

Employer Branding in the Digital Age: The Importance of Social Media and Online Reputation Management

Master Seminar Thesis



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List of abbreviations

AI – Artificial Intelligence

EB – Employer Branding

eWOM – Electronic Word of Mouth

WOM – Word of Mouth

B2C – Business-to-Consumer

ORM – Online Reputation Management

Abstract

In light of the rise of social media and individuals' decision-making being influenced by online reviews, employer branding faces new challenges and opportunities. This raises the question of how employer branding can be effectively managed in this digital environment to achieve talent attraction as one of its main objectives. The key research questions of this literature review investigate whether and how owned social media, in the form of corporate social networking profiles, and earned social media, conceptualized as online employer reviews, affect talent attraction and thus employer branding. In addition, the thesis investigates the role of management responses as a form of online reputation management in digital employer branding. To do so, empirical research findings from the areas of marketing, human resources and psychology were analyzed. The findings indicate that owned social media has the potential to positively influence employer branding. Hedonic and functional content can be employed to enhance talent attraction. Additionally, online employer reviews are shown to significantly influence talent attraction and management responses seem to have the capacity to impact employer branding.

Keywords: employer branding, social media, online reviews, online reputation management, talent attraction

1. Introduction

According to the resource-based-view (Wernerfelt 1984), organizations gain sustainable competitive advantage through the utilization of their inherent resources – based on the underlying assumption of heterogeneously distributed resources across firms (Barney 1991, p. 99). Human capital constitutes such a resource. Employer branding (EB), with its primary objectives of talent attraction and employee retention achieved through the internal and external marketing of what makes an organization different and desirable as an employer, constitutes a strategic approach for gaining a competitive advantage and is especially relevant in tight labor markets (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004, pp. 502-504). The advent of social media, for instance in the form of social networking sites and online review platforms, has substantial implications for EB. Nevertheless, research-based knowledge on EB in the digital age remains limited (Yu et al. 2022).

Consequently, questions arise on the effectivity of social media for EB and how social media can be utilized efficiently to leverage talent attraction. Drawing on the established triadic segmentation of media into paid (e.g. television advertising), owned (e.g. company website) and earned media (e.g. online ratings) among marketers (Stephen and Galak 2012, pp. 624-625), the following research questions are formulated: (1) In what way do owned social media in the form of company's social networking profiles influence EB? (2) In what way do earned social media in the form of online employer reviews influence EB? (3) In what way does online reputation management influence EB? The objective of the paper is to investigate the importance of social media and online reputation management (ORM) for EB.

To address these research questions, a literature review approach is employed. Chapter 2 provides the theoretical groundwork for answering the research questions by establishing theoretical foundations in the areas of EB, social media and ORM. Building on this foundation,

chapter 3 and 4 draw on findings from empirical research. Chapter 3 addresses the first research question, while section 4 focuses on the second and third research questions. The thesis concludes with a discussion chapter, which, in addition to practical implications, also highlights limitations and suggests directions for future research.

2. Theoretical Foundations

This chapter provides a theoretical foundation for the following analysis of empirical research literature. It offers a detailed examination of central concepts in the areas of EB, social media and ORM. Thus, it plays a pivotal role in addressing the research questions of this thesis.

2.1 Employer Branding: Definition and Concepts

In this section EB and related concepts are defined and conceptualized. In addition, a marketing-theoretical basis for EB is introduced.

The concept of the employer brand was first described in the literature by Ambler and Barrow (1996). By applying brand management techniques to the field of human resources and drawing on the principles of relationship marketing theory, they defined the concept of the employer brand as “the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company” (Ambler and Barrow 1996, p. 187). In contrast to this definition, which is primarily based on the idea of benefits, Backhaus and Tikoo (2004, p. 502) define the employer brand as “a concept of the firm that differentiates it from its competitors” and that “highlights the unique aspects of the firm’s employment offerings or environment”. Thus, this conceptualization places greater emphasis on a brand’s objective to differentiate itself from others. Based on the marketing-theoretical instrumental-symbolic-framework, employer brands are separated into instrumental and symbolic attributes. While instrumental attributes refer to objective and tangible attributes of an employer (like the wage

policy), symbolic attributes describe subjective and intangible aspects, such as perceiving an employer as prestigious (Carpentier et al. 2017, p. 2698; Lievens and Highhouse 2003, p. 78). Drawing on the work on organizational personality from Slaughter et al. (2004) the set of attributes associated with an employer can be described as employer brand personality (Carpentier, Van Hove, and Weijters 2019, p. 3). Backhaus and Tikoo (2004, p. 502) further posit a clear distinction between the concepts of the employer brand and EB, defining the latter as a “process of building an identifiable and unique employer identity”. Theurer et al. (2018, p. 156) criticize the frequently indistinct differentiation between employer brand and EB made in the literature and emphasize the importance of a clear distinction between these two terms.

A marketing theoretical foundation for EB can be found in brand equity theory. Given that the extant EB literature predominantly employs brand equity concepts as theoretical base (Theurer et al. 2018, p. 157), and that Ambler and Barrow (1996, p. 185) postulate the applicability of branding techniques to the employer brand, this paper will also utilize brand equity theory as a theoretical framework for EB. Brand equity theory is based on the idea that brands consist of various identifiers – such as name, symbol or sign – which enable firms to differentiate their products and services from competitors. Brand equity can be conceptualized as the added value linked to a product or service, which is constituted by a combination of assets and liabilities connected to these brand identifiers (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004, p. 504; Theurer et al. 2018, p. 157). From a company’s perspective, brand equity represents the additional value that accumulates due to the presence of the brand, which would not accrue to an equivalent unbranded product or service (Keller and Lehmann 2006, p. 745). Applying the concept to EB, brand equity theory refers to the effects employer brand knowledge has on potential applicants and employees of the organization. Consequently, employer brand equity as desired outcome of EB initiatives drives applicant attraction as well as employee retention and engagement and

influences the way in which potential applicants and employees react to recruitment and retention efforts (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004, p. 504).

The demonstrated effects of employer brand equity on both potential and current employees indicate the key distinction within the domain of EB, namely the differentiation between internal and external marketing of the employer brand. While external marketing is primarily concerned with attracting the target population and communicating the employer value proposition – a representation of the value the company offers its employees – internal marketing is concerned with integrating the brand promise made to new hires into the company and thus shaping the organizational culture (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004, pp. 502-503). Lievens and Slaughter (2016) apply this distinction to the employer brand and differentiate between the internal and the external employer brand. In addition, they equate the external employer brand with the term of employer image, which can be described as the mental representation of attributes that an external individual associates with an organization as an employer. In a similar approach, the internal employer brand is seen as synonymous with the identity of an organization, which can be constructed as the mental representation of attributes that an organization's insider associates with a firm as an employer. Following the authors' vision of construct clarity, these terms will henceforth be used synonymously throughout the remainder of this paper (Lievens and Slaughter 2016, p. 410).

Organizational attractiveness constitutes a frequently investigated construct in EB research. Applying the holistic view of employer image, which focuses on feelings and attitudes rather than knowledge structures and includes affective components alongside cognitive elements, surface employer image associations can be equated with organizational attractiveness (Collins and Kanar 2014, p. 286; Lievens and Slaughter 2016, p. 412). Summarizing the relationships as postulated by Lievens and Slaughter (2016), it can be concluded that the external employer brand, employer image in the holistic view and organizational attractiveness are

equivalent. While acknowledging the inherent limitations of this relationship, it is nevertheless argued that it provides a legitimate basis for the use of EB literature, which employs organizational attractiveness for operationalization, to address the research questions of this paper.

2.2 Social Media in Employer Branding: Theoretical Perspectives

This chapter presents a theoretical analysis of social media and outlines two dimensions in which social media impact EB.

McFarland and Ployhart (2015) view social media as a diverse set of digital platforms that have had a profound impact on the way people interact, communicate and develop relationships with each other. In more detail, they enable information sharing, content creation and distribution, and collaboration across users (McFarland and Ployhart 2015, p. 1653). These highly interactive platforms are built on web-based or mobile technologies (Kietzmann et al. 2011, p. 241). Social networking sites form a subgroup of social media. They enable individuals to create a profile, to establish a network of connections, and to interact with those connections, as well as with the connections of other users within the network. Two prominent examples of social networking sites are Facebook and LinkedIn, which are among the most used platforms of this group. Other social media, like YouTube, focus on media sharing. Furthermore, online forums where employees can share and unveil information about employers (employer review sites), such as Glassdoor, can also be categorized as social media platforms (McFarland and Ployhart 2015, p. 1654).

It is evident that social media have an influence on EB activities. McFarland and Ployhart (2015, p. 1653) even postulate that they have the “potential to revolutionize [...] a variety of Human Resource (HR) functions, including recruitment”. The following will highlight two dimensions in which social media impact EB. The advent of social media has transformed the way in which individuals process information about employer organizations. These digital platforms give users the ability to freely create, edit, share and exchange content in the

public sphere, which in turn affects how individuals perceive and process such employer related information. As a consequence, an employer brand can be seen as the result of co-creation between internal company sources and external third-party actors (Yu et al. 2022, p. 517). Kietzmann et al. (2011) describe the phenomenon of a democratization of corporate communication. The power over what is being said about a company has been transferred from firm-internals to individuals and communities on social media creating, sharing and consuming information about the respective firm – with or without the firm’s permission (Kietzmann et al. 2011, p. 242). Moreover, social media affect EB by “breaking down information barriers” and thereby reducing information asymmetry between potential employees and the employing organization (McFarland and Ployhart 2015, p. 1663). This can occur via the company’s social media account, representing a company-owned communication channel, which allows potential applicants to gain insight into the employee experience at the firm (Carpentier, Van Hoyer, and Weijters 2019, p. 5). Additionally, channels not owned by the company, such as reviews on employer review sites, contribute to the reduction of information asymmetries. Although the information provided on such forums may not be representative, candidates may nevertheless gain insight into the internal culture of the firm (McFarland and Ployhart 2015, p. 1663). The democratization of corporate communication and the reduction of information asymmetries present challenges for companies in managing the employer brand.

