

SOCIAL MEDIA AND EMPLOYER BRANDING

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CHAPTER 1

General introduction

Introduction

Employees are of great importance for the organizations' survival and success (Ployhart & Kim, 2014). Moreover, the quantity and the quality of people that apply to an organization influence the potential success of other human resource functions, such as selection, training, and development (Boudreau & Rynes, 1985; Breaugh, 2013). Hence, recruitment, which aims to influence and attract new employees to the organization, is a crucial function within organizations. However, because jobs have become increasingly knowledge-based and specialized and because of demographic trends, managers face challenges to recruit sufficient numbers of qualified applicants (Ployhart, Schmitt, & Tippins, 2017). Consequently, competition has risen among organizations that are trying to attract candidates. Hence, there is a greater need to understand how companies can manage target populations' perceptions of them as an attractive place to work.

Accordingly, research on recruitment and applicant attraction has expanded rapidly during recent years. One concept that recently has gained popularity both among researchers and practitioners is employer branding (Schollaert, Van Hoye, Van Theemsche, & Jacobs, 2017). Employer branding concerns organizations' activities aimed at managing awareness as well as the image potential applicants, employees, and stakeholders associate with the organization as a place to work (e.g., is the organization innovative, are there development opportunities, and so on; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). The current dissertation will focus on whether and how organizations can manage the attitudes and perceptions of potential applicants, which is referred to as *external* employer branding.

It is crucial to understand how organizations can influence job seekers' attraction as well as their perceptions of the employer brand, since this can ultimately affect whether or not they will apply (Cable & Turban, 2001; Lievens & Slaughter, 2016; Theurer, Tumasjan, Welpe, & Lievens, 2018). One new type of communication sources that are used increasingly by companies for recruitment and employer branding are social media (SHRM, 2016). However, despite its popularity, research on the use of social media for recruitment and employer branding is scarce. We do not yet know how organizations use social media for recruitment, what their experiences are with these platforms and whether and how social media can be used to influence organizational attractiveness, employer brand perceptions, and word-of-mouth intentions. A better understanding of how and why organizations are using social media for recruitment and employer branding and how their social media activities influence applicants' perceptions, attitudes, and intentions will

contribute to the recruitment literature and help research keep up with practice. Moreover, the findings of such research can be of value for organizations aiming to attract potential applicants, but are unsure on whether and/or how to use social media in this regard.

The current dissertation examines social media for recruitment and employer branding. We focus on how organizations can use social media to attract job applicants. In this introductory chapter we review the literature in regard to the central topics of this dissertation: recruitment, employer branding, and the use of social media. Furthermore, we introduce four main research questions that this dissertation aims to address. Finally, an outline of the dissertation's empirical studies is presented.

Recruitment

Recruitment refers to the activities that aim to inform potential applicants and attract them to jobs and organizations (Ployhart et al., 2017). In general, the recruitment process is said to consist of three stages (Barber, Wesson, Roberson, & Taylor, 1999; Breaugh, 2008). First, organizations have to locate and reach out to a group of potential applicants and influence them to make them apply to the organization. Next, after a subset of the potential applicants applied to the organization, the organization has to make sure they maintain interest during the selection process. Finally, the organization has to persuade the selected candidates to accept a job offer. This dissertation focuses on the first stage of recruitment: how organizations can influence potential applicants who have not yet completed a job application. For organizations, understanding how they can influence potential applicants in the early stage of recruitment is of importance to generate sufficient numbers of qualified applicants (Van Hove, 2006). A key concept in this stage, which takes an important role in this dissertation, is organizational attractiveness (Ehrhart & Ziegert, 2005). Organizational attractiveness is a generalized attitude towards an organization as a potential employer and is an important theoretical precursor of behavior in the later stages of recruitment (in line with the theory of planned behavior; Jaidi, Van Hooft, & Arends, 2011). Extensive research has found that organizational attractiveness relates to job pursuit intentions and actual decisions (Chapman, Uggerslev, Carroll, Piasentin, & Jones, 2005; Collins & Stevens, 2002; Highhouse, Lievens & Sinar, 2003).

Recruitment research has examined factors that influence organizational attractiveness and application decisions. A meta-analysis by Uggerslev, Fassina, and Kraichy (2012) shows that job characteristics (e.g., development, challenge, benefits), organization characteristics (e.g., coworkers, employee treatment, reputation), recruiter behaviors (e.g., personableness, trustworthiness, competence, informativeness), recruiting

practices (e.g., message credibility), selection procedures (e.g., face validity, interpersonal treatment), fit with the job and the organization (e.g., values, needs-supplies), as well as hiring expectancies are related to organizational attractiveness. When looking at the association with job choice decisions, less studies were available, but results indicated that all these overarching factors significantly related to actual decisions, except for fit.

A theory that is frequently used in the recruitment domain to understand the effect of recruitment activities on potential applicants and that is relevant for the current dissertation is signaling theory. Signaling theory originally proposes that in situations with information asymmetry, people rely on incomplete pieces of information to make inferences about the subject that they want to evaluate or judge (Spence, 1973). In the context of recruitment, job seekers typically only have access to limited information about jobs or employers. Research has found that they can rely on different types of cues, such as consumer advertising, the selection process, and recruiter characteristics, to make inferences about working conditions (Erhart & Ziegert, 2005; Rosengren & Bondesson, 2014; Rynes, Bretz, & Gerhart, 1991; Turban, 2001). Signaling theory is proposed to be most applicable early in the recruitment process, when still a large range of options are available and signals are used to screen-out organizations (Uggerslev et al., 2012). Based on signaling theory, understanding which information potential applicants attend to (e.g., on social media) and what perceptions they derive from it (e.g., perceived employer brand and organizational attractiveness), can help organizations to effectively manage how they are perceived by potential applicants.

Labor market changes as well as the rise of new technologies influence the way that potential applicants look for work, as well as the way organizations recruit. Next, we discuss two main evolutions in the recruitment domain: employer branding and the rise of social media.

Employer branding

Traditionally, the recruitment function in organizations focused on filling vacancies (Breaugh, 2008). However, due to increasing challenges for organizations to attract and retain talent (Ployhart et al., 2017), recruitment and communication activities no longer solely focus on attracting applicants when there is a vacancy. Rather, the recruitment process starts before specific job openings have to be filled and deals with influencing current and future potential applicants' attitudes and perceptions about what it is like to work at an organization (Breaugh, 2013). Hence, recruitment is shifting towards a more

marketing-like approach, in which an organization aims to position itself as a unique and attractive work place to a larger audience (Schollaert et al., 2017).

In order to describe and study these changing circumstances, scholars started to apply marketing theories and concepts to the recruitment domain (Collins & Kanar, 2014). In both fields, organizations are using persuasive communication to attract individuals who have to choose between different options and only have access to limited information on the offered product or job (Cable & Turban, 2001). It is in the light of these evolutions that the term employer branding made its entry. Branding is a key concept in marketing that has been applied in recruitment research (Gardner, Erhardt, & Martin-Rios, 2011; Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). Marketing research found that the establishment of a distinctive and favorable brand image increases the likelihood that consumers will purchase a particular good or service instead of other goods or services (Keller, 1993). Applied to a recruitment context, employer branding has been defined as the process of creating and communicating a clear image of a desirable and distinctive place to work (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Research shows that an employer brand strengthens organizations' ability to recruit applicants (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). Collins and Han (2004) found that companies that were included in best employer lists (e.g., Fortune's 100 best companies to work for) received more applicants and that the perceived applicant quality (rated by recruiters) was higher compared to companies that were not included in such lists.

A distinction is made between internal and external employer branding. Internal branding, which lies outside the scope of the current dissertation, concerns the activities and communications directed towards a company's current employees. Internal branding aims to create the desired organizational identity and to tie employees to the organization (Schollaert et al., 2017). External branding, on the other hand, concerns the activities a company undertakes to manage its employer brand as perceived by people outside the organization, notably potential applicants.

An employer brand "highlights unique aspects of the firm's employment offerings or environment" (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, p. 502). Specifically, it can be defined as the "mental representations of specific aspects of a company as an employer as held by individual constituents" (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016, p. 409). To conceptualize dimensions of an employer brand, Lievens and Highhouse (2003) relied on the Instrumental-Symbolic framework. This framework originated in the domain of consumers' perceptions of brands (Keller, 1993). Instrumental dimensions concern the perceptions of functional, more tangible aspects of an organization (e.g., wages, benefits, location, and advancement

opportunities). Symbolic dimensions are the perceptions of intangible and more subjective characteristics of an organization (e.g., innovativeness, competence, cheerfulness, and sincerity). Because these symbolic dimensions are similar to the personality traits of humans, they are also referred to as employer brand personality (Slaughter, Zickar, Highhouse, & Mohr, 2004). The assumptions behind the original Instrumental-Symbolic framework stem from the functionalist view to attitudes, according to which people's attitudes can provide benefits to them because they may serve certain needs people have. Broadly, instrumental attributes may serve utilitarian needs and symbolic features may serve social-identity functions (Highhouse, Thornbury, & Little, 2007; Katz, 1960; Shavitt & Nelson, 2002).

In recruitment research, both instrumental and symbolic employer brand dimensions have been found to relate to organizational attractiveness, intentions to apply, and application decisions (Cromheecke, 2016; Lievens, 2007; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Slaughter & Greguras, 2009; Slaughter, Zickar, Highhouse, & Mohr, 2004; Uggerslev et al., 2012; Van Hove & Saks, 2011). Both symbolic and instrumental dimensions explain unique variance, but a study on potential applicants' perceptions of banks found that symbolic attributes were useful to differentiate between different potential employers (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). Empirical results show that the specific dimensions that correlate significantly with organizational attractiveness, differ between different samples (e.g., Lievens, 2007). Hence, organizations are advised to audit their target populations to understand which dimensions might matter to them in general, as well as to get insight in which dimensions can allow the organization to differentiate from competitors on the labor market (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Schollaert et al., 2017). Moreover, keeping track of the organization's employer brand perceptions are important because these are dynamic and change over time (Cromheecke, 2016).

Thus, empirical findings show that employer brand matters to potential applicants. However, only limited research investigated the antecedents of employer brand perceptions (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). Consequently, little is known about how organizations can create and manage their desired employer brand as perceived by potential applicants. Organizations can use different channels to try to influence potential applicants' perceptions of the employer brand as well as organizational attractiveness. With the rise of the internet and more recently, web 2.0 (which allowed for the evolution of social media; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), this offers new opportunities and challenges to organizations' recruitment function.

Online recruitment and social media

Since the 1990s the increasing ubiquity of the internet changed many aspects of how people communicate, work, search for information, and so on. In the domain of recruitment, this internet gave rise to new ways of recruiting and also influenced how people look for work (Breaugh, 2013; Kuhn & Mansour, 2014). Online job boards emerged on which companies could upload vacancies and organizations began creating their own websites. Accordingly, research started investigating whether and how companies' websites influences potential applicants.

Company websites

Research investigated how company websites influence potential applicants' attitudes towards potential employers (Dineen & Allen, 2013). Some aspects of websites that were studied and found to influence potential applicants' perceptions of an organization are the perceived ease of use, availability and amount of job and/or organization information, media richness, and personableness (e.g., Allen, Biggane, Pitts, Otondo, & Van Scotter, 2013; Allen, Mahto, & Otondo., 2007; Braddy, Meade, & Kroustalis, 2008; Chen, Lin, & Chen, 2012; Cober, Brown, Levy, Cober, & Keeping, 2003; Gregory, Meade, & Thompson, 2013; Thompson, Braddy, & Wuensch, 2008; Thoms, Chinn, Goodrich, & Howard, 2004; Walker, Feild, Giles, Armenakis, & Bernerth, 2009; Walker, Feild, Bernerth, & Becton, 2012; Williamson, Lepak, & King, 2003). Other studies also focused on the possibility of providing customized information about individuals' fit with the organization through the company's website (e.g., Dineen, Ling, Ash, & DeVecchio, 2007; Dineen & Noe, 2009; Dineen, Ash, & Noe, 2002). They found that providing fit information influenced organizational attractiveness and increased the quality of the applicant pool in terms of demands-ability and person-organization fit (Dineen & Noe, 2009; Dineen et al., 2002).

Social media

Social media can often be defined as "digital platforms on which users can connect with other users, generate and distribute content, and engage in interactive communication" (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; McFarland & Ployhart, 2015). However, there are many different types of platforms that offer different combinations of features and functions (e.g., make or share video's, create communities) to different target groups (e.g., artists, vocational groups, organizations) with different main aims (e.g., communicating with friends, building professional networks, reviewing companies; El Ouiridi et al., 2014; Kaplan

& Haenlein, 2010). Since around 2007, the number of social media platforms and the number of users started to increase rapidly. As of March 31st 2019, Facebook communicates it has 2.38 billion monthly active users (Facebook, 2019). Hence, Facebook remains the largest social media site globally, followed by YouTube, WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, WeChat, and Instagram on a sixth place (Statista, 2019). LinkedIn, the largest platform with a professional orientation, is ranked fourteenth in number of users and states it has more than 610 million members (LinkedIn, 2019). Facebook and LinkedIn are the two platforms that are most used for recruitment and job search in several parts of the world (including Europe and the USA; Adecco, 2015; SHRM, 2016; Stepstone, 2013), but LinkedIn seems to be perceived as more effective for these ends by both recruiters and job seekers (Nikolaou, 2013). In general, the social media landscape is dynamic. From time to time new social media platforms emerge, while some previously popular platforms witness a decrease in the number of users. However, the number of social media users continues to grow across the globe (Statista, 2018). This continuing rise should be seen in the context of improved access to internet in developing areas (e.g., in India; The Economist, 2019).

Social media are unique settings compared to other communication channels used by organizations, which can give rise to different modes and norms of interaction (Etter, Ravasi, & Colleoni, 2019; Papacharissi, 2009). McFarland and Ployhart (2015) discuss several dimensions on which social media differ from other communication channels. They discuss how social media are more open (i.e., accessible), allow to share information instantly, to reach out to a large audience, to communicate both synchronously and asynchronously, and point out that content on social media can remain traceable long after it was posted. This new context may influence the expectations people have about the communication on social media, which might subsequently influence their reactions towards information shared on these platforms, for example by organizations.

Social media can be used by organizations to communicate with different types of stakeholders: both internally and externally (McFarland & Ployhart, 2015). Organizations recognized the potential benefits of social media and started using it for different functions, including marketing, internal communication and collaboration, as well as human resource activities, such as recruitment and selection (Knoll, 2016; Leonardi, Huysman, & Steinfield, 2013; SHRM, 2016). With regard to screening and selection, recruiters can use social media to look for and reach out to both active and passive job seekers (Nikolaou, 2014; SHRM, 2016). Moreover, many recruiters screen job candidates' social media pages and

use the information encountered on them to decide whether to keep a person in the selection process (Caers & Castelyns, 2010; SHRM, 2016). Some empirical evidence indicates that when structured rating forms are used, recruiters' ratings based on a candidate's social media page correlate with certain personality traits and academic performance (GPA) or IQ (Kluemper & Rosen, 2009; Kluemper, Rosen, & Mossholder, 2012; Roulin & Levashina, 2019). However, researchers raise several important concerns. First, there is still very limited evidence with regard to standardization, reliability, and validity of the social media screening for selection (Davison, Bing, Kluemper & Roth, 2016). Moreover, a study by Van Iddekinge, Lanivich, Roth, and Junco (2016) found that recruiters' ratings of a Facebook profile were not related to actual job performance (that is, supervisor ratings) or turnover behavior one year later, while other traditional selection tools were able to predict these outcomes. Second, studies show that information available on social media that is not relevant to the job influences recruiters' selection decisions (e.g., profile pictures; Baert, 2018). Additionally, the use of information on social media for selection might negatively impact applicants' reactions towards the organization (Stoughton, Thompson, & Meade, 2015). Other concerns are that social media may increase opportunities for discrimination and adverse impact (Davison et al., 2016). Consequently, scholars recommend recruiters not to use social media for screening and selection (Van Iddekinge et al., 2016) and if they do use it, to only do it as a back ground check, use platforms with a professional orientation, and to always proceed with caution (for further recommendations, see Davison et al., 2016).

With respect to social media screening, privacy concerns are a topic under increasing scrutiny, especially with the adoption of the General Data Protection Regulation by the European Union. In 2017, the Data Protection Working Party published an opinion which discussed the use of social media at work. According to this document, legal ground is required to process information on social media for selection or recruitment. Employers are only allowed to collect and process data that is necessary and relevant with regard to future job performance. Furthermore, the document advises employers to take into account whether the profile is created for work or private purposes (e.g., LinkedIn or Facebook), since this can be an indication for the legal admissibility of the data inspection. The opinion also recommends to delete the collected data once an individual is removed from the selection process (Data Protection Working Party, 2017). However, when the applicant consents, the information can be stored for a finite period with the eye on future job

opportunities (KMO Insider, 2018). In practice, it remains very difficult to check whether and how employers are screening candidates' social media presence.

However, social media are not only used by recruiters to form impressions of applicants, job seekers also use social media to form impressions of potential employers (McFarland & Ployhart, 2015; Nikolaou, 2014). Many organizations are investing resources in social media for employer branding and recruitment purposes (SHRM, 2016). However, despite its popularity, research on social media in a recruitment context is scarce (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). The current dissertation aims to add to this knowledge by examining four research questions. First, given the limited knowledge of the use of social media as a recruitment tool we aim to explore the experiences of organizations and employees with the use of social media for recruitment and employer branding. Second, we will look at the effects of one important way in which organizations can use social media: by creating an organizational profile. We aim to investigate if an organization's profile can influence organizational attractiveness, employer brand perceptions, and word-of-mouth intentions. Third, in order to advance our knowledge of the mechanisms underlying the effects of organization's social media pages on potential applicants' perceptions we will examine how social media pages affect these three recruitment outcomes. Finally, we aim to investigate whether organizations can manage organizational attractiveness after a negative online review by providing a response. Below we discuss these research questions more in depth.

The use of social media as a recruitment tool within organizations

Social media offer new opportunities and pose new challenges for the recruiting domain, yet not much is known about how and why organizations are using social media for recruitment and which barriers or pitfalls avail. Investigating these questions can lead to a better understanding of the current recruitment landscape. Moreover, it can be beneficial to organizations that are looking to employ social media as it will allow them to learn from others' experiences and will provide insights in which (potential) issues they should attend.

One of the opportunities social media offer for recruitment is that they can allow organizations to more easily involve employees in the recruitment process. Social media provide a new way in which employees can share recruitment related information with their own network (e.g., sharing a vacancy on their personal profile). Research has indicated that information shared by employees can increase organizational attractiveness beyond company controlled sources because it is perceived as credible (Van Hove & Lievens, 2009). Hence, organizations can benefit from involving employees in recruitment activities.

However, little is known about whether and how organizations are involving employees with regard to recruitment through social media. Also, insights in employees' perceptions and experiences of such involvement is lacking. Investigating these topics will shed light on the obstacles and opportunities with regard to involving and stimulating employees for recruitment through social media. Based on these considerations, we formulate the first research question of this dissertation.

Research Question 1. What are the experiences of organizations and employees with the use of social media for recruitment and employer branding?

The organization's social media profile

Besides involving employees, one main way in which organizations can use social media is by creating and maintaining a profile on social media. Such online presence provides an opportunity for organizations' information to be seen by a large group of potential applicants. For organizations it is important to know whether and how their presence on social media can influence potential applicants attitudes' towards them as an employer. So far, only a few studies investigated the effect information about organizations on social media have on potential applicants (Frasca & Edwards, 2017; Kissel & Büttgen, 2015; Sivertzen, Nilsen, & Olafsen, 2013). Frasca and Edwards (2017) compared the same message across three media platforms: Facebook, YouTube, and a website. However, participants did not visit the actual platforms: a screenshot or an imbedded video were provided. Facebook resulted in significantly higher source credibility compared to the website and YouTube, which in turn related to higher organizational attractiveness. Facebook resulted in higher media richness than the website. Sivertzen et al. (2013) found that self-reported exposure to information about an organization on social media, related to more positive perceptions of corporate reputation, which in turn positively related to intentions to apply. Since it concerns self-reported exposure, there is some reason to doubt the causal relation: it might also be that people were exposed more to information about organizations that they were already more interested in. Furthermore, Kissel and Büttgen (2015) surveyed people through company's career sites on Facebook. They found that the perceived available information was positively related to perceptions of general corporate image, which in turn positively related to employer attractiveness (which subsequently related to intentions to apply). These studies indicate that information on social media can influence potential applicants' perceptions of the organization. However,

more research is necessary to test whether and how exposure to a social media page influences employer brand perceptions and organizational attractiveness.

Understanding whether and how information disseminated by an organization on social media can influence potential applicants will add to the knowledge of how potential applicants' perceptions and attitudes are being shaped in the digital era. Moreover, the findings can help organizations' decisions regarding whether and how to spend their resources for recruitment and employer branding. A first important question is thus whether exposure to an organization's social media page influences potential applicants' attitudes towards the organization and their perceptions of the organization as a place to work. Moreover, additionally to organizational attractiveness and employer brand perceptions, we also aim to look at word-of-mouth intentions as outcome variable. Word-of-mouth refers to the dissemination of positive information about an organization as a potential employer by sources not under direct control of the organization (Van Hove & Lievens, 2009). Understanding if and how social media pages can influence word-of-mouth intentions will add to the understanding of how people outside the organization can be stimulated to share positive information with others such as friends, family, and acquaintances.

Research Question 2. Can an organization's profile influence organizational attractiveness, employer brand perceptions, and word-of-mouth intentions?

Furthermore, understanding the mechanisms underlying the effect of exposure to an organization's social media page on potential applicants' reactions can provide more insight into how potential applicants process information in a social media context. Investigating this will increase our understanding of how social media can be employed most efficiently and effectively. Such knowledge may allow organizations to better leverage social media for recruitment and employer branding purposes.

To this end, we will focus on communication characteristics of social media. Examining the role of specific communication characteristics can allow organizations to more effectively manage their profile in order to influence potential applicants. Several characteristics have been found to play a role in previous research on other sources of recruitment information, such as advertisements and websites (e.g., Allen et al 2013). Given the different context social media pages represents (McFarland & Ployhart, 2015; Papacharissi, 2009), we study characteristics that are proposed to be especially relevant and salient in this context, but also that can be generalized across different social media platforms. Three communication characteristics that this dissertation proposes to play a role with regard to social media profiles' effects on potential applicants are interactivity,

social presence, and informativeness (McFarland & Ployhart, 2015; Ryan, Horvath & Kriska, 2005; Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976). Even though previous research shows that these characteristics play a role in other recruitment sources, we are not sure whether they can help us understand the recruitment outcomes in the context of social media.

Interactivity. Social media created new ways to interact with organizations (McFarland & Ployhart, 2015), for example through private messages or by writing a reaction on or liking a post, picture, or video of the organization. Additionally, social media allow to see the communication that has occurred on the organizations' public profiles between the organization and other actors, such as customers and employees. According to media richness theory (Daft & Lengel, 1986; Daft, Lengel, & Trevino, 1987), communication media differ in the extent that they allow to convey rich information. When a medium allows for two-way-communication this allows for the communication of more rich information (Daft & Lengel, 1986). This is of importance for recruitment, because richer media allow to convey more complex messages and may thus be more capable of transmitting persuasive information (Allen et al., 2013). Thus, since social media provide several possibilities for interaction, this may lead to improved perceptions of and attitudes towards the organization. Hence, we expect that interactivity can explain the effect of exposure to a social media profile on potential applicants' attitudes and perceptions.

Social presence. Social presence is defined as the awareness of communicating with another person or entity and has been conceptualized as the extent to which the communication is perceived as personal, friendly, and sociable (Short, 1976). Research already found social presence played a role in the effect of organizational websites on potential applicants' attitudes (Allen et al., 2013). Since the initial purpose of social media was to build and maintain social contacts (Boyd & Ellison, 2007), this might influence how people and organizations communicate on these platforms and what kind of communication style is expected or considered appropriate. Accordingly, it might be that social presence plays an important role with regard to the influence of organization's social media pages on potential applicants.

Informativeness. We define informativeness as the relevance and usefulness of given information for potential applicants who want to evaluate the organization as an employer (Breaugh & Starke, 2000; Ryan et al., 2005; Van Hove & Lievens, 2009). Empirical evidence shows that recruitment sources' informativeness positively influences potential applicants' attitudes towards organizations (Ryan et al., 2005; Williamson et al., 2003). Further, informativeness is also found to play a role in the effectiveness of

recruitment communication on other channels, such as websites or job postings (e.g., Allen et al., 2007; Barber & Roehling, 1993). People pay attention to information adequacy, especially if there is little information available (Barber & Roehling, 1993). Since social media pages are tailored for posting short messages rather than elaborated texts, information adequacy might play an important role in managing people's perceptions in a social media context. Also, social media made a lot of information available, which might influence individual's expectations. For example, potential applicants looking to evaluate a company may expect relevant information to be readily available, if this is not the case, this might reduce the attitudes or intentions towards the organization. We expect that organizations' profiles can differ in terms of informativeness and propose that this may explain attitudes and intentions after exposure to such profiles.

Thus, focusing on these three communication characteristics, we aim to examine how social media pages affect organizational attractiveness, employer brand perceptions, and word-of-mouth intentions.

Research Question 3. How do social media pages affect organizational attractiveness, employer brand perceptions, and word-of-mouth intentions?

Besides the organization's profile, which is under control of the organization, we already mentioned that other actors can also share information about the organization as an employer on social media. In the following section we will discuss employer reviews and company's subsequent responses.

Responses to employer reviews

Social media thus not only allow organizations to disseminate information about themselves and project a positive image, these platforms also provide opportunities for individuals to produce, disseminate, and access evaluations of organizations (Etter et al., 2019). Hence, social media introduced a power shift with regard to corporate communication. This evolution provides opportunities for recruitment, since it offers a new way for organizations to involve employees in the recruitment process (see Research Question 1). However, it also raises new challenges as information that is not in line with the desired employer brand, as well as negative information about the organization as a place to work, can be easily disseminated by employees, potential applicants, and others. Indeed, employees and applicants started sharing their experience and evaluations of organizations as employers online (Pitt, Botha, Ferreira, & Kietzmann, 2018). We refer to these online evaluations about employers or jobs as online employer reviews. Empirical research shows that online employer reviews can influence organizational attractiveness

(Melián-González & Bluchand-Gidumal, 2016) and negative reviews were found to relate to reduced organizational attractiveness (Stockman, Van Hoye, & Carpentier, 2017).

An important question is what organizations can do to manage organizational attractiveness after a negative review. Most social media platforms as well as specific employer review sites (such as Glassdoor and Indeed) allow organizations to respond to negative reviews. However, in reality only a small amount of reviews seem to be met with a company response (Roshan, Warren, & Carr, 2016). In this dissertation we aim to add to the understanding of whether responding can affect organizational attractiveness.

Drawing on attribution theory (Kelley & Michela, 1980; Weiner, 1985), we will investigate whether two response strategies, a refutation and an accommodative response, to a negative review can influence organizational attractiveness. Additionally, we examine two potential underlying mechanisms: review credibility (i.e., the extent to which people believe that the content of the negative review reflects the truth) and organizational trustworthiness (i.e., perceptions of the organization as being sincere and dependable; Cook & Wall, 1980; Eisend, 2004; Klotz, Da Motta Veiga, Buckley, & Gavin, 2013).

Research Question 4. Can organizations' responses to a negative review affect organizational attractiveness?

Overview of the dissertation

This dissertation aims to contribute to the growing area of recruitment research by investigating a new type of communication sources used for recruitment and employer branding. Specifically, the objectives are to increase the understanding how and why organizations are using social media, what barriers still exist, whether and how social media profiles influence potential applicants, and whether and how responding to negative reviews can improve organizational attractiveness. Below, we describe the five empirical chapters of this dissertation. The empirical chapters can be read independently, therefore some overlap may occur in the literature review. Below, we briefly discuss each chapter and explain how they relate to our research questions. The final chapter of this dissertation contains a general discussion and conclusion.

Chapter 2 is titled '*Recruitment through social media: A qualitative study with HR managers and employees*'. This chapter presents a qualitative study, in which we use interviews with HR managers and employees to explore why and how organizations employ social media as a recruitment tool, how employees are involved in this process and their experiences. This chapter aims to address Research Question 1: what are the

experiences of organizations and employees with the use of social media for recruitment and employer branding?

In Chapter 3, titled '*Recruiting nurses through social media: Effects on employer brand and attractiveness*', we examine Research Question 2: whether an organizational profile on social media can influence organizational attractiveness and employer brand image. We use an experimental study in which we compare the attitudes and perceptions of a group of nurses that were exposed to one hospital's profile on social media (either LinkedIn or Facebook) compared to a control group which did not visit the social media page. Further, this chapter also investigates Research Question 3 about how social media pages affect organizational attractiveness and employer brand perceptions. We examine whether two perceived social media page communication characteristics, social presence and interactivity, underlie the effects of exposure to a social media profile (Allen et al., 2013; Short et al., 1976).

Chapter 4, titled '*Attracting applicants through the organization's social media page: Signaling employer brand personality*', also examines both Research Question 2 and 3, but from a different point of view. Chapter 4 uses a two-wave study in which final year students business administration are surveyed before exposure to the social media profile of potential employers in which students were interested in applying to (on LinkedIn or Facebook) and after one week. Such a design allows us to compare the outcome variables before and after exposure. Moreover it allows to examine the mechanisms underlying exposure to different pages instead of comparing one profile with no social media, as in Chapter 3. Accordingly, this study draws on signaling theory (Connelly et al., 2011) to examine how different social media pages influence organizational attractiveness and word-of-mouth intentions differently, by focusing on two communication characteristics, social presence and informativeness, and how these are used to infer two meta employer brand perceptions: organizational warmth and competence (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016).

Thus, on the one hand social presence might be a specific characteristic of social media profiles in general (Chapter 3). On the other hand, it might also be a useful characteristic to examine how profiles elicit potential applicants' reactions, as the conveyed social presence may differ between profiles (Chapter 4 and 5). Furthermore, note that, interactivity is no longer included in this chapter and the next. Chapter 3 was not able to find evidence that it played an important role, but more importantly, the interactivity concept is less relevant given that Chapter 4 and 5 examine the different effects of different profiles.

In Chapter 5, titled '*Social media recruitment: Communication characteristics and sought gratifications*', we further examine Research Question 3, only focusing on how social media pages' communication characteristics influence organizational attractiveness. Instead of examining *perceived* communication characteristics, we investigate whether organizations can manipulate social presence and informativeness on a social media page and the effects are of these manipulated characteristics on organizational attractiveness. Moreover, we examine whether these manipulated characteristics compensate or reinforce each other's effect and whether sought gratifications on social media influence these effects (Katz et al., 1973). In an experimental study, a sample consisting of Chinese employees and university students were shown a fictitious organization's profile on WeChat.

Chapter 6, titled '*Organizational attractiveness after a negative employer review: Company response strategies and review consensus*' addresses Research Question 4, which asked whether organizations' responses to a negative review can affect organizational attractiveness. This chapter draws on attribution theory (Kelley & Michela, 1980; Weiner, 1985) to examine the effect of a refutation and an accommodative response to an online negative employer review on organizational attractiveness. Moreover, two potential underlying mechanisms are examined by looking at whether and how the responses influence review credibility and organizational trustworthiness (Eisend, 2004; Klotz, Da Motta Veiga, Buckley, & Gavin, 2013). Additionally, we examine the effectiveness of company responses when consensus information is available. Two experimental studies are conducted using a negative employer review about a fictitious organization to a sample of employed individuals from the USA.

Finally, Chapter 7 comprises a general discussion and conclusion of this dissertation. Key findings from the empirical chapters are summarized. We also describe strengths, limitations, suggestions for future research, and discuss implications for practice.

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CHAPTER 2

Recruiting through social media: A qualitative study with HR managers and employees¹

The majority of job seekers are active on social media. These platforms are therefore promising tools for recruitment and employer branding. Organizations can use social media to fill in current vacancies, but also to create an attractive employer brand which can aid hiring in the future as well. Despite the increasing use of social media for recruitment, there is not much research on how and why social media are used in a recruitment context and which issues can arise doing so. This qualitative study examines the experiences of HR managers and employees. On the one hand the focus is on social media as a recruitment tool in general. On the other hand, we look at one specific way in which social media can be employed for recruitment: through involving employees. Based on the results, we advise HR professionals to set up more systematic collaborations with the marketing and communication departments and to invest in HR metrics. We also recommend organizations to inform their employees more about how they can contribute to a company's recruitment strategy, and to keying into employees' motives to spread positive information about their employer. Finally, we emphasize the importance of investing in recruitment as a long-term strategy to which all recruitment activities can be aligned.

1. This chapter is based on Carpentier, M., Stockman, S., & Van Hoyer, G. (2018). Rekrutering via sociale media: Een kwalitatief onderzoek bij HR-managers en medewerkers, *Tijdschrift voor HRM*, 4.

Introduction

Population ageing and the shift towards a knowledge economy are causing major challenges for organizations to attract sufficient employees with specific skills, knowledge and competencies (Ployhart, Schmitt, & Tippens, 2017; SHRM, 2016a). This has caused growing interest in recruitment and an increase in the number of studies in this domain (Rynes, Reeves, & Darnold, 2014). Scarcity on the labor market, amongst other things, caused organizations to no longer think about recruitment as an ad hoc solution to fill current vacancies. Instead, organizations need a more strategic focus on recruitment keeping in mind the development and maintenance of a favorable employer image (Kroon & Klijst, 2017). Accordingly, a concept that has become very popular the last few years in this context is the employer brand (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). The employer brand of an organization influences its attractiveness for job seekers (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003) and can influence how job seekers will respond to the recruitment activities of the organization (Collins & Kanar, 2014).

Social media seem promising tools for creating and managing a desirable employer brand, since many job seekers are active on these platforms (Adecco, 2015). Through the use of social media organizations can reach out to both active job seekers (people who are actively looking for a job) and passive job seekers (people who might be interested in a new job, but are not actively searching and applying; Nikolaou, 2014). Social media allow to reach a large audience, to send targeted messages, and to communicate interactively (McFarland & Ployhart, 2015). Hence, social media provide opportunities for new ways of recruiting. Many organizations already have one or multiple social media profiles and use these pages for recruitment purposes (SHRM, 2016a).

Besides having social media profiles for recruitment and employer branding on which an organization itself can post content, organizations can also try to involve their employees (McFarland & Ployhart, 2015). They can, for example, ask employees to share a vacancy on their own social media profile or to like the organization's social media profile. Research shows that recruiting through employees, or employee referrals, has positive pre- and post-hire effects (Van Hove & Lievens, 2009; Zottoli & Wanous, 2000). Moreover, it is a cost efficient way to attract employees and to spread out the employer brand (Stockman, Van Hove, & Carpentier, 2017).

So far, only a few studies focused on recruitment through social media (McFarland & Ployhart 2015; Roth, Boboko, Van Iddekinge, & Thatcher, 2016). Hence, not much is known about organizations' experiences with the use of social media to attract applicants

or how organizations can effectively use social media in a recruitment context. A better understanding is of importance for organizations that want to use social media, but do not know how to start or what they should pay attention to. Moreover, better insights may serve as basis for future research.

This study applies a qualitative approach to contribute to the current knowledge of recruitment through social media. We use interviews with Human Resources managers (HR managers) and employees to examine why organizations do or do not use social media as a recruitment tool and how they do this. Further, we investigate whether and why organizations involve their employees in this process and how this occurs. Besides HR managers, we also interview employees to better understand what motivates them to spread information through social media about their organization as an employer and which barriers they experience. We conclude with a number of suggestions for practice.

Social media in a recruitment context

Social media are digital platforms on which users can create a profile, establish connections with other users, create and share content, and can communicate interactively (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; McFarland & Ployhart, 2015). Facebook and LinkedIn are the two most used platforms for recruitment and job search (SHRM, 2016b). HR managers perceive LinkedIn to be the most efficient platform for these purposes (Nikolaou, 2014; SHRM, 2016b).

Until now, most research on social media focuses on whether and how recruiters use information available on these platforms to screen or select applicants (Davison, Bing, Kluemper, & Roth, 2016; Kluemper, Rosen, & Mossholder, 2012). In addition, social media are used by job seekers to find information on potential employers (for example through visiting an organization's profile or through advertisements). Information on social media about organizations can influence job seekers' perceived corporate reputation and the organization's attractiveness (Carpentier, Van Hoyer, & Stockman, 2017; Frasca & Edwards, 2017; Kissel & Büttgen, 2015; Sivertzen, Nilsen, & Olafsen, 2013).

Previous research shows that seeing an organizational page on social media can positively influence job seekers' employer brand perceptions. Employer brand concerns potential candidates' associations with an organization as an employer, for instance about the innovativeness of an organization or advancement opportunities at an organization (Carpentier et al., 2017). These studies on recruiting through social media focused mainly on the effect of social media profiles on potential applicants' perceived organizational attractiveness. Consequently, the strategic decisions and experiences of organizations

with the use of social media for recruitment remain in the dark. In this study we therefore investigate why organizations do or do not use social media as a recruitment tool and how they do this. The study aims to examine the following research questions:

Research Question 1. Why do organizations utilize social media as a recruitment tool and why not?

Research Question 2. How do organizations utilize social media as a recruitment tool?

Involving Employees in the Recruitment Process on Social Media

One specific way in which organizations can use social media as a recruitment tool, is by involving their current employees (McFarland & Ployhart, 2015). Several studies showed that organizational information spread by employees positively influences the potential applicants' perceived organizational attractiveness and decisions to apply (Van Hoya & Lievens, 2007, 2009). Moreover, studies also showed positive effects of employee word-of-mouth in the long term. More precisely, new employees that were hired through current employees not only show a better fit with the organization, but also higher job satisfaction and lower retention rates (Zottoli & Wanous, 2000). Consequently, organizations would benefit from a better understanding of how they can involve their employees in attracting applicants (Bloemer, 2010; Van Hoya, 2013).

An increasing amount of organizations reward their employees in case they refer someone and this person gets hired (i.e., a successful referral; Jobvite, 2015). Such extrinsic motives (e.g., financial bonuses) can be motivating (Van Hoya, 2013), but the recruiting message can also be perceived as less credible when potential applicants know about the bonus (Stockman et al., 2017; Van Hoya, Weijters, Lievens, & Stockman, 2016). Besides extrinsic rewards, research found that intrinsic motives (i.e., job satisfaction) and prosocial motives (i.e., helping a friend to find a job or helping the organization to find an appropriate new hire) also positively relate to sharing positive employer related information (Van Hoya, 2013). Thus, stimulating intrinsic and prosocial motives might be a way to stimulate employees to spread positive word-of-mouth, without the potential disadvantages associated with bonuses.

Employees can spread positive word-of-mouth about their organization as an employer through various channels (e.g., face-to-face, email). Social media are new tools that can facilitate this (McFarland & Ployhart, 2015; Van Hoya, 2013). However, little is known about how organizations (can) effectively stimulate their employees to spread positive information on social media and how employees experience this. The current

study investigates why and how organizations involve their employees in this process, what motives employees to spread information through social media, and the barriers they experience. Hence, our research questions are the following.

Research Question 3. Why do organizations involve their employees in the recruitment process through social media?

Research Question 4. How do organizations involve their employees in the recruitment process through social media?

Research Question 5. What motivates employees to spread recruitment and employer branding information through social media?

