

Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf
Wirtschaftswissenschaftliche Fakultät

**Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation in der Rekrutierung –
Empirische Analysen zu Ursachen und Wirkungen**

INAUGURAL-DISSERTATION
ZUR ERLANGUNG DES AKADEMISCHEN GRADES
„DOKTOR DER WIRTSCHAFTSWISSENSCHAFT“
(DOCTOR RERUM POLITICARUM – DR. RER. POL.)
AN DER WIRTSCHAFTSWISSENSCHAFTLICHEN FAKULTÄT
DER HEINRICH-HEINE-UNIVERSITÄT DÜSSELDORF

eingereicht im September 2021

von

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Diese Arbeit wurde als Dissertation von der Wirtschaftswissenschaftlichen
Fakultät der Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf angenommen.

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Datum der Disputation: 08. Dezember 2021

Danksagung

Im Entstehungsprozess der vorliegenden Arbeit haben einige Menschen eine entscheidende Rolle gespielt. Ihnen möchte ich an dieser Stelle von ganzem Herzen danken.

Mein größter Dank gilt meinem Doktorvater Univ.-Prof. Dr. Stefan Süß. Er war es, der diese Arbeit überhaupt erst ermöglicht hat und mich zu jeder Zeit sowohl fachlich als auch zwischenmenschlich unterstützt hat. Stefan, ich danke Dir für alles, was ich von Dir lernen durfte, sowie für die stets hervorragende Betreuung und die äußerst bereichernde Zeit der Zusammenarbeit. Auch dass man mit seinem Doktorvater so viel gemeinsam lachen kann, ist gewiss keine Selbstverständlichkeit.

Jun.-Prof. Dr. Marius Wehner danke ich für die Übernahme und schnelle Erstellung des Zweitgutachtens.

Die im Rahmen dieser Arbeit durchgeführten Studien wären ohne die Unterstützung einer Vielzahl von Studienteilnehmern nicht möglich gewesen. Mein Dank gilt daher all den Personen, die sich die Zeit genommen haben, an meinen Studien teilzunehmen und diese zu unterstützen.

Des Weiteren danke ich allen wissenschaftlichen Hilfskräften und Mitarbeitern des Lehrstuhls für ihre Kollegialität, Unterstützung und den fachlichen Austausch. Insbesondere gilt mein Dank meinen sehr geschätzten Kollegen und Co-Autoren, Prof. Dr. Lena Evertz und PD Dr. Sascha Ruhle, die zur Verwirklichung diverser Aufsatzprojekte beigetragen haben und stets ein offenes Ohr für mich hatten. Es war mir immer eine große Freude, mit Euch zu diskutieren und zusammenzuarbeiten. Dank gilt an dieser Stelle auch meiner Co-Autorin Dr. Annika Wilhelmy, die mich im Rahmen eines Aufsatzprojekts tatkräftig unterstützt hat.

Ferner möchte ich meinen langjährigen Weggefährten Dr. Sarah Altmann, Dr. Stefanie Faupel, Dr. Ingo Klingenberg, René Schmoll und Ines Wulf meinen Dank aussprechen. Ihr seid mir sehr ans Herz gewachsen und es war mir eine Ehre, den Weg gemeinsam mit Euch zu gehen.

Neben den Personen im beruflichen Umfeld hat natürlich auch meine Familie zur Entstehung der vorliegenden Arbeit beigetragen, indem sie mir unterstützend mit Rat und Tat zur Seite gestanden hat. In diesem Sinne danke ich meinen wunderbaren Eltern, Jeanine Rausch und Uwe Kollitz, für ihre Unterstützung und ihren stets liebevollen Umgang mit ihrem durch sein Promotionsvorhaben sehr geforderten Sohn. Dank gilt darüber hinaus meinen Großeltern, insbesondere Erika und Gert Rausch, die über all die Jahre zur Verwirklichung meiner Studienziele beigetragen haben.

Schließlich möchte ich noch meiner langjährigen Partnerin Camilla Sellner für ihre Unterstützung und ihr Verständnis danken. Camilla, Du hast mich in den letzten Jahren sowohl durch Hoch- als auch Tiefphasen begleitet und mir die Kraft gegeben, mein Ziel zu erreichen. Ich werde Dir immer dankbar dafür sein und hoffe, dass ich Dir in den kommenden Jahren eine ebenso große Stütze sein kann, wie du sie mir warst.

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Abkürzungsverzeichnis

Abb.	Abbildung
AIC	Akaike information criterion
ANOVA	analysis of variance
AQ	argument quality
BCH	Bolck, Croon und Hagaraars
BIC	Bayesian information criterion
CA	corrective action
ca.	circa
CEOs	chief executive officers
CFA	confirmatory factor analysis
CFI	comparative fit index
CI	confidence interval
df	degrees of freedom
ELM	elaboration likelihood model
ENESER	european network of selection researchers
EOR	evasion of responsibility
eWOM	electronic word-of-mouth
e.g.	exempli gratia (zum Beispiel)
E#	employer #
Fig.	figure
GC	general characteristics
GM	grand mean
HR	human resources
IMDb	internet movie database
IRT	image repair theory
i.e.	id est
JSE	job search experience
Kap.	Kapitel
korr. R^2	korrigiertes R^2
LL	model log-likelihood
M	Mittelwert/mean
MIMIC	multiple-indicator-multiple-cause
Mort.	mortification

MS	mean squares
n	Stichprobengröße
No.	number
n. s.	no significant differences across all sets
NR	no response
OA	organizational attraction
OR	odds ratio
o. H.	ohne Heftnummer
o. Jg.	ohne Jahrgang
part. η^2	partial eta-squared (partielltes Eta-Quadrat)
p.	page (Seite)
P-O	person-organization
P-J	person-job
RMSEA	root mean square error of approximation
RO	reducing offensiveness
RQ	research question
SABIC	sample-size adjusted Bayesian information criterion
SD	Standardabweichung/standard deviation
SE	source expertise
SEC	standard error of the coefficient
sig.	signifikant/significant
SMEs	subject matter experts
SRMR	standardized root mean square residual
SS	sums of squares
Tab.	Tabelle/table
TLI	Tucker-Lewis index
T1	time point 1
T2	time point 2
u. a.	unter anderem
VHB	Verband der Hochschullehrer für Betriebswirtschaft
z. B.	zum Beispiel
#fp	number of free parameters

1 Einleitung

1.1 Ausgangssituation

Die Fähigkeit einer Organisation, Wettbewerbsvorteile zu generieren und somit langfristig am Markt zu bestehen, wird maßgeblich durch das Wissen und die Fähigkeiten ihrer Mitarbeiter¹ bestimmt (vgl. Ployhart et al. 2014). Die Verfügbarkeit des zur Leistungserstellung erforderlichen Personals ist somit von hoher Bedeutung für den Erfolg von Organisationen, weshalb deren Sicherstellung das primäre Sachziel des Personalmanagements darstellt (vgl. Scherm/Süß 2016, S. 6). Einen zentralen Beitrag zur Sicherstellung der Verfügbarkeit von Personal leistet die **Personalbeschaffung**. Als Funktion des Personalmanagements verfolgt diese das Ziel, den im Rahmen der Personalplanung ermittelten Personalbedarf in einer Personalkategorie fristgerecht zu decken (vgl. Scherm/Süß 2016, S. 31). Die Beschaffung geeigneten Personals kann sowohl unter Rückgriff auf das organisationsinterne Arbeitskräftepotenzial als auch am externen Arbeitsmarkt erfolgen (vgl. Breugh 2008, S. 103-104; Scherm/Süß 2016, S. 31-33). Die Rekrutierung von Mitarbeitern am externen Arbeitsmarkt ermöglicht Organisationen dabei den Zugang zu bisher nicht vorhandener Qualifikation (vgl. Breugh 2014, S. 366; Scherm/Süß 2016, S. 33). Sie ist somit erfolgskritisch für die Erreichung von Wachstumszielen und die Anpassung an sich ändernde Markterfordernisse.

Aktuelle Studien deuten darauf hin, dass die Rekrutierung von Personal für zahlreiche Unternehmen eine **Herausforderung** darstellt. So zeigt eine internationale Studie in 43 Ländern, dass im Jahr 2019 insgesamt 54% der rund 44.000 befragten Arbeitgeber Schwierigkeiten hatten, offene Positionen mit geeigneten Mitarbeitern zu besetzen (vgl. ManpowerGroup 2020, S. 2). Die Studie verdeutlicht zudem, dass die Besetzungsschwierigkeiten seit 2009 kontinuierlich gestiegen sind und sich in jüngster Zeit intensiviert haben. Ähnliche Tendenzen lassen sich auch für Deutschland konstatieren. So gab im Rahmen einer Befragung des Instituts für Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung knapp ein Drittel der rund 14.600 teilnehmenden Betriebe an, aufgrund eines Bewerbermangels Probleme bei der Neubesetzung von Stellen zu

¹ Aus Gründen der besseren Lesbarkeit wird auf die gleichzeitige Verwendung männlicher und weiblicher Sprachformen verzichtet. Sämtliche Personenbezeichnungen gelten gleichermaßen für beide Geschlechter.

haben. Dieser Wert ist seit dem Jahr 2010 ebenfalls kontinuierlich gestiegen (vgl. IAB 2018, S. 6). Gleichmaßen deuten die seit 2010 stetig zunehmende Vakanzzeit und eine sinkende Arbeitslosen-Stellen-Relation auf eine aus Sicht von Organisationen angespannte Lage am Arbeitsmarkt hin (vgl. IAB 2018, S. 1; Bundesagentur für Arbeit 2019a, S. 6-7).

In einigen Regionen und Berufen lässt sich bereits ein **Fachkräftemangel** beobachten (vgl. Bundesagentur für Arbeit 2019a, S. 6), der ein zentrales Investitionshemmnis in Deutschland darstellt (vgl. IdW 2017, S. 3). So lassen sich Engpässe bezogen auf Fachkräfte, Spezialisten und Experten einzelner MINT-Berufe, z. B. im Bereich Softwareentwicklung und Energietechnik, feststellen (vgl. Bundesagentur für Arbeit 2019b, S. 19). Allerdings sind beispielsweise auch Gesundheits- und Pflegeberufe sowie Berufe im Transportwesen betroffen (vgl. Bundesagentur für Arbeit 2019a, S. 12-15).

Der Mangel an Fachkräften führt dazu, dass sich Arbeitgeber in einem verstärkten Wettbewerb um qualifizierte Bewerber befinden, wodurch eine **Positionierung als attraktiver Arbeitgeber** zunehmend wichtiger wird (vgl. Rode/Süß 2015, S. 352). Von wesentlicher Bedeutung im Rahmen dieser Positionierung ist das arbeitgeberbezogene Wissen von (potenziellen) Bewerbern. Dieses bestimmt, ob (potenzielle) Bewerber einen Arbeitgeber als attraktiv wahrnehmen, sich bewerben oder letztlich ein Arbeitsplatzangebot annehmen (vgl. Cable/Turban 2001, S. 117-118).

Eine Hauptaufgabe der Rekrutierung besteht folglich darin, (potenziellen) Bewerbern geeignete Informationen zur Verfügung zu stellen, um dadurch Aufmerksamkeit und den Wunsch nach Zugehörigkeit zur Organisation hervorzurufen bzw. zu verstärken. Einen zentralen Aspekt stellt dabei die **Art der Informationsquelle** dar, durch die der (potenzielle) Bewerber die Informationen erhält (vgl. Jaidi/van Hooft/Arends 2011, S. 136; Lin 2015, S. 941). Diesbezüglich hat sich die bisherige Rekrutierungsforschung primär auf sogenannte organisationsabhängige Informationsquellen, z. B. Stellenanzeigen oder Karrierewebsites (vgl. Baum/Kabst 2014, S. 354), fokussiert (vgl. van Hooft 2014, S. 251). Diese stehen tendenziell unter der Kontrolle der Organisation und werden daher zur (positiven) Selbstpräsentation genutzt (vgl. Cable/Turban 2001, S. 136). Der Forschungsstand zur Rolle von organisationsunabhängigen Informationsquellen, die sowohl positive als auch negative

Informationen bereitstellen und von Organisationen überwiegend indirekt beeinflusst werden können, ist hingegen vergleichsweise gering ausgeprägt (vgl. van Hoya 2014, S. 251; Dineen et al. 2019, S. 176).

Unter den organisationsunabhängigen Informationsquellen rückt insbesondere **Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation** (dt. Mund-zu-Mund-Propaganda) zunehmend in das Zentrum wissenschaftlichen Interesses (vgl. van Hoya et al. 2016, S. 43; Theurer et al. 2018, S. 165). Die Betrachtung der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation verfolgt dabei den Ansatz, durch den Einbezug jener Informationsquellen, die innerhalb der Marketingliteratur als einflussreich im Hinblick auf das Konsumentenverhalten identifiziert wurden, ein tiefergreifendes Verständnis von Bewerberreaktionen zu ermöglichen (vgl. Cable/Turban 2001, S. 132-133). Diesem Vorgehen liegt eine seitens der Rekrutierungsforschung häufig eingenommene Perspektive zugrunde, der zufolge Organisationen Arbeitsplätze vermarkten und Arbeitsplatzsuchende extensive „Kaufentscheidungen“ analog zu Konsumenten treffen (vgl. Maurer/Howe/Lee 1992, S. 808-809; Cable/Yu 2014, S. 527).

Im Kontext der Rekrutierung beschreibt Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation eine zwischenmenschliche Kommunikation über eine Organisation als Arbeitgeber oder über bestimmte Stellen, die von den Rekrutierungspraktiken der involvierten Organisation unabhängig ist (vgl. van Hoya/Lievens 2005, S. 180). Diese erfolgt „traditionell“ mündlich im Rahmen tatsächlicher sozialer Interaktionen, findet jedoch zunehmend als **elektronische Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation** via Internet statt (vgl. Lievens/Slaughter 2016, S. 418; Lievens/Chapman 2019, S. 128).

Die Entstehung elektronischer Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation wird insbesondere durch **Social Media** begünstigt (vgl. Dineen et al. 2019, S. 195-196). Diese auf Web-2.0-Technologie basierenden Applikationen ermöglichen es, dass Nutzer eigene Inhalte erstellen und austauschen (vgl. Kaplan/Haenlein 2010, S. 61). Sie werden daher auch zum Austausch arbeitsbezogener Informationen in Form von Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation eingesetzt (vgl. Dabirian/Kietzmann/Diba 2017, S. 199). Beispielsweise findet arbeitsbezogene Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation in sozialen Netzwerken statt (vgl. van Hoya 2014, S. 253), die von Nutzern zwar häufig (vgl. Nikolaou 2014, S. 180), aber

keineswegs ausschließlich zur Beschaffung von arbeitsbezogenen Informationen verwendet werden (vgl. z. B. Lin/Lu 2011, S. 1159).

Anders gestaltet sich dies mit Blick auf sogenannte **Arbeitgeberbewertungsportale**, wie Kununu und Glassdoor. Diese Portale erlauben es (ehemaligen) Mitarbeitern und Bewerbern, anonym Arbeitgeber zu beurteilen (vgl. z. B. Reuter 2015, S. 253-254) und verfolgen primär den Zweck, arbeitgeberbezogene Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation zu verbreiten (vgl. Melián-González/Bulchand-Gidumal 2016, S. 711).

Aktuelle Zahlen verdeutlichen die **intensive Nutzung von Arbeitgeberbewertungsportalen** als Quelle arbeitsbezogener Informationen (vgl. Bitkom 2015; Bitkom 2018). So gaben im Rahmen einer Studie des Digitalverbands Bitkom 36 % der befragten Internetnutzer an, dass sie schon einmal Arbeitgeberbewertungen im Internet gelesen haben (vgl. Bitkom 2018). Dieser Wert stellt im Vergleich zum Jahr 2015 einen Zuwachs von 7 Prozentpunkten dar (vgl. Bitkom 2015) und liegt in der Gruppe der jungen Berufstätigen (14 bis 29 Jahre) mit 52 % deutlich höher (vgl. Bitkom 2018). Gleichermäßen dienen die seitens der Portale kommunizierten Nutzerzahlen als Indizien für eine intensive Verwendung. So gibt Kununu als größtes Arbeitgeberbewertungsportal in Europa an, pro Monat bis zu 1 Million Nutzern Informationen zu über 966.000 Arbeitgebern zur Verfügung zu stellen (vgl. Kununu 2021). Diese Werte werden von Glassdoor, dem global betrachtet populärsten Arbeitgeberbewertungsportal (vgl. Dabirian/Kietzmann/Diba 2017, S. 199), übertroffen. Dort rufen monatlich 50 Millionen Nutzer Informationen zu 1,3 Millionen bewerteten Arbeitgebern ab (vgl. Glassdoor 2021).

Ausgehend von diesem umfangreichen Informationsangebot und der bedingten Steuerbarkeit von Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation wird in der Forschung zunehmend die Auffassung geteilt, dass Organisationen teilweise einen **Kontrollverlust** bezogen auf ihr Arbeitgeberimage erleiden (vgl. z. B. McFarland/Ployhart 2015, S. 1663; Lievens/Slaughter 2016, S. 420). Dineen und Kollegen (2019, S. 177) gehen in ihrer Aussage diesbezüglich sogar noch einen Schritt weiter. Die Forscher postulieren, dass durch Dritte verbreitete Informationen über Arbeitgeber in Zukunft mindestens gleichrangig neben die von Organisationen selbst verbreiteten Informationen treten und so das Arbeitgeberimage einer Organisation maßgeblich formen. Daraus ergeben

sich weitreichende Konsequenzen für die Rekrutierung, da das Arbeitgeberimage mit zahlreichen rekrutierungsbezogenen Ergebnisgrößen im Zusammenhang steht (vgl. Lievens/Slaughter 2016).

1.2 Problemstellung

Während die Erforschung der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation in der Marketingforschung bereits seit den 1960er Jahren eine Rolle spielt (vgl. z. B. Dichter 1966; Arndt 1967), steht diese innerhalb der Rekrutierungsforschung noch weitgehend am Anfang (vgl. van Hoya 2014, S. 252; van Hoya et al. 2016, S. 43). Im Vordergrund bisheriger Studien zu arbeitsbezogener Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation befindet sich die Analyse der **Wirkungen auf individueller Ebene** bzw. auf dort zu verortende recruitment outcomes (vgl. van Hoya 2014, S. 255-256). Dazu zählen insbesondere die wahrgenommene Arbeitgeberattraktivität (vgl. z. B. van Hoya/Lievens 2005; Keeling/McGoldrick/Sadhu 2013), aber auch die Intentionen und das Verhalten von (potenziellen) Bewerbern, beispielsweise die Intention, eine Bewerbung zu versenden, und das tatsächliche Versenden einer Bewerbung (vgl. z. B. Collins/Stevens 2002; Jaidi/van Hooft/Arends 2011). In Gänze betrachtet bestätigen bisherige Studien die Effekte positiver Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation, die daher als robust und generalisierbar gelten (vgl. van Hoya et al. 2016, S. 43). Studien zu den Wirkungen negativer Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation gelangen hingegen bisher zu widersprüchlichen Ergebnissen (vgl. 2.4.1), wodurch die weitere Erforschung der Bedingungen erforderlich wird, unter denen negative Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation ihre Wirkungen entfaltet (vgl. van Hoya 2014, S. 257).

Des Weiteren lassen sich bisher nur sehr wenige empirische Arbeiten identifizieren, die sich mit den **Wirkungen elektronischer Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation** beschäftigen (vgl. z. B. Melián-González/Bulchand-Gidumal 2016; van Hoya et al. 2016). Dieser Umstand steht im Kontrast zur zunehmenden Nutzung von Social Media (vgl. z. B. Kaplan/Haenlein 2010, S. 59) und insbesondere von Arbeitgeberbewertungsportalen (vgl. Bitkom 2015; Bitkom 2018), weshalb Lievens und Slaughter (2016, S. 420) konstatieren, dass die bisherige Forschung erheblich hinter Entwicklungen in der Praxis zurückbleibt. Verdeutlicht wird dieses Forschungsdefizit zudem durch eine Betrachtung der Marketingforschung. Diese zählt allein im Zeitraum von

2016 bis 2019 – den Berechnungen von Verma und Yadav (2021, S. 116) zufolge – 1055 wissenschaftliche Publikationen zu elektronischer Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation.

Die bisher überschaubare Forschung zu den Wirkungen elektronischer Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation liefert erste Hinweise, dass **positive Arbeitgeberbewertungen** die wahrgenommene Arbeitgeberattraktivität erhöhen, wohingegen **negative Arbeitgeberbewertungen** diese mindern können (vgl. z. B. Melián-González/Bulchand-Gidumal 2016). Wie genau dieser Prozess erfolgt bzw. welche Mechanismen diesen Wirkungen zugrunde liegen, ist jedoch kaum erforscht. Infolgedessen mangelt es bisher an einem tiefgreifenden Verständnis des Informationsverarbeitungsprozesses von (potenziellen) Bewerbern.

Dieses Erkenntnisdefizit ist insbesondere im Hinblick auf negative Arbeitgeberbewertungen als kritisch zu beurteilen, da es die **Gestaltung organisationaler Interventionen** im Sinne von Stellungnahmen auf den betreffenden Portalen erschwert. So bleibt bisher weitgehend offen, welche Varianten von Stellungnahmen bzw. Arbeitgeberkommentaren eingesetzt werden können und inwiefern diese die Beeinträchtigung der wahrgenommenen Arbeitgeberattraktivität mindern (vgl. Carpentier/van Hoya 2021, S. 276).