Despite the changes and challenges social media bring to the EB context, they constitute an opportunity to communicate the employer brand. Social networking sites can enhance all three aspects of an employer brand introduced in chapter 2.1 (employer value proposition, external marketing, and internal marketing). The value proposition can be enhanced through the creation of organizational profiles and knowledge sharing on social networking sites. By enabling the targeting of specific audiences, expansion of reach, recruitment of candidates and creation of profiles that represent the company, social networking platforms facilitate external

marketing. Lastly, they support internal marketing through formal and informal interactions with employees and fostering of relationships within the organization (Bondarouk et al. 2014, p. 29).

2.3 Online Reputation Management: Theoretical Perspectives

The aim of this section is to illustrate the importance of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and, more specifically, online reviews in ORM. It builds the theoretical fundament for the second and third research question, which are primarily addressed in chapter 4.

In order to gain an understanding of the field of ORM, it is necessary to provide an explanation for the concept of reputation. There is no uniform definition of reputation. Instead, there is a multitude of conceptualizations (Lange, Lee, and Dai 2011, p. 153). Highhouse et al. (2009, p. 783) understand corporate reputation as an evaluative judgement about a corporation that is global and temporally stable in character, and which is shared by the general public or multiple stakeholders. Although some scholars use the term reputation synonymously with the concept of image (Tkalac Verčič and Sinčić Ćorić 2018, p. 444), the two are distinct but closely related (Lievens and Slaughter 2016, pp. 409-410). Reputation focuses on affective components while the image mainly consists of cognitive elements and only considers affective aspects in the holistic view. Further, reputation is based on a collective evaluation of the general public rather than the view of an individual (Lievens and Slaughter 2016, pp. 409-410). ORM can be defined as “the process of positioning, monitoring, measuring, talking and listening as the organization engages in a transparent and ethical dialogue with its various on-line stakeholders” (Jones, Temperley, and Lima 2009, p. 934). Two core themes within the field of ORM are eWOM and online consumer reviews.

Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) offer a definition of eWOM that is frequently cited in research literature. They describe this construct, which arose through the internet, as any statement, whether positive or negative, made by a prospective, current, or former customer about

a product, service or firm, made publicly available on the internet. In contrast to traditional word-of-mouth (WOM), which occurs in a physical offline setting, eWOM is characterized by features of online communication. Consequently, it reaches a vast audience, is readily accessible as well as persistent and observable, and allows for anonymity (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004, p. 34; King, Racherla, and Bush 2014, p. 170). In light of these characteristics, Kietzmann and Canhoto (2013, p. 147) argue that it is a more powerful phenomenon than WOM. eWOM can manifest in a multitude of forms and occur on a variety of digital platforms. These include discussion forums, social networking sites and product reviews, among others (King, Racherla, and Bush 2014, p. 167). Web-based consumer-opinion platforms as one of the most widely used platforms for eWOM enable users to read other consumers' experiences with a product or company and to contribute as well by writing their own review (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004, pp. 39-40).

Online consumer reviews, as a specific form of eWOM, can be considered as content shared on consumer-opinion platforms (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004). They have a substantial influence on the decision-making-process of individuals (Sunder, Kim, and Yorkston 2019, p. 93). The information provided to consumers through the reviews serves as a valuable source of guidance in decision-making, potentially reducing the influence traditional signals of quality, such as price and brand, have (Hollenbeck 2018, p. 636). The significant importance these reviews hold, enables them not only to complement other forms, such as business-to-consumer (B2C) communication and offline WOM, but also to replace them (Chevalier and Mayzlin 2006, p. 345). In light of the considerable influence and reach of online reviews and associated platforms, organizations see themselves confronted with the increasing complexity of upholding an impeccable online reputation. Managing unfavorable reviews is particularly challenging, as such content cannot be simply deleted in an online setting and companies cannot choose to be exempt from being rated. Consequently, the response to consumer reviews has become a

widely employed tactic in the field of ORM. A management response can be defined as a publicly visible, open-ended text that remains permanently displayed below the review about which it is written (Proserpio and Zervas 2017, p. 645).

3. Empirical Evidence on Owned Social Media in Employer Branding

This chapter takes a primarily empirical approach – combined with the application of selected communication theories – to answer the first research question and examines the extant literature on social media in the field of EB. The impact of social networking sites on EB will be investigated. Chapters 3.2 and 3.3 analyze implications for EB strategies, specifically in the form of the hedonic and functional design of a firm's social media presence and content. To approach the research question, the focus is on the effects of social media on talent attraction, which has been identified as one of the main objectives of EB. This chapter exclusively deals with social networking sites as a subgroup of social media. Its focus lies on company-owned social media conceptualized by employers' profiles on social networking sites (Liadeli, Sotgiu, and Verlegh 2023, p. 406). For the sake of simplicity, the term social media is used in this chapter to refer exclusively to company-owned profiles on social networking sites. Furthermore, the constructs of organizational and employer attractiveness are equated.

3.1 Effects of Social Media on Employer Branding

This section demonstrates the general effects of social media on EB and its role in talent attraction. In addition, signaling theory is introduced as a theoretical foundation of the mechanisms described.

Sivertzen, Nilsen, and Olafsen (2013, p. 473) state that social media are an increasingly important tool in EB and recruiting. By emphasizing that social media allow for a close and yet

informal contact with (potential) employees, Kissel and Büttgen (2015, p. 758) provide a potential explanation for this development.

In an empirical study that focuses on the recruitment of nurses via social media, Carpentier et al. (2017, pp. 2704-2705) demonstrated that exposure to the LinkedIn and Facebook pages of a hospital – in the role of a potential employer – had significant positive effects on several of the investigated employer brand dimensions, including instrumental and symbolic attributes. Additionally, a positive effect of social media on the participants' organizational attraction was found in the Facebook condition of the study (Carpentier et al. 2017, p. 2705). These findings are supported by research conducted by Sivertzen, Nilsen, and Olafsen (2013, p. 473), which revealed that the potential applicants' perception of the use of social media in EB is positively related to corporate reputation and the latter positively links to intentions to apply. Also Kissel and Büttgen (2015, p. 767) demonstrate a positive triadic relationship between corporate image, employer attractiveness and intention to apply. The confirmed relationship between employer attractiveness and intention to apply supports previous findings in EB literature. Further, these findings are complemented by extending them to the social media context (Kissel and Büttgen 2015, p. 770). A theoretical explanation for the linkages between these constructs can be found in signaling theory (Carpentier, Van Hoyer, and Weijters 2019; Kissel and Büttgen 2015).

Signaling theory is used for the analysis of situations in which two parties possess different information sets. Typically the sender of the information has to determine whether and how to send/signal it, while the receiver must decide how to interpret it (Connelly et al. 2011, p. 39). Consequently, central to signaling theory is asymmetric information (Spence 2002, p. 434). Receivers use the information signaled to them for decision-making (Connelly et al. 2011, p. 45). Applying this concept to talent attraction, one can state that potential applicants, in the role of receivers with incomplete information, use signals from the employer to infer the

organization's characteristics and working conditions (Uggerslev, Fassina, and Kraichy 2012, p. 603). Carpentier, Van Hoyer, and Weijters (2019, p. 3) hypothesize that an organization's page on social media is used by potential applicants to derive those signals. This application stands in line with research that found a positive relationship between the exposure and applicants' perceptions of a firm's social networking profile, organizational attractiveness and talent attraction (Carpentier et al. 2017; Kissel and Büttgen 2015; Sivertzen, Nilsen, and Olafsen 2013).

Synthesizing the presented empirical results, social media seem to have the power to influence organizational attractiveness as well as the intention to apply and thus are considered a suitable tool for talent attraction and EB.

3.2 Hedonic Aspects of Social Media Presence

The focus of this chapter is on the hedonic aspects of social media content and its effects on talent attraction. Empirically confirmed mediator effects in the studies presented in 3.1 are discussed and are complemented by further empirical research as well as communication theories. This approach allows the author of this paper to derive specific EB strategies for the social media sphere, which will be presented in chapter 5.

Firstly, the distinction between hedonic and functional content, which will be analyzed in chapter 3.3, needs to be clarified. Lee, Hosanagar, and Nair (2018) distinguish between personality-related (emotional, humorous) and informative content shared on social media. Liadeli, Sotgiu, and Verlegh (2023, p. 408) draw on this and state that owned social media content is classified into functional and hedonic messages in the research literature – functional content provides informative, product-related messages, hedonic content includes emotional and social aspects. This paper applies this categorization in a global way by not only including social media content but the overall presence of the employer, also driven by characteristics of the communication medium itself, on social media.