Research Question 6. What kind of barriers do employees experience related to spreading recruitment and employer branding information through social media?

Method

Because of the lack of research and knowledge about the experiences of organizations with the use of social media for recruitment purposes, a qualitative research method is most suitable for this study. We conducted semi-structured interviews to find out how and why organizations do or do not use social media for recruitment purposes and to examine the experiences of employees with social media in a recruitment context and their motives for sharing recruitment related information through social media (Vogt, Gardner, & Haeffele, 2012). Interviewing both HR managers and employees allows us to study the involvement of employees in the recruitment process through social media from two different angles (Golafshani, 2003).

Sample

Our first interview sample contains 28 HR managers with decision-making power over the recruitment strategy and practices in the organization. The second sample contains 31 employees from 30 different organizations. In three organizations both the HR manager and employee were interviewed, all other respondents worked for different organizations. In total 55 organizations were involved in the study. We made sure different organizations from different sectors were included. Organizations were spread across Flanders (the Dutch speaking half of Belgium), spanned various sectors (e.g., consulting, finances, care, food, pharmacy, construction, IT, and retail), and differed in size (100 to 200.000 employees). HR managers (71% women) were on average 40 years old ($SD = 8.4$) and had an average tenure in their current organization of 9 years ($SD = 8.8$). The employees (45% women) were on average 40 years old ($SD = 12.1$) and had an average

tenure in their current organization of 13 years ($SD = 12.1$). For the quotes in the results section, we refer to HR managers with “HR” and to employees with “EM”.

Procedure

Our research questions and thus our research guide were developed based on scientific research on recruiting. More specifically, we relied on research on recruitment sources and word-of-mouth (Van Hoyer, 2013; Van Hoyer, 2014; Van Hoyer & Lievens, 2015) and initial research on social media (Nikolaou, 2014). Furthermore, we also relied on surveys conducted by private companies and an HR-association on the use of social media for recruiting (Adecco, 2015; Jobvite, 2015; SHRM, 2016b; WorldatWork, 2014). A third source of inspiration were unstructured telephone interviews about social media and employees in the recruiting process with 36 HR managers from companies that have been on the Great Place to Work in Belgium list during the last five years (Stockman et al., 2017). Table 1 shows example questions from the interview guide for both HR managers and employees.

Interviews were conducted in the end of 2015 and the beginning of 2016. Organizations were directly contacted through email to find HR managers. To contact employees, we used a snowball technique and started from the personal network of the interviewers. All participants signed an informed consent. Interviews were conducted with the help of well-informed and trained research assistants. All interviews were recorded and lasted between 45 and 60 minutes.

Analysis

The recorded interviews were transcribed and analyzed using NVivo. Interviews were repeatedly read and thematically coded by the two first authors of this study. In the case of discussion about the interpretation of the coding, the third author was involved in order to reach a consensus about the various themes.

Results

First, we discuss why organizations do or do not use social media for recruitment purposes. Next, we describe how organizations use social media as a recruitment tool. Specifically, we examine to which extent organizations use social media, when they use which specific social media platform, and who is responsible. Finally, we discuss organizations' experiences with involving employees in the recruiting process through social media. In line with our research questions, we analyze why and how organizations involve employees. We also focus on the employees' motives for spreading positive

information about their organization as an employer on social media, the barriers they experience in doing so, and how organizations try to remove these barriers. Table 1 provides a concise overview of the results for each research question.

Why do organizations utilize social media as a recruitment tool and why not?

Reasons to use social media for recruitment purposes. A first reason mentioned by HR managers for using social media for recruitment purposes is that it allows for recruitment in a very targeted way. Organizations can decide who will be exposed to the job advertisement in terms of region, education, and so on. *“You can recruit in a very targeted way. For example, I just want to contact engineers from Ghent, or show them an advertisement.”*- (HR, woman, 35 years, 5 years of tenure, construction). Social media also allow organizations to post a message or job opening in a specific community (group on LinkedIn, mostly specifically for people with a certain professional profile) to target very specific and/or senior profiles. Thus, when organizations are looking for specific, well defined profiles or want to target people from a specific region, social media are considered interesting tools. The possibility to reach out to people with certain expertise or educational backgrounds through LinkedIn was also mentioned as an important advantage. In the past, organizations had to make use of headhunters and/or selection offices for such hires, but now recruiters have the possibility to do their own targeted search by using social media.

A second reason to use social media as a recruitment tool for HR managers, is to reach out to passive job seekers to arouse their interest. This is illustrated by the following quote: *“This [recruitment through LinkedIn] is a total different way of recruiting. Because in this way you approach people that might not be looking for a job at that time. You first have to bring another story. Those people are not immediately planning on applying for a job, so you first have to arouse their interest.”* – (HR, woman, 54 years, 12 years tenure, telecom). Hence, organizations will not only post a job opening on the moment they have a vacancy, but will use social media to increase awareness and create and manage an attractive employer brand in the eyes of the targeted population. *“You will not see the return on investment right away. I think it is something that delivers in the long run.”* – (HR, woman, 39 years, 18 years of tenure, recycling). In this sense, organizations consider social media as one option out of a range of different methods. Social media are for instance used in addition to banners and job fairs. This finding confirms that organizations are increasingly rethinking their recruitment process, with a focus on the long term and with social media as one of several tools that can be used (Kroon & Klijs, 2017).

A third reason to use social media for recruitment, according to HR managers, is the limited cost compared to other recruiting sources (e.g., advertisements in newspapers or recruitment and selection offices). This is illustrated by the following quote: “*The comparison is clear: an advertisement in [a local Flemish newspaper] costs 1400 euro, Facebook costs 30 euro.*” – (HR, woman, 39 years, 18 years of tenure, recycling). Because of this relatively low cost, organizations dare to experiment with placing vacancies on social media.

Reasons for not using social media or using it to a lesser extent for recruiting purposes. Besides reasons to use social media, HR managers also discussed reasons why not to use social media (or to a lesser extent). Some HR-managers mentioned that it takes a lot of time and effort to keep the social media profiles up to date and to monitor and control what is being posted. Organizations sometimes experience this as a barrier, which makes them decide not to (or to a lesser extent) use social media for recruitment. Some HR managers mentioned the rapidly increasing costs in case organizations want to make use of additional functions of certain social media platforms. A basic organization profile on social media is free, but organizations have to pay for extra functionalities, such as job slots (a place to post vacancies), advertising, and special profiles which for example allow to contact more people.

Some organizations fear losing control about what is said by others on their social media profiles, for example in responses to a message. The following quote illustrates this: “*Once the word is out, it takes on a life on its own. It is important for us to be able to keep everything under control.*” – (HR, woman, 36 years, 10 months of tenure, healthcare).

Third, organizations think it is difficult to see the return on investment (and to prove this to the higher management). Outcomes such as brand awareness and arousing passive job seekers’ interest only manifest themselves on the long term. HR managers often do not seem to have access to the right tools to track which recruitment channels were used by applicants to discover a job opening or which information sources convinced them to apply (like social media, the job site, and so on). Many organizations do not keep any data records regarding their social media activities and the achieved results. However, some organizations use Google Analytics to better understand the effectiveness of their online activities. Some organizations survey applicants on where they saw the job posting for the first time. Nonetheless, according to HR managers it remains difficult to find hard evidence for the effectiveness of social media for recruitment. Being able to show such

kind of evidence to the management is sometimes necessary to justify the received resources, and/or keep receiving resources for the use of social media for recruitment.

How do organizations utilize social media as a recruitment tool?

The extent of the usage of social media as a recruitment tool. The data we collected showed that organizations differ in the extent to which, and the ways in which they utilized social media for recruitment purposes. Some HR managers indicated that their respective organization makes little to no use of social media platforms for recruitment. Others stated that they had posted vacancies on social media in the past, which resulted in little to no response. The data showed that organizations generally started off gently in their social media usage: they tended to begin experimenting by placing one or two vacancies. Some stopped if there were no results, while others persisted even if their first attempt proved unsuccessful. After a more positive experience, some organizations decided to put more effort into their social media presence. One HR manager shared how she decided to enter into a one-year contract with LinkedIn after a number of successful experiments: *“We sort of gradually rolled into it – first a few posts, a few vacancies that we had posted on the site with a kind of attitude of ‘we’ll see where this leads’.”* (HR, woman, 35 years old, 5 years of tenure, construction). Finally, there were also some organizations that made intensive use of social media. Apart from posting vacancies, they also posted other messages with recruitment in mind, such as photographs of a team in which a vacancy was opening up, HR-related competitions, or messages about new employees. Recruiters also used social media to proactively find and contact candidates. Generally speaking, the organizations that actively used social media experienced that these activities positively contributed to their ability to attract and hire new employees.

Social media platforms. Several HR managers considered social media to be additional channels that could be used alongside an organization’s standard channels such as their own website and job sites. They did not automatically post all vacancies on social media, but assessed each on a case-by-case basis. To safeguard the efficiency of the selection process, they generally chose not to advertise on social media for those vacancies for which they generally received a lot of applications anyway. After all, reviewing and responding to applications takes a lot of time. On the other hand, some organizations posted (nearly) all of their vacancies on LinkedIn automatically to improve the organization’s overall visibility and create a positive image.

The choice for specific social media platforms was usually based on the profile that the organization is looking for. To recruit people for niche positions and highly trained or

senior profiles, organizations preferred to use LinkedIn. In this case, they used the communities feature on LinkedIn, as well as the online networks of their recruiters and other employees, to advertise vacancies. To attract young graduates, organizations tended to use Facebook instead; the HR managers asserted that starters are reached more easily through Facebook than LinkedIn. *“School leavers often do have a LinkedIn page [...] but don’t really use it all that much yet.”* – (HR, woman, 42 years old, 17 years of tenure, recruitment). Organizations also used Facebook for those profiles that do not require higher education (e.g., operational workers or salespeople).

Responsibility. An important aspect is which department within the organization is responsible for an organization’s social media channels. It turns out that, in the case of most organizations, this was not the HR department. Final responsibility (and control of the budget) was usually borne by the marketing or communications department. Even more, within some organizations, there was no internal collaboration on these matters. Other HR managers indicated that within their organizations, HR and marketing each managed different social media channels (for example, HR handled the posting of vacancies on LinkedIn while Facebook was solely used for marketing purposes). In many organizations, HR was not kept up to date of what was going on in the social media channels that are managed by other departments.

The interviews indicated that several organizations were at the time experiencing a shift towards more collaboration between the different department managing the social media profiles and the HR department. This increased collaboration is evidenced by the following quote from one of the HR managers: *“You can tell that marketing on the one hand and HR – us – on the other hand are growing closer together in that respect. I suppose social media is the platform upon which those two come together.”* – (HR, man, 37 years old, 8 years of tenure, retail). However, the degree of collaboration between departments varied greatly from one organization to the other. Some HR managers indicated that such collaboration within their organizations occurred sporadically and on an ad hoc basis. At most, they would contact the marketing department to post a hard to fill vacancy on social media. Other HR managers indicated that they came together to discuss their organizations’ social media activities more regularly. *“In the past, internal recruitment never really dealt with the marketing department. [...] Nowadays, I’d estimate we get in touch with one another about these matters at least once a week.”* – (HR, woman, 32 years old, 10 years of tenure, recruitment). In those organizations, HR was viewed as a kind of an internal customer. One HR manager noted that their organization had a team

composed of people from various departments (marketing, HR, management, and the commercial department), that each bore the final responsibility for a particular social media channel.

Why deploy employees for recruitment through social media?

Some HR managers viewed social media as important tools for engaging current employees in the recruitment process, mainly by stimulating them to like and share vacancies and other information about the organization on social media. This way, organizations were able to utilize the online networks of their current employees. After all, when an employee liked, posted or shared something, it was made available to their audience. Consider the following quote: *“Even if a person likes it, but we are not hiring this person, they in turn might know someone that we would be interested in, and the first person liking it then results in that second person seeing it.”* – (HR, man, 26 years old, 3 months of tenure, media). The interviews showed that HR managers felt this method is mainly useful for vacancies that did not see a lot of conversion through other channels. Particularly for niche vacancies, several HR managers felt that there is potential in tapping into the networks of current employees with a similar profile. Also, the HR managers shared that current employees may be a part of relevant communities on social media (such as alumni groups), enabling them to share vacancies with very specific target audiences. However, most of the HR managers also agreed that the majority of their organizations’ current employees did not appear to be inclined to share vacancies of their own accord.

How do organizations deploy employees for recruitment purposes through social media?

It appeared that some organizations had not considered the potential advantages of involving their current employees in the recruitment process through social media. Other organizations actively stimulated their employees to share and like content, and they did so in various ways. Often, employees were asked in an informal way to share or like posts, such as face-to-face or via a one-off email or intranet message. Sometimes, this was done in light of a particular campaign or if the organization was having difficulties filling a particular vacancy. Some HR managers reinforced employees’ desirable behavior in an informal manner: *“When I see that someone has liked [something], I’ll tell them, ‘Great job, keep it up!’ There is definitely oral encouragement there.”* – (HR, woman, 39 years old, 18 years of tenure, recycling). A number of organizations stimulated supervisors in particular to share vacancies. Finally, a few organizations attempted to deploy their employees

through social media as part of their recruitment strategy in a more formal manner. Some specific ways in which this was done were formal programs in which employees received rewards for bringing in new employees, annual social media events, and regular official communications. The following quote showcases an organization rewarding employees to stimulate them to attract new potential employees via social media: “*Currently, social media are our most important sources of new employees. Our own employees are involved in our efforts as well. [...] If they bring in a new employee and that person stays on for at least six months, they get a nice reward.*” – (EM, man, 54 years old, 14 months of tenure, food). There are also some organizations that utilized formal communications several times a year to remind their employees of ways to help the organization achieve certain recruitment goals. Their employees indicated that such reminders were welcome and helped them to consider if they knew any potential new employees that they could contact: “*Once a month or so, we receive an email with the various vacancies [...]. If I think of someone who could be a good fit, I'll then refer them.*” – (EM, 28 years old, 3 months of tenure, food). One employee told that her employer had organized a playful competition with the aim of getting more Twitter followers. Employees were asked to invite others to like the company page. Once the predetermined number of likes had been reached, the organization would throw a party. She felt that this creative approach had been highly successful, as it resulted in a massive increase in the number of likes and followers.

What motivates employees to spread information through social media?

We asked the employees involved in our study what motivated them to spread information about their organization on social media. Employees who shared vacancies or messages spontaneously, indicated that they did so in part because they were proud of their organization or because they wanted to help their organization, as is illustrated by the following quote: “*My main motivation for sharing something is to showcase the company in a positive light.*” – (EM, woman, 26 years old, 3 months of tenure, security). Employees also shared vacancies because they wanted to help the people in their network. Prior research has already shown that, apart from intrinsic motives (job satisfaction; Van Hove 2013), prosocial motives (i.e., helping both the organization and their friends or acquaintances) are also an important reason why employees share positive information about their employer. Further, supervisors indicated that their position made them feel more involved in the recruitment process, leading them to share vacancies via social media more often. “*I am a team leader, so I am aware of the current vacancies and in dire*

need of people. As such, it serves my interests to advertise to the outside world just as much as my employer does." – (EM, 54 years old, 15 months of tenure, food).

Which barriers do employees experience in spreading information through social media?

Generally speaking, employees' involvement in the recruitment process seemed limited. The interviews with employees revealed a number of barriers. Some employees indicated that they were not well aware of their employers' activities on social media, and they did not tend to follow (all of) their organization's social media platforms. Moreover, it appeared that employees were generally not aware of how they might be able to contribute to their organizations' recruitment strategy via social media. *"I think we don't do it because we're insufficiently aware of things, and also, what would we get from it [...]?"* – (EM, man, 31 years old, 4 months of tenure, food). Moreover, employees generally did not think of getting involved of their own accord: *"I've never really thought about doing that. But if they asked me, I would definitely be willing."* – (EM, man, 28 years old, 3 years of tenure, food). Finally, employees often did not know what to share exactly, or lacked access to the necessary information.

On the whole, employees indicated that they were careful about the kinds of things they posted on social media regarding their work. A significant amount of the interviewed employees seemed to be nervous about accidentally posting something that is not appreciated by their employer. In some cases, this reluctance was caused by the employer's own policy. Several organizations had guidelines for their employees regarding their social media use. *"We don't tell people that they cannot use social media, but we do tell them to think twice about what they post, because it's not like a private conversation between two people; it's a public medium. Even if you're posting in a closed group, you're still putting something out there that will be there forever."* – (HR, woman, 52 years old, 28 years of tenure, healthcare). Some of these organizations also imposed sanctions in the event that the social media policy is violated, and some prohibited the use of social media in the workplace entirely. When an organization established such a policy filled with controlling guidelines or imposed sanctions, this seemed to restrain employees engagement in positive social media use. One employee stated the following: *"Anything you post could be used against you, so no, I would not share a vacancy."* – (EM, woman, 23 years old, 3 months of tenure, healthcare).

Employees' reluctance also appeared to be linked to a fear that being active on social media on their employers' behalf would upset their current work-life balance. They assumed that any such efforts would have to be made in their free time, and were not

willing to sacrifice their free time to post or share vacancies or messages about the organization. The following quote illustrates this: *“I already spend a great deal of time on work, so I don’t feel inclined to go home and do yet more work in my free time. That’s why I don’t do it. I might feel differently if some of my time at work was freed up to do something like this.”* – (EM, woman, 28 years old, 1 year of tenure, consultancy).

Another factor that played a role is the extent to which people were active on social media in general. Employees who never shared personal things on their social media profiles seemed to experience more of a barrier to do so on behalf of their employer. Age played an important role in this. Older employees tended to be more reluctant about using social media, because of their lack of understanding of or experience with social media: *“I have co-workers who do [post messages about their work on social media]. Unfortunately, I am part of a generation that has absolutely no interest in that sort of thing.”* – (EM, woman, 47 years old, 27 months of tenure, accountancy). This is in line with several HR managers who indicated that some of their employees were not comfortable with using social media and do not know how to utilize certain features (such as how to share messages).

Finally, employees appeared to feel that if an organization was active on social media, it was important that it invested sufficient time and resources into its social media profiles, provided quality content and kept them up to date. Employees appeared to be reluctant to share content that did not feel professional: *“I’ve looked at my organization’s social media channels before, but I wouldn’t like the pages myself, because I find it embarrassing.”* – (EM, 27 years old, 1.5 months of tenure, healthcare).

Table 1 (part 1).

Research Questions and Results

Research Questions	Example Interview Questions	Results
Why do organizations utilize social media as a recruitment tool?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why do you use social media for recruitment? ^a 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted (e.g., based on education, region) and pro-active recruitment • Increase brand awareness, arouse interest, reach passive job seekers • Limited cost
Why do organizations not (or to a lesser extent) utilize social media as a recruitment tool?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why don't you use social media for recruitment? ^a • Why don't you use certain social media platforms? ^a 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many resources and much time needed (e.g., monitoring, controlling, expensive functionalities) • Fear of losing control about what is being said • Outcomes and advantages of social media difficult to substantiate
How do organizations utilize social media as a recruitment tool?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent do recruiters use social media? ^a • In what ways do you try to reach potential applicants on social media? ^a • On which social media platforms are you active? ^a • Do recruiters share or post vacancies or messages about the organization? If so, what do they post? ^a 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizations differ in the extent that they use social media for recruitment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - experimenting with posts about job openings - posting job openings and other messages - proactive searching and contacting candidates • Social media as additional recruitment channel besides the standard sources • Choice of platform depends on the profile • Responsibility often lays with other departments, tendency to more collaboration

Note. ^a Questions for HR managers. ^b Questions for employees.

Table 1 (part 2).

Research Questions and Results

Research Questions	Example Interview Questions	Results
Why do organizations involve their employees in the recruitment process through social media?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent are employees of importance in the recruitment process?^a 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use employees' networks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - reach out to more people - job openings with limited applicants - reach out to niche profiles - reach out to relevant communities
How do organizations involve their employees in the recruitment process through social media?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent are employees involved in the use of social media for recruitment?^a To what extent and how do you stimulate employees to be active on social media?^a To what extent are you being actively involved in the recruitment process?^b 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some organizations do not do it Some organizations stimulate employees to share vacancies and messages by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - asking informally when necessary - acknowledging desired behavior orally - employ managers - formal programs, events, regular communication, ... - eliminating barriers for employees: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o explain how they can share o organize training on social media o put social media buttons underneath messages provide ready-made content to share

Note. ^a Questions for HR managers. ^b Questions for employees.

Table 1 (part 3).

Research Questions and Results

Research Questions	Example Interview Questions	Results
What motivates employees to spread recruitment and employer branding information through social media?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you sometimes recommend your organizations to others? To whom? Why?^b • How active are you on social media (e.g., posting, sharing, looking at information about your employer)?^b What is your main motivation to do this or to not do this? ^b 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proud of their employer • Help others with finding a job and helping the organization find new employees • Take responsibility as manager
What kind of barriers do employees experience related to spreading recruitment and employer branding information through social media?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you post messages about your employer on social media? Why (not)? ^b To what extent is it allowed to freely post or share things related to your work? Why do you this/why not? ^b 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Little insight in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Activities of employer on social media - How can they help by being active on social media (why is this useful?) - What can they share (no information about job openings) - How can they share (when less familiar with social media) • Fear for negative reaction of employer • Do not want to sacrifice free time (compromises work-life balance)

Note. ^a Questions for HR managers. ^b Questions for employees.

Which of these barriers are already being eliminated by employers?

Our interviews with HR managers revealed that they were already trying to eliminate some of the barriers listed above. For example, HR managers were taking the time (when asked) to explain employees how to share messages through social media. Some organizations provided trainings to employees on how to utilize social media. Another way that they facilitated the sharing of messages and vacancies via social media was by adding social media buttons to the messages on the website or newsletter. When employees click on one of these buttons, they are redirected to the relevant social media profile, where they can simply share the message. Apart from such buttons, pre-composed messages also made sharing easier for employees: “[...] when [the organization] had launched its Facebook page, everyone received an email suggesting that we share the page and share the messages that would be posted on the page. No demands were made; we were just given the necessary info.” – (EM, man, 31 years old, 5 months of tenure, food).

Conclusion

This study contributes to the knowledge of recruitment in the new age of digital revolution and labor market scarcity. Social media are increasingly being used for recruitment and employer branding (SHRM, 2016b), making it important to know how organizations can utilize social media effectively and which problems they may encounter. For an overview of the answers to our research questions, see Table 1. On the whole, the results of this study showed that social media are unique channels. They offer a variety of features that can be used for recruitment and employer branding. Some are very similar to those offered by traditional channels, such as the ability to post vacancies. Other features offer new possibilities, such as having employees’ (unique) networks within easy reach. Social media can also be used by organizations for employer branding purposes, to create brand awareness and a distinctive employer image in the long term (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016; Schollaert et al., 2017). On the other hand, some HR managers are scared of the public nature of social media. They mentioned things such as the inability to maintain control and to assess the results as reasons for making no or limited use of social media for recruitment purposes. The extent to which organizations utilize social media differs greatly. Responsibility for social media is usually not borne by HR, although there is currently a tendency towards more collaboration between the HR, marketing and communications departments.

This study also provides more insight into ways in which employees can be, and are currently involved in the recruitment process. Most HR managers feel that the ability to appeal to employees' networks is very valuable. As such, there are organizations that choose to stimulate this aspect. Some do so in an informal manner, while others regularly send out communications on the topic. We also interviewed employees, which revealed that pride, helping others, and a sense of responsibility (in the case of supervisors) played a role in employees' willingness to share positive information about their employer on social media. At the same time, we uncovered plenty of barriers that employees still experience with regards to their involvement in recruitment via social media. For example, our research showed that many employees are not aware of what they are allowed and able to do for their employer.

These insights will be useful for organizations to assess their recruitment strategy and as a source of inspiration for future research. The present study gives rise to a number of potential future research questions. One major limitation of our study is the fact that we did not investigate the perceptions of potential applicants. Future research might want to uncover the ways in which job seekers utilize social media in the job-seeking process and how they perceive activities of organizations on social media. A possible research question could be whether people respond differently to vacancies or employer brand related messages shared by an acquaintance as opposed to vacancies shared by organizations themselves or how potential applicants feel about targeted recruitment.

Practical recommendations

Based on the existing literature and the results of this study, we have a number of practical recommendations for HR departments regarding the use of social media for recruitment and employer branding. Table 2 contains an overview of those recommendations.

Systematic collaboration between various departments regarding social media

Our interviews revealed that the extent to which departments collaborate on social media varies greatly (ranging from no collaboration at all to weekly interdepartmental meetings). More collaboration can create more opportunities for utilizing one another's expertise and may save time and resources. The existing literature also recommends systematic collaboration between the various departments using social media, such as communications, marketing, and HR (Neill & Moody, 2015). This allows communication regarding recruitment and all other company communication to be coordinated properly,

helping to support the organizational strategy (Rosengren & Bondesson, 2014). There are many ways for the various departments to collaborate. One possibility encountered during our interviews, is a working group that convenes regularly, consisting of people from all departments bearing some responsibility for social media. This way, every department is able to share its needs and experiences and the departments can make joint decisions regarding their social media strategy.

Systematic use of HR metrics

Researchers recommend investing in HR metrics and analytics (Evers & Freese, 2014; Van den Heuvel & Freese, 2017). HR metrics and analytics require organizations to keep track of relevant recruitment data (such as how many people are brought in via each channel and the quality level of each inflow), analyze these data, and utilize the findings to make better informed decisions. The interviews show that many organizations do not keep data records regarding their social media activities and the achieved results. Many organizations indicated that they find this difficult. Even so, there are ways for organizations to measure long-term effects and evolutions regarding brand awareness and employer branding, such as by conducting image audits (Schollaert et al., 2017). It should be said that this method does not make it easier to determine exactly which results were achieved as a result of social media. In terms of short-term effects, organizations can analyze the number of clicks, likes, applications and recruits to determine what does and does not work. The interviews showed that some organizations use *Google Analytics* to assess the activity and efficacy of social media in the recruitment process (such as by measuring how many people watched an advertisement or clicked a link). For smaller organizations that only see a small number of new recruits each year, such efforts may not produce actionable results. Other options include querying employees regarding their experiences (asking questions like ‘which social media do you frequent?’ and ‘which posts on the organization’s website do you like?’) and asking applicants how they found the organization and what their preferences are. Such methods are relatively inexpensive and may result in valuable information. This way, organizations will be better able to assess whether investments in social media for recruitment purposes are needed.

Clear communication towards employees regarding the use of social media

Our data show that the lack of clear communication and information-sharing is one of the main reasons why employees do not get involved in the recruitment process. This suggests that if organizations want to involve their employees in the recruitment process

via social media, they need to communicate clearly about what they are expecting from their employees in terms of their social media activity, exactly how employees can contribute, and the value of their contributions to the organization's social media strategy.

A good first step is to establish what the organization is expecting from its employees in terms of their social media activity. One way is to establish an official, up-to-date policy in joint collaboration with all relevant departments. Our employee interviews indicate that organizations should not focus too much on controlling social media activity, but should also inform employees, as the policy could otherwise discourage employees' activity on social media (this is also in line with the proposed need voor consistency between different HRM messages by Bowen and Ostroff, 2004). For example, organizations could explain what kinds of behavior is desirable in terms of activity on social media for recruitment purposes. Our data show that frequent repetition of such communication is required, because using social media for recruitment will slip employees' minds after a while. Ways to communicate about the matter could include via intranet, via supervisors, or through a company campaign.

We also found that employees are not always aware of how to share messages on social media. They indicated that they would appreciate it if their employer would organize social media trainings. Such trainings are a great way to showcase ways in which employees can use social media for their organization. The results of our study also show that employees often do not know which information to share and where to find this information. As such, it is important for employees to be kept up to date on job openings. Additionally, it helps to make sure the sharing of messages and vacancies is as convenient as possible. Pre-composed messages and social media buttons (which are already being used by some organizations) make it easier for employees to share things via social media.

Apart from what and how, it appears that it is also necessary to explain to employees why it is important for them to act as ambassadors for the organization on social media. This can be done by pointing out the added value that their social media activity could have for the organization (such as by helping the organization find people for niche profiles) and for potential applicants (such as by helping friends find an interesting job). Organizations can also communicate results (HR metrics), such as how many people were recruited via current employees or how much increase there has been in terms of followers or likes of the organization's social media profile. This way, employees will know that they are making a real contribution. Scientific research suggests that such knowledge

may result in more involvement and effort on employees' behalf (de Vries, Peluso, Romani, Leeflang, & Marcati, 2017; Spence Laschinger, Finegan, & Shamian, 2002). If it is in line with the organization's desired employer brand, playful and creative initiatives may also help to communicate what the organization stands for and help involve and engage employees.

Keying into employees' motives

Our interviews with employees revealed that they have many different motives for acting on their organizations' behalf on social media. The motives we uncovered in our interviews were: to help job seekers, to help the organization, to take responsibility as part of a supervisory position, and pride for their organization. As such, it might be important for organizations to figure out what drives their employees (such as through informal conversation; Bloemer, 2010; Van Hoyer, 2013), so that the organization can invest into employees' motives. For example, organizations could set up a campaign focused on helping family and friends find a job (Van Hoyer, 2013). Motivating team leaders to share vacancies also appears to be a good avenue, which is already being pursued by several organizations. Pride is another good motive that organizations might be able to trigger, for example by showcasing the organization's successes and writing messages on them that employees can share.

Aiming towards using recruitment through social media as a long-term strategy

Most organizations appear to still be mainly focused on filling vacancies once they occur, but some also mentioned more long-term objectives. Social media are great tools for maintaining relationships with potential applicants, which can help in the event of future vacancies. When selecting social media channels and the communication on these channels, organizations need to determine which audiences they wish to target (both now and in the future), which social media channels those audiences currently use, and which image the organization is trying to create (Carpentier et al., 2017; Schollaert et al., 2017). They can set up communities, share posts, and stimulate discussion on themes that are of interest to the desired target audiences (Kroon & Klijs, 2017).

Table 2.

Recommendations for Practice (part 1)

What	Why	How
1. Systematic collaboration between departments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinated external communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exchange expertise • Save time and resources • Create a coherent image 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inter-departmental work group • Regularly exchanging information and alignment
2. Systematic use of HR metrics and analytics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep track of data • Impact analysis of the implemented activities • Make informed decisions (e.g., choice of channel) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timely adjust implemented activities • Convince employees and management of usefulness • Monitoring sharing behavior of employees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep track of inflow (which channel, quality), number of clicks per job posting, ... • Using Google Analytics and other free and paying tools (e.g., www.smarphshare.be, employerbranding.hogent.be) • Regularly survey employees and applicants
3. Clear communication towards the employees regarding: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expectations • How they can contribute • Link between activities of employees and the recruitment strategy (why) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eliminate barriers for employees • Increase employees' involvement • Employees as ambassadors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through an up-to-date, widely supported, and frequently repeated policy, with a focus on informing • Social media trainings, easily accessible information (e.g., job openings), ready-made messages, social media buttons • Stressing the added value of activities on social media for the organization and job seekers

Table 2.

Recommendations for Practice (part 1)

	What	Why	How
4.	<p>Keying into employees' motives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helping job seekers • Helping the organization • Taking up responsibility as manager • Pride 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stimulate the desired behavior • Increase involvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine employees' motives • Campaigns focused on helping job seekers and the organization • Specifically motivating managers • Keying into pride by emphasizing company successes
5.	<p>Recruitment as a long-term strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase awareness • Create employer image 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competitive advantage • Improved awareness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine what the organization wants to stand for as an employer (employer value proposition) • Align external activities and communication • Maintain a relationship with current and future potential job applicants • Align choice social media platform and activities and target group

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CHAPTER 3

Recruiting nurses through social media: Effects on employer brand and attractiveness²

The current study aims to investigate whether and how nurses' exposure to a hospital's profile on social media affects their perceptions of the hospital's brand and attractiveness as an employer. Since in many places across the globe hospitals are struggling with nursing shortages, competition is rising to be perceived as an attractive employer by this target group. Organizations are increasingly using social media for recruitment, however, little is known about its effects on potential applicants' perceptions of the organization as an employer. We thus examine whether these effects occur and rely on the media richness theory to explain the mechanisms at play. A between-subjects experimental design was applied. Three conditions were used: a control group, one condition that required visiting the Facebook page of a hospital, and one condition that required visiting the LinkedIn page. The focal organization was an existing Belgian hospital which had a LinkedIn and a Facebook page. An online questionnaire was sent to nursing students and employed nurses. The results show that nurses' exposure to the hospital's Facebook or LinkedIn page had a significant positive effect on a majority of the employer brand dimensions, both instrumental and symbolic. In addition, nurses who visited the Facebook page felt more attracted to working at the hospital. Most of these effects were mediated by social presence.

² This chapter is based on Carpentier, M., Van Hoye, G., Stockman, S., Schollaert, E., Van Theemsche, B., & Jacobs, G. (2017). Recruiting nurses through social media: Effects on employer brand and attractiveness. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 73(11), 2696-2708. doi:10.1111/jan.13336

Introduction

The recruitment of employees is of major importance for organizations, since human capital has the potential to be a key source of competitive advantage (Brymer et al., 2014). Different industries are facing increasing competition among organizations to attract qualified human capital (McDonnell, 2011). In several countries and regions, healthcare organizations face challenges to attract sufficient numbers of nurses (Buchan & Campbell, 2013). There are multiple causes for these shortages, including unfavorable working conditions, constrained resources (Buchan & Aiken, 2008) and population ageing, which creates a surge in the demand for care (Juraschek et al., 2012). Although the shortage of health care workers does not occur in every region or country (e.g., Galbany-Estragués & Nelson, 2016), it is globally a widespread phenomenon (Buchan & Campbell, 2013). This study takes place in a Belgian context where the nursing shortage is indeed prevalent (Bourdon, 2016; VDAB, 2016).

One way to improve returns on recruitment investments is through employer branding. Research shows that employer brand perceptions affect how potential applicants react to the recruitment messages and practices of the organization (Collins & Kanar, 2014). Thus, organizations aiming to attract applicants in high demand on the labor market, such as nurses, need to look for ways to promote a unique and favorable brand image in the minds of their target group.

Along these lines, online social media represent a promising new medium for employer branding and recruitment efforts (McFarland & Ployhart, 2015; Nikolaou, 2014). The use of social media has increased drastically in recent years (Kluemper et al., 2012). Surveys indicate that many nurses are also social media users (AMN, 2013; Usher et al., 2014). Through this new recruitment channel, organizations can reach a vast audience of active and passive job seekers (Nikolaou, 2014). An increasing number of organizations are investing in social media to communicate their employer brand and attract qualified applicants (Adecco 2015; EBI, 2014). For instance, many hospitals now have a social media profile that might influence how they are perceived by nurses considering applying for a job (Griffis et al., 2014). Despite the popularity of social media in practice, academic research in a recruitment context is limited (McFarland & Ployhart, 2015; Roth et al., 2016).

There is some research that discusses social media use by nurses. For example, some authors advocate the use of social media for professional purposes such as leadership or external communication (Mannix et al., 2014; Moorley & Chinn, 2016). Ethical and legal challenges associated with social media use, such as the disclosure of

patient information, are also a topic of debate (Levati, 2014). However, to the best of our knowledge, the effects of social media as an employer branding and recruitment tool on nurses have not been studied.

To guide hospitals and other organizations' recruitment practices and investment decisions, we need to know whether social media can have an impact on their perceived employer brand and attractiveness and how these effects might take place. In the current study, we chose a hospital as focal organization because in many regions hospitals face challenges in attracting nurses (Juraschek et al., 2012). It is therefore important for hospitals to be perceived as an attractive employer by this target group and to differentiate themselves from competing employers (Van Hoye, 2012). This study contributes to the literature by examining the effects of visiting a hospital's social media profile on nurses' perceptions of the hospital's employer brand and attractiveness. Using media richness theory, we investigate interactivity and social presence as possible explanations for these effects. We included both Facebook and LinkedIn in our study, as these social media platforms are most often used for job search and recruitment (Nikolaou, 2014). In addition, both nursing students and employed nurses were included in our sample, given that nursing recruitment often already starts during nursing studies (Reymen et al., 2015).

Background

Employer Branding

Employer branding is defined as the process of creating and communicating a clear image of an organization as an attractive and distinctive place to work for both current and potential employees (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). This study focuses on the image perceptions of potential nursing applicants. Research so far found that potential applicants' perceived employer brand is related to their application intentions and job acceptance decisions (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). Therefore, having a favorable and distinctive employer brand is an important asset for organizations. However, little is known about how the perceptions that constitute this influential employer brand can be created, managed, or improved through recruitment communication and practices (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016; Slaughter et al., 2014).

To identify key dimensions of potential applicants' employer brand perceptions, prior research has applied the instrumental-symbolic framework (e.g., Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Van Hoye, 2012). According to this framework, an employer brand can be decomposed into instrumental and symbolic attributes (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003).

Instrumental dimensions are the perceived objective characteristics of organizations and jobs. This might include potential applicants' perceptions of a company's wage policy or the flexibility of the working hours. A study by Aiken et al. (2013) indicates that instrumental employment benefits can play an important role for nurses' attraction. It found that many nurses in 12 European countries are dissatisfied with their advancement opportunities, pay and so on and intend to seek a job in another hospital. Additionally, symbolic dimensions are the perceived subjective characteristics and are compared with personality traits. For instance, organizations can differ in the extent to which people perceive them as prestigious or innovative. Van Hoye (2008) found that, in addition to instrumental dimensions, symbolic dimensions predicted nurses' intentions to recommend an organization as an employer. In the current study, both instrumental and symbolic image dimensions were included in our conceptualization of potential applicants' employer brand perceptions.

Social Media

Social media can be defined as digital platforms on which users can create a profile, connect with other users, generate and distribute content and engage in interactive communication (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; McFarland & Ployhart, 2015). A large part of the global population is active on social media. In 2016, LinkedIn had 433 million registered members (LinkedIn, 2016) and Facebook had 1.9 billion daily active users (Facebook, 2016).

There are many different social media platforms (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Musiał & Kazienko, 2013) and since these differ with regard to the specific communication characteristics, this might translate into different user reactions (McFarland & Ployhart, 2015). Therefore, we examine the effects of both Facebook and LinkedIn, the platforms that are most often used by job seekers as well as recruiters (Adecco, 2015; Stepstone, 2013). Facebook was initially designed for private purposes and LinkedIn for professional use, which translates in a particular architecture for each site and different prevailing norms (Papacharissi, 2009).

Social media represent a unique context and differ from more traditional communication sources, which might influence cognition and affect of its users (McFarland & Ployhart, 2015). Hence, when used by an organization and its stakeholders, social media are also likely to have an impact on a variety of organizational practices, including human resource management. However, there is very limited research to guide

organizations on the use of these platforms (McFarland & Ployhart, 2015; Roth et al., 2016).

Social Media and Recruitment. Given the large amount of people active on social media and the limited costs of setting up a social media page, social media seem to be an ideal new vehicle for attracting both active and passive job seekers (Nikolaou, 2014). Many organizations are aware of the potential of these booming communication channels and are employing social media for recruitment and employer branding, but scientific research is lagging far behind (McFarland & Ployhart 2015; Roth et al., 2016).