Darüber hinaus ist allgemein festzustellen, dass sich die bisherige Forschung im Vergleich zur individuellen Ebene kaum den **Wirkungen auf organisationaler Ebene** gewidmet hat (vgl. 2.4). Es existiert nur eine geringe Zahl von Studien, die vereinzelte Hinweise dafür liefern, dass Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation recruitment outcomes auf organisationaler Ebene, beispielsweise die Qualität des Bewerberpools, beeinflusst (vgl. z. B. Fernandez/Weinberg 1997; Baum/Kabst 2012). Zudem ist die Generalisierbarkeit der gewonnenen Ergebnisse in mehrerlei Hinsicht limitiert, wodurch deren Aussagekraft eingeschränkt wird und weitere Forschung notwendig ist. So fokussieren bisherige Studien beispielsweise kleine und mittlere Unternehmen (vgl. Baum/Kabst 2012) oder betrachten ausschließlich Mitarbeiterempfehlungen (vgl. Fernandez/Weinberg 1997). Letztere stellen jedoch eine spezifische Form des breiteren Konzepts der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation dar (vgl. van Hoya 2014, S. 254) und bilden dieses somit nicht vollumfänglich ab.

Die bisherige Forschung zu den **Ursachen der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation** fokussiert individuelle Ursachen sowohl auf Seiten des Informationssenders (vgl. z. B. van Hove/Lievens 2009; Breitsohl/Ruhle 2016) als auch auf Seiten des Informationsempfängers (vgl. z. B. Wanberg/Kanfer/Banas 2000; van Hove/Lievens 2009) und betrachtet darüber hinaus die Sender-Empfänger-Beziehung (vgl. van Hove/Lievens 2009). Weitgehend unberücksichtigt bleibt bisher hingegen die organisationale Ebene im Sinne von Eigenschaften und Handlungen der involvierten Organisation.

So existieren zwar erste Hinweise für einen Zusammenhang zwischen den **Eigenschaften** einer Organisation als Arbeitgeber und positiver Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation (vgl. van Hove 2008), im Hinblick auf negative Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation stehen diese jedoch noch aus. Auch **Handlungen** im Sinne von Maßnahmen zur Förderung positiver Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation sind bisher kaum erforscht. Dies ist überraschend, da die bisherige Forschung Organisationen zwar ermutigt, positive Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation zu fördern, jedoch bleibt bislang weitgehend unklar, wie genau dies erfolgen sollte (vgl. van Hove 2014, S. 258; Pieper/Greenwald/Schlachter 2018, S. 1159-1160).

In diesem Zusammenhang existiert zudem erste empirische Evidenz, dass bestimmte organisationale Eigenschaften (hier: Unternehmensgröße) mit einer Tendenz einhergehen, Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation zu fördern bzw. zu berücksichtigen (vgl. z. B. Barber et al. 1999; Kotey/Slade 2005). Dies deutet auf eine **Beziehung zwischen organisationalen Eigenschaften und Handlungen** hin, die bisher jedoch noch nicht umfassend erforscht ist. Es ist somit weitgehend unklar, welche organisationalen Eigenschaften mit einem Fokus auf Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation im Zusammenhang stehen und inwiefern dieser dem Rekrutierungserfolg zuträglich ist.

Zusammenfassend zeigt sich, dass die bisherige Forschung zwar begonnen hat, einzelne Facetten der arbeitsbezogenen Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation zu beleuchten, die wissenschaftliche Betrachtung jedoch keineswegs als umfassend, geschweige denn abgeschlossen zu bezeichnen ist. Vielmehr herrscht in vielerlei Hinsicht noch immer Ungewissheit darüber, wie arbeitsbezogene Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation entsteht, wie sie ihre Wirkungen entfaltet und welche Besonderheiten ihre elektronische Form aufweist.

Im Kontext der Rekrutierung ergibt sich folglich eine **Forschungslücke** hinsichtlich der Ursachen und Wirkungen der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation. Diese Forschungslücke ist überraschend, da Erkenntnisse über die Ursachen von Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation für Organisationen einen Ansatzpunkt zu deren Förderung bzw. Vermeidung darstellen. Des Weiteren wird durch die im Vergleich zu organisationsabhängigen Informationsquellen bisher mangelnde Berücksichtigung der Wirkungen der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation implizit unterstellt, dass (potenzielle) Bewerber im Rahmen der Rekrutierung lediglich von Informationen beeinflusst werden, die von Organisationen zur Verfügung gestellt werden. Dies widerspricht jedoch der Realität und zeichnet ein unvollständiges Bild von Bewerberreaktionen, da (potenzielle) Bewerber häufig Informationen von Dritten im Rahmen der Arbeitgeberwahl miteinbeziehen (vgl. Fisher/Ilggen/Hoyer 1979, S. 94; van Hove/Lievens 2007b, S. 2025; Dineen et al. 2019, S. 176-177).

Eine Vernachlässigung der Ursachen und Wirkungen der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation birgt somit die Gefahr, dass die Entstehung von Rekrutierungserfolg nicht vollumfänglich erklärt werden kann. Letztere stellt jedoch einen zentralen Untersuchungsgegenstand in der Rekrutierungsforschung dar (vgl. Saks 2014), weshalb der Schließung der skizzierten Forschungslücke **wissenschaftliche Relevanz** zukommt. Darüber hinaus trägt eine Reduktion des bestehenden Forschungsdefizits dazu bei, dass Empfehlungen für die Ausgestaltung von Rekrutierungsaktivitäten formuliert werden können. Organisationen werden dadurch bei der Erreichung ihrer Rekrutierungsziele unterstützt, sodass der weiteren Erforschung der Ursachen und Wirkungen der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation **praktische Relevanz** zuzuschreiben ist.

1.3 Zielsetzung und Aufbau der Arbeit

Vor diesem Hintergrund ist es das **Ziel** der vorliegenden Arbeit, die Ursachen und Wirkungen der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation in der Rekrutierung zu analysieren.

In **Kapitel 2** werden die für die Arbeit relevanten begrifflichen und konzeptionellen Grundlagen dargelegt. Zunächst erfolgt eine Beschreibung der Grundlagen zur Rekrutierung. Daran anknüpfend wird das der Arbeit zugrunde liegende Begriffsverständnis der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation erläutert sowie das integrative Modell der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation in

seinen Grundzügen skizziert. Im Anschluss wird ein Überblick über den aktuellen Forschungsstand zu den Ursachen und Wirkungen der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation in der Rekrutierung gegeben. Dies erfolgt differenziert nach individueller und organisationaler Ebene. Kapitel 2 endet mit der Herleitung eines Forschungsmodells zur Analyse der Ursachen und Wirkungen der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation.

In **Kapitel 3** werden die jeweiligen Schwerpunktsetzungen der in Kapitel 4 bis 7 folgenden empirischen Studien dargelegt und der inhaltliche Zusammenhang zwischen den Studien wird aufgezeigt. Dies erfolgt unter Rückgriff auf das zuvor hergeleitete Forschungsmodell (vgl. 2.5), in das die vier Kapitel eingeordnet werden.

Die Generierung von neuen Erkenntnissen zu den Ursachen und Wirkungen der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation in der Rekrutierung erfolgt mittels vier empirischer Studien. Diese werden in Kapitel 4 bis 7 präsentiert.

In **Kapitel 4** werden Ursachen und Wirkungen der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation auf organisationaler Ebene analysiert. Es wird der Frage nachgegangen, welche Ursachen im Sinne organisationaler Eigenschaften die Gestaltung der Rekrutierung im Allgemeinen sowie die Förderung von Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation im Speziellen erklären und wie sich verschiedene Gestaltungsvarianten auf den (Rekrutierungs-)Erfolg von Unternehmen auswirken. Dazu werden mittels latenter Profilanalyse typische Kompositionen eingesetzter Rekrutierungspraktiken exploriert, die in unterschiedlichem Ausmaß die Entstehung von Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation bedingen. Zudem wird analysiert, inwiefern organisationale Eigenschaften die Anwendung bestimmter Kompositionen erklären und ob diese wiederum mit (rekrutierungsbezogenen) Erfolgsgrößen im Zusammenhang stehen.

In **Kapitel 5 und 6** befindet sich die Analyse der Wirkungen der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation auf individueller Ebene im Vordergrund. In Kapitel 5 wird analysiert, inwiefern positive elektronische Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation in Form von Arbeitgeberbewertungen die von Arbeitsplatzsuchenden wahrgenommene Arbeitgeberattraktivität beeinflusst. Ein besonderer Fokus wird dabei auf das Zusammenspiel der Eigenschaften des Informations-

empfängers (bisherige Erfahrung in der Arbeitsplatzsuche), des Informations-senders (Expertise) sowie der Nachricht (Argumentqualität) gelegt, das im Rahmen einer Quasi-Experimentalstudie mittels Varianzanalyse analysiert wird. Kapitel 6 ergänzt die zuvor gewonnenen Erkenntnisse zur Wirkung positiver Arbeitgeberbewertungen um Erkenntnisse zur Wirkung negativer Arbeitgeberbewertungen. Darüber hinaus wird in Kapitel 6 die Betrachtungsperspektive um die Möglichkeit einer organisationsseitigen Intervention erweitert. So wird in einem experimentellen Design mittels eines Strukturgleichungsmodells untersucht, inwiefern verschiedene Varianten von Arbeitgeberkommentaren zu negativen Arbeitgeberbewertungen dazu geeignet sind, deren negative Effekte zu mindern. Dies erfolgt unter Berücksichtigung zweier mediiender Variablen (zugeschriebene Verantwortlichkeit für den in der Bewertung kritisierten Sachverhalt und dessen wahrgenommene Unerwünschtheit).

Kapitel 7 fokussiert mit Arbeitgeberkommentaren zu negativen Arbeitgeberbewertungen einen Faktor, der die Wirkungen der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation auf individueller Ebene beeinflusst. Unter der Verwendung eines diskurs- bzw. genreanalytischen Ansatzes werden Arbeitgeberkommentare hinsichtlich ihrer zentralen Textelemente und typischen Struktur analysiert. Ergänzt werden die Erkenntnisse zum Aufbau von Arbeitgeberkommentaren um Erkenntnisse zu deren Intertextualität und Tonalität. Ausgehend von den gewonnenen Einblicken in die Gestaltung von Arbeitgeberkommentaren werden zahlreiche Wege für zukünftige Forschung skizziert.

Die Arbeit schließt in **Kapitel 8** mit einer Darstellung der Beiträge und Schlussfolgerungen. Zunächst werden die Beiträge, die die vorliegende Arbeit zur wissenschaftlichen Diskussion über die Ursachen und Wirkungen der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation in der Rekrutierung leistet, zusammengefasst. Basierend auf den empirischen Studien in Kapitel 4 bis 7 werden darüber hinaus übergreifende Beiträge abgeleitet, bevor abschließend Praxisimplikationen, Grenzen der Arbeit und weiterer Forschungsbedarf aufgezeigt werden.

2 Begriffliche und konzeptionelle Grundlagen

2.1 Rekrutierung

Die **Personalbeschaffung** verfolgt das Ziel, den im Rahmen der Personalplanung ermittelten Personalbedarf in einer Personalkategorie fristgerecht zu decken. Sie wird erforderlich, falls Personalbedarf nicht durch Mehrarbeit gedeckt werden kann oder soll. Grundsätzlich werden die interne und externe Personalbeschaffung differenziert (vgl. Scherm/Süß 2016, S. 31). Die Besetzung vakanter Positionen mittels interner Personalbeschaffung geht mit Versetzung oder Beförderung von Mitarbeitern aus anderen Personalkategorien einher. Dabei werden Personalentwicklungsmaßnahmen erforderlich, um bestehende Qualifikationsdefizite der Mitarbeiter zu reduzieren und sie auf den neuen Stellen einzuarbeiten. Ist die benötigte Qualifikation im Unternehmen nicht vorhanden und nicht durch Personalentwicklungsmaßnahmen herbeizuführen oder ist die interne Beschaffung nicht gewollt, ist es notwendig, Personal außerhalb des Unternehmens zu beschaffen (vgl. Scherm/Süß 2016, S. 32-33).

Die **Rekrutierung** von Personal (engl. recruitment) umfasst dabei all jene organisationalen Aktivitäten und Praktiken, die primär darauf abzielen, potenzielle Mitarbeiter zu identifizieren und zu attrahieren (vgl. Barber 1998, S. 5). Dies erfolgt in drei Phasen: In der ersten Phase versucht die Organisation durch den Einsatz verschiedener Rekrutierungspraktiken potenzielle Bewerber zu identifizieren und zur Bewerbung zu motivieren. In der zweiten Phase fokussiert die Rekrutierung die Aufrechterhaltung des Bewerberinteresses. Ziel ist es, dass geeignete Bewerber im Bewerberpool verbleiben, bis die Organisation ihre Auswahlentscheidung getroffen hat. In der dritten Phase geht es darum, die seitens der Organisation favorisierten Bewerber zur Annahme eines Arbeitsplatzangebotes zu bewegen (vgl. Barber 1998, S. 12-15). Für (potenzielle) Bewerber ist es in jeder Phase möglich, sich selbst aus dem Prozess zu selektieren, weshalb aus Sicht der Organisation jede Phase als erfolgskritisch zu betrachten ist (vgl. Harold/Uggerslev/Kraichy 2014, S. 67). Dennoch ist die erste Phase besonders, da geeignete Kandidaten, die nicht in den Bewerberpool eintreten, der Organisation nicht als potenzielle zukünftige Mitarbeiter zur Verfügung stehen (vgl. van Hoyer 2012, S. 377).

Der Rekrutierungserfolg einer Organisation wird demnach maßgeblich durch ihre Fähigkeit bestimmt, in jeder Phase des Rekrutierungsprozesses die von (potenziellen) Bewerbern wahrgenommene Arbeitgeberattraktivität positiv zu beeinflussen. **Arbeitgeberattraktivität** beschreibt im Kern den wahrgenommenen Nutzen, den ein Individuum in der Beschäftigung bei einer bestimmten Organisation sieht (vgl. Berthon/Ewing/Hah 2005, S. 156). Sie steht mit rekrutierungsbezogenen Intentionen und Verhalten im Zusammenhang (vgl. z. B. Jaidi/van Hoof/Arends 2011; Gully et al. 2013; Überschaer/Baum 2020).

In Abhängigkeit von dem jeweiligen Forschungsstrang wird Arbeitgeberattraktivität jedoch nicht nur im Sinne eines wahrgenommenen Nutzens, sondern auch als Image eines Arbeitgebers konzeptualisiert. Dies erfolgt in der Forschung zum **Employer Image Management**, die sich mit der organisationsseitigen Gestaltung bzw. Beeinflussung des Arbeitgeberimages von (potenziellen) Bewerbern beschäftigt (vgl. Lievens/Slaughter 2016, S. 426-430).

Im Speziellen liegt der Konzeption als **Arbeitgeberimage** die sogenannte holistische Perspektive zugrunde (engl. *holistic perspective*), die generelle Gefühle und Einstellungen von (potenziellen) Bewerbern in den Vordergrund stellt. Diese ist von der sogenannten elementaren Perspektive (engl. *elementaristic perspective*) abzugrenzen, der zufolge sich das Arbeitgeberimage aus bestimmten Eigenschaften zusammensetzt, die ein Individuum mit der Organisation als Arbeitgeber assoziiert (vgl. Lievens/Slaughter 2016, S. 411-412).

Eine in der Rekrutierungsliteratur etablierte Kategorisierung von Arbeitgeberereigenschaften stellt die Unterscheidung in instrumentelle und symbolische Eigenschaften dar (vgl. Lievens/Slaughter 2016, S. 411). **Instrumentelle Eigenschaften** sind eher konkret und können einem Arbeitgeber faktisch zugeschrieben werden, beispielsweise das gezahlte Gehalt oder das Angebot flexibler Arbeitszeiten. **Symbolische Eigenschaften** sind hingegen in geringerem Maße greifbar und eher subjektiv. Exemplarisch zu nennen sind Eigenschaften wie die Innovativität oder das Prestige eines Arbeitgebers (vgl. Lievens/Highhouse 2003, S. 80-81).

Um (potenziellen) Bewerbern geeignete Informationen zur Verfügung zu stellen und dadurch zu attrahieren, steht Organisationen eine große Zahl von

unterschiedlichen **Rekrutierungspraktiken** zur Auswahl, die in der Literatur auch als Rekrutierungsmethoden (vgl. z. B. Breugh 2013, S. 390) oder Rekrutierungsquellen (vgl. z. B. Griffeth/Tenbrink/Robinson 2014, S. 215) bezeichnet werden. Diese weisen Unterschiede hinsichtlich des Umfangs, der Genauigkeit und des Realismus der zur Verfügung gestellten Informationen auf, die seitens der Forschung anhand der Klassifikation in formelle und informelle Rekrutierungspraktiken abgebildet werden (vgl. Griffeth/Tenbrink/Robinson 2014, S. 217).

Formelle Rekrutierungspraktiken, z. B. der Einsatz von Vermittlungsagenturen oder das Schalten von Stellenanzeigen, sind durch die Verwendung formeller Intermediäre charakterisiert, die in erster Linie für Rekrutierungszwecke existieren. **Informelle Rekrutierungspraktiken**, wie Mitarbeiterempfehlungen, benötigen hingegen keine formellen Intermediäre (vgl. z. B. Saks/Ashforth 1997, S. 399; van Hoya 2012, S. 377-378).

Forschungen zeigen, dass formelle und informelle Rekrutierungspraktiken unterschiedliche Vor- und Nachteile im Hinblick auf verschiedene rekrutierungsbezogene Ergebnisgrößen (engl. recruitment outcomes; vgl. Breugh 2013, S. 398) aufweisen (vgl. Griffeth/Tenbrink/Robinson 2014, S. 217-218). Zudem können Rekrutierungspraktiken nicht nur einzeln, sondern auch in Kombination eingesetzt werden (vgl. Carlson/Connerly/Mecham 2002, S. 463). Aus organisationaler Perspektive weist die Ausgestaltung der Rekrutierung folglich eine hohe Komplexität auf und stellt daher in der Praxis für zahlreiche Organisationen eine **Herausforderung** dar. Infolgedessen ist der Einsatz von Rekrutierungspraktiken bzw. rekrutierungsbezogenen Informationsquellen ein zentraler Untersuchungsgegenstand in der Rekrutierungsforschung (vgl. Breugh 2013; Griffeth/Tenbrink/Robinson 2014), der die Betrachtung der Ursachen und Wirkungen von Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation einschließt (vgl. van Hoya 2014).

2.2 Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation

2.2.1 Begriffsverständnis

Aus der **Perspektive der Psychologie** handelt sich bei Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation um eine Form von informativem sozialem Einfluss, der von dem normativen sozialen Einfluss zu unterscheiden ist (vgl. van Hoya 2014,

S. 252). Letzterer stellt einen Einfluss dahingehend dar, den Erwartungen einer anderen Person oder Gruppe zu entsprechen (vgl. Deutsch/Gerard 1955, S. 629). Normativer sozialer Einfluss wird daher auch teilweise mit dem Begriff der Konformität gleichgesetzt (vgl. Cohen/Golden 1972, S. 54). Informativer sozialer Einfluss lässt sich hingegen als ein Einfluss verstehen, Informationen von anderen als Beweis über die Beschaffenheit der Realität zu akzeptieren (vgl. Deutsch/Gerard 1955, S. 629) und ist durch den Wunsch nach Problemlösung motiviert (vgl. Wooten/Reed 1998, S. 80). So kann ein Informationsdefizit, eine mehrdeutige Situation oder die Erforderlichkeit einer frühzeitigen Handlung dazu führen, dass Individuen eigens zu beschaffende Informationen durch als zutreffend erachtete Informationen von anderen substituieren (vgl. Cohen/Golden 1972, S. 54-55).

Informativer sozialer Einfluss kann folglich in zahlreichen Situationen das Verhalten von Individuen beeinflussen, spielt jedoch insbesondere im Rahmen von Produktbewertungen eine Rolle (vgl. z. B. Wooten/Reed 1998), denn diese sind durch hohe Komplexität und zeitliche Restriktionen charakterisiert (vgl. Cohen/Golden 1972, S. 54). Vor diesem Hintergrund werden informativer sozialer Einfluss im Allgemeinen (vgl. z. B. Burnkrant/Cousineau 1975; Pincus/Waters 1977) und Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation im Speziellen (vgl. z. B. Dichter 1966; Engel/Blackwell/Kegerreis 1969) bereits seit geraumer Zeit in der **Marketingforschung** untersucht. Im Kontext des Marketings handelt es sich bei Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation, einer frühen Definition von Arndt (1967, S. 3) folgend, um „[...] eine Form der mündlichen Kommunikation über Marken, Produkte oder Dienstleistungen zwischen einem Empfänger und einem Sender, den der Empfänger als unabhängig und nicht von kommerziellen Interessen geleitet ansieht“ (Dubravko/Possett 2009, S. 251). Auch wenn sie ursprünglich mit mündlicher Kommunikation assoziiert wurde, erfolgt Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation gegenwärtig vermehrt über das Internet, wodurch die Geschwindigkeit und die Einfachheit des Informationsaustauschs erhöht wurden (vgl. Berger 2014, S. 587). Diese Entwicklung findet auch in der aktuellen Forschung Beachtung, was sich in einem buchstäblich exponentiellen Anstieg der Publikationen zu internetbasierter Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation manifestiert (vgl. Verma/Yadav 2021, S. 116).