One aspect of an organization's social media appearance, which the author of this thesis classifies as hedonic in nature, is social presence. Social presence can be described as a feature of communication media that represents "perceptions of humanness, intimacy, and interpersonal warmth, as if interacting with another person" (Allen et al. 2013, p. 274). The very nature of social networking sites implies a great level of social presence, given their objective of connecting individuals and their informal character, which results in a rather personal communication style (Carpentier et al. 2017, p. 2699). As previously outlined, the study conducted by Carpentier et al. (2017), illustrates the positive effects of an organization's social networking page on employer brand dimensions and organizational attractiveness. The effects on almost all studied employer brand dimensions as well as organizational attractiveness were found to be mediated by social presence. The perception of the communication as being warm, personal and friendly – these attributes were used to conceptualize social presence in this study – therefore plays a central role in explaining positive effects of social media on talent attraction. The perception of social presence can be attributed to the characteristics of social media or, additionally, to the content and specific design of an employer's social media presence. In the second case, employers should consider creating content that is perceived as kind and personal (Carpentier et al. 2017, p. 2705).

In a similar vein, Carpentier, Van Hove, and Weijters (2019) investigated the role of social presence in the context of social media and organizational attractiveness. However, they combined social presence with signaling theory and demonstrate that potential applicants utilize social presence as a signal to infer organizational warmth (Carpentier, Van Hove, and Weijters 2019, p. 1). Alongside organizational competence, organizational warmth is a central dimension of employer brand personality (Lievens and Slaughter 2016, p. 412). The study found that higher perceived social presence leads to higher perceptions of organizational warmth. The latter is, in turn, positively associated with organizational attractiveness as well as WOM

intentions (Carpentier, Van Hoyer, and Weijters 2019, p. 9). However, perceived social presence exerts an influence on organizational attractiveness not only through its effect on perceived organizational warmth; it also has a direct impact. In broader terms, the findings indicate that potential applicants use the perceived characteristics of the firm's social media page as signals of an employer's brand personality. Thus, they indicate that firms can utilize their own social networking profiles to communicate their employer brand personality, and thus leverage organizational attractiveness and WOM intentions (Carpentier, Van Hoyer, and Weijters 2019, pp. 10-11). These findings support the insights from Carpentier et al. (2017) regarding the importance of social presence in the context of social media communication. Moreover, they put social presence in a context with employer brand identity and illustrate a positive relationship between social presence and organizational attractiveness. This demonstrates the significance of social presence for talent attraction and extends its role beyond that of a mere mediator.

According to Carpentier et al. (2017, pp. 2698-2699), previous EB literature investigating social presence operationalized it as a dimension of media richness. Consequently, those two concepts seem to be closely connected to one another. The media richness theory posits that certain communication media are inherently richer than others. Richer communication media, such as face-to-face communication, can convey complex issues and facilitate the reduction of equivocality by enabling the overcoming of different frames of reference. Therefore, richer media with integrated feedback mechanisms and multiple cues are used more often in complex organizational settings (Daft and Lengel 1986, p. 560). Based on previous empirical findings, which indicate that richer media messages are able to communicate affect and are perceived as more accurate, credible, and interesting by the receivers, Walker et al. (2009, p. 1355) hypothesize that job seekers attribute higher organizational attractiveness and credibility to an employer when richer media are used for communicating employee testimonials. The researchers conducted a comparative analysis of the effects of presenting employee testimonials using

richer media (video with audio) versus leaner media (picture with text) as a form of recruitment messages on a recruitment web site (Walker et al. 2009, p. 1354). Participants of the study were found to have higher levels of organizational attractiveness and perceived information credibility when testimonials were presented on the web site compared to the condition without testimonials. So, employee testimonials, as a specific form of content, exert a positive influence on organizational attractiveness and credibility. The effect is amplified when rich media is used to communicate the message of the testimonials. This finding can be attributed to the fact that rich media provides potential applicants with more cues to evaluate their compatibility with potential colleagues (Walker et al. 2009, pp. 1360-1361). Although the study is based on recruitment websites, the findings are considered applicable to the social media context in this thesis. This assumption is based on the similarity of features and the level of media richness that these two communication media can convey, which allows a comparable presentation of testimonials as content. Moreover, it is crucial to re-emphasize the close connection between social presence and media richness. As social presence is considered a dimension of media richness, the findings of Walker et al. (2009) align with those of Carpentier et al. (2017) and Carpentier, Van Hoya, and Weijters (2019).

Another research study that the author of this paper categorizes as belonging to the hedonic domain is the one conducted by Kissel and Büttgen (2015). It builds on studies that have demonstrated that social media are suitable for communicating employer brand personality, like the already analyzed work of Carpentier, Van Hoya, and Weijters (2019), but goes one step further by investigating how self-congruity effects regarding the fit between employer brand personality and a jobseeker's self-concept influence organizational attractiveness (Kissel and Büttgen 2015, p. 757). According to Sirgy (1985, p. 195), self-congruity describes the congruity between a person's self-concept and the product image and influences preferences and purchase intentions. Kissel and Büttgen (2015, p. 759) apply this to employer brand personality and state:

the higher the congruence between the jobseeker's self-concept and the perceived employer brand personality, the higher the affinity for the employer. Self-esteem and self-consistency are two underlying aspects of the self-concept (Sirgy 1982, p. 287). Self-esteem and self-consistency needs are satisfied when the employer brand personality of an employer matches the jobseeker's actual or ideal personality. This match increases the perceived attractiveness of the employer (Kissel and Büttgen 2015, p. 759). The empirical study found that higher self-congruity with the employer brand personality leads to more positive employer image perceptions. These perceptions were demonstrated to be positively correlated with organizational attractiveness. Thus, the level of self-congruity affects organizational attractiveness through the mediator of image perceptions (Kissel and Büttgen 2015, pp. 768-769). Finally, it is important to emphasize the established relationship between organizational attractiveness and intentions to apply, which was also confirmed in this study (Kissel and Büttgen 2015, p. 767). A managerial implication that can be derived from these findings is to define a distinct employer brand personality and to communicate it on social media. This constitutes a way to illustrate what the organization stands for as an employer (Kissel and Büttgen 2015, p. 770).

Summarizing these findings, hedonic aspects – including social presence, media richness and self-congruity – can be seen as crucial in driving talent attraction via social media.

3.3 Functional Aspects of Social Media Presence

Functional content on owned social media takes on a primarily informative role (Liadeli, Sotgiu, and Verlegh 2023, p. 408). Carpentier, Van Hoya, and Weijters (2019, p. 1), who studied the impact of perceived employer brand personality on organizational attractiveness and WOM intentions, not only investigated the dimension of organizational warmth but also the domain of organizational competence. The study shows that organizational competence, as one of the two meta-dimensions of employer brand personality, is signaled through the communication characteristic of informativeness (Carpentier, Van Hoya, and Weijters 2019, p.1). The

researchers conceptualize the informativeness of an organization's social media page as the importance and usefulness of the information provided for potential applicants who want to assess the organization as an employer (Carpentier, Van Hoyer, and Weijters 2019, p. 4). The perceived informativeness of an organization's social media page relates positively to the perceived organizational competence of this firm. By providing more relevant information for potential applicants on their social networking account, firms can leverage their perceived organizational competence. Since organizational competence itself is positively linked to organizational attractiveness and WOM intentions, informativeness of content indirectly relates to these outcomes as well. There is an indirect relationship between informativeness and organizational attractiveness as well as WOM intentions through organizational competence (Carpentier, Van Hoyer, and Weijters 2019, pp. 9-11).

Kissel and Büttgen (2015) also investigated the role of informative content on organizational attractiveness but analyzed it through a different mechanism. Their findings suggest that the availability of information on a social media page does not directly affect organizational attractiveness and intentions to apply but is fully mediated by image perceptions (Kissel and Büttgen 2015, pp. 767-768). Kissel and Büttgen (2015, p. 768) confirmed a positive relationship between informativeness and corporate image, while Carpentier, Van Hoyer, and Weijters (2019) confirmed a direct correlation of this construct with organizational competence as an employer brand personality dimension. Although the two studies adopt different approaches, they both conclude that there is an indirect effect between informative content and organizational attractiveness.

Finally, this chapter is complemented by the findings of Liadeli, Sotgiu, and Verleghe (2023), who conducted a meta-analysis investigating the effects of company-owned social media pages on social media engagement and sales. Further, they compared the effects of hedonic and functional content on these outcome variables. Based on their analysis company-owned

social media seem to influence sales stronger than engagement – this contradicts popular beliefs. The authors further specify this result by postulating that hedonic content with an emotional focus is the most effective content-type for generating engagement. In contrast, functional content is best suited for increasing sales (Liadeli, Sotgiu, and Verlegh 2023, p. 406). Despite the fact that the dependent variables in this study have no relation to talent attraction and the paper is not concerned with EB, its insights are still considered valuable for this paper. The selection of an employer is a complex decision with a high level of uncertainty for an individual. Similarly, such complex decisions can be observed in the context of purchasing decisions, which have been studied by Kissel and Büttgen. Information can reduce uncertainty in both decision-settings (Kissel and Büttgen 2015, p. 757). Thus, the results are considered applicable.

In this section the importance of functional content for talent attraction was demonstrated. The functional content type was found to influence organizational attractiveness and thus talent attraction – albeit these effects were indirect.

