Collins & Stevens, 2002). This leaves ample room for recruitment advertising and word-of-mouth to provide more specific diagnostic information about important job and organizational characteristics that is likely to influence the perceptions of potential applicants. This higher diagnosticity is possible as a result of respectively the internal and personal features of recruitment advertising and word-of-mouth. Second, negative publicity creates a negative recruitment environment, in which positive recruitment advertising and word-of-mouth are probably perceived as more diagnostic than they would have been in an already positive environment, because they "stand out" more in a predominantly negative context (cf., Herr et al., 1991).

> *Prediction 1: Recruitment advertising will enhance organizational attractiveness perceived by potential applicants who are initially exposed to negative publicity.*

> *Prediction 2: Positive word-of-mouth will enhance organizational attractiveness perceived by potential applicants who are initially exposed to negative publicity.*

Furthermore, the accessibility-diagnosticity model predicts that the impact of positive word-of-mouth on organizational attractiveness would be larger than

that of equally positive recruitment advertising. Although the two information sources might be evenly diagnostic, word-of-mouth is more easily accessible in memory due to its personal and more vivid nature and thus more likely to enhance the perceptions of potential applicants (Feldman & Lynch, 1988; Herr et al., 1991).

Prediction 3: Positive word-of-mouth will enhance organizational attractiveness to a greater extent than recruitment advertising.

However, in accordance with a person-organization fit perspective (Kristof, 1996) and with the individual differences hypothesis in recruitment source research (Zottoli & Wanous, 2000), we expected that this source effect on organizational attractiveness would be moderated by individual differences. As word-of-mouth represents an interpersonal information source, we anticipated that its effects on organizational attractiveness would be greater for potential applicants high in self-monitoring, because they are more susceptible to social information (Snyder & Gangestad, 1986). High and low self-monitors were not expected to differ in their reactions to recruitment advertising. Along these lines, Kilduff (1992) found that self-monitoring moderated the relationship between friendship ties and similarity of interview bidding patterns of MBA students, so that high self-monitors were more similar to their friends in their bidding behavior than low self-monitors.

Prediction 4: Positive word-of-mouth will enhance organizational attractiveness to a greater extent for potential applicants high in self-monitoring than for potential applicants low in self-monitoring.

Finally, we examined the perceived credibility of recruitment advertising and word-of-mouth. Credibility is an important characteristic of recruitment-related information sources that influences how they are processed. In general, potential applicants seem to prefer obtaining information from credible sources (Cable & Turban, 2001; Fisher, Ilgen, & Hoyer, 1979). As word-of-mouth is an external information source, we anticipated that it would be perceived by potential applicants as more credible and trustworthy than recruitment advertising, because it does not have the explicit purpose to promote the organization (Fisher

et al., 1979). Furthermore, as credibility is thought to affect the processing of information sources, we expected it to mediate the predicted source effect on organizational attractiveness (Allen, Van Scotter, & Otondo, 2004; Breaugh & Starke, 2000).

> *Prediction 5a: Word-of-mouth will be perceived as a more credible information source than recruitment advertising.*

> *Prediction 5b: Credibility will mediate the differential effect of recruitment advertising and word-of-mouth on organizational attractiveness.*

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

Participants were 100 graduate students in I/O psychology who were given extra course credit for their participation. The majority of the sample was female (75%) and the mean age was 22 years ($SD = 1.27$). All of the participants had part-time work experience and 97% had experience in applying for a job (with an average of seven previous applications), so the task of evaluating organizational attractiveness was realistic and relevant for them. As most participants would be looking for a job similar to the position used in this study (Human Resources Coordinator) within the next few months (either for an internship or for a full-time job), we considered them to be potential applicants or a sample from the applicant population (Barber, 1998).

DESIGN AND PROCEDURE

An experimental approach enabled us to carefully manipulate the content of all information sources, which would have been almost impossible to achieve in a field study. More specifically, a mixed 2×2 experimental design was applied, incorporating both within- and between-subjects components. Time was a within-subjects factor as we investigated if initial assessments of organizational attractiveness based on negative publicity would enhance at a second evaluation

after exposure to a second more positive information source. Information source was a between-subjects factor as participants were exposed to either recruitment advertising or positive word-of-mouth as a second source. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two levels of the between-subjects factor.

First, participants were exposed to negative publicity and rated organizational attractiveness for the first time. Second, either recruitment advertising or word-of-mouth was shown and organizational attractiveness was assessed a second time. Finally, participants evaluated the credibility of the second information source, filled out the self-monitoring scale, and answered some demographical questions.

MATERIALS

Materials consisted of three recruitment-related information sources about a position of Human Resources Coordinator in a fictitious company Geropress, namely negative publicity, recruitment advertising, and positive word-of-mouth. The position was tailored to the interests and skills of our sample of graduate I/O psychology students.

Publicity was operationalized as a newspaper article about Geropress and was the same in both conditions. It was designed to present negative information about the company. More specifically, the newspaper article stated that due to the economic downturn the company would be restructured and that lay-offs were imminent. To enable a realistic first assessment of organizational attractiveness, some other neutral/positive attribute information was provided as well, namely location, industry, and size. For concerns of external validity, the publicity was designed on the basis of real newspaper articles about restructuring companies. Moreover, it was presented on a page laid out like an actual newspaper page amidst other articles (participants were instructed to read the encircled article).

Recruitment advertising was manipulated as a job advertisement from Geropress. Its layout resembled the typical structure found in real job ads,

consisting of the description of the company, job title, job content, company offer, candidate requirements, and contact information.

Word-of-mouth was operationalized as a casual conversation between two friends about the company as an employer. To resemble the personal and vivid nature of word-of-mouth while still maintaining control over the content of the information source, the conversation was presented in a video format (Allen et al., 2004; Fisher et al., 1979; Herr et al., 1991). Participants were instructed that the video presentation represented a conversation they had about the company with a friend. One person in the video, a graduate student in I/O psychology looking for a job, asked the other person, who worked as an I/O psychologist for another company, questions about Geropress. The camera zoomed in on the person providing information about the company.

Recruitment advertising and word-of-mouth were carefully designed to provide equally positive and attractive information about the same job and organizational attributes to ensure that found source effects would be due to differences in source characteristics and not to the amount, type, or valence of the provided information (Herr et al., 1991). A number of information categories were identified that typically appear in recruitment-related information sources and influence organizational attractiveness, namely location, industry, size, salary and benefits, career opportunities, educational prospects, and job content (Barber, 1998; Barber & Roehling, 1993; Bretz & Judge, 1994; Chapman, Uggerslev, Carroll, Piasentin, & Jones, 2005; Feldman & Arnold, 1978; Fisher et al., 1979; Highhouse & Hoffman, 2001). These categories were manipulated similarly in both recruitment advertising and word-of-mouth based on descriptions of actual Human Resources positions.

The design of the materials was evaluated in a *prestudy* among 53 graduate I/O psychology students (10 men, 43 women; mean age = 21 years), who were asked to judge the valence, attractiveness, and realism of one of the three recruitment-related information sources. Word-of-mouth was presented as a written scenario so that adjustments would still be possible before the actual recording of the video conversation. Table 2 shows that recruitment advertising

and word-of-mouth did not differ in valence and attractiveness. Publicity was perceived to be significantly more negative and less attractive than the two other sources. Finally, no significant differences in perceptions of realism were observed between publicity, recruitment advertising, and word-of-mouth.

Table 2. Evaluation of Materials in Prestudy (*N* = 53).

	Publicity (*n* = 18)		Word-of-mouth (*n* = 16)		Recruitment advertising (*n* = 19)	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Valence	3.24 b	.68	5.63 a	.56	5.49 a	.46
Attractiveness	3.72 b	1.19	5.21 a	.91	5.47 a	.66
Realism	5.54 a	.98	4.88 a	1.12	5.25 a	.94

Note. Valence and realism were rated on a 7-point bipolar scale, with higher scores indicating more positive and more realistic evaluations. Attractiveness was rated on a 7-point scale, ranging from 1 = *completely disagree* to 7 = *completely agree*. Means in the same row that do not share subscripts differ at $p < .05$ in the Tukey honestly significant difference comparison.

MEASURES

Organizational attractiveness. Perceived attractiveness of the organization as an employer was assessed using a five-item scale from Turban and Keon (1993). An example item is "I would like to work for Geropress". These items were rated on a 7-point rating scale, ranging from 1 = *completely disagree* to 7 = *completely agree*. The internal consistency of this scale was .89 for the first assessment and .93 for the second assessment.

Credibility. On the basis of previous research (Coleman & Irving, 1997; Fisher et al., 1979; Highhouse et al., 2002), we developed five items for measuring the perceived credibility of an information source. The formulation of the items was adapted to make sure the same scale could be used to measure the credibility of both recruitment advertising and word-of-mouth. An example item is "I think [the job advertisement] was telling the truth". All items were rated on a 7-point rating scale, ranging from 1 = *completely disagree* to 7 = *completely agree*. The

internal consistency of the scale was .93 for recruitment advertising and .95 for word-of-mouth.

Self-monitoring. Self-monitoring was assessed with the revised 18-item form of the Self-Monitoring Scale (Snyder & Gangestad, 1986). An example item is "I would probably make a good actor". Items were rated on a 4-point rating scale, ranging from 1 = *completely false* to 4 = *completely true*. As self-monitoring is essentially a dichotomous variable (Gangestad & Snyder, 1985), we followed guidelines to recode items into two categories (0 = *false*; 1 = *true*), and to apply a median split to identify high and low self-monitors (< 9 = *low*; ≥ 9 = *high*). The internal consistency of the scale was .78.

RESULTS

Table 3 presents the means and standard deviations of the study's dependent variables broken down by the experimental factors time and information source. A three-way mixed ANOVA was conducted to examine the effects of time, information source, and self-monitoring on organizational attractiveness. Time had a strong main effect on organizational attractiveness, $F(1, 96) = 105.47$, $p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .52$, as organizational attractiveness increased significantly from time 1 to time 2. The interaction of time and information source was not significant, $F(1, 96) = .71$, $p = .40$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$, indicating that recruitment advertising and word-of-mouth enhanced organizational attractiveness after negative publicity to the same extent. Therefore, we found that both recruitment advertising and positive word-of-mouth mitigated the effects of negative publicity on organizational attractiveness, in line with Predictions 1 and 2 derived from the accessibility-diagnosticity model. However, word-of-mouth did not enhance organizational attractiveness to a greater extent than recruitment advertising, failing to support Prediction 3.

The three-way interaction of time, information source, and self-monitoring was not significant, $F(1, 96) = .24$, $p = .62$, partial $\eta^2 = .00$. This implies that both information sources enhanced organizational attractiveness after negative publicity to the same extent for high self-monitors than for low self-monitors.

Contrary to Prediction 4, we did not find that word-of-mouth enhanced organizational attractiveness to a greater extent for potential applicants high in self-monitoring.

Table 3. Means and Standard Deviations of Dependent Variables by Time and Information Source (*N* = 100).

	Recruitment advertising (*n* = 50)		Word-of-mouth (*n* = 50)	
	Time 1	Time 2	Time 1	Time 2
Attractiveness				
M	3.74	4.70	3.65	4.78
SD	1.19	1.24	1.22	1.20
Credibility				
M	-	3.84	-	4.65
SD	-	1.22	-	1.21

Note. Attractiveness and credibility were rated on a 7-point scale, ranging from 1 = *completely disagree* to 7 = *completely agree*.

A one-way ANOVA indicated that information source had a significant effect on credibility, $F(1, 98) = 11.23$, $p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .10$. In support of Prediction 5a, we found that word-of-mouth was perceived as more credible than recruitment advertising. To test if credibility mediated the effect of information source on organizational attractiveness, we followed the three-step procedure for analyzing mediating effects advocated by Baron and Kenny (1986). However, as we failed to find a significant effect of information source on organizational attractiveness (Prediction 3), it made no sense to continue evaluating the mediating effects of credibility on this relationship. Therefore, Prediction 5b was not supported.

DISCUSSION

To our knowledge, the present study was the first to investigate negative publicity as a recruitment-related information source and thus begins to fill this gap in recruitment literature. Furthermore, the effects of publicity followed by a second information source on organizational attractiveness were examined, adding to the scarce body of knowledge on multiple source effects. More specifically, we investigated if recruitment advertising and positive word-of-mouth can be used to enhance organizational attractiveness perceived by potential applicants after being exposed to negative publicity.

Our results suggest that something can be done about the effects of negative publicity on organizational attractiveness. By exposing potential applicants to either recruitment advertising or positive word-of-mouth as a second information source after negative publicity, their perceptions of organizational attractiveness improved considerably. It seems that these additional information sources were sufficiently diagnostic to alter the evaluations of potential applicants (Feldman & Lynch, 1988; Herr et al., 1991).

Contrary to our expectations, positive word-of-mouth did not enhance organizational attractiveness to a greater extent than recruitment advertising, nor did self-monitoring moderate this relationship. It might be that the diagnosticity of both information sources was so high that their accessibility did not matter very much. Along these lines, the accessibility-diagnosticity framework proposes that accessible information is not used when more diagnostic information is available (Simmons, Bickart, & Lynch, 1993), indicating that highly diagnostic information is preferred over highly accessible information. Future research should investigate if recruitment advertising and word-of-mouth can have a differential effect on organizational attractiveness when they are less diagnostic, i.e., when they contain less information about important job and organizational attributes. Furthermore, future studies should examine if other variables such as the Big Five personality factors can help to explain individual differences in the processing and effectiveness of recruitment sources as well as if self-monitoring can moderate source effects in other contexts. For instance,

although self-monitoring was not related to the processing of enforced information sources in the present study, it might affect individual source preferences when potential applicants are given the choice of which information sources to use.

Although credibility did not mediate the effect of information source on organizational attractiveness, word-of-mouth was perceived as more credible than recruitment advertising. This might indicate that the two sources were cognitively processed in a different way (Cable & Turban, 2001). In terms of the elaboration likelihood model of persuasion (Cacioppo & Petty, 1984), credibility of the information source might be a factor influencing potential applicants to process the information more centrally, leading to greater and more enduring changes in attitudes and behavior than peripherally processed information. Supposing that word-of-mouth is processed more centrally than recruitment advertising because of its higher credibility, we would not expect evaluations of organizational attractiveness to differ after a short time interval, like in the present study, because both sources contained good arguments as well as positive peripheral cues. However, we would expect attitude change based on word-of-mouth to be more thorough and long-lasting, which would be supported by a differential effect of recruitment advertising and word-of-mouth on long-term assessments of organizational attractiveness. Future research should test these assumptions by measuring organizational attractiveness at longer time intervals after recruitment advertising and word-of-mouth, and by examining if credibility mediates the effects of these information sources on long-term organizational attractiveness.

Since organizational attractiveness was not measured before negative publicity, we cannot determine whether recruitment advertising and word-of-mouth merely mitigated part of the effect of negative publicity or whether they completely nullified it. An alternative approach might provide a preliminary answer to this issue. If we compare the experimental groups from our main study (see Table 3) to the control groups from our prestudy (see Table 2), an independent-samples *t*-test shows that organizational attractiveness after

negative publicity and recruitment advertising was significantly lower than after recruitment advertising alone, $t(60) = -3.35$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .14$. This suggests that although recruitment advertising diminished the effect of negative publicity, it could not cancel it out entirely. Another independent-samples t-test revealed that organizational attractiveness after negative publicity and word-of-mouth did not differ significantly from organizational attractiveness after word-of-mouth alone, $t(64) = -1.33$, $p = .19$, $\eta^2 = .03$, suggesting that word-of-mouth succeeded in nullifying the impact of negative publicity. Although this additional analysis should be interpreted cautiously, it implies that future research on the effects of multiple recruitment-related information sources should include baseline measures of organizational attractiveness to explore this matter more profoundly.

This study has some limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the experimental design of our study allowed us to carefully manipulate the content and timing of all information sources, but unfortunately it also limits the generalizability of the results. However, it would have been very difficult to investigate our specific research questions in a field study. For instance, we would have needed to find out which companies were about to appear negatively in the press, be able to develop parallel information sources, and test these on similar, but separate potential applicant samples. Future field studies might take a macro-level approach and examine retrospectively how various companies have dealt with negative publicity. Additionally, future research is needed to examine whether our results can be generalized to other applicant populations, organizations, and information sources. For instance, it might be that potential applicants with more work experience would react differently to negative publicity. Along these lines, Bretz and Judge (1998) observed that less experienced job seekers placed more weight on negative information than more experienced job seekers. Furthermore, Fombrun and Shanley (1990) found that level of organizational diversification moderated the effects of media exposure on corporate reputation, implying that the effects of publicity on organizational attractiveness might not be the same for all types of organizations. Moreover, in the current study we operationalized negative publicity as a single newspaper

article about lay-offs at a restructuring company that was moderately negative, as the article contained some neutral/positive information as well. It might be that the effects of negative publicity are harder to mitigate when other media are being used (e.g., TV news), when media coverage is more widespread, when other topics (e.g., an ethical scandal) are being covered, or when the negative information is more extreme. In addition, in our study there was a short time interval between publicity and the second information source. Future studies should examine the effects of recruitment advertising and word-of-mouth presented at larger time intervals after negative publicity and try to establish an optimal time for introducing a "mitigating" positive information source. Second, demand characteristics might have contributed to the observed increases in organizational attractiveness, although several precautions were taken to avoid this (Orne, 1962). The study's purpose was described rather vaguely as "examining how people form impressions about organizations and which organizational characteristics are important in this process". In line with this stated purpose, our questionnaire contained 16 filler items assessing perceptions of organizational characteristics (e.g., "How likely is it that the organization offers opportunities for rapid advancement?"). Participants were also instructed to answer honestly, they were reassured that there were no wrong answers, and participation was anonymous. Finally, the occurrence of positive word-of-mouth about the organization after negative publicity could be questioned. However, negative publicity usually provides rather general information that leaves enough room for more specific diagnostic information to influence the perceptions and interpretations of potential applicants. For instance, a company's restructuring could actually be explained as a positive signal that the company is striving to regain its health. Furthermore, our results indicate that the credibility of positive word-of-mouth was moderately high and that respondents were highly susceptible to it, even though it was provided after negative publicity.

Our findings have a number of theoretical implications suggesting directions for future research. First, the accessibility-diagnosticity model (Feldman & Lynch, 1988; Herr et al., 1991) can be used as a theoretical framework to guide future research on the effects of (multiple) recruitment-related information sources.

Future studies should include measures of perceived accessibility and diagnosticity to verify if they mediate the effects of information sources on organizational attractiveness. A particularly promising avenue for future research consists of integrating various theories to provide a more complete picture of recruitment sources. For example, media richness theory (Allen et al., 2004) could incorporate accessibility and diagnosticity as factors mediating the effects of media richness. Finally, more research is needed about external recruitment sources and multiple source effects, with word-of-mouth promising to be an especially powerful and credible recruitment tool. In fact, future research should investigate how specific dimensions of word-of-mouth, such as valence, tie strength, sender expertise, and medium, can be manipulated to influence its effects on organizational attractiveness (Bansal & Voyer, 2000; Bone, 1995). Another intriguing research question would be whether organizations can successfully imitate word-of-mouth (instead of indirectly stimulating it), for instance through the use of employee testimonials, and how this affects perceptions of credibility and organizational attractiveness.

Finally, several practical implications follow from our study. First, companies that are suffering from negative publicity can make use of recruitment advertising or positive word-of-mouth to soften its damaging effects. Although recruitment advertising is more easily and directly managed, it is more expensive and less credible than word-of-mouth and its impact might be less thorough and enduring. Companies can try to stimulate positive word-of-mouth indirectly, for instance by developing good relationships with key influentials and opinion leaders and by providing positive internship experiences. Second, companies should proactively try to avoid negative publicity and stimulate positive publicity because of their possible impact on organizational attractiveness. Again, this can be realized through indirect strategies such as press releases and public-service activities. Third, taken together, our results strongly suggest that companies should include external information sources in their recruitment mix because of their credibility and impact on organizational attractiveness. Moreover, the accessibility-diagnosticity model underlines the importance of developing an integrated recruitment communication strategy

(Keller, 1998). All the sources conveying organizational information to potential applicants need to be consistent in content and valence, because any "outlier" can be so diagnostic that it interferes with the effects of the other sources and has a major impact on organizational attractiveness.

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CHAPTER 4

TAPPING THE GRAPEVINE:
INVESTIGATING ANTECEDENTS, CONSEQUENCES, AND MEDIATORS OF WORD-OF-MOUTH AS A RECRUITMENT SOURCE

Although it is generally recognized that potential applicants often consult family or friends about possible jobs and organizations, research about word-of-mouth as a recruitment source is scarce. Therefore, the present study contributes to the recruitment literature by developing and testing a conceptual model of the antecedents, consequences, and mediators of positive and negative word-of-mouth communication. Results from 322 potential applicants for the Belgian Defense suggested that extraversion, tie strength, and source expertise were related to the use of word-of-mouth as a source of employment information. Positive word-of-mouth was positively associated with organizational attractiveness and prestige whereas negative word-of-mouth had a negative impact. The effect of positive word-of-mouth on organizational attractiveness was partially mediated by diagnosticity. Credibility partially mediated the effects of both positive and negative word-of-mouth on organizational prestige.

INTRODUCTION

Even though some research has indicated that social influences can affect potential applicants' attraction to organizations (Fisher, Ilgen, & Hoyer, 1979; Higgins, 2001; Kilduff, 1990, 1992; Ryan, Sacco, McFarland, & Kriska, 2000; Rynes, Bretz, & Gerhart, 1991; Turban, 2001), most recruitment studies have treated potential applicants as individual decision-makers, i.e. in social isolation. In addition, previous research on recruitment sources has paid far more attention to internal sources of employment information such as advertising than to external sources such as word-of-mouth (Barber, 1998; Breaugh & Starke, 2000; Rynes & Cable, 2003; Zottoli & Wanous, 2000). In fact, Cable and Turban (2001) suggested that:

> Any information source, ranging from company's brand advertisement to friends' word-of-mouth, has the potential to affect job seekers' employer knowledge (Cable et al., 2000). Unfortunately, several sources of organizational information suggested by the marketing literature have been relatively ignored in past recruitment research. (p. 132)

Although knowledge about word-of-mouth as a recruitment source is scarce, a few studies have indicated that positive word-of-mouth can influence organizational attraction (Cable, Aiman-Smith, Mulvey, & Edwards, 2000; Collins & Stevens, 2002; Van Hoye & Lievens, 2005). The present study contributes to the recruitment literature by developing and testing a comprehensive model of word-of-mouth used by potential applicants as a source of employment information. Our purpose was to gain an in-depth understanding of both positive and negative word-of-mouth by examining their antecedents and consequences. In addition, we tried to explain the relationship between word-of-mouth and its consequences by investigating several mediating variables. On a practical level, an increased knowledge of word-of-mouth might help organizations monitor and manage this external recruitment source.