So far, most studies focused on the screening of potential applicants' social media profiles by recruiters (e.g., Baert, 2018, Davison et al., 2016). With regard to organizations' profiles, some preliminary scientific evidence suggests that they can positively affect potential applicants' general perceptions of corporate image and reputation (Davison et al., 2011; Kissel & Büttgen, 2015; Sivertzen et al., 2013). However, we need to know whether social media can have an impact on organizations' image and attractiveness as an employer and how and why these effects might take place. Hence, we seek to understand how and why visiting a hospital's Facebook or LinkedIn profile affects nurses' perceptions of the hospital's instrumental and symbolic employer brand image dimensions as well as their attraction to the hospital as an employer. We rely on media richness theory to develop our hypotheses.

Media Richness Theory. According to the media richness theory (Daft & Lengel, 1986), richer media are media that are more capable of conveying complex and ambiguous information and are therefore more capable of successfully transmitting persuasive messages such as recruitment communication (Allen et al., 2013). Dineen and Allen (2013) discuss that the rise of the internet changed the recruitment process, since it allows to reach a larger audience without having to compromise much in terms of communication richness. The internet has increased the opportunities for interactive communication, which is certainly true for social media. Individuals can interact with the organization by communicating through private messages, liking a post or by writing a reaction on a post of the organization. Social media do not only allow for communication between the organization and the individual, but also make the interactions of others with the organization visible. We thus expect that social media are able to convey rich information because there are a lot of possibilities for interactive communication (McFarland & Ployhart, 2015), which might positively influence nurses' perceptions of the

hospital's employer brand image and attractiveness because of increased involvement and more activated information processing (Allen et al., 2013; Dineen & Allen, 2013).

Related to media richness theory is the concept of social presence (Short et al., 1976). Social presence is also a characteristic of communication media and can be defined as the feeling of humanness, interpersonal warmth and proximity when using a certain medium for communication (Allen et al., 2013). Two studies that investigated the impact of social presence on recruitment outcomes operationalized the concept as one of the dimensions of media richness (Allen et al., 2004, 2013). They proposed that media that are richer, might also more easily convey a sense of proximity and therefore be perceived as enabling more social presence. These studies found indications that social presence is related to improved attitudes, intentions and behavior related to joining the organization.

We expect social media to be perceived as conveying a greater sense of social presence, because their primary purpose is to create and maintain relations between individuals (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Social media are likely to be perceived as rather informal communication channels, which might result in a more friendly and personal communication style. Information presented in this way might be more persuasive and more attractive, positively influencing an organization's attractiveness and employer brand image.

Thus, we propose that nurses visiting a hospital's Facebook or LinkedIn page will have more positive perceptions of the hospital's employer brand image and attractiveness and that these effects will be mediated by the perceived interactivity and social presence of the social media platform.

The study

Aim

The aim of the study was to examine whether hospitals' presence on social media can positively affect nurses' perceptions of employer brand image and organizational attractiveness and to find out whether these effects can be explained by interactivity and social presence. More specifically, the following hypotheses were tested.

Hypothesis 1. Exposure to a hospital's profile on Facebook will be positively associated with nurses' perceptions of (a) employer brand image and (b) organizational attractiveness.

Hypothesis 2. Exposure to a hospital's profile on LinkedIn will be positively associated with nurses' perceptions of (a) employer brand image and (b) organizational attractiveness.

Hypothesis 3. Interactivity will mediate the relationship of exposure to a hospital's profile on Facebook with nurses' perceptions of (a) employer brand image and (b) organizational attractiveness.

Hypothesis 4. Interactivity will mediate the relationship of exposure to a hospital's profile on LinkedIn with nurses' perceptions of (a) employer brand image and (b) organizational attractiveness.

Hypothesis 5. Social presence will mediate the relationship of exposure to a hospital's profile on Facebook with nurses' perceptions of (a) employer brand image and (b) organizational attractiveness.

Hypothesis 6. Social presence will mediate the relationship of exposure to a hospital's profile on LinkedIn with nurses' perceptions of (a) employer brand image and (b) organizational attractiveness.

Design

We applied a between-subjects experimental design with three conditions to test our hypotheses. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the conditions. In every condition, participants first read a general recruitment message that was derived from the hospital's website and copy-pasted into the survey (Figure 1). The control condition only received this message. A second condition received this message and was requested to visit and go through the Facebook page of the hospital. A direct link was provided that opened a pop-up window. Respondents were asked to close that window and return to the survey, once they were done reading some information on the social media page. The third condition was exactly the same, except that people were provided a link to the LinkedIn profile of the hospital.

To increase external validity, we selected an existing Belgian hospital possessing both a Facebook and LinkedIn profile. The content of both pages was very similar at the time of the survey. Examples of messages on these pages were awards won by the hospital, links to job vacancies and invitations for certain healthcare-related information sessions.

[Name hospital] is a modern hospital in the green suburbs of [name city] with 631 beds, more than 1650 staff members, and 180 doctors. The hospital always strives to achieve a better, more comprehensive, and modernized patient care. Therefore, we are looking for motivated and talented personnel to contribute to this goal. Do you choose to work in an exciting organization in which you can develop your qualities to the fullest? Then you should definitely apply at [name hospital].

Figure 1. *Recruitment information from the hospital website, translated from Dutch to English*

Participants

Our target population consists of nurses who can be considered (future) potential applicants for hospitals that are trying to attract nurses. Given that new job market entrants as well as employed job seekers represent important target groups for organizations' recruitment activities (Boswell et al., 2012), both nursing students and employed nurses were included in our convenience sample of potential applicants. An exclusion criterion was that nurses could not be currently employed at the focal hospital. It was not required for the participants to have a Facebook or LinkedIn profile.

We contacted all Bachelor's and postgraduate students ($N = 488$) enrolled at one vocational college located in the same region as the hospital¹. Three random groups of students were created through an online learning platform, corresponding to our three conditions. Every group was sent an e-mail with a link to one of three surveys in Qualtrics.

Employed nurses were contacted using a snowball effect. E-mails were sent to two nursing schools, a hospital and to personal contacts, which were all situated in the same region as the hospital. We asked them to forward the survey to (other) employed nurses. For the employed nurses we created one survey link and Qualtrics randomly assigned participants to one of the three conditions.

Data collection

In December 2015, 488 nursing students were sent an e-mail inviting them to participate in an online questionnaire. One week later, a reminder was sent. A third reminder was sent the first week of January 2016. In total, 288 surveys were started, yielding a response rate of 59%. Of these responses, 170 were not used, mostly because of incomplete answers (responses where less than 15% of the questions were completed were removed) and because some respondents did not click on the link to visit the assigned social media site. The remaining 118 usable responses (41%) were used for analyses.

Regarding the employed nurses, data were collected from the end of February until the beginning of April 2016. Because we relied on respondents to forward the survey, we could not calculate the response rate. Of the 218 surveys started, 94 (43%) were included in the analyses. We removed cases where less than 15% of the questions were answered and where the respondent did not click on the link. Additionally, we excluded 7 participants that were currently employed at the focal hospital (3%).

The different steps of the survey are shown in Table 1. First, we assessed respondents' preliminary familiarity with the organization. In a second step, people were assigned to one of the three conditions. Afterwards, participants assessed organizational attractiveness, interactivity, social presence and employer brand. Finally, they were asked to provide some demographic information.

The ethics committee of our university approved this study. Each questionnaire started with a message outlining that participation was voluntary and that answers were anonymous and used for research purposes only. It was stated that clicking on the link to start the questionnaire was indicative of consent to participate. No information of the participants' social media profiles was collected, nor did we manipulate the organization's profile.

Measures

All measures and items are displayed in Table 1, as well as the internal consistencies (alpha's ranging from .65 to .94).

Organizational attractiveness. Three items, based on measures from Lievens *et al.*, (2005), were used to measure the hospital's perceived attractiveness as an employer.

Interactivity. Interactivity assessed the perceived possibility of feedback and interactive communication. The three items that were used, were based on existing measures (Allen *et al.*, 2004; Gao, Rau, & Salvendy, 2010).

Social presence. Social presence measured the extent of proximity, interpersonal warmth and friendliness with which the information was provided. It was measured with three items derived from the media richness scale by Allen *et al.* (2004).

Employer brand image. Constructs and items used to measure employer brand were based on different previous studies applying the instrumental-symbolic framework (Lievens, 2007; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Van Hoye, 2008).

Explanatory variables. We created two dummy variables to capture the three experimental conditions in our design. The first dummy variable is called *Facebook* from now on and was coded as follows: 1 = *Facebook condition* and 0 = *control group* and

LinkedIn condition. The second dummy variable is called *LinkedIn* and was coded 1 for the *LinkedIn condition* and 0 for the *two other conditions*. When added together in the regression analyses, this coding allows us to compare the effect of each social media platform against the control group (Field, 2009).

Control variables. Based on previous research we controlled for prior familiarity with the hospital (Brooks *et al.*, 2003). *Familiarity* was measured with three items based on Lievens *et al.* (2005). Applicant group was also included as control variable (1 = *employed nurse*, 0 = *student*).

Data analysis

SPSS 22 was used to analyze the data. We applied multiple linear regression analyses to test the main effects. For the mediation effects, we used the Hayes Process Macro in SPSS to apply a bootstrapping method which allowed us to test the indirect effects of Facebook and LinkedIn on the outcome variables through the proposed mediators (Preacher & Hayes, 2004).

A confirmatory factor analysis was performed with MPlus version 7.4 to validate the employer brand image factors. For the six instrumental factors, it demonstrated a satisfactory model fit: $\chi^2(89) = 153.401$, $p < .001$; RMSEA = .060; CFI = .957. For the five symbolic dimensions it demonstrated an acceptable model fit: $\chi^2(94) = 192.225$, $p < .001$; RMSEA = .072; CFI = .930 (Browne & Cudeck, 1993; Medsker *et al.*, 1994).

Results

Sample

Of the 212 respondents, the mean age was 28 years ($SD = 10.12$) and 85.5% were women. In this sample, 44% of the respondents were employed Belgian nurses with work experience between less than one year and 40 years ($M = 12.36$, $SD = 9.43$). The mean age of the employed nurses was 36 years ($SD = 9.58$) and 79.7% were female. The other 118 participants were nursing students. Of the students, 90.3% were female and their average age was 21 years ($SD = 2.87$). Of all the participants, 95.1% indicated they had a profile on Facebook and 10.4% had one on LinkedIn.²

Table 1 (part 1).

Content and Flow of the Study's Survey

Measure	α	Questions/Items
Familiarity	.80	- I have already heard about this organization - I know what this organization stands for - I know what this organization has to offer as an employer
Current employee of focal hospital ^a		Are you currently an employee at [name hospital]?
Random allocation to one of three conditions		
1. Control condition:		Recruitment message (see Figure 1)
2. Facebook condition:		Recruitment message & link to the hospital's Facebook profile
3. LinkedIn condition:		Recruitment message & link to the hospital's LinkedIn profile
Attractiveness	.87	- This organization seems like a good place to work - I would recommend this organization as an employer to others - I would like to work for this organization
Social Presence	.67	- The information was presented in a personal manner - I felt addressed in a warm manner - The information was presented in a friendly manner
Interactivity	.90	- There were opportunities for interaction - You could communicate with the organization - It was possible to provide or receive feedback
Employer brand dimensions		
Instrumental attributes ^b		
Pay	.88	- Within the organization, wages are generally high - This organization offers interesting benefits (=extra-legal advantages such as company car, cellphone, ...) besides the wage
Advancement	.87	- Within this organization one can make a good living - This organization offers possibilities to advance - The organization offers opportunities for promotion

Table 1 (part 2).

Content and Flow of the Study's Survey

Measure	α	Questions/Items
Task diversity	.86	- The organization offers a wide variety of tasks - The organizations offers an interesting range of jobs - The organization offers challenging work
Atmosphere	.91	- In this organization there is a good atmosphere among colleagues - Within this organization there is a pleasant work environment
Meaningfulness	.94	- Working for this organization gives people the opportunity to help others - The organization offers the opportunity to make yourself useful to others - I feel that my work in this organization would matter
Work-life balance	.88	- This organization allows to optimally combine work with other domains of life such as family and hobbies - The organization acknowledges the importance of other areas of life (family, ...) of the employee. - The organization allows flexibility of work according to the needs of other areas of life (family, hobby, ...)
Symbolic attributes ^c		
Competence	.83	intelligent, successful, reliable, demonstrating craftsmanship
Innovativeness	.80	daring, creative, innovative
Prestige	.65	prestigious, renowned, highly regarded
Robustness	.65	robust, masculine, tough
Sincerity	.80	honest, social, warm
Demographics		Gender Age Do you have a profile on LinkedIn? Do you have a profile on Facebook?

Note. The items were translated from Dutch and all (except the demographics) were rated on a 5-point rating scale ranging from 1=*completely disagree* to 5=*completely agree*. ^a This question was only asked in the survey that was sent to the employed nurses. ^b Factor analysis indicated an acceptable fit: $\chi^2(89) = 153.401$, $p = .000$; RMSEA = .060; CFI = .957.

^c Factor analysis indicated an acceptable fit: $\chi^2(94) = 192.225$, $p = .000$; RMSEA = .072; CFI = .930.

Table 2.

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations of Study Variables

Variable	Count	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1. Facebook ^{ac}	44 (20.8%)			–																
2. LinkedIn ^{ac}	57 (26.9%)			-.31**	–															
3. Applicant group ^{bc}	94 (44.3%)			-.01	.04	–														
4. Familiarity		3.95	.94	.08	-.01	.08	–													
5. Social Presence		3.50	.62	.22**	.16*	-.30**	.04	–												
6. Interactivity		2.93	.90	.33**	.30**	-.11	.06	.55**	–											
7. Pay		2.94	.71	.03	.09	-.38**	-.02	.32**	.27**	–										
8. Advancement		3.59	.79	.08	.23**	-.23**	.16*	.24**	.22**	.64**	–									
9. Task diversity		3.60	.56	.09	.15*	-.31**	.15*	.41**	.33**	.47**	.42**	–								
10. Atmosphere		3.27	.87	.11	.11	-.39**	.15*	.34**	.16*	.53**	.61**	.34**	–							
11. Meaningfulness		3.88	1	.11	.06	-.49**	.07	.28**	.14	.50**	.57**	.38**	.75**	–						
12. Work-life balance		3.22	.64	.04	.18*	-.28**	.03	.43**	.40**	.35**	.31**	.37**	.36**	.18*	–					
13. Competence		3.85	.53	.18*	.16*	-.35**	.21**	.40**	.39**	.38**	.54**	.47**	.50**	.49**	.45**	–				
14. Innovativeness		3.60	.60	.17*	0.13	-.33**	0.12	.41**	.35**	.46**	.39**	.46**	.37**	.35**	.38**	.49**	–			
15. Prestige		3.42	.54	.00	.11	-.25**	.09	.32**	.22**	.31**	.30**	.33**	.37**	.32**	.37**	.48**	.43**	–		
16. Robustness		2.80	.56	-.01	.07	-.06	-.03	.20**	.12	.29**	.05	.15*	.16*	.03	.18*	.12*	.21**	.26**	–	
17. Sincerity		3.79	.61	.19*	.05	-.31**	.11	.46**	.29**	.40**	.45**	.46**	.54**	.53**	.38**	.72**	.52**	.41**	.08	–
18. Attractiveness		3.67	.67	.17*	.03	-.40**	.13	.52**	.30**	.37**	.30**	.40**	.46**	.39**	.37**	.57**	.46**	.33**	.16	.63**

Note. ^a Two dummy variables were created, representing the three conditions of our experimental design.

^b Applicant group was coded with 0 = students 1= employed nurses

^c Categorical variables

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

Table 3.

Hierarchical Regression Analyses

	Instrumental						Outcome Variables					
	Pay	Advancement	Task	Atmosphere	Meaning	Work-life	Symbolic				Attract	
							Competent	Innovative	Prestige	Robust		Sincere
Control variables												
Applicant group ^a	-.38**	-.25**	-.33**	-.41**	-.49**	-.30**	-.37**	-.35**	-.26**	-.07	-.32**	-.42**
Familiarity	-.01	.16*	.15*	.16*	.08	.03	.21**	.11	.10	-.03	.11	.15*
Explanatory variables												
Facebook	.05	.15*	.14*	.14*	.13	.11	.24**	.22**	.03	.02	.22**	.19**
LinkedIn	.12	.29**	.21**	.17*	.12	.23**	.25**	.22**	.13	.08	.14	.11
ΔR^2	.01	.08**	.05**	.03*	.02	.05**	.08**	.07**	.02	.01	.05**	.03*
R^2	.16**	.16**	.17**	.22**	.27**	.13**	.26**	.20**	.09**	.01	.16**	.22**
Adjusted R^2	.14	.14	.15	.20	.25	.11	.24	.18	.07	-.01	.14	.21

Note. The values in the table are standardized regression coefficients for 12 regression analyses.

Results displayed are those of the final step.

The ΔR^2 displayed is the ΔR^2 for the last step. R^2 is for the total model.

^a Applicant group was coded as 0 = students 1= employed nurses.

* = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$

Table 4.

Indirect Effects of Facebook and LinkedIn on Employer Brand Dimensions and Organizational Attractiveness through Social Presence and Interactivity

Outcome variables	Explanatory Variables	Social Presence		Interactivity	
		Indirect effect	95% CI	Indirect effect	95% CI
Instrumental					
Pay	Facebook	.07	[.01, .15]	.15	[-.002, .29]
	LinkedIn	.06	[.01, .13]	.12	[-.003, .24]
Advancement	Facebook	.05	[-.02, .13]	.02	[-.14, .16]
	LinkedIn	.04	[-.01, .12]	.02	[-.13, .14]
Task diversity	Facebook	.10	[.04, .20]	.08	[-.02, .21]
	LinkedIn	.09	[.03, .17]	.07	[-.02, .17]
Atmosphere	Facebook	.14	[.07, .26]	-.10	[-.28, .05]
	LinkedIn	.12	[.05, .23]	-.08	[-.24, .04]
Meaningfulness	Facebook	.09	[-.001, .21]	-.07	[-.28, .13]
	LinkedIn	.07	[-.001, .17]	-.06	[-.23, .10]
Work-life	Facebook	.13	[.05, .22]	.19	[.07, .34]
	LinkedIn	.10	[.04, .18]	.16	[.07, .29]
Symbolic					
Competence	Facebook	.06	[-.001, .14]	.12	[.03, .23]
	LinkedIn	.05	[.002, .11]	.10	[.02, .20]
Innovativeness	Facebook	.11	[.03, .21]	.11	[-.01, .25]
	LinkedIn	.08	[.02, .18]	.09	[-.01, .21]
Prestige	Facebook	.09	[.03, .18]	.06	[-.05, .18]
	LinkedIn	.07	[.02, .15]	.05	[-.05, .15]
Robust	Facebook	.09	[.02, .18]	.03	[-.12, .16]
	LinkedIn	.07	[.02, .15]	.02	[-.10, .13]
Sincerity	Facebook	.17	[.09, .28]	.04	[-.08, .18]
	LinkedIn	.13	[.06, .24]	.03	[-.07, .15]
Attractiveness	Facebook	.20	[.11, .31]	.02	[-.08, .14]
	LinkedIn	.16	[.08, .27]	.02	[-.08, .12]

Note. CI = Confidence Interval

The unstandardized indirect effects and the 95% confidence intervals were computed for each of 10,000 bootstrapped samples.

Control variables applicant group and familiarity were also entered in the model.

Analysis and results

Table 2 reports the means, standard deviations and bivariate correlations for all study variables.

Multiple linear regression analyses. Hypotheses 1a and 2a suggested a positive association of the explanatory variables Facebook and LinkedIn with the employer brand dimensions as outcome variables. To test this, twelve regression analyses were performed with the control variables, applicant group and familiarity added in the first step and Facebook and LinkedIn in the second step.

First we examined the effect on the instrumental dimensions. Results are displayed in Table 3. Nurses in the Facebook condition reported more positive perceptions of the hospital's advancement opportunities ($\beta = .15, p < .05$), task diversity ($\beta = .14, p < .05$) and work atmosphere ($\beta = .14, p < .05$). Nurses in the LinkedIn condition showed more positive perceptions of advancement ($\beta = .29, p < .01$), task diversity ($\beta = .21, p < .01$), atmosphere ($\beta = .17, p < .05$) and work-life balance ($\beta = .23, p < .01$). Neither Facebook or LinkedIn was significantly associated with meaningfulness or pay and we did not find a significant effect of Facebook on work-life balance.

Next, we analyzed the symbolic dimensions (Table 3). Facebook significantly positively predicted nurses' perceptions of competence ($\beta = .24, p < .01$), innovativeness ($\beta = .22, p < .01$) and sincerity ($\beta = .22, p < .01$). Regarding LinkedIn, significant positive associations were found with competence ($\beta = .25, p < .01$) and innovativeness ($\beta = .22, p < .01$). LinkedIn had no significant effect on sincerity. Facebook nor LinkedIn had a significant effect on prestige and robustness.

In summary, Facebook had a significant positive effect on three out of six instrumental dimensions and three out of five symbolic dimensions. We can conclude that viewing a hospital's profile on Facebook can have a significant positive impact on employer brand perceptions, but not on all dimensions. Hypothesis 1a is partially supported. LinkedIn had a significant positive effect on four instrumental dimensions and two symbolic dimensions. Hypothesis 2a is thus also partially supported.

We hypothesized a positive effect of Facebook and LinkedIn on nurses' perceived organizational attractiveness (Hypotheses 1b and 2b). To test these hypotheses, we conducted another regression analysis with attractiveness as the outcome variable, the explanatory variables were the same as described above. The results are depicted in Table 3 and show that Facebook was positively related to attractiveness ($\beta = .19, p < .01$), but LinkedIn was not. Consequently, Hypothesis 1b was supported and 2b was not.

Bootstrapping procedure. Hypotheses 3a and 4a suggested a mediation of the relation of nurses' exposure to the social media platform with perceived employer brand by interactivity and Hypotheses 5a and 6a proposed a mediation by social presence. A bootstrapping procedure was used to test the indirect effect of social media platform on the perceived employer brand attributes through the mediators social presence and interactivity. The unstandardized indirect effects and the 95% confidence intervals were computed for each of 10,000 bootstrapped samples and are listed in Table 4 (Preacher & Hayes, 2004). Results show that social presence mediated the effect of both Facebook and LinkedIn on almost all the employer brand dimensions, thus supporting Hypotheses 5a and 6a. However, interactivity only mediated the effect of both Facebook and LinkedIn on work-life balance, as well as their effect on competence. Support for Hypotheses 3a and 4a is thus rather limited.

Hypotheses 3b and 4b proposed a mediation by interactivity of the effect on organizational attractiveness. Hypotheses 5b and 6b proposed a mediation by social presence. Again, we tested the indirect effect of Facebook and LinkedIn on the hospital's attractiveness through social presence and interactivity by using a bootstrapping procedure (Preacher & Hayes, 2004). Results are also displayed in Table 4. The effect of both Facebook and LinkedIn was mediated by social presence, but not by interactivity. Consequently, Hypotheses 5b and 6b are supported, while Hypotheses 3b and 4b were not.

Discussion

Research has started to look at the implications and opportunities of social media for the nursing profession (e.g., Moorhead et al., 2013). While many hospitals seem to have social media pages (Griffis et al., 2014), as far as we know, no study has investigated the impact of a hospital's social media use on nurses' perceptions of the organization as a potential employer, even though this might be of use to help organizations deal with hard-to-fill vacancies (Juraschek et al., 2012). Our results show that a hospital's social media page may be a useful recruitment tool because it can have a positive effect on nurses' perceptions of the employer brand and organizational attractiveness. This is good news for organizations trying to attract potential applicants. In addition, we found that in the context of social media, social presence plays an important role in influencing potential applicants' perceptions.

Sivertzen et al. (2013) found that self-reported exposure to information about an organization on social media was positively associated with overall corporate reputation.

Our study now shows that seeing a social media profile can change perceptions of the organization as an employer as well. Facebook and LinkedIn positively influenced a majority of the employer brand dimensions. An organization's social media page can thus be used by potential applicants to make inferences about several aspects of organizations (Connelly et al., 2011) regarding both instrumental and symbolic aspects (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). Additionally, we found that social media can improve nurses' organizational attraction. In this study, Facebook had a significant positive effect, but LinkedIn did not, even though the content was similar. This indicates that the impact strength of different social media on potential applicants' perceptions may differ. It may be that potential applicants have different expectations of, or look for different information on, each platform. Future research might examine which platforms are more effective and why. However, since social media are a quickly evolving area (Ferguson, 2013), we believe that future research should not merely focus on specific platforms, but mostly on the characteristics that explain their effects and that can be applied to future new platforms.

Along these lines, we found that the positive effects of social media were mostly explained by social presence. This feeling of warm, friendly and interpersonal communication may be an important strength of social media and should be included in future research which compares different recruitment channels, including social media. Communication on social media may be perceived as personal because people's perceptions are influenced by the platform itself of which the primary goal is to maintain relations (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). However, it might be that the manner that the hospital employed social media, was "socially present", thus implying that social presence might not be attributed entirely to the platform itself, but may also depend on the specific content that is shared. If this is the case, organizations should try to create content that is perceived as kind, warm and personal, such as a personal story of one of the employees and use accessible and friendly language rather than merely business-oriented or aloof. Future research should investigate the difference in perceived social presence between different types of content and should explore ways where organizations can improve the perceived social presence of their recruitment communication.

Finally, interactivity only explained the effect of social media on two employer brand dimensions. It might be that interactivity plays a more important role for other types of potential applicants or in another phase of the recruitment process (Van Hoye & Saks, 2008). Therefore, future research should explore the effect of interactivity further in other contexts.

Furthermore, some significant positive effects on employer brand dimensions were left unexplained. Therefore, future research may examine which other underlying processes are at play. Based on previous literature and empirical studies, credibility theory might be useful to further examine the effects of social media on potential applicants (e.g., Cable & Turban, 2001; Eisend, 2004). McFarland and Ployhart (2015) suggest that social media content is publicly accessible, which allows for more scrutiny. We propose that this might improve potential applicants' credibility perceptions of the information provided, leading to more positive attitudes toward the organization (Van Hoye, 2012).

Limitations

This study has some limitations. A first limitation is the experimental design, which might influence how people process the given information. It might be that participants processed information more consciously than they would in reality, because they knew that they had to fill in questions about the organization afterwards. Additionally, because respondents were instructed to visit a particular platform, we do not know whether they would actually come across this organizational page in reality.

Other limitations concern our use of a convenience sample. Moreover, we were not able to compute a response rate for the employed nurses because we applied a snowball technique. Furthermore, it is possible that some respondents had previous work experience in the focal hospital. This might influence the effect of social media on their perceptions. However, since it is realistic that organizations also aim to re-recruit former employees (e.g., Shipp et al., 2014), we believe this is no major issue. We control for familiarity, which takes in account past experiences with the hospital to some extent. Future research could use a fictitious company to completely rule out any previous experience with the organization.

In addition, caution is warranted when generalizing this study's findings to other contexts and other types of potential applicants and organizations. Our sample is collected in a region where there is a shortage of nurses (VDAB, 2016). Future research should also study social media for employer branding and recruitment purposes in other contexts, since nurses that are more concerned about finding a job, might respond differently. Furthermore, it is possible that specific social media platforms are more effective for certain profiles or certain organizations. For example, it is important for organizations to know on which social media their targeted profiles are active. In addition, it might also be that social presence is perceived as more important by nurses than by, for example, accountants. Research indicates that people who choose for the nursing profession are

generally caring and sociable (Eley et al., 2012), therefore, they may place more weight on this.

Conclusion

Many organizations are active on social media and are employing these platforms for recruitment and employer branding. This study indicates that hospitals' investments in social media can be justifiable because they can have a positive effect on potential applicants' organizational attractiveness and employer brand perceptions. At the very least, our study shows that future research into this domain is warranted. Furthermore, it shows that social presence plays an important role in shaping nurses' employer perceptions through social media. Future research should study what the determinants are of social presence perceptions and which types of social media content are most effective in influencing nurses' perceptions of potential employers.

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Footnotes

1. To assess the external validity of our design, we explored whether hospitals in Belgium are present on Facebook and LinkedIn. Therefore, we took a sample of 10 hospitals located in the same region as the hospital included in this study. Of these, seven had a Facebook profile that is updated regularly, one had a Facebook page that was not up-to-date. The eight hospitals who had a Facebook page, also had a LinkedIn profile. Two hospitals regularly posted messages on LinkedIn, but the others did not, they only had a general description and no regular posts or only posted vacancies. Two hospitals did not have a Facebook or LinkedIn profile.

2. We also ran the regression analyses with two dummy variables included to control for the effect of the participant having a personal Facebook profile and having a LinkedIn profile. Since these were not significant (except for 'having a LinkedIn profile' on advancement as the dependent variable) and did not change any results significantly, we decided to omit these to improve statistical power.

CHAPTER 4

Attracting applicants through the organization's social media

page: Signaling employer brand personality³

The purpose of this study is to examine how potential applicants' exposure to an organization's social media page relates to their subsequent organizational attractiveness perceptions and word-of-mouth intentions. Based on signaling theory and the theory of symbolic attraction, we propose that potential applicants rely on perceived communication characteristics of the social media page (social presence and informativeness) as signals of the organization's employer brand personality (warmth and competence), which in turn relate to organizational attractiveness and word-of-mouth. Data were gathered in a simulated job search process in which final-year students looked for an actual job posting and later visited an actual organization's social media page. In line with our hypotheses, results show that the perceived social presence of a social media page was indirectly positively related to attractiveness and word-of-mouth through its positive association with perceived organizational warmth. Perceived informativeness was indirectly positively related to these outcomes through its positive association with perceived organizational competence. In addition, we found that social presence was also directly positively related to organizational attractiveness. These findings suggest that organizations can use social media pages to manage key recruitment outcomes by signaling their employer brand personality.

³ This chapter is based on Carpentier, M., Van Hoye, G., & Weijters, B. (2019). Attracting Applicants Through the Organization's Social Media Page: Signaling Employer Brand Personality. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 115. doi:10.1016/j.jvb.2019.103326

Introduction

It has become increasingly difficult for many organizations to recruit the human capital needed to realize their strategy. Due to several trends, such as the population aging and the shift towards a knowledge economy, the competition to attract employees with specific skills and knowledge has risen markedly (Ployhart, Schmitt, & Tippins, 2017). Maintaining a positive employer image has become pivotal and organizations increasingly monitor what is being said about them, for instance on employer review sites (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). Consequently, the need to understand how to attract applicants and influence word-of-mouth has increased sharply (Ployhart et al., 2017; Van Hoye & Lievens, 2009).

With the emergence of social media, many organizations have created social media pages on which they present their organization, products, brands, and through which they communicate with different stakeholders (Etter et al., 2017; McFarland & Ployhart, 2015; Neill & Moody, 2015; SHRM, 2016). Because the majority of job seekers (both active and passive) use these platforms, organizations' social media pages seem to be promising devices for recruitment (Adecco, 2015). Moreover, organizations can use social media not only to directly attract applicants, but also to stimulate positive word-of-mouth (SHRM, 2016).

Notwithstanding the widespread use of social media both by organizations and by potential applicants, we know little about its effects on potential applicants' attitudes and intentions towards potential employers and about how these effects take place (McFarland & Ployhart, 2015). So far, only a few studies investigated the use of social media as tools to attract potential applicants. Although these studies provide initial evidence that exposure to information about an employer on social media can positively affect potential applicants' perceptions of the organization (Carpentier et al., 2017; Sivertzen, Nilsen, & Olafsen, 2013), we do not yet know how these effects unfold and can be influenced.

Hence, this paper investigates (a) processes through which a company's social media page relates to potential applicants' perceptions of organizational attractiveness and intentions to spread word-of-mouth, and (b) the role of perceived social media page communication characteristics in these processes. We thus focus on the underlying mechanisms explaining which social media pages are likely to be most effective and why. To this end we rely on signaling theory and the theory of symbolic attraction (Highhouse, Thornbury, & Little, 2007; Spence, 1973).

On the basis of signaling theory (Connelly, Certo, Ireland, & Reutzel, 2011; Spence,

1973), we propose that potential applicants interpret an organization's social media page as providing signals of what it would be like to work for that organization. These perceptions, in turn, are expected to influence perceptions of the employer brand personality (Slaughter, Zickar, Highhouse, & Mohr, 2004). Notably, we propose that potential applicants will rely on two specific perceived communication characteristics of the social media page to make inferences of two employer brand personality dimensions (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). We hypothesize that perceived social presence will signal organizational warmth and that perceived informativeness will signal organizational competence.

Further, in line with the theory of symbolic attraction (Highhouse et al., 2007), we propose that perceived organizational warmth and competence induced by exposure to social media page will positively relate to increased organizational attractiveness and word-of-mouth intentions. Consequently, we propose that the characteristics of a specific social media page will be indirectly positively related to organizational attractiveness and word-of-mouth intentions, through their association with signals of employer brand personality (Connelly et al., 2011). Since we want to take into account how seeing the organization's social media page changes potential applicants' perceptions of actual organizations, we control for initial perceptions before exposure to the social media page.

To summarize, social media are being used for recruitment and job search by many organizations and job seekers, but we do not know how exposure to social media pages influences potential applicants' organizational attractiveness and word-of-mouth intentions. This study fills in this gap by examining the mechanisms underlying the effects of organization's social media pages on potential applicants' perceptions. To this end, we apply insights from signaling theory and the theory of symbolic attraction. Understanding the mechanisms through which social media pages affect potential applicants provides insights into when and how social media can be most beneficial for employers. Such knowledge may allow organizations to better leverage social media for recruitment and employer branding purposes.

Literature review and hypotheses

The literature review is structured as follows. First, we discuss social media and the existing research on the use of social media for recruitment. Next, we introduce signaling theory, which is used to explain how potential applicants interpret perceived communication characteristics of social media pages as providing signals about an employer. Further, we discuss employer brand personality and the dimensions warmth and

competence. Subsequently, the social media page communication characteristics (i.e., informativeness and social presence) are introduced and we propose two hypotheses, based on signaling theory, linking the perceptions of these characteristics to inferences of competence and warmth. Finally, we discuss the study's outcome variables, attractiveness and word-of-mouth intentions, and propose a positive relation between competence and warmth and these outcome variables based on the theory of symbolic attraction and signaling theory. Table 1 provides an overview of all study's hypotheses.

Social media and recruitment

Social media are digital platforms on which users can connect with other users, generate and distribute content, and engage in interactive communication (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; McFarland & Ployhart, 2015). The amount of social media users has increased sharply during the past decade. Facebook and LinkedIn are the two platforms that are used most often for job search and recruitment (Adecco, 2015; Nikolaou, 2014). In June 2018, Facebook had 2.23 billion monthly active users (Facebook, 2018). LinkedIn does not communicate the number of monthly users, but states it has more than 575 million members (LinkedIn, 2018). Social media have the potential to reshape human resource activities, including recruitment (McFarland & Ployhart, 2015).

Many organizations are already investing resources in social media for employer branding and recruitment purposes (SHRM, 2016). Social media are unique settings which give rise to different modes and norms of interaction (Etter, 2017; Papacharissi, 2009). However, little is known about the effects of social media in a recruitment context, so it is not clear whether these social media expenditures are a wise investment. Initial empirical evidence in this domain shows that information about the organization on social media can influence potential applicants' perceptions of an organization (Frasca & Edwards, 2017). For example, Sivertzen et al. (2013) found that people who reported having seen information about the organization on social media, had a more positive perception of corporate reputation. In another study, Kissel and Büttgen (2015) showed that the perceived available information about an organization on social media was positively related with perceptions of corporate image, which in turn was positively associated with employer attractiveness. Further, a study by Carpentier et al. (2017) indicated that exposure to an organization's Facebook page had a positive influence on employer image and organizational attractiveness. Thus, research so far indicates that exposure to company information on social media can positively influence corporate reputation, corporate image, employer image, and organizational attractiveness. However, we do not

yet know much about what underlying mechanisms explain these effects and what characteristics make social media pages effective. The main aim of the current study is to understand the mechanisms underlying the effect of social media on potential applicants' perceptions of organizational attractiveness and intentions to spread word-of-mouth. To examine how potential applicants process information on organizations' social media pages, we rely on *signaling theory* and propose that people use social media pages to infer signals of employer brand personality.

Signaling theory

Signaling theory is one of the dominant paradigms in recruitment research (Uggerslev, Fassina, & Kraichy, 2012) and is typically applied to explain how recruitment activities can influence potential applicants' perceptions of an organization (e.g., Rynes, Bretz, & Gerhart, 1991; Turban, 2001). Central to signaling theory is information asymmetry (Connelly et al., 2011). Job seekers want to know what it is like to work at an organization to decide whether to apply to or accept a job offer from it (Turban, 2001), but they generally have incomplete knowledge. Hence, information they read, hear, or see related to an organization, is interpreted as providing signals about characteristics of the organization (Uggerslev et al., 2012).

Based on signaling theory, we propose that potential applicants will use an organization's social media page to derive signals about what the organization is like as an employer, which will influence their attitudes and intentions towards the organization (Slaughter et al., 2004). Previous research has described two categories of perceived characteristics of employers: instrumental and symbolic dimensions (e.g., Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). Instrumental dimensions are perceptions of functional characteristics such as wages and location. Symbolic dimensions concern intangible attributes such as competence, prestige, and sincerity. Although potential applicants' attraction to an organization is influenced by both type of dimensions, research indicates that organizations can more easily differentiate themselves from competitors on the basis of symbolic characteristics (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003).

Furthermore, recruitment sources are likely to differ in the extent to which they can be used to assess each type of characteristics. While certain sources, such as the job vacancy and the company website, may be more useful to assess instrumental attributes, we propose that applicants will especially use organization's social media pages to derive symbolic organizational characteristics. Social media are more interactive and open communication channels (McFarland & Ployhart, 2015), which might allow people to more

easily infer symbolic organizational attributes. For example, potential applicants may look at the way an organization communicates with the public and the kind of information they share to derive what the employer's traits are. This study thus focuses on symbolic attributes and proposes that applicants use an organization's social media page to assess its *employer brand personality*.

Employer brand personality

Employer brand personality is the set of symbolic attributes that are associated with a certain employer (Slaughter et al., 2004). It concerns the individual's perceptions of the organization's subjective characteristics (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). These subjective characteristics are similar to the personality traits of humans, hence the term *employer brand personality* is used (Slaughter et al., 2004). Scholars propose that employer brand personality provides applicants with signals of what it would be like to work in the organization (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). Several studies have examined potential applicants' perceptions of symbolic employer attributes and applied various frameworks and variables to conceptualize employer brand personality. Examples of specific characteristics that have been included in research are the perceptions of the organization's sincerity, trustworthiness, cheerfulness, prestige, and competence (Kausel & Slaughter, 2011; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Lievens, Van Hove, & Anseel, 2007; Van Hove, 2008). Because of these various frameworks, opportunities to generalize findings to other settings may be overlooked.

To facilitate the identification of communalities, Lievens and Slaughter (2016) suggested that perceptions of organizational warmth and competence can serve as meta-dimensions of employer brand personality inferences. These two dimensions originate from human interaction research, in which scholars found that people use two universal dimensions when they judge other people or groups (Cuddy, Glick, & Beninger, 2011; Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002). Perceptions of warmth concern whether the other party has positive intentions and goals. Perceptions of competence concern the ability to act on these intentions and to reach these goals.

Scholars found that warmth and competence dimensions play an important role in different domains, such as stereotyping, automatic evaluation of faces, leadership styles, and consumer behavior (Cuddy et al., 2011). When consumers judge a brand, they make inferences about how warm and competent the brand is, which relates to different emotional and behavioral reactions, such as brand loyalty or purchase intentions (Aaker, Vohs, & Mogilner, 2010; Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2007; Kervyn, Fiske, & Malone, 2012).