4. Empirical Evidence on Earned Social Media in Online Reputation Management

This chapter addresses the second and third research question by dealing with earned media in the form of online reviews, as well as active ORM. Section 4.1 focusses on the influences of eWOM in the form of online employer reviews on EB. In 4.2 the influences active management of those reviews can have on organizational attractiveness are investigated. Employer review sites, such as Glassdoor, are the object of interest in this chapter.

4.1 Effects of Online Reviews on Employer Branding

This section examines the impact of online employer reviews on an employer's organizational attractiveness and a potential applicant's intention to apply, based on an analysis of empirical research literature. Given that employer reviews have been categorized under the umbrella of

WOM, the author of this paper views herself as legitimized to also draw on research literature that examines WOM, not online reviews specifically, to answer the second research question. Online employer reviews are defined as evaluations published online by current/former employees or applicants about an organization in an employment context. They may take the form of text, audiovisual content, or ratings (Carpentier and Van Hoyer 2021, p. 275). Consumers rely strongly on ratings in decision-making (Abell, Morgan, and Romero 2024, p. 1), so a negative reputation can impair an employer's ability to recruit a suitable workforce (Kantar, Collins, and Bell 2015, p. 518). Van Hoyer and Lievens (2007b) demonstrate the influence eWOM has on organizational attractiveness by comparing it to the effects that employee testimonials, as a company-dependent recruitment format, have on this outcome variable. eWOM was found to be associated with higher levels of organizational attractiveness. This effect was fully mediated by perceived source credibility (Van Hoyer and Lievens 2007b, pp. 378-379).

There is a consensus in the research literature that positive WOM is positively related to talent attraction. Van Hoyer and Lievens (2009, p. 347) demonstrated that the time potential applicants spend receiving positive WOM is positively associated with a higher organizational attractiveness of an employer, as well as an increased intention to apply. In doing so, the researchers replicate a finding from one of their previous studies, which indicates that positive WOM is positively related to organizational attractiveness (Van Hoyer and Lievens 2007a, p. 2039). Melián-González and Bulchand-Gidumal (2016, pp. 717-718) applied WOM to the online setting and found that participants that were exposed to positive eWOM about an organization perceived this firm as a better place to work and showed a higher intention to apply than those exposed to intermediate or negative eWOM. The research design of this study is perfectly consistent with the subject matter of this chapter, as eWOM was presented on a web page modelled on Glassdoor. Additionally, participants were presented real reviews posted on Glassdoor as eWOM (Melián-González and Bulchand-Gidumal 2016, p. 713). Also Evertz, Kollitz, and

Süß (2021) investigate the effects of online employer reviews on attractiveness outcomes. Their findings suggest that the exposure to positive eWOM on employer review sites enhances the perceived organizational attractiveness of job seekers. Thus, they support the findings of previous research. Further, message and source characteristics of eWOM were found to have a positive effect on organizational attractiveness. eWOM messages with a high argument quality are associated with higher organizational attractiveness than those with low quality. Moreover, job seekers seem to be influenced more by sources with high expertise (current or former employees) than those with lower expertise (applicants) as senders of eWOM. (Evertz, Kollitz, and Süß 2021, pp. 3441-3445).

While the effects of positive employer reviews show great consistency, there is mixed evidence whether negative eWOM affects talent attraction negatively or not (Stockman, Van Hoyer, and Da Motta Veiga 2020, p. 2). For example, the study conducted by Van Hoyer and Lievens (2009, pp. 347-348) did – contrary to a hypothesized negative effect – not reveal a relationship between the time spent receiving negative WOM and organizational attractiveness. Contrary to that, Van Hoyer and Lievens (2007a, p. 2036) find that negative WOM has the potential to significantly decrease perceived organizational attractiveness. The study by Melián-González and Bulchand-Gidumal (2016, pp. 717-718) comes to a similar conclusion, finding that those participants exposed to negative eWOM of a firm did not perceive it as a good place to work, nor did they show an intention to apply. The research by Lee, Hwang, and Yeh (2013) yields similar results. By employing an eye-tracking approach, Yu, Goh, and Kawasaki (2022, pp. 606-607) found that participants spend more time on negative eWOM compared to positive eWOM, which indicates a deeper cognitive processing of the negative message.

Acknowledging the mixed evidence in the field of negative WOM on talent attraction, Stockman, Van Hoyer, and Da Motta Veiga (2020, p. 1) investigate under which conditions negative WOM affects applicants perceptions and decisions. Based on the observation that studies

identifying an effect of negative WOM used fictitious firms in their research design, while those that did not find an effect used existing companies with an established employer brand image, the authors hypothesize that employer brand equity might influence the responses of job seekers to negative WOM (Stockman, Van Hoyer, and Da Motta Veiga 2020, p. 2). The results of the study suggest that employer brand equity – whether positive or negative – moderates the negative effect of negative WOM on the attraction of applicants in such a way that the negative effect is weaker. Employer brand equity, which has been operationalized as knowing and being familiar with an employer, acts as buffer against the effects of negative WOM. Drawing on signaling theory, the buffer effect of brand equity can be explained by a reduced signaling strength of negative WOM due to the existence of prior knowledge about the employer. Despite this finding, negative WOM was still found to affect applicants' attraction to companies with employer brand equity, indicating that other variables might play a role in explaining the mixed evidence in the research literature (Stockman, Van Hoyer, and Da Motta Veiga 2020, pp. 5-7).

Taking the relationship between organizational attractiveness and talent attraction outlined in chapter 3 as given, the research insights can be summarized as follows. Positive eWOM has a positive effect on talent attraction. The negative effect of negative eWOM on talent attraction can be mitigated by employer brand equity. But still, other variables seem to influence this effect.

4.2 Management Responses as an Online Reputation Management Strategy

Management responses on online reviews have already been identified as an ORM strategy (Proserpio and Zervas 2017, p. 645). By employing this strategy, firms transition from passive listening to actively engaging on social media (Ma, Sun, and Kekre 2015). This chapter investigates the effects of management responses on subsequent reviews and organizational attractiveness.

Management responses seem to influence subsequent reviews. Proserpio and Zervas (2017, p. 645), who studied the relationship between the utilization of management responses and an organization's online reputation in the hotel industry, found a different online review pattern when firms use management responses. Besides a larger total number of reviews, the researchers detected an increase in the average star rating and the length of negative reviews after hotels employ management responses. A potential reason for these findings could be the increased costs of writing negative reviews. The authors hypothesize that the knowledge that organizations pay attention to the reviews and respond publicly to them changes the review behavior of individuals. For instance, individuals feel they must leave more detailed negative reviews. Only for some individuals it is worth the effort to write such a detailed review. Others refrain from doing so and won't leave a review at all. Conversely, individuals who are considering leaving a positive review might appreciate the hotel responding to them and are more likely to submit their feedback. Reviewer selection through the use of management responses seems to be the underlying mechanism of the research findings (Proserpio and Zervas 2017, pp. 661-663). Also Wang and Chaudhry (2018, p. 163) find that management responses to negative reviews positively influence subsequent reviews – given that those management responses are visible at the time of reviewing. Responding to positive reviews on the other hand, seems to have a negative effect. Furthermore, the authors find evidence for the moderating role of tailored responses: Tailored management responses amplify the positive effect of responding to negative reviews on subsequent opinion. The opposite effect can be observed in the case of positive reviews. The mechanism underlying this effect is assumed to be a change in the opinion expressed by reviewers, rather than a change in the composition of reviewers (Wang and Chaudhry 2018, p. 174).

A study that focuses on concrete response strategies after a negative employer review and their influence on organizational attractiveness was conducted by Carpentier and Van Hoya

(2021). The effects of a denial as a response strategy, in which the company denies responsibility and provides counterevidence, and the effects of an accommodative response, in which the company takes responsibility and apologizes, were investigated. While there seems to be no difference between providing an accommodative response and not responding, the strategy of denial yields higher organizational attractiveness than the condition of not offering a management response (Carpentier and Van Hoya 2021, p. 274). The effect is explained through review credibility. Denying will negatively affect the credibility of reviews, which will reduce the negative effects of unfavorable reviews on organizational attractiveness (Carpentier and Van Hoya 2021, p. 281). In a second study, in which consensus information in form of an average employer rating was provided alongside the reviews, neither denial nor an accommodative response had a direct effect on organizational attractiveness. Nevertheless, an indirect effect of denial in the condition of a good consensus (high star rating) on organizational attractiveness through organizational trustworthiness was found (Carpentier and Van Hoya 2021, p. 284).

In summary, empirical evidence suggests that management responses can influence subsequent reviews and thus online reputation. Under certain conditions they even have a direct effect on organizational attractiveness.

5. Discussion

This chapter derives practical implications for EB based on the presented research insights. Furthermore, the limitations of this research as well as the literature it is based on are critically evaluated and research gaps are stated.

5.1 Implications for Employer Branding in Practice

Practical implications for the EB practice can be derived from the explanations and findings of this research.