Our model of word-of-mouth was tested in a military setting. More specifically, we examined how potential applicants used word-of-mouth to gain employment

information about the Belgian Defense. This military context was relevant because many armed forces are increasingly facing difficulties in attracting and enlisting the required numbers of new recruits (Bachman, Segal, Freedman-Doan, & O'Malley, 2000; Knowles et al., 2002; Lievens, Van Hoye, & Schreurs, 2005). In addition, it is important to understand why potential applicants decide to apply for a job with a particular organization because if they choose not to apply, they disappear from the recruitment process and cannot be reached by later recruitment or selection activities (Barber, 1998; Breaugh & Starke, 2000; Collins & Han, 2004; Collins & Stevens, 2002; Murphy, 1986; Rynes, 1991; Rynes & Barber, 1990; Rynes & Cable, 2003; Saks, 2005; Taylor & Collins, 2000; Turban, 2001).

THEORETICAL MODEL AND HYPOTHESES

DEVELOPMENT OF MODEL

To develop our model of word-of-mouth as a recruitment source, two sources of information were used. First, we supplemented the scant knowledge on social influences in recruitment (Collins & Stevens, 2002; Fisher et al., 1979; Kilduff, 1992; Van Hoye & Lievens, 2005) with the voluminous marketing literature on word-of-mouth (Bansal & Voyer, 2000; Bone, 1995; Brown & Reingen, 1987; Herr, Kardes, & Kim, 1991; Mangold, Miller, & Brockway, 1999; Smith & Vogt, 1995) to identify possible antecedents, consequences, and mediators of word-of-mouth. Second, a prestudy served to examine the empirical relevance of these theoretical constructs as well as to identify additional variables that might be included in the model. Specifically, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 19 potential applicants who visited a Belgian Defense's career office (16 men, 3 women; average age = 23 years, $SD = 4.56$) about their use of word-of-mouth as a recruitment source. Every participant mentioned at least one word-of-mouth source and in total 34 word-of-mouth sources were reported (average use of word-of-mouth sources = 1.79, $SD = .86$). For eight potential applicants, word-of-mouth was the only source they had used to obtain information about the Belgian Defense. The final selection of constructs to be included in our

model of word-of-mouth was based on the integration of the prestudy's findings with the previous research literature on word-of-mouth. This resulted in the conceptual model depicted in Figure 1.

OVERVIEW OF MODEL

Our model has the following components. First of all, the hypothesized model distinguishes between positive and negative word-of-mouth because word-of-mouth is an external recruitment source that can contain both positive and negative information (Cable & Turban, 2001). Furthermore, we expected that some potential applicants would rely more on word-of-mouth for obtaining employment information than others. Similarly, in some situations potential applicants may be more prone to use word-of-mouth information. Therefore, the model proposes three individual difference variables (i.e., extraversion, conscientiousness, and self-monitoring) and two situational variables (i.e., tie strength and source expertise) as antecedents of using word-of-mouth as a recruitment source. With respect to consequences, the model suggests that positive (negative) word-of-mouth has a positive (negative) effect on organizational attractiveness and prestige. These two outcomes were chosen because they are situated in the first phase of recruitment in which organizations try to identify and attract *potential* applicants (Barber, 1998). Moreover, previous research has demonstrated that organizational attractiveness and prestige are related to actual application and job choice decisions in later recruitment stages (Chapman, Uggerslev, Carroll, Piasentin, & Jones, 2005; Collins & Stevens, 2002; Highhouse, Lievens, & Sinar, 2003, Judge & Cable, 1997; Powell & Goulet, 1996; Turban, Campion, & Eyring, 1995). Finally, we incorporated two different theories that might explain the effects of word-of-mouth, namely the accessibility-diagnosticity model (Feldman & Lynch, 1988; Herr et al., 1991) and the source credibility framework (Eisend, 2004; Pornpitakpan, 2004). To this end, the model includes accessibility, diagnosticity, and credibility as variables mediating the relationship between positive and negative word-of-mouth and organizational attractiveness and prestige.

Antecedents

Extraversion

Conscientiousness

Self-monitoring

Tie strength

Source expertise

Word-of-mouth

Positive word-of-mouth

Negative word-of-mouth

Mediators

Accessibility

Diagnosticity

Credibility

Consequences

Organizational attractiveness

Organizational prestige

H1a
H1b
H1c
H2a
H2b
H5a
H5b
H5c
H3a
H3b
H4a
H4b
H5c
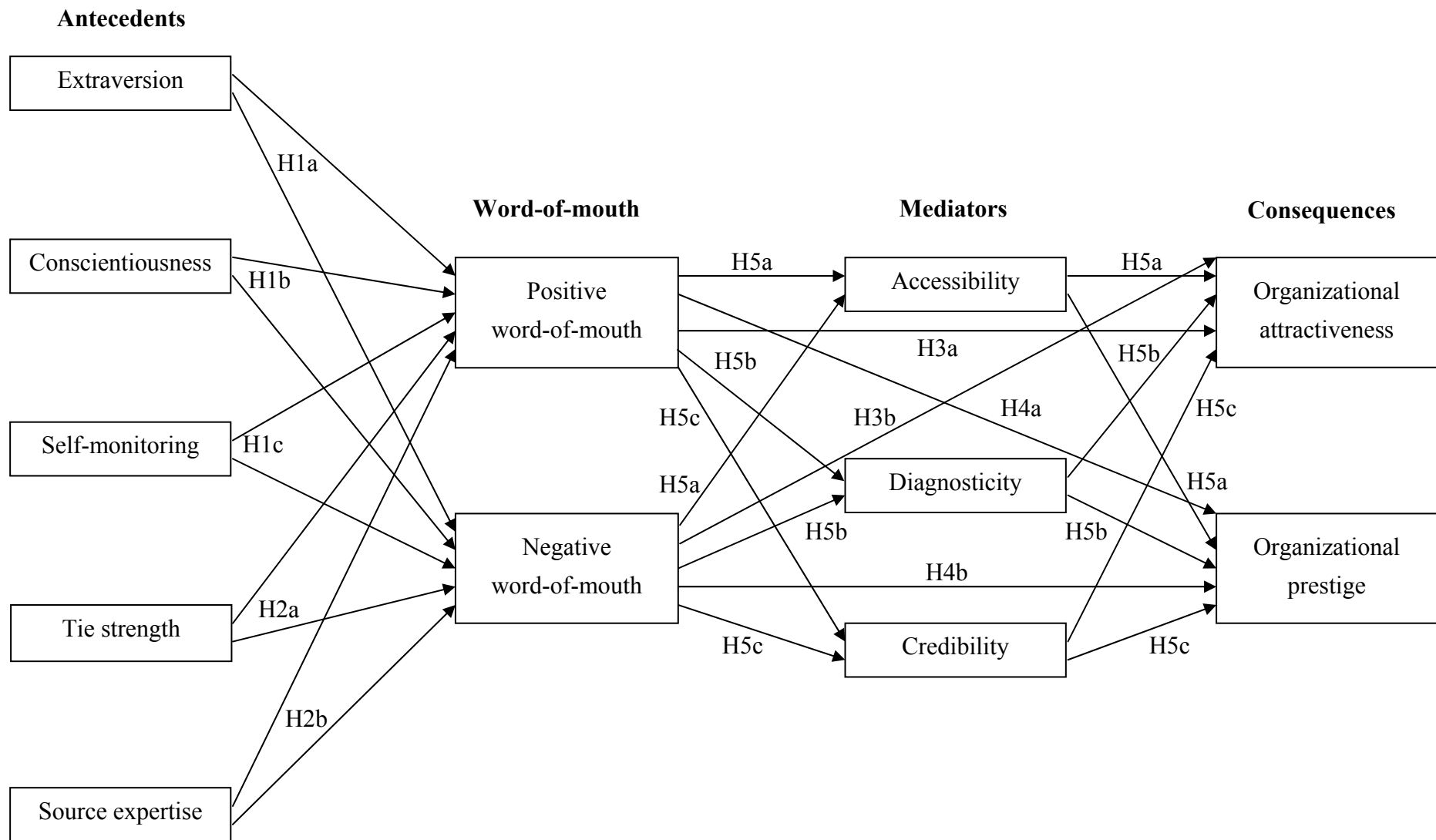
Figure 1. Theoretical Model of Word-of-Mouth as a Recruitment Source.

In the following sections, we discuss each of the components of the model of word-of-mouth and formally develop all hypotheses shown in Figure 1.

A DEFINITION OF WORD-OF-MOUTH AS A RECRUITMENT SOURCE

Word-of-mouth as a recruitment source can be defined as an interpersonal communication, independent of the organization's recruitment activities, about an organization as an employer or about specific jobs (Bone, 1995; Cable et al., 2000; Collins & Stevens, 2002; Van Hoye & Lievens, 2005). Examples include conversations with friends and advice from independent experts.

The definition identifies the three key characteristics of word-of-mouth. First, word-of-mouth is clearly a social phenomenon as it occurs between people, in an informal manner (Bone, 1995). Second, given that the focus is on transferring information, word-of-mouth represents a particular type of informational social influence. Whereas normative social influences result from pressure to conform to certain expectations held by others, informational social influences such as word-of-mouth refer to accepting information provided by others as evidence about reality (Cohen & Golden, 1972; Wooten & Reed, 1998). Finally, word-of-mouth is an external or company-independent information source that is not under the direct control of the organisation (Cable & Turban, 2001).

In addition to these defining characteristics, word-of-mouth can vary across at least four other dimensions that are likely to influence its effects. First, even though word-of-mouth is typically associated with face-to-face communication, it can be provided through all sorts of media such as the telephone or the internet (Dellarocas, 2003; Herr et al., 1991; Smith & Vogt, 1995). Second, as long as they are operating independently of the organization, everyone can provide word-of-mouth information including friends, family, and even complete strangers (Brown & Reingen, 1987; Smith & Vogt, 1995). Third, word-of-mouth can be based on motives of the source as well as the recipient, and even on coincidence (Mangold et al., 1999). Finally, as word-of-mouth is an external source that does not have the explicit purpose to promote the organization, it can contain both positive and negative information (Bone, 1995; Cable & Turban,

2001; Herr et al., 1991; Smith & Vogt, 1995). In our prestudy, 15% of the word-of-mouth sources used by potential applicants provided negative information. Therefore, our model contributes to the recruitment literature by taking the valence of word-of-mouth into account when examining its effects on the attraction of potential applicants (Collins & Stevens, 2002).

These dimensions clarify how word-of-mouth relates to two other concepts that have been used in previous research. In fact, employee referrals and networking represent particular types of word-of-mouth. Whereas everyone can provide word-of-mouth, employee referrals are restricted to information provided by an employee of the organization (Zottoli & Wanous, 2000). Moreover, employee referrals typically contain only positive information as the organization is recommended to potential applicants. Similarly, networking refers to one specific kind of word-of-mouth. While word-of-mouth can be initiated by the source as well as the recipient or can even occur coincidentally, networking consists of word-of-mouth initiated by job seekers with the explicit intention to gather information about potential jobs (Wanberg, Kanfer, & Banas, 2000).

ANTECEDENTS OF WORD-OF-MOUTH

Although there is a lack of research about the antecedents of word-of-mouth as a recruitment source, previous marketing research (Bansal & Voyer, 2000; Bone, 1995; Mangold et al., 1999) has demonstrated that the use of word-of-mouth is determined by the characteristics of the recipient (i.e., individual differences) as well as the characteristics of the source (i.e., situational variables). Therefore, our model first proposes that some potential applicants make more use of word-of-mouth as a source of employment information than others. The most prevalent taxonomy of individual differences identifies five broad personality factors, namely extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness to experience (Digman, 1990; Goldberg, 1990). Two of these Big Five personality factors seem conceptually most useful for predicting the use of word-of-mouth as a recruitment source, namely extraversion and conscientiousness. Extraversion refers to the extent to which a person is sociable, gregarious, assertive, talkative, and active (Barrick & Mount, 1991).

People with high levels of extraversion prefer social situations in which they can interact with others. We expected potential applicants higher in extraversion to make more use of word-of-mouth for two reasons. First, given their characteristics, extraverts are likely to have larger social networks through which word-of-mouth information might be provided (cf., Russell, Booth, Reed, & Laughlin, 1997). Second, even if their networks would be equally large, extraverts would still interact more frequently with other people increasing the likelihood of employment-related word-of-mouth to occur (cf., Caldwell & Burger, 1998). Conscientiousness reflects dependability (i.e., being careful, thorough, responsible, organized, and planful) and having a high will to achieve (i.e., being hardworking, achievement-oriented, and persevering) (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Digman, 1990). We expected potential applicants higher in conscientiousness to make more use of word-of-mouth because they tend to be more motivated and more persistent. Therefore, they will probably try harder to obtain word-of-mouth information in addition to internal recruitment sources such as advertising to get a more complete and balanced picture of the organization (cf., Caldwell & Burger, 1998). In support of these theoretical assumptions, Wanberg et al. (2000) found that of all Big Five personality factors only extraversion and conscientiousness were significant predictors of the intentional use of word-of-mouth as a job search behavior (i.e., networking).

> *Hypothesis 1a: Potential applicants higher in extraversion will make more use of positive and negative word-of-mouth.*

> *Hypothesis 1b: Potential applicants higher in conscientiousness will make more use of positive and negative word-of-mouth.*

In addition to these broad personality factors, our model includes a more specific personality trait as an antecedent of word-of-mouth, namely self-monitoring. People differ in the extent to which they monitor their self-presentation in social settings and interpersonal relationships (Day, Schleicher, Unckless, & Hiller, 2002). Individuals high in self-monitoring regulate their expressive self-presentation for the sake of desired public appearances (Snyder & Gangestad, 1986). Conversely, the expressive self-presentation of low self-

monitors is not controlled by deliberate attempts to appear situationally appropriate but reflects their own inner attitudes, emotions, and dispositions (Gangestad & Snyder, 2000). Previous research has demonstrated that self-monitoring is significantly related to job performance, leadership, and several work-related attitudes (Day et al., 2002). Given that high self-monitors are more responsive to social and interpersonal cues of situationally appropriate performances, they are more likely to seek out such social information than low self-monitors (Gangestad & Snyder, 2000; Snyder & Gangestad, 1986). Therefore, we hypothesized that potential applicants higher in self-monitoring would rely more on word-of-mouth. In support of these theoretical arguments, Kilduff (1992) found that high self-monitors were more similar to their friends in their application decisions than low self-monitors.

Hypothesis 1c: Potential applicants higher in self-monitoring will make more use of positive and negative word-of-mouth.

The theoretical model further postulates that the use of word-of-mouth does not only differ across potential applicants but also across situations. More specifically, word-of-mouth information can come from a lot of different sources. Instead of investigating a long list of possible sources (e.g., neighbor, friend, father, coworker, employee, and so forth), it makes more sense to conceptually distinguish the characteristics of those sources that are likely to influence the extent to which potential applicants rely on them for obtaining employment information. One such characteristic is tie strength, which can be defined as the closeness of the social relationship between the source and the recipient of word-of-mouth information (Brown & Reingen, 1987). We hypothesized that word-of-mouth coming from a stronger tie would be used more often because stronger ties are more readily available and result in more frequent interaction through which word-of-mouth information can be provided (Brown & Reingen, 1987). In our prestudy, 73% of the word-of-mouth sources used by potential applicants were described as strong ties.

Hypothesis 2a: Potential applicants will make more use of positive and negative word-of-mouth provided by a stronger tie.

Another important characteristic of word-of-mouth sources is their expertise with respect to the organization. We expected potential applicants to rely more on word-of-mouth sources who work for the organization or have personal experiences with the organization because they are perceived as more knowledgeable and thus more likely to provide accurate employment information (cf., Bansal & Voyer, 2000; Bone, 1995). In our prestudy, 73% of the consulted word-of-mouth sources (previously) worked for the Belgian Defense and an additional 15% applied for a job in the Belgian Defense or requested information in one of the Belgian Defense's career offices.

> *Hypothesis 2b: Potential applicants will make more use of positive and negative word-of-mouth when the expertise of the word-of-mouth source is higher.*

CONSEQUENCES OF WORD-OF-MOUTH

Both positive and negative word-of-mouth are recruitment sources through which potential applicants receive employment information that can influence their perceptions of the organization (Barber, 1998; Breaugh & Starke, 2000; Rynes, 1991; Rynes & Barber, 1990; Rynes & Cable, 2003; Zottoli & Wanous, 2000). However, positive information should have a more positive effect on perceptions than negative information (Bretz & Judge, 1998; Meglino, Ravlin, & DeNisi, 2000). Moreover, the impact of different recruitment sources is likely to differ due to their specific characteristics (Allen, Van Scotter, & Otondo, 2004; Collins & Han, 2004; Zottoli & Wanous, 2000), which will be discussed extensively in the next section.

First, our theoretical model postulates that word-of-mouth will influence organizational attractiveness, which is a key recruitment outcome in the first phase of recruitment (Barber, 1998; Chapman et al., 2005). Organizational attractiveness can be defined as potential applicants' attitudes and intentions toward an organization as an employer (Highhouse et al., 2003; Turban & Keon, 1993). Previous research has indicated that positive word-of-mouth can have a positive effect on organizational attractiveness (Collins & Stevens, 2002; Van

Hoye & Lievens, 2005). However, there has been no research investigating the impact of negative word-of-mouth.

Hypothesis 3a: Positive word-of-mouth will be positively associated with organizational attractiveness.

Hypothesis 3b: Negative word-of-mouth will be negatively associated with organizational attractiveness.

Apart from organizational attractiveness, our model identifies another conceptually relevant outcome of word-of-mouth. Organizational prestige or perceived reputation refers to a perceived social consensus on the degree to which an organization's characteristics are regarded as either positive or negative (Highhouse et al., 2003). To our knowledge, no previous research has investigated the effects of word-of-mouth on organizational prestige. However, of all recruitment sources, word-of-mouth might be most relevant for potential applicants' social consensus perceptions because it represents a social source of employment information. What other people say about the organization should allow potential applicants to infer how well-regarded it is. In addition, the more word-of-mouth sources are used, the easier it will be to perceive a social consensus about the organization's characteristics. Along these lines, Cable and Graham (2000) found that endorsements by a trusted person or organization can influence perceptions of organizational reputation.

Hypothesis 4a: Positive word-of-mouth will be positively associated with organizational prestige.

Hypothesis 4b: Negative word-of-mouth will be negatively associated with organizational prestige.

MEDIATORS OF WORD-OF-MOUTH

Two different theoretical perspectives can be applied to explain the relationship between word-of-mouth and its consequences. First, the accessibility-diagnosticity model (Feldman & Lynch, 1988; Herr et al., 1991) posits that the likelihood that information is used to form an evaluation is determined by the

accessibility of that information in memory, the diagnosticity of that information, and by the accessibility and diagnosticity of other information. The vividness of the provided information is an important determinant of its accessibility. Information is perceived to be diagnostic if it helps to discriminate between alternative hypotheses, interpretations, or categorizations. In other words, a recruitment source provides diagnostic information if it helps potential applicants to decide whether a specific organization would be a good or bad employer for them. On the basis of this model, we expected that word-of-mouth would have a greater effect on organizational attractiveness and prestige when it provides more accessible and more diagnostic information. Compared to other recruitment sources, accessibility might be more relevant for explaining the effects of word-of-mouth because of its more personal and vivid nature (Herr et al., 1991). Although previous research applied the accessibility-diagnosticity model as a theoretical framework to predict the effects of word-of-mouth on organizational attractiveness (Van Hoye & Lievens, 2005), it was not verified if perceived accessibility and diagnosticity of the provided information mediated these effects.

> *Hypothesis 5a: The perceived accessibility of the provided information will mediate the relationship between positive and negative word-of-mouth on the one hand and organizational attractiveness and prestige on the other hand.*

> *Hypothesis 5b: The perceived diagnosticity of the provided information will mediate the relationship between positive and negative word-of-mouth on the one hand and organizational attractiveness and prestige on the other hand.*

Second, the source credibility framework postulates that more credible sources of information are more persuasive in both changing attitudes and gaining behavioral compliance (Eisend, 2004; Pornpitakpan, 2004). Perceived credibility is based on perceptions of accuracy, appropriateness, and believability of the received information (Allen et al., 2004; Eisend, 2004). This theory implies that recruitment sources vary in the degree to which potential applicants perceive

them as providing credible employment information, which in turn might explain their different effects on recruitment outcomes (Allen et al., 2004; Breaugh & Starke, 2000; Cable & Turban, 2001; Fisher et al., 1979). Compared to internal recruitment sources such as advertising, word-of-mouth might be perceived as providing more credible information because it does not have the explicit purpose to promote the organization (Fisher et al., 1979; Van Hoye & Lievens, 2005). In our prestudy, potential applicants perceived all word-of-mouth sources as credible.

> *Hypothesis 5c: The perceived credibility of the provided information will mediate the relationship between positive and negative word-of-mouth on the one hand and organizational attractiveness and prestige on the other hand.*

A comment is in order with respect to these mediating variables. Our theoretical model postulates partial mediation instead of complete mediation (Baron & Kenny, 1986; MacKinnon, Lockwood, Hoffman, West, & Sheets, 2002), implying that word-of-mouth will have a direct effect on organizational attractiveness and prestige (see Hypotheses 3a-b and Hypotheses 4a-b) as well as an indirect effect through accessibility, diagnosticity, and credibility (see Hypotheses 5a-c). As noted above, the employment information provided by word-of-mouth is likely to influence potential applicants' perceptions of the organization, regardless of its characteristics as a recruitment source. In addition, we propose that accessibility, diagnosticity, and credibility are not conflicting explanations but can be combined to more fully explain the consequences of word-of-mouth. Therefore, none of these mediating variables is expected to completely mediate its effects.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURE

A sample was drawn from the applicant population targeted by the Belgian Defense. Potential applicants are people who have some interest in the job and a

reasonable possibility of applying (Barber, 1998; Ryan, Horvath, & Kriska, 2005). Unlike actual applicants, they have not yet applied and might decide not to. Unlike the more general population of job seekers, they express some interest, usually by actively looking for (additional) information about the organization and possible jobs. With respect to the Belgian Defense, potential applicants gather employment information mainly by visiting a career office or by consulting the website (Schreurs et al., 2005). Therefore, all visitors of the Belgian Defense's career offices and of the jobs page on the Belgian Defense's website between September and November 2005 were invited to participate in a study about the Belgian Defense as an employer and were provided with the website address where the questionnaire could be completed. It was also explained that participants could take part in a raffle to win a gift certificate. The questionnaire was administered online on an independent website especially created for this study. Participants could access the website whenever and wherever they desired. Following recommendations for web-based data collection strategies (Stanton & Rogelberg, 2001), the obtained data were carefully screened (i.e., for responses not matching "legal" identifiers and for inadvertent and malicious multiple responses), and all suspect cases were removed (about 5%).