Previous recruitment research has successfully applied marketing concepts and theories to better understand recruitment processes (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). Similar to how consumers develop perceptions of brands' warmth and competence, potential applicants are proposed to develop perceptions of employers' warmth and competence. Research has found that during a recruitment interview, applicants' inferences of recruiter warmth and competence influence their perceptions of the hiring organization (Schreurs et al., 2005; Uggerslev et al., 2012). Furthermore, certain dimensions used in previous recruitment research to capture organization personality perceptions are either conceptually similar to warmth (e.g., sincerity and cheerfulness) or to competence (e.g., competence and prestige; Cable & Yu, 2006; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Lievens, Van Hove, & Schreurs, 2005). Accordingly, we conceptualize a warm organization as a friendly organization that has positive intentions and goals towards others and has high morals (Fiske et al., 2007; Kervyn et al., 2014; Maehle, Otnes, & Supphellen, 2011). A competent organization is conceptualized as an organization that is intelligent, efficient, prestigious, and is well-known for its ability to reach its goals (Fiske et al., 2007; Fiske et al., 2002; Highhouse, Lievens, & Sinar, 2003).

Based on signaling theory we expect that potential applicants derive signals of employer brand personality from an organization's social media. Specifically, potential applicants will use particular *perceived communication characteristics of a social media page* to create perceptions of organizational warmth and competence.

Social media page communication characteristics

Social information processing literature shows that in online communication, people rely on informational cues and other available cues in order to shape impressions of the person or entity that they are communicating with (Lim & Van Der Heide, 2015; Walther & Parks, 2002). In a recruitment context, research has found that communication features of recruitment sources such as websites influence attitudes and intentions toward an organization as a potential employer (Allen, Scotter, & Otondo, 2004). Social media, however, represent a different context from these more traditional recruitment communication channels (Papacharissi, 2009). For example, social media provide more opportunities to share information to a larger audience, they allow for interaction, they are more easily accessible, and their content is more permanent (McFarland & Ployhart, 2015). Therefore, we do not know whether and how communication characteristics studied in previous recruitment research influence perceptions in a social media context. This study focuses on two communication characteristics relevant to a social media context:

social presence and informativeness. Social interaction and searching for information are two of the main reasons why people use social media (Azar, Machado, Vacas-de-Carvalho, & Mendes, 2016; Gao & Feng, 2016).

Social presence is defined as the awareness of communicating with another person or entity and has been conceptualized as the extent to which the communication is perceived as personal, friendly, and sociable (Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976). The initial purpose of social media was to build and maintain social contacts (Boyd & Ellison, 2007), which is likely to influence how people communicate on these platforms. People might therefore expect the communication style on a social media page to be rather informal, interactive, and personal. In other words, they might expect that pages portray a certain level of social presence (Carpentier et al., 2017). Based on signaling theory, an organization's social media page that portrays higher levels of social presence, might lead people to infer that the organization itself is more friendly, has high morals and good intentions, which results in improved perceptions of organizational warmth. For example, imagine a potential applicant who sees a page on which the organization answers peoples' questions in a friendly way, or frequently posts personal anecdotes about employees, accordingly this person might be inclined to think the organization has good intentions and is a warm place to work. In contrast, imagine that a job seeker sees a page on which the posts are quite aloof and distant, this might result in the perception of the organization as being more distant and a cold place to work. Accordingly, we hypothesize that after viewing a social media page higher in social presence, the organization will be perceived as higher in warmth.

Hypothesis 1. The perceived social presence of a social media page will relate positively to perceived organizational warmth.

The second communication characteristic included in this study is informativeness. We define informativeness as the relevance and usefulness of given information for potential applicants who want to evaluate the organization as an employer (Breugh & Starke, 2000; Ryan, Horvath & Kriska, 2005; Van Hoye & Lievens, 2009). Empirical evidence shows that recruitment sources' informativeness positively influences potential applicants' attitudes towards organizations (Ryan, Horvath, & Kriska, 2005; Williamson, Lepak, & King, 2003). People pay attention to information adequacy, especially if there is little information available (Barber & Roehling, 1993). Since social media pages are tailored for posting short messages rather than elaborated texts, information adequacy might play an important role in managing people's perceptions in a social media context.

In this study, we rely on signaling theory to propose that potential applicants use the perceived informativeness of an organization's social media page to infer organizational competence. Williamson et al. (2003) suggested that the usefulness of information on a web site influences potential applicants' perceptions of a company's quality. In a qualitative study, Barber and Roehling (1993) found indications that job seekers perceive job advertisements with little relevant information as an indicator of "sloppy, disinterested recruiting practices" (p. 853), which might influence the perception of overall organizational competence. For example, imagine a person who is looking for information about a potential employer on social media to decide whether this would be a good place to work. When she can easily find useful information, the organization is able to fulfill her needs for specific information, resulting in improved perceptions. The organization may be perceived as capable of providing the right information on the right place (i.e., knows how to manage its communication). This might reflect on the organization as being more efficient, prestigious, intelligent, and better able to reach its goals, thus more competent. However, an organization that provides rather irrelevant or vague information may generate perceptions of the organization as being less competent overall. Accordingly, we propose that informativeness will relate to the strength of the social media page's signal of competence, in the sense that organizations will be viewed as more competent after seeing a more informative social media page.

Hypothesis 2. The perceived informativeness of a social media page will relate positively to perceived organizational competence.

In the next section, we discuss *organizational attractiveness and word-of-mouth intentions* and describe how organizational warmth and competence relate to these important recruitment outcomes. Additionally, we argue that the communication characteristics social presence and informativeness will indirectly relate to these outcomes through their association with respectively warmth and competence.

Organizational attractiveness and word-of-mouth intentions

As described before, based on signaling theory we expect that an organization's social media page characteristics influence applicants' inferences about the organization's warmth and competence. These signals allow applicants to form an impression of what it is like to work for this organization, which will influence their perceived attractiveness of the organization as an employer (Cable & Turban, 2001).

To understand the relation between employer brand personality and organizational attractiveness, Highhouse et al. (2007) draw on a functionalist approach of attitudes to

develop a theory of symbolic attraction. They propose that attraction to employer brand personality dimensions of a firm might be explained by the idea that such symbolic features allow job seekers (and employees) to communicate to others how they want to be perceived. Thus job seekers' attitude towards or choice for an organization as a potential employer may help people to express themselves and/or to acquire social approval (Katz, 1960). Specifically, Highhouse et al. (2007) proposed that attitudes towards a potential employer may serve two psychological needs: social adjustment and value expression. Social adjustment concerns relate to the need for approval of significant others (as this will influence self-esteem; Leary & Kowalski, 1990). Value expression concerns relate to the need to express one's self-concept ("we find reward in the expression of any attributes associated with our egos", Katz, 1960, p. 173). From a broader perspective, the theory of symbolic attraction builds on the social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) according to which affiliation to groups is an important part of one's identity and may help people to enhance their self-esteem. Accordingly, one's employer can be an important part of one's identity (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

Hence, working for a competent or warm organization may be attractive to potential applicants because they believe that this will help them gain others' approval or because it helps them to express certain values. However, potential applicants may distance themselves from an organization that is perceived as incompetent and/or cold because they might fear it could negatively reflect on their self-concepts (Banks, Kepes, Joshi, & Seers, 2015).

In line with these theoretical assumptions, previous research found that the symbolic dimensions sincerity and cheerfulness (which are conceptually similar to warmth) and the dimensions prestige and competence (conceptually similar to the organization's ability or competence) positively related to potential applicants' perceptions of organizational attractiveness (Lievens et al., 2005; Slaughter & Greguras, 2009; Slaughter et al., 2004; Van Hove, 2008). Consequently, based on the theory of symbolic attraction and signaling theory, we expect that an employer's social media page that is perceived as signaling higher levels of warmth and/or competence, will be perceived as a more attractive place to work.

Hypothesis 3. Perceived organizational (a) warmth and (b) competence after seeing an organization's social media page will relate positively to organizational attractiveness.

Further, we propose that when potential applicants derive favorable signals of warmth and competence from an organization's social media page, they will perceive that it is a good place to work in general (not only for themselves) and will be more willing to also recommend the organization to friends, family, or others in order to help them find good employment (Connelly et al., 2011; Van Hoyer, 2013). Thus, besides organizational attractiveness, brand personality may influence intentions to recommend an organization to others (Van Hoyer, 2008). This recommendation behavior is called word-of-mouth and can help organizations tap into new pools of potential applicants and spread their employer brand (both key aims of organization's social media use for recruitment; SHRM, 2016). However, so far, knowledge on how word-of-mouth can be stimulated is scarce (Van Hoyer & Lievens, 2009).

In line with the symbolic attraction theory (Highhouse et al., 2007), recommending of an organization that is perceived as warm or competent might allow an applicant to publicly associate oneself with the organization's values, and satisfy one's value expression concerns. Moreover, by talking positively about an organization that is high on competence and/or warmth, an individual might believe they can gain social approval, thus satisfying social adjustment concerns.

Previous research shows that perceptions of employer brand personality can predict employees' recommendation intentions (Van Hoyer, 2008). Along these lines, we propose that inferences of warmth and competence derived from a social media page will also positively relate to potential applicants' intentions to spread positive word-of-mouth about the organization.

Hypothesis 4. Perceived organizational (a) warmth and (b) competence after seeing an organization's social media page will relate positively to intentions to share word-of-mouth.

To summarize, relying on signaling theory and the theory of symbolic attraction, we proposed that the underlying mechanism through which social media pages relate to important recruitment outcomes is that potential applicants use these pages to infer employer brand personality (Connelly et al., 2011). Specifically, we hypothesized that the perceived social presence of a social media page signals organizational warmth and that its perceived informativeness signals organizational competence (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). Next, we proposed that the inferred employer brand personality dimensions both relate positively to organizational attractiveness and word-of-mouth intentions. Accordingly, we propose that the extent to which a social media page is perceived as conveying social

presence will be indirectly positively related to these recruitment outcomes, through its positive association with the signal of organizational warmth. Similarly, we propose that informativeness will be indirectly positively associated with attraction and word-of-mouth intentions through inferences of organizational competence.

Hypothesis 5. The perceived social presence of the organization's social media page will indirectly positively relate to (a) organizational attractiveness and (b) intentions to spread word-of-mouth through perceived organizational warmth.

Hypothesis 6. The perceived informativeness of a social media page will indirectly positively relate to (a) organizational attractiveness and (b) intentions to spread word-of-mouth through perceived organizational competence.

Table 1.

Overview of the Study's Hypotheses

Hypothesized Relationships	
H1	Social presence → Organizational warmth
H2	Informativeness → Organizational competence
H3	a Organizational warmth → Organizational attractiveness b Organizational competence → Organizational attractiveness
H4	a Organizational warmth → Word-of-mouth intentions b Organizational competence → Word-of-mouth intentions
H5	a Social presence → Organizational warmth → Organizational attractiveness b Social presence → Organizational warmth → Word-of-mouth intentions
H6	a Informativeness → Organizational Competence → Organizational attractiveness b Informativeness → Organizational Competence → Word-of-mouth intentions

Note. We control for baseline measures of Organizational warmth, Organizational competence, Organizational attractiveness, or Word-of-mouth intentions at Time 1.

Method

Sample

In total, 198 students participated, however 33 cases were removed because respondents did not consent, referred to a different organization on two different time points, missed multiple variables at Time 1 or 2, (in one case) identically rated all questions, or organizations did not have Facebook or LinkedIn. Our final sample thus consisted of 165 final-year Master's students Business Administration of a Belgian university. This is a relevant sample, since these students are about to enter the labor market and are an attractive pool of new talent for employers (VDAB, 2017). The average age was 21.6 years ($SD = 1.04$), 68% was female, and 95.2% had work experience (including part-time jobs or internships). All participants had a Facebook account (on which they spent on average 10.66 hours per week, $SD = 8.84$) and 62% had a page on LinkedIn (with an average activity of .06 hours per week, $SD = 1.12$).¹

Design and procedure

Data were gathered in October 2016 in the context of a career orientation assignment. We used a two-stage design which allowed us to control for initial perceptions of the organization. For the first stage (Time 1), participants who took part in a simulated job search process were asked to look for an actual job posting they were interested in, that is, a job they would consider applying for. They were instructed to look for this job posting on a job site (three jobsites were listed as examples). After uploading a copy of the job posting on the online learning platform, students rated initial perceptions of organizational attractiveness, word-of-mouth intentions, organizational warmth and competence (these are used as baseline measures and controlled for in the analyses), and some demographic information.

For the second stage (Time 2), one week later, participants were randomly assigned to one of two groups created in an online learning platform. Considering that Facebook and LinkedIn are the social media platforms most often used by organizations as well as job seekers (Nikolaou, 2014), both were included in our study. One group was instructed to visit the Facebook page of the organization of which they had read the job posting. They were asked to look for additional information about the organization as a potential employer on this page, in order to prepare an application. We instructed the other group to visit the LinkedIn page of the organization and gave the same instructions.² We did not include a control group without exposure to social media, given that this paper's aim is not

to examine the overall effect of social media pages, but the specific processes through which social media relate to recruitment outcomes. After visiting the assigned social media page, participants completed a survey that assessed perceived social presence and informativeness of the social media page, perceptions of the employer's warmth and competence, as well as organizational attractiveness and word-of-mouth intentions.

Measures

All measures and items were in Dutch and are listed in Table 2 (translated to English). Unless mentioned otherwise, measures were operationalized with three items and answers were rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *completely agree*, 7 = *completely disagree*). Internal reliabilities (Cronbach's Alpha) ranged from .77 to .93 and are listed in Table 3.

Organizational attractiveness. We used three items from Lievens et al. (2005).

Word-of-mouth. Items to measure intentions to spread positive word-of-mouth were adapted from previous research (Van Hove, 2008, 2013; Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1996).

Employer brand personality. To measure the employer brand personality perceptions of warmth and competence we started from conceptually related employer brand personality dimensions: sincerity and cheerfulness for warmth, competence and prestige for competence (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Lievens, 2007; Lievens et al., 2007; Lievens et al., 2005; Van Hove, 2008). We used two six-item scales to measure warmth and competence, each item composed of one adjective. Participants rated to which extent the adjectives described the organization. Warmth and competence are both measured using a combination of existing and self-developed items based on the dimensions' definitions (each dimension was measured using three existing items and three self-developed items). To validate the scale we performed an additional test, using a method applied by Yu (2019). The sample of this test consisted of a group of ten researchers, topic matter experts in human resource management and organizational behavior (average age = 28 years, $SD = 2.45$, 8 women). These researchers were first presented with the definitions of warmth and competence, next we asked them to assign each item to one of the two categories. All of the items used in this study were placed in the right category.

Social presence. The social presence items were based on items used by Short et al. (1976) and the media richness scale by Allen et al. (2004).

Informativeness. Items to measure informativeness were based on items used by Williamson et al. (2003) and based on the definition used in this paper: "the relevance and

usefulness of given information for potential applicants who want to evaluate the organization as an employer” (Breugh & Starke, 2000).

Demographics. We requested demographical information including sex, age, social media use (platforms and intensity), and work experience.

Table 2.

Variables and Items Used

Variables	Items
Organizational attractiveness	This organization would be a good place to work for me. I think this organization is an attractive employer. A job with this organization appeals to me.
Word-of-mouth intentions	I would recommend this organization to a friend who is looking for work. If they inquire about it, I would recommend this organization as an employer to others. I would tell positive things about this organization to others.
Employer brand personality	
Organizational warmth	Cheerful Warm Sociable Sincere Transparent Has integrity
Organizational competence	Successful Capable Professional Highly regarded Prominent Renowned
Perceived social media page characteristics	
Social presence	The [Facebook/LinkedIn] page of the organization addressed me in a personal manner. I felt warmly addressed by this page. The communication on the [Facebook/LinkedIn] page was sociable.
Informativeness	The page allowed me to create a mental picture of this organization as an employer. The page provided useful information to evaluate a potential employer. I think this page gives an accurate view of the organization.

Note. Items were translated from Dutch.

Results

Table 3 shows the observed means, standard deviations, correlations, and internal reliabilities. A paired sample *t*-test showed a significant increase in perceptions of organizational warmth from Time 1 ($M = 4.87$, $SD = .68$) to Time 2 ($M = 5.15$, $SD = .78$; $t(164) = 5.37$, $p < .001$), after exposure to the social media page. Similarly, there was a significant increase in competence from Time 1 ($M = 5.43$, $SD = .88$) to Time 2 ($M = 5.53$, $SD = .85$; $t(164) = 2.06$, $p = .041$). Furthermore, a paired sample *t*-test showed a significant decrease in organizational attractiveness from the initial assessment at Time 1 ($M = 5.57$, $SD = .71$) to Time 2 after viewing the organization's social media page ($M = 5.36$, $SD = .97$; $t(164) = -3.08$, $p = .002$). Average word-of-mouth intentions increased significantly from Time 1 ($M = 4.8$, $SD = .79$) to Time 2 ($M = 5.09$, $SD = .84$; $t(164) = 4.52$, $p < .001$). So overall, without considering the specific page characteristics, perceptions of organizational warmth and competence as well as word-of-mouth intentions improved after viewing an organization's social media page. On the contrary, and somewhat surprisingly, organizational attractiveness decreased on average.

Measurement model

The data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) in Mplus 7.4. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was performed using the following variables: social presence and informativeness (both at Time 2), warmth, competence, organizational attractiveness, and word-of-mouth intentions (all at Time 1 and 2). Items that measured warmth and competence were combined into parcels (two items per parcel), because this requires fewer parameter estimates (Little, Rhemtulla, Gibson, & Schoemann, 2013) and we wanted to avoid having too many parameters estimates relative to the number of respondents. Parceling is appropriate since this study focuses on the relationships between constructs and not on the structure of these constructs (Little et al., 2013).

CFA indicated an acceptable fit ($\chi^2(364) = 583.186$, $p < .001$, RMSEA = .060, CFI = .949; SRMR = .057; Browne & Cudeck, 1993; Medsker, Williams, & Holahan, 1994). Results of the discriminant validity analysis showed that squared correlations of the variables were smaller than the average variance extracted of the items of each measure (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), therefore the concepts were sufficiently distinct (Bagozzi, Yi, & Phillips, 1991).

Table 3.

Observed Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations, and Internal Reliabilities

Time 1	Mean	SD	N	Correlations and Internal Reliabilities											
				1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.		
1 Warmth	4.87	.68	165	(.77)											
2 Competence	5.43	.88	165	.36**	(.92)										
3 Attractiveness	5.57	.71	165	.38**	.53**	(.83)									
4 Word-of-mouth	4.8	.79	165	.34**	.56**	.55**	(.83)								
Time 2															
5 Social presence	4.33	1.24	165	.23**	.13	.26**	.18*	(.91)							
6 Informativeness	4.43	1.11	165	.24**	.21**	.18*	.18*	.73**	(.84)						
7 Warmth	5.15	.78	165	.59**	.22**	.27**	.26**	.57**	.44**	(.85)					
8 Competence	5.53	.85	165	.26**	.76**	.44**	.51**	.35**	.42**	.40**	(.92)				
9 Attractiveness	5.36	.97	165	.33**	.38**	.47**	.40**	.60**	.46**	.55**	.57**	(.93)			
10 Word-of-mouth	5.08	.84	165	.26**	.38**	.38**	.53**	.43**	.37**	.46**	.57**	.68**	(.88)		

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

Items were rated on a 7-point scale.

Cronbach Alpha's are shown on the diagonal in parentheses.

Structural model

The study's hypotheses were tested in a single integrative SEM model (see Table 1 for an overview of the hypotheses). We controlled for warmth, competence, organizational attractiveness, and word-of-mouth intentions measured at Time 1 (before visiting the social media page). This allowed us to examine the change in these variables before and after exposure to an actual social media page. Fit measures indicated an acceptable fit ($\chi^2(382) = 626.617, p < .001$; RMSEA = .062; CFI = .943; SRMR = .072; Browne & Cudeck, 1993; Medsker et al., 1994). Since our sample size was quite small ($N = 165$), we used bootstrapping and parceling. A Chi-Square difference test indicates a significant difference between the measurement and the structural model ($\Delta\chi^2(18) = 43.431, p < .001$). First we discuss alternative models that were tested, then we discuss the final model and the hypotheses' findings.

Alternative model

We tested and compared alternative SEM models (see Table 4). First, it might be that the specific social media platform influences potential applicants' perceptions. Therefore, we compared our model with a model including a dummy variable that indicated the social media platform (*Facebook* = 1, *LinkedIn* = 0). For the fit measures, see Table 4 (*Model A*). In this Model A, paths were included between the dummy variable and all measured variables at Time 2. None of these paths were significant. The model fit is worse in terms of RMSEA, CFI, and SRMR. No Chi-square difference test was performed, as both models include different variables.

Second, we hypothesized a positive relation between social presence and warmth and between informativeness and competence. In an alternative structural model we included a path from social presence to competence (at Time 2) and a path from informativeness to warmth (at Time 2; *Model B*). Path coefficients show that social presence was not significantly associated with competence, nor was informativeness significantly associated with warmth. The change in chi-square model fit was also not significant. The relations were thus not included in the model.

Third, potential applicants' attitudes towards an organization might influence their intention to spread word-of-mouth about that company to others. We compared a model including a path from Organizational attractiveness at Time 2 to Word-of-mouth intentions at Time 2 (*Model C*). Although this new directed path was significant, the model fit indices show that there was no substantial difference in model fit. We were not able to test the Chi-

square difference as the models are not nested. Comparing the alternative model fit indices indicates that a non-directional correlation instead of a directional path does not result in a decrease in model fit. In addition, this relation was not hypothesized a priori, nor is the relation between these two variables the focus of our study, we did not include this path in our final model.

Fourth, it might be that people's attraction and word-of-mouth intentions after exposure to social media, are not only influenced by the perceived social media page characteristics and prior attraction, but also by prior perceptions of employer brand personality. In another model we therefore added paths from warmth and competence measured at Time 1 to the outcome variables organizational attractiveness and word-of-mouth intentions at Time 2 (*Model D*). A chi-square test showed a significant change in the chi-square fit index ($\Delta\chi^2(4) = 13.54, p = .009$). However, none of the new paths are significant, nor did the relationships already in the model or findings change significantly by including these new paths. Therefore, to keep the model parsimonious we do not further include these paths.

Finally, we hypothesized indirect effects of the social media page characteristics on organizational attractiveness and word-of-mouth intentions. However, it might be that these characteristics also directly relate to these outcomes. Testing these direct paths can give us more insight in whether the relation between social media page characteristics and recruitment outcomes are fully or partially mediated by warmth and competence. Thus, in an additional alternative model we tested the direct paths between social presence and informativeness and the study's outcome variables organizational attractiveness and word-of-mouth intentions (all at Time 2). We first ran a model that included these four paths (*Model E*). The model fit was significantly better ($\Delta\chi^2(4) = 26.02, p < .000$), but from the new paths, only the path from social presence to attractiveness was significant. For reasons of parsimoniousness, we only kept the significant path in the final model. When comparing the basic structural model with the model including the path from social presence to organizational attractiveness (*Model F*), still a significant change (improvement) in chi-square model fit index is found ($\Delta\chi^2(1) = 19.396, p < .000$). Moreover, when compared to the measurement model, no significant difference in chi-square was found anymore ($\Delta\chi^2(17) = 24.035, p = .119$).

Table 4.

Alternative Structural Models

Model Name	Fit Measures							Chi ² Difference Tests Comparisons with Hypothesized Model		
	RMSEA	CFI	SRMR	AIC	BIC	χ^2	Df	$\Delta \chi^2$	ΔDf	<i>p</i>
Hypothesized Model	.062	.943	.072	9733	10084	626.617	382			
Model A	.064	.936	.112	9738	10083	691.755	414	/	/	/
Model B	.063	.943	.072	9736	10093	625.388	380	1.229	2	.541
Model C	.063	.942	.072	9737	10088	630.102	382	/	/	/
Model D	.061	.945	.065	9728	10091	613.077	378	13.54	4	.008
Model E	.060	.948	.062	9715	10078	600.597	378	26.02	4	< .001
Model F	.060	.947	.065	9716	10070	607.221	381	19.396	1	< .001

Note. The Chi² difference tests compares all models with the Hypothesized Model.

Dashes are used to indicate when no comparison was possible due to non-nested models.

Model A: paths from dummy social media platform to all variables at Time 2; Model B: paths from social presence to competence and informativeness to warmth; Model C: path from organizational attractiveness to word-of-mouth intentions; Model D: paths from warmth and competence at Time 1 to attractiveness and word-of-mouth at Time 2; Model E: paths from social presence and informativeness to attractiveness and word-of-mouth; Model F: path from social presence to attractiveness

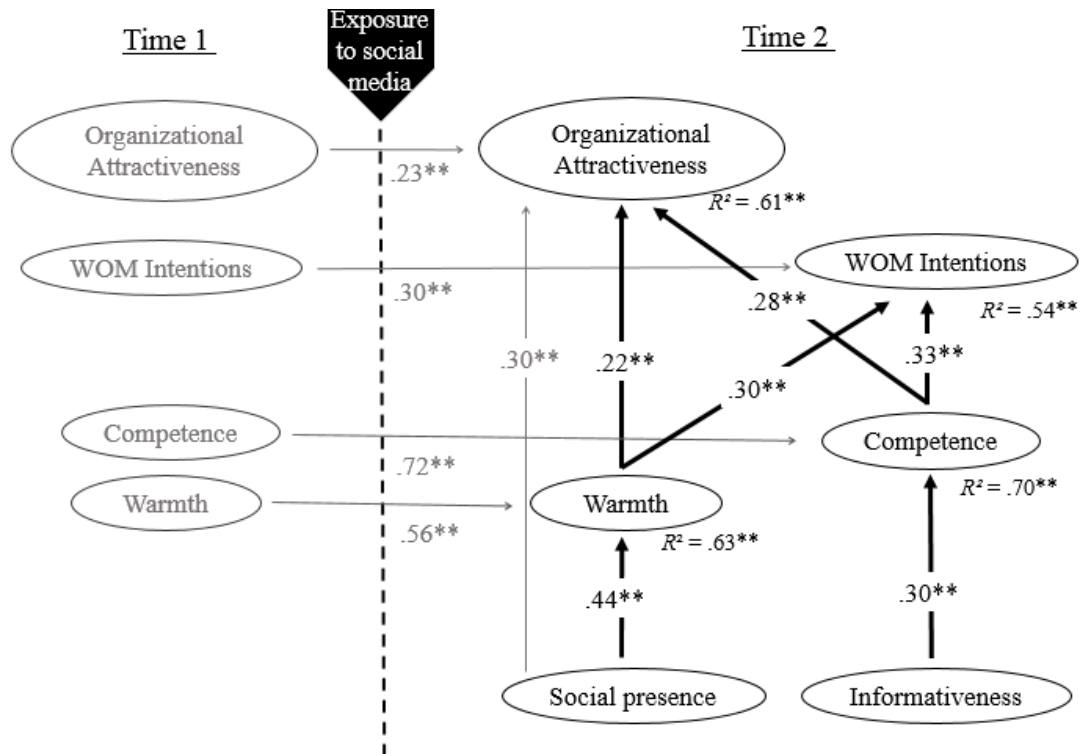


Figure 1. *Structural Equation Model*. WOM intentions = word-of-mouth intentions. Fit measures: $\chi^2(381) = 607.221, p < .001$; RMSEA = .06; CFI = .947; SRMR = .065. Coefficients displayed are standardized results. For each factor, one item loading was fixed at one. Residual correlations are not shown. The indirect effects are (a) the association of social presence with organizational attractiveness through warmth ($\beta = .097, CI = [.024, .175]$), (b) the association of social presence with word-of-mouth through warmth ($\beta = .132, CI = [.054, .218]$), (c) the association of informativeness with organizational attractiveness through competence ($\beta = .085, CI = [.036, .142]$), and (d) the association of informativeness with word-of-mouth through competence ($\beta = .099, CI = [.043, .173]$). * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Results: Hypotheses

The final model, which besides the hypothesized relationships thus also includes the path from social presence to organizational attractiveness, is shown in Figure 1 (Fit measures: $\chi^2(381) = 607.221$, $p < .000$; RMSEA = .06; CFI = .947; SRMR = .065). In support of Hypothesis 1, the perceived social presence of the social media page was significantly positively associated with organizational warmth ($\beta = .44$, $p < .001$), controlling for initial perceptions of warmth at Time 1. Additionally, in support of Hypothesis 2, the perceived informativeness of the social media page was significantly positively associated with organizational competence ($\beta = .30$, $p < .001$), controlling for competence at Time 1. As proposed by Hypothesis 3a, the perceived warmth of the organization after viewing the social media page was positively associated with the organization's attractiveness as an employer ($\beta = .22$, $p = .005$), beyond initial organizational attractiveness at Time 1. Furthermore, in support of Hypothesis 4a, the perceived organizational warmth after viewing the social media page was positively associated with potential applicants' intentions to spread positive word-of-mouth ($\beta = .30$, $p < .001$), beyond word-of-mouth intentions at Time 1. Next, in support of Hypothesis 3b, the perceived competence of the organization after viewing the social media page was positively associated with organizational attractiveness ($\beta = .28$, $p < .001$), beyond organizational attractiveness at Time 1. In support of Hypothesis 4b, competence was positively associated with word-of-mouth intentions as well ($\beta = .33$, $p < .001$), beyond word-of-mouth intentions at Time 1.

Next, we used a bootstrapping procedure to examine the indirect relationships between social media page characteristics and the study's outcome variables through the employer brand personality signals. The standardized indirect effects and the 95% Confidence Intervals (CI) were computed for each of 5,000 bootstrapped samples. The indirect positive association of social presence with organizational attractiveness through perceptions of organizational warmth was significant ($\beta = .10$, CI = [.024, .175]). As mentioned above, based on a model comparison, we also included the direct path from social presence to organizational attractiveness ($\beta = .30$, $p < .001$). The indirect association of social presence with word-of-mouth intentions through warmth was also significant ($\beta = .13$, CI = [.054, .218]). These results support Hypotheses 5a and 5b. Additionally, the indirect association of informativeness with organizational attractiveness through enhanced perceptions of organizational competence was significant ($\beta = .09$, CI = [.036, .142]). Finally, the indirect association of informativeness with word-of-mouth intentions through competence was significant ($\beta = .10$, CI = [.043, .173]), supporting

Hypotheses 6a and 6b.

Discussion

Social media represent a promising tool for organizations to manage potential applicants' perceptions and intentions, yet knowledge of the processes at play is limited. Understanding the mechanisms underlying the effects of social media on organizational attractiveness and intentions to spread word-of-mouth adds to the knowledge on recruitment in the digital era. In line with signaling theory and the theory of symbolic attraction (Highhouse et al., 2007; Spence, 1973), the study's findings show that potential applicants use social media pages' communication characteristics to infer employer brand personality dimensions, which in turn positively relate to attraction and word-of-mouth intentions.

This study sheds light on how potential applicants interpret perceived characteristics of an organization's social media pages as signals about that organization (Da Motta Veiga & Turban, 2014). In this sense, a crucial finding of our study is that perceived communication characteristics play an important role in the process of inferring employer brand personality signals from social media pages (Connelly et al., 2011). Potential applicants rely on perceived communication characteristics of the page to create a mental picture of what the organization is like as an employer. Specifically, perceptions of warmth increased after seeing a social media page high in social presence. Hence, organizations that are perceived to communicate in a more personal, friendly and sociable way, are perceived as more warm overall. Further, higher perceived levels of informativeness were associated with increased inferences of competence. Potential employers that are perceived to provide more relevant information, are considered as more competent overall, as suggested by Williamson et al. (2003).

These insights in the process of interpreting signals conveyed by a social media page are especially valuable for organizations aiming to recruit employees, since our results show that the perceived social media page characteristics informativeness and social presence indirectly relate to organizational attractiveness through their association with organizational warmth or competence respectively. Hence, this study makes a valuable contribution by showing that potential applicants extrapolate the way an organization communicates on its social media page to infer overall employer brand personality (Turban, 2001), which in turn relates positively to potential applicants' organizational attractiveness. Additional to an indirect effect through warmth, social presence had a direct effect on organizational attractiveness as well. This finding indicates

that another mechanism besides the signaling of organizational warmth underlies this effect. Future research should investigate this further. For example, it might be that higher social presence, a more personal and friendly perceived communication on the social media page, makes potential applicants feel they have some sort of personal connection with the organization. In line with social identity theory, this might increase identification with the organization, which can result in increased organizational attractiveness (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

Furthermore, results show that social media characteristics indirectly relate to intentions to spread positive word-of-mouth as well. Getting people to spread word-of-mouth is highly favorable for recruitment and employer branding (Van Hoya & Lievens, 2009). However, until now, very little was known of how organizations can stimulate this. Moreover, the few studies on the determinants of word-of-mouth have mainly examined why current employees disseminate word-of-mouth about their employer, and has largely ignored the word-of-mouth intentions of people outside the organization (Bloemer, 2010; Van Hoya, 2013). First, our findings show that overall potential applicants' intentions to spread word-of-mouth increased after seeing an organization's social media page. This suggests that, in general, exposing people to information about your organization on social media positively influences their willingness to recommend your organization as an employer to others. Second, the findings provide more insight in how organizations can stimulate word-of-mouth most effectively. Specifically, word-of-mouth intentions were higher when the social media page was high in social presence, signaling organizational warmth, and high in informativeness, signaling organizational competence.

We operationalized employer brand personality as warmth and competence, two dimensions that emerged in several research domains (Cuddy et al., 2011; Fiske et al., 2002). Our study indicates that organizations can use social media to manage how they are perceived on these dimensions. Moreover, these dimensions were positively related to organizational attractiveness and word-of-mouth intentions. These findings suggest that warmth and competence can play an important role for better understanding potential applicants' reactions towards potential employers. We encourage future research to examine how these dimensions relate to other employer brand frameworks and to other measures of warmth and competence used in different domains (e.g., Judd, James-Hawkins, Yzerbyt, & Kashima, 2005). To understand the positive association of warmth and competence with organizational attractiveness, potential applicants' self-presentation concerns provide a potential explanation in line with the theory of symbolic attraction

(Highhouse et al., 2017). Positive attitudes towards a competent and/or warm organization can help people to gain social approval or to express certain values. Similarly, recommending an organization that is perceived as competent and warm may serve these functions as well. Future research should measure people's self-presentation concerns (i.e., value expression and social approval concerns) and examine whether these moderate the effect of warmth and competence on recruitment outcomes (Highhouse et al., 2007).

Finally, rather surprisingly, the average organizational attractiveness after seeing the organization's social media page was lower than before, even though average warmth and competence perceptions increased. A possible explanation is that participants were instructed to look for a job posting they found appealing, which might have led to high initial organizational attractiveness. When they, afterwards, processed more information about the employer, this may have made them critically reflect on whether this is an appropriate place for them to work, which caused some of them to self-select out of the recruitment process. Therefore, even though they perceived the organization as a good place to work for others (i.e., improved employer brand personality and word-of-mouth intentions), their own attraction had lowered.

Practical implications

This study provides interesting implications for organizations looking to recruit talent. The findings suggest that organizations can signal their employer brand personality through their own social media page, which in turn positively relates with organizational attractiveness and word-of-mouth intentions. Based on these findings, it is important for organizations to find out which social media platforms their target group uses to look for information about potential employers and to create and maintain a page on those platforms.

Further, two particular communication characteristics of the page relate to the extent to which an organization is perceived as warm and as competent (which consequently relate to improved organizational attractiveness and increased intentions to spread word-of-mouth). Although these results seem to imply that organizations should aim to be perceived as both highly competent and warm, other things should be considered such as the organization's target group, the desired employer value proposition, and the distinctiveness relative to competitors (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Theurer, Tumasjan, Welpe, & Lievens, 2018). With this in mind, we recommend that organizations that want to increase potential applicants' perceptions of the organization as a warm employer, should

create a page high in social presence. Future research should investigate specifically how organizations can make their page be perceived as high in social presence. It might be that social presence perceptions increase as the organization communicates with the audience in a sociable manner and posts personal messages, pictures, and stories (e.g., about employees), thus not merely shares business oriented or aloof content. Next, to increase potential applicants' perceptions of the organization as a competent employer, organizations should provide sufficient relevant and useful information for job seekers. More research is needed here as well. In summary, to strengthen the signals a social media page conveys, organizations should deliberate on what and how they communicate on their page and how this can be interpreted by potential applicants. To this end, collaboration between an organization's communication or public relations and the recruitment department seems advisable (Neill & Moody, 2015).

Limitations and directions for future research

We now discuss the study's limitations, which might inspire future research. First, we requested participants to go to the social media page of the organization to find out more about it as a potential employer. One can wonder whether potential applicants in reality use social media to gather information on employers. In the first survey, we therefore asked which sources the respondents would generally use to find out more about potential employers. Results show that 67% would likely use Facebook and 62% would likely use LinkedIn (97% would likely use company's websites, 60% would likely consult friends, and 14 % would likely use Twitter).

Second, our study examined organizations' Facebook and LinkedIn pages, because these are the two platforms most used for job search and recruitment (Adecco, 2015). Social media platforms can differ strongly in terms of content format possibilities, available functions, and type of users. Hence, we do not know if findings can be generalized to other platforms. Future research might examine how different platforms affect job applicants' attitudes and intentions.

Third, given our focus on *how* (rather than *whether*) social media pages affect potential applicants, we did not include a control group. Based on our results, we thus cannot draw conclusions about the relative effect of social media compared with no recruitment information or other recruitment sources. Future research might investigate social media in comparison with or in addition to other recruitment channels such as job ads and recruitment websites.

Fourth, the study's design does not allow for causal conclusions and might lead to

common method variance. We aimed to reduce this by controlling for baseline measures at Time 1 (Podsakoff et al., 2003). To test causal effects and to rule out common method variance, future research could first experimentally manipulate social media page characteristics, next measure employer brand personality, and later measure actual application and word-of-mouth behavior.

Fifth, we relied on naturally occurring variability of informativeness and social presence instead of experimentally manipulating them. This allowed us to use real organizational social media pages, chosen by the participants (more than hundred different organizations). However, we could not investigate which specific features increase perceptions of these characteristics. Future research should examine what kind of content is considered socially present or informative. Studies can look at specific characteristics and analyze how these relate to perceived page characteristics and eventually to employer brand perceptions. Researchers can, for example, investigate the influence of the number of pictures displayed and the specific content (e.g., people or not) on perceptions of social presence. Such analyses would provide detailed information for organizations that want to convey a specific employer brand value proposition.

Due to our research operationalization, we were not able to control for the time spent browsing a specific social media page. Future research can use a more controlled research setting in which they can measure the time spent on the page and examine whether and how it influences perceptions of the page. Furthermore, in addition to organizational attractiveness, future research might want to measure intentions to apply or actual application behavior.

Our sample consists of 165 final year students, we recommend future research to investigate different (e.g., job seekers with work experience) and larger samples.

Finally, our study shows how an organization's social media presence can increase word-of-mouth intentions. Given the important recruitment outcomes of word-of-mouth about an employer (e.g., Van Hove & Lievens, 2009), future research should further investigate how social media influences actual word-of-mouth. Researchers can examine word-of-mouth behaviors on social media platforms themselves (such as sharing organization's vacancies) as these platforms increased the possibility for actors outside the organization to share information about their experience with organizations (Dineen, Van Hove, Lievens, & Rosokha, 2019).