It has been demonstrated that owned social media are a useful tool for talent attraction as a central objective of EB. Employer brand personality and image can be communicated through social media, allowing marketing and human resources professionals to benefit from enhanced organizational attractiveness and increased application intentions among potential job candidates (Carpentier, Van Hoyer, and Weijters 2019, p. 11; Kissel and Büttgen 2015, p. 770). The author of this paper derives that companies should utilize social media in their EB activities. A concrete content strategy is important to make use of social media effectively (Liadeli, Sotgiu, and Verlegh 2023, p. 421). One practical implication revolves around increasing the perceived social presence on a firm's social networking page. This can be achieved by sharing hedonic content that is perceived as personal, warm and kind, and by using friendly language (Carpentier et al. 2017, p. 2705). Additionally, content high in media richness, such as a video, should be used (Walker et al. 2009, p. 1361). The author of this paper further suggests aiming for congruity between the content and the potential applicants' self-concepts. Practically, this means understanding the target group of potential applicants and tailoring content to their self-concepts. In light of the indirect effect of functional content on talent attraction, EB practitioners are further advised to include such content on the firm's social media sites (Kissel and Büttgen 2015, p. 770).

In the field of earned social media, and more specifically online employer reviews, practitioners should try to foster positive eWOM to benefit from its effects on organizational attractiveness and application intentions. Thus, stimulating positive eWOM, for instance by introducing employee referral programs or active image management, constitutes a practical recommendation derived from empirical findings (Van Hoyer and Lievens 2009, p. 349). Negative eWOM should be closely monitored and firms should aim to maintain an accurate image of them as an employer (Stockman, Van Hoyer, and Da Motta Veiga 2020, p. 13). Further, research suggests that companies might consider actively engaging on employer review sites by

providing management responses – especially to negative reviews. This way, they can benefit from an improved online reputation and ratings (Proserpio and Zervas 2017, p. 663). In the case of negative reviews, that do not reflect the truth, companies are advised to employ a management response of denial. However, this strategy is limited in its effect on settings where there is no presentation of a consensus (Carpentier and Van Hove 2021, p. 286). This also contributes to creating and maintaining an accurate image of a company as a potential employer.

5.2 Limitations and Avenues for Future Research

This paper is not without limitations, as is the research literature on which it is founded. Those limitations will be presented alongside research gaps that have been identified.

The limitations of the analyzed research papers primarily concern the research design, the sample and the research focus. The experimental design employed by a part of the studies brings limitations regarding the generalization of the results to real life settings. Also, self-reports that were used in surveys limit the applicability of research findings as they do not constitute an objective measure and are limited in their construct validity (Sivertzen, Nilsen, and Olafsen 2013, p. 480). In addition, the representativity of the samples used in the studies and thus the external validity of the findings is questionable. Students were an often-used group of participants. Also, some studies utilized convenience samples. Regarding the research focus, limitations stem from the focus on specific industries, certain social media platforms, and the cultural environment that were the subjects of the investigations. For instance, the research literature used focuses exclusively on western social media platforms, such as LinkedIn or Facebook. Accordingly, is the cultural context in which the studies were conducted.

In addition to limitations, avenues for future research emerge from the analysis of the research literature. Firstly, the role of social media and ORM is not fully investigated along the whole recruitment process but is limited to the early recruitment stage. Secondly and closely connected to the previous aspect, no long-time effects of social media and ORM in EB practice

were investigated so far. Both aspects deserve scientific investigation. Thirdly, further research is needed regarding the negative effects of negative online employer reviews on talent attraction. Although, employer brand equity provides a partial explanation, other mediating variables remain unclear. Fourthly, EB research is strongly focused on talent attraction and the external employer brand (Tanwar and Prasad 2016, p. 186). Thus, the author of this paper calls for research concerning the effects of social media on employee retention and the internal employer brand.

Additional to the limitations and research gaps of the analyzed literature, this paper itself possesses its limitations. One of them being that the findings are solely based on academic literature written in English. Other sources have been excluded from the analysis. Moreover, research findings on WOM were applied to the digital context of online employer reviews to provide further support for findings in the eWOM context. Given the specific characteristics of online reviews, Evertz, Kollitz, and Süß (2021, p. 3430) view the extent to which such an application is justified as unclear. In a similar manner, research insights regarding the effects of management responses were applied from a non-employment-setting to the employment context. Due to the limited scope of this paper, earned media on social networking sites – for example in form of employee advocacy – were not part of the analysis. Rooted in the same cause, the review exclusively addresses management responses as one form of ORM. Other ORM strategies, such as measuring and monitoring eWOM, are not covered (Jones, Temperley, and Lima 2009, p. 929). Parallel to the focus of research literature, this paper only considers talent attraction and does not examine effects on employee retention. Further, the paper is limited to owned and earned social media and does not contribute to the field of paid media.

6. Conclusion

In summary, this thesis provides a comprehensive overview of the current state of knowledge on EB in the digital age. Social media and ORM were demonstrated to be valuable tools in EB. By responding to the first research question, it was illustrated that EB is indeed affected by owned social media and that the latter can and should be utilized to leverage talent attraction through hedonic and functional content. Social presence in the realm of hedonic content was identified as a key variable for enhancing talent attraction. Additionally, earned social media in the form of online employer reviews – positive or negative in nature – have been shown to influence talent attraction, including applicants' decision-making, and thus research question two was answered. Lastly, the paper provides an answer to the third research question by demonstrating that ORM in the form of management responses has the capacity to positively influence EB – however, its influence is contingent upon certain boundary conditions.

Appendix A: Literature Review Table

The following literature review tables may use direct citations from the respective literature stated in the first column.

Author/s (Year) [Journal]	Research Focus	Theoretical Background	Sample	Method/Analysis	Main Findings
Carpentier and Van Hoyer (2021) [European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management of organizational attractiveness after receiving a negative online employer review • Effects of different response strategies to negative reviews on organizational attractiveness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attribution Theory • Review credibility • Signaling Theory • Online reputation management 	<p>Study 1: n = 142</p> <p>Study 2: n = 205</p> <p>In both studies: employed individuals with American nationality</p>	<p>Study 1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Between-subjects experimental design with 3 conditions (no management response, response strategy of denial, accommodative response strategy) • Procedure: participants were asked to imagine they saw a suitable job opening, afterwards organizational information was provided, and negative Glassdoor review was viewed (here: 3 conditions) 	<p>Study 1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Denial response significantly increased organizational attractiveness compared to no response condition • Effect is mediated by review credibility and organizational trustworthiness

Continues

<p>Carpentier and Van Hoyer (2021) [European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology]</p>				<p>Study 2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 (consensus good/poor) by 3 (no response, denial, accommodative response) experimental between-subjects design • Same materials as in Study 1 <p>Analysis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ANCOVA • Mediation analyses • Bootstrapping method 	<p>Study 2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With good consensus: denial has indirect effect on organizational attractiveness through trustworthiness
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Author/s (Year) [Journal]	Research Focus	Theoretical Background	Sample	Method/Analysis	Main Findings
Carpentier et al. (2017) [Journal of Advanced Nursing]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effects of exposure to hospital's (in the role of an employer) social media profile on nurse's employer brand perceptions and perceived employer attractiveness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social Presence Media Richness Social media in employer branding Interactivity 	<p>n = 212</p> <p>Nursing students (bachelor and postgraduate) from a college in the hospital's region and employed nurses</p> <p>Existing Belgian hospital as employer</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Between-subjects experimental design Online questionnaire was sent to participants 3 conditions. In every condition, participants first read recruitment message. Control condition: participants only receive this message. Facebook condition: received message and are requested to visit hospital's Facebook profile. LinkedIn condition: received message and are requested to visit hospital's LinkedIn profile <p>Analysis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multiple linear regression analysis Bootstrapping method 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exposure to hospital's Facebook or LinkedIn page has positive effect on employer brand dimensions (instrumental, symbolic) Exposure to Facebook page is directly positively related to organizational attractiveness. Exposure to LinkedIn is not. Social Presence mediates effect between social media exposure and employer brand dimensions and between social media exposure and organizational attractiveness. Interactivity does only limited.

Author/s (Year) [Journal]	Research Focus	Theoretical Background	Sample	Method/Analysis	Main Findings
Carpentier, Van Hoya and Weijters (2019) [Journal of Vocational Behavior]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relationship between potential applicant's exposure to an organization's social media page and their perceptions of organizational attractiveness and WOM intentions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Signaling theory Social Presence Theory of symbolic attraction Employer brand personality 	<p>n = 165</p> <p>Final-year Master's students (studying business administration at a Belgian university)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2-stage design (allowed for control for initial perceptions of the organization) <p>Stage 1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants took part in simulated job search process and were asked to search for actual job posting they are interested in. After uploading this job posting, participants rated initial perceptions (organizational attractiveness, WOM intentions, organizational warmth and competence) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social presence of a social media page positively relates to organizational attractiveness and WOM – mediated through its positive relationship to perceived organizational warmth Social presence also directly positively relates to organizational attractiveness Informativeness of a social media page relates indirectly to organizational attractiveness and WOM – through its positive association with perceived organizational competence