In total, we received usable responses from 322 potential applicants. The majority of the participants were men (76%) and the average age was 23 years ($SD = 6.08$). With respect to education, 6% obtained a primary school degree, 67% a high school degree, and 27% a college degree. Most potential applicants (70%) had some work experience and 64% had experience in applying for a job. We were not able to determine an exact response rate but the description of the sample suggests that it was representative of the Belgian Defense's target applicant population (Schreurs et al., 2005).

MEASURES

To increase participation, administration time was reduced by using short measures (two or three items per scale). Unless stated otherwise, items were

rated on a 5-point rating scale, ranging from 1 = *completely disagree* to 5 = *completely agree*.

Extraversion. Three items were selected from the International Personality Item Pool (2001) for measuring potential applicants' levels of extraversion (Goldberg, 1999). A sample item is "I feel comfortable around other people". The internal consistency of the scale was .82.

Conscientiousness. Potential applicants' levels of conscientiousness were measured by three items selected from the International Personality Item Pool (2001; Goldberg, 1999). A sample item is "I make plans and stick to them". The internal consistency of the scale was .80.

Self-monitoring. Three items from Snyder and Gangestad's (1986) revised Self-Monitoring Scale were used for assessing self-monitoring. An example item is "I would probably make a good actor". Items were rated on a 4-point rating scale, ranging from 1 = *completely false* to 4 = *completely true*. By removing one item, the internal consistency of the scale increased from .58 to .65. Therefore, the final scale consisted of two items.

Tie strength. The closeness of the social relationship with the sources of word-of-mouth information was measured by three items adapted from Brown and Konrad (2001). A sample item is "Most people I have talked with about the Belgian Defense are people I know very well, such as family or friends". The internal consistency of the scale was .84.

Source expertise. On the basis of previous research (Bansal & Voyer, 2000; Fisher et al., 1979), two items were developed for measuring the expertise of the word-of-mouth sources with respect to the organization. An example item is "Most people I have talked with about the Belgian Defense work or have worked for the Belgian Defense themselves". The internal consistency was .89.

Word-of-mouth. On the basis of the recruitment source literature, several guidelines were derived for developing an adequate measure of the use of word-of-mouth by potential applicants. First, external sources such as word-of-mouth can contain positive as well as negative information (Cable & Turban, 2001).

Second, participants should be able to indicate that they have used more than one source to obtain job and organizational information (Saks & Ashforth, 1997). Third, potential applicants are likely to vary in the extent to which they use a particular source (Zottoli & Wanous, 2000). This implies that the use of a Likert-type scale might be more appropriate than a simple yes/no response scale (Blau, 1994). In keeping with these guidelines, four items were developed to measure how much time participants had spent on positive and negative word-of-mouth separately (van Hooft, Born, Taris, van der Flier, & Blonk, 2004). All items were rated on a 5-point rating scale, ranging from 1 = *no time at all* to 5 = *very much time*. The specific wording of the items was based on previous research (Blau, 1994; Cable et al., 2000; Collins & Stevens, 2002; van Hooft et al., 2004; Wanberg et al., 2000), on discussions with several career counselors of the Belgian Defense, and on the comments of potential applicants in our prestudy. The items measuring positive (negative) word-of-mouth were "How much time have you spent on talking to people you know who told you positive (negative) things about the Belgian Defense?" and "How much time have you spent on inquiring about the Belgian Defense of family, friends, or acquaintances who recommended (advised against) the Belgian Defense as an employer?". Internal consistencies were .78 for positive word-of-mouth and .78 for negative word-of-mouth.

Accessibility. On the basis of previous research (Babin & Burns, 1998; Busselle & Shrum, 2003; Keller & Block, 1997), three items were developed for measuring the perceived accessibility of the provided information. An example item is "The information that I received was easy to understand". The internal consistency of the scale was .71.

Diagnosticity. The perceived diagnosticity of the provided information was assessed with three items from Williamson, Lepak, and King (2003). A sample item is "I received all the information that I would like to have when evaluating a prospective employer". The internal consistency was .87.

Credibility. Three items from Van Hoye and Lievens (2005) were used for measuring the perceived credibility of the provided information. An example

item is "I think that the information that I received was trustworthy". The internal consistency of the scale was .90.

Organizational attractiveness. Perceived attractiveness of the Belgian Defense as an employer was assessed with three items from Turban and Keon (1993). An example item is "I would like to work for the Belgian Defense". The internal consistency of this scale was .88.

Organizational prestige. Perceived prestige of the Belgian Defense as an employer was assessed with three items developed by Highhouse et al. (2003). An example item is "The Belgian Defense probably has a reputation as being an excellent employer". The internal consistency was .76.

Demographic variables. Participants were asked to fill out their gender, age, education, number of previous applications, and work experience.

RESULTS

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Means, standard deviations, and correlations among all variables are presented in Table 1. Similar to our prestudy, positive word-of-mouth seemed to be used more frequently than negative word-of-mouth. A paired samples t-test indicated that this difference in means was significant, $t(321) = 15.37$, $p < .01$. Positive and negative word-of-mouth were only moderately correlated ($r = .23$), indicating that they represent related, but distinct constructs. With respect to the antecedents in our theoretical model, extraversion, conscientiousness, and source expertise were related to positive but not to negative word-of-mouth. Conversely, tie strength was related to both sources. All hypothesized mediators and consequences were related to positive but not to negative word-of-mouth. All mediators were related to organizational attractiveness and prestige.

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Between Study Variables ($N = 322$).

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Extraversion	4.19	.74	-										
2. Conscientiousness	3.99	.72	.44	-									
3. Self-monitoring	2.37	.79	.11	.01	-								
4. Tie strength	3.60	1.18	.31	.20	.11	-							
5. Source expertise	3.58	1.38	.18	.19	-.09	.18	-						
6. Positive word-of-mouth	3.05	1.07	.28	.23	-.07	.41	.41	-					
7. Negative word-of-mouth	1.99	.91	.01	-.01	.06	.17	.11	.23	-				
8. Accessibility	3.78	.84	.34	.31	.01	.27	.31	.36	.02	-			
9. Diagnosticity	3.58	.99	.25	.27	-.01	.24	.26	.38	.05	.58	-		
10. Credibility	4.02	.85	.28	.33	-.06	.20	.14	.26	-.10	.62	.61	-	
11. Organizational attractiveness	4.40	.80	.33	.36	-.08	.22	.14	.32	-.06	.41	.42	.38	-
12. Organizational prestige	3.95	.85	.34	.34	-.04	.24	.07	.31	-.09	.36	.35	.44	.49

Note. Correlations $\geq |.12|$ are significant at $p < .05$, correlations $\geq |.15|$ are significant at $p < .01$.

TEST OF MEASUREMENT MODEL

We used EQS 6.1 (Bentler, 2003) to test the fit of the measurement model. This is a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) model in which each indicator variable is specified to load only on the latent variable it was purported to measure (see the Measures section). In addition, each latent variable was allowed to covary with the other latent variables. No structural relationships between the twelve latent variables were specified.

We used several goodness-of-fit indices to assess how the CFA model represented the data. Specifically, the comparative fit index (CFI) and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) were inspected. For the CFI, values > .95 constitute good fit and values > .90 acceptable fit (Medsker, Williams, & Holahan, 1994). For the RMSEA, values < .05 constitute good fit, values in the .05 to .08 range acceptable fit, values in the .08 to .10 range marginal fit, and values > .10 poor fit (Browne & Cudeck, 1992).

Mardia's normalized coefficient of multivariate kurtosis was greater than 3, indicating that the assumption of multivariate normality was violated. Therefore, we used maximum likelihood estimation but added the robust option in EQS that corrects the χ^2 statistic as well as the standard errors of the parameter estimates for nonnormality (Satorra & Bentler, 1994).

The goodness-of-fit indices showed that the measurement model produced a good fit to the data, $\chi^2(398) = 423.60$ ($p > .05$), CFI = .994, and RMSEA = .015. Inspection of the factor loadings showed that each variable had a highly significant loading on the factor it was purported to measure, indicating satisfactory convergent validity. In addition, in support of the discriminant validity of the measures, a one-factor model produced a poor fit to the data, $\chi^2(464) = 2812.33$ ($p < .01$), CFI = .444, and RMSEA = .130.

TEST OF STRUCTURAL MODEL AND HYPOTHESES

Given that the measurement model produced a good fit to the data, we tested our theoretical model of word-of-mouth as a recruitment source in the second step of our analysis. In this model, structural relationships between the latent variables were added as shown in Figure 1. The goodness-of-fit indices showed that overall our hypothesized model provided a good fit to the data, $\chi^2(423) = 488.37$ ($p < .05$), CFI = .985, and RMSEA = .023. Standardized parameter estimates for the coefficients related to our hypotheses are presented in Figure 2.

Our first set of hypotheses suggested that extraversion, conscientiousness, and self-monitoring would be positively related to the use of positive and negative word-of-mouth. As shown in Figure 2, we found only some support for these hypothesized individual difference antecedents. Potential applicants higher in extraversion made more use of positive word-of-mouth (.19, $p < .05$) but made less use of negative word-of-mouth (-.19, $p < .05$), providing only partial support for Hypothesis 1a. Conscientiousness and self-monitoring were not significantly related to word-of-mouth, failing to support Hypotheses 1b and 1c.

Next, our theoretical model proposed tie strength and source expertise as situational antecedents of word-of-mouth. In support of Hypothesis 2a, potential applicants made more use of both positive (.38, $p < .01$) and negative word-of-mouth (.24, $p < .01$) when it was provided by a stronger tie. In addition, the expertise of the word-of-mouth source was positively related to positive (.35, $p < .01$) and negative word-of-mouth (.13, $p < .05$), supporting Hypothesis 2b.

Our third set of hypotheses related to the direct effects of word-of-mouth on its consequences. Figure 2 indicates that positive word-of-mouth was positively associated with organizational attractiveness (.25, $p < .01$) and with organizational prestige (.32, $p < .01$), lending support to Hypotheses 3a and 4a. We also found support for Hypotheses 3b and 4b, which suggested that negative word-of-mouth would be negatively associated with organizational attractiveness (-.16, $p < .01$) and with organizational prestige (-.20, $p < .01$).

Antecedents

Extraversion

Conscientiousness

Self-monitoring

Tie strength

Source expertise

Word-of-mouth

Positive word-of-mouth

Negative word-of-mouth

Mediators

Accessibility

Diagnosticity

Credibility

Consequences

Organizational attractiveness

Organizational prestige

-.19*   .19*

.11

.01

-.10

.10

.38**

.24**

.35**   .13*

.59**   .16

.25**

.53**

.40**   -.16**   .32**   .26**   .00

-.14*

-.11   .02   .09
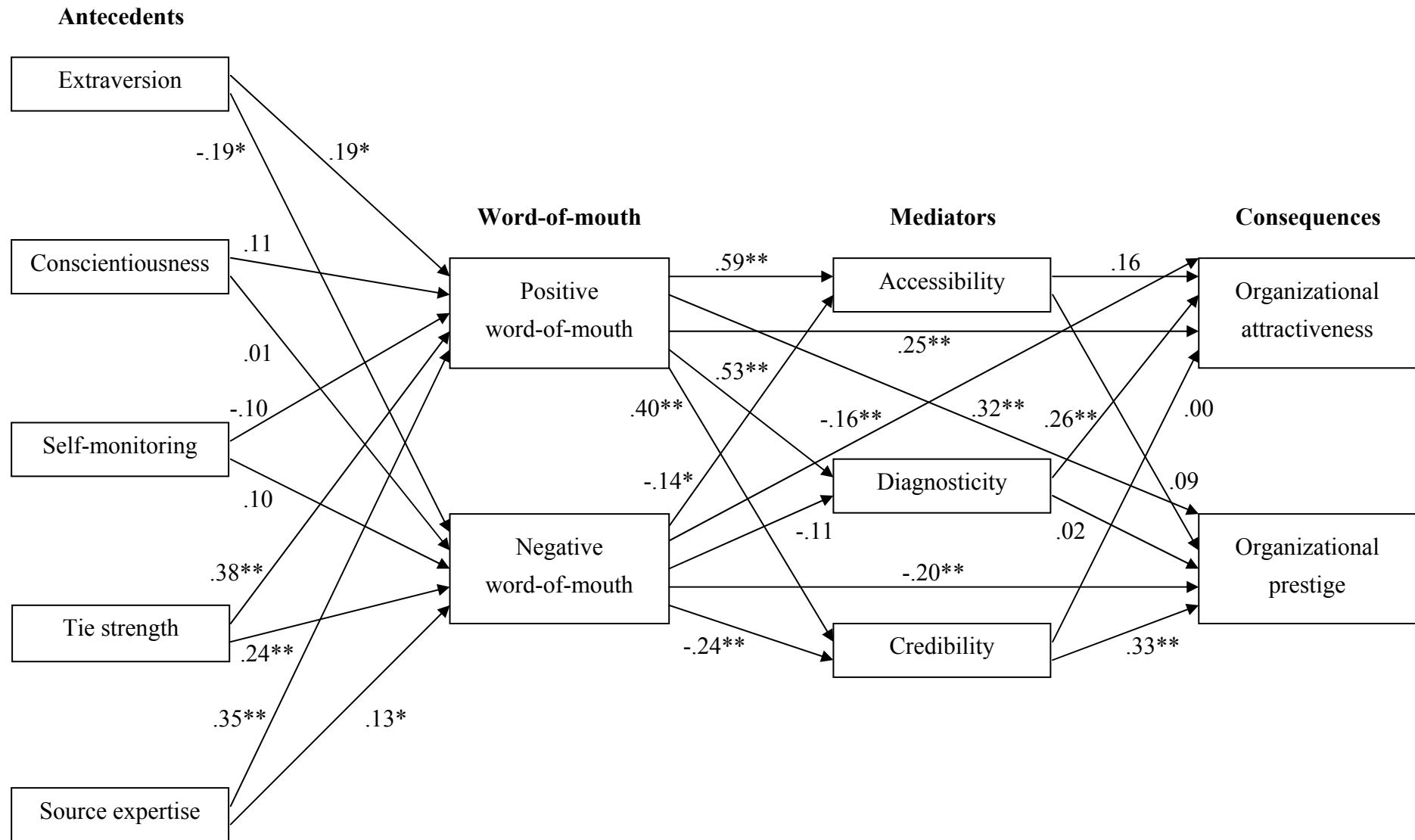
-.20**

-.24**   .33**

Figure 2. Standardized Path Coefficients for the Hypothesized Model. * _p_ < .05. ** _p_ < .01.

Finally, our theoretical model postulated that accessibility, diagnosticity, and credibility would partially mediate the relationships between word-of-mouth and its consequences. The results for the previous set of hypotheses already indicated that the effects of word-of-mouth were not completely mediated as all direct effects were significant (Baron & Kenny, 1986; MacKinnon et al., 2002). Contrary to Hypothesis 5a, Figure 2 shows that accessibility did not mediate the effects of word-of-mouth as it was not significantly related to organizational attractiveness and prestige (Baron & Kenny, 1986; MacKinnon et al., 2002). Given that positive word-of-mouth was positively associated with the diagnosticity of employment information (.53, $p < .01$) and that diagnosticity was positively related to organizational attractiveness (.26, $p < .01$), diagnosticity partially mediated the effect of positive word-of-mouth on organizational attractiveness, providing partial support for Hypothesis 5b (Baron & Kenny, 1986; MacKinnon et al., 2002). At last, Figure 2 suggests that positive word-of-mouth was positively associated with the credibility of the employment information obtained by potential applicants (.40, $p < .01$) whereas negative word-of-mouth was negatively associated with credibility (-.24, $p < .01$). Given that credibility was positively related to organizational prestige (.33, $p < .01$), it partially mediated the effects of positive and negative word-of-mouth on organizational prestige, providing partial support for Hypothesis 5c (Baron & Kenny, 1986; MacKinnon et al., 2002).

In addition to the overall fit of the model and the parameter estimates, the proportion of variance (R^2) explained by our theoretical model should be considered as well. Taken together, the antecedents accounted for 50% of the variance in positive word-of-mouth but only for 8% of the variance in negative word-of-mouth. Positive and negative word-of-mouth together with the mediating variables explained 32% of the variance in organizational attractiveness and 40% of the variance in organizational prestige.

DISCUSSION

Previous recruitment research has typically examined individual potential applicants in social isolation. The present paper addresses this gap in the recruitment literature by developing and testing a comprehensive model of word-of-mouth used as a recruitment source by potential applicants. We investigated individual differences as well as situational variables as possible antecedents of both positive and negative word-of-mouth. We further examined the effects of positive and negative word-of-mouth on organizational attractiveness and prestige and tried to gain a better understanding of these relationships by exploring theoretically relevant mediating variables.

Our study yields several conclusions that contribute to the literature on recruitment sources and word-of-mouth. First, we found evidence that positive and negative word-of-mouth are related but distinct constructs. Not only does this make sense theoretically as word-of-mouth is an external recruitment source that can contain both positive and negative information (Cable & Turban, 2001), but it was also empirically demonstrated by their moderate correlation. In addition, we observed that positive and negative word-of-mouth had different relationships with their antecedents and even more so with their mediating variables and outcomes. Therefore, we recommend that future research conceptualize and measure positive and negative word-of-mouth as two distinct constructs.

To our knowledge, the present study was the first to investigate the antecedents of word-of-mouth as a recruitment source. Overall, our results were more supportive of situational differences in using word-of-mouth than of individual differences, implying that source characteristics might be more important in explaining word-of-mouth than the characteristics of the recipients. More specifically, we found that potential applicants made more use of both positive and negative word-of-mouth when it was provided by a stronger tie and when the expertise of the source was higher. These antecedents might operate in two different ways (Bansal & Voyer, 2000). First, potential applicants might be more likely to request word-of-mouth information from people they know better and

from people who they think possess valuable information about the organization (Brown & Reingen, 1987; Bansal & Voyer, 2000). Second, people who know the potential applicant better and who have personal experiences with the organization might be more likely to provide unsolicited word-of-mouth information (Brown & Reingen, 1987; Mangold et al., 1999).

With respect to individual differences, only extraversion was significantly related to word-of-mouth. Potential applicants higher in extraversion made more use of positive word-of-mouth whereas negative word-of-mouth was used more frequently by potential applicants lower in extraversion. Given that extraverts are more sociable and talkative (Goldberg, 1990), this might reflect a difference in the degree to which potential applicants actively sought word-of-mouth information (Bansal & Voyer, 2000). In fact, previous marketing research (Mangold et al., 1999) has found that word-of-mouth initiated by the recipient was more likely to be positive. Conversely, word-of-mouth initiated by the source was more likely to be negative. Therefore, it might be that potential applicants higher in extraversion more actively seek word-of-mouth, increasing the probability of receiving positive information. On the contrary, potential applicants lower in extraversion might have a greater chance of passively receiving negative word-of-mouth information. In addition, there might be a difference in interpretation. Given that extraverts are more optimistic (Goldberg, 1990), they may be more prone to classify word-of-mouth information as positive than as negative. Our results further indicated that conscientiousness and self-monitoring did not operate as antecedents of word-of-mouth. It might be that these traits are related to actively seeking word-of-mouth, but not to the likelihood of passively receiving it. In fact, contrary to extraversion, conscientiousness and self-monitoring are not necessarily related to the size of someone's social network (Goldberg, 1990; Snyder & Gangestad, 1986). All of this implies that taking into account the degree to which word-of-mouth information is actively sought might constitute a valuable extension of a theoretical model of word-of-mouth as a recruitment source.

Our findings further underline the importance of gaining a better understanding of word-of-mouth as it was related to organizational attractiveness and prestige, two crucial recruitment outcomes in the applicant population (Chapman et al., 2005; Highhouse et al., 2003). Whereas positive word-of-mouth had a positive influence on these outcomes, negative word-of-mouth had a negative impact. This implies that negative word-of-mouth might help to explain why some potential applicants decide not to apply and disappear from the recruitment process (Murphy, 1986). Given that this was the first study to investigate negative word-of-mouth, we extended previous research that tended to focus on recruitment sources providing positive information to potential applicants (e.g., Collins & Stevens, 2002).

On the basis of the accessibility-diagnosticity model (Feldman & Lynch, 1988; Herr et al., 1991) and the source credibility framework (Eisend, 2004; Pornpitakpan, 2004), we proposed several partial mediators to explain the consequences of word-of-mouth. In line with the accessibility-diagnosticity framework, positive word-of-mouth contributed positively to the perceived accessibility and diagnosticity of the employment information obtained by potential applicants. As most of the other recruitment sources such as advertising provide mainly positive information (Cable & Turban, 2001), additional positive information from an independent source probably increases potential applicants' perceptions of having sufficient, clear, and easy-to-understand information. Conversely, we found that negative word-of-mouth was negatively associated with accessibility and was not related to diagnosticity. It seems plausible that receiving negative word-of-mouth information in addition to mainly positive information from other sources leads potential applicants to believe that they do not yet have enough information to evaluate the organization as an employer and that the information that they do have is more unclear and difficult to understand. However, negative information in itself is usually perceived as more diagnostic than positive information (Feldman & Lynch, 1988; Herr et al., 1991). These two opposing effects might explain why negative word-of-mouth and diagnosticity were unrelated. Similar findings were observed for credibility, providing support for the source credibility framework

(Eisend, 2004; Pornpitakpan, 2004). If positive word-of-mouth backs up the claims of other mainly positive recruitment sources, potential applicants probably have more trust in the total employment information. On the contrary, if the information from other sources is contradicted by negative word-of-mouth, the total employment information should be perceived as less credible.

We further found that the effect of positive word-of-mouth on organizational attractiveness was partially mediated by diagnosticity whereas the effects of both positive and negative word-of-mouth on organizational prestige were partially mediated by credibility. This implies that the accessibility-diagnosticity model might be more relevant for explaining the effects of word-of-mouth on organizational attractiveness while the source credibility framework seems to shed more light on the effects of word-of-mouth on organizational prestige. This might be attributed to the differences between these two recruitment outcomes. Organizational attractiveness involves an active and individual evaluation of the organization as an employer by the potential applicant that might be mainly influenced by the content of employment information (Highhouse et al., 2003). This relates mostly to the accessibility-diagnosticity model, which tries to predict the likelihood that information is used in forming evaluations (Feldman & Lynch, 1988; Herr et al., 1991). One of the predictions of the framework is that accessible information is not used when more diagnostic information is available (Herr et al., 1991; Simmons, Bickart, & Lynch, 1993), which might explain why diagnosticity but not accessibility was significantly related to organizational attractiveness in our study. Conversely, organizational prestige is not really an evaluation but rather a more passive perception of a social consensus regarding the organization as an employer (Highhouse et al., 2003). Therefore, it might be influenced more by the valence and source of employment information rather than by its specific content, which relates to the source credibility framework postulating that recruitment sources vary in the degree to which potential applicants perceive them as providing credible information about the organization (Eisend, 2004; Fisher et al., 1979; Pornpitakpan, 2004).