Conclusion

In line with signaling theory and the theory of symbolic attraction, we found that potential applicants use social media pages' communication characteristics to infer employer brand personality, which in turn positively relates to organizational attractiveness and word-of-mouth intentions. Specifically, social presence relates to these two recruitment outcomes indirectly through its positive association with organizational warmth (and in addition relates directly to organizational attractiveness). Furthermore, informativeness relates positively to these outcomes through its positive association with organizational competence. These findings suggest that organizations can use social media pages to effectively manage key recruitment outcomes by signaling their employer brand personality.

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Footnotes

1. In an alternative model we included the average weekly amount of time spent on Facebook as a control variable for all paths at Time 2. This model resulted in similar findings (all the same relationships remained significant) and time spent on Facebook had no significant effects, except for a negative association with organizational attractiveness ($\beta = -.14$; $p = .008$). Moreover, we also ran the model controlling for gender, this model also resulted in similar findings and gender was not significantly associated with the study variables.

2. In case the organization did not have a page on the assigned platform, respondents were requested to contact us for instructions. When the organization did not have a Facebook page (8 cases), respondents were instructed to visit the LinkedIn page and vice versa (6 cases). In the final dataset, 7 participants switched social media platforms. Analyses were also performed without these cases, resulting in similar fit and findings. Cases with no social media page on either Facebook or LinkedIn were excluded (7).

CHAPTER 5

Social media recruitment: Communication characteristics and sought gratifications⁴

This study examines how social media pages can be used to influence potential applicants' attraction. Based on the uses and gratifications theory, this study examines whether organizations can manipulate the communication characteristics informativeness and social presence on their social media page to positively affect organizational attractiveness. Moreover, we examine whether job applicants' sought gratifications on social media influence these effects. A 2x2 between-subjects experimental design is used. The findings show that organizations can manipulate informativeness and social presence on their social media. The effect of manipulated informativeness on organizational attractiveness depends on the level of manipulated social presence. When social presence was high, informativeness positively affected organizational attractiveness. This positive effect was found regardless of participants' sought utilitarian gratification. Social presence had no significant main effect on organizational attractiveness. There was some evidence that the effect of social presence differed for different levels of social gratification.

⁴ This paper is based on Carpentier, M., Van Hove, G., & Weng, Q (2019). Social media recruitment: Communication characteristics and sought gratifications. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, 1669. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01669

Introduction

Employees are an important source of competitive advantage for organizations (Brymer, Molloy, & Gilbert, 2014). However, due to an ageing workforce and an increasingly knowledge based economy in several countries across the world, competition is rising between organizations to attract and retain employees with the right skills and competencies (Ployhart, Schmitt, & Tippins, 2017). Accordingly, the interest in recruitment and employer branding has risen both among practitioners and scholars (e.g., Banerjee, Saini, & Kalyarnaram; Wallace, Lings, & Cameron, 2018). Thus, research started to examine potential applicants' reactions to selection and recruitment activities and found that their perceptions of these activities can influence their attraction towards the organization as an employer (Uggerslev, Fassina, & Kraichy, 2012). With regard to China, the setting of this study, research indicates that geographical and competency mismatches occur in the labor market (Athukorala & Wei, 2017; Peng, Zhang, & Gu, 2016; Wen, Wu, & Wang, 2016). These mismatches impose difficulties for several organizations to attract the right human capital (Hays, 2015). Due to these challenges, organizations are investing in new ways to recruit talented applicants (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016).

Both the majority of organizations and job seekers are increasingly active on social media (Nikolaou, 2014; SHRM, 2016). Through these platforms organizations may influence potential applicants' perceptions of the organization as an employer. However, there is limited knowledge about how organizations can effectively manage potential applicants' perceptions through social media (McFarland & Ployhart, 2015). Hence, this study aims to advance the current knowledge on social media recruitment, by investigating how organizations can enhance their organizational attractiveness through the use of social media. Moreover, we aim to add to the understanding of potential applicants' responses to social media pages in a recruitment context by investigating the impact of individual differences in terms of sought gratifications.

According to the uses and gratifications theory, people use specific media to fulfill certain needs (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973). This proposition also applies to social media: people use social media to seek different gratifications (Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008). In particular, utilitarian gratification and social gratification are two important motives to use social media (Azar, Machado, Vacas-de-Carvalho, & Mendes, 2016; Bae, 2018; Gao & Feng, 2016). Utilitarian gratification refers to the use of social media to gather information to learn and to gain understanding of different topics. Social gratification refers to the use of social media to establish and maintain social contacts (Gao & Feng, 2016).

Guided by the uses and gratification theory, we examine two social media page communication characteristics that are conceptually related to these motives, namely informativeness and social presence (Carpentier et al., 2017; Kissel & Büttgen, 2015; Frasca & Edwards, 2017). Informativeness is the relevance and usefulness of given information for potential applicants who want to evaluate the organization as an employer (Breaugh & Starke, 2000; Van Hove & Lievens, 2005). Social presence is the awareness of communicating with another person or entity, and has been described as the perceptions of a warm and personable communication (Allen, Biggane, Pitts, Otondo, & Scotter, 2013; Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976). Previous recruitment research indicates that communication characteristics can play an important role in shaping potential applicants' perceptions (e.g., Allen et al., 2013). We now propose that actual manipulated informativeness (e.g., providing information about a day as an employee at the organization, providing information about the type of jobs) and social presence (e.g., addressing the reader directly and in a friendly way, using personal pronouns and smileys) of a social media page will have a positive effect on potential applicants' organizational attractiveness. Additionally, we explore whether these two characteristics interact with each other in their effect on organizational attractiveness.

Furthermore, individuals can differ with regard to their sought gratifications for social media use (Orchard, Fullwood, Galbraith, & Morris, 2014). As pages can show considerable differences in terms of content and design, sought gratifications may not always be satisfied to the same extent (Palmgreen, Wenner, & Rayburn, 1980). Hence, a second aim of this study is to investigate whether people's sought gratifications on social media influence the effect communication characteristics have on potential applicants' attraction (Bae, 2018; Gao & Feng, 2016). Investigating this can contribute to a deeper understanding of how potential applicants respond to organization's social media use (Stoughton, Thompson, & Meade, 2015). We propose that when an organization's social media page is more aligned with a potential applicant's sought gratifications (in terms of communication characteristics), applicants will exhibit more positive attitudes towards the sender of that information (i.e., the organization).

In summary, this study examines whether organizations can manipulate social media pages' communication characteristics to positively affect organizational attractiveness and how this effect might vary between different individuals by looking at sought gratifications for social media use. We investigate these questions by using an experimental design in which a sample of Chinese potential applicants are exposed to a

fictitious company account on the social media platform WeChat.

Social media and recruitment

Social media are defined as digital platforms on which users can create pages, connect with other users, generate and distribute content, and engage in interactive communication (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; McFarland & Ployhart, 2015). New social media platforms emerge, while some previously popular platforms witness a strong decrease in the number of users and some shut down. However, the number of social media users continues to grow across the globe (Statista, 2018). Social media allow organizations to reach out to or to find additional information on potential applicants, hence these platforms have the potential to influence the recruitment and selection functions within organizations (McFarland & Ployhart, 2015).

Many recruiters review information on job candidates on social media and use it for selection decisions (Roth, Bobko, Van Iddekinge, & Thatcher, 2016). A study by Roulin and Levashina (2019) found that recruiters' ratings based on candidates' LinkedIn profiles relate to self-rated extraversion (but not to other self-rated Big-Five factors) and cognitive ability test scores. However, another study found that recruiters' screening of a candidate's Facebook page does not allow to predict future job performance (Van Iddekinge, Lanivich, Roth, & Junco, 2016). Moreover, scholars raise some essential concerns regarding the influence of information that is irrelevant for the job and risks regarding adverse impact (Baert, 2018; Davison, Bing, Kluemper, & Roth, 2016; Roth et al., 2016). Moreover, research shows that applicants' perceptions of the selection process (e.g., the procedural justice) influence their attitudes and intentions towards that organization as a place to work (for a meta-analysis, see Hauknecht, Day, & Thomas, 2004). Along these lines, perceptions of the use of social media as a selection tool can also influence recruitment outcomes. Indeed, initial research indicates that applicants perceive screening of the social media profile as an invasion of privacy and that this practice can result in lower organizational attractiveness and job pursuit intentions (Madera, 2012; Stoughton, et al., 2015). This is thus another argument for organizations to be careful with the use of social media for the screening and selection of applicants. Overall, more research is needed investigating the use of social media for screening and selection (Davison et al., 2016).

Besides screening and selection, many organizations are also using social media to attract applicants (SHRM, 2016), but in this respect research lags behind as well. Studies indicate that seeing information on social media can positively influence how potential applicants perceive an organization as an employer (Carpentier et al., 2017; Frasca &

Edwards, 2017; Kissel & Büttgen, 2015; Sivertzen, Nilsen, & Olafsen, 2013). For example, research found that self-reported exposure to information on social media was positively associated with general corporate reputation (Kissel & Büttgen, 2015; Sivertzen et al., 2013). Carpentier et al. (2017) found that exposure to an organization's page on Facebook resulted in improved organizational attractiveness and employer brand perceptions. However, research is needed in order to better understand how organizations can effectively create and manage a social media page for recruiting purposes. To examine this, we rely on the uses and gratifications theory and investigate the role of communication characteristics of a social media page.

Uses and gratifications theory and communication characteristics

Uses and gratifications theory roots in the communication literature (Whiting & Williams, 2013). This theory regards the audience as not being merely passive receivers of communication, but as being goal-directed in their choice of communication media. It is based on the idea that people have different motivations for using certain media. In other words, people use a specific communication medium based on certain needs that they wish to satisfy through the usage of that medium (Katz et al., 1973). While different gratifications have been studied in previous research, our study focusses on two types that have consistently been found to play a role in guiding people's media behavior: utilitarian gratification and social gratification (e.g., Gan, 2017). Utilitarian gratification (or information seeking) is about the use of a medium to gather information or to learn. Social gratification concerns interacting and connecting with others (Bae, 2018; Gan, 2017; Whiting & Williams, 2013).

These gratifications have been found to play a vital role in social media use as well. For example, Raacke and Bonds-Raacke (2008) found that the main reason why college students used MySpace and Facebook was to keep in touch with old and current friends, but also learning about events and sharing information played a role. Leung (2013) found that social media are used to satisfy socio-psychological needs: including showing affection and fulfilling cognitive needs. A study using a Chinese sample also found that those two gratifications (utilitarian and social) were the most important motives for using Renren, a Chinese social media page (Gao & Feng, 2016).

Two communication characteristics that are conceptually related to these two motives for using social media are informativeness and social presence (Ryan, Horvath, & Kriska, 2005; Short et al., 1976). These communication characteristics can thus be considered to be relevant in a social media context. We now aim to examine how social

media pages affect potential applicants' attraction by looking at these characteristics. Previous recruitment research on other recruitment channels, such as websites, found that informativeness and social presence can influence potential applicants' reactions (Allen et al., 2013; Ryan et al., 2005). However, investigating these characteristics in a social media context remains valuable, since due to the rise of social media, information consumption has changed. Accordingly, the expectations with regard to how organizations communicate may have changed as well (Phillips-Wren, Doran, & Merrill, 2016). Examining these communication characteristics in this new context is thus useful for organizations, since we aim to provide insights into how organizations can manage their social media page in order to increase their attractiveness.

Based on signaling theory (a theory that is especially relevant in a recruitment context; Connelly, Certo, Ireland, & Reutzel, 2011; Spence, 1973; Uggerslev et al., 2012), job search can be considered a situation with information asymmetry. Potential applicants only have limited access to information about what the organization is like as an employer. Accordingly, they may be inclined to interpret characteristics of the organization's communication on social media (here: informativeness and social presence) as providing signals of what the organization is like as an employer, which may influence organizational attractiveness.

Informativeness in a recruitment context is defined as the extent to which relevant, useful, and adequate information is provided for potential applicants (Van Hove & Lievens, 2005). Based on uses and gratifications theory, gathering information is an important motive for social media use (Bae, 2018). Social media represent a new context compared to more traditional recruitment channels, for example, social media are mostly focused on relatively short messages (Papacharissi, 2009). Since information adequacy is proposed to especially play a role when little information is available, informativeness is expected to be an important factor influencing people's perceptions in a social media context (Barber & Roehling, 1993). Consequently, whether an organization provides relevant information on their page might influence potential applicants' attitudes towards that organization. Providing sufficient relevant information (e.g., about possible jobs and company culture) will enable potential applicants to get to know the organization as a place to work. Moreover, based on signaling theory (Connelly et al, 2011; Spence, 1973), informativeness might function as a signal of what the organization is like as an employer. An organization that is able to provide relevant and useful information to job seekers, might be perceived as more professional and competent, and hence a more attractive place to work. Along

these lines, Barber and Roehling (1993) found indications that job seekers perceive job ads with little relevant information as an indicator of “sloppy, disinterested recruiting practices” (p. 853).

Of the few studies on recruitment through social media, as far as we know, two included variables related to perceived informativeness to examine how social media influence job seekers’ reactions (Frasca & Edwards, 2017; Kissel & Büttgen, 2015). Kissel and Büttgen (2015) found that the perceived available information about an organization on social media was positively related to corporate image, which in turn related positively to employer attractiveness. Frasca and Edwards (2017) found that a message on Facebook (written) and YouTube (video) was perceived as more informative than a message on the website of an organization (written). This perception was positively related to source credibility, which in turn was positively related with organizational attractiveness. These results suggest that informativeness might influence potential applicants’ attitudes towards the organization as an employer in a social media context. However, these studies only examined perceptions, rather than page characteristics. Moreover, they were not able to test causality because of their cross-sectional design. In the current study we examine whether organizations can manipulate social media page informativeness and whether this manipulated informativeness has a positive effect on organizational attractiveness. We used an experimental design to establish causality.

Hypothesis 1. Social media page informativeness will have a positive effect on organizational attractiveness.

Next, social presence is defined as the extent to which it feels as if you are communicating with another person. It is also described as the perception that communication is personal, friendly, and warm (Short et al., 1976). Since the maintenance and establishment of social contact is an important motive for using social media (in line with the uses and gratifications theory; Bae, 2018), the extent to which an organization communicates in a personable way may influence potential applicants’ reactions. We propose that personable communication might have a more positive influence on affect, and may result in a stronger connection with the organization. Moreover, higher social presence conveyed through a social media page may be interpreted as a signal that the organization is a friendly and warm employer, which might thus lead to improved organizational attractiveness (Connelly et al., 2011).

Allen et al. (2013) showed that perceived social presence of an organization’s website was positively associated with the attitude towards the organization. In a social

media context, Carpentier et al. (2017) found that the perceived social presence of a Facebook profile was positively associated with organizational attractiveness. However, again this was a cross-sectional study which measured perceptions and could thus not test the causal relation. In the current study, we examine whether organizations can manipulate social presence on their social media page and whether it has a positive effect on organizational attractiveness.

Hypothesis 2. Social media page social presence will have a positive effect on organizational attractiveness.

Thus, both social presence and informativeness are proposed to increase potential applicants' organizational attraction. Both characteristics can be manipulated independently from each other (e.g., information that is less relevant to job seekers, like product specifications, can be communicated in a personal, friendly manner). However, it is possible that the effect of informativeness on organizational attractiveness depends on the level of social presence and vice versa. On the one hand, when a page has high levels of social presence as well as informativeness, such a page may have a bigger impact on organizational attractiveness than a page that provides a feeling of friendly and personal communication, but contains no or limited relevant information or, conversely, a page that provides relevant content, but where the information is presented in an impersonal, aloof manner. We thus might propose that the social media page characteristics will strengthen each other's effect on organizational attractiveness. On the other hand, a recruitment study by Gregory, Meade, and Thompson (2013) found that the effect of website usability on organizational attractiveness, was higher when less job information was available. They relied on signaling theory to explain the finding (Spence, 1973): when less relevant information is available (available job information), cues that may not seem to be directly connected to the job or the organization (usability) can be used to infer what the organization is like as an employer. According to this reasoning, lower informativeness might result in an increased positive effect for social presence on organizational attractiveness and vice versa. Given that both a reinforcing and a compensating effect seem possible and there is a lack of prior research, we formulate a research question.

Research Question 1. Is there an interaction effect between informativeness and social presence on organizational attractiveness and in which direction?

In addition, as people use a social media platform with certain expectations and goals in mind (in line with the uses and gratifications theory; Bae, 2018), the extent to which these expectations are met, may influence their reactions. Individuals can have

different sought gratifications for social media use in general (Orchard et al., 2014). Thus, the effect of the communication characteristics on organizational attractiveness may differ between potential applicants. We propose that potential applicants' sought gratifications will influence the impact of social media characteristics on how they respond towards the sender of the information in terms of organizational attractiveness (Gao & Feng, 2016). Recent research indicates that the discrepancy between sought and obtained gratifications can influence satisfaction with a specific episode of social media use (Bae, 2018). Accordingly, we now zoom in on a specific social media page and propose that the extent to which an organization's page is more aligned with a person's sought gratifications, will relate to more positive attitudes towards the organization as an employer. In other words, the correspondence between sought gratifications and page characteristics is proposed to influence how the person perceives the organization that is sharing this communication.

Specifically, we hypothesize that the effect of informativeness on organizational attractiveness is moderated by the extent to which a person seeks utilitarian gratification. Someone who generally uses social media to obtain relevant information, may be relatively more satisfied when they encounter a page that provides useful information compared with someone who does not really use social media for information gathering purposes. A person who does not expect or aim to find much information, will be less influenced by the informativeness of the organization's social media page.

Similarly, we expect that the effect of social presence on organizational attractiveness will be moderated by a person's social gratification. In other words, someone who uses social media for social contact is expected to be more positively influenced by a social media page that provides a personal feeling, which will result in higher organizational attractiveness. We expect this effect to be less strong for someone who does not really use social media to satisfy social needs.

Hypothesis 3. The effect of informativeness on organizational attractiveness will be stronger for people with higher utilitarian gratification.

Hypothesis 4. The effect of social presence on organizational attractiveness will be stronger for people with higher social gratification.

To summarize, we propose that both manipulated social presence and informativeness will have a positive effect on organizational attractiveness. Moreover, we explore whether both communication characteristics interact in their effect on organizational attractiveness. With regard to the sought gratifications, we propose that the effect of informativeness on organizational attractiveness will be stronger for people with

higher utilitarian gratification and that the effect of social presence will be stronger for people with higher social gratification.

Method

Sample

Our final sample consisted of 200 Chinese respondents (convenience sample). Responses from people who took the survey multiple times (same identification number) or that showed answer biases were not included. The average age was 26 years ($SD = 7.21$) and 63% was female. Of the respondents, 55% were students (71% bachelor, 29% master) and 42% were employees (average tenure = 8.64 years; $SD = 6.87$).¹ Both employed people and university students are relevant potential applicants as organizations might want to hire them in the close or distant future, and thus benefit from managing how they are perceived by this target population (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). With regard to their social media use, all respondents have WeChat, 85% indicated they follow organizations on WeChat (61% of them also reads companies' updates). Further, when looking for work, 46% would very likely and 30% would likely look for more information about potential employers on WeChat.

Design and procedure

We used a 2x2 between-subjects experimental design to test our hypotheses. Four versions of a social media account of one fictitious company were created. The experimental variables are informativeness and social presence: the messages were manipulated to differ on the level of informativeness (high or low) and social presence (high or low). Participants randomly saw one of the conditions and subsequently assessed organizational attractiveness. To conduct a manipulation check, perceived informativeness and perceived social presence were measured next. Finally, we requested demographic information and assessed sought utilitarian and social gratifications for using WeChat.

We contacted participants by sharing a link to the online Qualtrics survey in different WeChat groups consisting of current students and alumni of a Chinese university. We also asked them to share this link with fellow students or colleagues who might be looking for jobs. Participants were rewarded with a small monetary amount after completing the survey. On the first page of the survey, instructions stated that by participating, respondents consented to the anonymous use of their responses for research purposes. We claimed that this organization had several vacancies, and that there was likely also a vacancy that fitted the profile of the respondent. Respondents were instructed to go

through the provided pages of the social media account and to imagine that they wanted to find out more about the organization as a potential employer. We stressed that we wanted the participants to answer honestly as this would provide us the most valuable insights.

For the operationalization of the study, we used the Chinese platform WeChat (*Weixin*, 微信). By the end of 2017, it was reported that WeChat had 989 million monthly active users (Tencent, 2018). The platform offers a variety of features. Users can, for example, engage in real-time communication via text, voice or video messages, share photos with their contacts, and respond to information shared by contacts. WeChat plays an important role in daily life in China, many Chinese people use it to pay for their groceries, meals, or to shop online (Wang, 2018). Further, organizations can create official accounts, which users can follow to receive updates. WeChat is being used by organizations both for marketing and recruitment ends (Guillet, Kucukusta, & Liu, 2016).

The experimental materials were developed based on the definitions of social presence and informativeness used in this paper. The print screens (text and pictures) were developed in an iterative process in which we frequently consulted Chinese PhD students. We provided the PhD students the definitions of the constructs and discussed how we could improve the WeChat pages further, while keeping them as realistic as possible. The name of the fictitious company was also chosen in consultation with Chinese PhD students; we chose a name that sounded neutral and realistic. To increase the realism, multiple print screens were shown as if the participant was surfing through WeChat and the interface of a smartphone was used (device most used to access WeChat). Each participant first saw a general page displaying the company name and sector, which is always seen on WeChat, before visiting an organization's page. Next, they saw the welcome page of the fictitious organization with a short message. This message was manipulated to be either high/low on social presence and high/low on informativeness. Finally, one page was shown with two posts: one elaborated post was manipulated to be either high/low on social presence and informativeness, a second short post was added for increased realism and was kept constant across all conditions. For the low social presence condition, the messages were kept impersonal and a neutral image presenting a work desk was shown. In the high social presence condition, the messages addressed the reader directly (using the word "you") and in a friendly way, referred to the writer as a person ("we", "our" company, using a person's name), included smileys and a picture of an employee. Recruitment-related informativeness was manipulated by either providing information on how consumers could order products (low informativeness), versus

providing information relevant for job seekers, including information about the selection process, the location, and profiles of the employees (high informativeness). The study's materials are shown in the appendix.

The texts for the fictitious WeChat pages were written in English and translated to Chinese in a collaborative and iterative translation process including multiple researchers (Douglas & Craig, 2007). We included as many sentences from real Chinese company's WeChat pages and websites as possible. For the survey questions and items, the same procedure was applied and an external bureau performed a back translation. The few issues identified by the back translation were resolved together with a qualified translator (Brislin, 1970).

Manipulation check

We conducted a manipulation check to test the internal validity of our operationalizations. To this end, we measured perceived informativeness and perceived social presence of the social media page. The measures consisted of a combination of existing and self-developed items based on the definitions of the two constructs. For all measures and items, see Table 1. Items for perceived informativeness are based on items used by Williamson, Lepak, & King (2003) and items for perceived social presence were based on Short et al. (1976) and Xu, Ryan, Prybutok, and Wen (2012). All items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Independent sample *t*-tests using SPSS 22 showed that the perceived informativeness of the social media page was significantly higher in the high versus the low informativeness condition ($M_{\text{high}} = 4.64$, $SD_{\text{high}} = 1.13$; $M_{\text{low}} = 3.95$, $SD_{\text{low}} = 1.33$; $t(155.61) = 3.634$, $p < .001$). In addition, perceived social presence was significantly higher in the high versus the low social presence condition ($M_{\text{high}} = 4.64$, $SD_{\text{high}} = 1.29$; $M_{\text{low}} = 4.07$, $SD_{\text{low}} = 1.35$; $t(172) = 2.831$, $p = .005$). These results confirm a successful manipulation of the communication characteristics. Moreover, these results indicate that organizations can successfully manipulate informativeness and social presence on their social media profile.

Table 1.

Measures and Items of the Manipulation Check and Study Variables

Variables	Items
Manipulation check	
Perceived informativeness	I think this page gave an accurate picture of the organization This WeChat account provided information that is relevant for people who are looking for a job This page provided detailed information about the organization as a potential employer
Perceived social presence	I felt addressed in a warm way by this account There was a sense of human contact in the WeChat account I had the feeling that I was interacting with another person
Study variables	
Organizational attractiveness	This organization would be a good place to work for me I think this organization is an attractive employer A job with this organization appeals to me
Utilitarian gratification	I use WeChat to get timely information ... to get information to help me make important decisions ... to get the information that I am interested in ... to obtain useful information
Social gratification	I use WeChat because it allows me to get others' opinions and advice ... because it allows me to express my ideas ... to see what other people say ... to meet new people

Table 2.

Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations and Cronbach Alphas

Variable name	Mean	SD	Pearson Correlations			
			1.	2.	3.	4.
1. Organizational attractiveness ^a	3.19	.93	(.86)			
2. Utilitarian gratification ^a	3.94	.85	.30**	(.87)		
3. Social gratification ^a	3.58	.91	.40**	.48**	(.78)	
4. Manipulated informativeness	.51	.50	.31**	.08	.10	
5. Manipulated social presence	.52	.50	.02	-.09	.08	.02

Note. ^a These variables were measured on a 5-point rating scale.

Manipulated informativeness and social presence are dummy variables with 0 = *low level*, 1 = *high level*.

Cronbach Alphas are shown between brackets on the diagonal.

** $p < .01$.

Measures

All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*) and are shown in Table 1 in English (Chinese items are available on request).

Internal reliabilities are displayed in Table 2.

Organizational attractiveness. Three items to measure attractiveness were based on previous research (Lievens, Van Hove, & Schreurs, 2005).

Gratifications. Utilitarian and social gratifications were each measured with four items derived from various previous research into social media, including studies in a Chinese context. The items for utilitarian gratification come from the measures used by Lien and Cao (2014), Ha, Kim, Libaque-Saenz, Chang, and Park (2015), and Gao and Feng (2016). The items for social gratification were used by Ha et al. (2015) and Gao and Feng (2016).

A confirmatory factor analysis was performed using MPlus 7.4. The measurement model included organizational attractiveness, utilitarian gratification, social gratification, perceived social presence, and perceived informativeness. The results indicated a good fit ($\chi^2(109) = 149.558$, $p = .006$; RMSEA = .043; CFI = .973; SRMR = .05). On the contrary, a model specifying one overall factor showed a bad fit ($\chi^2(119) = 716.388$, $p < .001$; RMSEA = .158; CFI = .602; SRMR = .128).

Results

Table 2 displays the means, standard deviations, internal reliabilities, and correlations of the study's variables. Table 3 shows the mean and standard deviation of organizational attractiveness for each condition separately and shows the sample sizes and mean differences.

Hypothesis 1 proposed a positive effect of informativeness and Hypothesis 2 proposed a positive effect of social presence on organizational attractiveness. Research Question 1 asked whether there was an interaction effect between the two characteristics with regard to organizational attractiveness. To test these hypotheses and the research question, we ran a two-way independent ANOVA with manipulated informativeness and social presence as independent variables and organizational attractiveness as dependent variable. Organizational attractiveness was higher when manipulated informativeness was high ($M = 3.47$, $SD = .9$) compared to low ($M = 2.89$, $SD = .87$). The results of the ANOVA indicate that this difference was significant, as manipulated informativeness had a main effect on organizational attractiveness ($F(1, 196) = 20.903$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .096$). There was no significant main effect of manipulated social presence on organizational attractiveness ($F(1, 196) = .014$, $p = .907$, partial $\eta^2 < .001$). However, the interaction of manipulated informativeness and social presence was significant ($F(1, 196) = 6.524$, $p = .011$, partial $\eta^2 = .032$).² The interaction effect is shown graphically in Figure 1a and Figure 1b.

We performed additional tests to better understand this interaction effect. Independent sample t-tests were performed for low and high manipulated social presence separately. Results show that when social presence was fixed to zero (low social presence condition), there was no significant effect of informativeness on organizational attractiveness ($t(94) = -1.378$, $p = .172$). However, when social presence was fixed to one (high social presence condition), informativeness had a significant effect on organizational attractiveness ($t(102) = -5.218$, $p < .001$). With regard to Research Question 1, these findings indicate that a high level of social presence is necessary for informativeness to have a significant positive effect on organizational attractiveness. We also tested the effect of manipulated social presence on organizational attractiveness at the different levels of manipulated informativeness using independent t-tests. Either when informativeness was set to zero (low informativeness condition) or when informativeness was set to one (high informativeness condition), there was only a marginal significant effect of manipulated social presence on organizational attractiveness.

Hypothesis 3 proposed that the effect of informativeness on organizational attractiveness depends on people's level of sought utilitarian gratification. The Process macro in SPSS was used to test the interaction between manipulated informativeness and utilitarian gratification (see Table 4). 95% Confidence intervals were computed for the indirect effect based on 5,000 bootstrapped samples. Manipulated informativeness and utilitarian gratification (standardized) were entered as independent variables. Organizational attractiveness was the dependent variable. Results showed that the interaction effect was not significant. When we controlled for manipulated social presence, the interaction effect remained insignificant. Thus, no support was found for Hypothesis 3.

Next, Hypothesis 4 proposed that the effect of social presence on organizational attractiveness depends on people's level of sought social gratification. We again performed a moderation analysis using the Process macro (see Table 5). Manipulated social presence and social gratification (standardized) were entered as independent variables, organizational attractiveness as the dependent variable. Results show that the 95% confidence interval of the interaction term did not contain zero ($B = .335$, $CI = [.049, .62]$). When we controlled for manipulated informativeness, the interaction effect remained significant. A graph of the interaction effect is shown in Figure 2.

Simple slope analyses showed that the slope was only significant for very low values of social gratification: below 2.12 on a scale that ranges from 1 to 5 (1.6 *SD* below the mean; only 11 respondents scored below this threshold, 151 scored higher, 38 values were missing; Dawson, 2013). For people scoring low on social gratification, a negative relation between social presence and organizational attractiveness was observed. Thus, there was no support for Hypothesis 4, however we did find indications that social gratifications can influence the effect of social presence on organizational attractiveness.

Table 3.

Organizational Attractiveness per Condition: Means, Standard Deviations, Sample Sizes, and Mean Differences

Condition	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	ΔM^a		
				Low SP Low Inf	Low SP High Inf	High SP Low Inf
Low SP - Low Inf	3.05	.92	48			
Low SP - High Inf	3.30	.86	50	.25		
High SP - Low Inf	2.75	.79	48	-.30	-.55**	
High SP - High Inf	3.63	.92	54	.58**	.33	.88**

Note. SP = social presence, Inf = informativeness

A one-way ANOVA indicated a significant difference in organizational attractiveness between the four conditions ($F(3, 196) = 9.484, p < .001$).

^a Post-hoc Tukey tests were performed to examine the differences in average organizational attractiveness between pairs of conditions.

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

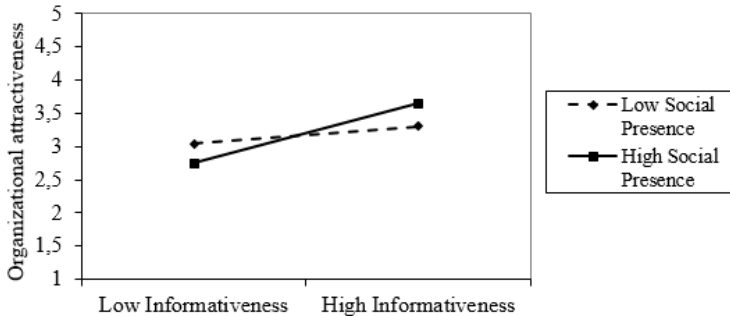


Figure 1a. *Interaction effect of informativeness and social presence on organizational attractiveness (social presence as moderator: 0 = low social presence, 1 = high social presence). The difference in organizational attractiveness between high and low informativeness is only significant when social presence is high.*

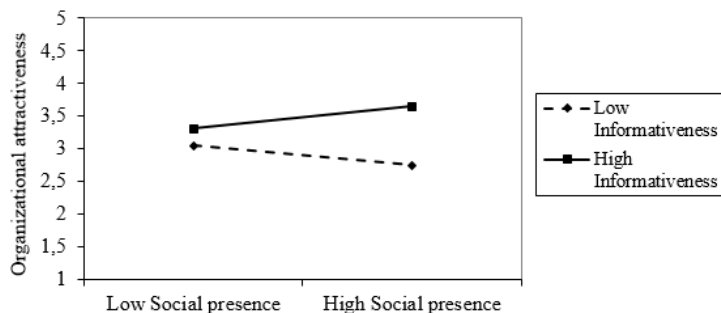


Figure 1b. Interaction effect of informativeness and social presence on organizational attractiveness (informativeness as moderator: 0 = low informativeness, 1 = high informativeness). The difference in organizational attractiveness between low and high social presence is never significant.

Table 4.

Results of Moderation Analysis Process Macro: Interaction Informativeness and Utilitarian Gratification

	Organizational attractiveness	
	B	95% CI
Manipulated informativeness	.62	[.353; .895]
Utilitarian gratification	.31	[.125; .502]
Manipulated informativeness x utilitarian gratification	.097	[-.282; .475]
<i>R</i> ²	.198**	

Note. The coefficients displayed are the unstandardized coefficients.

* *p* < .05, ** *p* < .01

Table 5.

Results of Moderation Analysis Process Macro: Interaction Social Presence and Social Gratification

	Organizational attractiveness	
	B	95% CI
Manipulated social presence	-.02	[-.288; .255]
Social gratification	.45	[.303; .588]
Manipulated social presence x social gratification	.33	[.049; .62]
R^2	.181**	

Note. The coefficients displayed are the unstandardized coefficients.

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

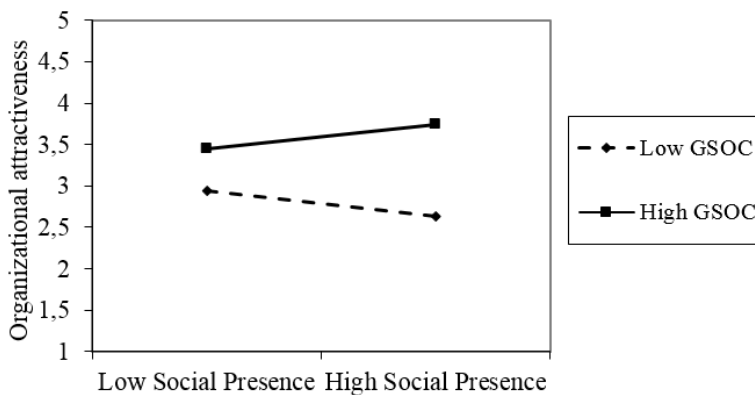


Figure 2. *Interaction effect of manipulated social presence and social gratification on organizational attractiveness. GSOC = social gratification. The lines displayed are for the value of 1 SD above and below the mean of the moderator. The slope of the full line is never significant. The dotted line is only significant when the moderator (social gratification) is 1.6 SD below the mean. For this value: gradient of simple slope = $-.50$, $t = -1.971$, $p = .050$ (Dawson, 2013, 2018).*

Discussion

This study aims to improve the understanding of how organizations' social media pages can influence potential applicants' organizational attractiveness. Based on the uses and gratifications theory (Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008), we derived two communication characteristics relevant in a social media context (i.e., informativeness and social

presence). We examined whether organizations can manipulate these characteristics and whether they positively affect potential applicants' attraction. Additionally, we investigated whether expected outcomes of social media use influence how these communication characteristics affect potential applicants' attitudes.

This study shows that organizations can deliberately manage informativeness and social presence on their social media page. This adds to previous research, which only looked at the perceptions of these characteristics on social media (Carpentier et al., 2017; Frasca & Edwards, 2017; Kissel & Büttgen, 2015). Moreover, providing relevant information, such as the day schedule of an employee and information about company culture, improved the attitudes of potential applicants towards the organization. It might be that providing relevant recruitment related information on a social media page functions as a signal about the organization as being a good or competent place to work (Connelly et al., 2011). These results are in line with previous research in different contexts, which showed that providing sufficient and useful information, for example on websites, in job advertisements, or in job interviews, improved applicants' reactions (Uggerslev et al., 2012; Walker & Hinojosa, 2014; Williamson et al., 2003).

Social presence had no main effect on organizational attractiveness. However, this does not imply that communicating in a personable and friendly manner did not play a role. In fact, our findings show that informativeness only positively influenced potential applicants' attraction, when the organization's page also conveyed a high level of social presence. These findings thus suggest that it is important for future research to examine different communication characteristics together as their combined use can result in different reactions.

Further, as far as we know this was the first study to integrate uses and gratifications theory in recruitment research. However, this study found only very little indications that sought gratifications for social media use may influence the effect of communication characteristics on organizational attractiveness. More specifically, the findings show that the positive effect of informativeness did not depend on the extent to which people use social media to obtain information. A possible explanation is the specific context of job search and recruitment. Choosing a new place to work has a great impact on people's lives (Highhouse & Hoffman, 2001). Therefore, in this specific context, almost all people might be highly motivated to actively look for and process relevant information in order to make a well-informed choice. For social presence, there were some indications of an interaction effect, but only for a few people who indicated that they did not use social

media for social purposes. For these people, high social presence had a significant negative effect on their attitudes towards the organization. More research is necessary to understand whether some people are scared off by social presence on the social media page and if so, why. For example, it may depend on the specific operationalization: we only had one low and one high manipulation of social presence. Maybe the high level was too much for these individuals, hence future research should look into more moderate levels of social presence as well. On the other hand, it is also interesting to know who the people are that score low on social gratifications, maybe this relates to other traits or attitudes which may provide some information about their fit with the organization or specific jobs.

Practical implications

Based on the results of this study, we can provide guidelines for organizations on how to communicate on their social media pages in order to better attract applicants. First, it is important that an organization maintains its social media profiles by providing relevant information for job seekers as this is a feature that influences organizational attractiveness, independent of the reasons why individuals use social media. Organizations can, for example, provide information about the company's current employees, its culture, the vacancies, and the selection process. Additionally, organizations should communicate this relevant information in a personable manner on their social media page. In our study, providing relevant information only resulted in positive attitudes when the information in question came across as if a friendly person was communicating it towards the reader. This can be achieved, for example, by directly addressing the reader (using personal pronouns), using pictures from employees, and including emoticons. However, results indicated that for a small subset of people this communication style made them less attracted towards the organization as a place to work. Hence, organizations should mind that their communication is not scaring off people in their target group. As this was the first study to investigate this, more research is necessary before further specific advice can be formulated for practice.

Limitations and future research

Next, we discuss this study's limitations and some suggestions for future research. First, we used an experimental design, which allows high internal validity, but results in uncertainty with regard to the external validity of the findings. However, a meta-analysis of recruitment outcomes by Chapman, Uggerslev, Carroll, Piasentin, and Jones (2005)

indicated that differences between experimental and real applicants were small, especially in early recruitment stages in which our study is situated.

Second, we decided to use fictitious organizations' accounts. Because of this, participants could not freely go through the WeChat account. A typical profile contains multiple pages and sometimes allows interaction through, for example, a chat robot and hyperlinks. The absence of these features might have influenced the perceived realism of the page. However, the use of fictitious accounts allowed us to keep other factors constant in order to examine causal effects.

Next, our manipulations consisted of a high and a low level of informativeness and social presence, but the difference in perceived informativeness and social presence between the high and the low conditions was not extremely large. Future research may include and compare different levels of and stronger differences in informativeness and social presence. Moreover, we performed a manipulation check to test the internal validity of our materials, however no pilot test was performed.