Continues

<p>Carpentier, Van Hoya and Weijters (2019) [Journal of Vocational Behavior]</p>				<p>Stage 2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants were randomly assigned to a Facebook or LinkedIn condition and were instructed to visit the respective page • Afterwards they complete a survey assessing their perceptions (social presence and informativeness of social media page, organizational warmth and competence, organizational attractiveness, WOM intentions) <p>Analysis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) • Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) 	
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Author/s (Year) [Journal]	Research Focus	Theoretical Background	Sample	Method/Analysis	Main Findings
Evertz, Kollitz and Süß (2021) [The In- ternational Journal of Human Resource Management]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effects of eWOM on employer review sites on organizational attractiveness • Investigating the influence of message, source and recipient characteristics on the effects of eWOM 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) • eWOM 	<p>n = 386</p> <p>Participants in Germany with heterogeneous experience in job search. Recruitment via various channels (More experienced participants: via recruiting agencies, transfer agencies, university alumni-network. Less experienced participants: via German job board newsletter, schools)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quasi-experiment • 2x2x2 between-subjects factorial design • Experimental variables: argument quality (high, low), source expertise (high, low), job search expertise (high, low) <p>Procedure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants were asked to act as if they were looking for a job • General information about a fictitious company was introduced and participants were asked to rate organizational attractiveness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exposure to positive employer review is positively associated with perceived organizational attraction • Argument quality of eWOM message has positive effect on organizational attraction • Source expertise of eWOM message has positive effect on organizational attraction • For individuals with low job search experience: eWOM from a non-expert source with high argument quality leads to higher organizational attractiveness ratings (compared to low argument quality from expert source) • For individuals with high job search expertise: interaction effect of argument quality and source expertise on organizational attractiveness

Continues

<p>Evertz, Kollitz and Süß (2021) [The International Journal of Human Resource Management]</p>				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Next, participants were randomly assigned to one of 4 experimental conditions, where an online employer review of the fictitious company was presented: (argument quality [high; low] x source expertise [high; low]). The review provided information about working conditions • Job search experience levels were operationalized afterwards • Next, participants rated organizational attractiveness again <p>Analysis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three-way ANOVA 	
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Author/s (Year) [Journal]	Research Focus	Theoretical Background	Sample	Method/Analysis	Main Findings
Kissel and Büttgen (2015) [Journal of Brand Management]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying drivers of employer attractiveness in the social media context Effects of informativeness and self-congruity with the employer/its employees on organizational attractiveness and corporate image Examining the different effects for company-dependent and company-independent social media sites (e.g. Facebook career page vs. XING) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Branding theory Self-congruity theory Informativeness 	<p>Study 1: Company-controlled social media. 30 largest German-language company-controlled career sites on Facebook. Link to questionnaire was posted on these sites. n = 265 German-speaking jobseekers</p> <p>Study 2: Non-company-controlled social media n = 100 (online members from student/graduate platforms focusing on job and career topics; German-speaking)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online questionnaire Perceived available information, self-congruity with the employer brand personality/employee, corporate image, employer attractiveness, and applicant intentions were assessed <p>Study 1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigates effects on company-controlled sites <p>Study 2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigates effect on non-company-controlled sites <p>Analysis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partial least square (PLS) Bootstrapping method 	<p>Study 1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perceived available information on the social media page positively influences corporate image Self-congruity with the organization's employer brand personality relates positively to corporate image Corporate image is positively related to employer attractiveness Organizational attractiveness has a positive effect on application intentions Perceived available information and self-congruity with the employer relate to organizational attractiveness – but only indirectly through corporate image <p>Study 2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Results in line with study 1, but self-congruity with employer personality has a direct effect on organizational attractiveness for company-independent social media

Author/s (Year) [Journal]	Research Focus	Theoretical Background	Sample	Method/Analysis	Main Findings
Lee, Hwang and Yeh (2013) [Journal of Applied Social Psy- chology]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impact of public- ity exposure and the specificity of recruitment ad- vertising on job seeker's percep- tions of organiza- tional attractive- ness and inten- tions to apply 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accessibil- ity-Diag- nosticity model Information integration theory Publicity, WOM 	<p>n = 415</p> <p>Participants were undergrad- uate business administration students</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Experimental 2 x 2 factorial design Experimental varia- bles: publicity (posi- tive/negative), re- cruiting advertise- ment (detailed/gen- eral) Participants were randomly assigned to one of the experi- mental conditions Participants read positive or negative publicity about a fic- titious company. Af- terwards they de- scribed initial atti- tudes towards the or- ganization and their perceived credibility of the publicity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Negative publicity affects in- ital attitude towards the or- ganization more than positive publicity Perceived truthfulness of re- cruiting advertisement posi- tively influences the attitude towards the advertisement Specificity of recruiting ad- vertisement influences the ef- fects of negative publicity on participants: detailed job ad- vertisements weaken the neg- ative effects of negative pub- licity on applicant attraction more than general job adver- tisements. Advertisement specificity moderates effects of negative publicity.

Continues

Lee, Hwang and Yeh (2013) [Journal of Applied Social Psychology]			<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In a second step, participants read detailed or general recruitment advertisement. Afterwards they reported perceived truthfulness of and attitude towards the advertisement, organizational attractiveness, and intentions to apply <p>Analysis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to evaluate distinctiveness of measures• Correlation analysis	
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Author/s (Year) [Journal]	Research Focus	Theoretical Background	Sample	Method/Analysis	Main Findings
Liadeli, Sotgiu and Verlegh (2023) [Journal of Marketing]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact of brands' owned social media on social media engagement and sales • Examining influences of content, brand, industry, platform and culture on the impact organization's social media have (moderators examined) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media engagement • Categorization of content into hedonic and functional • Categorization of brands into utilitarian and hedonic • Categorization into product and service industry • Hofstede's power distance 	<p>Meta-analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on 1,641 elasticities across 86 studies (conducted between 2011 and 2021) • 50 papers cover social media engagement, 37 papers cover sales • The analysis covers 31 industries, 14 platforms, 17 countries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meta-analysis • Using elasticities from primary studies that have investigated the impact of owned social media (when those elasticities were not available: researchers computed them from parameter estimates and descriptive statistics) • 2-step meta-analytical model: (1) Computation of the average owned social media elasticities for each dependent variable and analysis of elasticity distribution; (2) Identification of significant moderators by applying a two-level hierarchical linear meta-analysis model with elasticities nested within papers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media positively affect sales and engagement. The effect on sales is stronger. • Hedonic content (especially emotional content, compared to social content) has a stronger impact on engagement compared to functional content • Functional content has a stronger impact on sales compared to hedonic content • Researchers observed larger sales elasticities for a small brand community size • No significant differences across brand or industry types were found • Owned media on social networking sites stimulates social media engagement more than owned media on microblogs • Mobile phone penetration relates negatively to engagement, but positively to sales

Continues

<p>Liadeli, Sotgiu and Verlegh (2023) [Journal of Marketing]</p>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigated moderating variables: owned social media content (functional, hedonic) and contextual moderators (1) brand characteristics (utilitarian/hedonic, brand community size), (2) industry characteristics (service/product/mixed, new products), (3) platform characteristics (social networks/microblogs/multiple platforms, platform-specific advertising) and (4) country (mobile phone penetration, GDP per capita, power distance) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Owned social media have a stronger effect on sales in countries with a low GDP per capita compared to countries with a higher GDP per capita • Consumers with a high power distance trust branded social media content for sales more to satisfy their needs
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Author/s (Year) [Journal]	Research Focus	Theoretical Background	Sample	Method/Analysis	Main Findings
Melián-González and Bulchand-Gidumal (2016) [International Journal of Man-power]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impact of worker eWOM for HR image, job seeker's intentions and employee's attitudes Effects of positive, intermediate, and negative eWOM on applicant's intentions and employee's attitudes towards the organization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Signaling theory HR image Employer review sites eWOM 	<p>n = 238</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Convenience sample Survey distribution via several channels (e.g. via social networking sites – objectives of the study were posted together with a link to the experiment) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Web-based experiment 3 different types of real worker eWOM, extracted from the review platform Glassdoor, were presented Participants were randomly assigned to one of the 3 conditions: (1) positive, (2) intermediate, and (3) negative eWOM Web-page in the experiment was built similar to Glassdoor For evaluating attitudes of employees, participants were asked to assume the role of employees of the organization in question. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants exposed to positive worker eWOM perceived the presented company as a good place to work, the group exposed to negative worker eWOM did not evaluate it as such. The difference in employer attractiveness is significant. Participants exposed to positive worker eWOM showed higher interest to apply at that company than those exposed to negative worker eWOM. A positive external image resulted from positive worker eWOM, a negative one from negative worker eWOM

Continues

Melián-González and Bulchand-Gidumal (2016) [International Journal of Man-power]				Analysis: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) to test differences among the conditions regarding intentions and attitudes towards the organization	
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Author/s (Year) [Journal]	Research Focus	Theoretical Background	Sample	Method/Analysis	Main Findings
Proserpio and Zervas (2017) [Marketing Science]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relationship between an organization's utilization of management responses on online reviews and its online reputation (for the platform TripAdvisor) Impact of employing management responses on subsequent reviews Effectiveness of management responses in improving online ratings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online reputation management Management responses Signaling Theory 	<p>(Initial) TripAdvisor sample:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> n = 5,356 Texas hotels on TripAdvisor n = 314,776 reviews on TripAdvisor <p>(Initial) Expedia sample:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> n = 3,845 Texas hotels on Expedia n = 519,962 reviews on Expedia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collection and matching of review data from the platforms TripAdvisor and Expedia for Texas hotels Sample without management responses on Expedia acts as a control Difference-in-Difference (DD) approach to assess effects of management responses on Tripadvisor reviews Cross-platform DD Strategy: matched reviews on both platforms are used, Expedia ratings act as baseline. Examining changes in ratings on TripAdvisor after starting to respond. <p>Analysis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regression analyses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using management responses leads to an increase in average star rating Using management responses leads to an increase in review volume Using management responses leads to fewer, yet longer negative reviews