This study is not without limitations. First, in accordance with numerous calls for more research situated in the first phase of recruitment (e.g., Rynes & Cable, 2003), we developed and tested a theoretical model of word-of-mouth used as a recruitment source by *potential* applicants. This implies that our findings might not generalize to actual applicants nor to the general population of job seekers. For instance, we found that potential applicants made less use of negative word-of-mouth than of positive word-of-mouth. However, it is possible that job seekers who receive negative word-of-mouth never even become potential applicants, implying that the occurrence of negative word-of-mouth may be higher in the general population. Therefore, future research should develop and test alternative models of word-of-mouth adapted to the specific characteristics of these other populations. For instance, with respect to actual applicants, other recruitment outcomes should be incorporated in the model such as acceptance intentions and job choice (Chapman et al., 2005). Second, our results are based on cross-sectional self-reports to a single survey. Therefore, some of our findings might be attributed to common method variance. In addition, although we presented logical and theoretical arguments for the relationships depicted in Figure 1, it is not possible to ascertain the causal sequencing of the variables. Finally, our model was tested in a sample of potential applicants targeted by the Belgian Defense. It might be that this specific context affected some of the observed relationships. Therefore, future research should test our model of word-of-mouth in other settings and countries.

In terms of other future research directions, more studies should investigate negative word-of-mouth. For instance, the antecedents in our model explained only 8% of the variance in using negative word-of-mouth versus 50% for positive word-of-mouth. Future research should investigate other possible antecedents of negative word-of-mouth such as core self-evaluations (Judge, Erez, Bono, & Thoresen, 2003) and negative affect (Watson, Clark, McIntyre, & Hamaker, 1992). Another fruitful area for future research might be to investigate the antecedents of providing positive and negative word-of-mouth among the sources of word-of-mouth information. On a practical level, such research would provide valuable information for organizations trying to influence word-of-

mouth. Along these lines, Sundaram, Mitra, and Webster (1998) found that consumers engaged in positive word-of-mouth for altruistic, product involvement, and self-enhancement reasons. Negative word-of-mouth was motivated by altruism, anxiety reduction, vengeance, and advice seeking.

Finally, several practical implications follow from our study. Organizations should try to stimulate positive word-of-mouth and to avoid negative word-of-mouth because of their impact on important recruitment outcomes. Even though word-of-mouth is an external recruitment source, organizations can try to influence it indirectly through other recruitment activities such as image management, campus recruitment, building relationships with key influentials and opinion leaders (e.g., career counselor, class president), employee referral programs (e.g., providing referral bonuses), or internships. Our finding that potential applicants were more likely to receive word-of-mouth information from strong ties and from people with higher expertise provides organizations with specific clues for how to influence word-of-mouth most effectively. For instance, organizations might decide to aim their recruitment communication not only at potential applicants but also at their friends and family. In fact, a growing number of job sites are installing "Refer a Friend" programs. In addition, organizing family fairs or open house events might increase the involvement of potential applicants' family. Furthermore, as much of word-of-mouth is provided by an organization's own employees, the organization should ensure that all employees have easy access to accurate and complete information about the organization and vacant positions.

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CHAPTER 5

INVESTIGATING WEB-BASED RECRUITMENT SOURCES:

EMPLOYEE TESTIMONIALS VERSUS WORD-OF-MOUSE[1]

Even though the internet has dramatically changed recruitment practices, many web-based recruitment sources have not yet been investigated. The present study examines the effects of web-based employee testimonials and web-based word-of-mouth communication (i.e., "word-of-mouse") on several organizational attraction outcomes. The source credibility framework is used to compare these company-dependent and company-independent sources of employment information. In addition, we apply a person-environment fit perspective to investigate if the content of the recruitment message can moderate these effects. In a sample of potential applicants for a head nurse position, web-based word-of-mouth was associated with higher organizational attractiveness than web-based employee testimonials. However, potential applicants perceived a better fit, were more attracted, and applied more when testimonials provided person-person fit information instead of person-organization fit information. Conversely, word-of-mouth was associated with better subjective fit, higher organizational attractiveness, and more organizational pursuit behavior when it focused on person-organization fit instead of on person-person fit. Most of these observed effects were mediated by credibility perceptions.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade the internet has dramatically changed recruitment practices. For organizations, the internet provides an efficient and less costly means to provide more job and organizational information to potential applicants in a much more dynamic and consistent way than was the case in the past (Cober, Brown, Blumental, Doverspike, & Levy, 2000; Lievens & Harris, 2003). Internet recruitment has also substantially affected how potential applicants look for a job (Van Rooy, Alonso, & Fairchild, 2003). In the past, job seekers had to consult newspapers or contact acquaintances to locate a suitable job opening. In the internet age, however, job seekers can immediately search through thousands of available job openings.

Apart from the speed and quantity of the information provided through the internet, potential applicants also have a broader array of information available. On the one hand, there is a wealth of company-supplied information, which is typically placed on job boards or company websites (Lievens & Harris, 2003). Examples are job ads and employee testimonials (Geisheker, 2001). On the other hand, there also exists a lot of information about jobs and companies that is "going around" on the Internet (Dellarocas, 2003). Job seekers can easily and quickly search for such independent information about an organization from diverse sources such as employees' weblogs, chatrooms, electronic bulletin boards, and independent websites presenting company information (e.g., www.vault.com).

Paralleling these developments in practice, there is a growing trend in recruitment research to examine pre-hire sources of employment information other than recruitment advertising (Collins & Stevens, 2002; Van Hoye & Lievens, 2005). In fact, prior recruitment research has paid a lot of attention to official company information sources whereas more independent sources of information have largely been ignored (Cable & Turban, 2001; Rynes & Cable, 2003; Saks, 2005; Taylor & Collins, 2000). Similarly, previous research on web-based recruitment has focused on investigating how the characteristics of official

recruitment websites affect various reactions of potential applicants (Cober, Brown, Levy, Cober, & Keeping, 2003; Dineen, Ash, & Noe, 2002; Lievens & Harris, 2003; Tong, Duffy, Cross, Tsung, & Yen, 2005; Williamson, Lepak, & King, 2003). Along these lines, Cable and Turban (2001) suggested that:

> Any information source, ranging from company's brand advertisement to friends' word-of-mouth, has the potential to affect job seekers' employer knowledge (Cable et al., 2000). Unfortunately, several sources of organizational information suggested by the marketing literature have been relatively ignored in past recruitment research. (p. 132)

The present study starts to fill these gaps in recruitment research. Specifically, the source credibility framework (Eisend, 2004; Pornpitakpan, 2004) is applied to compare company-dependent sources of employment information to company-independent sources and to investigate their effects in a web-based environment. In addition, the person-environment fit perspective (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005) is used to examine if the content of the recruitment message can moderate these effects. In this study, company-dependent recruitment source is operationalized through web-based employee testimonials, whereas company-independent recruitment source is operationalized through web-based word-of-mouth (also known as "word-of-*mouse*").

STUDY BACKGROUND

COMPANY-DEPENDENT VERSUS COMPANY-INDEPENDENT RECRUITMENT SOURCES

Both on and off the internet, potential applicants receive employment information from a broad array of different sources including advertising, recruiters, publicity, and word-of-mouth. A key distinction can be made between company-dependent and company-independent recruitment sources (Cable & Turban, 2001). Company-dependent sources such as advertising are part of the organization's recruitment activities and can be directly controlled to

communicate a positive message to potential applicants. Conversely, company-independent sources such as word-of-mouth can only be influenced indirectly through other recruitment activities and can contain positive as well as negative information.

The source credibility framework can be applied to predict differential outcomes for these two main types of recruitment sources. This framework postulates that more credible sources of information are more persuasive in both changing attitudes and gaining behavioral compliance (Eisend, 2004; Pornpitakpan, 2004). Perceived credibility consists of the perceived accuracy, appropriateness, and believability of the communicated information and is largely determined by the trustworthiness and expertise of the information source (Allen, Van Scotter, & Otondo, 2004; Eisend, 2004; Pornpitakpan, 2004). This theory implies that recruitment sources vary in the degree to which potential applicants perceive them as providing credible employment information, which in turn might explain their different effects on recruitment outcomes (Allen et al., 2004; Breaugh & Starke, 2000; Cable & Turban, 2001; Fisher, Ilgen, & Hoyer, 1979). Compared to company-dependent sources, company-independent sources might be perceived as providing more credible information because they do not have the explicit purpose to promote the organization (Fisher et al., 1979; Van Hoye & Lievens, 2005).

Recruitment advertising represents the most typical example of a company-dependent recruitment source and can be defined as any paid form of non-personal presentation and promotion of an organization as an employer by the organization itself (Highhouse & Hoffman, 2001; Kotler & Keller, 2005). Examples include recruitment brochures and job opportunities webpages. In contrast to independent sources, recruitment advertising has received a considerable amount of research attention, demonstrating that it can influence organizational attraction (Barber & Roehling, 1993; Cable & Turban, 2001; Highhouse & Hoffman, 2001).

As a typical example of a company-independent recruitment source, word-of-mouth can be defined as an interpersonal communication, independent of the

organization's recruitment activities, about an organization as an employer or about specific jobs (Bone, 1995; Cable, Aiman-Smith, Mulvey, & Edwards, 2000; Collins & Stevens, 2002; Van Hoye & Lievens, 2005). Examples include conversations with friends and advice from independent experts. Even though word-of-mouth is typically associated with face-to-face communication, it can be provided through all sorts of media such as the telephone or the internet (Dellarocas, 2003; Herr, Kardes, & Kim, 1991; Smith & Vogt, 1995). In fact, the importance of web-based word-of-mouth has increased in practice, as shown by the emergence of e-mails, weblogs, chatrooms, electronic bulletin boards, and independent websites presenting interpersonal company information (Dellarocas, 2003). Although knowledge about word-of-mouth as a recruitment source is still scarce, a few studies have indicated that word-of-mouth can influence organizational attraction (Collins & Stevens, 2002; Van Hoye & Lievens, 2005).

The inability to directly control word-of-mouth represents both an advantage and a disadvantage. While it contributes to its credibility as a company-independent recruitment source (Van Hoye & Lievens, 2005), it makes it difficult, if not impossible for organizations to convey their recruitment message through word-of-mouth in exactly the way they want to. Using employee testimonials in recruitment advertising might help to address this problem by combining the advantages of a company-dependent recruitment source that can be directly controlled to promote a favorable image, with the characteristics of word-of-mouth as an interpersonal information source. In fact, employee testimonials can be seen as company-controlled imitations of word-of-mouth.

Marketing research suggests that the use of testimonials can increase the credibility and persuasive power of advertising (Feick & Higie, 1992; Mittelstaedt, Riesz, & Burns, 2000; Till, 1998). Hence, on recruitment websites organizations are increasingly having employees testify about their work experiences to inform and attract potential applicants (Geisheker, 2001). However, empirical research has lagged behind these new and innovative recruitment activities (Rynes & Cable, 2003; Saks, 2005; Taylor & Collins,

2000). In fact, as far as we know, no studies have scrutinized the effects of web-based employee testimonials on applicant attraction. Therefore, we do not know if these attempts to imitate word-of-mouth are successful or not. On the one hand, Fisher et al. (1979) found that employees and friends as sources of employment information had comparable effects: both were more credible and influential than recruiters. On the other hand, it might be that the greater organizational control of employee testimonials leads to a loss in credibility and influence compared to word-of-mouth that is truly independent of the organization (Pornpitakpan, 2004; Van Hoye & Lievens, 2005). Therefore, a key test of the effectiveness of employee testimonials consists of comparing their effects on important attraction outcomes to word-of-mouth. Given that we wanted to examine the effects of web-based testimonials, we compared them to web-based word-of-mouth, to avoid medium-related confound.

> *Hypothesis 1: Web-based word-of-mouth will lead to (a) better subjective fit, (b) higher organizational attractiveness, and (c) more organizational pursuit behavior than the web-based employee testimonial.*

> *Hypothesis 2: The effect of recruitment source on (a) subjective fit, (b) organizational attractiveness, and (c) organizational pursuit behavior will be mediated by credibility.*

RECRUITMENT MESSAGE: PERSON-PERSON FIT VERSUS PERSON-ORGANIZATION FIT

The source credibility framework (Eisend, 2004; Pornpitakpan, 2004) does not only propose a main effect of source credibility, but also postulates that the communicated message will moderate the effect of source credibility on persuasion. This implies that the credibility and impact of word-of-mouth and employee testimonials might vary as a function of the content of the recruitment message. The person-environment fit perspective (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005) can be applied to better understand the effect of recruitment message as a moderating variable. In the context of recruitment, the person-environment fit perspective states that potential applicants are more attracted to work

environments with characteristics compatible with their own characteristics. This implies that, to increase organizational attraction, an effective recruitment message should emphasize similarities between the characteristics of potential applicants and the work environment that the company can offer them. Although several aspects of the work environment can be communicated in the recruitment message, a main distinction can be made between messages based on person-organization fit and on person-person fit.

A recruitment message emphasizing the similarities between potential applicants and the organization itself is in line with a person-organization fit perspective, which suggests that potential applicants are more attracted to organizations with characteristics similar to their own (Kristof, 1996; Schneider, 1987). A large amount of research has provided support for the assumption that the effects of organizational characteristics on applicant attraction are moderated by individual difference variables (e.g., Cable & Judge, 1994, 1996; Judge & Bretz, 1992; Judge & Cable, 1997; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Rentsch & McEwen, 2002; Turban & Keon, 1993).

A recruitment message describing the similarities between potential applicants and the organization's current employees is based on a person-person fit perspective, which proposes that potential applicants will be more attracted to organizations with employees similar to themselves (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). In contrast to the research attention for person-organization fit, there have been no studies investigating the effects of person-person fit in a recruitment context. However, previous research in other domains has repeatedly demonstrated that interpersonal similarity is related to attraction (see similar-to-me effect or the similarity-attraction hypothesis, Byrne, 1971; Cialdini, 2001; Strauss, Barrick, & Connerley, 2001; Van Vianen, 2005). In addition, social identity theory argues that people define their self-concepts by choosing membership in organizations consisting of people similar to themselves (Tsui, Egan, & O'Reilly, 1992).

In line with the source credibility framework (Eisend, 2004; Pornpitakpan, 2004), we expected that the recruitment message (person-organization fit versus

person-person fit) would moderate the effect of recruitment source (employee testimonial versus word-of-mouth) on credibility and organizational attraction. For the employee testimonial, we hypothesized that the person-person fit recruitment message would be more credible and therefore more effective. The employee testimonial is a company-dependent recruitment source that potential applicants are less likely to trust because it tries to "sell the organization" (Breaugh & Starke, 2000; Cable & Turban, 2001). However, this ulterior motive is probably less evident when the employee describes herself instead of the organization as a whole (Fisher et al., 1979). Conversely, we expected that for word-of-mouth the recruitment message would be more credible and effective if it would focus on person-organization fit. Although word-of-mouth is probably trusted more as a company-independent recruitment source, it is sometimes perceived as having less expertise than company-dependent recruitment sources (Cable & Turban, 2001). In particular, if information on person-person fit is provided outside of the organizational context, potential applicants might think that this information is not representative for all employees nor for the organization as a whole. Therefore, potential applicants are probably less likely to generalize the person-person fit recruitment message to their global perceptions of the organization than the person-organization fit message.

> *Hypothesis 3: The recruitment message will moderate the effect of recruitment source on (a) subjective fit, (b) organizational attractiveness, and (c) organizational pursuit behavior: The web-based employee testimonial (word-of-mouth) will be more effective when the message focuses on person-person fit (person-organization fit).*

> *Hypothesis 4: The interaction effect of recruitment source and recruitment message on (a) subjective fit, (b) organizational attractiveness, and (c) organizational pursuit behavior will be mediated by credibility.*

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

A sample was drawn from the population of potential applicants targeted by hospitals recruiting head nurses or nursing managers (Barber, 1998). This is a particularly relevant population for studying recruitment issues because of the worldwide shortage of nurses. For instance, in the United States there was a 6% shortage of nurses in 2000, projected to expand to a 12% shortage by 2010 (Crow & Hartman, 2005). We went to a school offering a graduate nursing management program and asked registered nurses attending an HR management course in the final year of the program to participate in a web-based recruitment simulation in exchange for extra course credit. A sample of 70 potential applicants participated in all stages of the simulation. The majority of our sample was female (84%), with an average age of 25 years (SD = 4.74). Most potential applicants had already applied for a job in the past (90%), averaging four previous applications. The majority of the sample (81%) had some previous work experience. More than half of the potential applicants were currently employed (57%), mainly as a nurse (60%).

DESIGN AND PROCEDURE

A 2 × 2 between-subjects factorial design was applied with recruitment source (web-based employee testimonial or web-based word-of-mouth) and recruitment message (person-organization fit or person-person fit) as experimental variables. Participants were randomly assigned to one of these four conditions.

The following recruitment simulation was used. Participants were asked to visit the website of a medium-sized regional hospital. The hospital website provided general background and employment information about the organization. The job opportunities page described a vacant position for a head nurse. To ensure that potential applicants visited all parts of the website, the pages making up the site were linked serially (Dineen et al., 2002). After visiting the same hospital website, half of the potential applicants were presented with an employee

testimonial that was part of the same website. The other half was directed to another website where they received word-of-mouth from a friend not employed by the hospital. In both cases, the recruitment message described either the organization or the employee. To enhance ecological validity, all materials were modeled after an actual hospital (recruitment) website as well as job advertisements and testimonials relevant for a position as a head nurse. To control for reputation, the name of the organization was changed into a fictitious name.

After visiting the website and being exposed to one of the experimental recruitment communications, potential applicants completed a web-based questionnaire to assess subjective fit, organizational attractiveness, organizational pursuit behavior, credibility, and some demographic variables. Finally, participants completed an online manipulation check. About two weeks after the simulation, potential applicants received a debriefing e-mail, explaining the study's purpose and revealing that it was a simulation. They also received feedback on their scores on the personality and preferred organization personality scales measured in the prestudy (see Materials section).

MATERIALS

As a manipulation of the experimental variable *recruitment source*, potential applicants were presented with either a web-based employee testimonial or web-based word-of-mouth. In the testimonial condition, an additional page was added to the hospital website entitled "Employee testimonials". On this page, a head nurse working for the organization provided the recruitment message. In the word-of-mouth condition, participants were linked to a company-independent website where they received the same information from a friend also working as a head nurse, but in another organization. To avoid confound, a picture of the same person was presented in both conditions. The name and age of this person were kept constant as well. A woman was chosen because the prestudy indicated that the majority of our sample of nurses was female. To strengthen the manipulation, she was wearing a nurse's uniform and was standing against a neutral background in the testimonial condition. In the word-

of-mouth condition, she was shown in a casual environment wearing casual clothes.

To develop an adequate *recruitment message*, a prestudy with the same sample was conducted about a month prior to the main study. To be able to emphasize similarities with potential applicants' characteristics in the recruitment message, a web-based questionnaire measured their individual and preferred organization personality (see Measures section). Three criteria were used to select the individual and organizational characteristics to base the recruitment message on. First, potential applicants had to score high on a given characteristic, as evidenced by high mean, minimum, and maximum scores. Second, potential applicants' scores had to be relatively homogeneous, as evidenced by a small standard deviation. Third, given that we intended to compare a recruitment message describing the organization to a message focusing on the employee, we wanted to base both messages on the same personality factor to avoid confound. In terms of individual personality, Table 1 shows that agreeableness and conscientiousness best met the first two criteria. In terms of preferred organization personality, agreeableness (e.g., socially oriented organizations that provide support to their employees, help them, and invest in them) was associated with the highest mean score and the smallest standard deviation. Therefore, in accordance with the third criterion, agreeableness was chosen as a basis for developing the content of the recruitment message. In support of the external validity of our operationalization, previous research has found that employed nurses tend to score high on agreeableness *and* that agreeableness is positively associated with performance in nursing and other service-oriented jobs (Day & Bedeian, 1995; Frei & McDaniel, 1998). Consequently, the recruitment message was manipulated by describing either the organization as a whole high in agreeableness (i.e., person-organization fit) or a head nurse high in agreeableness, corresponding to the vacant position (i.e., person-person fit). The specific wording of the recruitment message was based on items from the individual personality and preferred organization personality measures used in the prestudy.

Table 1. Internal Consistencies, Means, Standard Deviations, Minima, and Maxima of Individual Personality and Preferred Organization Personality (*N* = 70).

	α	*M*	*SD*	Minimum	Maximum
Individual personality					
Extraversion	.86	6.25	1.36	2.67	9.00
Agreeableness	.61	7.27	.82	4.67	8.67
Conscientiousness	.86	7.52	.86	4.33	9.00
Emotional Stability	.91	5.74	1.68	2.00	9.00
Openness to Experience	.63	6.83	1.01	3.67	8.67
Preferred organization personality					
Extraversion	.78	5.27	.91	2.60	7.00
Agreeableness	.85	6.19	.51	4.17	7.00
Conscientiousness	.78	5.71	.58	3.80	6.70
Emotional Stability	.72	5.29	.71	3.50	6.83
Openness to Experience	.88	5.91	.68	4.33	7.00

Note. Individual personality variables were rated on a 9-point bipolar scale. Preferred organization personality variables were rated on a 7-point scale, ranging from 1 = *completely disagree* to 7 = *completely agree*.

The combination of these two experimental variables resulted in four different versions of the recruitment communication. An overview of the operationalization of these four conditions is provided in Table 2.

MEASURES

Prestudy measures. First, the Big Five Bipolar Markers were used to draw up a personality profile of our sample of potential applicants (Goldberg, 1992; Mervielde, 1992). Each factor was measured by three 9-point bipolar items. All factor scales had acceptable internal consistencies (see Table 1). Second, the job and organizational preferences of our sample were assessed by the 43-item Organizational Big Five Inventory, which enables commensurate measurement with our measure of individual personality (Van Oudenhoven, Prins, Bakker,

Schipper, & Tromp, 2003). Five to twelve items per factor were assessed on a 7-point rating scale, ranging from 1 = *completely disagree* to 7 = *completely agree*. All factor scales had satisfactory internal consistencies (see Table 1).

Subjective fit. A 3-item scale developed by Judge and Cable (1997) was used to assess potential applicants' own perception of the degree of fit with the organization. An example item is "To what degree do your values, goals, and personality match this organization and its current employees?". The items were rated on a 7-point rating scale, ranging from 1 = *not at all* to 7 = *completely*. The internal consistency of this scale was .90.