Bisherige Studien zeigen, dass Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation einen erheblichen Einfluss auf die Einstellungen und das Verhalten von Konsumenten hat, der im Allgemeinen sogar größer ist als der Einfluss der unternehmensseitigen Marketingkommunikation (vgl. Buttle 1998, S. 242; van Hoya/Lievens 2007b, S. 2027). Zudem existieren Hinweise, dass Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation insbesondere im Bereich von Dienstleistungen eine hohe Bedeutung zukommt, da diese vor Inanspruchnahme kaum bewertet werden können (vgl. Bansal/Voyer 2000, S. 167). Ein zentraler Erklärungsansatz für die Wirkung von Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation liegt darin begründet, dass diese eine vergleichsweise **hohe Glaubwürdigkeit** aufweist (vgl. z. B. Laczniak/DeCarlo/Ramaswami 2001, S. 57). Denn anders als von Unternehmen direkt steuerbare Informationsquellen, beispielsweise Werbung, verfolgt Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation nicht das primäre Ziel, Produkte, Marken oder gar Organisationen als vorteilhaft erscheinen zu lassen (vgl. z. B. Buttle 1998, S. 243; van Hoya et al. 2016, S. 44).

Ausgehend von diesen Ergebnissen und den konzeptionellen Parallelen zwischen Marketing und Rekrutierung, die darin bestehen, dass Organisationen versuchen, eine begrenzte Zahl von Individuen zu attrahieren (vgl. Cable/Turban 2001, S. 120), findet eine zunehmende Betrachtung von Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation in der **Rekrutierungsforschung** statt. Im Kontext der Rekrutierung wird arbeitsbezogene Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation in Anlehnung an van Hoya und Lievens (2005, S. 180) als „an interpersonal communication, independent of the organization’s recruitment activities, about an organization as an employer or about specific jobs“ definiert. Dieser Konzeption folgend ist Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation eine informelle und organisationsunabhängige rekrutierungsbezogene Informationsquelle, die in allen Phasen des Rekrutierungsprozesses (vgl. 2.1) sowohl positive als auch negative Informationen über Arbeitgeber zur Verfügung stellen kann (Valenz; vgl. van Hoya 2014, S. 252-254).

Die bisherige Forschung zeigt, dass Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation verschiedene recruitment outcomes, darunter insbesondere die wahrgenommene Arbeitgeberattraktivität, beeinflussen kann (vgl. 2.4). Zur **Erklärung der Wirkung auf die wahrgenommene Arbeitgeberattraktivität** hat sich die

Forschung bisher überwiegend zwei theoretischer Ansätze bedient (vgl. van Hoyer 2014, S. 254):

Das **Source Credibility Framework** (vgl. Pornpitakpan 2004) postuliert, dass glaubwürdige Informationsquellen überzeugender sind als in geringerem Maße glaubwürdige Informationsquellen und daher mit größerer Wahrscheinlichkeit eine Einstellungs- und Verhaltensänderung bewirken können. Übertragen auf rekrutierungsbezogene Informationsquellen bedeutet dies, dass Unterschiede in deren wahrgenommener Glaubwürdigkeit ausschlaggebend dafür sind, inwiefern es zu einer Beeinflussung von recruitment outcomes kommt. Im Speziellen suggeriert das Source Credibility Framework, dass Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation aufgrund ihrer hohen Glaubwürdigkeit einen Einfluss auf wahrgenommene Arbeitgeberattraktivität hat. Zudem legt es den Schluss nahe, dass Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation einflussreicher ist als andere, weniger glaubwürdige Informationsquellen (vgl. van Hoyer 2014, S. 254).

Auch aus dem **Accessibility-Diagnosticity Model** (vgl. Feldman/Lynch 1988) lässt sich ableiten, dass Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation die wahrgenommene Arbeitgeberattraktivität beeinflusst. Die Einflussbeziehung basiert jedoch auf anderen Annahmen. Diese bestehen zum einen darin, dass Informationen mit größerer Wahrscheinlichkeit zur Entscheidungsfindung genutzt werden, sofern sie leicht im Gedächtnis zugänglich sind. Zum anderen wird angenommen, dass Informationen genutzt werden, wenn sie eine hohe Diagnostizität aufweisen. Diese ist gegeben, falls Informationen dazu geeignet sind, zwischen alternativen Ansichten zu unterscheiden (z. B. ob eine Organisation ein positives oder negatives Arbeitgeberimage hat). Vor diesem Hintergrund wird argumentiert, dass Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation die wahrgenommene Arbeitgeberattraktivität beeinflusst, da die vermittelten Informationen aufgrund der persönlichen und lebhaften Präsentation leicht zugänglich sind. Daneben lassen sich spezifische Vorhersagen über die Rolle der Valenz der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation formulieren. So sollten negative Informationen eine höhere Diagnostizität aufweisen und damit einflussreicher sein als positive Informationen, da Letztere im Kontext der Rekrutierung überwiegend zur Verfügung stehen (vgl. van Hoyer 2014, S. 254).

Der Aspekt der Valenz ist jedoch nicht nur für die Wirkungen, sondern auch für die konzeptionelle Spezifizierung der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation relevant. Er ermöglicht es, Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation von verwandten Konzepten, wie der klassischen **Mitarbeiterempfehlung**, abzugrenzen. Letztere beinhaltet in der Regel ausschließlich positive Informationen, da die Organisation als Arbeitgeber angepriesen wird. Zudem werden Mitarbeiterempfehlungen von gegenwärtigen Mitarbeitern ausgesprochen, wohingegen Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation auch von Nichtorganisationsmitgliedern (z. B. Bewerbern) ausgehen kann. Folglich stellen Mitarbeiterempfehlungen eine Facette des breiteren Konzepts der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation dar (vgl. Shinnar/Young/Maena 2004, S. 273; van Hoyer 2014, S. 254).

Die letztgenannte Aussage gilt auch für das sogenannte **Networking**. Dabei handelt es sich um Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation, die von Arbeitsplatzsuchenden mit dem expliziten Motiv initiiert wird, arbeitsbezogene Informationen zu sammeln, wohingegen Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation im Allgemeinen auch vom Sender ausgehen bzw. durch dessen Motive begründet sein kann (vgl. van Hoyer 2014, S. 254).

Darüber hinaus existieren neben der Valenz und den zugrunde liegenden Motiven weitere Aspekte, hinsichtlich derer Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation variieren kann. Zu diesen Aspekten zählen der kommunizierte Inhalt (z. B. instrumentelle vs. symbolische Arbeitgebereigenschaften), die Sender-Empfänger-Beziehung (z. B. Freunde vs. Bekannte) und das zur Kommunikation verwendete Medium („face-to-face“ vs. Internet; vgl. van Hoyer/Lievens 2009, S. 343; van Hoyer et al. 2016, S. 43-45).

Insbesondere dem verwendeten Medium wird seitens der Forschung Aufmerksamkeit gewidmet. Dies zeichnet sich in Studien ab, die explizit internetbasierte bzw. **elektronische Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation** analysieren. Die Betrachtung erfolgt dabei differenziert nach sogenannten Subtypen elektronischer Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation (vgl. van Hoyer 2014, S. 262). So untersuchen Studien elektronische Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation, die via Foren (vgl. Cable/Yu 2006) oder E-Mail vermittelt wird (vgl. van Hoyer et al., 2016) und insbesondere jene, die durch Arbeitgeberbewertungsportale Verbreitung findet (vgl. z. B. Melián-González/Bulchand-Gidumal 2016; Könsgen et al. 2018; Stockman/van Hoyer/da Motta Veiga 2020).

Letzteres liegt darin begründet, dass durch **Arbeitgeberbewertungsportale** verbreitete Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation in mehrfacher Hinsicht Unterschiede zu mündlicher Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation aufweist, sodass frühere Forschungsergebnisse nicht übertragen werden können. So findet Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation auf Arbeitgeberbewertungsportalen zwischen zahlreichen anonymen Sendern und Empfängern statt und kann, ausgehend von ihrer Persistenz, aggregiert sowie dauerhaft abgerufen werden (vgl. z. B. Dabirian/Kietzmann/Diba 2017, S. 198; Dineen et al. 2019, S. 197).

Davon ausgehend, dass Arbeitgeberbewertungen die Außenwahrnehmung von Arbeitgebern beeinflussen können, ergeben sich aus der Existenz von Arbeitgeberbewertungsportalen gleichzeitig neue **Chancen und Herausforderungen für Organisationen** (vgl. Melián-González/Bulchand-Gidumal 2016, S. 718; Könsgen et al. 2018, S. 167). Diese liegen zum einen in dem Umstand begründet, dass sowohl positive als auch negative Informationen verbreitet werden können. Zum anderen resultieren sie aus der Funktionalität von Arbeitgeberbewertungsportalen, denn diese ermöglicht es, dass Organisationen die sie betreffenden Bewertungen kommentieren und so in den Kommunikations- bzw. Informationsverarbeitungsprozess intervenieren (vgl. Melián-González/Bulchand-Gidumal 2016, S. 720).

2.2.2 Integratives Modell der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation

Aufbauend auf bisherigen empirischen Erkenntnissen entwickelte van Hoya (2014) das sogenannte integrative Modell der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation, das in Abbildung 2.1 visualisiert wird. Das Modell verdeutlicht zum einen die Zusammenhänge zwischen arbeitsbezogener Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation und ihren Ursachen sowie Wirkungen. Zum anderen gibt es einen Überblick über bisherige Forschung (vgl. van Hoya 2014, S. 260).

Das Modell zeigt, dass die **Entstehung** von Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation durch die Eigenschaften des Informationsempfängers (z. B. Persönlichkeit), des Informationssenders (z. B. Expertise) sowie durch deren Beziehung beeinflusst wird. Zudem trägt das Modell dem Gedanken Rechnung, dass im betrachteten Kontext auch die Eigenschaften (z. B. Arbeitgebermarke) und Handlungen der involvierten Organisation (z. B. Rekrutierungspraktiken) eine Rolle spielen (vgl. van Hoya 2014, S. 260-261).

Ebenso wird das **Ausmaß der Wirkungen** von Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation sowohl durch die Eigenschaften und die Beziehung von Empfänger und Sender als auch durch die Eigenschaften und Handlungen der Organisation beeinflusst bzw. moderiert. So führt beispielsweise ein hohes Maß an Expertise nicht nur dazu, dass bestimmte Personen vergleichsweise häufiger als Informationsquelle konsultiert werden. Vielmehr sind Informationen von Personen mit hoher Expertise tendenziell glaubwürdiger und somit einflussreicher als jene von Personen mit geringer Expertise (vgl. van Hoyer 2014, S. 260-261).

Neben Empfänger, Sender und Organisation spielen mit Blick auf die Wirkungen von Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation noch weitere Aspekte eine Rolle. So beeinflusst neben der Valenz der Nachricht (positiv vs. negativ) sowohl deren jeweiliger Inhalt als auch das Medium, über das die Nachricht vermittelt wird, die Wirkungen der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation. Zusätzlich können **Prozessvariablen**, beispielsweise die wahrgenommene Glaubwürdigkeit oder die Realitätsnähe der Information, im Sinne von Mediatoren einen Beitrag zur Erklärung der Wirkungen der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation leisten (vgl. van Hoyer 2014, S. 261-262).

Hinsichtlich der **Wirkungen** der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation sieht das Modell eine Unterscheidung zwischen der individuellen und der organisationalen Perspektive vor. Die individuelle Perspektive bezieht sich auf den Erfolg in der Arbeitsplatzsuche aus Sicht des Arbeitsplatzsuchenden bzw. auf damit im Zusammenhang stehende Ergebnisgrößen, die als job search outcomes bezeichnet werden. Die organisationale Perspektive umfasst hingegen sogenannte recruitment outcomes, die rekrutierungsbezogene Ergebnisse aus der Perspektive der Organisation darstellen. Diese werden wiederum dahingehend unterschieden, inwiefern sie (potenzielle) Bewerber oder (neue) Mitarbeiter betreffen (vgl. van Hoyer 2014, S. 262).

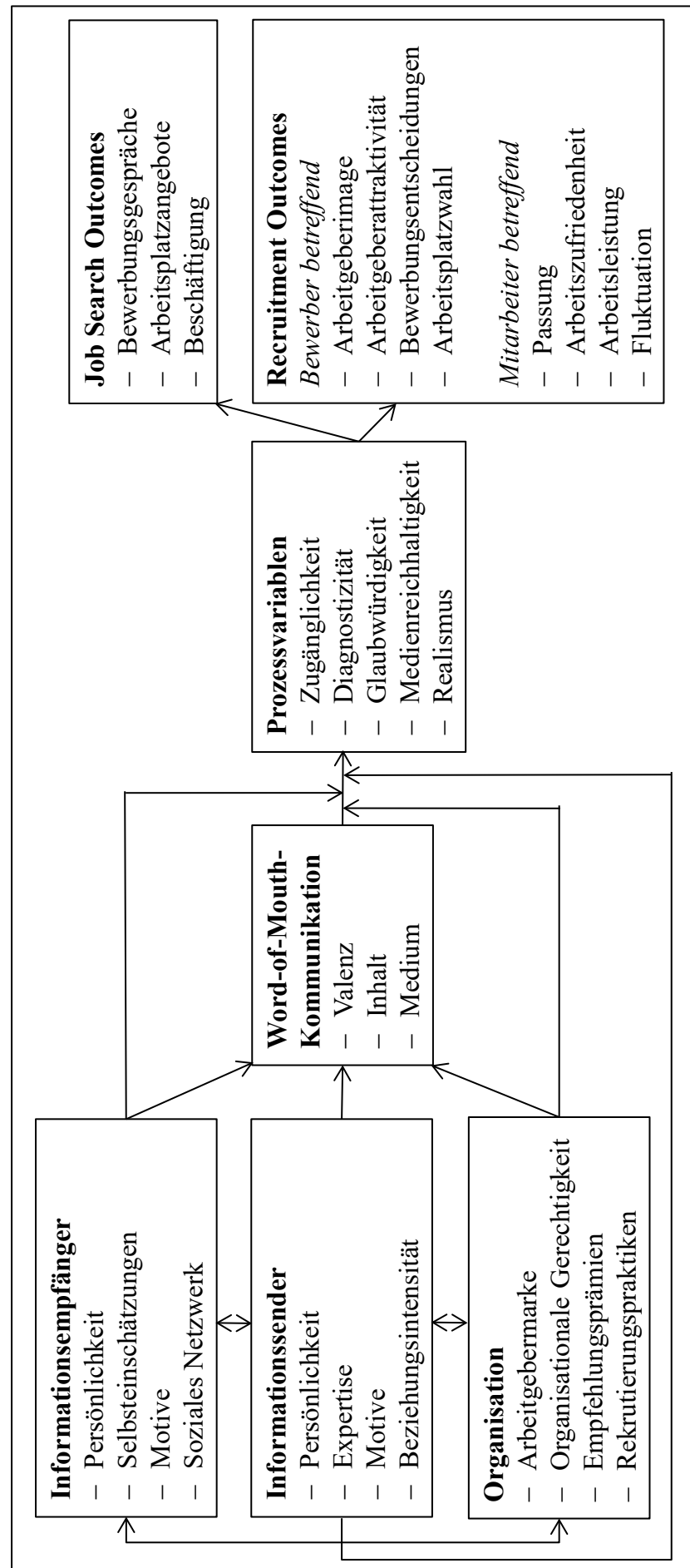


Abb. 2.1: Integratives Modell der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation (eigene Darstellung; in Anlehnung an van Hove 2014, S. 253)

2.3 Ursachen der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation

2.3.1 Ursachen auf individueller Ebene

Da es sich bei Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation im Allgemeinen um eine dyadische Form der Kommunikation zwischen einem Informationssender und einem Informationsempfänger handelt (vgl. 2.2.1), wird ihre Entstehung maßgeblich durch die individuellen Eigenschaften der Beteiligten sowie deren beiderseitige Beziehung bestimmt (vgl. 2.2.2; van Hoya 2014, S. 258-259). Die bisherige Forschung zu den Ursachen von Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation fokussiert folglich individuelle Ursachen sowohl auf Seiten des (1) Informationssenders als auch auf Seiten des (2) Informationsempfängers und betrachtet darüber hinaus die (3) Rolle der Beziehungsintensität.

(1) Bezogen auf den Informationssender konnte gezeigt werden, dass ein höheres Maß an **Expertise**, definiert als der Grad an Wissen und Erfahrung in Bezug auf die Stelle oder die rekrutierende Organisation (vgl. van Hoya 2014, S. 259), dazu führt, dass Personen verstärkt als Informationssender agieren (vgl. van Hoya/Lievens 2009, S. 347). Dies liegt zum einen darin begründet, dass Arbeitsplatzsuchende vermehrt Personen mit Expertenwissen kontaktieren, die in der Lage sind, zutreffende Informationen zur Verfügung zu stellen. Zum anderen haben Personen mit hoher Expertise häufig ein höheres Involvement und somit eine stärkere Tendenz, unaufgefordert Informationen in Form von Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation zu verbreiten (vgl. van Hoya/Lievens 2009, S. 348).

Darüber hinaus untersuchte van Hoya (2013b) die **Motive von Mitarbeitern**, die zu einer Verbreitung positiver und negativer Informationen über Arbeitgeber führen. Es wurde ersichtlich, dass die Verbreitung positiver Informationen durch die Arbeitszufriedenheit, den Wunsch, der Organisation passende Mitarbeiter zu beschaffen, und den Wunsch, Arbeitsplatzsuchenden eine passende Stelle zu vermitteln, motiviert ist. Letzteres stellte dabei das stärkste Motiv dar (vgl. van Hoya 2013b, S. 460). Mit Blick auf negative Informationen zeigte sich, dass primär Arbeitsunzufriedenheit Mitarbeiter dazu motiviert, sich schlecht über den Arbeitgeber zu äußern. Vergleichsweise geringe Bedeutung kam dem prosozialen Wunsch zu, Arbeitsplatzsuchenden dabei zu

helfen, die Auswahl schlecht passender Stellen zu vermeiden. Keinerlei Erklärungsgehalt wies hingegen der Wunsch auf, Organisationen dabei zu helfen, die Auswahl schlecht passender Mitarbeiter zu vermeiden. Dieses Ergebnis deutet darauf hin, dass Mitarbeiter die Verbreitung negativer Informationen als kaum nützlich für die Organisation erachten, insbesondere, da sie möglicherweise über Umwege passende Kandidaten erreicht (vgl. van Hove 2013b, S. 460).

Breitsohl und Ruhle (2016) fanden in ihrer Studie heraus, dass **residuales affektives Commitment** von Praktikanten eine Ursache der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation darstellt. Dieses ist als das verbleibende affektive Commitment nach Organisationsaustritt definiert (vgl. Breitsohl/Ruhle 2013, S. 162). Die Forscher konnten in einer ersten Studie zeigen, dass ein hohes residuales affektives Commitment dazu führt, dass Praktikanten positiv über ihren ehemaligen Arbeitgeber sprechen (vgl. Breitsohl/Ruhle 2016, S. 837). Dieser Effekt konnte in einer zweiten Studie, der ein erweitertes Forschungsmodell zugrunde lag, repliziert werden. Zudem wird in dieser Studie mit Blick auf Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation ein Interaktionseffekt zwischen der Attraktivität des Standortes und dem residualen affektiven Commitment erkennbar. So führt ein höheres residuales affektives Commitment dazu, dass der Zusammenhang zwischen der Standortattraktivität und Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation abgeschwächt wird (vgl. Breitsohl/Ruhle 2016, S. 841). Die Ergebnisse liefern somit substanzielle Hinweise darauf, dass es sich bei residualem affektiven Commitment um eine Ursache arbeitsbezogener Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation handelt. Zugleich verdeutlichen sie, dass zwischen den Ursachen von Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation komplexe Wirkungsbeziehungen bestehen (vgl. Breitsohl/Ruhle 2016, S. 844).

Weitere Hinweise zur Rolle des Commitments sind in der Forschung zu Mitarbeiterempfehlungen anzutreffen, die eine spezielle Form der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation darstellen (vgl. 2.2.1). So fand Bloemer (2010, S. 1784) heraus, dass ein hohes **affektives Commitment** von Mitarbeitern dazu führt, dass diese ihren Arbeitgeber vermehrt weiterempfehlen. Kein Zusammenhang bestand hingegen zwischen normativem Commitment und Mitarbeiterempfehlungen. Ein hohes kalkulatives Commitment bewirkte, dass eine signifikant geringere Zahl von Empfehlungen ausgesprochen wurde.

(2) Im Hinblick auf den Informationsempfänger konnten van Hoya und Lievens (2009) zeigen, dass bestimmte **Persönlichkeitsmerkmale** dazu führen, dass Individuen mehr Zeit für die Informationsaufnahme in Form von Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation verwenden. Extrovertiertere potenzielle Bewerber verbringen mehr Zeit mit positiver Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation, wohingegen keine Unterschiede bezogen auf negative Kommunikation zu beobachten sind. Potenzielle Bewerber mit einem höheren Maß an Gewissenhaftigkeit verbringen hingegen mehr Zeit mit der Aufnahme sowohl von negativen als auch von positiven Informationen (vgl. van Hoya/Lievens 2009, S. 347).

Die Forschung zu Networking als spezielle Form der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation unterstreicht ebenfalls die Bedeutung von Persönlichkeitsmerkmalen, insbesondere die der Extraversion und Gewissenhaftigkeit. So konnten Wanberg und Kollegen (2000, S. 497) in ihrer Studie zeigen, dass Extraversion und Gewissenhaftigkeit die Intensität des Networkings Arbeitsplatzsuchender vorhersagen, wobei sich der Effekt der Gewissenhaftigkeit als in geringerem Maße robust erweist. Den übrigen Persönlichkeitsmerkmalen gemäß dem Big-Five-Modell (Offenheit für Erfahrung, Neurotizismus und Verträglichkeit; vgl. z. B. Digman 1990; McCrae/Costa 1997) kam hingegen kein Erklärungsgehalt zu.