Continues

Proserpio and Zervas (2017) [Marketing Science]		Effective sample of matched ho- tels across TripAdvisor and Expedia: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• n = 3,264 ho- tels reviewed on both sites• n = 806,342 reviews Subset of the ef- fective sample that excludes hotels that pro- vided manage- ment responses on Expedia: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• n = 2,697 ho- tels• n = 552,051 reviews	
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Author/s (Year) [Journal]	Research Focus	Theoretical Background	Sample	Method/Analysis	Main Findings
Sivertzen, Nilsen and Olafsen (2013) [Journal of Product and Brand Management]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Factors to focus on in employer brandings strategies • Investigating the relationship between employer attractiveness and social media usage in employer branding in relation to corporate reputation and application intentions • Influences of social media in employer branding on reputation and application intentions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employer attractiveness scale developed by Berthon et al. • Resource-based view 	n = 366 answers 184 Norwegian engineering students from 3 higher education institutions participated in the study. They were able to submit up to 3 answers (for the 3 employers studied)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electronic questionnaire surveyed participants about 3 well-known Norwegian engineering firms (potential employer) • Participants were asked how familiar they are with the presented firms and to only answer the questions related to the firms they are familiar with. (They were able to submit up to 3 answers) • Employer attractiveness was conceptualized by employer attractiveness scale <p>Analysis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structural equation modelling (SEM) to test the proposed model • Bootstrapping method 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Several employer attributes (specifically psychological value, application value, use of social media) relate positively to corporate reputation • Use of social media relates positively to corporate reputation • Corporate Reputation relates positively to intentions to apply

Author/s (Year) [Journal]	Research Focus	Theoretical Background	Sample	Method/Analysis	Main Findings
Stockman, Van Hoyer and Da Motta Veiga (2020) [Journal of Vocational Behavior]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Negative impact of negative WOM on applicant attraction and the moderating effect of employer brand equity Signaling strength of negative WOM on talent attraction and potential applicant's decision making Exploring factors that influence negative WOM's signaling strength 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Signaling theory Brand equity theory WOM 	<p>Study 1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> n = 276 business administration students of a Belgian university in their second or third Bachelor year. Students took part in a class about recruitment and selection tests 	<p>Study 1 (quantitative):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 x 2 between-subjects experimental design Participants were randomly assigned to one of 6 conditions Independent variables: negative WOM (yes/no), employer brand equity (positive, negative, no employer brand equity) Dependent variable: applicant attraction WOM operationalized by online employer review that was shown Retail chains were presented as employers 	<p>Study 1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employer brand equity moderates the effect of negative WOM and applicant attraction (it acts as a buffer) The negative effect of negative WOM is weaker when the company is well-known (positive or negative brand equity) compared to companies without brand equity (when the organization is unknown)

Continues

<p>Stockman, Van Hoya and Da Motta Veiga (2020) [Journal of Vocational Behavior]</p>			<p>Study 2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • n = 32 Belgian job seekers (recently graduated job seekers, unemployed job seekers with prior work experience, employed job seekers) 	<p>Analysis study 1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moderated hierarchical regression analysis. Applicant attraction as dependent variable <p>Study 2 (qualitative):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Semi-structured face-to-face interviews • Examining how actual job seekers react to negative WOM during the job search process and the role employer brand equity plays. The role of negative WOM on social media was addressed. A Glassdoor employer review was used as an example of negative WOM. <p>Analysis study 2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abductive coding process 	<p>Study 2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extends buffer effect of employer brand equity to application intentions: Employer brand equity also buffers against negative effects of negative WOM on application and job choice decisions • Prior knowledge about an employer influences job seeker's reactions to WOM: When job seekers have positive prior knowledge about an employer, the majority would still apply after receiving negative WOM. • Job seekers are more open to negative WOM if it is consistent with their prior knowledge • Other contingency variables (consensus, verification, direct experience) influence the signaling strength of negative WOM – especially when no prior knowledge is given
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Author/s (Year) [Journal]	Research Focus	Theoretical Background	Sample	Method/Analysis	Main Findings
Van Hoyer and Lievens (2007a) [Journal of Applied Social Psychology]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact of WOM communication on perceived organizational attractiveness of potential applicants • Effect of WOM on recruitment advertising • Investigation of moderating variables and determinants that influence the effects of WOM 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessibility-Diagnosticity model • Normative social influences and informational social influences • WOM • Recruitment sources • Credibility 	<p>n = 171</p> <p>Graduate students in industrial/organizational psychology from a Belgian university</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2x2x2 between-subjects factorial design • Experimental variables: WOM (positive/negative), order of information sources (WOM presented prior/after recruitment advertising), tie strength (weak/strong) • Participants were randomly assigned to one of the 8 conditions and were exposed to WOM and recruitment advertising. A control group was exposed exclusively to a recruitment advertisement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WOM (positive or negative) has a strong impact on organizational attractiveness • Positive WOM has a more positive effect on organizational attractiveness than negative WOM • Negative WOM decreased the effect of recruitment advertising on organizational attractiveness. Positive WOM does not significantly increase it • WOM (positive or negative) received from a strong tie is perceived as more credible and has stronger positive effect on organizational attractiveness than WOM from a weak tie • Effect of WOM on organizational attractiveness is partially mediated by the credibility of recruitment advertising, but not by the credibility of WOM

Continues

<p>Van Hoya and Lievens (2007a) [Journal of Applied Social Psychology]</p>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After being exposed to the second information source, participants answered a questionnaire assessing organizational attractiveness, credibility of WOM and recruitment advertising and self-monitoring • WOM was operationalized by a casual conversation between 2 people about an employer; presented as video • Recruitment advertising was presented as printed job advertisement • A fictitious company was used <p>Analysis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent-sample t-tests • Four-way ANOVA • Regression analyses • Mediation analyses 	
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Author/s (Year) [Journal]	Research Focus	Theoretical Background	Sample	Method/Analysis	Main Findings
Van Hoyer and Lievens (2007b) [International Journal of Selection and Assessment]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effects of web-based employee testimonials and eWOM on organizational attraction • Comparing the effects of company-dependent and company-independent online recruitment sources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Source-credibility framework 	<p>n = 108 nurses following a graduate nursing management program at a Belgian university</p> <p>Sample was drawn from the population of potential applicants for a head nurse or nursing manager role</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Web-based recruitment simulation followed by a questionnaire • 2 x 2 between-subjects factorial design • Experimental variables: recruitment source (web-based employee testimonial/eWOM) and recruitment message (organization/individual) • Participants were randomly assigned to one of the 4 conditions • Participants were instructed to visit the website of a fictitious hospital. The job page of the website promoted a vacant head nurse position. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • eWOM (company-independent) is associated with higher levels of organizational attractiveness and perceived credibility than web-based employee testimonials (company-dependent) • Effect of recruitment source on organizational attractiveness is mediated by credibility • Content of the recruitment message (focus on the organization/individual employees) moderates the effects of the recruitment source • Employee testimonials are associated with higher levels of organizational attractiveness and intention to apply when focusing on individual individuals rather than on the organization

Continues

<p>Van Hoyer and Lievens (2007b) [International Journal of Selection and Assessment]</p>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After viewing the website, half of the participants was presented an employee-testimonial, the other half received WOM from a friend not employed at the hospital. In both cases: either the organization or the employee was described by the message <p>Analysis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) • Logistic regression analysis • Mediation analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • eWOM is associated with higher levels of organizational attractiveness and intention to apply when focusing on the organization rather than individual employees
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Author/s (Year) [Journal]	Research Focus	Theoretical Background	Sample	Method/Analysis	Main Findings
Van Hoyer and Lievens (2009) [Journal of Applied Psychology]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigation of WOM as company-independent recruitment source Investigation of the determinants and outcomes of WOM – especially in the early stages of the recruitment process Effects of WOM on organizational attractiveness and application decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recipient-source framework WOM Accessibility-diagnosticity model 	<p>n = 612 potential applicants</p> <p>Participants were targeted by the Belgian army</p> <p>Visitors of the job page on the Belgian Defence's website were invited to participate in the study about the Belgian Defence as an employer</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online questionnaire Variables assessed: extraversion, conscientiousness, source expertise, tie strength, time spent receiving positive/negative WOM, organizational attractiveness, application decisions <p>Analysis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regression analyses Hierarchical regression analyses Correlation analyses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential applicants high in extraversion and conscientiousness spend more time receiving positive WOM Source expertise and tie strength are positively related to receiving positive WOM Conscientiousness and source expertise are determinants of receiving negative WOM Receiving positive WOM early in the recruitment process is positively related to perceived organizational attractiveness and actual applicant decisions Time spent receiving negative WOM early in the recruitment process does not significantly predict perceived organizational attractiveness or application decisions