Organizational attractiveness. Potential applicants' attitude towards the organization as an employer was measured by a 5-item scale from Highhouse, Lievens, and Sinar (2003). An example item is "For me, this organization would be a good place to work". The items were rated on a 7-point rating scale, ranging from 1 = *completely disagree* to 7 = *completely agree*. The internal consistency of the scale was .92.

Organizational pursuit behavior. To have an indication of how many people would apply for a job in the hospital, potential applicants could provide their e-mail address if they wanted the hospital to contact them about current or future job opportunities. Answers were coded as 0 = *did not provide e-mail* or 1 = *provided e-mail*. A similar measure has been used in previous research to assess organizational pursuit behavior, which is related to the quantity of the applicant pool (Barber, 1998; Highhouse et al., 2003). As already noted, in the debriefing e-mail people were told that e-mail addresses were not actually passed to the hospital because the recruitment communication was part of a simulation.

Credibility. A 3-item scale adapted from Fisher et al. (1979) was used to measure the perceived credibility of the recruitment source. An example item is "I consider this person to be an extremely credible source of information about the organization". The items were rated on a 7-point rating scale, ranging from 1 = *completely disagree* to 7 = *completely agree*. The internal consistency of the scale was .79.

Table 2. Operationalization of Recruitment Message by Recruitment Source.

	Employee testimonial	Word-of-mouth
Person-organization fit	In the Saint-John Hospital the social factor is very important. Helping and supporting others, that is what it is all about. You can feel that the Saint-John Hospital supports its employees and as an employee it is clear where you stand.	In the Saint-John Hospital the social factor is very important. Helping and supporting others, that is what it is all about. You can feel that the Saint-John Hospital supports its employees and as an employee it is clear where you stand.
Person-person fit	For me, others come first. As a head nurse, I try not to keep a distance, but to be helpful and modest. When I have to take important decisions, I discuss them with the team and we usually decide together.	For a head nurse in the Saint-John Hospital, others come first. As a head nurse, you try not to keep a distance, but to be helpful and modest. When important decisions have to be taken, the head nurse discusses them with the team and they usually decide together.

Demographic variables. Potential applicants were asked to fill out their age, gender, job search experience, work experience, employment status, and current job title.

MANIPULATION CHECK

To check the successful manipulation of *recruitment source*, participants were asked to indicate whether the person providing the recruitment message was an employee of the organization or not. All potential applicants correctly perceived that this person was an employee in the testimonial condition or that this person was not an employee in the word-of-mouth condition, enabling an accurate comparison of web-based employee testimonials and web-based word-of-mouth.

The manipulation check also examined potential applicants' perceptions of the *recruitment message*. Specifically, they were asked to assess both the perceived agreeableness of the hospital (e.g., "In this hospital the social factor is very important"; $\alpha = .68$) and the perceived agreeableness of its employees (e.g., "For a head nurse in this hospital, others come first"; $\alpha = .58$) on two items, developed on the basis of the operationalization of the recruitment message. All items were rated on a 7-point rating scale, ranging from 1 = *completely disagree* to 7 = *completely agree*. In line with our operationalization of the recruitment message, a first independent samples *t*-test indicated that the perceived agreeableness of the hospital was higher for the person-organization fit message ($M = 5.64$, $SD = .94$) than for the person-person fit message ($M = 4.96$, $SD = .86$), $t(68) = -3.19$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .13$. A second independent samples *t*-test indicated that the perceived agreeableness of the hospital's employees was higher for the person-person fit message ($M = 5.36$, $SD = 1.42$) than for the person-organization fit message ($M = 4.43$, $SD = .99$), $t(61) = 3.17$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .13$.

Table 3. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Between Study Variables ($N = 70$).

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Recruitment source[a]	.49	.50	-				
2. Recruitment message[b]	.50	.50	.00	-			
3. Subjective fit	4.63	1.12	.11	.10	-		
4. Organizational attractiveness	4.71	1.19	.28**	.09	.76***	-	
5. Organizational pursuit behavior[c]	.63	.49	.10	.06	.19	.22*	-
6. Credibility	4.68	1.09	.34***	-.04	.39***	.33***	.11

Note. All continuous variables were rated on a 7-point scale, ranging from 1 = *completely disagree* to 7 = *completely agree*.

[a] 0 = *employee testimonial*, 1 = *word-of-mouth*. [b] 0 = *person-person fit*, 1 = *person-organization fit*. [c] 0 = *did not provide e-mail*, 1 = *provided e-mail*.

* $p < .10$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$.

RESULTS

Means, standard deviations, and correlations among all variables are presented in Table 3. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to analyze the effects of recruitment source and message on subjective fit, organizational attractiveness, and credibility. Given that organizational pursuit behavior is a dichotomous variable, a logistic regression analysis was performed to examine the effects of recruitment source and message. In support of Hypothesis 1, we found a multivariate main effect of recruitment source, $F(3, 64) = 5.45$, $p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .20$. The univariate main effect of recruitment source was significant for organizational attractiveness, $F(1, 66) = 6.00$, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .08$, and for credibility, $F(1, 66) = 8.91$, $p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .12$, but not for subjective fit, $F(1, 66) = .88$, $p > .10$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$. Web-based word-of-mouth was associated with higher organizational attractiveness ($M = 5.05$, $SD = 1.04$) and was perceived as more credible ($M = 5.10$, $SD = .68$) than the web-based employee testimonial ($M = 4.39$, $SD = 1.24$, and $M = 4.32$, $SD = 1.17$, respectively). The logistic regression analysis indicated that the effect of recruitment source on organizational pursuit behavior was not significant, $B = .24$, Wald(1) $= .84$, $p > .10$. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was only partially supported.

In support of Hypothesis 3, we found a multivariate interaction effect of recruitment source and message, $F(3, 64) = 2.42$, $p < .10$, partial $\eta^2 = .10$. Inspection of univariate results revealed that this interaction effect was significant for subjective fit, $F(1, 66) = 3.94$, $p = .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .06$, for organizational attractiveness, $F(1, 66) = 4.63$, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .07$, and for credibility, $F(1, 66) = 4.45$, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .06$. As shown in Table 4, the web-based employee testimonial was associated with better subjective fit, higher organizational attractiveness, and higher credibility when the recruitment message focused on person-person fit instead of on person-organization fit. The reverse was true for web-based word-of-mouth as potential applicants perceived a better fit, were more attracted, and reported higher credibility when the

recruitment message provided person-organization fit information instead of person-person fit information. Figure 1 illustrates this interaction effect for subjective fit. In addition, the logistic regression analysis indicated that the interaction effect of recruitment source and message on organizational pursuit behavior was also significant, $B = .54$, Wald(1) $= 4.02$, $p < .05$. More people applied when the web-based employee testimonial emphasized person-person fit (67%) instead of person-organization fit (50%). For web-based word-of-mouth, more people applied when the message focused on person-organization fit (82%) than on person-person fit (53%). Therefore, full support was found for Hypothesis 3. It should be noted that none of the multivariate or univariate main effects of recruitment message were significant.
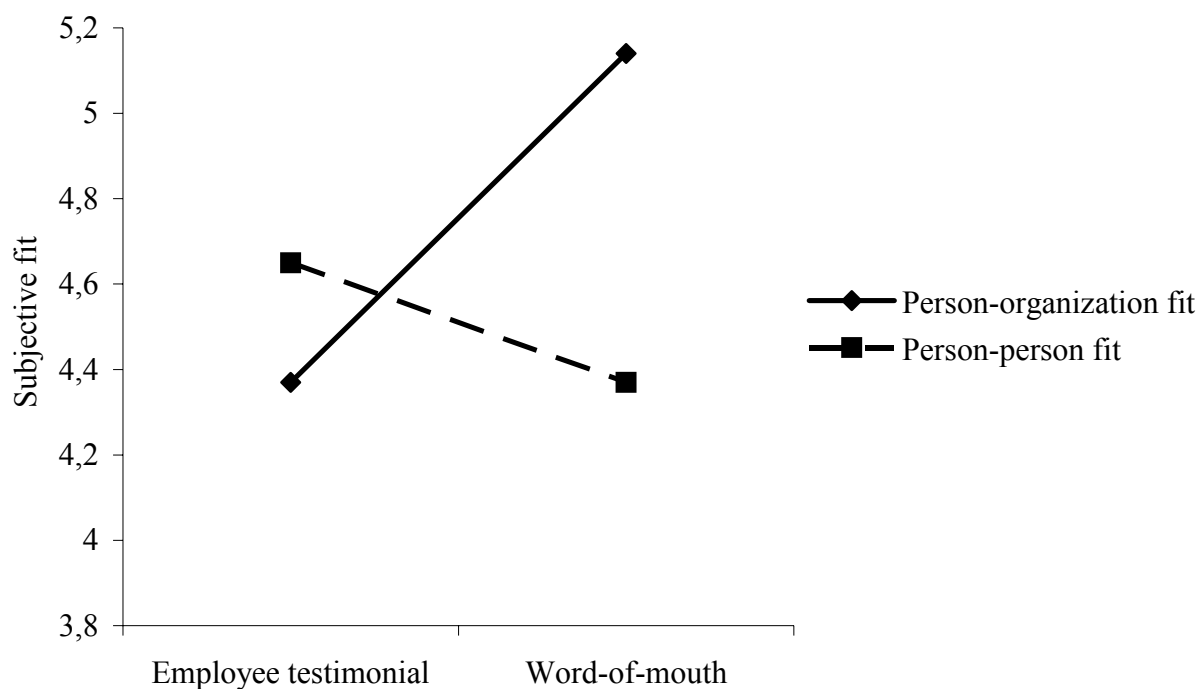
Figure 1. Interaction Effect of Recruitment Source and Recruitment Message on Subjective Fit.

Table 4. Means and Standard Deviations of Dependent Variables by Recruitment Source and Recruitment Message ($N = 70$).

	Employee testimonial ($n = 36$)				Word-of-mouth ($n = 34$)			
	Person-organization fit ($n = 18$)		Person-person fit ($n = 18$)		Person-organization fit ($n = 17$)		Person-person fit ($n = 17$)	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Subjective fit	4.37	1.21	4.65	1.14	5.14	.91	4.37	1.09
Organizational attractiveness	4.21	1.41	4.57	1.07	5.45	.80	4.65	1.11
Organizational pursuit behavior [a]	.50	.51	.67	.49	.82	.39	.53	.51
Credibility	4.04	1.35	4.61	.92	5.27	.77	4.82	.92

Note. All continuous variables were rated on a 7-point scale, ranging from 1 = *completely disagree* to 7 = *completely agree*.

[a] 0 = *did not provide e-mail*, 1 = *provided e-mail*.

To test if credibility mediated the main effect of recruitment source (Hypothesis 2) and the interaction effect of recruitment source and message (Hypothesis 4), we followed the three-step procedure for analyzing mediating effects advocated by Baron and Kenny (1986). To establish mediation, three conditions must be met: (a) the independent variable should influence the mediating variable, (b) the independent variable should influence the dependent variables, and (c) the mediating variable should influence the dependent variables while controlling for the independent variable, whereas the influence of the independent variable on the dependent variables should be reduced when controlling for the mediating variable.

With respect to Hypothesis 2, the MANOVA already indicated that although the first condition was met, the second condition was only established for organizational attractiveness. To test for the third condition, we regressed organizational attractiveness on recruitment source and credibility. Whereas organizational attractiveness was significantly influenced by credibility, $\beta = .27$, $p < .05$, the effect of recruitment source failed to reach statistical significance when controlling for credibility, $\beta = .19$, $p > .10$. This implies that the effect of recruitment source on organizational attractiveness was completely mediated by credibility, providing partial support for Hypothesis 2.

With regard to Hypothesis 4, the MANOVA and logistic regression analysis showed that the first two conditions were met. To test for the third condition, three regression analyses were performed with credibility and the interaction term of recruitment source and message as predictors and with subjective fit, organizational attractiveness, and organizational pursuit behavior as respective dependent variables. For organizational pursuit behavior, a logistic regression analysis was carried out. While credibility influenced subjective fit, $\beta = .35$, $p < .01$, the interaction term failed to reach statistical significance, $\beta = .15$, $p > .10$, indicating that credibility completely mediated the interaction effect of recruitment source and message on subjective fit. Similar results were observed for organizational attractiveness, as credibility had a significant effect, $\beta = .29$, $p < .05$, but the interaction term did not, $\beta = .18$, $p > .10$. Hence, the interaction

effect of recruitment source and message on organizational attractiveness was completely mediated by credibility as well. However, credibility did not mediate this interaction effect on organizational pursuit behavior, as the effect of credibility failed to reach statistical significance, $B = .11$, Wald(1) = .20, $p > .10$. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 was partially supported.

DISCUSSION

In spite of the enormous impact of the internet on recruitment practices, there has been a lack of research on web-based sources of employment information other than official recruitment websites (Cable & Turban, 2001; Lievens & Harris, 2003; Rynes & Cable, 2003; Saks, 2005; Taylor & Collins, 2000). The current study contributes to the recruitment literature by examining web-based employee testimonials and web-based word-of-mouth as company-dependent and company-independent recruitment sources respectively. Given a dearth of previous research, the theories on source credibility and person-environment fit were used to formulate hypotheses regarding the effects of recruitment source and message.

Our study yields several conclusions that contribute to the recruitment source literature. First, we found that potential applicants were more attracted to the organization when employment information was provided through web-based word-of-mouth than through a web-based employee testimonial. In line with the source credibility framework (Eisend, 2004; Pornpitakpan, 2004), this effect was completely mediated by credibility. Specifically, potential applicants were more likely to believe the information they received from a company-independent source than the employee testimonial on the company's own website. It seems that the greater organizational control of web-based testimonials causes them to be somewhat less credible and influential than web-based word-of-mouth (Cable & Turban, 2001; Fisher et al., 1979; Van Hoye & Lievens, 2005). Therefore, our findings suggest that employee testimonials may not fully succeed in imitating word-of-mouth as an interpersonal source of employment information.

However, our results indicate that the content of the recruitment message can moderate the effect of recruitment source. In fact, a recruitment message based on person-organization fit was more effective for web-based word-of-mouth whereas a person-person fit message was more effective for a web-based employee testimonial. This was a robust finding as it was observed for all attraction outcomes including actual application behavior. Most of these effects were completely mediated by credibility, providing support for the source credibility framework (Eisend, 2004; Pornpitakpan, 2004). For the testimonial, potential applicants were more likely to believe the information that the employee provided about herself than about the organization as a whole, suggesting that the ulterior recruitment motive of trying to sell the organization was less obvious in case of a person-person fit message (Fisher et al., 1979). With respect to word-of-mouth, person-organization fit information was perceived as more credible than person-person fit information. This might indicate that potential applicants considered the person-person fit message to be less representative and thus less relevant for their organizational perceptions (Cable & Turban, 2001).

In terms of future research, our findings suggest that the source credibility framework (Eisend, 2004; Pornpitakpan, 2004) can be a useful theoretical framework for examining company-dependent and company-independent recruitment sources. First, it can be applied to study the effects of web-based sources of employment information other than employee testimonials and word-of-mouth. Examples include live chats with company recruiters and independent news sites. In fact, Zottoli and Wanous (2000) suggested that not only differences between categories of recruitment sources should be investigated, but also between and even within specific sources. Second, other premises of the source credibility framework could be tested in future recruitment source research. For instance, apart from message content, the framework postulates that the effect of source credibility on persuasion can also be moderated by the characteristics of the recipients of the information such as their initial disposition (e.g., towards the organization as an employer), need for cognition, and propensity to differentiate stimuli (Pornpitakpan, 2004).

Given that this was the first study about web-based employee testimonials, more research is needed to understand their effects more fully. For instance, future research should investigate the impact of multiple employee testimonials on organizational attraction. Along these lines, attribution theory might serve as a fruitful theoretical framework, especially the predictions concerning consensus information (Kelley & Michela, 1980). Furthermore, the effectiveness of testimonials should be compared to other recruitment sources, both company-dependent (e.g., recruitment advertising) and company-independent (e.g., publicity). The current study suggests that employee testimonials cannot completely imitate word-of-mouth. However, future research has yet to investigate if testimonials can successfully be used to increase the credibility and effectiveness of recruitment advertising.

Our findings suggest that web-based word-of-mouth can be a credible and influential recruitment source. Even though some other studies have also indicated that word-of-mouth can influence organizational attraction for potential applicants (Collins & Stevens, 2002; Van Hoye & Lievens, 2005), knowledge about the specific conditions under which word-of-mouth is most or least effective is still scarce. The current study started to address this gap in the literature by showing that the effectiveness of web-based word-of-mouth can be increased by providing information about person-organization fit instead of about person-person fit. Along these lines, future research needs to gain a better understanding of which factors might influence the impact of word-of-mouth. Examples include the valence of the provided information and the strength of the tie between the source and the recipient of word-of-mouth (Brown & Reingen, 1987).

This study has some limitations that should be acknowledged. First, given the lack of previous research, we did not distinguish between different types of web-based word-of-mouth. With respect to future research, it might be interesting to examine the distinct effects of e-mails, weblogs, chatrooms, electronic bulletin boards, independent websites presenting interpersonal company information, and so forth. Second, our operationalization of recruitment message from a

person-environment fit perspective was based on organizational and individual agreeableness. Our results might have been different if the recruitment message had been described in terms of other personality factors, values, or goals (Rentsch & McEwen, 2002). Finally, we investigated potential applicants' attraction to a position as a head nurse in a medium-sized regional hospital. It might be that this specific context affected some of the observed relationships. Therefore, future research should examine the generalizability of our findings in other settings.

Several practical implications follow from our study. Although recruitment websites increasingly feature employees testifying about their work experiences, there has been no research about the actual impact of web-based employee testimonials on organizational attraction. Our findings suggest an easy and inexpensive way in which the effectiveness of employee testimonials might be increased. It seems that potential applicants are more attracted to the organization when the testimonial focuses on the fit with the organization's current employees instead of with the organization as a whole. At a practical level, this implies that the credibility and impact of testimonials might be increased by having employees describe themselves instead of the organization. Our results further indicate that employment information provided through word-of-mouth might be more credible and attractive than information from an employee testimonial. Hence, it remains important to stimulate positive word-of-mouth about the organization and to avoid negative word-of-mouth. Even though word-of-mouth is a company-independent recruitment source, organizations can try to influence it indirectly through other recruitment activities such as image management, campus recruitment, building relationships with key influentials and opinion leaders (e.g., career counselor, class president), employee referral programs (e.g., providing referral bonuses), or internships.

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CHAPTER 6

SOCIAL NETWORKS AND NETWORKING IN JOB SEARCH

Although job seekers often find a new job through contacting people they know, there has been little research about networking or the intentional use of word-of-mouth communication as a job search method. Moreover, contrary to social network theory, previous research has ignored the relationships between social network characteristics and networking. Therefore, the present study investigates if social network structure and composition account for incremental variance in networking beyond individual differences in personality. Furthermore, we distinguish networking from other preparatory job search behaviors and examine their differential effects on job search and employment outcomes. Results from 653 Flemish job seekers indicate that core self-evaluations outperformed extraversion and conscientiousness in predicting networking behavior. However, the composition of job seekers' social network emerged as the single strongest predictor of networking. In turn, networking was positively associated with active job search behavior and the number of job offers received. Moreover, networking explained incremental variance in these outcomes beyond job seekers' use of print advertising, internet, and public employment service.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, unemployment rates have risen again and mass layoffs have been occurring on a regular basis (McKee-Ryan, Song, Wanberg, & Kinicki, 2005). As a result, it has become even more important to examine which factors influence employment outcomes for job seekers. Although previous research has identified job search behavior as a major determinant of employment outcomes, job search behavior was typically measured at a composite level, without distinguishing between specific job search behaviors (Kanfer, Wanberg, & Kantrowitz, 2001).

An example of a job search behavior that was largely ignored in previous research is networking. Even though a significant number of newly hired employees find a job through contacting people they know (Corcoran, Datcher, & Duncan, 1980; Kirnan, Farley, & Geisinger, 1989; Saks & Ashforth, 1997), only a few studies have actually investigated networking as a job search behavior (Marmaros & Sacerdote, 2002; Tziner, Vered, & Ophir, 2004; Wanberg, Kanfer, & Banas, 2000).

In addition, although social network theory (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Mouw, 2003) suggests that the structure and composition of job seekers' social network are related to their networking behavior, previous research has focused exclusively on individual differences in personality as determinants of networking (Tziner et al., 2004; Wanberg et al., 2000). Moreover, we do not know yet whether it is useful to study networking as a separate job search behavior as previous research has not examined if networking explains incremental variance in employment outcomes beyond other specific job search behaviors (Wanberg et al., 2000).

The present study starts to fill these gaps in the job search literature. Specifically, social network theory is used to identify key components of job seekers' social network that might determine networking. Given that previous research has already demonstrated that individual differences in personality are related to networking, we examine the incremental variance explained by social

network structure and composition. In addition, we assess the usefulness of networking as a job search behavior by investigating if it accounts for incremental variance in relevant job search and employment outcomes beyond other specific job search behaviors.

A DEFINITION OF NETWORKING AS A JOB SEARCH BEHAVIOR

In general, networking behavior can be defined as "individuals' attempts to develop and maintain relationships with others who have the potential to assist them in their work or career" (Forret & Dougherty, 2001, p. 284). Applied to a job search context, we define networking as "individual actions directed toward contacting friends, acquaintances, and other people to whom the job seeker has been referred for the main purpose of getting information, leads, or advice on getting a job" (Wanberg et al., 2000, p. 492).

A better understanding of networking can be obtained by framing it with respect to two classifications of job search behaviors applied in previous research. First, according to the formal-informal classification (Barber, Daly, Giannantonio, & Phillips, 1994; Saks & Ashforth, 2000; Zottoli & Wanous, 2000), networking can be defined as a specific type of informal job search behavior. Formal job search makes use of formal intermediaries that exist primarily for recruitment purposes including employment agencies, recruitment advertising, and campus recruitment. Conversely, informal job search does not rely on formal intermediaries and consists of contacting friends, relatives, or acquaintances; contacting current or former employees; re-hires; and walk-ins. Second, with respect to the preparatory-active categorization (Blau, 1993, 1994; Saks & Ashforth, 2000), networking can be classified as a specific kind of preparatory job search behavior. In fact, the job search process can be conceptualized as consisting of two sequential stages. Preparatory job search involves gathering information about potential job leads through various sources. Subsequently, active job search consists of contacting and applying to prospective employers.

Most previous research has assessed the frequency of networking behaviors (e.g., talking with friends or relatives about possible job leads) together with

other specific job search behaviors (e.g., reading help wanted ads in newspapers) to produce a composite measure of general job search intensity (Kanfer et al., 2001). Similarly, specific job search behaviors have generally been combined to measure overall preparatory versus active or formal versus informal job search (Kanfer et al., 2001; Saks & Ashforth, 2000; Zottoli & Wanous, 2000). As this precludes gaining a better insight into networking, the current study measured networking as a specific job search behavior, separate from other specific job search behaviors.