(3) Mit Blick auf die Sender-Empfänger-Beziehung wurde im Rahmen bisheriger Forschung die sogenannte **tie strength** betrachtet, die die Nähe innerhalb der sozialen Beziehung zwischen Sender und Empfänger der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation bezeichnet (vgl. van Hoya et al. 2016, S. 44). Van Hoya und Lievens (2009, S. 347) fanden diesbezüglich heraus, dass positive Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation mit größerer Wahrscheinlichkeit auftritt, wenn zwischen Sender und Empfänger eine enge soziale Beziehung besteht, beispielsweise zwischen Freunden und Familie, als im Falle einer lockeren sozialen Beziehung (z. B. zwischen Bekannten). Bezogen auf negative Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation zeigte sich hingegen kein Einfluss der tie strength (vgl. van Hoya/Lievens 2009, S. 347).

2.3.2 Ursachen auf organisationaler Ebene

Neben Ursachen der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation auf Ebene des Individuums lassen sich Ursachen auf organisationaler Ebene identifizieren. Dabei handelt es sich um die (1) Eigenschaften und (2) Handlungen der involvierten Organisation (vgl. 2.2.2; van Hoya 2014, S. 259-260).

(1) In Bezug auf die Eigenschaften der Organisation lässt sich das von gegenwärtigen Mitarbeitern wahrgenommene Image einer Organisation als Arbeitgeber anführen, das in der Literatur auch als organisationale Identität oder interne Arbeitgebermarke bezeichnet wird (vgl. Lievens/Slaughter 2016, S. 410). So konnte eine Studie von van Hoya (2008) zeigen, dass ein von gegenwärtigen Mitarbeitern als positiv wahrgenommenes **Arbeitgeberimage** zu einer verstärkten Weiterempfehlungsbereitschaft führt. Im Speziellen wurde ersichtlich, dass sowohl instrumentelle (z. B. Aufgabenvielfalt) als auch symbolische Facetten (z. B. Prestige) des Arbeitgeberimages mit der Intention von Mitarbeitern im Zusammenhang stehen, ihren Arbeitgeber weiterzuempfehlen (vgl. van Hoya 2008, S. 371-372).

(2) Es ist festzuhalten, dass Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation als organisationsunabhängige Informationsquelle nicht direkt von Organisation gesteuert werden kann (vgl. 2.2.1; van Hoya 2008, S. 367). Daher können organisationale Handlungen nicht unmittelbar ursächlich für die Entstehung von Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation sein. Dennoch ist es möglich, positive Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation mittelbar zu stimulieren, beispielsweise durch die **Gewährung monetärer Anreize**. Dies verdeutlicht eine Studie von van Hoya (2013b), in deren Rahmen ein positiver Zusammenhang zwischen Anreizgewährung und Mitarbeiterempfehlungen beobachtet werden konnte. Dieser Befund wird durch eine Studie von Pieper und Kollegen (2018) gestützt. Die Forscher konnten zeigen, dass monetäre Anreize bzw. deren Vorhandensein und Höhe in einem positiven Zusammenhang mit der Weiterempfehlungswahrscheinlichkeit von Mitarbeitern stehen (vgl. Pieper/Greenwald/Schlachter 2018, S. 1166).

Darüber hinaus sind in der Forschung Hinweise darauf zu finden, dass bestimmte organisationale Eigenschaften mit der Anwendung von Maßnahmen in Zusammenhang stehen, die Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation fördern, und

damit ebenso ursächlich für deren Entstehung sind. So deutet die Studie von Barber und Kollegen (1999) darauf hin, dass es sich bei der **Unternehmensgröße** um solch eine organisationale Eigenschaft handelt. Die Forscher fanden heraus, dass kleine Unternehmen im Vergleich zu großen Unternehmen mit größerer Wahrscheinlichkeit Mitarbeiterempfehlungen und Networking forcieren (vgl. Barber et al. 1999, S. 856). Zu ähnlichen Ergebnissen gelangten auch Kotey und Slade (2005). Die Forscher fanden heraus, dass bei steigender Unternehmensgröße eine Tendenz zum Einsatz formeller Rekrutierungspraktiken (z. B. Zeitungsannoncen) besteht. Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation stellte hingegen für kleine Unternehmen die primäre Rekrutierungsquelle im Rahmen der Besetzung von Nichtführungspositionen dar (vgl. Kotey/Slade 2005, S. 25).

Ergänzt werden diese Befunde durch die von Tanova (2003) gewonnenen Studienergebnisse. Im Rahmen der Studie zeigte sich zum einen, dass kleine Unternehmen mit größerer Wahrscheinlichkeit zu Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation tendieren als große Unternehmen (vgl. Tanova 2003, S. 111). Zum anderen konnten Hinweise auf **Unterschiede zwischen öffentlichen und privaten Organisationen** gefunden werden. Im Speziellen wurde ersichtlich, dass privatwirtschaftliche Unternehmen, die in den Bereichen Produktion und Dienstleistung tätig sind, mit größerer Wahrscheinlichkeit Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation nutzen als Organisationen der öffentlichen Hand (vgl. Tanova 2003, S. 111).

2.4 Wirkungen der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation

2.4.1 Wirkungen auf individueller Ebene

Die bisherige Forschung zu den Wirkungen der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation betrachtet überwiegend die individuelle Ebene. Insbesondere frühe Forschung hat dabei (1) den Vergleich von Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation mit anderen rekrutierungsbezogenen Informationsquellen zum Gegenstand. Jüngere Forschung fokussiert hingegen verstärkt die den Wirkungen der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation zugrunde liegenden Mechanismen bzw. das Zusammenspiel von (2) Nachrichteneigenschaften, (3) Moderatoren und (4) Mediatoren.

(1) Wegbereitend für die Erforschung der Wirkungen arbeitsbezogener Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation war die Untersuchung von Fisher und Kollegen (1979), obgleich die Forscher noch nicht den Begriff der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation verwendeten (vgl. van Hoya 2014, S. 256). Im Rahmen einer Experimentalstudie konnten sie zeigen, dass die aus Sicht von Bewerbern für eine Beschäftigung relevanten Informationen ein höheres Maß an **Glaubwürdigkeit** aufweisen, wenn diese nicht durch einen Recruiter, sondern durch Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation (hier: Freund oder gegenwärtiger Stelleninhaber) übermittelt werden. Darüber hinaus wurde der Arbeitgeber als attraktiver wahrgenommen, falls die Informationen in Form von Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation vermittelt wurden (vgl. Fisher/Ilggen/Hoyer 1979, S. 101).

Als einige der ersten Forscher, die Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation in der Rekrutierung untersuchten und auch als solche bezeichneten (vgl. van Hoya 2014, S. 255), gingen Cable und Kollegen (2000) der Frage nach, wie akkurat Bewerber in Abhängigkeit der Nutzungsintensität verschiedener Informationsquellen die **kulturellen Werte einer Organisation** einschätzen können. Die Forscher vermuteten, dass Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation im Vergleich zu organisationsabhängigen Informationsquellen mit größerer Wahrscheinlichkeit zu einer akkuraten Einschätzung führt, da objektive Informationen über kulturelle Werte für Bewerber schwer zu beschaffen sind. Entgegen den Erwartungen konnte kein Zusammenhang zwischen der Nutzung von Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation als Informationsquelle und der Genauigkeit der Einschätzung der kulturellen Werte nachgewiesen werden (vgl. Cable et al. 2000, S. 1082).

Collins und Stevens (2002) untersuchten im Rahmen ihrer Studie die Wirkungen verschiedener Informationsquellen (hier: Publicity, Sponsoring, Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation und rekrutierungsbezogene Werbung) auf die **Bewerbungsintention** und das **Bewerbungsverhalten** von Studierenden. Es wurde ersichtlich, dass Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation einen positiven Effekt auf die Bewerbungsintention und das Bewerbungsverhalten hat. Dieser gerichtete Zusammenhang konnte auch im Hinblick auf rekrutierungsbezogene Werbung festgestellt werden (vgl. Collins/Stevens 2002, S. 1130).

Ein weiterer Vergleich der Wirkungen von Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation und rekrutierungsbezogener Werbung (hier: Stellenanzeigen) ist in der Studie von van Hoyer und Lievens (2005) zu finden. Die Forscher untersuchten, ob eine durch **negative Publicity** hervorgerufene Beeinträchtigung der wahrgenommenen Arbeitgeberattraktivität durch positive Informationen, die durch andere Informationsquellen vermittelt werden, wieder ausgeglichen werden kann. Im Rahmen der durchgeführten Experimentalstudie zeigte sich, dass sowohl positive Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation als auch rekrutierungsbezogene Werbung den schädlichen Effekt negativer Publicity auf die wahrgenommene Arbeitgeberattraktivität mindern kann. Im Vergleich zu rekrutierungsbezogener Werbung wurde Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation jedoch als die glaubwürdigere Informationsquelle wahrgenommen (vgl. van Hoyer/Lievens 2005, S. 183).

(2) Um vertiefende Einblicke in die Rolle von Nachrichteneigenschaften zu gewinnen, untersuchten van Hoyer und Lievens (2007b, 2009) die **Valenz** der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation. Im Rahmen einer Experimentalstudie wiesen sie nach, dass positive Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation mit einer hohen, negative Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation hingegen mit einer niedrigen wahrgenommenen Arbeitgeberattraktivität im Zusammenhang steht (vgl. van Hoyer/Lievens 2007b, S. 2039). Diese Ergebnisse konnten die Forscher im Rahmen einer anschließenden Feldstudie jedoch nur dahingehend replizieren, dass positive, nicht aber negative Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation einen Einfluss auf die wahrgenommene Arbeitgeberattraktivität und Bewerbungsintention aufwies (vgl. van Hoyer/Lievens 2009, S. 348-349). Zu ähnlichen Ergebnissen gelangte auch die Studie von Jaidi und Kollegen (2011). Die Forscher konnten einen positiven Zusammenhang zwischen positiver Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation und der Intention, eine Anstellung bei der involvierten Organisation anzustreben, feststellen. Dieser Zusammenhang zeigte sich auch hinsichtlich des Verhaltens der Befragten bzw. des tatsächlichen Strebens nach einer Anstellung. Bei negativer Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation zeichneten sich diese Zusammenhänge hingegen nicht ab (vgl. Jaidi/van Hooft/Arends 2011, S. 147-150). Im Gegensatz dazu konnten Kanar und Kollegen (2010) einen stärkeren Einfluss von negativer als von positiver Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation auf die wahrgenommene Arbeitgeberattraktivität

nachweisen. Dieser Effekt erwies sich als stabil, da er auch noch eine Woche nach der initialen Messung festzustellen war (vgl. Kanar/Collins/Bell 2010, S. 202-203).

Bezogen auf den **Nachrichteninhalt** untersuchten van Hove und Lievens (2007a) Unterschiede im Einfluss von Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation auf die wahrgenommene Arbeitgeberattraktivität in Abhängigkeit davon, ob Informationen über die Organisation als Ganzes oder über einzelne Mitarbeiter übermittelt werden. Es wurde ersichtlich, dass Informationen über die Organisation als Ganzes eine stärkere arbeitgeberattraktivitätssteigernde Wirkung aufweisen als Informationen, die sich auf einzelne Mitarbeiter beziehen (vgl. van Hove/Lievens 2007a, S. 378).

Als weitere Facette des Nachrichteninhalts analysierten van Hove und Kollegen (2016) in zwei Studien den Einfluss von kommunizierten **Arbeitgebereigenschaften** (hier: instrumentelle vs. symbolische Eigenschaften) auf die wahrgenommene Arbeitgeberattraktivität. Während in der ersten Studie kein Unterschied bezüglich der Attraktivitätswahrnehmung in Abhängigkeit des Nachrichteninhalts zu beobachten war, konnte in der zweiten Studie ein stärkerer Einfluss symbolischer Arbeitgebereigenschaften im Vergleich zu instrumentellen Arbeitgebereigenschaften nachgewiesen werden (vgl. van Hove et al. 2016, S. 49-50). In Anbetracht dessen, dass in beiden Studien unterschiedliche Arten von Arbeitsplatzsuchenden befragt wurden (hier: Arbeitslose in Studie 1 vs. gegenwärtig Beschäftigte in Studie 2), deuten die Ergebnisse darauf hin, dass individuelle Unterschiede bei der Verarbeitung von Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation von Bedeutung sind.

Obwohl Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation ursprünglich mit mündlicher Kommunikation assoziiert ist, kann sie auch vermittelt durch ein **Medium**, insbesondere via Internet, erfolgen (vgl. 2.2.1). Vor diesem Hintergrund widmen sich Studien der Untersuchung der Wirkungen elektronischer Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation.

Cable und Yu (2006) analysierten in ihrer Studie die Glaubwürdigkeit von arbeitgeberbezogenen Informationen, die von Mitarbeitern über ein **elektronisches Forum** (engl. bulletin board) übermittelt wurden. Anders als von den

Forschern angenommen, wurde ersichtlich, dass diese Informationen von Arbeitsplatzsuchenden als vergleichsweise weniger glaubwürdig eingestuft werden als jene Informationen, die über die unternehmenseigene Webseite kommuniziert werden (vgl. Cable/Yu 2006, S. 832).

Wie van Hoya (2014, S. 256) konstatierte, stehen diese Ergebnisse auf den ersten Blick im Widerspruch zu den Resultaten der Studie von van Hoya und Lievens (2007a). Die Forscher fanden – basierend auf einem Vergleich von elektronischer Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation und Mitarbeiter-Testimonials auf der unternehmenseigenen Homepage – Belege für eine höhere Glaubwürdigkeit von Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation. Es ist jedoch zu vermuten, dass sich diese **Inkonsistenz aufgrund der Operationalisierung** der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation ergibt. So wurde Letztere zwar in beiden Studien über eine unternehmensunabhängige Webseite vermittelt, jedoch handelte es sich in der Studie von van Hoya und Lievens (2007a) beim Informationssender um einen Freund des Informationsempfängers. Es besteht somit die Möglichkeit, dass die Anonymität des Informationssenders in der Studie von Cable und Yu (2006) die Glaubwürdigkeit der Informationen reduziert hat (vgl. van Hoya 2014, S. 256). Dies deutet darauf hin, dass der Informationssender auch für die Wirkungen elektronischer Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation eine Rolle spielt.

Daneben fokussieren erste wissenschaftliche Studien die Wirkungen elektronischer Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation in Form von **Arbeitgeberbewertungen auf Arbeitgeberbewertungsportalen**. Melián-González und Bulchand-Gidumal (2016) konnten in Bezug auf potenzielle Bewerber zeigen, dass eine positive Arbeitgeberbewertung im Vergleich zu einer neutralen Arbeitgeberbewertung die wahrgenommene Arbeitgeberattraktivität, die Bewerbungsintention sowie die Weiterempfehlungsbereitschaft erhöhen kann. Eine negative Arbeitgeberbewertung führt hingegen im Vergleich zu einer neutralen zu einer Verschlechterung in den besagten Ergebnisgrößen (vgl. Melián-González/Bulchand-Gidumal 2016, S. 717-718).

Jüngere Studien bestätigen die negativen Wirkungen negativer Arbeitgeberbewertungen (vgl. z. B. Stockman/van Hoya/da Motta Veiga 2020) und untersuchen zudem, wie diese gemindert werden können. Dieses Vorgehen

kommt der Analyse von Moderatoren in Form organisationaler Eigenschaften und Handlungen gleich (vgl. 2.2.2).

(3) Im Hinblick auf organisationale Eigenschaften existieren erste Hinweise dafür, dass das Vorhandensein von **Employer Brand Equity** die negativen Wirkungen negativer Arbeitgeberbewertungen reduzieren kann. Dabei handelt es sich um die Meinungen von Bewerbern über eine Organisation als Arbeitgeber, die auf ihrem Wissen über diese und ihren Erfahrungen mit dieser Organisation basieren (vgl. Stockman/van Hoya/da Motta Veiga 2020, S. 12). Im Speziellen konnten Stockman und Kollegen (2020) nachweisen, dass sowohl positives Employer Brand Equity (hier: eine bekannte Organisation mit positivem Image) als auch negatives Employer Brand Equity (hier: eine bekannte Organisation mit negativem Image) dazu führt, dass sich negative Arbeitgeberbewertungen in geringerem Maße schädlich auf die wahrgenommene Arbeitgeberattraktivität auswirken (vgl. Stockman/van Hoya/da Motta Veiga 2020, S. 20).

Hinsichtlich organisationaler Handlungen zeigte eine Studie von Könsgen und Kollegen (2018), dass sich ein **konstruktiver Arbeitgeberkommentar** zu einer negativen Arbeitgeberbewertung positiv auf die von Arbeitsplatzsuchenden wahrgenommene Vertrauenswürdigkeit der Organisation auswirkt. Dies beeinflusst wiederum das Streben nach einer Anstellung bei der betreffenden Organisation positiv (vgl. Könsgen et al. 2018, S. 172). Zu ähnlichen Erkenntnissen gelangte auch die Studie von Carpentier und van Hoya (2021). Ein **Denial** bzw. eine Form von Arbeitgeberkommentar, mittels derer die Organisation die Verantwortlichkeit für den in der Bewertung kritisierten Sachverhalt von sich weist, führt zu einer höheren wahrgenommenen Arbeitgeberattraktivität. Erklärt wird dieser Effekt durch eine höhere wahrgenommene Vertrauenswürdigkeit der Organisation und eine geringere Glaubwürdigkeit der Arbeitgeberbewertung (vgl. Carpentier/van Hoya 2021, S. 280-281).

Neben den Eigenschaften und Handlungen der Organisation können die Eigenschaften des Informationssenders und des Informationsempfängers die Wirkungen der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation moderieren. Gleiches gilt für die beiderseitige Beziehung von Sender und Empfänger (vgl. 2.2.2).

Im Hinblick auf die Eigenschaften des Informationssenders untersuchten van Hove und Kollegen (2016) in zwei Studien, inwiefern Expertise und zugrunde liegende Motive die Wirkungen positiver Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation auf die wahrgenommene Arbeitgeberattraktivität determinieren. Hinsichtlich der **Expertise** wurde in beiden Studien ersichtlich, dass durch erfahrene Informationssender (hier: Organisationsmitglieder) bereitgestellte Informationen einflussreicher sind als jene, die durch unerfahrene Informationssender (hier: Nichtorganisationsmitglieder) verbreitet werden. In Bezug auf **Motive** zeigte sich konsistent, dass durch monetäre Anreize geförderte Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation in geringerem Maße arbeitgeberattraktivitätssteigernd wirkt als Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation, die rein intrinsisch motiviert ist. Dieser Befund konnte im Rahmen einer weiteren Untersuchung bestätigt werden (vgl. Stockman/van Hove/Carpentier 2017, S. 620).

Hinsichtlich der Eigenschaften des Informationsempfängers gingen van Hove und Lievens (2005, 2007b) der Frage nach, ob es sich bei dem sogenannten **Self Monitoring** (vgl. Snyder 1974) um einen Moderator der Wirkungen von Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation auf die wahrgenommene Arbeitgeberattraktivität handelt. Gemäß dem Konzept des Self Monitorings können Individuen entweder als „high self-monitors“ oder als „low self-monitors“ kategorisiert werden (Kilduff 1992, S. 169-170). Erstere sind besonders empfänglich für die Rollenerwartungen anderer Menschen, wohingegen Letztere trotz gesellschaftlicher Erwartungen darauf beharren, sie selbst zu sein. Anders als erwartet, zeigte sich weder bei van Hove und Lievens (2005, S. 183) noch bei van Hove und Lievens (2007b, S. 2037) ein moderierender Einfluss des Self Monitorings.

Als eine weitere Eigenschaft des Informationsempfängers betrachteten van Hove und Kollegen (2016) in zwei Studien das **Geschlecht**. Im Speziellen untersuchten die Forscher zum einen, ob Frauen im Vergleich zu Männern mit größerer Wahrscheinlichkeit durch positive Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation attrahiert werden. Zum anderen wurde analysiert, ob die Übereinstimmung des Geschlechts von Sender und Empfänger die Reaktion auf positive Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation moderiert. Entgegen der Annahme der Forscher konnte in beiden Studien weder ein Unterschied zwischen Frauen und

Männern noch eine moderierende Wirkung der Übereinstimmung des Geschlechts festgestellt werden (vgl. van Hoya et al. 2016, S. 49).

Die Beziehung zwischen Informationssender und -empfänger fokussierend, analysierten sowohl van Hoya und Lievens (2007b) als auch van Hoya und Kollegen (2016) die Rolle der **tie strength**. Van Hoya und Lievens (2007b) gingen der Frage nach, ob die Nähe innerhalb der sozialen Beziehung den Zusammenhang zwischen Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation (hier: positiv vs. negativ) und wahrgenommener Arbeitgeberattraktivität moderiert. Die Forscher fanden jedoch keine Belege für einen Interaktionseffekt. Vielmehr wurde ein schwacher Haupteffekt der tie strength auf die wahrgenommene Arbeitgeberattraktivität erkennbar. Unabhängig davon, ob positive oder negative Informationen kommuniziert wurden, hatte Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation, die im Rahmen einer engen sozialen Beziehung auftritt, einen positiveren Einfluss auf die wahrgenommene Arbeitgeberattraktivität als jene, die eine schwache soziale Beziehung zugrunde liegt (vgl. van Hoya/Lievens 2007b, S. 2037). Dieser Befund wurde durch die Untersuchung von van Hoya und Kollegen (2016) gestützt. Die Forscher konnten im Rahmen von zwei Studien zeigen, dass Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation einen stärkeren Einfluss auf die wahrgenommene Arbeitgeberattraktivität aufweist, sofern diese von einem Freund anstatt von einem Bekannten ausgeht.