The study's main independent variables informativeness and social presence were manipulated experimentally, eliminating concerns of common method variance for these variables. However, there is still a potential issue of common method variance between the sought gratifications and organizational attractiveness. We tried to limit this possibility by first measuring organizational attractiveness, next perceived social presence and informativeness, demographics and finally the gratifications, hence trying to create more space between the measures in line with one of the recommendations by Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff (2003). In addition, a CFA demonstrated that a one-factor model showed a bad fit with the data.

Furthermore, caution is warranted when generalizing the findings to other contexts. Results might, for example, differ for people who feel their profile is less or more wanted by organizations. This might influence how critically they evaluate potential employers. Furthermore, future research might examine the role of communication characteristics in the different stages of the recruitment process (Breugh, 2013). It might be that the social media page plays a stronger role early in the recruitment process, while people are still forming an initial impression of an employer. Once a person has some kind of personal experience with the organization (e.g., job interview), the information derived from this experience may weigh more strongly on their attitudes and intentions towards the organization (Cable & Turban, 2001).

Finally, this study focused on the effect of potential applicants' exposure to information on an organization's social media page. However, organizations can also encourage their employees to share vacancies with their personal network through social media (McFarland & Ployhart, 2015). Future research could examine which employees are more likely to act as an ambassador of their employer on social media and examine the effects of these shared messages on potential applicants' attraction.

Conclusion

Based on the uses and gratifications theory, this study examined how two communication characteristics of a social media page influence organizational attractiveness and whether sought gratifications moderate these effects. Findings of our experimental study show that organizations can manipulate informativeness and social presence on their social media page. Moreover, providing relevant information for job seekers on social media positively influences organizational attractiveness. However, this effect is only found when the social media page also conveys a high level of social presence. Contrary to our expectations, there is not much evidence which proves sought gratifications influence how characteristics affect potential applicants' attitudes. Findings of this study can inspire organizations to manage their social media pages more effectively.

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Footnotes

1. To test the robustness of our results, we performed all analyses while including a dummy variable to control for potential differences between students and employees (0 = *employee*, 1 = *student*). All main findings were similar and the dummy variable was never significantly related to organizational attractiveness, therefore we decided not to include this variable in the discussed analyses.

2. We also tested the moderation model using the Process macro in SPSS, indicating a significant moderation effect as the 95% confidence interval computed for 5,000 bootstrapped samples did not contain zero, $B = .633$, $CI = [.14; 1.126]$.

Appendix

Figure A1. *First page of stimulus material. The same message was shown in all four conditions. Original in Chinese, translation in English.*



Details

Tongjia company

Introduction: The official account of Tongjia technology company

Account: Tongjia technology company

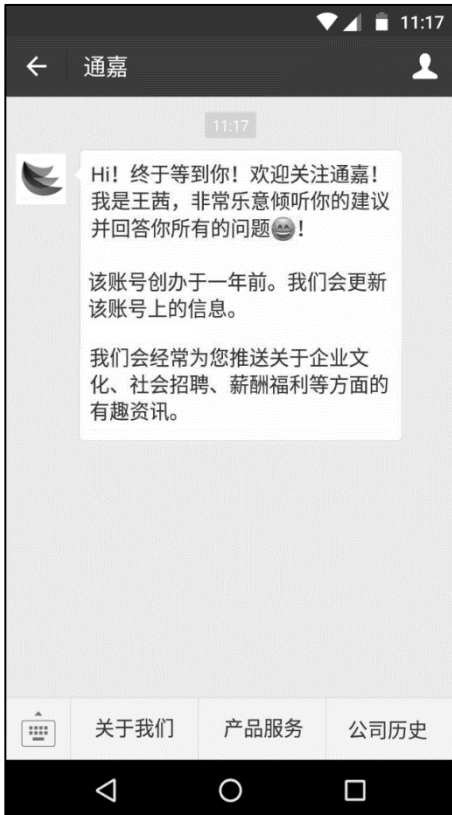
Brand: Tongjia

View history

View location

[Follow]

Figure A2. *Second page of stimulus material: welcoming message. The Chinese print screen shown is the high social presence – high informativeness condition. The English translation of both the high and the low manipulated characteristics are displayed.*



[High social presence: Hi! I was waiting for you! Welcome to the Tongjia account. I am Wang Qian and I am very willing to hear your suggestions and to answer all your questions 😊!

Low social presence: This is the official Tongjia WeChat account. For inquiries about product warranty, go to our sales account.]

This account is created one year ago. We post updates on this account.

[High informativeness: We often provide interesting information about the organization's corporate culture, vacancies, compensation and benefits, and so on.

Low informativeness: Below there are three buttons: about us, product service, and company history. Click on it and a new page will open.]

About us

Product service

Company history

Figure A3. Third page of stimulus material: high informativeness - high social presence condition. The Chinese print screen shows two excerpts from the total page. The English translation of the manipulated message is displayed.



Do you want to know what it is like to work for Tongjia?

I will explain it to you 😊.

If you have questions afterwards, you can ask me, I'm happy to help you!

Business

Our company provides communication technology solutions for both individuals and businesses (including software and hardware, such as smartphones, Wi-Fi transmitters, and home automation).

Company culture

Our core values are consumers first, embrace change, and employee dedication. These values are fundamental to the way we operate, recruit, evaluate, and compensate our employees.

Our employees

Did you know that our company has over 3500 employees from all over the country? 😊 Our employees have many different profiles, including IT, accountants, engineers, salesmen, HR, administrative personnel, and so on. Our organization currently has vacancies for both for recent graduates and management positions. All employees are provided the necessary training.

Location

Our company's headquarters are located in Shanghai and has offices in 20 cities in China, including Beijing, Chengdu, Chongqing, Fuzhou, Guangzhou, Xian, Hangzhou, Wuhan, Nanjing and so on. Possibly we also have an office in your city!

Daily life

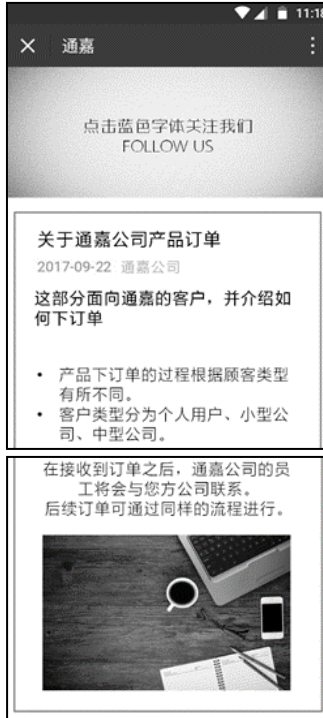
Are you interested in knowing what a day as an employee is like? One of our customer managers Yang Zekai explains it to you: "My day starts at 8:30 with a team briefing to discuss current affairs which lasts about 45 minutes. Next, I go to my own office to check emails and make some calls and prepare for meetings in the afternoon. We eat lunch at 12:00 in the company canteen." [to read more...]

Selection process

After applying online, you will do an online personality test and our HR manager Zhang Ruifang will call you for a telephone interview. If you pass, you will be invited for an interview at our office most close to you. Do you want to apply for a job at our organization? Sent your resume to our HR department by clicking on [this link](#). Please explain your motivation.

Do you want to know find out more about current job vacancies, work environment, wages and benefits, advancement opportunities ...? [Click on this link](#)

Figure A4. *Third Page of Stimulus Material: Low Informativeness – Low Social Presence Condition. The Chinese print screen shows two excerpts from the total page. The English translation of the manipulated message is displayed.*



About ordering products with Tongjia

This message is directed at the customers of Tongjia and introduces how to order products.

- The product order procedure differs depending on the type of customer.
- There are different procedures for private persons, small sized companies, and medium sized companies

Private persons can buy online or in a local shop. No order form is needed.

Small sized companies should make use of a special order form. This form can be downloaded from our page (under the header “small companies”). The form should be filled in, signed and uploaded back on the page. For large orders, take in account that delivery times can be somewhat longer. To make sure your order arrives on time, place your order 3 days earlier.

Medium sized companies that order for the first time are requested to place their order through email. Email addresses of the business units can be found on the page too (under the header “departments”). Following orders can be done by the same procedure as described above.

Figure A5. *Third page of stimulus material: low informativeness – high social presence condition. The print screen shows two excerpts from the total page. The English translation of the manipulated message is displayed.*



Hi!

Our colleague Yang Zekai will explain how you can order our products. If you have any questions afterwards, you can ask me. I would love to help you!

- There are different procedures for private persons, for small companies, and for medium-sized companies.
- Our customer service manager Yang Zekai explains this below.

“Are you a private person?”

“Then you don’t need to worry about this 😊. You can just buy online or in a local shop.”

“Do you want to order for a small sized company?”

“Then you will have to use a special order form. This form can be downloaded from our page (under the header “small companies”). You have to fill in the form, sign it and upload it. For large orders, take in account that delivery times can be somewhat longer. To make sure your order arrives in time, it is best you order three days in advance.”

“Do you want to order for a medium sized company?”

“If you order for the first time, please [click here](#) to tell me which kind of products you wish to buy. I will send this to the right department. One of our employees will contact you to help you place the order.”

Figure A5. Third page of stimulus material: high informativeness – low social presence condition. The print screen shows two excerpts from the total page. The English translation of the manipulated message is displayed.



What it is like to work for Tongjia

Below some information is presented about the organization. To find out more about the topics, click on the links in the texts.

Business

Providing communications technology solutions for both individuals and businesses (including software and hardware, such as smartphones, WIFI transmitters and home automation).

Company culture

The organization's core values are customers first, embrace change, and employee dedication. These values are fundamental to the way we operate, recruit, evaluate and compensate the employees.

Employees

Tongjia employs over 3500 employees from all over the country. The employees have many different profiles, including IT, accountants, engineers, salesmen, HR, administrative personnel and so on. The company currently has vacancies for both recent graduates and management positions. All employees are provided the necessary training.

Location

Tongjia company has its headquarters in Shanghai. It has offices in 20 cities in China, including in Beijing, Chengdu, Chongqing, Fuzhou, Guangzhou, Xian, Hangzhou, Wuhan, Nanjing, and so on. The headquarters are located in Shanghai.

Daily life

Below, there is a description of a day out of the life of a customer manager at Tongjia: The day usually starts at 8:30 with a team briefing to discuss current affairs, which lasts about 45 minutes. Next, people go to their own office to check emails and make some calls and prepare for meetings in the afternoon. Lunch is served at 12:00 in the company canteen. [\[to read more\]](#)

Selection process

Send resume --- online personality test --- telephone interview --- face-to-face interview.

To apply, please [click here](#) to send a resume to the HR department. Please explain your motivation.

Find out more about current job vacancies, the work environment, wages and benefits, advancement opportunities by [clicking on this link](#). Frequently asked questions are also shown here.

CHAPTER 6

Managing organizational attractiveness after a negative employer review: Company response strategies and review consensus⁵

Online negative reviews about organizations as employers can have a negative impact on potential applicants' organizational attractiveness. However, due to a lack of research, organizations do not know how to manage attitudes after a negative review. Based on attribution theory and signaling theory, we conducted two experimental studies investigating the effect of two response strategies to a negative review on organizational attractiveness: a refutation and an accommodative response. The results of a first study show that a refutation results in higher organizational attractiveness compared to not responding and that this effect is explained by lower review credibility and higher organizational trustworthiness. No difference was found between an accommodative response and no response in terms of organizational attractiveness. A second study shows that when consensus information (conceptualized as high agreement amongst a large number of reviews) was added, company responses did not influence organizational attractiveness, regardless whether reviewers agreed about the organization as a good or a poor place to work. Overall, the findings imply that responding to a negative employer review can influence potential applicants' perceptions, but when there is high agreement amongst a large number of reviews, an organization's ability to manage organizational attractiveness through responding seems limited.

⁵ This paper is based on Carpentier, M., Van Hove, G. *Managing organisational attractiveness after a negative employer review: Company response strategies and review consensus*

Introduction

Given the war for talent, companies are increasingly trying to manage how they are perceived by potential applicants (Ployhart, Schmitt, & Tippins, 2017). To this end, many companies started to use social media for recruitment and employer branding (SHRM, 2016). However, with the emergence of social media, audiences are taking up a more active role in the evaluations of organizations (Etter, Ravasi, & Colleoni, 2017). Hence, also third party employer branding (i.e., employment-related information generated by parties outside of direct company control) is playing an increasingly important role as not only organizations are communicating how they are like as an employer, but also consumers, applicants, and employees are talking about organizations and jobs online (Bradley, Sparks, & Weber, 2016; Dabirian, Kietzmann, & Diba, 2017; Dineen, Van Hoya, Lievens, & Rosokha, 2019).

The information shared online by employees about their employer is not always positive (Könsgen, Schaarschmidt, Ives, & Munzel, 2018). When potential applicants see an online negative employer review, research found that this can negatively affect their attraction towards that organization (Melián-González & Bulchand-Gidumal, 2016; Stockman, Van Hoya, & Carpentier, 2017). An important question is thus whether and how organizations can manage these negative reviews in order to minimise the damage. Specific online platforms allow organizations to publicly respond to employees' and job applicants' reviews about them (e.g., Glassdoor, Indeed) and responding is also possible on general social media (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn). However, we do not yet know what response strategy might improve organizational attractiveness after a negative review. In practice, it seems that many organizations do not respond to negative online reviews (Roshan, Warren, & Carr, 2016). Investigating the effect of providing a response compared to not responding will therefore improve our understanding of whether and how organizations can manage potential applicants' perceptions of organizational attractiveness.

According to attribution theory (Kelley & Michela, 1980; Weiner, 1985), individuals engage in attribution of responsibility after a negative event. Along these lines, we propose that an organization's response to a negative review could deny responsibility or accept responsibility. Accordingly, in this study we examine two response strategies: a refutation and an accommodative response. In the refutation, the organization denies responsibility for the problems discussed in the review and tries to provide some counterevidence. In the

accommodative response, the company apologises, accepts responsibility, and proposes actions for improvement.

Further, investigating the processes that underlie the effects of response strategies will add to the theoretical understanding of how potential applicants' impressions are shaped by information on social media platforms. To examine how the two response strategies under investigation might influence potential applicants' perceptions of organizational attractiveness, we rely on attribution and signaling theory, and focus on two potential mechanisms that have already been found to play a role in the context of recruitment information: review credibility and organizational trustworthiness (Eisend, 2004; Klotz, Da Motta Veiga, Buckley, & Gavin, 2013; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995).

Finally, the effects of responses may differ depending on the presence of certain contextual cues. Based on attribution and signaling theory, consensus is an important attribution dimension for evaluating third party employer branding (Dineen et al., 2019). Consensus is relevant in the context of online negative reviews. For instance, when people visit an organization's page on Glassdoor, they see an average score of all ratings (from one to five stars) as well as the total number of reviews on which this average is based. We examine whether responding is still useful in managing potential applicants' attitudes when consensus information is available. This study conceptualises consensus as high agreement amongst multiple reviewers on how an organization is evaluated (Dineen et al., 2019). We examine the effects of a refutation and an accommodative response in two different scenarios: one in which there is consensus that the organization is a good place to work (i.e., a high average rating across reviews and mostly positive reviews) and one in which there is consensus that it is a poor place to work (i.e., low average rating and mostly negative reviews).

Thus, our overall research questions are: 'What is the effect of a refutation and an accommodative response to a negative review on organizational attractiveness compared to not responding?'; 'Do the mechanisms of review credibility and organizational trustworthiness underlie these effects?'; and 'Is responding still effective when consensus information is provided?'. To examine these questions, we use two between-subjects experimental studies with a negative employee review about a fictitious organization on Glassdoor. The first study examines the first two research questions. The second study additionally looks at consensus information.

This paper adds to the knowledge on recruitment and third party employer branding in the digital era by investigating whether and how companies can deal with negative

employer related information shared online. This is relevant since there are more opportunities online for stakeholders such as employees to influence the construction of an organization's reputation, for example through written reviews (Dineen et al., 2019; Etter et al., 2019). Our study aims to contribute both on a theoretical and a practical level. Theoretically, we aim to examine the mechanisms underlying the effects of company responses on organizational attractiveness relying on two theories: attribution and signaling theory. Understanding these theoretical mechanisms will further the recruitment literature by providing a better insight in how potential applicants' attitudes and perceptions can be managed in the context of negative employer reviews. Furthermore, by focusing on two specific response strategies and additionally examining the effects when consensus information is provided, our findings are of practical use for organizations that are confronted with negative reviews and are looking to manage their attractiveness as an employer.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. First, we discuss relevant literature and formulate hypotheses and research questions with regard to the effects of company responses and the underlying mechanisms, which are subsequently tested in Study 1. Next, we discuss consensus and formulate research questions relating to the effects of responses when consensus information is present. These research questions are then tested in Study 2, followed by a general discussion and conclusion.

Employer reviews

With the emergence of third-party employer branding, employees and job applicants are increasingly sharing their experiences with, and evaluations of organizations online (Dineen et al., 2019). Such reviews can be placed on social media such as Facebook, Twitter, WeChat, and blogs, but also on specific platforms that allow to post anonymous reviews about experiences with employment or selection. One well-known employer review site is Glassdoor. Glassdoor contains millions of company reviews written by employees and job applicants. The site also offers job listings, salary reports, interview reviews, and office photos, but its main purpose is providing employer reviews (Pitt, Botha, Ferreira, & Kietzmann, 2018).

We define online employer reviews as evaluations posted online by current or former employees or applicants about an organization as an employer that can consist of written text, video, and/or ratings. Research on online employer reviews is still limited. Dabirian et al. (2017) used language processing software to analyze the content of 38,000 Glassdoor reviews. They examined which employer brand attributes are mentioned on

Glassdoor and described which are discussed more frequently for companies with an overall very good or very bad rating. They found, for example, that complaints about overall badly rated organizations frequently included topics such as compensation, benefits, and supervisors, while praises about best places to work often discuss work atmosphere, collegiality, and how interesting the work is. Pitt et al. (2018) also performed a content analysis on employer reviews for business-to-business companies on Glassdoor. They found that reviews written by employees of top-ranked organizations (in terms of the number of neutral and positive mentions on social media platforms) showed higher optimism and communality than reviews for bottom-ranked firms, which, according to the authors, indicates high brand engagement.

So far, few studies investigated the effect of employer reviews on applicants' attitudes and intentions towards an organization as a place to work. Overall, they show that online employer reviews can affect these attitudes and intentions (Evertz, Kollitz, & Süß, 2019; Könsgen et al., 2018; Melián-Gonzalez & Bulchand-Gidumal, 2016; Stockman et al., 2017). More specifically, Melián-Gonzalez and Bulchand-Gidumal (2016) found that a positive review in combination with a positive average score on Glassdoor increased potential applicants' interest to send their résumé and to recommend the organization, compared to a neutral scored review and a neutral overall company rating. A negative review in combination with a negative average score was found to decrease interest and willingness to recommend. A study by Evertz et al. (2019) shows that source expertise matters, since a positive online review written by an employee had a stronger impact on organizational attractiveness than a review written by a job applicant. Further, Könsgen et al. (2018) found that when potential applicants were exposed to a general article about the existence of fake company reviews after seeing online employer reviews, this information indirectly decreased intentions to pursue employment through decreased company trustworthiness. Additionally, they examined the impact of low versus high review agreement among four reviews (larger versus smaller difference in terms of reviews' ratings and sentiment). Low agreement (i.e., two very positive and two very negative reviews) had a negative effect on perceived company trustworthiness compared to high agreement (i.e., nearly the same rating and sentiment across reviews). Further, Stockman et al. (2017) found that negative reviews on Glassdoor reduced organizational attractiveness. Their findings show that the decrease of attractiveness after reading a negative online review was smaller for an organization with a strong employer brand equity compared to an unknown organization. Thus, to mitigate the negative effects of negative

reviews, organizations are recommended to improve their employer brand equity. However, creating a favorable employer brand equity can be a long and difficult project (Collins & Kanar, 2014).

There might be other actions organizations can undertake to restore potential applicants' perceptions after they have read a negative review online. Findings of research on trust violations (e.g., Kim, Ferrin, Cooper, & Dirks, 2004), crisis communication (e.g., Park, 2017), and consumer and customer reviews (e.g., Dens, De Pelsmacker, & Purnawirawan, 2015; Sparks, So, & Bradley, 2016) show that an organization's response to a negative event can influence stakeholders' perceptions (for a review, see Dens et al., 2015, and Li, Cui, & Peng, 2018). Also in a recruitment context, Rabl (2015) found that a company's response after a corruption allegation can help to reduce its negative effect on potential applicants' attraction. With regard to online reviews, Könsgen et al. (2018) found that the presence of constructive company responses indirectly related to increased intentions to pursue employment through perceptions of trustworthiness.¹ Accordingly, in a recruitment context, responding to a negative employer review online might influence potential applicants' organizational attraction. However, little is known about what response strategies can be used and whether and how they influence organizational attractiveness.

Theoretical framework and mediating mechanisms

Attribution theory and review credibility

Attribution theory proposes that people try to assess to which extent a certain entity is responsible for an event (i.e., look for causal explanations), especially when the event is negative and unexpected (Kelley & Michela, 1980; Weiner, 1985). Applied to the context of negative employer reviews, when people read a negative review, they are likely to assess who is responsible for this review. Relevant for this study is the concept of "locus of control" (Weiner, 1985). Locus of control concerns perceptions of whether the negative review was either caused mostly by internal organization-related factors or whether it was caused mostly by external factors. On the one hand, potential applicants may attribute a negative employer review to more internal aspects of the organization (i.e., factors or problems related to the employer). In this case, the potential applicants believe the negative information in the employer review reflects what actually happened or happens within this organization. On the other hand, instead of inferring that the cause of a reviewer's motivation is related to actual problems in the organization, potential applicants may also attribute responsibility to factors external of the organization, that is more to

reviewer-related dispositions such as their motivations, traits, moods, or attitudes (e.g., it is their subjective opinion; Chen & Lurie, 2013; Gilbert & Malone, 1995; Kelley & Michela, 1980). In this case, the information provided in the review will not be perceived (or less) as reflecting reality, but rather as an individual's perceptions. The review might be perceived as less credible.

In a response to a negative review, companies might provide information about the internal situation in the organization or about the dispositions of the reviewer. Such information might make readers re-evaluate responsibility for the negative review. Drawing on attribution theory, companies might try to influence attribution of the review by denying responsibility (and by referring to counterevidence with regard to the situation and the reviewer's dispositions) or accepting responsibility (and by indicating how they will deal with the issues discussed). In this study, we therefore examine a refutation and an accommodative response, and compare the effect of these response strategies to when companies do not provide a response. Similar response strategies have been studied in several domains such as service management, organizational trust, and consumer behaviour (e.g., Dens et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2004; Li et al., 2018; Utz, Matzat, & Snijders, 2009), but not yet in the recruitment literature.

Based on attribution theory, we propose that a refutation and an accommodative response will influence organizational attractiveness through review credibility (Eisend, 2004). Review credibility is the extent to which the potential applicant perceives the review to be believable and true (Van Hove & Lievens, 2007). Dineen & Allen (2016) and Dineen et al. (2019) pointed to credibility as an important characteristic of third party employer branding. In general, employment related information conveyed by third parties such as employees is proposed to be perceived as credible because employees have no self interest in promoting the organization (Cable & Turban, 2001; Dineen et al., 2019). This is important since the credibility of an information source impacts the attitude change generated by that information (Baum & Überschaer, 2018). Accordingly, perceived credibility of information and/or its source influence attitude formation in a recruitment context as well (Cable & Turban, 2001; Dineen et al., 2019). Hence, we expect that the credibility of a negative employer review will relate to organizational attractiveness (i.e., higher credibility will relate to lower organizational attractiveness and vice versa).

Cable and Yu (2006) found that an online review site (Vault.com) was perceived as less credible than career fairs or a company website. Although credibility perceptions of online reviews may have changed since this study was published (as its prevalence has

increased sharply), these findings imply that online employee reviews' credibility can be questioned by potential applicants (especially when reviews are anonymous). Thus, the credibility perceptions of a review may be influenced by subsequent company responses. Accordingly, we propose that the information in the company response will influence perceived credibility of the negative review. When in the response responsibility for the negative review is attributed to factors internal to the organization, this may cause the review itself to be perceived as more credible. Otherwise, when responsibility is refuted and attributed to external factors, that is dispositions of the reviewer, this implies that the perceived credibility of the review may be lower, which may subsequently relate to organizational attractiveness.

Signaling theory and organizational trustworthiness

Further, we rely on signaling theory to propose that, besides review credibility, another mechanism may underlie the effect of a company refutation or accommodative response on organizational attractiveness: organizational trustworthiness (Connelly et al., 2011). Signaling theory has been frequently applied in the recruitment literature to understand how potential applicants' images of organizations are shaped (Klotz et al., 2013; Mayer et al., 1995; Uggerslev, Fassina, & Kraihy, 2012). Since potential applicants only have limited knowledge about organizations, according to signaling theory, they rely on the organization's communication and activities as well as information provided by third parties and use these informational signals to make inferences about the organization as an employer (Turban, 2001; Carpentier, Van Hove, & Weijters, 2019). Especially in the first stages of recruitment, potential applicants face uncertainty with regard to what employers are like due to limited available information. When in this stage potential applicants are exposed to a negative review, they might be even more unsure whether the organization is trustworthy.

Organizational trustworthiness concerns whether potential applicants have confidence in the words and actions of the organization and perceive an organization as being dependable, sincere, and having good intentions (Cook & Wall, 1980). When perceived organizational trustworthiness is low, this can have detrimental consequences for organizations, as research indicates that applicants' perceptions of organizational trustworthiness seem related to organizational attractiveness and intentions to pursue employment (Klotz et al., 2013; Könsgen et al., 2018; Rampl & Kenning, 2014). In line with signaling theory, hearing the organization's voice after such a review, may provide new

and relevant informational signals, which potential applicants use to make favorable inferences about organizational trustworthiness (Connelly et al. 2011; Turban, 2001).

Response strategies: Hypotheses

Refutation

As a refutation discusses aspects related to the internal situation and the reviewer, this may influence perceived organizational responsibility. By refuting what is said in a negative review, organizations may be able to lower review credibility (Eisend, 2004). In other words, a refutation may steer potential applicants' attributional judgements for the negative review away from the organization towards the reviewer, which may improve organizational attractiveness by reducing the credibility of the review. For instance, suppose that an employee complains about poor working conditions, the employer might provide counterevidence to refute this claim (e.g., Great Place To Work certificate; Dineen & Allen, 2016) and suggest that personal reasons (e.g., frustration about a missed promotion) might be the underlying reason for the review. This may lead the reader of the review to question the credibility of the review, which may reduce the negative effect on organizational attractiveness. Accordingly, we propose that a refutation posted as response to a negative review will positively affect organizational attractiveness compared to when no response is provided, through a decrease in the review's credibility.

Hypothesis 1. A refutation will have a positive effect on organizational attractiveness compared to no response.

Hypothesis 2. A refutation will have a positive indirect effect on organizational attractiveness through review credibility (a refutation will negatively influence review credibility, which will in turn negatively relate with organizational attractiveness).

Depending on how information in the refutation is interpreted, that is which signals are more salient to potential applicants (Connelly et al., 2011), a refutation may result in increased or decreased trustworthiness compared to when no response is provided. On the one hand, taking the time to respond, denying that the organization did something wrong, and describing certain positive initiatives that are already installed in the organization might provide potential applicants with signals of the organization as being trustworthy and reliable. Hence, this might improve trustworthiness compared to not responding, resulting in a weakened negative effect of the review on organizational attractiveness. On the other hand, denying responsibility might be interpreted as a sign that the organization has low concern about employees, as well as that the organization is

not aware that things went wrong, which might result in decreased inferences of organizational trustworthiness and, consequently, decreased organizational attractiveness compared to when no response is provided. Since we consider the arguments for a positive as well as a negative relation between a refutation and organizational trustworthiness plausible, we formulate competing hypotheses.

Hypothesis 3a. A refutation will have a positive indirect effect on organizational attractiveness through organizational trustworthiness (a refutation will positively influence organizational trustworthiness, which will in turn positively relate with organizational attractiveness).

Hypothesis 3b. A refutation will have a negative indirect effect on organizational attractiveness through organizational trustworthiness (a refutation will negatively influence organizational trustworthiness, which will in turn positively relate with organizational attractiveness).

However, a refutation might not always be the best possible strategy. When the negative review is accurate, an organization would not want to cover up the truth. Falsely denying responsibility when the company is responsible for a negative event is not only unethical, it may damage the organization's image if the truth is discovered (Benoit, 1997). As a consequence, the organization may come across as merely acting out of selfish motives and future statements or acts may be evaluated with skepticism. Therefore, sometimes it might be better to accept responsibility (Coombs & Holladay, 1996). Hence, we investigate a second strategy to respond to a negative employer review: an accommodative response.

Accommodative Response

An accommodative response acknowledges that the organization has caused a dissatisfying situation. In other research domains it has been operationalized as a response in which the organization apologizes and takes responsibility for the issues described in the negative review (e.g., service recovery; Weitzl & Hutzinger, 2017). In a highly accommodative response, corrective actions are introduced, such as promises to take steps to not let the issue reoccur (e.g., Lee & Carnage, 2014). Providing an accommodative response can indicate that the organization is concerned about its employees' experiences and feelings and wants to take steps to improve, which might be interpreted as signals of the organization as being more reliable and sincere compared to when no response is provided (Connelly et al., 2011). Hence, apologies may signal empathy towards the apparently disadvantaged party, which might re-establish trust (Lee &

Carnage, 2014). We propose that an accommodative response may increase organizational attractiveness compared to no response, through increased perceptions of organizational trustworthiness. For instance, when potential applicants see that the company responds and apologizes, they may use this as a signal about the organization's concern with its employees' experiences and perceptions, hence infer that the organization is trustworthy, which is proposed to relate to improved attitudes towards the organization as a potential employer. Similarly, Könsgen et al. (2018) found that a general 'constructive' response to online reviews, compared with no response, indirectly related to intentions towards a potential employer through increased trustworthiness perceptions.

Hypothesis 4. An accommodative response will have a positive effect on organizational attractiveness compared to no response.

Hypothesis 5. An accommodative response will have a positive indirect effect on organizational attractiveness through organizational trustworthiness (an accommodative response will positively influence organizational trustworthiness, which will in turn positively relate with organizational attractiveness).

However, accepting responsibility can be expected to result in increased review credibility. Doubts about the truthfulness of the review might be reduced when the company admits it made certain mistakes, which in turn may relate to decreased organizational attractiveness. Hence, we expect that an accommodative response will increase the credibility of the negative review since the company admits that the problems mentioned in the review are true. Accordingly, we expect that there will also be a negative indirect effect of an accommodative response on organizational attractiveness through review credibility. However, we expect that there will still be a positive main effect compared to not responding.

Hypothesis 6. An accommodative response will have a negative indirect effect on organizational attractiveness through review credibility (an accommodative response will positively influence review credibility, which will in turn negatively relate with organizational attractiveness).

Finally, we aim to explore which response strategy will result in higher organizational attractiveness after exposure to a negative employer review. Although we expect positive effects for both response strategies compared to not responding (Könsgen et al., 2018), it is not clear which strategy will lead to higher attractiveness. For a refutation, the association with organizational trustworthiness might either be positive or negative. For an accommodative response, it is not clear how large the negative indirect effect through

review credibility will be compared to the positive indirect effect through organizational trustworthiness. Therefore, we formulate the following research question.

Research Question 1. Which response (refutation versus accommodative response) will result in higher organizational attractiveness?

Next, we discuss the design, procedure, sample, experimental materials, and results of Study 1 in which we test the hypotheses and research questions proposed above. We also describe two pre-tests that were performed to develop and check the study materials.

Method Study 1

Sample

The participants of the studies (pre-tests and main studies) were all recruited through Prolific Academic (Peer, Brandimarte, Samat, & Acquisti, 2017). Prolific is an online crowdsourcing platform, through which researchers can recruit participants in exchange for payment. The platform offers similar services as MTurk, however Peer et al. (2017) found that Prolific produced a similar data quality and more diverse participants. Porter, Outlaw, Gale, and Cho (2018) proposed that online panel data can be appropriate for studies in the domain of recruitment to reach a relevant target group of potential applicants.

For all studies, we recruited participants with an American nationality, because Glassdoor is well-known in the USA (Glassdoor, 2017, 2019). Our sample consists of employed people. Since many organizations are looking to hire people with work experience, this is a relevant group of potential applicants. Through Prolific we requested people who had received higher education to get a more homogeneous sample which might better match the company described in the materials (those who indicated that they only had a high school degree were removed). For the two pre-tests discussed below unemployed respondents were accepted as well because we wanted to avoid having an overlap in respondents and still have a sufficiently large sample to recruit from for the main surveys.

The original sample for Study 1 consisted of 150 respondents, eight were removed after data screening (e.g., because they filled in the survey more than once, i.e. same IP address, or because they indicated that they were unemployed). Our final sample thus consisted of 142 participants, with an average age of 36.87 years ($SD = 10.84$) and an average work experience of 15.5 years ($SD = 10.74$), 52.1% were men. Of the sample

75.4% had already visited Glassdoor, 52.1% indicated that they looked for a job in the previous 12 months (looked up job openings or employers).

Design and procedure

An experimental between-subjects design with three conditions was used. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three groups. First, we asked them to imagine that they were looking for a new job and that they had seen a job opening that fitted their profile at the organization “Lewis-Young”. Next, some information was shown about the organization Lewis-Young. A fictitious organization was used to rule out the influence of prior knowledge. Then, we instructed that in order to get some more information about the organization, they decided to look up the organization on Glassdoor. Here, we briefly explained that Glassdoor is a site that allows employees to rate the organization and write reviews. Next, the negative review was displayed and participants were asked to read the information carefully. The no response group only saw the company information and the negative review; they saw no company response. The refutation group additionally saw a refutation from the organization immediately below the negative review. This response stated that the review “does not seem to paint an accurate picture” and tries to shift responsibility to the reviewer (“missing a promotion can [...] be frustrating [...] perceptions may differ from reality”). Moreover, specific examples are given of practices that deal with the issues described in the review. The accommodative response group saw an accommodative response to the negative review. In this reply the company admits that mistakes have occurred, offers its sincere apologies, and takes full responsibility. Additionally, the organization states it is taking steps to solve the problems and gives specific examples of how they will do this. The company responses were similar in length (101 and 102 words). After going through the materials, we assessed organizational attractiveness, organizational trustworthiness, and review credibility, as well as demographic information.

All study materials are displayed in the Appendix. The review was carefully developed based on real Glassdoor reviews of different companies. The responses were developed based on previous research in different domains (e.g., service recovery; Dens et al., 2015; Lee & Carnage, 2014) and in collaboration with researchers in the domain of human resources and organizational behaviour.

Before carrying out Study 1, two pre-tests were conducted to test whether the review and the responses were realistic and whether the refutation and accommodative response were well manipulated. In both pre-tests, respondents were randomly assigned

to one of the two conditions with a company response. First, they all read some general information about the company, next they saw a negative review and a company response (either a refutation or an accommodative response). Unlike our main study, there was no condition in which respondents did not see an organization response.

First Pre-test. The first pre-test was completed by 50 respondents with an average age of 32 years ($SD = 9.42$) and an average of 9.28 years of work experience ($SD = 9.69$), 42 percent were women, and 12 of the respondents were currently employed. First we assessed review valence (the response options were negative, neutral, or positive). Of the respondents 49 indicated that the review was negative, one indicated it was neutral. Additionally, we assessed review realism with three items on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*; $\alpha = .75$; e.g., “*It seems possible that an employee would write such a review on Glassdoor.*”). The average review realism was 4.37 (*minimum* = 3.67, $SD = .458$) and did not differ significantly between response conditions ($t(48) = -.511$, $p = .612$). These results indicate that the review was perceived as sufficiently realistic and that the valence manipulation was acceptable. Next, we assessed the company responses. We used three items to assess whether the response denied responsibility ($\alpha = .95$; e.g., “*The company suggests that the reviewer is responsible for the described issues*”). Also three items were used to assess whether the response was accommodative ($\alpha = .92$; e.g., “*The company takes responsibility for the issues described by the reviewer*”). All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). Independent t-tests were performed to test the materials. The refutation response resulted in significantly higher perceived refutation ($M = 4.15$, $SD = .54$) compared to the accommodative response ($M = 1.83$, $SD = .61$; $t(48) = 14.29$; $p < .001$) and the accommodative response resulted in significantly higher perceived accommodativeness ($M = 3.91$, $SD = .7$) compared to the refutation ($M = 1.79$, $SD = .64$; $t(48) = 11.22$; $p < .001$). These findings indicate that the manipulations were successful. Further, we also measured realism of the company responses using two items ($\alpha = .83$; e.g., “*It seems possible that such a response would be written on Glassdoor*”). No significant difference was found in realism between the two company response strategies (refutation: $M = 3.44$, $SD = 1.06$; accommodative: $M = 3.92$, $SD = .81$); $t(48) = -1.793$, $p = .079$). Additionally, an open question asked participants’ opinion and reaction to the response. The open answers in the refutation condition indicated that it came across as somewhat unprofessional and condescending. The accommodation was by some participants described as vague. Based on the remarks, we made some changes to the

company responses to make them sound equally concrete, friendly, and professional. Specifically, we added the same concrete examples to both responses, we removed some phrases in the refutation to make it less condescending, such as “maybe you needed to let off some steam”, and ran a second pilot test.

Second Pre-test. The adapted company’s responses were tested in a second pre-test. We recruited 20 participants with an average age of 31.30 years ($SD = 8.18$) of which 65 percent were women. They had an average work experience of 9.65 years ($SD = 6.52$), six participants were currently employed. We again performed t -tests. The refutation response resulted in a significantly higher average score on the refutation measure ($M = 3.63$, $SD = .51$) than the accommodative response ($M = 1.53$, $SD = .57$; $t(18) = 8.69$, $p < .001$). Similarly, the accommodative response, resulted in a significantly higher average score on the perceived accommodativeness ($M = 4.33$, $SD = .59$) compared to the refutation ($M = 2.2$, $SD = .71$; $t(18) = -7.34$, $p < .001$). No difference was found in terms of realism between the refutation ($M = 3.85$, $SD = .67$) and the accommodative response ($M = 3.8$, $SD = .63$; $t(17.94) = .172$, $p = .866$). The respondents’ answers to the open question about the responses did not include any more remarks about the responses being unprofessional, the responses were also no longer described as vague. Results indicate that our materials adequately serve their purpose.

Measures

All study items are presented in Table 1.

Organizational attractiveness. Organizational attractiveness concerns the generalised attitudes towards an organization as a potential employer. This variable was measured with five items based on Highhouse, Lievens, and Sinar (2003) and rated on a 5-point Likert Scale (1= *completely disagree*, 5= *completely agree*).

Organizational trustworthiness. Organizational trustworthiness is the extent to which potential applicants have confidence in the words and actions of the organization and believe that the organization is dependable, sincere, and has good intentions (based on Cook & Wall, 1980). Four items consisting of adjectives were assessed on a 7-point semantic differential scale (with 4 = *neutral*). This measure was adapted from Ayeh, Au, and Lau (2013).

Review credibility. Review credibility is the extent to which a potential applicant perceives the online review is believable and is an honest representation of what happened. It was measured using five items based on Van Hove and Lievens (2007) and rated on a 5-point Likert Scale (1= *completely disagree*, 5= *completely agree*).