DETERMINANTS OF NETWORKING AS A JOB SEARCH BEHAVIOR

Even though previous research has neglected situational determinants of networking (Tziner et al., 2004; Wanberg et al., 2000), other studies have demonstrated that job search behavior in general is influenced by individual differences as well as situational variables (Kanfer et al., 2001; Wanberg, Hough, & Song, 2002). Accordingly, the present study investigates individual differences in personality (i.e., extraversion, conscientiousness, and core self-evaluations) and social network characteristics (i.e., size, tie strength, and composition) as determinants of networking behavior.

INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES IN PERSONALITY

The most prevalent taxonomy of individual differences identifies five broad personality factors, namely extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness to experience (Digman, 1990; Goldberg, 1990). Two of these Big Five personality factors seem conceptually most useful for predicting network behavior, namely extraversion and conscientiousness. Extraversion refers to the extent to which a person is sociable, gregarious, assertive, talkative, and active (Barrick & Mount, 1991). People with high levels of extraversion prefer social situations in which they can interact with others. We expected job seekers higher in extraversion to make more use of networking for two reasons. First, given their characteristics, extraverts are likely to know more people whom they can possibly contact for information about jobs (cf.,

Russell, Booth, Reed, & Laughlin, 1997). Second, even if the number of potential contacts would be the same, extraverts would still be more likely to contact these people in their job search (cf., Caldwell & Burger, 1998). Conscientiousness reflects dependability (i.e., being careful, thorough, responsible, organized, and planful) and having a high will to achieve (i.e., being hardworking, achievement-oriented, and persevering) (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Digman, 1990). We expected job seekers higher in conscientiousness to make more use of networking because they tend to be more motivated and more persistent. Therefore, they are likely to display a higher intensity as well as a wider range of job search behaviors including networking (cf., Caldwell & Burger, 1998). In support of these theoretical assumptions, Wanberg et al. (2000) found that of all Big Five personality factors only extraversion and conscientiousness were significant predictors of networking as a job search behavior. However, Tziner et al. (2004) failed to replicate these findings as neither personality factor explained a significant amount of variance in networking.

> *Hypothesis 1a: Job seekers higher in extraversion will make more use of networking.*

> *Hypothesis 1b: Job seekers higher in conscientiousness will make more use of networking.*

Whereas the above hypotheses aim to replicate previous research findings, we also extend previous research by examining core self-evaluations as another individual difference predictor of networking. Core self-evaluations refer to the fundamental evaluations that people make about themselves and their functioning in their environment (Judge, Van Vianen, & De Pater, 2004). It represents a broad, latent, higher order concept indicated by four traits: self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy, emotional stability, and locus of control (Judge, Erez, Bono, & Thoresen, 2003). People with positive core self-evaluations appraise themselves in a consistently positive manner across situations and view themselves as capable, worthy, and in control of their lives (Judge et al., 2004). As a result, they perform better, are more motivated, persist

more, and strive harder to achieve goals than individuals with negative core self-evaluations (Erez & Judge, 2001; Judge & Bono, 2001; Judge et al., 2004). Therefore, we expected job seekers with positive core self-evaluations to make more use of networking as a means to achieve their goal of finding a job. Along these lines, previous research has demonstrated that individuals higher in self-esteem and self-efficacy reported higher levels of general job search behavior (Kanfer et al., 2001). In addition, Wanberg, Glomb, Song, and Sorenson (2005) found that more positive core self-evaluations were associated with higher intensity and persistence of job search behavior over time. In support of our theoretical arguments, Wanberg et al. (2005) described the answers of two job seekers differing in core self-evaluations to a follow-up survey asking them how their job search changed over time. Whereas the person with negative core self-evaluations emphasized that it was a very sad time for him, the job seeker with positive core self-evaluations responded that throughout his unemployment he "tried hard to set a schedule and focus on my search, remain positive and network, network, network" (p. 425). Given that no previous research has examined the relationship between core self-evaluations and networking, we evaluated the usefulness of this newly proposed determinant by investigating if it explains incremental variance in networking beyond extraversion and conscientiousness.

> *Hypothesis 2a: Job seekers with more positive core self-evaluations will make more use of networking.*

> *Hypothesis 2b: Core self-evaluations will account for incremental variance beyond extraversion and conscientiousness in explaining networking.*

SOCIAL NETWORK CHARACTERISTICS

Although social network theory (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Mouw, 2003) suggests that the characteristics of job seekers' social network are related to their networking behavior, previous research has only examined individual differences in personality as determinants of networking (Tziner et al., 2004; Wanberg et al., 2000). Therefore, the present study aims to integrate the job

search and social network literatures by investigating how social network characteristics relate to networking.

Social network theory focuses on relationships among actors (i.e., individuals, work units, or organizations) and thereby distinguishes itself from more traditional organizational research perspectives that examine individual actors in isolation (Brass, Galaskiewicz, Greve, & Tsai, 2004). The central premise underlying the social network paradigm is that actors are embedded within networks of interconnected relationships that provide opportunities for and constraints on behavior (Borgatti & Foster, 2003). Both the structure and composition of these social networks have been proposed as potential sources of social capital. In fact, there has been a long-standing debate among social network theorists between formalists emphasizing the importance of network structure and substantialists focusing on network content or composition (Borgatti & Foster, 2003). Adler and Kwon (2002) tried to integrate both positions by defining social capital as "the goodwill available to individuals or groups. Its source lies in the structure and content of the actor's social relations. Its effects flow from the information, influence, and solidarity it makes available to the actor." (p. 23).

In light of social network theory, networking as a job search behavior can be defined as the intentional use of an individual job seeker's social network with the purpose of finding a job. Borrowing arguments from formalists as well as substantialists, we expected that both the structure and composition of job seekers' social network would influence their propensity for networking.

According to formalists, the source of social capital is situated in the formal structure of the relationships or ties that make up the social network (Adler & Kwon, 2002). A first key component of network structure is network size or the total number of people to whom an individual is tied (Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001). All else being equal, as job seekers' social network consists of more people, they should be more likely to contact some of those people in their job search. A second important aspect of social network structure consists of the strength of the ties in the network (Granovetter, 1973). Tie strength can be

defined as the closeness of the social relationship between the individual and the other people in the social network (Brown & Reingen, 1987). Close friends are an example of strong ties, whereas seldom-contacted acquaintances represent weak ties. We expected job seekers to make more use of stronger ties in their job search for two reasons. First, stronger ties are typically more readily available and result in more frequent interaction through which job-related information can be provided (Reingen & Kernan, 1986). Second, job seekers have a better knowledge of the people to whom they are tied more strongly so that they can more easily evaluate whether those people will be able to provide relevant job information (Brown & Reingen, 1987).

> *Hypothesis 3a: The size of job seekers' social network will be positively associated with networking.*

> *Hypothesis 3b: The strength of the ties within job seekers' social network will be positively associated with networking.*

Conversely, substantialists focus on the resources that flow through social ties and argue that the effects of tie structure depend entirely on the content of those ties (Lin, 1999). Specifically, tie content or network composition refers to the characteristics of the other people in an individual's social network (Adler & Kwon, 2002). It reflects the quality of the resources (i.e., information) that can be provided by the social network and is often operationalized in terms of socio-economic and occupational status (Reingold, 1999; Seibert et al., 2001). For instance, unemployed persons are less likely to provide job seekers with high-quality information about jobs (Aguilera, 2002). Therefore, we hypothesized that job seekers would make more use of their social network if its composition would be better, offering them more valuable job-related information.

> *Hypothesis 3c: The composition of job seekers' social network will be positively associated with networking.*

Although previous research has indicated that the structure and composition of job seekers' social network are associated with employment outcomes (Brass et al., 2004), their relationships to job search behavior and networking have not yet

been investigated. Therefore, we assessed their relevance as determinants of networking by investigating the incremental variance they explain beyond individual differences in personality.

Hypothesis 3d: The characteristics of job seekers' social network (i.e., size, tie strength, and composition) will account for incremental variance beyond the hypothesized individual differences in explaining networking.

RELEVANCE OF NETWORKING AS A JOB SEARCH BEHAVIOR

Given the scarcity of previous research (Marmaros & Sacerdote, 2002; Tziner et al., 2004; Wanberg et al., 2000), the present study wanted to evaluate the usefulness of studying networking as a specific job search behavior. To this end, we examined the relationships between networking and a number of relevant job search and employment outcomes. Moreover, we investigated if networking accounts for incremental variance in predicting those outcomes beyond other prevalent job search behaviors, namely making use of print advertising, internet, and public employment service.

As networking provides job seekers with information about potential jobs, we expected that it would increase the likelihood of finding a job. Along these lines, Wanberg et al. (2000) found that networking was positively related to employment status. Whereas employment status represents an employment quantity outcome, we also extend previous research by examining the effects of networking on job search and employment quality outcomes (Brasher & Chen, 1999).

First, we hypothesized that networking would be associated with active job search behavior as it represents a specific kind of preparatory job search behavior (Blau, 1994). More specifically, job seekers are likely to contact prospective employers on the basis of the information gathered by networking. Few studies have empirically distinguished between preparatory and active job search behavior, but the results generally indicate that preparatory job search

behavior is a major determinant of active job search behavior (Blau, 1993, 1994; Saks & Ashforth, 1999, 2000).

As another job search outcome, we expected that job seekers' networking would be related to the total number of job offers they would receive (Brasher & Chen, 1999). Even though job seekers only need to accept one job offer, more intensive use of networking is likely to produce more information about multiple job opportunities, increasing job seekers' chances of receiving multiple job offers. Previous research has demonstrated that job search behavior in general is positively related to the number of job offers received (Kanfer et al., 2001).

Finally, we hypothesized that networking would be positively associated with employment quality as indicated by job seekers' perceptions of fit between their new job/organization and the job/organization they were looking for (Saks & Ashforth, 1997). As an informal job search behavior, networking is likely to provide job seekers with more realistic information, allowing them to apply for jobs that better fit their interests and skills (Zottoli & Wanous, 2000). In fact, the main finding of more than three decades of recruitment source research has been that employees hired through informal sources have more positive work-related attitudes than employees hired through formal sources (Saks, 2005; Zottoli & Wanous, 2000). Moreover, previous research has indicated that job search behavior in general is positively related to job seekers' fit perceptions (Saks & Ashforth, 2002).

> *Hypothesis 4a: Networking will be positively associated with employment status, active job search behavior, number of job offers, and job-organization fit.*

In addition, we expected that networking would explain incremental variance in these outcomes beyond other specific preparatory job search behaviors. Given its characteristics as a specific type of informal job search behavior, networking is likely to provide job seekers with information about potential jobs that is nonredundant with information gathered by other, often more formal job search behaviors (Barber et al., 1994; Saks & Ashforth, 2000; Zottoli & Wanous, 2000). Nonetheless, Wanberg et al. (2000) found that networking did not

account for incremental variance in employment status beyond other job search behaviors. However, a composite measure of general job search behavior was used, including both preparatory and active job search behaviors. Therefore, their results do not allow to conclude if networking explains incremental variance beyond other specific preparatory job search behaviors.

> *Hypothesis 4b: Networking will account for incremental variance beyond other preparatory job search behaviors in explaining employment status, active job search behavior, number of job offers, and job-organization fit.*

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURE

The data were collected in a two-wave longitudinal design in collaboration with the Public Employment Service in Flanders, the Dutch-speaking district of Belgium. Participants were registered job seekers recruited from 35 Workforce Centers distributed evenly across Flanders. Unemployed people filing for unemployment insurance benefits are obliged to register with the Public Employment Service, but other job seekers (e.g., recent graduates or employed job seekers) can also register voluntarily to enjoy free guidance and training services. Workforce Centers represent a kind of "one-stop shop" for job seekers, integrating all job search related services offered by different governmental agencies. In these Workforce Centers, job seekers can self-register on one of the self-service computers. If they self-registered as a job seeker in one of the 35 selected Workforce Centers between May and July 2005, a pop-up screen appeared asking them to participate in the current study. If they agreed, they could click on a link leading them to a web-based (intranet) survey assessing Time 1 measures (antecedents of networking and control variables). Following recommendations for web-based data collection strategies (Stanton & Rogelberg, 2001), the obtained data were carefully screened (i.e., for responses not matching "legal" identifiers and for inadvertent and malicious multiple responses), and all suspect cases were removed (about 10%). All of this resulted

in 1,066 usable responses. Research assistants were trained to administer a follow-up survey by phone four months after participants completed Time 1 measures. Given this administration mode, scales for Time 2 measures (job search behaviors and employment outcomes) were kept short. In total, 653 individuals completed the Time 2 survey, yielding a response rate of 61%. Most of the 413 Time 2 non-respondents could not be reached after three trials and were subsequently deleted from the phone list. Only about 5% actually refused to participate.

Of our final sample of 653 job seekers, 57% were women and 43% were men. Individuals ranged in age from 17 to 57 years ($M = 27.50$, $SD = 9.24$). With respect to education, 11% obtained a primary school degree, 65% a high school degree, and 24% a college degree. Participants offered a variety of reasons for their job search, but the most important reasons were recent graduation (i.e., new entrants) (29%), getting fired (21%), and end of contract (23%). The majority was unemployed at Time 1 (93%), but 7% was working when they registered as a job seeker. At Time 2, 395 individuals (61%) had found a (new) job. Of these, 35% had found their job through networking.

To check for selective nonresponse (Goodman & Blum, 1996), the respondents in the final sample ($N = 653$) were compared with the nonrespondents who only completed the Time 1 survey ($N = 413$). Multivariate analysis of variance including gender, age, education, job search reason, and unemployment status at Time 1, indicated that overall there were no significant differences between the two groups, $F(6, 946) = 1.50$, $p = .18$. Inspection of the univariate results revealed that there was only a difference in gender, $F(1, 951) = 4.74$, $p < .05$. More women completed the Time 2 questionnaire (57%) compared to the nonrespondents (48%).

It is also important to compare our sample to the general population of job seekers in Flanders. Of all job seekers who registered in 2004, 51% were women and 49% were men. The average age was 30 years. With respect to education, 20% obtained a primary school degree, 58% a high school degree, and 22% a college degree. Reason for job search and unemployment status at the time of

registration were not included in the databases of the Flemish Public Employment Service, but records show that 81% of job seekers were unemployed at the end of the month in which they registered. However, more people are likely to have been unemployed at the time of registration because some might have already found a job before the end of the month. In conclusion, these figures indicate that our sample contained more women, was slightly younger and was more highly educated.

TIME 1 MEASURES

Extraversion. Ten items were selected from the International Personality Item Pool (2001) for measuring job seekers' levels of extraversion (Goldberg, 1999). A sample item is "I feel comfortable around other people". Items were rated on a 5-point rating scale, ranging from 1 = *completely disagree* to 5 = *completely agree*. The internal consistency of the scale was .87.

Conscientiousness. Conscientiousness was measured by ten items selected from the International Personality Item Pool (2001; Goldberg, 1999). A sample item is "I make plans and stick to them". Items were rated on a 5-point rating scale, ranging from 1 = *completely disagree* to 5 = *completely agree*. The internal consistency of the scale was .80.

Core self-evaluations. Core self-evaluations, a theoretical composite of the core traits of self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy, emotional stability, and locus of control, were measured with the 12-item Core Self-Evaluations Scale (CSES) developed by Judge et al. (2003). An example item is "When I try, I generally succeed". Items were rated on a 5-point rating scale, ranging from 1 = *completely disagree* to 5 = *completely agree*. The internal consistency was .83.

Network size. On the basis of previous research (Seibert et al., 2001; Wanberg et al., 2002), four items were developed for measuring the size of job seekers' social network. A sample item is "I know a lot of people who might help me find a job". Items were rated on a 5-point rating scale, ranging from 1 = *completely disagree* to 5 = *completely agree*. The internal consistency of the scale was .84.

Network tie strength. The strength of the ties making up job seekers' social network was measured by three items adapted from Brown and Konrad (2001a). A sample item is "Most people who might help me find a job are people I know very well, such as family or friends". Items were rated on a 5-point rating scale, ranging from 1 = *completely disagree* to 5 = *completely agree*. The internal consistency of the scale was .77.

Network composition. On the basis of previous research (Aguilera, 2002; Brown & Konrad, 2001b; Reingold, 1999), three items were developed for measuring the characteristics of the other actors in job seekers' social network. An example item is "Most people who might help me find a job have a good job themselves". Items were rated on a 5-point rating scale, ranging from 1 = *completely disagree* to 5 = *completely agree*. The internal consistency was .86.

Control variables. Participants were asked to fill out their gender, age, education, reason for job search, and whether they were unemployed at Time 1. Two dummy variables were created for education, with the largest category (i.e., high school) as the reference group. As job seekers provided a variety of reasons for their job search, only one dummy variable was created distinguishing recent graduates from other job seekers. This was done because recent graduates constituted the largest group (29%) and because they were most likely to differ from other kinds of job seekers such as various types of job losers.

TIME 2 MEASURES

Specific preparatory job search behaviors. On the basis of previous research (Blau, 1994; Kanfer et al., 2001; Saks & Ashforth, 2000; van Hooft, Born, Taris, van der Flier, & Blonk, 2004; Wanberg et al., 2005; Wanberg et al., 2000) as well as focus groups with job seekers and consultants at a Workforce Center, we identified the four most common preparatory job search behaviors (i.e., *networking*, *print advertising*, *internet*, and *public employment service*) and developed two items for measuring each one of them as a separate variable. Job seekers were asked to indicate how much time they had spent on eight job search activities in the past four months or until they found a job. Items were

rated on a 5-point rating scale, ranging from 1 = *no time at all* to 5 = *very much time*. Sample items include "Contacting people you know to help you find a job" (networking, α = .86), "Looking for jobs in newspapers or journals" (print advertising, α = .79), and "Looking for jobs on the internet" (internet, α = .84). The internal consistency of the scale measuring the use of public employment service was somewhat lower (α = .59), which might be explained by a slight difference between its two items "Contacting a Workforce Center or public employment service office" and "Looking for jobs on a public employment service's job kiosk". Whereas the public employment service's job kiosks can be consulted in its offices and Workforce Centers, they can also be found in other publicly accessible locations such as libraries, shopping malls, and railroad stations.

Job search outcomes. Three items were adapted from Blau (1994) to measure job seekers' *active job search behavior*. Items referring to preparatory job search behaviors or to other job search outcomes (e.g., having a job interview) were excluded (Wanberg et al., 2000). Job seekers were asked to indicate how much time they had spent on three job search activities in the past four months or until they found a job. An example item is "Sending out a resume or completing a job application". Items were rated on a 5-point rating scale, ranging from 1 = *no time at all* to 5 = *very much time*. The internal consistency of the scale was .61. Furthermore, job seekers were asked to report the actual *number of job offers* they received in the past four months (Kanfer et al., 2001; Saks & Ashforth, 2000).

Employment outcomes. First, *employment status* was measured by asking participants if they found a (new) job in the past four months (0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*) (Kanfer et al., 2001; Saks & Ashforth, 2000). Second, only job seekers who found a job completed two items (Saks & Ashforth, 1997; Wanberg et al., 2002) to assess the perceived fit of their new job/organization with the job/organization they were looking for (*job-organization fit*). An example item is "To what extent does your new job measure up to the kind of job you were

seeking?". Items were rated on a 5-point rating scale, ranging from 1 = *completely disagree* to 5 = *completely agree*. The internal consistency was .83.

RESULTS

Means, standard deviations, and correlations among all variables are presented in Table 1. In support of Hypotheses 1a-b, 2a, and 3a-c, all individual differences in personality and social network characteristics were significantly related to job seekers' networking behavior. To provide a more stringent test of these hypotheses as well as to test Hypotheses 2b and 3d, a hierarchical regression analysis was performed. After entering the control variables in the first step, extraversion and conscientiousness were added in the second step because previous research has already demonstrated that they are related to networking. In the next step, core self-evaluations were entered to investigate its usefulness as a new individual difference determinant. Finally, social network characteristics were added to examine the incremental variance they explained in networking beyond individual differences in personality.

As shown in Table 2, the control variables did not explain a significant portion of the variance in networking. Gender was the only significant predictor, indicating that women reported less networking than men (β = -.10, $p < .05$). The addition of extraversion and conscientiousness in the second step significantly increased the variance explained in networking by 1%, $F(2, 574)$ = 3.66, $p < .05$. In support of Hypothesis 1b, job seekers higher in conscientiousness made more use of networking (β = .10, $p < .05$). However, contrary to Hypothesis 1a, extraversion did not emerge as a significant predictor. In support of Hypothesis 2b, core self-evaluations explained an additional 1% of variance, $F(1, 573)$ = 5.23, $p < .05$. Job seekers with more positive core self-evaluations made more use of networking (β = .12, $p < .05$), supporting Hypothesis 2a. It should be noted that conscientiousness was no longer significantly associated with networking when core self-evaluations were entered into the equation.

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Between Study Variables.

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
1. Gender[a]	.57	.50	-																		
2. Age	27.50	9.24	.06	-																	
3. Education: Primary school[b]	.11	.32	-.01	*.09*	-																
4. Education: College[b]	.24	.43	**.13**	-.02	**-.20**	-															
5. Recent graduate[c]	.29	.45	.01	**-.47**	**-.17**	**.21**	-														
6. Unemployed at Time 1[c]	.93	.26	.01	-.01	-.02	.00	-.04	-													
7. Extraversion	3.61	.65	.04	**-.14**	*-.08*	**.11**	.04	-.01	-												
8. Conscientiousness	3.94	.49	**.14**	.04	.03	*.10*	.04	-.01	**.41**	-											
9. Core self-evaluations	3.61	.54	-.00	-.08	-.06	**.13**	**.17**	-.04	**.44**	**.52**	-										
10. Network size	2.73	.90	*-.10*	**-.22**	-.04	.05	**.17**	-.04	**.22**	**.12**	**.29**	-									
11. Network tie strength	2.93	.94	*-.08*	**-.19**	-.03	-.04	*.08*	-.04	**.17**	.08	**.19**	**.55**	-								
12. Network composition	3.51	.87	-.06	**-.18**	*-.10*	.06	**.12**	-.04	**.17**	**.18**	**.22**	**.43**	**.44**	-							
13. Networking	2.39	1.06	*-.09*	-.08	.02	-.04	.06	.01	*.08*	*.09*	**.14**	**.16**	**.16**	**.18**	-						
14. Print advertising	2.82	1.13	.05	**.12**	-.02	-.01	**-.11**	.00	.00	.05	-.09	*-.10*	-.07	-.02	**.17**	-					
15. Internet	2.76	1.34	.02	-.08	-.10	**.25**	**.13**	-.06	*.08*	*.09*	.02	-.02	.02	.04	**.16**	**.27**	-				
16. Public employment service	2.50	1.05	-.07	-.02	-.01	**-.12**	-.03	-.07	-.05	-.02	-.06	**-.11**	-.01	-.01	**.12**	**.23**	**.10**	-			
17. Active job search behavior	2.44	.97	.06	**-.11**	*-.09*	**.14**	**.12**	-.05	**.13**	**.17**	**.12**	.06	.07	**.13**	**.31**	**.28**	**.34**	**.28**	-		
18. Number of job offers	4.12	6.93	**-.11**	-.00	.02	-.04	-.02	-.00	.02	-.01	.01	.04	.01	.06	**.12**	.07	.05	**.14**	*.10*	-	
19. Employment status[c]	.60	.49	*-.08*	**-.28**	-.07	.02	**.15**	.06	*.08*	.03	.06	**.18**	**.14**	**.11**	-.06	**-.13**	-.04	-.07	-.03	**.14**	-
20. Job-organization fit	4.04	1.21	.07	**.17**	.03	.07	-.09	.02	.01	*.11*	.07	.02	-.03	-.01	-.06	-.08	-.01	-.04	.00	-.07	-

Note. N ranges from 620 to 653 for Variables 1-6 (Control variables). *N* = 653 for Variables 7-12 (Time 1 antecedents of networking). *N* ranges from 630 to 653 for Variables 13-19 (Time 2 job search behaviors and outcomes for total sample). *N* = 341 for Variable 20 (Time 2 outcome only for individuals who found a job).
[a] 0 = *male*, 1 = *female*. [b] Omitted dummy category for education is high school. [c] 0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*.
Correlations in italics are significant at *p* < .05, **correlations in bold** are significant at *p* < .01.