Um zu einem nuancierteren Verständnis des Zusammenspiels der Faktoren zu gelangen, die den Einfluss von Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation bestimmen, untersuchten Keeling und Kollegen (2013) die **Interaktion von Valenz, Nachrichteninhalt und tie strength**. Es wurde deutlich, dass, sofern negative Informationen über kaum greifbare Arbeitgeberereignisse kommuniziert werden, dies im Falle einer engen sozialen Beziehung einen stärkeren negativen Effekt auf die wahrgenommene Arbeitgeberattraktivität hat als im Falle einer schwachen sozialen Beziehung. Anders gestaltet sich dies hingegen im Falle negativer Informationen über besser greifbare Arbeitgeberereignisse. Hier wurde im Falle einer schwachen sozialen Beziehung ein stärkerer negativer Effekt erkennbar (vgl. Keeling/McGoldrick/Sadhu 2013, S. 95).

Ähnlich differenzierte Einblicke gewährt die Untersuchung von Liu und Kollegen (2016), im Rahmen derer die **Interaktion von Valenz, tie strength und individuellem Entscheidungsstil** von Arbeitsplatzsuchenden analysiert wurde. Mit Blick auf den Entscheidungsstil wurde eine Unterscheidung in Maximizers und Satisficers vorgenommen (vgl. Schwartz et al. 2002). Erstere führen tendenziell gründlichere Informationsrecherchen durch, um ihre Entscheidungen zu treffen, und vergleichen alle gesammelten Informationen sorgfältig, um die besten Ergebnisse zu erzielen. Letztere weisen eine niedrigere Anspruchshaltung bezüglich ihrer Entscheidungen und Ergebnisse auf. Sie fokussieren sich ausschließlich darauf, eine Entscheidung zu treffen, die „gut genug“ ist (vgl. Liu/Keeling/Papamichail 2016, S. 1407). Im Rahmen der Untersuchung zeigte sich, dass das Zusammenspiel von Valenz und tie strength für Maximizers und Satisficers unterschiedlich ausfällt. Erhalten Maximizers Informationen von einer Person, zu der sie eine schwache soziale Beziehung haben, führen positive Informationen zu einer höheren wahrgenommenen Arbeitgeberattraktivität im Vergleich zu negativen Informationen. Liegt eine starke soziale Beziehung vor, ist kein Unterschied zu beobachten. Bei Satisficers zeigte sich hingegen, dass im Falle einer starken sozialen Beziehung positive Informationen zu einer höheren wahrgenommenen Arbeitgeberattraktivität führen als negative Informationen. Im Falle einer schwachen sozialen Beziehung waren jedoch keine Unterschiede in Abhängigkeit der Valenz zu beobachten (vgl. Liu/Keeling/Papamichail 2016, S. 1415).

(4) Im Hinblick auf Mediatoren bzw. Prozessvariablen fokussieren bisherige Studien die Rolle der **Glaubwürdigkeit**. So untersuchten van Hoyer und Lievens (2005) in ihrer Studie, ob der unterschiedliche Effekt von rekrutierungsbezogener Werbung und Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation auf die wahrgenommene Arbeitgeberattraktivität durch die Glaubwürdigkeit der Informationsquellen vermittelt wird. Die Forscher fanden jedoch keine Hinweise für den vermuteten Mediationseffekt (vgl. van Hoyer/Lievens 2005, S. 184). Anders gestaltete sich dies in zwei anschließenden Untersuchungen, im Rahmen derer erste Hinweise für die mediiierende Wirkung der Glaubwürdigkeit gefunden werden konnten (vgl. van Hoyer/Lievens 2007b; van Hoyer 2012). Im Speziellen zeigte sich zum einen in einer weiteren Experimentalstudie, dass

der Effekt von Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation auf die wahrgenommene Arbeitgeberattraktivität teilweise durch die Glaubwürdigkeit rekrutierungsbezogener Werbung, jedoch nicht durch die Glaubwürdigkeit der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation mediiert wird (vgl. van Hoya/Lievens 2007b, S. 2039). Zum anderen konnte mittels einer Feldstudie nachgewiesen werden, dass der Zusammenhang zwischen Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation und wahrgenommener Arbeitgeberattraktivität teilweise durch die Glaubwürdigkeit der erhaltenen Informationen vermittelt wird (vgl. van Hoya 2012, S. 385). Substanzielle Hinweise auf die mediiierende Wirkung der Glaubwürdigkeit sind hingegen in einer Experimentalstudie von Hoya und Lievens (2007a) zu finden, die den Vergleich von Mitarbeiter-Testimonials auf der Unternehmenshomepage mit elektronischer Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation zum Gegenstand hatte. Hierbei wurde deutlich, dass der Effekt der Informationsquelle auf die wahrgenommene Arbeitgeberattraktivität durch die Glaubwürdigkeit vermittelt wird (vgl. van Hoya/Lievens 2007a, S. 379).

Das Forschungsmodell der Studie von Collins und Stevens (2002) gibt ebenfalls Aufschluss über die Mechanismen, die der Wirkung von Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation zugrunde liegen. So wurde im Rahmen der Studie erkennbar, dass der Einfluss der untersuchten Informationsquellen auf die Bewerbungsintention und das Bewerbungsverhalten durch die wahrgenommene **Arbeitgeberattraktivität** sowie die wahrgenommenen **Arbeitgebereigenschaften** mediiert wird. Insbesondere Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation wies dabei einen starken Einfluss auf die beiden vermittelnden Variablen auf (vgl. Collins/Stevens 2002, S. 1121).

Um die Wirkmechanismen der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation zu erklären, bedienten sich Jaidi und Kollegen (2011) der **Theorie des geplanten Verhaltens** (vgl. Ajzen 1991). Die Forscher konnten in ihrer Studie zeigen, dass der Zusammenhang zwischen positiver Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation und der Intention, eine Anstellung bei der involvierten Organisation anzustreben, vollständig durch die Variablen der Theorie des geplanten Verhaltens mediiert wird (vgl. Jaidi/van Hooft/Arends 2011, S. 147). Des Weiteren wurde ersichtlich, dass besagte Intention mit dem tatsächlichen Anstreben einer Anstellung im Zusammenhang steht, das wiederum positiv mit der Arbeitgeberwahl zusammenhängt (vgl. Jaidi/van Hooft/Arends S. 149).

2.4.2 Wirkungen auf organisationaler Ebene

Neben den Erkenntnissen zu den Wirkungen auf Ebene des Individuums existieren erste Hinweise, dass Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation auch recruitment outcomes auf organisationaler Ebene beeinflusst.

So untersuchten Mencken und Winfield (1998), welche Vorteile Unternehmensvertreter, die für die Rekrutierung neuer Mitarbeiter verantwortlich sind, mit informeller Rekrutierung verbinden. Die Forscher fanden heraus, dass Unternehmensvertreter mit informeller Rekrutierung (hier: Mitarbeiterempfehlungen und Nutzung professioneller Netzwerke) eine hohe **Qualität des Bewerberpools** assoziieren. Niedrigere Kosten wurden hingegen – anders als erwartet – nicht als Vorteil informeller Rekrutierung angesehen (vgl. Mencken/Winfield 1998, S. 144).

Zu ähnlichen Ergebnissen hinsichtlich der Qualität des Bewerberpools gelangt die Studie von Fernandez und Weinberg (1997). Die Forscher untersuchten unter Rückgriff auf tatsächliche Bewerbungen auf vakante Stellen bei einer großen Privatkundenbank, ob Mitarbeiterempfehlungen zu mehr geeigneten Bewerbern führen. Im Einklang mit der vorab aufgestellten Vermutung wurde deutlich, dass empfohlene Bewerber im Vergleich zu nicht empfohlenen Bewerbern eine systematisch höhere fachliche Eignung aufweisen (vgl. Fernandez/Weinberg 1997, S. 890).

Umfassendere Erkenntnisse liefert die Studie von Baum und Kabst (2012). Die Forscher untersuchten im Hinblick auf kleine und mittlere Unternehmen, inwiefern sich informelle Rekrutierung auf verschiedene recruitment outcomes auf organisationaler Ebene auswirkt (hier: Quantität/Qualität des Bewerberpools und Passung zwischen Bewerber und Stelle/Organisation). Es zeigte sich, dass informelle Rekrutierung (hier: Mitarbeiterempfehlungen und Nutzung geschäftlicher sowie privater Netzwerke) die Qualität des Bewerberpools erhöhen kann. Des Weiteren konnte ein positiver Einfluss sowohl auf die **Passung zwischen Bewerber und Stelle** als auch auf die **Passung zwischen Bewerber und Organisation** festgestellt werden. Kein Einfluss wurde hingegen bezüglich der Quantität des Bewerberpools erkennbar (vgl. Baum/Kabst 2012, S. 129).

Rafaeli und Kollegen (2005) verglichen im Rahmen ihrer Studie Stellenanzeigen und Mitarbeiterempfehlungen hinsichtlich der **Kosten je Neueinstellung** und der sogenannten **yield ratio**. Letztere beschreibt den Anteil der Neueinstellungen aus dem gesamten Bewerberpool, der auf eine bestimmte rekrutierungsbezogene Informationsquelle zurückzuführen ist (vgl. Rafaeli/Hadomi/Simons 2005, S. 356). Die Ergebnisse verdeutlichen zum einen, dass Mitarbeiterempfehlungen im Vergleich zu Stellenanzeigen mit deutlich geringeren Kosten je Neueinstellung einhergehen, was in Widerspruch zu den kostenbezogenen Ergebnissen von Mencken und Winfield (1998, S. 144) steht. Zum anderen zeigen die Studienergebnisse auf, dass Mitarbeiterempfehlungen im Vergleich zu Stellenanzeigen mit einer signifikant höheren yield ratio einhergehen (vgl. Rafaeli/Hadomi/Simons 2005, S. 356).

Als eine der bisher seltenen Studien, die den Zusammenhang zwischen rekrutierungsbezogenen Informationsquellen und **Fluktuation** auf organisationaler Ebene betrachten (vgl. Griffeth/Tenbrink/Robinson 2014, S. 219), untersuchte Tanova (2003) die Wirkung von Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation. Im Gegensatz zu bisherigen Erkenntnissen auf individueller Ebene (vgl. z. B. Taylor 1994) wurde ersichtlich, dass kein Zusammenhang zwischen Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation und der Fluktuationsrate besteht (vgl. Tanova 2003, S. 111).

2.5 Herleitung eines Forschungsmodells zur Analyse der Ursachen und Wirkungen der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation

Bisherige Forschung zu Ursachen und Wirkungen arbeitsbezogener Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation lässt sich anhand des integrativen Modells der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation systematisieren (vgl. 2.2.2). Das integrative Modell stellt dabei jedoch keine vollständige bzw. abschließende Konzeption relevanter Ursachen und Wirkungen dar. Vielmehr handelt es sich um einen auf der Synthese bisheriger Ergebnisse basierenden konzeptionellen Rahmen, der durch zukünftige Forschung zu überprüfen und zu erweitern ist (vgl. van Hoye 2014, S. 260). Daher liegt dem in Abbildung 2.2 dargestellten **Forschungsmodell** das integrative Modell der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation zugrunde.

In Analogie zum integrativen Modell werden die Elemente des Modells in Form von Rechtecken dargestellt und durch Pfeile miteinander verbunden, die die Wirkungsrichtung der jeweiligen Zusammenhänge anzeigen. Modellelemente im Sinne von Ursachen stellen die Eigenschaften des Informationsempfängers, des Informationssenders sowie der Organisation dar. Diese Elemente werden, inklusive ihrer durch Doppelpfeile dargestellten wechselseitigen Beziehungen, links in der Abbildung unterschieden. Zudem beeinflussen sie die Entstehung von Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation und moderieren wiederum deren Einfluss auf Prozessvariablen (Mediatoren) bzw. nachgelagerte recruitment outcomes.

Wie in Abbildung 2.2 dargestellt ist, erfolgt im Rahmen der Konzeption des Forschungsmodells in zweierlei Hinsicht eine **Modifikation des integrativen Modells**. Diese betrifft zum einen die formale Darstellung (1) und zum anderen die inhaltliche Fokussierung (2).

(1) In Bezug auf die jeweiligen Modellelemente wird auf die Auflistung von bereits untersuchten Variablen verzichtet. Stattdessen wird eine abstrakte Darstellung gewählt, die den Charakter des Forschungsmodells im Sinne eines allgemeinen konzeptionellen Rahmens betont. Zudem werden mit dem Ziel der Komplexitätsreduktion die von Informationsempfänger und -sender sowie Organisation ausgehenden Wirkungsbeziehungen zu Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation in aggregierter Form mittels eines einzelnen Pfeils dargestellt. Gleiches gilt für die angenommene Moderationswirkung der betreffenden Modellelemente.

(2) Hinsichtlich der durch Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation beeinflussten Ergebnisgrößen beinhaltet das Forschungsmodell ausschließlich recruitment outcomes, wohingegen job search outcomes, die auf den individuellen Erfolg in der Arbeitsplatzsuche abstellen, nicht inkludiert werden (vgl. 2.2.2). Diese Spezifikation resultiert aus der innerhalb der vorliegenden Arbeit fokussierten organisationalen Perspektive. Aufgrund dieses Fokus werden im Rahmen der vorliegenden Arbeit zudem jene rekrutierungsbezogenen Ergebnisgrößen unter dem Begriff der recruitment outcomes gefasst, die der organisationalen Ebene zuzurechnen sind (z. B. Qualität und Quantität des Bewerberpools; vgl. z. B. Saks 2014, S. 469).

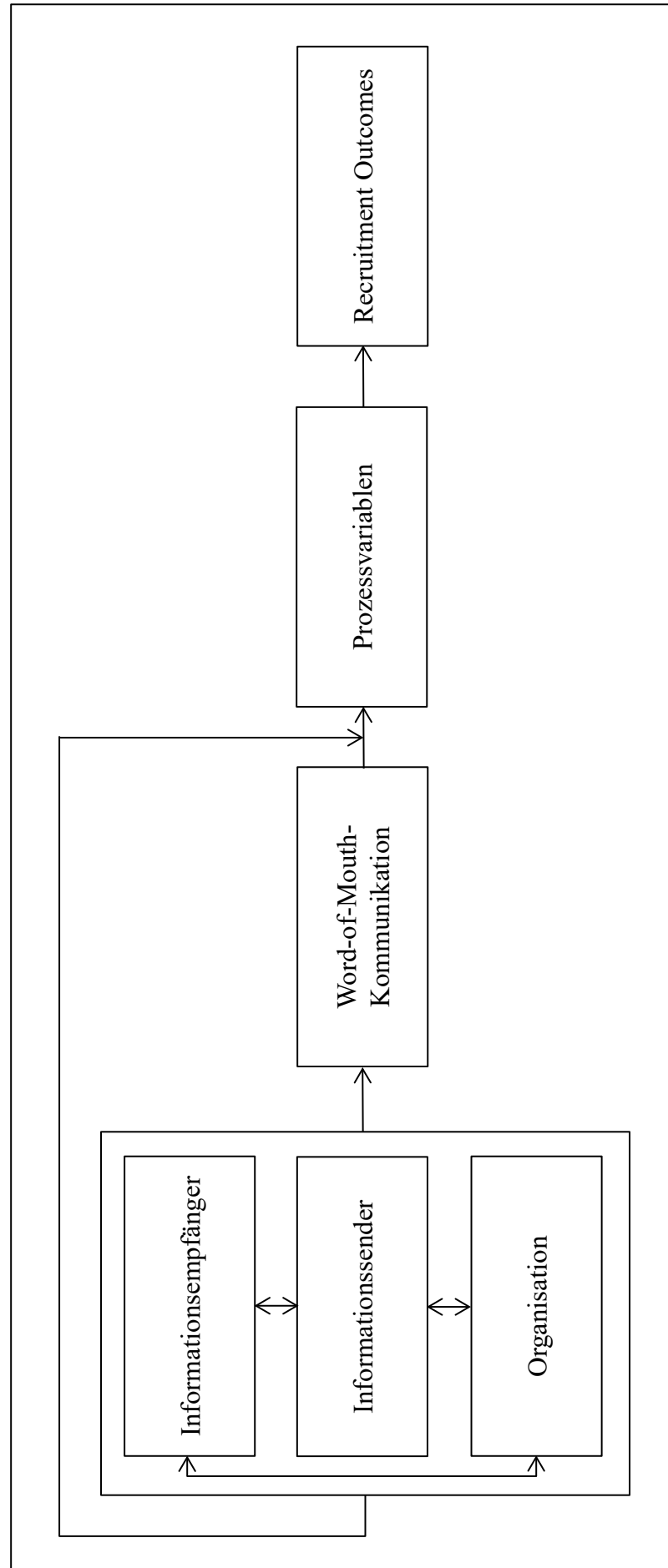


Abb. 2.2: Forschungsmodell zu Ursachen und Wirkungen der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation (eigene Darstellung; in Anlehnung an van Hoya 2014, S. 253)

3 Einordnung der Kapitel 4 bis 7 in das Forschungsmodell

In Kapitel 4 bis 7 werden empirische Studien zu Ursachen und Wirkungen der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation im Rahmen der Rekrutierung durchgeführt. Die Studien lassen sich in das in Abbildung 2.2 dargestellte Modell einordnen. Die Herleitung der jeweiligen Fragestellungen erfolgt dabei anhand verschiedener Theorien und bisheriger empirischer Erkenntnisse zu den Ursachen und Wirkungen der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation. In Abhängigkeit von der jeweiligen Fragestellung und dem gegenwärtigen Forschungsstand werden Methoden der quantitativen und der qualitativen Forschung angewendet, um neue Erkenntnisse zu gewinnen. **Quantitative Forschung** zeichnet sich dabei durch ihre Eignung für die Überprüfung von Wirkungsbeziehung zwischen Variablen aus und ist durch ein hohes Maß an Objektivität charakterisiert (vgl. Leavy 2017, S. 9). **Qualitative Forschung** weist eine hohe Eignung auf, wenn es darum geht, soziale Phänomene zu explorieren, zu beschreiben oder zu erklären (vgl. Leavy 2014, S. 2; Levitt et al. 2018, S. 27-28). Sie trägt maßgeblich zur Erlangung eines tiefgreifenden Verständnisses – bezogen auf den Untersuchungsgegenstand – bei (vgl. Leavy 2017, S. 9).

Abbildung 3.1 visualisiert die **Einordnung der Kapitel 4 bis 7 in das Forschungsmodell** zu Ursachen und Wirkungen der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation. Die grauen Ellipsen stellen die jeweiligen Studien dar, die in das Modell eingeordnet werden. Die von den Ellipsen ausgehenden grauen Pfeile zeigen die jeweiligen Schwerpunkte der Kapitel an.

Ausgehend vom gegenwärtigen Forschungsstand steht in der vorliegenden Arbeit ein Erkenntnisgewinn im Sinne der **Prüfung der Zusammenhänge** zwischen Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation und ihren Ursachen sowie Wirkungen im Fokus. Diesem deduktiven Ansatz folgend (vgl. Sedlmeier/Renkewitz 2013, S. 25), kommen primär unterschiedliche quantitative Forschungsmethoden zum Einsatz (vgl. Kap. 4 bis 6).

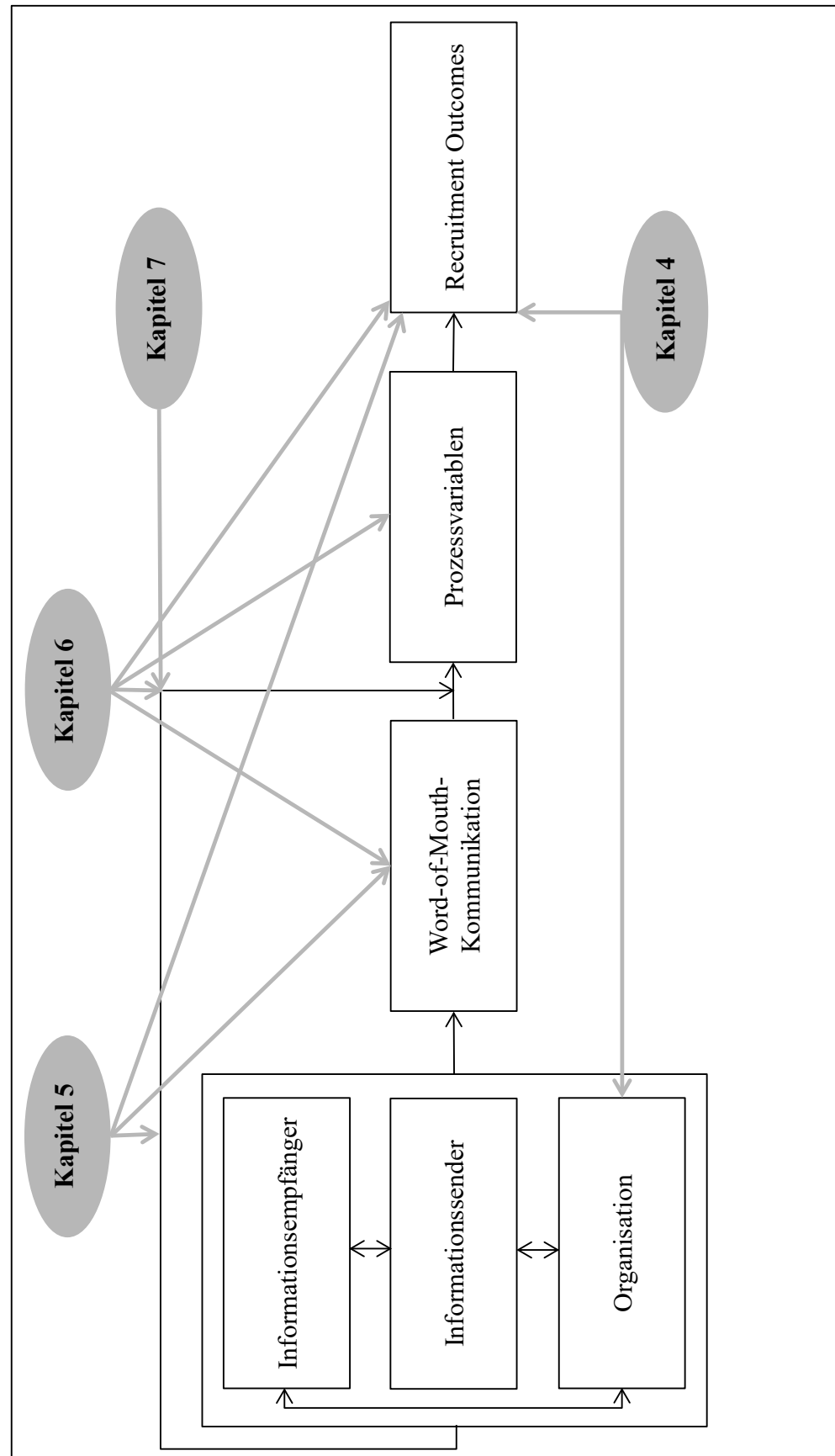


Abb. 3.1: Einordnung der Kapitel 4 bis 7 in das Forschungsmodell zu Ursachen und Wirkungen der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation

Wie in Abbildung 3.1 deutlich wird, liegt ein besonderer Fokus auf der **Analyse von Moderatoren und Mediatoren** der Wirkungen der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation. Aufbauend auf den Ergebnissen der Studie in Kapitel 6, widmet sich dabei insbesondere die Studie in Kapitel 7 einem tiefgreifenden Verständnis eines spezifischen Moderators (hier: Arbeitgeberkommentare zu negativen Online-Arbeitgeberbewertungen). Vor diesem Hintergrund wird sich zur Erreichung des Studienziels in Kapitel 7 einer qualitativen Forschungsmethode bedient.