For the three dependent variables, we performed a CFA in MPlus 7.4. Results showed that there was a good fit (RMSEA = .065; CFI = .975; SRMR = .036; $\chi^2(74) = 117.825$, $p < .001$) and a better fit than a one-factor model (RMSEA = .225; CFI = .695; SRMR = .134; $\chi^2(77) = 622.393$, $p < .001$). A chi-square difference test indicated that this difference was significant ($D\chi^2(3) = 504.568$, $p < .001$). Additionally, two two-factor models were run, one combining the items of organizational attractiveness and trustworthiness (RMSEA = .141; CFI = .882; SRMR = .054; $\chi^2(76) = 286.424$, $p < .001$) and one combining the items of organizational trustworthiness and review credibility (RMSEA = .194; CFI = .775; SRMR = .136; $\chi^2(76) = 477.581$, $p < .001$). Fit indices for both alternative CFA models indicated a bad model fit. These results support the choice for a three-factor model.

Demographic variables. We assessed respondents' age, gender, whether they were employed, and whether they had looked for a job in the previous 12 months. We also included two control variables which theoretically may influence how people process and are affected by a negative review and subsequent company response on Glassdoor. The first control variable included is whether respondents ever visited Glassdoor before (1 = *visited Glassdoor*, 0 = *never visited Glassdoor*). Such experience may influence how critically information is processed and which information cues on such platforms are attended to (this is also in line with previous research on consumer review platforms; Van der Heide & Lim, 2016). The second control variable is years of work experience. Based on the elaboration likelihood model, previous research found that people with less experience relied more on peripheral cues in recruitment information (Walker, Field, Giles, & Bernerth, 2008). Hence, similarly, respondents with less work experience might pay attention to different elements in a negative review and company response, compared to more experienced respondents.

Table 1.

Study Variables and Items

Variables	Items								
Organizational attractiveness	For me this would be a good place to work If I was searching for a job, I would apply to this organization A job at this organization is appealing to me This organization is attractive to me as a place for employment If I was looking for a new job, I would accept a job offer from this organization								
Review credibility	I think the information shared by the employee is accurate I believe the reviewer is telling the truth I think the review accurately describes conditions at the organization It seems a reliable review I think the person who wrote the review is honest								
Organizational trustworthiness	<table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%;">Untrustworthy</td> <td style="width: 50%;">Trustworthy</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Unreliable</td> <td>Reliable</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Insincere</td> <td>Sincere</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Undependable</td> <td>Dependable</td> </tr> </table>	Untrustworthy	Trustworthy	Unreliable	Reliable	Insincere	Sincere	Undependable	Dependable
Untrustworthy	Trustworthy								
Unreliable	Reliable								
Insincere	Sincere								
Undependable	Dependable								

Table 2.

Means and Standard Deviations of Study 1 and 2 Variables

	No response	Refutation	Accommodative response
Study 1			
No consensus information (<i>N</i> = 142)			
Organizational attractiveness	2.64 (.72) ^a	3.28 (.89) ^b	2.84 (.99) ^a
Review credibility	3.53 (.59) ^{ab}	3.21 (.76) ^a	3.77 (.69) ^b
Organizational trustworthiness	3.46 (1.04) ^a	4.53 (1.14) ^b	3.67 (1.44) ^a
Study 2			
Consensus good (<i>N</i> = 101)			
Organizational attractiveness	3.36 (.9) ^a	3.66 (.78) ^a	3.54 (.81) ^a
Review credibility	3.32 (.74) ^{ab}	3.14 (.92) ^a	3.63 (.69) ^b
Organizational trustworthiness	4.4 (1.39) ^a	5.08 (.88) ^b	4.74 (1.07) ^{ab}
Consensus poor (<i>N</i> = 104)			
Organizational attractiveness	2.38 (.88) ^a	2.61 (.84) ^a	2.54 (.79) ^a
Review credibility	3.62 (.76) ^a	3.50 (.75) ^a	3.85 (.58) ^a
Organizational trustworthiness	3.31 (1.15) ^a	3.77 (1.06) ^a	3.48 (1.06) ^a

Note. The numbers in the table indicate: Mean (Standard Deviation)

Organizational attractiveness and review credibility were measured on a 5-point Likert scale, organizational trustworthiness on a 7-point Likert scale.

The results of ANOVA pairwise comparisons post hoc Tukey HSD tests are indicated with a letter in subscripts. The same subscripts in one row indicate that the means are not significantly different.

Table 3.

Pearson Correlations and Internal Reliabilities from Study 1 and 2

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.
1. Work experience	/	-.10	.03	.04	-.07	-.06	-.02	.08
2. Glassdoor	-.08	/	.06	-.08	.07	.15*	-.18*	.17*
3. Refutation	.04	-.09	/	n/a	n/a	.10	-.19**	.18**
4. Accommodative response	.16*	.09	n/a	/	n/a	.03	.22**	-.01
5. Consensus	---	---	---	---	/	.52**	-.20**	.48**
6. Organizational attractiveness	.16	.08	.28**	-.06	---	(.93/.94)	-.54**	.75**
7. Review credibility	-.20**	.005	-.29**	.26**	---	-.52**	(.92/.94)	-.52**
8. Organizational trustworthiness	.17*	.05	.35**	-.11	---	.76**	-.48**	(.94/.93)

Note. * < .05, ** < .01

Correlations below the diagonal are from Study 1, above the diagonal are from Study 2. Numbers between parentheses on the diagonal are Cronbach's alphas (Study 1/Study 2).

The dummy variables are coded as follows: Glassdoor (1 = *visited Glassdoor*, 0 = *never visited Glassdoor*), Refutation (1 = *refutation*, 0 = *accommodative response*, 0 = *no response*), Accommodative response (1 = *accommodative*, 0 = *refutation*, 0 = *no response*), Consensus (1 = *consensus good*, 0 = *consensus poor*).

The time used to fill in the survey is for Study 1: $M = 7.83$, $SD = 5.73$, and for Study 2: $M = 8.03$, $SD = 6.88$.²

The correlation between organizational attractiveness and trustworthiness is high, to test this further we ran a bootstrapped Pearson correlation analysis and the results showed that for 5,000 bootstrapped samples, the confidence interval did not contain 1 in Study 1 [.67; .83] and in Study 2 [.67; .82], indicating that the variables are different.

Results Study 1

Analyses were performed using SPSS 22. Table 2 provides study variables' means and standard deviations for the three conditions: no response, refutation, and accommodative response. Table 3 shows internal reliabilities and correlations.

Hypotheses 1 and 4 proposed that a refutation and an accommodative response would result in increased organizational attractiveness compared to no response. We performed ANCOVA's to test these hypotheses. Organizational attractiveness was entered as the dependent variable. Work experience and visited Glassdoor were entered as covariates. Two dummy variables were entered as fixed variables: refutation (1 = *refutation*, 0 = *accommodative response*, 0 = *no response*) and accommodative (1 = *accommodative response*, 0 = *refutation*, 0 = *no response*). This allowed us to compare the refutation and the accommodative response with the no response condition. Results show that there is a significant difference in organizational attractiveness between the refutation ($M = 3.28$, $SD = .89$) and no response ($M = 2.64$, $SD = .72$; $F(1, 137) = 11.758$, $p = .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .079$). These results support Hypothesis 1. However, no significant difference was found between the accommodative response and the no response condition (accommodative response: $M = 2.84$, $SD = .99$; $F(1, 137) = .467$, $p = .496$, partial $\eta^2 = .003$), thus no support was found for Hypothesis 4.

To examine Research Question 1 about which response strategy would result in higher organizational attractiveness, another ANCOVA was performed with organizational attractiveness as dependent variable, work experience and visited Glassdoor as covariates, and two dummies with accommodative response as reference category as fixed variables: refutation (1 = *refutation*, 0 = *accommodative response*, 0 = *no response*) and no response (1 = *no response*, 0 = *accommodative response*, 0 = *refutation*). Results show that there was a significant difference between the refutation and the accommodative response ($F(1, 137) = 7.376$, $p = .007$, partial $\eta^2 = .051$), indicating that a refutation results in higher organizational attractiveness than an accommodative response.

Hypotheses 2, 3a, 3b, 5, and 6 discussed the indirect effects of the responses on organizational attractiveness through review credibility and organizational trustworthiness. To test this, we performed mediation analyses using the process macro in SPSS 22. Organizational attractiveness was introduced as the dependent variable, review credibility and organizational trustworthiness as explaining mechanisms, and work experience and visited Glassdoor as covariates. Two independent variables were entered: refutation (1 = *refutation*, 0 = *accommodative response*, 0 = *no response*) and accommodative response

(1 = *accommodative response*, 0 = *refutation*, 0 = *no response*). The unstandardized indirect effects and the 95% confidence intervals were computed for each of 5,000 bootstrapped samples (Preacher & Hayes, 2004). With regard to the mediators, as expected, review credibility was negatively associated with organizational attractiveness ($B = -.27, p = .001$) and organizational trustworthiness was positively associated with attractiveness ($B = .46, p < .001$). The refutation was only marginally significantly negatively related to review credibility ($B = -.27, p = .053$), but significantly positively related to trustworthiness ($B = 1.01, p < .001$). The accommodative response was positively related to credibility ($B = 1.02, p < .001$), but not to trustworthiness ($B = .09, p = .711$). In support of Hypothesis 2, the indirect effect of the refutation on organizational attractiveness through review credibility was significant ($B = .07, CI = [.007; .198]$). Moreover, in line with Hypothesis 3a and contrary to Hypothesis 3b, the indirect effect of the refutation on organizational attractiveness through organizational trustworthiness was significant and positive ($B = .46, CI = [.265; .718]$). The indirect effect of the accommodative response on organizational attractiveness through trustworthiness was not significant, providing no support for Hypothesis 5 ($B = .04, CI = [-.183; .2572]$). The accommodative response had a significant negative indirect effect on organizational attractiveness through review credibility ($B = -.09, CI = [-.21; -.02]$), supporting Hypothesis 6.

Discussion Study 1

After a negative employer review online, our results show that when the organization uses a refutation response strategy, this can result in more positive perceptions of organizational attractiveness compared to not responding, as well as compared to an accommodative response. This effect is explained by lower review credibility and higher organizational trustworthiness. These findings indicate that responding to a negative review using a refutation might be beneficial.

No difference was found between an accommodative response and no response in terms of organizational attractiveness. Thus, this indicates that apologizing and taking responsibility results in similar attitudes of potential applicants as not responding to a negative review. The indirect effect of an accommodative response on organizational attractiveness through organizational trustworthiness was also not significant. These findings contradict our hypotheses and are discussed more in depth in the general discussion (after Study 2). However, the indirect effect on organizational attractiveness through review credibility was significant.

Scholars already indicated that it is useful to study how different informational signals interact with one another (Baum & Überschaer, 2016; Connelly et al., 2011). Accordingly, the effect of a refutation or an accommodative response may differ depending on the presence of certain contextual signals. One potential contextual factor that is relevant for online reviews is consensus. Until now we only looked at one negative review. However, when looking up an organization on an employer review website such as Glassdoor and Indeed, visitors will often see an average rating of all reviews that have been posted and they are able to go through multiple reviews. When on an employer review site large number of reviews tend to agree, in other words when there is high consensus about the organization as an employer, this raises several questions. For example, would a refutation still weaken the negative effect of a negative review on organizational attractiveness when the company is also rated poorly by a large number of reviewers or might an accommodative response result in better perceptions in that case? What is the effect of the response strategies to one negative review when the company is overall evaluated as a good employer by other reviewers? It is important to understand if responding can influence organizational attractiveness when consensus information is provided, and if so, which response strategy works best under which circumstances. In a second study we will investigate whether and how company responses to a negative review affect organizational attractiveness when consensus information about the organization as either a good or a poor employer is available.

Consensus

Several studies in different domains proposed that situational cues can influence the appropriateness and outcomes of specific reply strategies to negative events (e.g., crisis management and trust violations; Coombs, 1995; Kim et al., 2004). Both from a signaling and attribution theory perspective, consensus is proposed as an important situational cue that influences perceptions of an event (Connelly et al., 2011; Dineen & Allen, 2016; Kassin, 1979; Kelley & Michela, 1980). How other employees rate an organization in general might influence how subsequent information, such as a company response is evaluated. It is valuable to understand whether organizations' responses can still influence attitudes when consensus information is available and if so, how organizations should respond to a negative review depending on the general opinion displayed. We focus on two different consensus situations. Both concern a high level of consensus, which is a high agreement among individuals' evaluations of an organization (i.e., online employer review ratings by employees). On the one hand, we look at a

situation in which there is a general consensus among reviewers that the organization is a good place to work. We operationalize this as a high average rating (4.3 out of 5 stars for 134 reviews) and a statement that most reviews are positive. For reading clarity, we will refer to this as 'consensus good' (as this indicates that most reviewers believe that the organization is a good employer). Note that this general evaluation contrasts with the negative review. Secondly, we examine a situation in which there is a general consensus that the organization is a poor place to work. We operationalize this as a low average rating (1.7 out of 5 stars for 134 reviews) and a statement that *most reviews are negative*. We will refer to this as 'consensus poor'. This general evaluation is thus in line with the negative review. Whether the review contradicts or is in line with the consensus information may influence potential applicants' perceptions of the review, as well as the effect of company responses.

Based on theoretical considerations and previous research (Dineen et al., 2019; Melián-González & Bulchand-Gidumal, 2016), it is expected that when applicants see consensus information indicating high agreement among reviewers, this will influence organizational attractiveness in the sense that consensus good (even though it is contradicted by the negative review) will result in higher organizational attractiveness compared to consensus poor (which is in line with the negative review).

Research questions

For both consensus situations we will investigate whether, when such information is available as a particular information signal, responding to a review can help in managing organizational attractiveness and if so, which response strategy is more effective in which situation. In addition, we will examine the indirect effects of a refutation and an accommodative response on organizational attractiveness through review credibility and organizational trustworthiness, in order to better understand the mechanisms when one of the two types of consensus information is available. This can generate a better understanding of whether potential applicants still make attributions of review credibility and derive signals of company trustworthiness based on company responses (Connelly et al., 2011; Kelley & Michela; 1980).

Given consensus good, the negative review contradicts the overall evaluation. Thus, potential applicants may derive conflicting signals about the employing organization. However, since consensus reflects the experience of multiple people, this can allow for a more confident attribution, compared to one single review (Fiske & Taylor, 2008). Hence, given the contradiction between these two, potential applicants might be more inclined to

believe that the review does not paint an accurate picture, leading to lower review credibility. In this case, a refutation might result in higher organizational attractiveness compared to no response. A refutation stresses that the organization did not make mistakes, which might make the perception that the organization is a good employer even more salient. In addition, taking the time to respond might signal organizational trustworthiness. Providing an accommodative response, on the other hand, may result in lower organizational attractiveness compared to no response. Based on the consensus information, potential applicants may believe that the organization is a good place to work and may not place too much weight on the negative review. However, when the organization admits that mistakes were made and to be responsible for these mistakes, this might increase review credibility and thus ambiguity about the organization as a place of work, which might deteriorate organizational attractiveness.

Given consensus poor, the negative review is backed up by a large number of other negative reviews and will therefore likely be believed more. All information signals available are pointing in the same direction (i.e., bad employer). Trying to deny responsibility and attribute the negative review to the individual reviewer, will probably not be believed. A refutation might result in a further deterioration of organizational attractiveness compared to not responding, as it might look like the organization is trying to cover up the truth or is not aware of the problems going on, leading to diminished perceptions of organizational trustworthiness. However, an accommodative response might result in higher organizational attractiveness compared to no response when consensus poor information is provided. Admitting the company's mistake may be viewed as a signal that the company is aware that there are some issues, recognises this in an honest fashion, and tries to solve these problems, which might increase their perceived trustworthiness.

However, it might also be that providing a refutation or an accommodative response will not affect organizational attractiveness compared to not responding when consensus information is available because the average of a large number of reviews can be perceived to be a more informative signal than only one additional review (e.g., wisdom of the crowd; Lorenz, Rauhut, Schweitzer, & Helbing, 2011). Hence, the review and the corresponding company response may not make a difference, because the attitudes are already shaped based on the consensus information. Because of different possible arguments, there are no clear expectations, thus, we formulate research questions.

Research Question 2. Do (a) a refutation and (b) an accommodative response have an effect on organizational attractiveness compared to no response, when there is consensus about the organization being a good place to work, and in what direction?

Research Question 3. Do (a) a refutation and (b) an accommodative response have an effect on organizational attractiveness compared to no response, when there is consensus about the organization being a poor place to work, and in what direction?

Research Question 4. Do a refutation and an accommodative response have indirect effects on organizational attractiveness through review credibility and organizational trustworthiness, given consensus good or consensus poor?

Method Study 2

Sample

We received 217 responses through Prolific, of which 6 were removed because they failed a manipulation check (see below) and 6 were removed after data screening (e.g., no responses to any question, filled in the survey twice – same IP address, were unemployed). Our final sample thus consists of 205 respondents (all USA citizens) with an average age of 35 years ($SD = 8.94$), 57.6% were men, 41.5% women, and 1% other. The average work experience was 15 years ($SD = 9.88$). Of these respondents, 55.1% indicated that they looked for a job in the previous 12 months, 79% had already visited Glassdoor.

Design and procedure

We used a 2 (consensus: consensus good or consensus poor) by 3 (response: no response, refutation, and accommodative response) experimental between-subjects design. We used the same materials as in study one. The consensus information was manipulated as follows. An image in a Glassdoor design was shown displaying the average employee rating: 4.3 stars out of five for the consensus good condition and 1.7 stars out of five for the consensus poor condition. We chose these ratings because we wanted clearly positive and negative, but also realistic average ratings. We mentioned that this was the average rating of 134 reviews (in reality, the number of reviews is always visible on the Glassdoor company profile). Additionally, the participants read the sentence: “On Glassdoor you notice that most of the employee reviews about the company Lewis-Young are positive (negative).” We included this sentence because it is likely that, in

reality, potential applicants who are interested in assessing reviews' consensus look at the average number of stars, but also might skim through some reviews. They might see mostly positive reviews, mostly negative reviews, or another proportion. We choose a total number of 134 reviews that was realistic given the size of the company, based on actual numbers of reviews for similarly-sized companies on Glassdoor. Moreover a sufficient number of reviews is needed to establish consensus. All study materials are in Appendix.

Measures

All measures were the same as in Study 1. Additionally, we included two questions as a manipulation check to test whether the consensus manipulation worked as intended. The first question asked whether most employee reviews for the focal company on Glassdoor were positive, neutral, or negative. The second question asked what the average employee review rating was: 1.7 or 4.3. Both questions also had a response option "I don't remember". As mentioned above, in six cases, the respondents failed the manipulation check and were thus not included for the analyses.

A CFA including organizational attractiveness, review credibility, and organizational trustworthiness was performed and indicated an acceptable fit (RMSEA = .064; CFI = .978; SRMR = .031; $\chi^2(74) = 136.673$, $p < .001$) which was better than the one-factor model (RMSEA = .237; CFI = .681; SRMR = .129; $\chi^2(77) = 965.784$, $p < .001$). A chi-square difference test indicated that this difference was significant ($D\chi^2(3) = 829.111$, $p < .001$). Additionally, two two-factor models were run: one combining the items of organizational attractiveness and trustworthiness (RMSEA = .147; CFI = .88; SRMR = .053; $\chi^2(76) = 410.388$, $p < .001$), one combining organizational trustworthiness and review credibility (RMSEA = .203; CFI = .77; SRMR = .117; $\chi^2(76) = 715.408$, $p < .001$). Fit indices for both alternative CFA models indicated a bad fit, again supporting the three-factor model.

Results Study 2

Study variables' means and standard deviations are shown in Table 2. Correlations and internal reliabilities are shown in Table 3.

To test Research Questions 2a, 2b, 3a, and 3b, we compared both response strategies with the no response condition for consensus good and consensus poor separately, using a one-way ANCOVA (one for each consensus condition). Organizational attractiveness was entered as dependent variable, work experience and visited Glassdoor as covariates, and two dummy variables: refutation (1 = *refutation*, 0 = *accommodative response*, 0 = *no response*) and accommodative response (1 = *accommodative response*,

0 = *refutation*, 0 = *no response*) were entered as fixed factors. No significant difference was found in terms of organizational attractiveness between a refutation and no response, both for the consensus good ($F(1, 99) = 2.73, p = .102, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .027$) and for the consensus poor condition ($F(1, 96) = 1.01, p = .317, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .01$). Also no significant difference was found in organizational attractiveness between an accommodative response and no response, neither in the consensus good condition ($F(1, 99) = 1.38, p = .243, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .014$), nor in the consensus poor condition ($F(1, 96) = .607, p = .438, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .006$). These findings indicate that a refutation or an accommodative response do not have an effect on organizational attractiveness compared to no response when consensus information is provided.

Next, we examined Research Question 4 which pertained to the indirect effects of a refutation and an accommodative response on organizational attractiveness through review credibility and organizational trustworthiness when consensus good or consensus poor information was provided. To this end, we used bootstrapped mediation in the Process macro. The two underlying mechanisms were review credibility and organizational trustworthiness, the control variables work experience and visited Glassdoor, the independent variables were refutation (1 = *refutation*, 0 = *accommodative response*, 0 = *no response*) and accommodative response (1 = *accommodative response*, 0 = *refutation*, 0 = *no response*). Indirect effects and 95% confidence intervals were computed for 5,000 bootstrapped samples. We ran this mediation model for the consensus good and consensus poor condition separately. The results show that, in the consensus good condition, the indirect effect of the refutation on organizational attractiveness through organizational trustworthiness was significant ($B = .26, CI = [.055; .597]$). All other indirect effects for either refutation or accommodative response were insignificant.³ In the consensus poor condition, all indirect effects were also insignificant.⁴

General discussion

Research on third party employer branding is on the rise (e.g., Dineen et al., 2016; Dineen et al., 2019). Indeed, a part of an organization's employer branding lies outside of its control. Especially with the increased popularity of social media and review platforms, grievances or complaints shared by stakeholders, such as employees, can reach a large audience of potential applicants. Research indicates that negative messages online may decrease organizational attractiveness (Melián-González & Bulchand-Gidumal, 2016; Stockman et al., 2017). However, little is known about how organizations can try to manage the perceptions of potential applicants after reading such a negative employer

review. This paper aimed to investigate whether and how organizations can manage perceptions of potential applicants after a negative employer review by applying two experimental studies.

Our findings show that when no consensus information is available (Study 1), denying responsibility after a negative review can allow the organization to increase organizational attractiveness in comparison to when no response is given and in comparison to an accommodative response. The positive effect of a refutation shows that while companies have to accept that the employer brand is not fully controllable (e.g., Dineen et al., 2019; Etter et al., 2019), it can still be beneficial to take an active approach in managing potential applicants' attitudes after exposure to information shared online.

With regard to the explaining mechanisms, the positive effect of a refutation compared to no response was partly explained by decreased review credibility, as we expected based on attribution theory (Kelley & Michela, 1980). Hence, refuting a negative review can make that review less believable, which is associated with a reduced negative effect on the attitudes about the organization as an employer. However, the positive effect of a refutation compared to no response was mostly explained by organizational trustworthiness. The refutation seems to be interpreted as signaling that the organization is more trustworthy, which positively related to organizational attractiveness (Connelly et al., 2011).

Contrary to our expectations, an accommodative response did not significantly influence organizational attractiveness, compared to no response. We also did not find evidence for an indirect effect through organizational trustworthiness. Hence, in contrast to the refutation, an accommodative response does not seem to provide a (strong) signal of organizational trustworthiness. These findings are in contradiction with previous research in service recovery which found that apologizing improves customer outcomes (e.g., Chang, Tsai, Wong, Wang, & Cho, 2015; Lee, 2005). A possible explanation might be that employment constitutes a significant part of people's lives. Hence, if the response indicates that the organization has faulted in its role as employer, even though the organization apologises and provided steps for improvement, this cannot improve organizational trustworthiness, nor attractiveness compared to not responding, because the stakes are high. Further, even though the overall effect was not significant, we found that an accommodative response had a negative indirect effect on organizational attractiveness through increased review credibility. Because the organization accepted responsibility for the issues described in the review, this increased the perceptions that the negative review

was accurate, which in turn related to decreased organizational attractiveness, in line with our expectations based on attribution theory.

Note that we operationalized the organization's refutation in a friendly and professional way and provided concrete examples of how policies and initiatives in the organization contrast the negative experience of the reviewer. Such an operationalization was chosen, because we aimed to create professional responses which could be used by companies in reality. It seems possible that refuting in a less professional way would result in less positive effects (e.g., Utz et al., 2009). In the operationalization of the accommodative response we referred to the same activities that were described as examples of how the organization was already functioning in the refutation, but in the accommodative response these were framed to be plans for the future. This might have influenced the findings. Maybe if the organization had already undertaken these actions, findings would differ. However a study on hotel customer reviews did not find evidence for a different reaction between past action or future action promised in the response (Sparks et al., 2016).

Further, our results from Study 2 show that when consensus information is available to potential applicants, neither an accommodative response, nor a refutation was able to directly influence organizational attractiveness compared to not responding. When there is consensus about the organization being a good place to work, we found some evidence that a refutation can have a positive indirect effect on organizational attractiveness through organizational trustworthiness. However, all other indirect effects were insignificant. This indicates that consensus information functions as an influential source of social information (Darke et al., 1998). When consensus information shows that individuals tend to agree that the organization is a good employer, this resulted in higher organizational attractiveness compared to when there was consensus information indicating that the organization was a poor place to work. These findings indicate that potential applicants assume that the majority opinion is accurate and use it to guide their own judgement (Darke et al., 1998). When reading an additional review, the responsibility for that review may be attributed based on the majority's opinion, and may no longer be influenced by a single company response. In such a situation, one response seems not to provide sufficiently salient signals about the organization. These findings showcase that it is important to investigate different combinations of information signals as this closely aligns to reality and results may differ (Baum & Überschaer, 2016). Future research investigating company responses to employer reviews is recommended to take in account contextual cues (e.g., consensus,

prior knowledge about the organization) as these can influence the effects of company's recruitment communication.

When there is consensus about the organization being a good place to work, we found some evidence that a refutation still can have a positive indirect effect on organizational attractiveness through organizational trustworthiness, even though there was no difference in terms of attractiveness between a refutation and no response. However overall, responding in different ways to a negative review only seem to influence organizational attractiveness, when no consensus information is available. This seems to contradict consumer review research by Dens et al. (2015), which found that organizations can improve consumers' attitudes after a negative review, even when the majority of reviews are negative. For their study, however, only a very small amount of reviews were shown (four to six). Since consensus in our study was operationalized as the average rating of 134 reviews, a possible conclusion is that the amount of reviews matter. Once an employer has a sufficiently large number of reviews and either a very positive or very negative average rating, a single additional review does not influence expectations about the organization (in line with wisdom of the crowd, e.g., Lorenz et al., 2011). Hence, responding or not to that review does not influence potential applicants either. Future research should examine the influence of different levels of average ratings. It might be that more moderate average ratings are not able to sufficiently reduce ambiguity about the organization as an employer, which may enable company responses to influence potential applicants' perceptions of organizational attractiveness. It is interesting to investigate at what point (number of reviews, average score) responses do not longer allow organizations to influence organizational attractiveness.

Practical implications

Previous research shows that online reviews influence potential applicants' attitudes. A first step organizations can undertake is to monitor what is being said about them online. If a company receives a negative employer review online of which the complaints or accusations do not reflect the truth and no consensus information is available, our findings suggest that the company should try to refute that review in a friendly and professional way and using concrete examples as counterevidence for the claims in the negative review. However we warrant caution and strongly advice organizations to be very careful when using a refutation and make sure that they only use this strategy if they are sure that the review is not true. If the review is accurate, refuting or denying is unethical and, when the organization clearly bears responsibility, we do not

know whether a refutation might backfire. Also, when the organization is not able to provide counterevidence, we do not know if a refutation might still result in improved attitudes.

When consensus information is available on the website where the review has appeared, our findings indicate that the ship has sailed and companies are not able to influence organizational attractiveness through either a refutation or an accommodative response. However, in the case of consensus about the organization being a good place to work, providing a refutation can still help the organization increase their perceived trustworthiness.

This study indicates that it is important for organizations to keep track of online reviews and to manage the overall rating to be positive. Companies may want to try stimulating positive reviews. A possible action a company can try, is stimulating employees of whom they know they are happy to work at the organization to function as employer brand ambassadors and post online reviews.

Limitations and future research

We discuss some limitations and interesting avenues for future research based on the current study. First, we decided to use a fictitious company in order to exclude the effect of prior knowledge, which might influence information processing. Research already found that the effect of a negative review was weaker for more familiar organizations (Stockman et al., 2017). The effectiveness of responses might differ as well between companies that are more or less well-known or that have a good or bad reputation. Future research should investigate this.

Second, our experimental design allows us to test causal effects of the responses (and the consensus information) on the study variables. However, review credibility, organizational trustworthiness, and organizational attractiveness were assessed using self-reported measures. Thus, no conclusions can be made about causality and endogeneity issues such as common method variance (CMV) are possible (Antonakis, Bendahan, Jacquart, & Lalive, 2010). Some precautions against CMV were taken: trustworthiness was measured using a different scale (semantic differential scale and 7-point scale) than the other two variables (5-point Likert scale). Moreover, with regard to the order of the measures, we first assessed attractiveness, then trustworthiness, and finally review credibility (thus space was created between two measures using the same scale; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Lee, 2003).

Third, the experimental design did not include a condition in which there was no review (or a neutral review), therefore we were not able to compare organizational attractiveness with or without a negative review and cannot make conclusions about whether the refutation in the first study could restore organizational attractiveness above the level before exposure to the negative review.

In addition, we only investigated one version of a refutation and accommodative response. However, within these categories, different configurations are possible. Future research should examine the role of specific content differences as research in services reviews found that these influence reactions to responses (e.g., more or less tailored to the review, more conversational or more professional voice; Sparks et al., 2016; Wang & Chaudhry, 2018).

Further, we only investigated responses to one possible employer review. However, the effectiveness of a response might also depend on the review content. It would be interesting to investigate cues that may influence potential applicants' attitudes after a company's response, such as review length, emotionality of the review, job category of the reviewer (Vendemia, 2017).

Moreover, consensus was operationalized as an average rating and a statement about most reviews. In reality, potential applicants will be able to read multiple reviews. Future research should investigate the effect of exposure to a multitude of reviews and subsequent company responses.

Researchers might also want to investigate other outcomes of responses to online reviews. In this study we examined the impact on the external audience. However, as a review might also impact employee commitment and intentions to leave the organization, it is also important to investigate the impact on the employee who wrote the review, and on other employees reading the review and response. Another outcome that can be studied is the effect of responses on subsequent reviews, as marketing research indicates it can play a role, such as resulting in fewer, but longer negative reviews. (e.g., Proserpio and Zervas, 2017).

Finally, we examined a review on Glassdoor. Investigating non-anonymous reviews, for example on Facebook, can be an interesting avenue for future research. It might be that non-anonymous reviews are perceived as more credible which might impact the effectiveness of responses.

Conclusion

This study investigated the effect of different response strategies to a negative employer review. In a first study, we found that when no consensus information was available, a refutation increased organizational attractiveness. This effect was explained by reduced review credibility and increased organizational trustworthiness. When consensus information was available, neither a refutation, nor an accommodative response influenced organizational attractiveness. These findings indicate that an organization's response to a negative review can influence potential applicants' attitudes. However, when there is high agreement among reviewers about the organization either being a good or a poor place to work, a company response will not influence organizational attractiveness.

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Footnotes

1. We contacted the authors, but they were not able to provide us the exact responses used.

2. We reran all analyses to test whether omitting respondents who took a very short or long time to complete the survey, impacts the results. For respondents who filled in the survey quickly, we used a cut-off of 3 minutes for the no response condition (Study 1: 7 respondents, Study 2: 5 respondents) and 4 minutes for the response conditions (Study 1: 3 respondents, Study 2: 10 respondents). With regard to the people that took a long time, three outliers were determined: one respondent in Study 1 (59.40 min.) and two in Study 2 (61.58 and 66.7 min.). In both studies, similar results were found with regard to the effect on attractiveness as well as the indirect effects.

3. In the consensus good condition, the indirect effect of the refutation on organizational attractiveness through review credibility was not significant ($B = .07$, $CI = [-.028, .254]$). Further, the indirect effects of the accommodative response on organizational attractiveness through review credibility ($B = -.084$, $CI = [-.263; .015]$) and trustworthiness were both not significant ($B = .139$, $95\%CI = [-.061; .43]$). For consensus poor, the indirect effect of a refutation through review credibility was insignificant ($B = .033$, $CI = [-.074; .18]$), as well as through organizational trustworthiness ($B = .172$, $CI = [-.033; .456]$). Also, the indirect effects of accommodative response through credibility ($B = -.07$, $CI = [-.234; .018]$) and trustworthiness ($B = .083$, $CI = [-.137; .312]$) were insignificant.

4. These findings indicate that there are no significant differences in response strategies' effects on organizational attractiveness depending on which type of consensus information is provided. To test this further, we performed a moderation analysis using ANCOVA. Organizational attractiveness was entered as dependent variable, we controlled for work experience and visited Glassdoor. Refutation (1 = *refutation*, 0 = *accommodative response*, 0 = *no response*), Accommodative (1 = *accommodative response*, 0 = *refutation*, 0 = *no response*), and consensus (1 = *good employer*, 0 = *poor employer*) were entered as fixed variables. We specified two interaction effects between consensus and each response dummy. Both interaction effects were not significant ($F_{\text{refutation}*\text{consensus}}(1, 197) = 1.813$, $p = .166$, partial $\eta^2 = .018$; $F_{\text{accommodative}*\text{consensus}}(1, 197) = .958$, $p = .385$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$). Moreover, we found that the condition consensus good resulted in a significantly higher attractiveness compared to the condition consensus poor ($F(1, 197) = 50.887$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .205$).

Appendix

Figure A1. *General Organization Information.*



Lewis-Young (LY) was founded in 1970 by Peter Lewis and William

Young. Lewis-Young develops, manufactures and markets pharmaceutical and consumer goods, which are sold by pharmacies and retailers to the end users in 19 countries. The company currently employs 3,400 people and is located in different cities across the USA and Europe.

Please read the following excerpt from the organization's website:

Vision


Our purpose is enhancing quality of life and contributing to a **healthier future**. We want to help shape a better and healthier world and inspire people to live healthier lives. This is how we ensure the long-term success of our company. Our ways of working allow us to adapt to the ever-changing world.

Career

As a global company, we have many job opportunities. The first decision you need to make is where your **passion** lies. At Lewis-Young you can learn from people in a huge range of professions.

Figure A2. *Negative Review.*

Aug 28, 2018



"I would not recommend"

★☆☆☆☆ Current Employee - Anonymous Employee

I have been working at Lewis-Young full-time (More than 2 years)





Pros

Decent money, health insurance.

Cons

Lewis-Young used to be better than this but the company has changed much and not for the better.

In general, input from employees falls on deaf ears. Opportunities to grow are extremely limited. There is little recognition of hard work done. Career progression is done entirely through relationship building. Although everybody expected I would get the promotion because of my hard work, management thought otherwise and gave it to someone less qualified.


Helpful 

Figure A3. *Accommodative Response. The response was displayed directly below the review.*

Lewis-Young Response

Dear employee, thank you for your review. We admit that mistakes have occurred in the past. Therefore, we want to sincerely apologize for the negative experience you have had and take full responsibility for it. We agree that employees' input is vital for our company's success and career progression decisions should be as objective as possible.

We are taking steps to ensure that these issues will not reoccur, like installing idea boxes in the hallways and making sure that promotion decisions are made by selection teams that take into account all of the available information on the candidates' performance, skillset and motivation.

Figure A4. *Refutation Response. The response was displayed directly below the review.*


Lewis-Young Response

Dear employee, thank you for your review. However, it does not seem to paint an accurate picture of our company. We strongly encourage employee input and believe it is vital for our company's success. For example, several suggestions generated by the idea boxes in the hallways have already been realized.

Missing a promotion can, of course, be frustrating and employees' perceptions may differ from reality. However, know that we make career progression decisions as objective as possible. All promotion decisions are made by selection teams that take into account all of the available information on the candidates' performance, skillset and motivation.

Figure A5. *Consensus poor information Study 2.*


On Glassdoor you notice that **most** of the **employee reviews** about the company Lewis-Young are **negative**.

This is the average rating of 134 employee reviews (out of 5 stars): **1.7** 

You decide to take a closer look at one review.

Figure A6. *Consensus good Study 2.*

On Glassdoor you notice that **most** of the **employee reviews** about the company Lewis-Young are **positive**.

This is the average rating of 134 employee reviews (out of 5 stars): **4.3** 

You decide to take a closer look at one review.

CHAPTER 7

General discussion

Introduction

In the context of increased competition between organizations to attract employees (Ployhart, Schmitt, & Tippins, 2017), many organizations started using social media for recruitment and employer branding ends (SHRM, 2016). However, research is lagging behind. Little is known about the experiences of organizations and about the effects of organizations' social media communication on potential applicants' attitudes and perceptions. To improve the understanding of social media in a recruitment context, we formulated four research questions that focused on organizations' use of social media to attract and influence potential employees. These questions were examined in five empirical chapters. Chapter 2 aimed to shed light on the experiences of organizations and employees with the use of social media for recruitment. Chapter 3 and 4 examined whether an organization's profile can influence organizational attractiveness, employer brand perceptions, and word-of-mouth intentions. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 studied mechanisms underlying the influence of social media pages on these outcomes. Finally, Chapter 6 examined whether (and how) organization's responses to a negative review can affect organizational attractiveness. Below we summarize the studies' main findings with regard to the research questions. Furthermore, we identify strengths and limitations of this dissertation and point out directions for future research. Next, practical implications are discussed.

Research overview

Research Question 1. What are the experiences of organizations and employees with the use of social media for recruitment and employer branding?

Given the limited research on recruitment through social media, Chapter 2 presented a qualitative study in which HR managers were interviewed to get a better understanding of how and why organizations are using or not using social media. Moreover, we also interviewed employees to understand why they would share recruitment related information on social media and what barriers still exist for the involvement of employees in this process. This study generated insights in how social media are used within organizations, as well as in the opportunities and challenges that are faced.

The results showed that social media are increasingly being used for recruitment and employer branding, however, organizations differ in the extent that they use social media for these ends. Often, several departments are involved in managing social media (Neil & Moody, 2014). Our results showed that responsibility for social media is often borne

with other departments than HR and the level of collaboration differs between organizations. Organizations use social media as a recruitment tool because it allows them to perform targeted recruitment and proactively contact potential applicants (similar to the services provided by recruitment agencies). Moreover, it allows organizations to increase brand awareness with passive job seekers and the basic functions are perceived as inexpensive. Often, social media are viewed as additional channels which can be used besides a standard recruitment source or set of sources on which the organization usually advertises its job openings (frequently, this is the company website and job sites). Reasons not to use social media for recruitment are a lack of resources and time, fear of losing control, and difficulties to provide evidence for its outcomes.