Table 2. Hierarchical Regression of Networking on Individual Differences in Personality and Social Network Characteristics.

Predictor	Block 1	Block 2	Block 3	Block 4
Control variables				
Gender[a]	-.10*	-.11**	-.10*	-.08*
Age	-.06	-.06	-.06	-.02
Education: Primary school[b]	.02	.01	.01	.02
Education: College[b]	-.04	-.05	-.05	-.05
Recent graduate[c]	.04	.04	.03	.02
Unemployed at Time 1[c]	.00	.01	.01	.02
Individual differences				
Extraversion		.03	-.01	-.03
Conscientiousness		.10*	.05	.04
Core self-evaluations			.12*	.08
Social network characteristics				
Network size				.06
Network tie strength				.07
Network composition				.12*
R^2	.02	.03*	.04**	.08**
Adjusted R^2	.01	.02*	.03**	.06**
ΔR^2	.02	.01*	.01*	.03**

Note. N = 583 because of missing data. The values in the table are standardized beta weights (β). Block 1 portrays results with only the control variables in the equation. In Block 2 extraversion and conscientiousness were added. Core self-evaluations were added in Block 3. Block 4 portrays the results with the addition of social network characteristics.

[a] 0 = *male*, 1 = *female*. [b] Omitted dummy category for education is high school. [c] 0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

The addition of social network characteristics in the fourth and final step significantly increased the variance explained in networking by 3%, $F(3, 570) =$

7.06, $p < .01$, supporting Hypothesis 3d. However, only network composition was positively related to networking ($\beta = .12$, $p < .05$), providing support for Hypothesis 3c. Contrary to Hypotheses 3a and 3b, network size and tie strength were not significantly associated with networking. Controlling for social network characteristics, core self-evaluations were no longer a significant predictor. In total, the antecedents measured at Time 1 explained 8% of the variance in job seekers' networking measured at Time 2, $F(12, 570) = 3.85$, $p < .01$.

With respect to Hypothesis 4a, Table 1 indicates that networking was significantly related to active job search behavior and the number of job offers received. To provide a more stringent test of this hypothesis as well as to test Hypothesis 4b, a series of hierarchical regression analyses were performed. Table 3 presents the results of the hierarchical regression analyses of active job search behavior, number of job offers, and perceived job-organization fit on preparatory job search behaviors. Given that employment status is a dichotomous variable, a hierarchical logistic regression analysis was performed. The values shown for this analysis in Table 4 are logistic regression odds ratios. A significant odds ratio greater than 1 indicates that the odds of the outcome variable increase when the predictor increases. A significant odds ratio less than 1 indicates that the odds of the outcome variable decrease when the predictor increases (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). In each of these regression analyses, the control variables were entered in the first step. Job seekers' use of print advertising, internet, and public employment service were added to the equation in the second step. As we wanted to examine the incremental variance explained by networking beyond these preparatory job search behaviors, networking was entered in the third and final step.

Table 3. Hierarchical Regression of Active Job Search Behavior, Number of Job Offers, and Job-Organization Fit on Preparatory Job Search Behaviors.

Predictor	Active job search behavior			Number of job offers			Job-organization fit		
	Block 1	Block 2	Block 3	Block 1	Block 2	Block 3	Block 1	Block 2	Block 3
Control variables									
Gender[a]	.05	.06	.08*	-.11**	-.11**	-.10*	.06	.07	.06
Age	-.09	-.08*	-.07	.01	.02	.03	.15*	.17**	.17**
Education: Primary school[b]	-.05	-.03	-.04	.02	.02	.02	.03	.03	.03
Education: College[b]	.11**	.07	.08*	-.02	-.02	-.02	.08	.09	.08
Recent graduate[c]	.04	.05	.04	-.00	.00	-.00	-.03	-.04	-.04
Unemployed at Time 1[c]	-.06	-.03	-.03	.02	.03	.03	.05	.05	.05
Preparatory job search behaviors									
Print advertising		.17**	.14**		.02	.00		-.14*	-.13*
Internet		.27**	.24**		.06	.05		.01	.02
Public employment service		.21**	.20**		.12**	.12**		.00	.01
Networking			.22**			.09*			-.03
R^2	.04**	.23**	.28**	.01	.04*	.04**	.04	.06*	.06
Adjusted R^2	.03**	.22**	.26**	.00	.02*	.03**	.02	.03*	.02
ΔR^2	.04**	.19**	.04**	.01	.02**	.01*	.04	.02	.00

Note. Due to missing data, $N = 581$ for active job search behavior, $N = 565$ for number of job offers, and $N = 306$ for job-organization fit. The values in the table are standardized beta weights (β). Block 1 portrays results with only the control variables in the equation. In Block 2 print advertising, internet, and public employment service were added. Block 3 portrays the results with the addition of networking.
[a] 0 = *male*, 1 = *female*. [b] Omitted dummy category for education is high school. [c] 0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 4. Hierarchical Logistic Regression of Employment Status on Preparatory Job Search Behaviors.

Predictor	Block 1	Block 2	Block 3
Control variables			
Gender[a]	.77	.76	.74
Age	.94**	.94**	.94**
Education: Primary school[b]	.86	.83	.83
Education: College[b]	1.14	1.21	1.19
Recent graduate[c]	1.09	1.08	1.10
Unemployed at Time 1[c]	1.83	1.76	1.77
Preparatory job search behaviors			
Print advertising		.92	.93
Internet		.92	.92
Public employment service		.90	.91
Networking			.89
χ^2	52.41 (6)**	59.16 (9)**	61.02 (10)**
Nagelkerke R^2	.12**	.13**	.14**
$\Delta\chi^2$	52.41 (6)**	6.74 (3)	1.87 (1)

Note. Due to missing data, $N = 581$. The values in the table are logistic regression odds ratios (Exp B). Block 1 portrays results with only the control variables in the equation. In Block 2 print advertising, internet, and public employment service were added. Block 3 portrays the results with the addition of networking. Degrees of freedom for χ^2 are in parentheses.
[a] 0 = *male*, 1 = *female*. [b] Omitted dummy category for education is high school. [c] 0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

The results indicated that networking explained incremental variance for active job search behavior (4%), $F(1, 570) = 33.82$, $p < .01$, and number of job offers (1%), $F(1, 554) = 3.89$, $p < .05$. Contrary to our expectations, networking did not explain a significant additional portion of variance in employment status and job-organization fit. Therefore, Hypothesis 4b was partially supported. We also found partial support for Hypothesis 4a as networking was positively associated

with active job search behavior ($\beta = .22$, $p < .01$) and with number of job offers ($\beta = .09$, $p < .05$), but not with employment status and job-organization fit.

We briefly discuss some interesting results that we did not explicitly hypothesize. Table 4 indicates that age was the only significant predictor of employment status. The odds of finding a job were decreased 6% by a one-unit increase in age. None of the preparatory job search behaviors were significantly associated with employment status. As shown in Table 3, women and more highly educated individuals reported more active job search behavior. In addition, all preparatory job search behaviors were significantly related to active job search behavior. We further found that women received less job offers and that making use of public employment service increased the number of job offers. Older job seekers who found a job were more likely to report a positive fit. However, making use of print advertising was negatively associated with job-organization fit.

DISCUSSION

In light of the scarcity of previous research (Marmaros & Sacerdote, 2002; Tziner et al., 2004; Wanberg et al., 2000), the present paper aimed to gain a more comprehensive understanding of networking as a job search behavior. On the basis of social network theory, we examined if the structure and composition of job seekers' social network explained incremental variance in networking beyond individual differences in personality. In addition, we assessed the usefulness of studying networking as a specific job search behavior by investigating the incremental variance it accounted for in relevant job search and employment outcomes beyond other preparatory job search behaviors.

Our study yields several conclusions that contribute to the literature on job search behavior and networking. First, we found that the characteristics of job seekers' social network explained incremental variance in their propensity for networking beyond individual differences. Given that social network characteristics were measured four months prior to and through a different medium than networking behavior, this provides a stringent test of their

usefulness as situational determinants. Moreover, controlling for social network structure and composition, individual differences in personality were no longer significant determinants of networking. This attests to the value of integrating insights from social network theory into the job search literature. In support of both the formalist and substantialist positions taken by social network theorists (Adler & Kwon, 2002), network structure and composition were related to job seekers' networking behavior. However, the composition of job seekers' social network emerged as the only significant predictor of networking. Apparently, the quality of social contacts mattered more to job seekers than the total number of contacts or how well they knew them. In line with the arguments of substantialists, the effects of social ties were determined by their content and not by their structure (Lin, 1999). The observed relationship between network composition and networking is also in line with some indirect evidence from previous research. Aguilera (2002) found that network composition or quality was a better predictor of employment status than network size. Moreover, Reingold (1999) observed that individuals who found a job through networking differed more in network composition than in network structure from those who found a job through another source. However, given that this was the first study to investigate social network characteristics as determinants of job search behavior, more research is needed before we can draw firm conclusions with respect to their relative efficacy.

Our findings underline the importance of studying networking as a job search behavior as it was related to relevant job search outcomes. Job seekers who spent more time networking showed more active job search behavior and received more job offers. Extending previous research (Marmaros & Sacerdote, 2002; Tziner et al., 2004; Wanberg et al., 2000), we also found that networking explained incremental variance in these outcomes beyond print advertising, internet, and public employment service. Moreover, attesting to its usefulness as a job search behavior, 35% of the (re)employed individuals reported finding their job through networking. In line with Blau's (1993, 1994) conceptualization of the job search process, job seekers seemed to use the information gathered by all preparatory job search behaviors to actively contact prospective employers.

Conversely, only networking and public employment service were related to the actual number of job offers received by job seekers, attesting to their efficacy as job search behaviors. The preparatory job search behavior used most by job seekers, namely print advertising, seemed to be the least effective. In fact, print advertising was negatively correlated with employment status and emerged as a negative predictor of employment quality (i.e., perceived job-organization fit).

Although all individual differences in personality were correlated with networking, core self-evaluations outperformed extraversion and conscientiousness in predicting job seekers' networking behavior. Individuals with more positive core self-evaluations spent more time contacting friends, relatives, and acquaintances to gather job-related information. Even though no previous research has investigated the relationship between core self-evaluations and networking, our findings are in line with Wanberg et al. (2005) who found that people with more positive core self-evaluations reported a higher intensity of general job search behavior and were more persistent in their job search over time. Our results are also consistent with previous research indicating that core self-evaluations might be one of the best dispositional predictors of job performance (Erez & Judge, 2001; Judge & Bono, 2001; Judge et al., 2003; Judge et al., 2004). It seems that the impact of core self-evaluations on performance can be explained mainly by its effect on motivation. Individuals with more positive core self-evaluations set more challenging goals and are more motivated to achieve those goals (Erez & Judge, 2001; Judge et al., 2004). Therefore, it seems likely that job seekers with more positive core self-evaluations are more motivated to find a good job and are therefore more willing to invest time and effort in job search behaviors helping them to achieve their goal. In line with previous research, we further found that men were more likely to engage in networking behaviors than women (Forret & Dougherty, 2001; Marmaros & Sacerdote, 2002).

This study is not without limitations. First, although we provided a stringent test of our hypotheses relating to the determinants of networking by measuring them at Time 1, both job search behaviors and outcomes were measured at Time 2.

Therefore, some of our findings might be attributed to common method variance. In addition, although we presented logical and theoretical arguments for the relationships between networking and its outcomes, it is not possible to ascertain the causal sequencing of these variables. Second, on the basis of previous job search research and focus groups, we identified three other preparatory job search behaviors to examine in addition to networking. Although we believe that networking, print advertising, internet, and public employment service represent the most commonly used preparatory job search behaviors in Flanders, our results with respect to the incremental variance explained by networking might have been different if we had included others such as private employment agencies. Finally, our sample consisted of Flemish job seekers who self-registered in one of the selected Workforce Centers. It might be that this specific context affected some of the observed relationships. Therefore, future research should examine the generalizability of our findings in other settings and countries.

In terms of other future research directions, more studies should investigate specific preparatory job search behaviors. First, this would allow to obtain a more profound and differentiated knowledge of the relationships between job search behaviors and employment outcomes than measuring job search behavior at a composite level (Kanfer et al., 2001). Second, it would permit to paint a more accurate picture of the relative efficacy of job search behaviors. Even though recruitment source research has reported on the source through which newly hired employees found a job, the job seekers who did not find jobs were not taken into account (Zottoli & Wanous, 2000). Another fruitful area for future research might be to further explore the relationships between core self-evaluations and job search behaviors. Similar to job performance research (Erez & Judge, 2001; Judge et al., 2004), future studies could explore if job search motivation can explain these relationships. To this end, theories such as the theory of planned behavior (van Hooft et al., 2004) and self-determination theory (Vansteenkiste, Lens, De Witte, De Witte, & Deci, 2004) might be useful as guiding frameworks.

Finally, several practical implications follow from our study. First, job seekers should be encouraged to make use of networking and public employment service as we found that these were the most effective preparatory job search behaviors. Second, even though looking for a job in print advertising is one of the easiest job search behaviors to perform, it may also be one of the least effective. Therefore, job seekers should be warned against relying solely on print advertising in their job search. Third, given that networking seemed to be one of the more effective job search strategies, job seekers who are less likely to use networking might need special attention from job search counselors. Our study indicated that poor network composition, negative core self-evaluations, and gender (i.e., female) might help to identify those individuals.

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CHAPTER 7

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

In this final chapter, the main findings obtained in the empirical studies are summarized and discussed. On the basis of the five research questions guiding this doctoral dissertation, an integrated overview of the results is provided, discussing how word-of-mouth relates to its outcomes, other recruitment sources, mediating variables, individual differences, and situational factors. Furthermore, the strengths and limitations of the present dissertation are acknowledged and directions for future research are identified. The chapter ends with implications for the practice of recruitment and job search.

RESEARCH OVERVIEW

In this doctoral dissertation, five empirical studies were presented to address five overarching research questions, relating to (a) the effects of word-of-mouth, (b) word-of-mouth and other recruitment sources, (c) mediators of word-of-mouth, (d) word-of-mouth and individual differences, and (e) word-of-mouth and situational variables. Answering these questions, the present dissertation contributes to the recruitment literature by gaining a more profound knowledge of word-of-mouth communication as a recruitment source. Guided by the overarching research questions, the main findings of this dissertation are discussed in the five following sections.

RESEARCH QUESTION 1: EFFECTS OF WORD-OF-MOUTH

Even though potential applicants often consult family, friends, or acquaintances about jobs and organizations, most previous studies have treated potential applicants as individual decision-makers in social isolation (Barber, 1998; Cable & Turban, 2001; Highhouse & Hoffman, 2001; Kilduff, 1990). The present dissertation addressed this gap in the recruitment literature by investigating the effects of word-of-mouth communication on potential applicants' attraction to organizations.

The first experimental study (Chapter 2) found that word-of-mouth influenced organizational attractiveness. Specifically, potential applicants (graduate students in I/O psychology) were more attracted to the organization if positive word-of-mouth was provided instead of negative word-of-mouth. The experimental study in Chapter 3 confirmed these findings as positive word-of-mouth enhanced organizational attractiveness perceived by potential applicants (graduate students in I/O psychology). The study in Chapter 4 investigated if these results would generalize to a field setting in a sample of potential applicants for the Belgian Defense. In line with the experimental studies, this field study found that positive word-of-mouth had a positive effect on organizational attractiveness whereas negative word-of-mouth was negatively

related to organizational attractiveness. Providing further support, the experimental study in Chapter 5 found that positive web-based word-of-mouth had a positive effect on organizational attractiveness in a sample of potential applicants for a head nurse position.

Together, these findings strongly attest to the relevance of studying word-of-mouth communication as an external recruitment source. Both positive and negative word-of-mouth are related to organizational attractiveness, a key recruitment outcome in the applicant population that mediates most effects of recruitment activities on actual application and job choice decisions in later stages (Chapman, Uggerslev, Carroll, Piasentin, & Jones, 2005; Collins & Stevens, 2002; Highhouse, Lievens, & Sinar, 2003; Judge & Cable, 1997; Powell & Goulet, 1996; Turban, Campion, & Eyring, 1995).

In addition, the field study in Chapter 4 demonstrated that both positive and negative word-of-mouth are related to organizational prestige or perceived reputation. Organizational prestige represents a distinct component of organizational attractiveness that has received less research attention but that also has significant consequences for potential applicants' attraction to organizations (Cable & Turban, 2003; Gatewood, Gowan, & Lautenschlager, 1993; Turban & Greening, 1996).

Finally, the field study in Chapter 6 indicated that Flemish job seekers' reliance on word-of-mouth as a job search method affected their active job search behavior as well as the number of job offers they received. Specifically, job seekers who spent more time talking to other people to gather employment information applied more often and received more job offers.

In sum, this doctoral dissertation suggests that word-of-mouth communication is an influential recruitment source affecting job search and recruitment outcomes. This is in line with previous research indicating that word-of-mouth influences consumer attitudes and behavior (Bone, 1995; Herr, Kardes, & Kim, 1991; Smith & Vogt, 1995) and that social influences in general can have an effect on potential applicants' attraction to organizations (Fisher, Ilgen, & Hoyer, 1979; Higgins, 2001; Kilduff, 1990, 1992; Ryan, Sacco, McFarland, & Kriska, 2000;

Rynes, Bretz, & Gerhart, 1991; Turban, 2001). By investigating both positive and negative word-of-mouth, the present dissertation extended previous research that focused on recruitment sources providing positive information to potential applicants (e.g., Collins & Stevens, 2002). In addition, it seems that positive and negative word-of-mouth are related but distinct constructs. Not only does this make sense theoretically as word-of-mouth is an external recruitment source that can provide both positive and negative information (Cable & Turban, 2001), but it is also empirically demonstrated by their moderate correlation and differential impact on recruitment outcomes. Similarly, positive and negative word-of-mouth also have different relationships with their antecedents and mediating variables, which will be discussed more extensively in the following sections.

RESEARCH QUESTION 2: WORD-OF-MOUTH AND OTHER RECRUITMENT SOURCES

To address the dearth of research on the combined effects of multiple recruitment sources (Cable & Turban, 2001; Collins & Han, 2004), the present doctoral dissertation did not examine the effects of word-of-mouth communication in isolation. To this end, a number of other recruitment sources were also investigated, including recruitment advertising, publicity, internet, and public employment service.

First, it was found that the presence of other recruitment sources can affect the impact of word-of-mouth. Whereas positive word-of-mouth did not significantly increase organizational attractiveness after recruitment advertising (Chapter 2), it did enhance organizational attractiveness after negative publicity (Chapter 3). In line with the accessibility-diagnosticity model (Feldman & Lynch, 1988; Herr et al., 1991), this suggests that the impact of positive word-of-mouth on organizational attractiveness is greater in the presence of a negative information source instead of another positive one. Furthermore, the experimental study in Chapter 2 also indicated that recruitment advertising can interfere with the impact of word-of-mouth as a recruitment source. Specifically, adding recruitment advertising to positive word-of-mouth increased organizational attractiveness. Similarly, potential applicants were more attracted when they

were exposed to both recruitment advertising and negative word-of-mouth than to negative word-of-mouth alone, implying that recruitment advertising might be used to diminish the detrimental effect of negative word-of-mouth on organizational attractiveness. Conversely, negative publicity interfered with the impact of recruitment advertising but not of positive word-of-mouth (Chapter 3).

Second, word-of-mouth communication seems to affect the impact of other recruitment sources as well. Negative word-of-mouth decreased the effect of recruitment advertising on organizational attractiveness (Chapter 2). Positive word-of-mouth decreased the effect of negative publicity on organizational attractiveness (Chapter 3) but did not increase the effect of recruitment advertising (Chapter 2).

Finally, the studies described in Chapters 3, 5, and 6 allow to compare the impact of word-of-mouth to other recruitment sources. Although word-of-mouth and recruitment advertising had comparably positive effects on organizational attractiveness, word-of-mouth canceled out the effect of negative publicity whereas advertising did not (Chapter 3). The experimental study in Chapter 5 compared web-based word-of-mouth to a specific type of recruitment advertising, namely web-based employee testimonials. The results indicated that word-of-mouth was associated with higher organizational attractiveness than the employee testimonial. Similarly, it was found that word-of-mouth was a more effective job search method than printed recruitment advertising (Chapter 6). Specifically, word-of-mouth had a more positive impact on active job search behavior and the number of job offers than advertising. Moreover, advertising had a negative effect on employment quality whereas word-of-mouth did not. In addition, this field study indicated that job seekers relying on word-of-mouth received more job offers than those using the internet. Word-of-mouth and public employment service had comparable effects.

In conclusion, this doctoral dissertation finds that other recruitment sources can affect the impact of word-of-mouth and vice versa. Although research on the effects of multiple recruitment sources is scarce (Cable & Turban, 2001), these findings are in line with other studies providing evidence of interactions

between recruitment sources (Collins & Han, 2004; Collins & Stevens, 2002). Furthermore, it seems that word-of-mouth as an external, experiential recruitment source generally outperforms advertising as an internal, informational recruitment source, providing support for the assumptions of the accessibility-diagnosticity model (Feldman & Lynch, 1988; Herr et al., 1991) and the source credibility framework (Eisend, 2004; Pornpitakpan, 2004). This also corroborates previous marketing research indicating that word-of-mouth typically exceeds the impact of advertising on consumer persuasion (Bone, 1995; Herr et al., 1991; Hogan, Lemon, & Libai, 2004).