Konkret wird in **Kapitel 4** („Recruitment practices under scrutiny: A latent-profile analysis of family firms’ approaches to recruit non-family employees“) die Analyse der Ursachen und Wirkungen von Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation auf organisationaler Ebene fokussiert. Dazu werden Unternehmensvertreter mittels Fragebogen zu organisationalen Eigenschaften, eingesetzten Rekrutierungsmaßnahmen sowie (rekrutierungsbezogenen) Erfolgsgrößen befragt. Mittels latenter Profilanalyse werden sogenannte recruitment sets identifiziert, die spezifische Bündel von Rekrutierungsmaßnahmen repräsentieren. Diese beinhalten u. a. Maßnahmen zur Förderung von und zum Umgang mit Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation. Die Anwendung spezifischer recruitment sets wird im Rahmen der Analyse mit organisationalen Eigenschaften sowie Erfolgsgrößen in Zusammenhang gebracht. Dies lässt Aussagen dahingehend zu, welche organisationalen Eigenschaften im Sinne von Ursachen zu einer vermehrten Förderung und Berücksichtigung von Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation führen und welche Wirkung dies auf den (Rekrutierungs-)Erfolg hat. Ausgehend von der seitens der Literatur proklamierten Relevanz von Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation für Familienunternehmen, wird ein Fokus auf diesen spezifischen Organisationstyp gelegt. Die Studie in Kapitel 4 trägt somit dazu bei, das in der Vernachlässigung der organisationalen Ebene bestehende Forschungsdefizit zu reduzieren, das bisher sowohl für die Forschung zu Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation im Speziellen (vgl. 1.2) als auch für die Rekrutierungsforschung im Allgemeinen zu konstatieren ist (vgl. Saks 2014, S. 466-467).

Kapitel 5 („Electronic word-of-mouth via employer review sites: The effects on organizational attraction“) fokussiert die Wirkungen elektronischer Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation auf individueller Ebene. Konkret werden in einer

Quasi-Experimentalstudie Auswirkungen positiver elektronischer Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation in Form von Arbeitgeberbewertungen auf die wahrgenommene Arbeitgeberattraktivität analysiert. Dabei werden Eigenschaften des Informationsempfängers (bisherige Erfahrung in der Arbeitsplatzsuche), des Informationssenders (Expertise) sowie der Nachricht (Argumentqualität) als für das Ausmaß der Wirkungen relevante Aspekte untersucht. Die Studie liefert dabei nicht nur weitere empirische Evidenz für die Wirkung positiver Arbeitgeberbewertungen, wodurch deren Relevanz für Organisationen verdeutlicht wird. Sie trägt auch zu einem nuancierteren Verständnis der Informationsverarbeitung von Arbeitsplatzsuchenden bei, wodurch die bisherige Forschung zu den Wirkungen der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation erweitert wird.

Kapitel 6 („How to deal with negative online employer reviews: An application of image repair theory“) hat die Analyse der Wirkungen negativer Arbeitgeberbewertungen auf die wahrgenommene Arbeitgeberattraktivität unter Berücksichtigung von Arbeitgeberkommentaren zum Gegenstand. Ausgehend von dem gegenwärtigen Erkenntnisdefizit hinsichtlich möglicher Varianten von Arbeitgeberkommentaren, wird zunächst ein multidisziplinärer Literaturüberblick über Typologien und Frameworks organisationaler Antwortstrategien gegeben. Dieser dient der Selektion möglicher Varianten von Arbeitgeberkommentaren zu negativen Arbeitgeberbewertungen, die hinsichtlich ihrer Pufferwirkung experimentell getestet werden. Ein besonderer Fokus liegt dabei auf der Untersuchung der zugrunde liegenden Wirkmechanismen. Neben Nachrichteneigenschaften (Kommunikation instrumenteller vs. symbolischer Arbeitgebereigenschaften; vgl. 2.1) werden zwei Prozessvariablen bzw. Mediatoren untersucht. Dabei handelt es sich um die einer Organisation zugeschriebene Verantwortlichkeit für den in der Bewertung kritisierten Sachverhalt sowie dessen wahrgenommene Unerwünschtheit. Kapitel 6 trägt somit zum einen dazu bei, die bisherige Inkonsistenz der Befunde zu den Wirkungen negativer Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation zu reduzieren. Zum anderen wird der Forschungsstand zu den Effekten organisationaler Reaktionen in Form von Kommentaren zu negativen Arbeitgeberbewertungen erweitert.

Kapitel 7 („Employer responses to negative online reviews: A genre analysis and avenues for future research“) setzt unmittelbar an den Befunden der Studie in Kapitel 6 an. Diese zeigen auf, dass zur Weiterentwicklung des Forschungsfelds ein tiefgreifendes Verständnis von Arbeitgeberkommentaren zu negativen Arbeitgeberbewertungen nötig ist. Mittels eines qualitativen bzw. diskursanalytischen Ansatzes (hier: Genreanalyse) wird daher die Gestaltung von Arbeitgeberkommentaren zu negativen Arbeitgeberbewertungen im Internet analysiert. Dazu werden reale Arbeitgeberkommentare zum einen hinsichtlich ihrer Struktur analysiert. Zum anderen werden die Intertextualität und Tonalität von Arbeitgeberkommentaren untersucht. Die Ergebnisse tragen zu einem tiefgreifenden Verständnis von Arbeitgeberkommentaren zu negativen Arbeitgeberbewertungen bei und ermöglichen es darüber hinaus, zahlreiche Wege für zukünftige Forschung aufzuzeigen.

Zusammenfassend werden in Kapitel 4 bis 7 (1) Erkenntnisse zu den bisher kaum erforschten Ursachen der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation generiert und zugleich (2) die Wirkungen der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation unter Berücksichtigung von Moderatoren und Mediatoren differenziert analysiert. Es findet dabei insbesondere (3) elektronische Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation auf Arbeitgeberbewertungsportalen Betrachtung, deren Erforschung trotz ihrer zunehmenden Verbreitung (vgl. 1.2) noch am Anfang steht. Basierend auf den durchgeführten Analysen wird somit zu einem umfassenden Verständnis der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation als rekrutierungsbezogene Informationsquelle beigetragen.

4 Recruitment practices under scrutiny: A latent-profile analysis of family firms' approaches to recruit non-family employees ^{2 3 4}

4.1 Introduction

In the light of demographic and economic changes (Beechler/Woodward 2009), recruiting qualified employees is a challenge for many organizations (Connerley 2014). This is particularly true for family firms, which often struggle to attract qualified employees from outside the family (Verbeke/Kano 2012; Block et al. 2016). As extant research suggests, **recruitment in family firms** is different from recruitment in non-family firms: on the one hand, it has been stated that potential applicants sometimes hold negative beliefs about employment conditions in family firms, which might affect the available applicant pool (Botero 2014; Hauswald et al. 2016). On the other hand, evidence has been found that family firms tend to rely on informal recruitment practices (e.g., De Kok/Uhlander/Thurik 2006; Gómez-Mejía et al. 2011). With regard to the latter, conceptual work has started to provide explanations for family firms' tendency toward informal recruitment by drawing on the concept of socioemotional wealth (Gómez-Mejía et al. 2007). In particular, it has been proposed that family firms tend to make use of informal recruitment practices (e.g., word-of-mouth), as they allow them to focus on a narrow pool of known candidates, who fit the organization in terms of sharing the family's values and culture (Cruz/Firfiray/Gómez-Mejía 2011; Gómez-Mejía et al. 2011).

Although the adoption of **informal recruitment practices** might serve family firms' socioemotional wealth preservation motive, mainly relying on these

² Dieser Beitrag ist in Zusammenarbeit mit Sascha Ruhle und Stefan Süß entstanden. Die Anteile an diesem Beitrag betrugen etwa 50% (Kollitz), 25% (Ruhle) und 25% (Süß). Der Autor der vorliegenden Arbeit war an der Konzeption der Studie, ihrer Durchführung, ihrer Auswertung sowie an der Diskussion der Ergebnisse maßgeblich beteiligt.

³ Eine vorherige Fassung dieses Beitrags ist im German Journal of Human Resource Management erschienen: Kollitz, Rouven/Ruhle, Sascha/Süß, Stefan (2019): Recruitment practices under scrutiny: A latent-profile analysis of family firms' approaches to recruit non-family employees, in: German Journal of Human Resource Management 33 (3/2019), S. 167-196 Copyright © 2019 SAGE Publications DOI: 10.1177/2397002219831502.

⁴ Eine vorherige Fassung dieses Beitrags wurde auf der Wissenschaftlichen Kommission Personal im Verband der Hochschullehrer für Betriebswirtschaft (VHB) in München (14.09.2018) präsentiert.

can be disadvantageous: due to their limited range, informal recruitment practices are likely to result in a restricted applicant pool, that insufficiently provides the family firm with the required job-specific capabilities and knowledge (Cruz/Firfiray/Gómez-Mejía 2011). In addition to the often limited human resource pool provided by family members (Sirmon/Hitt 2003; Dyer 2006), relying on informal recruitment might, therefore, lead to a less qualified workforce. Moreover, when regarding firm-level outcomes, choosing informal over formal recruitment practices can be detrimental, as the incorporation of the latter has been shown to be beneficial for family firm performance (Dekker et al. 2015).

However, family firms choose their recruitment practices not exclusively based on socioemotional wealth considerations, but also based on other organizational characteristics or contingencies, such as availability of resources due to firm size (Cruz/Firfiray/Gómez-Mejía 2011). Therefore, whether a specific recruitment practice is carried out is not solely determined by its formality. Rather, family firms might consider multiple aspects of recruitment practices, such as their respective costs (e.g., Cardon/Stevens 2004) or their ability to reach a large number of job seekers (e.g., Dineen/Allen 2014). As recruitment reflects a combination of diverse practices (Carlson/Connerley/Mecham 2002), this advocates for a more nuanced perspective on the ways in which recruitment is carried out in family firms.

In this regard, we argue that various **sets of recruitment practices** – defined as general schemes underlying and describing family firms' composition of applied recruitment practices – occur, which are based on socioemotional, economic, and structural aspects. Given that the way an organization recruits can influence the quality of applicants and thus of individuals being hired (Breaugh 2014; Griffeth/Tenbrink/Robinson 2014), firms' sets of recruitment practices constitute a potential source of variance regarding recruitment outcomes and firm performance.

Surprisingly, research so far has made little attempt to explain the formation of these sets as well as their link to recruitment and firm-level outcomes. In particular, research is still lacking a clear understanding of (1) what sets of recruitment practices are adopted by family firms, (2) which organizational characteristics (including socioemotional wealth) predict the adoption of

those sets, and (3) whether the adoption of particular sets leads to differences in recruitment outcomes and firm performance. Given the importance of recruitment in family firms (Hauswald et al. 2016), this **gap in research** is crucial; a lack of knowledge might prevent family firms from adopting more efficient recruitment practices, especially in the light of their unique characteristics (Gómez-Mejía et al. 2011). Without this understanding, family firms might not reach their recruitment goals in terms of acquiring an adequate workforce.

Against this background, the **aim of the study** is to explore which particular sets of recruitment practices are adopted by family firms. At the same time, we analyze which organizational characteristics predict firms' adoption of these recruitment sets and whether these sets, in turn, predict recruitment outcomes and firm performance.

To achieve this aim, a quantitative empirical study was conducted. Survey-based data were gathered regarding recruitment practices, organizational characteristics, and recruitment and performance outcomes. Given the wide array of outcomes that might be incorporated in the study of recruitment effectiveness (Carlson/Mecham 2014), we focus on a selection of pre-hire outcomes which we derive from extant recruitment research (i.e., applicant pool quality/quantity and applicants' P-O/P-J fit). To address the complexity of recruitment, we apply **latent-profile analysis** to test the sets of recruitment practices as well as correlatives and outcomes of those sets.

In so doing, we advance the understanding of heterogeneity of family firms (Stanley/Kellermanns/Zellweger 2017), as we identify meaningful subgroups among family firms based on their respective approaches to recruitment. By linking these subgroups to multiple recruitment outcomes, we add to the so far limited body of research that seeks to explain recruitment effectiveness in family firms. Furthermore, we shed light on the combined effects of recruitment practices, answering the call for the simultaneous study of multiple recruitment practices (Saks 2014).

4.2 Conceptual background

4.2.1 Recruitment practices in family firms

Recruitment – defined in terms of those organizational practices carried out with the primary purpose of identifying and attracting potential employees (Barber 1998) – is a top priority for many organizations (van Hove 2014). To address potential applicants, organizations have a considerable variety of **recruitment practices** to choose from, each having various impacts on both pre- and post-hire outcomes (Moser 2005; Griffeth/Tenbrink/Robinson 2014). Among these are traditional recruitment practices, such as newspaper job advertisements (e.g., Walker/Hinojosa 2014), career fairs (e.g., van Hove/Saks 2011), and employee referrals (e.g., Shinnar/Young/Maena 2004). With the advent of the World Wide Web, several new ways of recruitment have emerged (Dineen/Allen 2014), such as usage of an organization’s website (e.g., Allen/Mahto/Otondo 2007) and online job boards (e.g., Dineen/Noe 2009). These promise to reach a vast number of applicants at relatively low cost (Cober et al. 2000). In addition, organizations might make use of social media to attract the attention of the individuals and make them aware of the job openings (e.g., Sivertzen/Nilsen/Olafsen 2013) and stimulate the online version of positive word-of-mouth (e.g., McFarland/Ployhart 2015; Lievens/Slaughter 2016).

In consideration of this variety of available recruitment practices, research has attempted to provide some guidance for organizations regarding their choice of recruitment practices also referred to as “recruitment methods” (Breaugh 2008) or “recruitment sources” (Griffeth/Tenbrink/Robinson 2014). In this effort, there has been a considerable interest regarding the effectiveness of recruitment practices (Ma/Allen 2009; Breaugh 2013; Griffeth/Tenbrink/Robinson 2014) and even some researchers have even concluded that certain recruitment practices could be considered as superior (Zottoli/Wanous 2000).

Although recruitment practices themselves may account for differences in recruitment outcomes, the proclaimed superiority of some practices might strongly depend on which criteria are employed to measure their relative effectiveness. Hence, whether a particular recruitment practice is carried out or

considered as effective might rather depend on the organization's respective characteristics and objectives. This is why some researchers advocate that recruitment effectiveness should be considered as an organizational-level phenomenon (Taylor/Collins 2000). To consider certain recruitment practices as inherently (in-)efficient might fall short: for example, even though recruitment via organizational web sites is perceived as generating a large number of job applicants at relatively low cost (Cober et al. 2000), the effectiveness of such a recruitment practice is highly dependent upon the employer's visibility and reputation (Breaugh 2008), which are likely to be limited for many organizations.

With regard to **family firms**, this implies that they might favor specific recruitment practices as they strive to maximize both business and family welfare objectives (Moore 2009). This is consistent with extant research, that suggests that family firms' approach to recruitment shows less reliance on formal intermediaries (hence being "informal"; e.g., Gómez-Mejía et al. 2011) and emphasizes the use of social networks (Cruz/Firfiray/Gómez-Mejía 2011). Furthermore, it has been stated that family firms often tend to fill vacant positions with family members ("nepots") rather than with non-family members (Jaskiewicz et al. 2013; Firfiray et al. 2018).

Although recruiting based on social networks and family ties might facilitate the achievement of some objectives desired by family firms, such as maintaining family control and influence (Cruz/Firfiray/Gómez-Mejía 2011; Firfiray et al. 2018), there are also potential downsides: for example, when considering nepotism as a hiring mechanism, it has been stated that, in general, it is detrimental to the family firm (Astrachan 2010), as the quality and quantity of human capital provided by family members are often limited (Sirmon/Hitt 2003; Dyer 2006). In particular, it has been argued that family firms that tend to recruit close family members may reduce the possible economic benefits which are based on the specialized knowledge and expertise provided by non-family employees (Cruz/Firfiray/Gómez-Mejía 2011). In a similar vein, the family firms' tendency toward informal recruitment practices might entail some risk, as these practices often result in a narrow applicant pool that might be limited with regard to the availability of the required jobspecific capabilities (Cruz/Firfiray/Gómez-Mejía 2011).

In sum, this suggests that family firms face a variety of recruitment practices they may opt to choose from, each being more or less beneficial for the achievement of their economic and family welfare objectives. Therefore, to combine recruitment practices in a way that serves their multiple objectives is a task of both high complexity and relevance for family firms, as the acquisition of qualified non-family employees in particular could be crucial for their growth and value creation (Botero 2014).

4.2.2 Distinguishing organizations' approaches to recruitment: Recruitment sets

4.2.2.1 Characterization of adopted recruitment sets

Given the complexity of recruitment, we argue that the appropriate level of analyzing or distinguishing organizations' approaches to recruitment is what we refer to in terms of "**recruitment sets**". We conceptualize these sets in terms of general schemes underlying and describing organizations' composition of applied recruitment practices, which are based on the respective organization's characteristics.

To explore these sets, we apply a **person-centered approach**. While the term personcentered seems misleading, it reflects an approach that focuses on the specific entity (in our case organizations) and not, as the name might suggest, a specific person (see van Rossenberg 2016). Recently, it has been applied to both the small and medium-sized enterprise (Baum/Schwens/Kabst 2015) and family firm domains (Dekker et al. 2012; Stanley/Kellermanns/Zellweger 2017) to distinguish different types (or subpopulations) of organizations based on their respective characteristics. Given that this study is the first to apply a person-centered perspective to the study of recruitment practices in family firms, the assumptions remain preliminary. Hypotheses will not be explicated, as it would be impracticable to provide specific hypotheses regarding the recruitment sets and the relationships between sets and covariates (i.e., their predictors and outcomes), which is not uncommon when using a person-centered perspective (Morin et al. 2011).

As for the selected **covariates**, however, it can be assumed that organizational characteristics that have been found to drive the choice of management and recruitment practices (e.g., firm size; Cardon/Stevens 2004; Kim/Gao 2010)

will also be related to the adoption of recruitment sets. With regard to family firms, this implies that the specifics of family firms should be considered as well. In this regard, we draw on the concept of socioemotional wealth, which extant research suggests is an important driver of family firm behavior (Gómez-Mejía et al. 2011; Sharma/Chrisman/Gersick 2012). Furthermore, we incorporate “family firm demographics” (e.g., presence of multiple generations). In a similar vein, we link set adoption to an array of recruitment outcomes, which we derive from prior recruitment research.

When applied to recruitment practices, a person-centered approach suggests that organizations’ adopted recruitment sets differ across **multiple dimensions**, which can be conceptually derived from the recruitment practices they include. Following this consideration implies that recruitment sets are to be characterized in terms of being (1) formal or informal (e.g., Saks/Ashforth 1997), (2) online or offline (e.g., Dineen/Allen 2014), and (3) high cost or low cost (e.g., Cardon/Stevens 2004).

(1) According to extant research, a rudimentary and frequently used distinction of recruitment practices can be provided by means of their reliance on formal intermediaries, which commonly has been referred to as the formal/informal distinction (Ma/Allen 2009; van Hoya 2012). Whereas **formal recruitment practices** involve the use of formal intermediaries that exist primarily for recruitment purposes, such as placement agencies or recruitment advertising, informal recruitment practices do not involve the use of formal intermediaries (Saks/Ashforth 1997; Ma/Allen 2009; van Hoya 2012). Instead, **informal recruitment practices** either involve private intermediaries, such as referrals by (former) employees, relatives, or friends, or involve no intermediaries, such as rehires (van Hoya 2013a).