Author/s (Year) [Journal]	Research Focus	Theoretical Background	Sample	Method/Analysis	Main Findings
Walker et al. (2009) [Journal of Applied Psychology]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effects of displaying employee testimonials on recruitment websites on job seeker's perceptions of organizational attractiveness and information credibility • Effects of richer media being used to communicate testimonials on job seeker's perceptions of organizational attractiveness and information credibility • Interaction between race of job seekers and race of testimonial 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media-Richness-Theory • Social identity theory • Similarity-Attraction paradigm • Persuasive communication and recruiting models 	<p>n = 546</p> <p>students enrolled in upper-level management courses from one predominantly white university and three historically black universities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2x3x2 quasi-experimental design • Experimental variables: participant race (black/white), representation of racial minorities in employee testimonials (low/medium/high), communication medium (low media richness/high media richness) • Low media richness was conceptualized with a picture and written text. High media richness with a video including audio • Dependent variables: organizational attractiveness, perceived credibility of recruitment web site information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Including testimonials on the recruitment web site led to higher organizational attractiveness and higher perceived credibility of information • Testimonials delivered via media high in richness are rated higher in attractiveness and information credibility ratings than those delivered via media low in richness • Black participants respond more favourably while white participants responded more negatively to the organization as the proportion of minorities represented in the testimonials increases • The use of richer media attenuates this racial effect

Continues

Walker et al. (2009) [Journal of Applied Psychology]			<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participants were asked to evaluate a fictitious company's recruitment web site and to take on the role of a job seeker. Afterwards, participants answered questions regarding their reactions to the web page and the firm as a potential employer <p>Analysis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Multivariate analysis of covariance (MANOVA)• Univariate analysis of covariance (ANCOVA)• Hierarchical regression analyses• Post-hoc analyses	
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Author/s (Year) [Journal]	Research Focus	Theoretical Background	Sample	Method/Analysis	Main Findings
Wang and Chaudhry (2018) [Journal of Marketing Research]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Externalities of managers' responses to online reviews on travel websites • Effects of public management responses on subsequent reviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • eWOM • Online reputation management • Management responses 	<p>Entire database:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More than 20 million hotel reviews • Review ratings, texts, and management responses are collected on hotel review site (TripAdvisor) and hotel booking sites (Expedia, Hotels.com, Orbitz) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross-platform difference-in-differences identification strategy is used to demonstrate that the observability of management reviews at the time of reviewing can be a boundary condition to the impact of management responses on subsequent reviews • A within-Tripadvisor identification strategy is employed to estimate the effects of management responses on subsequent reviews • Analysis of reviews and management responses is used to identify the existence of different response tailoring strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management reviews (that are observable at the time of reviewing) on negative reviews positively influence subsequent opinion • Management reviews (that are observable at the time of reviewing) on positive reviews negatively influence subsequent opinion • Tailored management responses amplify these positive/negative effects on subsequent opinion. Tailored responses act as a moderator. • Observability of management responses at the time of reviewing is crucial for their impact

Continues

Wang and Chaudhry (2018) [Journal of Marketing Research]			Matched hotels with corresponding TripAdvisor hotel: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 15,824 for Expedia• 15,552 for Hotels.com• 12,591 for Orbitz	Analysis: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Difference-in-differences• Moderator analysis	
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Author/s (Year) [Journal]	Research Focus	Theoretical Background	Sample	Method/Analysis	Main Findings
Yu, Goh and Kawasaki (2022) [Human Resource Management]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cognitive processing of eWOM about jobs and employers on social media • Factors influencing job seekers' cognitive processing of eWOM • Factors influencing the perceived credibility of eWOM as a source of employer information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elaboration-Likelihood-Model (ELM) • eWOM • Negativity bias • Employer brand knowledge • Information credibility 	<p>Total number of participants: n = 181</p> <p>Pilot test sample: n = 12</p> <p>Study 1 sample: n = 49 (excluded one drop-out)</p> <p>Study 2 sample: n = 119</p> <p>Undergraduate students from an English-speaking Asian university</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eye-tracking methodology <p>Study 1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants view a series of 15 employer reviews (based on actual Glassdoor reviews) and were instructed to read them carefully to learn about the employer. Participant's eye movements were tracked to determine the amount of attention and cognitive processing paid to positive/negative eWOM 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants spend more time processing negative eWOM compared to positive eWOM • Pre-existing familiarity with an employer is related to increased time spent on positive and negative eWOM • Active job seekers inspect negative eWOM more carefully when the employer has a negative reputation. Contrary to that are the findings for the case of a positive reputation. • Credibility of eWOM depends on the reputation and the job search effort of the individual

Continues

<p>Yu, Goh and Kawasaki (2022) [Human Resource Management]</p>			<p>Study 2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Again, an eye-tracking-approach was used • Participants first rated their familiarity and reputation about the employer, then the same eye-tracking-procedure as in study 1 was conducted. • Afterwards, participants answered questions about job search effort, credibility of eWOM, and demographics <p>Analysis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multilevel Modeling (MLM) • Multilevel Regression • Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) 	
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Appendix B: Comparative Literature Table

Citation	Theoretical Background			Empirical Findings					
	Employer Branding	Social Media	ORM	Owned Social Media in Employer Branding			Earned Social Media in Employer Branding		
				Effects of Social Media	Hedonic Aspects	Functional Aspects	Online Employer Reviews	Management Responses	
							Positive eWOM	Negative eWOM	Subsequent Reviews
									Response Strategies
This thesis	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Carpentier and Van Hoya (2021)			x						x
Carpentier et al. (2017)	x	x		x	x				
Carpentier, Van Hoya and Weijters (2019)	x	x	x		x	x			
Evertz, Kollitz and Süß (2021)			x				x		
Kissel and Büttgen (2015)	x	x		x	x	x			
Lee, Hwang and Yeh (2013) ¹							x	x	
Liadeli, Sotgiu and Verlegh (2023) ²		x			x	x			
Melián-González and Bulchand-Gidumal (2016)	x		x				x	x	
Proserpio and Zervas (2017) ²			x						x
Sivertzen, Nilsen and Olafsen (2013)	x	x		x					
Stockman, Van Hoya and Da Motta Veiga (2020)	x		x					x	
Van Hoya and Lievens (2007a)			x				x	x	
Van Hoya and Lievens (2007b)			x				x	x	
Van Hoya and Lievens (2009)			x				x	x	
Walker et al. (2009) ³					x				
Wang and Chaudhry (2018) ²			x						x
Yu, Goh and Kawasaki (2022)			x				x	x	

¹ The content of this paper was applied to eWOM in this thesis.

² The content of this paper was applied to the employer branding context in this thesis.

³ The content of this paper was applied to the social media context in this thesis.

Appendix C: Reflection on the Use of Artificial Intelligence

This paper employed artificial intelligence (AI) for assistance. This section discloses in what way AI was used. Discovered limitations of AI, based on the author's own experiences, are highlighted. In consultation with the advisor of this paper, chat histories and prompts are not provided by submitting screenshots. Instead, the following explanations are considered legitimate to make the use of AI in this paper transparent.

One of the AI tools used in this thesis is ChatGPT. In the very beginning of the research process, ChatGPT was used to create a first rough draft for an outline. Information concerning the topic and the aim of the paper was provided to the tool. Albeit the AI created a comprehensive outline and provided first ideas for research areas, it was not detailed enough and lacked focus. It was based on very generic topics not tailored towards the research focus and aim of this thesis. Consequently, the author of this paper did not employ this AI-generated outline for the thesis. Instead, the author developed an outline through familiarization with the research topic and by reading scientific literature. This approach allowed to gain an increasingly in-depth understanding and made it possible to further narrow down the research topic. In addition to that, ChatGPT was used during the literature research process. Scientific literature was uploaded to ChatGPT with the instruction to analyze the content of the paper. This way, a broad overview of what the paper deals with was provided. Although sometimes helpful for getting a first glimpse of a source and assisting in deciding whether to allocate further time to read it, the information provided was occasionally found to be inaccurate. Thus, the author abandoned this approach after ChatGPT repeatedly provided false statements. One purpose ChatGPT was found to be helpful for was the correction of sentence structures, which was used during the writing phase to improve grammatical accuracy. Sentences written by the author were uploaded to ChatGPT with the instruction to correct any grammatical mistakes.

Another tool that supported the writing process is DeepL write. The AI-based tool was mainly used for inspiration regarding sentence structure and for finding synonyms to improve the vividness of the paper. Furthermore, grammatical mistakes were corrected with this tool. The AI tools utilized during the writing process were applied throughout the whole paper for occasional assistance in sentence correction and inspiration for sentence structure. It is crucial to emphasize that the author provided the AI tools with self-developed sentences and that the main reason for AI usage lies in the objective of achieving grammatical flawlessness. If AI tools were used for inspirational purposes, the sentences provided were critically evaluated.

The last AI tool that was employed in this thesis is an integrated AI assistant in Adobe. This assistant is – similarly to ChatGPT – based on a chat function. The Adobe AI assistant was exclusively used to create the literature review table in appendix A. The author uploaded a paper that was to be analyzed into Adobe. With the help of the AI assistant relevant parts of the paper were extracted. The author instructed the AI assistant to find information on the categories in the literature review table (research focus, theoretical background, sample, method/analysis, main findings) by analyzing the uploaded document. Compared to ChatGPT, this AI tool was found to be helpful in analyzing research literature. One reason for this is that the Adobe AI provides exact information about the sources of its answers by highlighting text passages in the uploaded document. This way, information provided by the AI tool can be easily attributed to a text passage. Furthermore, the information provided by the Adobe AI was more accurate and closer to the actual content of the literature compared to ChatGPT. Nevertheless, the answers provided by the tool were not blindly adopted. The tool was rather used to shorten the search process for specific information within a literature source and the highlighted text passages constitute a valuable aid for that.

It can be concluded that AI was found a helpful technology in sentence correction and (in the case of the Adobe AI assistant) to search for specific information within literature.

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