RESEARCH QUESTION 3: MEDIATORS OF WORD-OF-MOUTH

Two different theories were applied to explain the effects of word-of-mouth communication as a recruitment source, namely the accessibility-diagnosticity model (Feldman & Lynch, 1988; Herr et al., 1991) and the source credibility framework (Eisend, 2004; Pornpitakpan, 2004). Although the accessibility-diagnosticity model served as a basis for formulating hypotheses in multiple studies, measures of accessibility and diagnosticity were only included in the field study in Chapter 4. Conversely, the source credibility framework was tested in four of the five empirical studies in this dissertation.

Overall, considerable support was found for the source credibility framework. Potential applicants perceived positive word-of-mouth as a more credible source of employment information than recruitment advertising (Chapter 3) and web-based employee testimonials (Chapter 5). The experimental study in Chapter 2 found that the effect of word-of-mouth on organizational attractiveness in the presence of recruitment advertising was partially mediated by the credibility of recruitment advertising, but not by the credibility of word-of-mouth. In other words, whereas the credibility of word-of-mouth remained relatively stable, the credibility of recruitment advertising varied as a function of word-of-mouth. Specifically, if the positive message of recruitment advertising was backed up by positive word-of-mouth, ad credibility remained high. If, on the contrary, recruitment advertising was contradicted by negative word-of-mouth, ad credibility fell significantly lower. The field study in Chapter 4 observed a

similar effect as credibility partially mediated the effects of positive and negative word-of-mouth on organizational prestige. If positive word-of-mouth backed up the claims of other mainly positive recruitment sources, potential applicants seemed to have more trust in the total employment information. On the contrary, if the information from other sources was contradicted by negative word-of-mouth, the total employment information was perceived as less credible. The studies described in Chapters 3 and 5 investigated if credibility mediated the differential impact of word-of-mouth versus other recruitment sources. Given that no differential effect of word-of-mouth and recruitment advertising on organizational attractiveness was observed in Chapter 3, credibility could not operate as a mediator. Conversely, in Chapter 5, credibility completely mediated the differential impact of web-based word-of-mouth and web-based employee testimonials on organizational attractiveness.

With respect to the accessibility-diagnosticity model, the field study in Chapter 4 observed that positive word-of-mouth contributed positively to the perceived accessibility and diagnosticity of the employment information obtained by potential applicants. Additional positive information from an independent source probably increases potential applicants' perceptions of having sufficient, clear, and easy-to-understand information. Negative word-of-mouth was negatively associated with accessibility and was not related to diagnosticity. It seems plausible that receiving negative word-of-mouth information in addition to mainly positive information from other sources leads potential applicants to believe that they do not yet have enough information to evaluate the organization as an employer and that the information that they do have is more unclear and difficult to understand. However, negative information in itself is usually perceived as more diagnostic than positive information (Feldman & Lynch, 1988; Herr et al., 1991). These two opposing effects might explain why negative word-of-mouth and diagnosticity were unrelated. Furthermore, the effect of positive word-of-mouth on organizational attractiveness was partially mediated by diagnosticity but not by accessibility. This is in line with one of the predictions of the accessibility-diagnosticity model, stating that accessible

information is not used when more diagnostic information is available (Herr et al., 1991; Simmons, Bickart, & Lynch, 1993).

As a concluding remark, the field study in Chapter 4 indicated that the accessibility-diagnosticity model and the source credibility framework should not be seen as conflicting theories for explaining the impact of word-of-mouth communication as a recruitment source. Instead, they can be combined to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how word-of-mouth affects its outcomes.

RESEARCH QUESTION 4: WORD-OF-MOUTH AND INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES

This doctoral dissertation examined which potential applicants rely more than others on word-of-mouth communication for obtaining employment information. With respect to the Big Five taxonomy of individual differences (Digman, 1990; Goldberg, 1990), extraversion and conscientiousness were investigated as antecedents of using word-of-mouth as a recruitment source. The field study in Chapter 4 revealed that potential applicants higher in extraversion made more use of positive word-of-mouth whereas negative word-of-mouth was used more frequently by potential applicants lower in extraversion. Although conscientiousness was positively associated with positive word-of-mouth, it did not emerge as a significant predictor. Conversely, the field study in Chapter 6 indicated that both extraversion and conscientiousness were positively related to using word-of-mouth as a job search method but only conscientiousness was a significant predictor. These differences might be explained by the distinct focus of the two field studies. Whereas Chapter 4 investigated the use of word-of-mouth as a recruitment source initiated by both sources and potential applicants, Chapter 6 examined the use of word-of-mouth as a job search method initiated by job seekers. Given that extraversion is related to potential applicants' social behavior as well as the characteristics of their social networks, it might be especially relevant for explaining the overall use of word-of-mouth as a recruitment source (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Russell, Booth, Reed, & Laughlin, 1997). On the contrary, conscientiousness relates most to intentional and planful behavior, which may explain why it is most predictive of intentionally using word-of-mouth as a job search method (Digman, 1990). Taken together, these

findings are in line with Wanberg, Kanfer, and Banas (2000) who found that of all Big Five personality factors only extraversion and conscientiousness were significant predictors of using word-of-mouth.

The field study in Chapter 6 further demonstrated that core self-evaluations outperformed extraversion and conscientiousness in predicting job seekers' use of word-of-mouth. Individuals with more positive core self-evaluations spent more time contacting friends, relatives, and acquaintances to gather job-related information. Even though no previous research has investigated the relationship between core self-evaluations and word-of-mouth, these results are in line with Wanberg, Glomb, Song, and Sorenson (2005) who found that people with more positive core self-evaluations reported a higher intensity of general job search behavior and were more persistent in their job search over time. It seems that job seekers with more positive core self-evaluations are more motivated to find a good job and are therefore more willing to invest time and effort in job search behaviors helping them to achieve their goal (Erez & Judge, 2001; Judge, Van Vianen, & De Pater, 2004).

Finally, self-monitoring was examined as both an antecedent and moderator of word-of-mouth. The field study in Chapter 4 found that self-monitoring was not related to using positive or negative word-of-mouth as a recruitment source. Furthermore, the experimental studies in Chapters 2 and 3 indicated that the effect of word-of-mouth on organizational attractiveness was not greater for potential applicants high in self-monitoring. Chapter 2 did observe that, for high self-monitors only, word-of-mouth had a stronger effect on organizational attractiveness when it was presented last rather than first, suggesting that self-monitoring moderated a recency effect for word-of-mouth. Overall, however, little support was found for the usefulness of self-monitoring as an individual difference variable explaining the use and impact of word-of-mouth. It might be that Kilduff's (1992) finding that high self-monitors were more similar to their friends in their application decisions than low self-monitors can be attributed more to normative social influences than to informational social influences such as word-of-mouth. In fact, normative social influences result from a pressure to

conform to other people's expectations, whereas self-monitoring involves the adaptation of self-presentation to social cues about appropriate behavior (Snyder & Gangestad, 1986; Wooten & Reed, 1998). Conversely, informational social influences involve accepting information from others as evidence of reality and operate through a process of internalization, making the link to self-monitoring less obvious (Wooten & Reed, 1998). Along these lines, Bone (1995) found that susceptibility to interpersonal influences did not moderate the effect of word-of-mouth on consumers' product evaluations.

In sum, it is found that some potential applicants make more use of word-of-mouth as an external source of employment information than others. However, this doctoral dissertation suggests that the use of word-of-mouth is determined more by the characteristics of the source (i.e., situational variables) than by the characteristics of the recipient (i.e., individual differences), which will be discussed in the next section.

RESEARCH QUESTION 5: WORD-OF-MOUTH AND SITUATIONAL VARIABLES

In some situations, potential applicants may be more prone to use word-of-mouth communication as a recruitment source than in other situations. With respect to the characteristics of the source providing word-of-mouth information, social network theory suggests that both the structure and the composition of potential applicants' social network might influence their use of word-of-mouth (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Mouw, 2003). The present dissertation examined network size and tie strength as key components of social network structure. Social network composition was investigated at a global level as well as in terms of source expertise.

Whereas the field study in Chapter 6 revealed that both network structure (i.e., size and tie strength) and composition were related to job seekers' use of word-of-mouth, network composition emerged as the only significant predictor. Job seekers relied more on word-of-mouth if the composition of their social network was better, offering them higher-quality information. Conversely, the field study in Chapter 4 indicated that both network structure (i.e., tie strength) and

composition (i.e., source expertise) determined potential applicants' use of word-of-mouth as a recruitment source. Potential applicants made more use of both positive and negative word-of-mouth when it was provided by a source to whom they were more strongly tied and when it came from a source possessing greater expertise with respect to the organization. Again, the distinct focus of the two field studies might help to explain these divergent findings. Network composition, reflecting the quality of the information provided, may be the key determinant of job seekers' intentional use of word-of-mouth. On the contrary, network structure mainly determines the number and intensity of interactions individuals have with potential word-of-mouth sources (Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001), which might explain why it is most related to the overall use of word-of-mouth initiated by sources as well as potential applicants. Finally, the experimental study in Chapter 2 revealed that tie strength can also influence the effects of word-of-mouth. Specifically, word-of-mouth from a stronger tie (i.e., friend) was perceived as more credible and had a more positive effect on organizational attractiveness than word-of-mouth from a weaker tie (i.e., acquaintance). All of this implies that network structure as well as network composition are related to the use and impact of word-of-mouth communication as a recruitment source, providing support for both the formalist and substantialist positions taken by social network theorists (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Lin, 1999).

In addition to source characteristics, this doctoral dissertation examined if the impact of word-of-mouth was also affected by other situational variables such as the order of recruitment sources and the content of the recruitment message. First, contrary to the assumptions of the accessibility-diagnosticity model (Feldman & Lynch, 1988; Herr et al., 1991), word-of-mouth did not have a stronger effect on organizational attractiveness when it was provided prior to rather than after another recruitment source (Chapter 2). In fact, for high self-monitors only, word-of-mouth had a greater impact when it was presented last instead of first, suggesting a recency effect for word-of-mouth. Second, in line with the source credibility framework (Eisend, 2004; Pornpitakpan, 2004), web-

based word-of-mouth was more credible and influential if the recruitment message focused on person-organization fit instead of on person-person fit.

As noted above, situational variables generally outperformed individual differences as antecedents of word-of-mouth communication. The field study in Chapter 4 found that more situational than individual difference variables were related to word-of-mouth and the relationships were stronger. Moreover, Chapter 6 revealed that individual differences in personality were no longer significant determinants of job seekers' use of word-of-mouth when social network characteristics were taken into account.

STRENGTHS, LIMITATIONS, AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Answering numerous calls for more research about organizational attraction in the first phase of recruitment (Barber, 1998; Breaugh & Starke, 2000; Collins & Han, 2004; Collins & Stevens, 2002; Rynes, 1991; Rynes & Barber, 1990; Rynes & Cable, 2003; Saks, 2005; Taylor & Collins, 2000; Turban, 2001) and about social influences on organizational attraction (Barber, 1998; Cable & Turban, 2001; Highhouse & Hoffman, 2001; Kilduff, 1990, 1992; Ryan et al., 2000; Rynes et al., 1991), this doctoral dissertation contributes to the recruitment literature by providing a better knowledge of word-of-mouth communication as a recruitment source.

Five empirical studies were carried out in response to five overarching research questions. All studies addressed several research questions and all research questions were addressed in several studies so that well-founded conclusions could be drawn. Moreover, the present dissertation consisted of experimental studies as well as field studies, allowing the identification of causal effects in addition to the exploration of relationships between variables. With respect to the experimental studies, both between-subjects and within-subjects factorial designs were applied. The field studies collected cross-sectional as well as longitudinal data. Finally, samples were drawn from several applicant populations, including graduate students in I/O psychology, potential applicants

for the Belgian Defense, nurses enrolled in a graduate nursing management program, and registered Flemish job seekers. Overall, the diversity of the applied methods enhances the generalizability of the results.

In spite of these strengths, this doctoral dissertation has some limitations that should be acknowledged. First, to resemble the personal and vivid nature of word-of-mouth while still maintaining control of its content, word-of-mouth was operationalized as a videotaped conversation in the first two experimental studies (Chapters 2 and 3). Even though such a video-based medium ensures a good balance between internal and external validity concerns (Allen, Van Scotter, & Otondo, 2004; Fisher et al., 1979; Herr et al., 1991; Smith & Vogt, 1995), future research should examine the effects of word-of-mouth provided through other media, including face-to-face communication. For instance, a research confederate might be used to simulate a "live" face-to-face interaction (cf., Bone, 1995). Second, given the lack of previous research, the empirical studies in this dissertation did not distinguish between different subtypes of word-of-mouth. However, with respect to recruitment source research, Zottoli and Wanous (2000) suggested that not only differences between categories of recruitment sources should be considered, but also between and even within specific sources. For instance, future research might examine the distinct effects of e-mails, weblogs, chatrooms, electronic bulletin boards, and independent websites presenting interpersonal company information as specific kinds of web-based word-of-mouth. Finally, in accordance with calls for more research situated in early recruitment phases (e.g., Rynes & Cable, 2003), the present dissertation examined the impact of word-of-mouth as a recruitment source on *potential* applicants' attraction to organizations. This implies that the reported findings might not generalize to actual applicants nor to the general population.

This doctoral dissertation demonstrates that word-of-mouth communication is an influential recruitment source meriting further research attention. In light of the scarcity of previous research, the present dissertation focused on operationalizing word-of-mouth in terms of its defining characteristics as a company-independent social source of information. A particularly promising

avenue for future research would be to systematically vary other dimensions of word-of-mouth and examine how this influences its effects. On the one hand, future studies might focus on one specific dimension to gain an in-depth understanding of how it affects the impact of word-of-mouth. On the other hand, further research could try to incorporate several or all of these dimensions, for instance in a policy-capturing design, to acquire a comprehensive overview of how variations in word-of-mouth influence its outcomes.

First, word-of-mouth can be provided through all sorts of media, ranging from face-to-face to written communication (Herr et al., 1991). The accessibility-diagnosticity model suggests that media providing more accessible and diagnostic information have a greater impact on evaluations (Feldman & Lynch, 1988; Herr et al., 1991). This is in line with media richness theory, postulating that "richer" media are more persuasive (Daft & Lengel, 1986). Media richness is determined by the medium's capacity for immediate feedback, the number of cues and channels utilized, personalization, and language variety. Therefore, a face-to-face conversation with a word-of-mouth source should have a greater effect on potential applicants' attraction to organizations than an e-mail from the same person.

Second, word-of-mouth information can be communicated by a broad array of sources (Smith & Vogt, 1995). As evidenced in the current dissertation, social network theory (Adler & Kwon, 2002) can be applied to identify source characteristics that might influence the impact of word-of-mouth. For instance, it was found that word-of-mouth provided by stronger ties was more credible and influential. In addition, network composition variables such as the occupational status and organizational tenure of the source may affect the outcomes of word-of-mouth.

Third, word-of-mouth communication is mainly based on motives of the source, motives of the recipient, or coincidence (Mangold, Miller, & Brockway, 1999). The field studies in this doctoral dissertation indicated that some differences exist in the antecedents determining the overall use of word-of-mouth as a recruitment source versus the intentional use of word-of-mouth by job seekers.

Similarly, the motives for engaging in word-of-mouth communication might influence its effects. In addition, an increased knowledge of these motives would be very useful for organizations trying to stimulate word-of-mouth. Along these lines, Bansal and Voyer (2000) observed that word-of-mouth that was more actively sought by the recipient had a greater impact on the recipient's purchase decisions.

Finally, the valence and specific content of word-of-mouth information may affect its impact (Cable & Turban, 2001). In this respect, the present dissertation demonstrated that positive word-of-mouth is positively associated with organizational attractiveness while negative word-of-mouth has a negative effect. Furthermore, word-of-mouth seems to be more influential if it provides person-organization fit information instead of person-person fit information. However, other content variables might be of importance as well. For instance, word-of-mouth probably has a greater impact if it provides information about job and organizational characteristics that matter most to potential applicants, such as type of work, work environment, and organizational image (Chapman et al., 2005). Furthermore, attribution theory suggests that word-of-mouth messages will be more persuasive if they are characterized by high consensus, high distinctiveness, and high consistency (Kelley & Michela, 1980). Some of these assumptions were tested and supported in previous marketing research (Laczniak, DeCarlo, & Ramaswami, 2001).

In terms of other directions for future research, the present dissertation focused on investigating the determinants and outcomes of word-of-mouth communication among its recipients. Future studies might extend this dissertation by examining word-of-mouth communication among its sources. Along these lines, Shinnar, Young, and Meana (2004) proposed a conceptual model of the antecedents and consequences of employees' referral behavior. Future research could test this model and examine if it can be generalized to other types of word-of-mouth and to the willingness to appear in employee testimonials. With respect to the latter, Posthuma and Campion (2005) found that nurses who perceived higher procedural justice of work schedules and

assignments were more willing to publicly endorse their employer in recruitment advertising.

A final fruitful area for future research might be to examine the relative efficacy of various strategies used by organizations to influence word-of-mouth communication. Given that word-of-mouth is an external recruitment source (Cable & Turban, 2001), it can only be influenced indirectly through other recruitment activities such as campus recruitment, building relationships with key influentials and opinion leaders (e.g., career counselor or class president), employee referral programs (e.g., providing referral bonuses), employee testimonials, or internships. However, the effects of these strategies on the occurrence and content of word-of-mouth have not yet been investigated.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

First of all, this doctoral dissertation aims to increase organizations' awareness of the importance of word-of-mouth communication as an external recruitment source. Not only does it influence potential applicants' attraction to organizations, word-of-mouth can also interfere with the effectiveness of other, company-dependent recruitment sources such as advertising. Therefore, organizations should monitor the occurrence and content of word-of-mouth communication on a regular basis. Furthermore, positive word-of-mouth should be stimulated and negative word-of-mouth has to be avoided and countered. The empirical studies in this dissertation offer some suggestions as to how this might be achieved.

The experimental study in Chapter 2 suggests that recruitment advertising can be used to enhance the beneficial effect of positive word-of-mouth on organizational attractiveness and to diminish the detrimental effect of negative word-of-mouth. Given that stronger ties were more frequently used and were more influential as sources of word-of-mouth information (Chapters 2 and 4), organizations should also broaden the target group of their recruitment activities to include potential applicants' friends and family. In this respect, "Refer a Friend" programs on recruitment websites might encourage job seekers to

forward relevant vacancies to their friends. In addition, organizing family fairs or open house events may increase the involvement of potential applicants' family. Furthermore, as much of word-of-mouth seems to be provided by an organization's own employees (Chapter 4), the organization should ensure that all employees have easy access to accurate and complete information about the organization and vacant positions. Moreover, this finding illustrates the importance of marketing an organization's "employer brand" both outside and within the organization (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). This will increase the likelihood that the content of the word-of-mouth communication provided by employees will be consistent with the message communicated to potential applicants through the organization's internal recruitment sources.

Additionally, the field study in Chapter 6 provides a number of practical implications for job seekers and job search counselors. First, job seekers should be encouraged to look for jobs through networking and the public employment service as these were the most effective preparatory job search behaviors. Second, even though looking for a job in newspapers and journals is one of the easiest and most frequently applied job search behaviors, it might also be one of the least effective. Therefore, job seekers should be warned against relying solely on print advertising in their job search. Third, given that networking seemed to be one of the more effective job search strategies, job seekers who are less likely to use networking might need special attention from job search counselors. Poor composition of the social network, negative core self-evaluations, and gender (i.e., female) might help to identify those individuals. As a last implication, it appears that older job seekers constitute a particularly vulnerable group on the Flemish labor market, which might be in need of intensive job search guidance and protective measures.

Finally, despite their increased relevance in the practice of recruitment, the present dissertation was the first to study negative publicity and web-based employee testimonials as recruitment sources (Chapters 3 and 5). The results suggest that organizations suffering from negative publicity can make use of recruitment advertising or positive word-of-mouth to soften its damaging

effects. Although recruitment advertising is more easily and directly managed, it is more expensive and less credible than word-of-mouth and its impact might be less thorough and enduring. Furthermore, it seems that web-based employee testimonials may not fully succeed in imitating web-based word-of-mouth as a social source of employment information. However, the effectiveness of testimonials can be increased by providing information about person-person fit instead of about person-organization fit. Specifically, the credibility and impact of web-based testimonials might be enhanced by having employees describe themselves instead of the organization as a whole.

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DUTCH SUMMARY

Rekrutering bestaat uit de activiteiten die door een organisatie worden uitgevoerd om potentiële medewerkers te identificeren en aan te trekken. Aangezien rekrutering de kwantiteit en de kwaliteit van de sollicitantenpool beïnvloedt, heeft het gevolgen voor alle andere human resources praktijken, zoals de utiliteit van selectie. Een essentiële component van rekrutering is de keuze van een rekruteringsbron of -kanaal waarlangs potentiële sollicitanten informatie over de organisatie en specifieke jobs ontvangen. Voorgaand onderzoek richtte zich vrij eenzijdig op interne informatiebronnen die door de organisatie zelf worden gecontroleerd, zoals de personeelsadvertentie. Kenmerkend hierbij was dat de potentiële sollicitant als individuele besluitvormer, met andere woorden in sociaal isolement, werd bestudeerd. Hoewel in de praktijk wordt vastgesteld dat potentiële sollicitanten vaak andere mensen als bron van informatie over organisaties als werkgever hanteren, is deze externe rekruteringsbron nog nauwelijks wetenschappelijk onderzocht.

Het huidige doctoraatsproefschrift tracht deze lacune in de rekruteringsliteratuur op te vullen door de impact van mond-aan-mond communicatie als een rekruteringsbron op de organisatie-attractiviteit voor potentiële sollicitanten te onderzoeken. Mond-aan-mond communicatie als rekruteringsbron wordt daarbij gedefinieerd als een interpersoonlijke communicatie over de organisatie als werkgever of over specifieke jobs, onafhankelijk van de rekruteringsactiviteiten van de organisatie. Voorbeelden zijn gesprekken met vrienden of advies van een onafhankelijke jobconsulent.

Drie experimentele studies en twee veldstudies tonen aan dat (a) zowel positieve als negatieve mond-aan-mond communicatie de aantrekking van potentiële sollicitanten tot organisaties beïnvloeden, (b) andere rekruteringsbronnen kunnen interfereren met de impact van mond-aan-mond communicatie en vice versa, (c) credibiliteit en diagnosticiteit de effecten van mond-aan-mond

communicatie helpen verklaren, en (d) het gebruik van mond-aan-mond communicatie bepaald wordt door individuele verschillen in persoonlijkheid enerzijds en door de structuur en de samenstelling van het sociale netwerk anderzijds.