(2) The World Wide Web has significantly changed the ways in which organizations tend to recruit (Sylva/Mol 2009; Dineen/Allen 2014), as various **online** and **offline** practices might be used for recruitment. In particular, it has been suggested that online recruitment practices (e.g., usage of electronic job boards, recruitment web sites, and social media) are more than just a more efficient version of their analogous equivalents (e.g., paper-based job postings, classified ads, or employee referrals), thus having changed the very nature of recruitment (Dineen/Allen 2014). Social media, for example, has been

stated to have the potential to change the traditional applicant–employer relationship (McFarland/Ployhart 2015): on the one hand it breaks down information barriers by providing information internal to the organization to a large amount of job seekers (e.g., via employer review sites), so organizations that take little care of how they are perceived on social media might hardly build any positive reputation, regardless of the efforts made in an offline environment. On the other hand, social media offers new opportunities with regard to the sourcing of passive candidates (i.e., those who are not actively looking for a job) as it enables organizations to actively search for qualified applicants more precisely than any other way of recruitment (Dineen/Allen 2014; McFarland/Ployhart 2015). As a result, considering whether an organization uses online recruitment practices might be fundamental for explaining differences in recruitment outcomes. Drawing on this, we argue that in order to characterize an organization’s recruitment set, it is important to take into account whether an organization favors offline recruitment practices over online recruitment practices (or vice versa) or uses both kinds of practices to the same extent.

(3) It is widely agreed that organizations vary with regard to their available resources (e.g., due to size) resulting in a tendency (or reluctance) to engage in **high-cost** or **low-cost** human resource management practices (HR practices) (Cardon/Stevens 2004). Consequently, the respective costs of recruitment practices may account for differences in terms of whether they are carried out or not. In particular, differences are quite likely to occur due to a considerable variation in the costs of recruitment practices. This can be observed, for example, when comparing more traditional with online recruitment practices (e.g., Maurer/Liu 2007), but also when comparing distinct online recruitment practices with each other (e.g., Jattuso/Sinar 2003). In this regard, in order to conceptually derive more fine-grained recruitment sets, we take the cost aspect of recruitment practices into account.

In general, all three characteristics can be used to describe a specific recruitment practice as being formal or informal, online or offline, and high cost or low cost. For example, the recruitment via a free electronic job board can be considered as formal, online, and low-cost. However, given the complexity of recruitment, organizations generally do not rely on a single recruitment

practice. Organizations can use combinations of different practices (Carlson/Connerley/Mecham 2002) – reflecting **different preferences of recruitment** – that will form a set of recruitment practices preferred by a specific organization. Furthermore, the dimensions are somewhat related. For example, the cost of hiring through social media is reported to be up to nine times less cost-intensive than traditional methods (Melanthiou/Pavlou/Constantinou 2015). In a similar vein, informal recruitment practices, such as employee referrals, are generally considered as being inexpensive (e.g., Carroll et al. 1999; Zottoli/Wanous 2000). Consequently, the resulting sets of recruitment practices will include all six dimensions (formal, informal, online, offline, high cost, and low cost) that need to be considered simultaneously, as combinations of practices are possible. Drawing on this, we assume that there is no universal approach to recruitment across organizations.

4.2.2.2 Predictors of adopted recruitment sets

Research has not addressed the predictors that are directly related to the formation of organizations' adopted recruitment sets. However, as mentioned earlier, recruitment sets can be considered as an abstract characterization of organizations' composition of adopted recruitment practices. Thus, the formation of these sets is likely to be attributable to factors (i.e., organizational characteristics) that account for the adoption of particular types of recruitment practices.

Regarding organizational characteristics, it has been suggested that due to the embeddedness and influence of family members, family firms differ from each other in significant ways (Dekker et al. 2012). To a varying extent, family firms strive to maximize both economic (i.e., efficiency) and noneconomic (i.e., family welfare) objectives, which is also why there is no overall governance rationale for family firms (Basco/Pérez Rodríguez 2009; Moores 2009).

One relevant aspect for the formation of adopted recruitment sets lies in the noneconomic factors that meet the owning family's affective needs, which have collectively been labeled as “**socioemotional wealth**” or “affective endowments” (Gómez-Mejía et al. 2007, 2011). Applying a socioemotional perspective suggests that gains or losses in socioemotional wealth represent the

primary frame of reference for the family firms' managerial choices (i.e., recruitment practices) in a way that family firms would accept putting the firm at economic risk if this meant preserving their socioemotional wealth (Berrone/Cruz/Gómez-Mejía 2012). Consequently, it has been stated that these noneconomic objectives may account for differences in the family firms' adopted HR practices (Gómez-Mejía et al. 2011; Sánchez-Marín/Meroño-Cerdán/Carrasco-Hernández 2019), which is why the socioemotional wealth approach has been considered as an appropriate theoretical lens for explaining the determinants of human resource management in family firms (Cruz/Firfiray/Gómez-Mejía 2011).

Drawing on this, Cruz and colleagues (2011) proposed that based on socioemotional wealth considerations, recruitment in family firms is carried out in a specific way: As family firms tend to use their socioemotional wealth as a frame of reference, the recruitment process in family firms is said to be more reliant on applicants' fit with the organization (i.e., P-O fit) rather than on their fit with the specific job (i.e., P-J fit). In particular, it has been suggested that family firms might be less likely to make use of formal recruitment practices, as they are less efficient in obtaining P-O fit than informal recruitment practices. Instead, family firms might tend to make use of informal recruitment practices, as they allow them to focus on a narrow pool of known candidates who might fit the organization in terms of sharing the family's values and culture (Cruz/Firfiray/Gómez-Mejía 2011; Gómez-Mejía et al. 2011).

However, it has been also stated that socioemotional wealth is multidimensional in nature (Berrone/Cruz/Gómez-Mejía 2012). In order to capture these multiple facets, Berrone and colleagues (2012) conceptually derived the so-called **FIBER dimensions of socioemotional wealth** (i.e., Family control and influence, Identification of family members with the firm, Binding social ties, Emotional attachment of family members, and Renewal of family bonds to the firm through dynastic succession). Thus, they contributed significantly to its theoretical development and operationalization (Hauck et al. 2016). In consideration of this multidimensionality, it has been argued that there are complex relationships between the various facets of socioemotional wealth (including their different weights and valences) and the ways in which strategic choices are made (Hauck et al. 2016), which might also be given with

regard to family firms' recruitment practices. Hence, we argue that the distinct facets of socioemotional wealth (i.e., those suggested by Berone/Cruz/Gómez-Mejía 2012) might be relevant predictors for the formation of a family firm's recruitment set.

Besides considering the distinct facets of socioemotional wealth, in order to cover the full scope of relevant predictors, "**family firm demographics**" need to be taken into account, such as the percentage of shares held by the family (e.g., Chrisman/Patel 2012) or the percentage of family members in the top management team (e.g., Basco 2013). This also includes generational aspects, such as the firm's generational stage, which research suggests as being an important source of heterogeneity among family firms (Blanco-Mazagatos/de Quevedo-Puente/Delgado-García 2018), or the presence of multiple generations as the entrance of younger successors may be linked with new ideas in terms of management and technology (Sardeshmukh/Corbett 2011), which in turn could affect the adoption of particular recruitment practices.

Although simultaneous consideration of both direct and indirect measures of socioemotional wealth might point to some level of redundancy at first glance (Hauck et al. 2016), we argue that it might advance our understanding of its operationalization. This draws on the strengths of our methodological approach, which – if both kinds of measures are incorporated – allows us to test whether a multidimensional direct measure of socioemotional wealth shows predictive strength above and beyond indirect measures that have been used in prior studies (Hauck et al. 2016).

Furthermore, extant research suggests that apart from the characteristics that are related to the presence or influence of family members, there are **other organizational characteristics** that might account for differences in a family firm's adopted HR practices (Cruz/Firfiray/Gómez-Mejía 2011), such as firm size (Cardon/Stevens 2004; Kim/Gao 2010). Drawing on this, we conclude that to explain the formation of family firms' adopted recruitment sets, it is relevant to take family firm-specific and general organizational characteristics into account, as they will predict whether a particular practice is carried out, thus also predicting the composition of practices.

4.2.2.3 Expected outcomes of adopted recruitment sets

As we lack a clear understanding of what recruitment sets are adopted by family firms, we consequently lack the ability to formulate exact hypotheses regarding their outcomes. However, as the usage of recruitment practices can have various impacts on **recruitment outcomes** (Moser 2005; Griffeth/Tenbrink/Robinson 2014), similar effects are likely to be observed with regard to firms' adopted recruitment sets. This suggests that in order to advance our understanding of the effects of the respective sets, in the first instance a diverse array of recruitment outcomes should be taken into account.

In an effort to classify recruitment outcomes, extant research has distinguished between pre-hire outcomes (i.e., those involving information concerning job applicants) and posthire outcomes (i.e., those involving behaviors and attitudes of new employees; Breugh 2013). Whereas the appropriateness of **posthire outcomes** to measure recruitment effectiveness has been questioned, given the primary purpose of recruitment, there is little doubt in the relevance of pre-hire outcomes (Saks 2014). In particular, when studying the effects of recruitment practices, focus on pre-hire outcomes is necessary, as these are more immediately affected by the choice of recruitment practices than are posthire outcomes (Breugh/Starke 2000). Consequently, we assume that differences in recruitment success due to set adoption will primarily manifest in varying levels of prehire outcomes, thus being the focus of our analysis.

With regard to the effects on **pre-hire outcomes**, such as the number or quality of applicants in the available pool (e.g., Carlson/Mecham 2014), evidence has been found that distinct categories of recruitment practices (e.g., informal vs formal) affect some outcomes more positively than others. For example, although informal recruitment practices such as employee referrals are generally considered to yield more positive organizational outcomes than formal recruitment practices (Breugh 2013; Griffeth/Tenbrink/Robinson 2014), only a small pool of applicants will be created via these means (Tanova 2003). Alternatively, by using formal recruitment practices, firms can access different populations of individuals with different skill sets and abilities which can result in a more diverse and larger applicant pool (Tanova 2003; Griffeth/Tenbrink/Robinson 2014).

In addition, it is widely agreed that online recruitment practices are likely to outperform offline recruitment practices in terms of range (e.g., Zusman/Landis 2002; Allen/Mahto/Otondo 2007). Although this might be vital regarding the quantity of available applicants, it has been suggested that there is also a “dark side of web recruitment” (Dineen et al. 2007), as the intense usage of online recruitment practices often leads to a vast number of applications from unqualified applicants. In sum, this illustrates that both the combination of distinct categories of recruitment practices and the extent to which practices of specific categories are used might account for differences in various pre-hire recruitment outcomes.

Drawing on this, as recruitment sets express firms’ tendency toward the usage of recruitment practices in terms of multiple higher order categories (i.e., informal or formal, online or offline, and high cost or low cost), it is likely that their adoption will be associated with differences in an array of pre-hire recruitment outcomes. Moreover, given the crucial role of recruitment for the acquisition of a high-quality workforce (Breaugh 2014; Ployhart/Kim 2014), set-induced success in recruitment might also be reflected in firm-level outcomes (i.e., firm performance). Thus, depending on whether the adopted recruitment practices share similar (dis-)advantages or even mutually compensate their weaknesses, we propose that differences be observed regarding the **number and quality of applicants, the fit between applicants and their job and organization, and the resulting performance of the organization.**

As a first requisite step, it is important for organizations to influence job seekers’ application intentions and decisions, because organizations cannot select from job seekers who do not apply (Collins 2007). These pre-hire outcomes are affected by the job seekers’ employer knowledge (i.e., the beliefs that a job seeker holds about a potential employer; Cable/Turban 2001), whose various facets (i.e., employer familiarity, employer reputation, and employer image) in turn can be influenced by various recruitment practices (Collins 2007). Hence, it is likely that – besides affecting the factual number of applications – the adoption of particular recruitment sets will have implications regarding the various facets of job seekers’ employer knowledge.

As for qualitative aspects of the applicant pool, past research drawing on the concept of “fit” suggests that the choice of recruitment practices influences

applicants' fit with the organization and the specific job, which in turn are precursors of a number of positive organizational outcomes (Cable/DeRue 2002; Griffeth/Tenbrink/Robinson 2014). In particular, evidence has been found of formal and informal recruitment practices being differently related to perceptions of fit (e.g., Werbel/Landau 1996; Saks/Ashforth 1997). Consequently, as organizations' adopted recruitment sets are to a varying degree characterized by the use of both formal and informal recruitment practices, it can conceivably be proposed that differences in fit variables (i.e., P-O fit and P-J fit) will be observed which are attributable to the respective set an organization adopts.

Furthermore, when considering the relatedness of HR practices and firm performance (Wright et al. 2005), it is likely that recruitment sets, which reflect firms' tendency toward the adoption of a particular subset of HR practices, might be related to different levels of firm performance as well. This assumption draws on the critical role of recruitment in terms of being an initial gatekeeper, influencing which individuals are willing to join the organization, thus being antecedent of the effectiveness of all subsequent HR practices (Taylor/Collins 2000; Ployhart/Kim 2014; Greer/Carr/Hipp 2016).

4.3 Method

4.3.1 Sample and procedure

We conducted a survey in German and it was provided to members of top management teams or heads of human resources at various German organizations contacted via email using the AMADEUS Database. The final survey instrument was created by the three authors of this study and pretested by 15 academic experts to increase validity.

The questionnaire was available from 1 December 2017 to 2 January 2018. From 1787 interested participants, 433 participants finished the questionnaire (24.23 %). As our sample consisted of heterogeneous organizations, we initially asked the participants to rate whether they would describe their own organization as a "family firm", which 60.09 % of the participants agreed. Overall, to ensure data quality, we removed individuals with implausible answer behavior, such as too low total time spent on the questionnaire

(< 2 minutes) or disproportionate number of missing values, resulting in a sample of 259 family firms.

4.3.2 Measures

To measure the **preferences of recruitment**, participants were asked, “In the following, we would like to know how you would characterize the recruitment in your company. Please indicate how often your company uses actions that fall under the categories below”, and had to report the frequency of used recruitment practices based on the general characteristics (online, offline, formal, informal, high cost, low cost), ranging from 1 = never to 5 = very often.

Furthermore, as we are interested in the link between organizations’ characteristics and recruitment sets, we investigate which organizational characteristics may account for set membership. Consequently, we adapted our measurement from established scales in the family firms and management literature. To measure **socioemotional wealth**, we use the German version of the FIBER scale (Hauck et al. 2016). Each of the items was measured on a seven-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). We then computed five scores for each of the FIBER dimensions: family control and influence ($\alpha = .82$), identification of family members with the firm ($\alpha = .87$), binding social ties ($\alpha = .76$), emotional attachment of family members ($\alpha = .80$), and renewal of family bonds through dynastic succession ($\alpha = .80$).

In addition, we measured more **organizational characteristics** including family involvement in management and family ownership, both based on Chrisman and Patel (2012). Generational stage (“Which family generation is currently formally managing the company?”; Sciascia/Mazolla/Kellermanns 2014), generation in charge of the family firm (“Which family generation currently has the strongest influence on the company?”; Kraiczy/Hack/Kellermanns 2015), firm age in number of generations (“How many generations ago was your company founded/In what generation is your organization currently?”) ranging from one generation to five or more, firm age (in years), firm size, and firm sector are all based on Hauck and colleagues (2016). Finally, we included a self-developed scale regarding the number of current generations (“How many family generations are (currently) present in your company?”), ranging from one to five or more.

Regarding the distal **outcomes**, we measured applicant pool quality (four items, five-point Likert-type scale, $\alpha = .78$), person-organization fit (three items, five-point Likert-type scale, $\alpha = .79$), and person-job fit (two items, five-point Likert-type scale, $\alpha = .77$) based on validated scales by Baum and Kabst (2012). Furthermore, as we were interested in the applicant pool quantity for low and high qualifications, we asked for the number of received applications of the last advertised low/high-skilled position. We measured self-rated firm performance in contrast to other companies, using a single item (“Compared with other companies in your industry, how do you rate the success of your company?”; Chrisman et al. 2007) as well as self-rated firm performance (five items, seven-point Likert-type scale, $\alpha = .89$; Zellweger et al. 2012).

Finally, at the very end of the questionnaire, we asked participants to voluntarily provide us with the name of their organization to acquire **external ratings of employer reputation** (i.e., job seekers’ beliefs about the general public’s affective evaluation of the organization; Cable/Turban 2001), as we were interested in providing initial evidence with regard to job seekers’ employer knowledge. To do so, we used the employer rating platform Kununu.com, which can be considered an important source of employer information in Europe/Germany (Dabirian/Kietzmann/Diba 2017). In particular, we collected data on overall rating, employee rating, as well as applicant rating, ranging from 0.5 to 5. Furthermore, we acquired the percentage of recommendations in the past 24 months, ranging from 0 % to 100 %. As not all firms provided the information or were not listed, the sample for these outcomes is small ($n = 36-44$).

4.3.3 Analytical strategy

First, we estimated a **confirmatory factor analysis** (CFA) in Mplus 7.4, containing five latent factors representing socioemotional wealth, as well as separate latent factors for each correlate. Each indicator was only allowed to load on its own latent factor. In addition, we permitted covariance between factors (Morin et al. 2016). This model exhibited adequate fit with $\chi^2(820) = 6000.736$, $p < .001$; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .073 (confidence interval (CI): 0.068 – 0.077), $p(< .05) = .000$; Comparative

Fit Index (CFI) = .81; Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) = .74; and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = .075.

Second, we estimated **latent sets** in Mplus 7.4 based on factor scores estimated from the scales of the dimension of the general recruitment practices. We freely estimated means and variances across sets with the MLR estimator for one through 10 latent classes, using at least 100,000 random starts, 1000 iterations each, and the best 5000 solutions for final optimization. Fit indices are presented in Table 4.1. Based on elbow plots for the log-likelihood, Akaike information criterion (AIC) and sample-size adjusted Bayesian information criterion (SABIC), as well as conceptual considerations, we selected the five-set solution. Finally, we explored how those classes relate to organizational characteristics, using multinomial logistic regression (“R3Step”) as well as distal outcomes using the auxiliary 3-step approach (“BCH”) to include the outcomes of the adopted recruitment sets (Lubke/Muthén 2007; Asparouhov/Muthén 2014b).

Model	LL	#fp	AIC	BIC	SABIC	Entropy
1 Class	−2492.512	12	5009.024	5051.706	5013.662	n/a
2 Classes	−2410.475	19	4858.951	4926.531	4866.294	0.974
3 Classes	−2353.624	26	4759.248	4851.725	4769.296	0.986
4 Classes	−2150.868	33	4367.737	4485.112	4380.490	1
5 Classes	−2121.638	40	4323.275	4465.548	4338.734	0.897
6 Classes	−2102.458	47	4298.916	4466.087	4317.080	0.886
7 Classes	−2090.735	54	4289.471	4481.540	4310.340	0.873
8 Classes	−2082.279	61	4286.559	4503.525	4310.133	0.86

Note. LL: Model log-likelihood; #fp: Number of free parameters; AIC: Akaike information criterion; BIC: Bayesian information criterion; SABIC: sample-size adjusted BIC.

Tab. 4.1: Fit results from the latent-class analyses

4.4 Results

4.4.1 Recruitment sets identified in the sample

Before we describe the identified sets, we need to consider the **grand mean** (across all sets) of the different dimensions of general characteristics of recruitment practices, as the overall sample characteristics are otherwise lost. As was expected, the use of online (2.98) and offline (3.37) recruitment practices was reported to be used nearly equally and occasionally, while formal

recruitment practices (2.66) were reported to be used less frequently than informal practices (3.16). Overall, organizations tend to rely more on low-cost (3.29) than on high-cost (1.63) practices.

For the sets of recruitment practices, we settle for **five classes**, based on conceptual and empirical considerations, which is important when selecting the optimal number of sets (Marsh et al. 2009; Morin et al. 2016). Fit indices suggest a very good fit, with entropy of .898, and the resulting sets of recruitment practices were conceptually sound. No sets represented small parts of the sample, and the five-set solution was stable and plausible and will be described in the following. To test for robustness, predictors were added directly to the models, which did not change the characteristics of the sets, thus confirming their stability (Marsh et al. 2009; Morin et al. 2011). Descriptive statistics for all sets can be found in Table 4.2.

GC	GM	SD	Reduced recruit- ment set 1	Online high-cost set 2	Full scope recruit- ment set 3	Offline informal set 4	Formal high-cost set 5
Online	2.981	1.942	2.322	3.515	3.581	3.005	3.176
Offline	3.367	1.205	2.541	3.333	3.721	3.874	3.412
Formal	2.660	1.568	2.393	3.000	2.953	2.543	3.059
Informal	3.158	1.415	2.001	3.545	3.581	3.756	3.176
Low cost	3.293	1.821	2.881	3.606	3.907	3.103	3.824
High cost	1.633	0.974	1.000	3.000	2.000	1.000	4.235
Note. n = 259; GC = general characteristics; GM = grand mean; SD = standard deviation.							

Tab. 4.2: Mean levels of general characteristics in the retained sets

We found a **reduced recruitment** set (29.84 % of the sample) consisting of less average levels of all general recruitment dimensions, with the exception of formal recruitment, which was closest to average. Another set was dominated by the reported use of online and high-cost recruitment practices, with no clear preferences regarding formal or informal practices, which we termed **online high-cost** set (34.10 %). Furthermore, the analysis yielded a set that reported above-average use of all recruitment dimensions and was termed **full scope recruitment** (16.67 %). Another set was dominated by the dimensions offline and informal and was termed **offline informal** set (6.59 %). Finally, we found a **formal high-cost** set (12.80 %), in which the highest use of cost-

intensive practices was reported. All sets are displayed in Figure 4.1. An extensive explanation of the identified sets can be found in the discussion section.