As social media provide opportunities to involve employees in the recruitment process, we interviewed both HR managers and employees about their experiences in this regard. Not all organizations are involving their employees, but in some organizations employees are being stimulated, either formally or informally, to share messages and vacancies on social media. Some organizations are also trying to reduce the barriers for sharing, for example by organizing social media trainings. The findings showed that employees share recruitment information on social media out of pride (in line with organizational identification; Riketta, 2005) to help (i.e., pro-social motives; Van Hoye, 2013), and managers in particular feel it is their responsibility to do so. Overall, employees still have little insight in why, what, and how they can help their organization's recruitment on social media. Moreover, some fear they might do something wrong.

Overall, these findings indicated that many organizations did not have a clear social media strategy for employer branding at the time of the study, but rather used an ad hoc approach. This might cause organizations to miss out on opportunities to create a strong and coherent external brand. With regard to involving employees, our findings showed that more and clearer communication is necessary. A theoretical perspective that might be useful to help further investigate how organizations can involve employees in their recruitment in general and through social media, is "system strength". System strength implies that, in order to generate desired outcomes, HRM systems need distinctiveness, consistency, and consensus (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). Applied to our specific context, organizations need to align all their activities and communication with regard to social media use. Such alignment will allow them to generate a shared perception of what behavior is expected and valued with regard to spreading information about the organization on social media (and other communication channels).

Our interviews showed that one of the reasons why organizations use social media for recruitment is to increase brand awareness and arouse interest. One way to use social media to these ends is by creating and maintaining a social media profile. However, limited research investigated the effectiveness of potential applicants' exposure to the profile of an employer.

Research Question 2. Can an organization's profile influence organizational attractiveness, employer brand perceptions, and word-of-mouth intentions?

Many organizations have one or several profiles on social media (SHRM, 2016). To investigate whether an organization's profile can influence employer brand dimensions or organizational attractiveness, Chapter 3 presented an experimental study addressing this question in the context of exposure of a group of nurses to the real social media page of one hospital on LinkedIn or Facebook. The findings showed that, compared to a control group, exposure to an organization's profile on social media can positively influence employer brand dimensions (both instrumental and symbolic) and indicated that it can result in increased organizational attractiveness (although evidence for this effect was only found for Facebook, not for LinkedIn). Chapter 4 further allowed to investigate whether potential applicants' perceptions of employer brand personality and organizational attractiveness, as well as word-of-mouth intentions changed after exposure to the social media page of an actual company they were interested in. The findings also showed that employer brand perceptions can improve after exposure to a social media page. Moreover, intentions to spread word-of-mouth can increase as well. This is an interesting finding, as so far little research investigated how organizations can stimulate employee word-of-mouth in a recruitment context (Bloemer, 2010). However, the findings of Chapter 4 showed that exposure to a social media profile can also decrease organizational attractiveness. Positive attitudes prior to visiting the social media page might explain this decrease (participants in this study were requested to look up the organization that had published a job opening that they might apply for). It might be that the social media page helped them create an image of the organization as an employer, based on which they could assess whether or not they would fit in that organization. These fit perceptions may have resulted in some people feeling less attracted (which is not a bad thing per se, as it might be that people who would fit less in the organization were less attracted to it; Dineen, Ash, & Noe, 2002).

Overall, these findings indicated that creating and managing an organizational profile on social media and getting potential applicants to see that profile, can allow

organizations to positively influence applicants' perceptions of the employer brand as well as increase intentions to spread positive word-of-mouth. Moreover, such activities can also allow organizations to influence organizational attractiveness.

To increase the understanding of the mechanisms underlying these effects, we formulated a third research question. Investigating these underlying effects can provide more insights in how organizations best use social media to influence potential applicants' attitudes and intentions towards the organization.

Research Question 3. How do social media pages affect organizational attractiveness, employer brand perceptions, and word-of-mouth intentions?

This dissertation looked at communication characteristics as potential explaining mechanisms underlying the effect of exposure to a social media page on potential applicants' attraction, employer brand perceptions, and word-of-mouth intentions. Specifically, three social media page characteristics were investigated: interactivity, social presence, and informativeness (Daft & Lengel, 1986; Ryan, Horvath, & Kriska, 2005; Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976).

Chapter 3 examined whether the effect of exposure to a social media profile could be explained by perceived interactivity and social presence of the social media profile, compared to a control group. Findings indicated that perceived social presence explains most of the effects, while perceived interactivity does not seem to play a role (a possible explanation might be that people are not really looking to interact with the company in the first stage or recruitment). Thus, the feeling that the information on the social media page is communicated in a friendly and personal way, helps to positively influence perceptions about the organization as an employer. However, we do not know whether this higher perceived social presence is due to the fact that the potential applicants see an organization's profile on social media as such or because of the specific characteristics of that organization's profile.

Chapter 4 and 5 further examined how organizational pages on social media influence potential applicants' perceptions and intentions (i.e., comparing between profiles instead of comparing to no exposure to a social media profile). Based on the findings of Chapter 3 and the different research designs, Chapter 4 and 5 did not include interactivity. However, in addition to social presence these studies examine informativeness in order to generate a better understanding of the effectiveness of social media pages.

Chapter 4 examined how social media pages' social presence and informativeness affect employer brand personality, organizational attractiveness, and word-of-mouth

intentions. This study took a more fine grained approach with regard to the role of the employer brand. Instead of including employer brand personality as an outcome variable (as in Chapter 3), it was included as a mediator between social media page characteristics and organizational attractiveness and word-of-mouth intentions. Moreover, it was operationalized using two meta- dimensions: organizational warmth and competence (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). In line with signaling theory (Connelly, Certo, Ireland, & Reutzel, 2011), the findings of Chapter 4 showed that organizations can use social media to signal their employer brand personality, which influences organizational attractiveness and word-of-mouth intentions. Specifically, the way that an organization is perceived to communicate on its profile matters as these communication characteristics seem to be interpreted as providing signals about what the company is like as an employer. Higher perceived social presence relates to improved perceptions of the organization as a warm employer, while higher perceived informativeness relates to improved perceptions of organizational competence. An important question is thus whether and how organizations can influence the perceptions of communication characteristics on their social media profile to influence recruitment outcomes.

Subsequently, Chapter 5 aimed to address this question. It built on a Uses and Gratifications perspective (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973) and the results showed that organizations can manipulate informativeness and social presence on their social media profile. Contrary to what was expected, only manipulated informativeness (and not social presence) was found to affect organizational attractiveness. However, we found evidence of an interaction effect between these manipulated characteristics: informativeness only had an effect when social presence was high, which indicates that manipulated social presence does play a role. With regard to the influence of individuals gratifications, barely any evidence was found that these influenced the effect of communication characteristics on organizational attractiveness.

Overall, our findings indicated that the communication characteristics informativeness and social presence can play a role in explaining the effects social media pages have on potential applicants' reactions (with regard to the role of social presence, we provide some additional discussion and analyses in Appendix). Our results indicated that more (perceived) relevant information for job seekers on a company's website helps to improve recruitment outcomes. Moreover, our findings indicated that communicating in a friendly and personal way on social media also results in improved reactions of potential applicants. Specifically, it seemed that the way an organization communicates or is

perceived to communicate is interpreted as signaling what the organization is like as an employer, hence providing support for the signaling theory in the social media context and even shed light on specific signaling mechanisms (from social presence to organizational warmth and from informativeness to organizational competence; Connelly et al., 2011).

Besides company profiles, another type of information on social media that may influence potential applicants are reviews about the organization written by other applicants or (former) employees. Our fourth research question concerned the effect of responses of organizations to a negative review by an employee.

Research Question 4. Can organizations' responses to a negative review affect organizational attractiveness?

Social media allow actors that are not under direct control of the organization to disseminate information (Etter, Ravasi, & Colleoni, 2017). One type of information that is shared about organizations and that is especially relevant for a recruitment context are employer reviews. Negative online reviews by (former) employees can negatively influence organizational attractiveness (Melián-González & Bulchand-Gidumal, 2016; Stockman, Van Hoye, & Carpentier, 2017). In Chapter 6 we used an experimental study to examine whether and how company responses to a negative review can influence these attitudes. Based on attribution theory (Kelley & Michela, 1980), we focused on two potential response strategies: a refutation and an accommodative response.

The findings of Chapter 6 showed that when no consensus information is available, a professional and friendly refutation resulted in higher organizational attractiveness compared to when no response was provided. This effect was explained by lower review credibility and an increase in organizational trustworthiness (Eisend, 2004; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). Unexpectedly, an accommodative response did not result in higher organizational attractiveness compared to no response. The findings further showed the importance of clear consensus information online. When a lot of reviewers agree that the organization is either a good place to work or a poor place to work, the positive influence of a response on organizational attractiveness seems limited.

Strengths, Limitations, and Directions for Future Research

This dissertation contributed to the literature by presenting five empirical chapters investigating whether and how social media can be used by organizations for recruitment. Even though many organizations are using social media for recruitment and employer branding, research on this topic is scarce. Hence, little is known about their experiences with these tools as well as the effects on potential applicants' perceived organizational

attractiveness and employer brand. By investigating these questions, the present dissertation added to the knowledge of recruitment and employer branding in the digital era. We used different study methods and designs, including a qualitative study (Chapter 2) as well as quantitative studies (Chapter 3 - 6). These quantitative studies used both real (Chapter 2 – 4) and fictitious organizations (Chapter 5 and 6). Moreover, we used different samples, including students, but also employed respondents (Breugh, 2013). Finally, we surveyed respondents from three different countries (Belgium, China, and the USA).

The current dissertation also has limitations that should be acknowledged. In what follows, we will point out limitations and directions for future research. A first limitation of the present dissertation is that the outcome variables of the quantitative studies (Chapter 3-6) included attitudes (organizational attractiveness), perceptions (employer brand), and intentions (word-of-mouth intentions), but did not include behavioral outcomes, such as actual application decisions, decisions to stay in the selection process, job offer acceptance, or word-of-mouth behavior (Harold, Uggerslev, & Kraichy, 2013). Even though previous research indicates that attitudes and intentions relate to actual behavior (Chapman, Uggerslev, Carroll, Piasentin, & Jones, 2005; Collins & Stevens, 2002; Highhouse, Lievens & Sinar, 2003), we are not certain whether exposure to social media would yield behavioral outcomes of interest to organizations. However, we expect that the benefits of social media for recruitment are situated more in the first stages when applicants are selecting organizations in or out their decision set and, in line with previous research on recruitment activities, might only have a small impact on actual behavior in the final stage of recruitment (Uggerslev, Fassina, Kraichy, 2012). Future research could investigate this, for instance, by using a longitudinal design in which real job seekers are being followed throughout the different stages of the job search process. Such a design would allow to not only focus on attitudes shortly after exposure to the information on social media, but also on outcomes in the longer run.

Second, the current dissertation examined the impact of exposure to an organization's social media page as well as to responses to a negative review, however social media can be used in different ways in the recruitment process and little is known about the effectiveness of different tools available. For example, the findings of Chapter 2 indicated that organizations use social media to proactively reach out to applicants and to place job slots on LinkedIn. Future research should examine the effectiveness of (combinations of) other activities on social media, besides having a social media page and responding to negative reviews. Moreover, Chapter 2 showed that organizations use social

media as an additional source next to other recruitment sources. Hence, future research should also investigate whether and how social media influence potential applicants beyond their exposure to other sources. Such research will increase the understanding whether organizations should invest money and time in social media.

Third, an important remaining question in this regard is how potential applicants are using social media in relation to their job search. This topic has received little attention so far (Nikolaou, 2014, and SHRM, 2016). Future research could interview or survey job seekers to find out more in detail whether, when, and how they view and process information about potential employers online. Also knowing how they use social media in combination with other recruitment sources is important to guide future research and practice.

Another important topic that requires further attention is the authenticity of employer branding communication. We did not study whether the communication by the organization reflected reality, even though this might play an important role, especially in the long term (e.g., applicants' satisfaction after hire). On the one hand authenticity should be minded in terms of how organizations communicate on their social media profile. Research suggest it is important to be honest and create the right expectations (e.g., realistic job preview literature; Landis, Earnest, & Allen, 2013). Hence, the employer brand communicated on the page should reflect the reality of working at the organization. Future research can further investigate how such an authentic employer branding can be realized and the related outcomes. On the other hand, the importance of authenticity also relates to company responses to negative reviews. Our results found that a refutation could result in less organizational attractiveness. However, it is necessary to reflect on how honest/authentic a response is as well as the outcomes of a response strategy on the longer term.

Moreover, it is not only recruitment sources and information characteristics that are influencing potential applicants. The effect of social media should be seen in the bigger picture of a broad number of factors that influence individuals' job search and choice (e.g., Chapman et al., 2005; Horvath, 2015; Uggerslev et al., 2012). Ideally, future research should investigate the role of social media in relation to other factors that have been found to influence recruitment outcomes (such as job characteristics, hiring expectancies; Chapman et al., 2005), thus a field study is recommended.

So far, only very little research investigated social media for recruitment and employer branding, while this dissertation adds to the knowledge in this domain, much

more research is necessary. For example, in addition to the effects of social media on the external brand as perceived by potential applicants, it is also of interest for organizations to examine whether and how recruitment and employer branding activities on social media affect the internal brand as perceived and experienced by employees (e.g., De Stobbeleir et al., 2018). Even broader, the way an organization employs social media may influence other stakeholders as well. Hence, future research might benefit from investigating, for instance, whether and how marketing activities on social media influence potential applicants and how recruitment activities influence customers. This may allow different departments within organizations to better coordinate their activities and to create synergies (see Chapter 2).

Other directions worth studying with regard to the link between the internal and external employer brand, are the effects of involving employees on social media (Chapter 2 and 6). One potential outcome might be that social media reduce the distinction between the internal and external employer brand. Future research should examine disparities between internal and external employer brands, the consequences of such disparities, and whether stimulating employees to share information on social media helps to resolve the potential gaps. Further, organizations are also using social media for communication towards and between employees within an organization. Future research should investigate how this can best be employed to support the internal employer brand.

Further, future research might want to investigate how recruiting through social media relates to the quality of the applicant pool, as well as whether the organization is able to attract its target groups (instead of attracting large groups of people in general). As shown by the qualitative study in Chapter 2, social media allow for targeted recruitment. By using this functionality organizations can reach out to potential applicants with the right education, experience, living in the right region, and so on. However for organizations it is important to know what kind of content, design, communication features particularly appeal to their target population. For instance, research might want to look at specific groups of potential applicants to get a more fine grained insight in how to best target certain groups of applicants. The findings in Chapter 2 already indicate that organizations experienced that different platforms are more effective to recruit different types of employees (e.g., to recruit highly trained or senior profiles they preferred LinkedIn).

Finally, in addition to recruitment and employer branding, researchers and organizations might want to consider other ways to reach the goals of hiring and retaining the desired number of employees (De Cort, 2019). A first step could be to adopt a broader

view on who is a potential applicant to a firm. For instance, organizations can employ people who do not yet have the specific skills or knowledge needed, but train them for specific jobs in the organization. Another avenue is to look for solutions to employ people who are in more disadvantaged situations with regard to employment (e.g., people with disabilities, migrants). A further avenue might be to hire in other countries where there is less scarcity of the sought profile (e.g., nurses in Spain; Galbany-Estragués & Nelson, 2016). Interesting research questions could be examining how this can be done best, what the advantages and disadvantages are of these alternative strategies, and what the outcomes are with regard to the individuals as well as in terms of strategic outcomes of organizations.

Practical implications

Here we discuss the general practical implications of the current dissertation. More specific implications are discussed at the end of each empirical chapter.

First, the rise of social media has changed the recruitment landscape. Organizations should develop an employer branding and recruitment strategy and deliberate on how to integrate social media in it. The findings in this dissertation indicate that being active on social media can be used to influence employer brand perceptions, organizational attractiveness, and word-of-mouth intentions. Thus, organizations are recommended to find out on which social media their target population is active and to create a profile and try to get this group to visit the organization's profile.

However, merely creating a page does not automatically result in positive recruitment outcomes. Our findings show that it matters how the organization communicates on its social media profile and how potential applicants perceive the organization is communicating on this profile. Especially, we found evidence that it is beneficial to communicate in a friendly and personal way, as this can relate to organizational attractiveness. Moreover, providing relevant information for people looking for work (e.g., about the company culture, the selection process) can also increase the attitudes towards the organization. Before generating and sharing content, it is important to have a clear understanding what employer value proposition you are aiming for (Schollaert, Van Hoyer, Van Theemsche, & Jacobs, 2017). Additionally, organizations should understand that the way applicants perceive their communication on social media, is seen as signals about the company as an employer. Hence, reflect on the signals that the organization is sending by the way that the organization is communicating on its page. In this sense, a clear strategy and alignment of communication can be beneficial. This

might be reached through a more close collaboration with other departments involved in the use of social media and communication.

Further, it is important that organizations are aware that employees, applicants, and others can share information about these organizations online. Hence, we recommend organizations to monitor what is being said on different social media and review platforms. Our findings show that in case of a negative employer review online, when there is no consensus information available, providing a professional and friendly response can reduce the negative effect of the review. Specifically, but only if the review is indeed not reflecting reality, the organization can deny its content and provide counterevidence for the claims. However, when there is consensus information available, responding does not seem to allow organizations to improve organizational attractiveness. Along these lines, communicating clearly to employees why sharing positive information about the organization and jobs on social media matters and how they can do this (e.g., providing specific trainings), may help improve their contribution in the recruitment process. Organizations might want to think about this and other ways to increase the amount of positive employer reviews about them visible on employer review sites and other social media platforms. This can be done, for example, by cueing into employees motives, such as asking for their help, sharing success stories about the organization, and asking managers to do it as part of the responsibility that comes with their role in the organization.

General conclusion

This doctoral dissertation wanted to provide both researchers and practitioners with more insights into whether and how organizations can use social media for recruitment and employer branding. The findings show that not all organizations are already using social media for recruitment, and that those who do it, use it in different ways or to a different extent. We found that potential applicants' exposure to a social media page can influence organizational attractiveness, employer brand perceptions, and word-of-mouth intentions. Two communication characteristics that play a role in these effects are social media page social presence and informativeness. Finally, we found that providing a professional and friendly response to a negative review can allow organizations to improve organizational attractiveness. However, when a large numbers of reviewers agree in their evaluation of the organization, the effect of company responses seems limited.

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Appendix

There remains some ambiguity when interpreting the studies' designs and findings with regard to the third research question on how social media pages influence applicants' organizational attractiveness and employer brand. More specifically when comparing Chapter 3 and 4, this raises some questions with regard to the role of social presence as well as the relations between social presence, employer brand personality dimensions, and organizational attractiveness. We try to shed more light by discussing these issues more in detail and by performing some additional analyses. A first important aspect that should be taken in account while comparing or contrasting the study presented in Chapter 3 with the one in Chapter 4 and that in Chapter 5 is that they have a different focus. Chapter 3 focuses on the effect of a profile of one organization on social media compared to a control group without social media. In Chapter 4, potential applicants visited one profile of an organization that they considered a potential employer for them (thus many different organizational profiles were included in this study). In Chapter 5, respondents were randomly allocated to one of the four different versions of a fictitious organization's social media profile. Thus instead of only trying to explain the effect of exposure to social media versus no exposure to social media, Chapter 4 and 5 give more insights on how differences in pages (or perceived differences in pages) explain attitudes and intentions.

The communication characteristics social presence was included in the three chapters investigating the effects of social media profiles. Note that in Chapter 3, perceived social presence explained the effect of exposure to one social media page compared to only seeing some recruitment information (not on social media), while Chapter 4 (and Chapter 5) focused on the effects of differences between profiles in terms of perceived social presence. First, we will discuss the relation between social presence and the symbolic employer brand dimensions. Second, we also discuss the relation between the symbolic employer brand dimensions and organizational attractiveness.

Social presence and employer brand personality

An ambiguity with regard to social presence in the current dissertation concerns its relation to warmth and competence. In Chapter 3, we proposed and found that perceived social presence mediates the effect of exposure to the hospital's social media profile on all employer brand dimensions, including prestige and competence (two dimensions we propose to be associated to the dimension of competence in the second study). However, in Chapter 4 we proposed and found that perceived social presence influenced

organizational attractiveness through perceptions of warmth. Relying on signaling theory (Connelly et al., 2011), perceived social presence was proposed and found to relate to warmth, not to competence. However, in Chapter 3, the indirect effect of social media page through perceived social presence on competence and prestige was significant. This raises questions with regard to our conclusion based on Chapter 4, that perceived communication characteristics are interpreted as providing specific signals about the organization as an employer, with perceived social presence relating to organizational warmth and perceived informativeness to organizational competence.

This different finding may be due to differences in study design. First, informativeness was not included in Chapter 3. It is possible that including this variable in the analyses would result in different findings. Second, in Chapter 4, we controlled for prior perceptions of organizational warmth, competence, and attractiveness: the effect was thus examined of communication characteristics on change in these variables, while Chapter 3 did not control for prior measurements. Third, in Chapter 3, we compared the perceptions of people who only saw a recruitment message (they did not visit social media) with the perceptions of people who visited the hospital's social media page. While in Chapter 4, we only assessed the perceptions of respondents who were exposed to a social media page. Thus to make the findings better comparable, we reran the analyses, but only for respondents that were exposed to a social media page in Chapter 3 ($N = 101$). Like in Chapter 3, we used the Process macro in SPSS to test the mediation, but for this subset of respondents. Organizational attractiveness was included as dependent variable, social presence as independent variable, and sincerity, competence, and prestige were included as mediators (as these were dimensions based on which warmth and competence were measured in Chapter 4). The same two control variables were used as in Chapter 3 (applicant group and familiarity). The 95% confidence intervals were computed for 5,000 bootstrapped samples. The results showed that only the confidence interval for the indirect effect of social presence through sincerity did not contain zero ($B = .129$, $CI = [.031; .326]$). The confidence intervals for the effects through competence ($B = .015$, $CI = [-.031; .109]$) and prestige ($B = .002$, $CI = [-.067; .069]$) did. When looking at the direct association of social presence with the three symbolic employer brand dimensions, also there only the relation between social presence and sincerity was significant ($B = .311$, $p = .008$), the relation with competence was marginally significant ($B = .181$, $p = .061$), and the relation with prestige was not significant ($B = .17$, $p = .107$). These findings are more in line with the proposed relationships and findings from Chapter 4 and the view that within social

media profiles, social presence is seen as a signal of organizational warmth.

Employer brand personality and organizational attractiveness

An additional point of discrepancy between Chapter 3 and 4 is the absence (Chapter 3) versus the presence (Chapter 4) of hypothesized relations between employer brand dimensions and organizational attractiveness. In the first study, the employer brand dimensions were included as outcome variables in addition to organizational attractiveness. We did not propose an effect of the employer brand dimensions on organizational attractiveness. While in the second study, our model proposed that the “meta employer brand dimensions” warmth and competence positively relate to organizational attractiveness. In Chapter 5, no employer brand dimensions were included, this is not discussed further here.

The results of the indirect effects tested above using the Process Macro also give information on the direct relations between sincerity, competence, prestige, and organizational attractiveness. These results show that sincerity was significantly positively related to organizational attractiveness ($B = .41, p = .016$), but competence ($B = .08, p = .6$) and prestige ($B = .01, p = .96$) were not. These findings are thus different from Chapter 4 because improved perceptions of organizational competence did not seem to relate to improved attitudes towards the organization as an employer. A possible explanation is that this is due to the specific sample. In Study 1 our sample consisted of nurses (both students as employed nurses), while in Study 2 the sample consisted of final-year students business administration. It might be that perceptions of competence are less important to nurses compared to students business administration, while organizational warmth (or sincerity) may matter to both samples.

English summary

Because of an increasing competition among employers to attract job applicants, organizations started investing in recruitment and employer branding. Organizations are using communication and other activities to create an attractive and distinctive image as perceived by potential applicants. The ultimate goal is to convince them to apply or accept a job offer. One type of communication channels that are increasingly being used to this end during the last few years, are social media. Both organizations and potential applicants are using these platforms. However, there is only little research investigating social media for recruitment and employer branding. The current dissertation examines how and why organizations are using social media, whether and how social media profiles influence potential applicants, and whether and how responding to negative reviews can improve organizational attractiveness. To answer these questions, five empirical studies were conducted.

In a first qualitative study, interviews were conducted with HR managers and employees. On the one hand the focus is on social media as a recruitment tool in general. On the other hand, we look at one specific way in which social media can be employed for recruitment: through involving employees. The results describe how and why organizations are using social media, what barriers still exist, how they are trying to stimulate employees to share content, and how employees experience this. Based on the results, we advise HR professionals to set up more systematic collaborations with the marketing and communication departments and to invest in HR metrics. We also recommend organizations to inform their employees more about how they can contribute to a company's recruitment strategy, and to keying into employees' motives to spread positive information about their employer. Finally, we emphasize the importance of investing in recruitment as a long-term strategy to which all recruitment activities can be aligned.

The second study aims to investigate whether and how nurses' exposure to a hospital's profile on social media affects their perceptions of the hospital's brand and attractiveness as an employer. Additionally, we rely on the media richness theory to explain the mechanisms at play. A between-subjects experimental design is applied. Three conditions are used: a control group, one condition that required visiting the Facebook page of a hospital, and one condition that required visiting the LinkedIn page. The focal organization is an existing hospital which had a LinkedIn and a Facebook page. An online questionnaire was sent to nursing students and employed nurses. The results show that potential applicants' exposure to the hospital's Facebook or LinkedIn page had a

significant positive effect on the majority of the employer brand dimensions, both instrumental and symbolic. In addition, nurses who visited the Facebook page felt more attracted to working at the hospital. Most of these effects were mediated by social presence (i.e., the extent to which the communication is perceived as personal, friendly, and sociable).

The third study examines how potential applicants' exposure to an organization's social media page relates to their subsequent organizational attractiveness perceptions and word-of-mouth intentions. Based on signaling theory and the theory of symbolic attraction, we propose that potential applicants rely on perceived communication characteristics of the social media page (social presence and informativeness) as signals of the organization's employer brand personality (warmth and competence), which in turn relate to organizational attractiveness and word-of-mouth. Data were gathered in a simulated job search process in which final-year students looked for an actual job posting and later visited an actual organization's social media page. In line with our hypotheses, results show that the perceived social presence of a social media page was indirectly positively related to attractiveness and word-of-mouth through its positive association with perceived organizational warmth. Perceived informativeness was indirectly positively related to these outcomes through its positive association with perceived organizational competence. In addition, we found that social presence was also directly positively related to organizational attractiveness. These findings suggest that organizations can use social media pages to manage key recruitment outcomes by signaling their employer brand personality.

The fourth study examines how social media pages can be used to influence potential applicants' attraction. Based on the uses and gratifications theory, this study examines whether organizations can manipulate the communication characteristics informativeness and social presence on their social media page to positively affect organizational attractiveness. Moreover, we investigate whether job applicants' sought gratifications on social media influence these effects. A 2x2 between-subjects experimental design was used. The findings show that organizations can manipulate informativeness and social presence on their social media. The effect of manipulated informativeness on organizational attractiveness depends on the level of manipulated social presence. When social presence was high, informativeness positively affected organizational attractiveness. This positive effect was found regardless of participants' sought utilitarian gratification. Social presence had no significant main effect on organizational attractiveness. There was

some evidence that the effect of social presence differed for different levels of social gratification.

The final study focuses on how companies can deal with negative online employer reviews. Negative online negative reviews about organizations as employers can have a negative impact on potential applicants' organizational attractiveness. However, due to a lack of research, organizations do not know how to manage attitudes after a negative review. Based on attribution theory, we conducted two experimental studies investigating the effect of two response strategies to a negative review on organizational attractiveness: a refutation and an accommodative response. The results of a first study show that a refutation results in higher organizational attractiveness compared to not responding and that this effect is explained by lower review credibility and higher organizational trustworthiness. No difference was found between an accommodative response and no response in terms of organizational attractiveness. A second study shows that when consensus information was added (conceptualized as high agreement amongst a large number of reviews), company responses did not influence organizational attractiveness, regardless whether reviewers agree about the organization as a good or a poor place to work. Overall, the findings imply that responding to a negative employer review can influence potential applicants' perceptions, but when there is high agreement amongst a large number of reviews, an organization's ability to manage organizational attractiveness through responding seems limited.

This doctoral dissertation wants to provide both researchers and practitioners with more insights into whether and how organizations can use social media for recruitment and employer branding. The findings show that not all organizations are already using social media for recruitment, and that those who do it, use it in different ways or to a different extent. We found that potential applicants' exposure to a social media page can influence organizational attractiveness, employer brand perceptions, and word-of-mouth intentions. Two communication characteristics on the social media page that play a role in these effects are social presence and informativeness. Finally, we found that refuting a negative review can allow organizations to improve organizational attractiveness. However, when a large numbers of reviewers agree in their evaluation of the organization, the effect of company responses seems limited.

Dutch summary – Nederlandse samenvatting

Door een toegenomen concurrentie tussen werkgevers om sollicitanten aan te trekken, is de nood ontstaan om te investeren in rekrutering en employer branding (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016; Ployhart, Schmitt, & Tippins, 2017). Dit houdt in dat werkgevers communicatie en andere activiteiten gebruiken om een aantrekkelijk en onderscheidend beeld te creëren in de ogen van potentiële sollicitanten. Het uiteindelijke doel is hen te overtuigen te solliciteren of een jobaanbieding te aanvaarden. Een type communicatiekanalen dat de laatste jaren hier steeds meer voor wordt aangewend, zijn sociale media. Zowel organisaties als potentiële sollicitanten zijn actief op deze kanalen (Nikolaou, 2014; SHRM, 2016). Er is desondanks nog maar weinig onderzoek over de ervaringen van HR managers met deze kanalen. Ook is er weinig geweten over de effecten van de activiteiten op sociale media door een organisatie op de percepties van potentiële sollicitanten. Om bij te dragen aan de kennis over deze communicatiekanalen in een rekruteringscontext, formuleerden we in dit proefschrift vier onderzoeksvragen over het gebruik van sociale media voor rekrutering en employer branding. We bestuderen deze onderzoeksvragen in vijf empirische studies.

Ten eerste verkennen we de ervaringen van organisaties en medewerkers met sociale media in een rekruterings- en employer branding context (Hoofdstuk 2). Een tweede onderzoeksvraag peilt of het profiel van een organisatie op sociale media een invloed kan hebben op organisatieattractiviteit, employer brand percepties en intenties om mond-tot-mond reclame te verspreiden (Hoofdstuk 3 en 4). Ten derde gaan we dieper in op hoe sociale media pagina's deze drie variabelen kunnen beïnvloeden (Hoofdstuk 3, 4 en 5). We focussen hierbij op specifieke communicatiekenmerken. Naast het organisatieprofiel, dat onder controle is van de organisatie, kunnen andere actoren (zoals medewerkers) ook informatie delen over de organisatie als werkgever op sociale media. Een laatste onderzoeksvraag is of het antwoord van een organisatie op een negatieve online review een effect kan hebben op organisatie attractiviteit (Hoofdstuk 6). Hieronder bespreken we kort de vijf studies en we sluiten af met een conclusie.

Empirische studies

In een eerste studie (Hoofdstuk 2) onderzoeken we aan de hand van interviews met HR managers en medewerkers de ervaringen met het gebruik van sociale media als rekruteringsstool. We onderzoeken waarom en hoe organisaties sociale media inzetten voor rekrutering in het algemeen. Daarnaast bekijken we ook één specifieke manier waarop

sociale media kan worden ingezet, namelijk door het betrekken van medewerkers. We bevragen op welke manier organisaties dit doen en hoe medewerkers dit ervaren. Uit de resultaten blijkt dat sociale media verschillende functies aanbieden, waaronder het plaatsen van vacatures en het bereiken van de (unieke) netwerken van medewerkers. Sociale media worden ook ingezet om naambekendheid te creëren. Toch zijn er ook redenen voor organisaties om minder of geen sociale media te gebruiken voor rekrutering, met name de angst om controle te verliezen en de moeilijkheid om de resultaten te staven. De mate waarin sociale media worden ingezet, verschilt sterk tussen organisaties. De verantwoordelijkheid om deze platformen van inhoud te voorzien en ze op te volgen, ligt meestal niet bij HR. Toch zien we in een aantal organisaties een tendens naar meer interdepartementale samenwerking hieromtrent. Gebruik maken van de netwerken van medewerkers is iets wat HR managers als waardevol beschouwen. Een aantal organisaties kiest er dan ook voor om dit te stimuleren: dit gebeurt vaak informeel, maar soms ook met regelmatige formele communicatie. Een deel van de geïnterviewde medewerkers geven aan dat ze de organisatie willen helpen door actief te zijn op sociale media, maar dat ze barrières ervaren waardoor ze het niet doen. Zo denken veel medewerkers hier niet spontaan aan en lijken ze niet goed te weten hoe ze de organisatie kunnen helpen. Ook blijkt er onduidelijkheid over welke activiteit op sociale media mag van de medewerker, wat leidt tot angst. Mensen die het wel al doen, geven aan dat ze dit doen uit fierheid over hun werkgever, omdat ze anderen wilden helpen of vanuit een gevoel van verantwoordelijkheid als leidinggevende. Op basis van de resultaten adviseren we het HR departement een samenwerking uit te bouwen met de andere departementen die sociale media gebruiken, alsook om te investeren in HR-metrics. Verder blijkt het belangrijk om medewerkers beter te informeren over op welke manier hun activiteit op sociale media nuttig kan zijn voor de organisatie. Ook dienen organisaties na te denken over een langetermijnstrategie voor rekrutering.

Verder onderzoekt dit proefschrift het effect van een organisatiepagina op potentiële sollicitanten. In een tweede studie (Hoofdstuk 3) gebruiken we een experimenteel onderzoek waarin verpleegkundigen het profiel van een specifiek ziekenhuis bekijken (op Facebook of op LinkedIn). Vervolgens meten we de employer brand percepties en gepercipieerde attractiviteit van de verpleegkundigen. We vergelijken deze percepties met participanten uit een controlegroep. Uit de resultaten blijkt dat het zien van een sociale media profiel een positief effect kan hebben op employer brand percepties en attractiviteit (hoewel we enkel een significant effect vonden voor Facebook op attractiviteit en niet voor

LinkedIn). Verder vinden we ook dat gepercipieerde social presence, maar niet interactiviteit, het merendeel van de gevonden effecten verklaart. Dit geeft aan dat social presence van belang is voor rekrutering en employer branding via sociale media.

In een derde studie (Hoofdstuk 4) meten we de percepties van laatstejaarsstudenten voor- en nadat ze een potentiële werkgever opzoeken op sociale media (Facebook of LinkedIn). We vinden dat de employer brand percepties (hoe warm en competent de organisatie wordt gezien) verbeteren (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). Na het bezoeken van het sociale media profiel nemen ook de intenties om mond-tot-mond reclame te verspreiden toe, maar gemiddeld genomen daalt organisatieattractiviteit. Op basis van signaaltheorie (Connelly, Certo, Ireland, & Reutze, 2011) onderzoekt deze studie verder ook mogelijke mechanismes waardoor potentiële sollicitanten beïnvloed kunnen worden door sociale media. We vinden dat percepties van kenmerken van communicatie op sociale mediaprofielen kunnen functioneren als signalen van hoe de organisatie is als werkgever, die dan weer relateren aan rekruteringsuitkomsten. Concreet vinden we dat de social presence van de organisatiepagina functioneert als een signaal van warmte en informativiteit en als een signaal van competentie. Zowel warmte als competentie vertonen een positief verband met organisatieattractiviteit als mond-tot-mond intenties

Voorlopig bekijken we enkel gepercipieerde communicatiekenmerken. In een vierde studie (Hoofdstuk 5) manipuleren we social presence en informativiteit van een sociale mediaprofiel (op WeChat) van een fictieve organisatie (hoog/laag). De sample bestaat uit Chinese universiteitsstudenten en alumni. De resultaten tonen aan dat het mogelijk is om deze kenmerken te manipuleren op een profiel. We vinden echter dat alleen gemanipuleerde informativiteit een positief direct effect heeft op organisatieattractiviteit. Toch blijkt ook de gemanipuleerde social presence een rol te spelen, aangezien er een interactie-effect is waarbij informativiteit enkel een positief effect heeft wanneer social presence ook hoog is. Verder bestuderen we in deze studie of de gezochte gratificaties van potentiële sollicitanten (i.e., hun motieven om WeChat te gebruiken) een rol konden spelen. We kijken of, wanneer er een overeenstemming is tussen de gemanipuleerde kenmerken op het profiel van de organisatie en de gezochte gratificaties voor het gebruik van sociale media, dit resulteert in een sterker effect op attractiviteit van de organisatie. Hier werd echter slechts beperkt bewijs voor gevonden: mensen die WeChat helemaal niet gebruikten voor sociale doeleinden, waren minder aangetrokken tot de organisatie in de conditie van hoge social presence. Dit ging echter over een klein aantal respondenten, dus meer onderzoek is nodig om dit resultaat te bevestigen en beter te begrijpen.

Ten slotte bekijken we nog een ander type van informatie op sociale media dat een invloed kan hebben op potentiële sollicitanten, namelijk online werkgeverreviews. Voorgaand onderzoek toont inderdaad aan dat negatieve online reviews een negatief effect kunnen hebben op attractiviteit (Melián-González & Bulchand-Gidumal, 2016; Stockman, Van Hove, & Carpentier, 2017). We willen onderzoeken of organisaties hier iets aan kunnen doen. Daarom onderzoeken we in een vijfde studie (Hoofdstuk 6) het effect van een antwoord gegeven door de organisatie op een negatieve review op de reviewsite Glassdoor. We focussen op twee mogelijke antwoordstrategieën: ontkennen of verontschuldigen, en vergelijken met een situatie waarin geen antwoord gegeven wordt. Uit de resultaten blijkt dat een ontkenning leidt tot een toename in organisatieattractiviteit, maar een verontschuldiging heeft geen effect. De onderliggende mechanismes van het effect van een ontkenning zijn een daling in geloofwaardigheid van de review en een toename in betrouwbaarheid van de organisatie. Verder onderzoeken we ook wat de effecten zijn van deze antwoordstrategieën wanneer het reviewplatform informatie weergeeft waaruit blijkt dat veel reviewers (i.e., 134) dezelfde mening hebben over de organisatie: enerzijds bestuderen we een situatie waarin de gemiddelde score van verschillende reviewers hoog is, anderzijds bestuderen we een situatie waarin deze gemiddelde score laag is. Uit de resultaten van de tweede studie blijkt dat wanneer zulke informatie beschikbaar is, antwoorden geen effect heeft op organisatieattractiviteit.

Conclusie

Dit proefschrift wilt zowel onderzoekers als de praktijk inzichten verlenen in de manier waarop organisaties sociale media kunnen gebruiken voor rekrutering en employer branding en de effecten ervan op potentiële sollicitanten. Uit de resultaten blijkt dat niet alle organisaties al gebruik maken van sociale media en degene die het doen, blijken het in verschillende mate en op verschillende manieren te gebruiken. Verder vinden we dat wanneer potentiële sollicitanten een organisatiepagina op sociale media zien, dit een invloed kan hebben op hun organisatieattractiviteit, employer brand percepties en intenties om mond-tot-mond reclame te verspreiden. De communicatiekenmerken social presence en informativiteit blijken hierbij een rol te spelen. Ten slotte, vinden we dat een ontkenning na een negatieve medewerkers review een organisatie kan helpen haar attractiviteit te verbeteren. Wanneer er echter een groot aantal reviews beschikbaar zijn en de gemiddelde rating duidelijk goed of duidelijk slecht is, dan is er geen effect van een organisatieantwoord op attractiviteit.

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