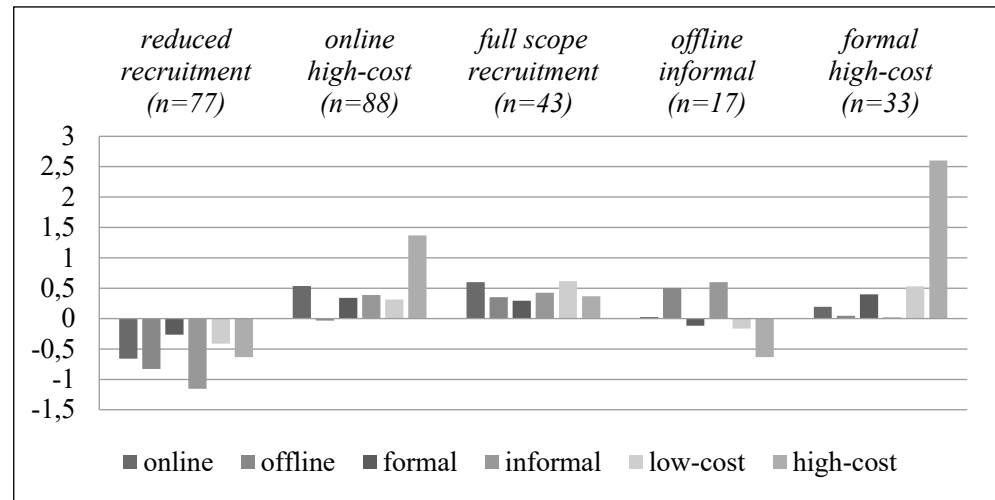


Fig. 4.1: Retained sets of recruitment practices

4.4.2 Predictors of set membership

To better understand what factors are important for the formation of recruitment sets, we used a multinomial regression, based on the 3-STEP APPROACH (Asparouhov/Muthén 2014b). Due to problems of multicollinearity, firm age (in years) and firm sector were removed from the analysis. Table 4.3 shows the coefficients and odds-ratio for class membership between the five classes. Because of the explorative nature of the study, we will focus on the most interesting findings. Overall, it can be noted that both categories of predictors, the dimensions of socioemotional wealth and the other organizational characteristics, showed significant relationships with the adopted recruitment sets, underlining the importance of a more fine-grained analysis. Consequently, the results reflect the multivariate effects, controlled for all other variables in the respective model. Most of the covariates (with the exception of family control and influence, emotional attachment, and the number of current generations) contribute to the prediction of at least one class.

Predictors (Multivariate)	Set 1 vs 5		Set 2 vs 5		Set 3 vs 5		Set 4 vs 5		Set 1 vs 4	
	Coef. (SEC)	OR	Coef. (SEC)	OR	Coef. (SEC)	OR	Coef. (SEC)	OR	Coef. (SEC)	OR
(F) Family control and influence	-0.048 (0.391)	0.95	-0.057 (0.450)	0.94	0.192 (0.425)	1.21	0.399 (0.396)	1.49	-0.447 (0.294)	0.64
(I) Identification	-1.821 (0.672)**	0.16	-1.531 (0.694)**	0.22	-1.688 (0.677)**	0.18	-1.673 (0.673)**	0.19	-0.148 (0.395)	0.86
(B) Binding social ties	-0.730 (0.510)	0.48	0.286 (0.541)	1.33	0.267 (0.506)	1.31	0.080 (0.479)	1.08	-0.810 (0.363)**	0.44
(E) Emotional attachment	-0.151 (0.330)	0.86	-0.032 (0.349)	0.97	-0.276 (0.327)	0.76	-0.164 (0.319)	0.85	0.012 (0.257)	1.01
(R) Dynastic succession	0.053 (0.479)	1.05	0.299 (0.446)	1.35	-0.010 (0.418)	0.99	-0.238 (0.429)	0.79	0.291 (0.441)	1.34
Family management	1.595 (1.535)	4.93	0.514 (1.541)	1.67	1.133 (1.458)	3.10	0.243 (1.486)	1.28	1.352 (0.898)	3.87
Family ownership	-1.966 (1.332)	0.14	-1.277 (1.515)	0.28	-3.630 (1.796)**	0.03	-2.777 (1.365)**	0.06	0.811 (0.895)	2.25
Ownership inherited	-1.045 (1.039)	0.35	0.152 (0.940)	1.16	0.388 (0.918)	1.47	0.870 (0.875)	2.39	-1.915 (0.929)**	0.15
Generation in charge	0.046 (0.567)	1.05	-0.138 (0.411)	0.87	0.016 (0.349)	1.02	0.507 (0.368)	1.66	-0.462 (0.672)	0.63
Generational stage	-0.692 (0.361)*	0.50	-0.591 (0.403)	0.55	-0.709 (0.342)**	0.49	-0.876 (0.371)**	0.42	0.185 (0.421)	1.20
Number of current generations	0.819 (0.643)	2.27	0.480 (0.711)	1.62	0.614 (0.657)	1.85	0.907 (0.638)	2.48	-0.088 (0.392)	0.92
Firm age in generations	0.419 (0.467)	1.52	0.690 (0.402)**	1.99	0.783 (0.397)**	2.19	0.484 (0.377)	1.62	-0.065 (0.398)	0.94
Family = Firm name	-0.323 (0.793)	0.72	0.706 (0.758)	2.03	1.303 (0.754)*	3.68	0.693 (0.723)	2.00	-1.016 (0.648)	0.36
Firm size (log)	-3.550 (1.405)**	0.03	0.357 (1.160)	1.43	1.716 (1.138)	5.56	0.074 (1.089)	1.08	-3.624 (1.397)**	0.03

Note. OR = odds ratio; SEC = standard error of the coefficient; Firm size was logarithmized; * $p < .10$. ** $p < .05$.

Tab. 4.3: Results from the multinomial logistic regression evaluation on latent-class membership

Predictors (Multivariate)	Set 2 vs 4			Set 3 vs 4			Set 1 vs 3			Set 2 vs 3			Set 1 vs 2		
	Coef. (SEC)	OR		Coef. (SEC)	OR		Coef. (SEC)	OR		Coef. (SEC)	OR		Coef. (SEC)	OR	
(F) Family control and influence	-0.456 (0.306)	0.63		-0.207 (0.285)	0.81		-0.240 (0.303)	0.79		-0.249 (0.328)	0.78		-0.005 (0.350)	1.00	
(I) Identification	0.142 (0.347)	1.15		-0.015 (0.305)	0.99		-0.133 (0.350)	0.88		0.157 (0.337)	1.17		-0.372 (0.393)	0.69	
(B) Binding social ties	0.206 (0.310)	1.23		0.187 (0.282)	1.21		-0.997 (0.370)**	0.37		0.020 (0.333)	1.02		-1.071 (0.400)**	0.34	
(E) Emotional attachment	0.132 (0.235)	1.14		-0.112 (0.198)	0.89		0.124 (0.259)	1.13		0.244 (0.257)	1.28		-0.100 (0.294)	0.91	
(R) Dynastic succession	0.537 (0.282)**	1.71		0.228 (0.220)	1.26		0.064 (0.379)	1.07		0.309 (0.270)	1.36		-0.224 (0.424)	0.80	
Family management	0.271 (0.765)	1.31		0.889 (0.602)	2.43		0.463 (0.780)	1.59		-0.618 (0.731)	0.54		1.283 (0.855)	3.61	
Family ownership	1.500 (0.804)**	4.48		-0.853 (1.479)	0.43		1.664 (1.407)	5.28		2.353 (1.322)*	10.52		-0.647 (0.876)	0.52	
Ownership inherited	-0.718 (0.648)	0.49		-0.482 (0.584)	0.62		-1.433 (0.881)*	0.24		-0.236 (0.683)	0.79		-1.329 (0.871)	0.27	
Generation in charge	-0.645 (0.421)	0.52		-0.492 (0.350)	0.61		0.030 (0.559)	1.03		-0.153 (0.348)	0.86		0.117 (0.578)	1.12	
Generational stage	0.285 (0.379)	1.33		0.168 (0.314)	1.18		0.017 (0.287)	1.02		0.117 (0.309)	1.12		-0.071 (0.368)	0.93	
Number of current generations	-0.427 (0.429)	0.65		-0.293 (0.356)	0.75		0.205 (0.468)	1.23		-0.134 (0.476)	0.87		0.330 (0.502)	1.39	
Firm age in generations	0.206 (0.260)	1.23		0.299 (0.280)	1.35		-0.364 (0.419)	0.69		-0.093 (0.302)	0.91		-0.264 (0.397)	0.77	
Family = Firm name	0.012 (0.551)	1.01		0.610 (0.496)	1.84		-1.626 (0.634)**	0.20		-0.598 (0.606)	0.55		-1.166 (0.687)*	0.31	
Firm size (log)	0.283 (0.874)	1.33		1.642 (0.829)**	5.17		-5.266 (1.303)**	0.01		-1.359 (0.929)	0.26		-3.117 (0.916)**	0.04	

Note. OR = odds ratio; SEC = standard error of the coefficient; Firm size was logarithmized; * $p < .10$. ** $p < .05$.

Tab. 4.3 (continued): Results from the multinomial logistic regression evaluation on latent-class membership

Focusing on the FIBER dimensions, we found that family members' identification with the firm predicted the membership in the formal high-cost set, while high scores on binding social ties were related to a less likely membership in the reduced recruitment set. Finally, dynastic succession predicted being in the online high-cost set.

In addition to the distinct facets of socioemotional wealth, interesting results regarding the organizational characteristics were found. First, family ownership was significantly related to the membership in the formal high-cost set as well as the online high-cost set, indicating that family ownership was a significant predictor of class membership. Second, a firm's generational stage was related to having adopted a formal high-cost recruitment set. Third, firm age in generations was related to an online high-cost and a full scope recruitment set. Finally, these relationships are corrected for the effect of firm size, which was related to not having a reduced recruitment set as well as more likely having a full scope recruitment set.

4.4.3 Outcomes of set membership

With regard to the “**distal outcomes**” of the adopted recruitment sets, we conducted comparisons based on the auxiliary 3-step “BCH” approach, using χ^2 -tests of equality between sets (Asparouhov/Muthén 2014a). As no differences between self-rated firm performance in contrast to other companies and self-rated firm performance were found, we focused on the latter. Results are displayed in Table 4.4. While we found no differences regarding the self-rated applicant pool quality, firms adopting reduced recruitment sets reported lowest person-organization fit, lowest person-job fit, as well as lowest self-rated firm performance. Overall, the other sets did not differ significantly. In addition to the self-rated outcomes, we tested whether the adopted recruitment sets predicted external ratings of employer reputation acquired on Kununu.com. Again, reduced recruitment predicted the significantly lowest overall rating as well as lowest rating of employees. Interestingly, the online high-cost set received a higher overall rating compared to the full scope recruitment set, which is in line with the online focus of this set. Surprisingly, the offline informal set also received high ratings as well as a high ratio of recommendations.

Outcome \ Set	Reduced recruitment set 1	Online high-cost set 2	Full scope recruitment set 3	Offline informal set 4	Formal high-cost set 5	Significant comparisons
1. Applicant pool quality	3.31	3.52	3.50	3.50	3.55	n. s.
2. Applicant pool quantity (high skill)	1.95	2.17	2.32	2.55	2.00	1 < 3 = 4; 5 < 3
3. Applicant pool quantity (low skill)	2.33	2.50	2.63	2.82	2.36	1 < 3 = 4
4. Person-organization fit	3.50	3.85	3.78	3.71	3.92	1 < 2; 2 = 3 = 4 = 5
5. Person-job fit	3.26	3.44	3.56	3.27	3.24	1 < 3; 2 = 3 = 4 = 5
6. Self-rated firm performance	5.27	5.74	5.54	5.64	5.39	1 < 2; 2 = 3 = 4 = 5
7. Overall rating	2.67	4.05	3.22	3.50	3.19	1 < 2; 2 > 3 = 5
8. Rating employees	2.56	4.02	3.28	4.00	3.19	1 < 2 = 4; 2 > 5
9. Rating applicants	1.03	1.19	0.00	1.33	0.48	3 < 2 = 4
10. % Recommendation	56.13	79.33	65.13	82.00	56.87	n. s.
Note. Outcomes 1-6, n = 259; Outcomes 7-10, n = 44; 1-6 based on key informant self-rating, 7-10 based on a sub-sample of firms for whom data was retrievable on Kununu.com. Comparisons based on Auxiliary 3-step "BCH" approach with χ^2 -tests of equality between sets; n. s. = no significant differences across all sets.						

Tab. 4.4: Summary of estimated means for outcomes of the retained recruitment sets

4.5 Discussion

4.5.1 General discussion

The present study is among the first to use a person-centered approach in order to explore differences in adopted recruitment practices of family firms. As a result of this exploratory approach, we did not formulate hypotheses regarding the recruitment sets to be extracted or the ways in which they are related to potential predictors and outcomes. However, based on the conducted analyses, we settled for a five-set solution. The extracted sets revealed both qualitative and quantitative differences regarding the use of recruitment practices, thus providing evidence for heterogeneous recruitment approaches to exist.

Regarding **quantitative differences**, we found two sets (set 1: reduced recruitment and set 3: full scope recruitment) that differed on all six general recruitment dimensions. In particular, it was found that firms in these sets use different amounts of practices of certain categories, but do not favor specific categories over others. Opposed to the full scope recruitment set, which was characterized by moderately high levels of all recruitment dimensions, the reduced recruitment set consistently reflected low levels of usage regarding any category of recruitment practices. Given that almost one out of three family firms in our sample had adopted such a reduced recruitment set, findings suggest that for a large portion of the family firm population, recruitment might be a neglected area. As family firm research often equates the hiring of non-family members with professionalization (Madison et al. 2018), findings might be interpreted as an indication for the professionalization of this subgroup of family firms. This draws on the idea that the pool of applicants from which new hires (i.e., non-family members) can be chosen is largely determined by the firms' adopted recruitment practices (Carlson/Connerley/Mecham 2002). In this regard, it would be interesting to see whether the adoption of a reduced recruitment set is a deliberate decision or the result of the respective family firms' lacking ability to perform in a different way (Stewart/Hitt 2012).

As for the **qualitative differences**, three distinct sets were found (set 2: online high cost, set 4: offline informal, and set 5: formal high cost). These sets were

characterized by a higher use of specific practices, reflecting a dominance of certain categories. Among these, the online high-cost and offline informal sets stand out somehow, although for different reasons: according to the provided results, the largest subgroup in our sample seemed to have adopted an online high-cost recruitment set. This suggests that a large number of family firms are willing to allocate financial resources to recruitment and consider online recruitment practices as particularly vital for their recruitment purposes. This resonates with the growing number of both organizations and applicants turning to the web as part of the recruitment process (Ehrhart/Mayer/Ziegert 2012). Job search nowadays is largely carried out online (e.g., Boswell/Zimmerman/Swider 2012; Nikolaou 2014), so organizations that want to keep pace with this development tend to adopt online recruitment practices. In this regard, the prevalent adoption of an online high-cost set might indicate that family firms recognize that, to compete for the scarce talent available in the German labor market (Kahlert/Botero/Prügl 2017), they need to incorporate online practices in their recruitment efforts. Furthermore, as family firms are often familiar with the usage of online technology, such as social media (Raman/Menon 2018) or using their own websites to execute corporate brand identity strategies (Micelotta/Raynard 2011), it is possible that they draw on those competencies and use them for online recruitment.

In contrast, the offline informal set reflects an approach to recruitment which is likely to rely on face-to-face recruitment activities in the firms' extended social network. As such, it represents a way of recruitment which prior research suggests is typical for family firms (Gómez-Mejía et al. 2011). However, regarding its dissemination, one might wonder that only a very small portion of the sample adopted such a set. At this point, it is necessary to bear in mind that the sample consists only of family firms. Consequently, the average approach to recruitment tends to be informal, which is reflected in the sample mean of the informal dimension (3.158). This means the offline informal set can be seen as an extreme use of informal practices and represents a further degree of specialization along the formal-informal continuum. Moreover, when compared to other sets, and in particular to the formal high-cost set, it strengthens the idea that differences in the formality of recruitment between family firms exist.

4.5.2 Discussion of the predictors of set membership

Regarding potential predictors of firms' adopted recruitment sets, different facets of socioemotional wealth as well as other organizational characteristics were taken into account. As for socioemotional wealth, the predictive strength of **family members' identification with the firm** stands out, as it was found to consistently be related to firms' adoption of a formal high-cost set (set 5). This suggests that for family firms in which family members strongly identify with the firm, recruitment in large part is carried out by means of formal recruitment practices. Moreover, these firms seem to allocate a comparatively large amount of financial resources to the recruitment of prospective employees.

Prior research stated that the owning family members' identity is often inextricably tied to the organization, so family members care a lot about the firm's reputation and the image they project to external stakeholders (Berrone/Cruz/Gómez-Mejía 2012; Deephouse/Jaskiewicz 2013; Sageder/Mitter/Feldbauer-Durstmüller 2018). As the firm's image and reputation as an employer can be considered as facets of the broader constructs of organizational image and reputation (Lievens/Slaughter 2016), identification might also cause family members to strive for the creation of a favorable image and reputation as an employer. This implies that strongly identified family members have a tendency toward the use of formal and high-cost recruitment practices (e.g., job advertisements and job fairs) as they provide appealing company-authorized information to outsiders (Liu/Keeling/Papamichail 2016). This information to outsiders might help family firms to build a favorable image in the minds of potential applicants. Findings also indicate that higher costs of recruitment might be accepted in exchange for a favorable image. This is consistent with prior research suggesting that if family members take pride in the firm due to heightened identification, they are encouraged to invest in the firm (Zellweger et al. 2012).

Furthermore, identification of family members operationalized in terms of a distinct FIBER dimension showed predictive strength above "identification proxies" used in previous research, such as the congruence of family and firm name (e.g., Deephouse/Jaskiewicz 2013). This supports the idea that a direct multidimensional scale of socioemotional wealth might help to disentangle

the complex relationships between socioemotional wealth dimensions and family firms' strategic choices (Hauck et al. 2016).

Another important finding was that the **binding social ties** dimension (Berrone/Cruz/Gómez-Mejía 2012) was observed as being predictive of the adoption of some sets, although findings were less consistent. The results indicate that high levels are related to the adoption of the online high-cost, full scope recruitment, and offline informal sets (set 2, set 3, and set 4). This finding is somewhat counterintuitive at first glance, as the comparison of these sets reveals both quantitative and qualitative differences. However, they also share a central similarity in terms of relying almost to the same extent on informal recruitment practices. Accordingly, family firms that report having strong social relationships both within and outside the firm seem to rely more heavily on informal recruitment practices. This might be explained as these firms are said to pursue the welfare of those who surround them and to enjoy being recognized for generous actions by their community (Berrone/Cruz/Gómez-Mejía 2012). Thus, it may be that as firms see their employees as an extension of the family, they tend to encourage them to refer their own relatives and friends, although this could result in less fitting applicants in terms of job requirements (Cruz/Firfiray/Gómez-Mejía 2011).

As for family firm-specific characteristics, **generational stage** (e.g., Sciascia/Mazolla/Kellermanns 2014) was consistently found to be related to the adoption of a formal high-cost set (set 5). Findings suggest that in later generational stages, the adoption of a set consisting of mainly formal and expensive recruitment practice becomes more likely. This is in line with prior research suggesting a positive relationship between family firms' generational stage and the level of professionalization of HR practices that exist (Blanco-Mazagatos/de Quevedo-Puente/Delgado-García 2018). To explain this relationship, extant research has drawn on a shift in goals alongside the entrance of successive generations. In particular, as firms move through generations, financial considerations are said to become more important as a frame of reference than the preservation of socioemotional wealth (Gómez-Mejía et al. 2011; Sciascia/Mazolla/Kellermanns 2014). In this regard, our findings are somewhat contradictory, as we provided evidence for the influence of generational stage while controlling for firms' levels of socioemotional wealth. So

it might be that professionalization of HR practices is rather a function of the complexity of firm operations, which is likely to increase when firms evolve through the corporate lifecycle (Blanco-Mazagatos/de Quevedo-Puente/Delgado-García 2018). From a methodological point of view, this further raises the question of whether generational stage should be used as an indirect measure of socioemotional wealth (Hauck et al. 2016) or be treated as a distinct construct.

Last, we found **firm size** to be related to the adoption of a reduced recruitment set (set 1). According to the data, firm size decreases the likelihood of adopting a reduced recruitment set, which means that this set is likely to be prevalent in small family firms. This finding is consistent with the small and medium-sized enterprise literature, which suggests that in small firms there is often only a small number of formal HR departments or professionals and also a lack of financial resources (Cardon/Stevens 2004). As family firms – not exclusively – but to a great extent – belong to the population of small and medium-sized enterprises (Astrachan/Shanker 2003; Cruz/Firfiray/Gómez-Mejía 2011), this might explain why such a large portion of our sample was found to have adopted a reduced recruitment set.

4.5.3 Discussion of the outcomes of set membership

To advance our understanding regarding the consequences of recruitment in family firms, we analyzed whether the adoption of particular sets would be related to an array of outcomes. According to the results, the adoption of a reduced recruitment set was related to lower levels in nearly all outcomes. In contrast, when comparing the other sets with each other, almost no differences were found.

For the **reduced recruitment set**, findings suggest that those family firms making little effort to recruit would be less successful in creating an adequate applicant pool. Findings also indicate (to some degree) that the adoption of a reduced recruitment set is related to lower firm performance. A possible explanation for this relationship is that the adoption of a reduced recruitment might result in less employment of non-family members, which extant research suggests is positively related to firm performance (Tabor et al. 2018). This draws on the idea that family firms adopting a reduced recruitment set

may be less able or willing to acquire talent from outside the family, such as qualified non-family managers and CEOs. However, further empirical evidence for this assumption is required.

Regarding the **other recruitment sets**, it is remarkable that almost no differences were observed, as one might expect intra-set synergies to occur through complementarities among practices (e.g., Subramony 2009). While for some outcomes it might be argued that recruitment is not the direct predictor (i.e., person-organization (P-O) fit, person-job (P-J) fit) as recruitment is only the first step in the staffing process (Ployhart/Kim 2014), for the direct consequences such as the number and quality of applicants the results are surprising. This observation might be attributed to different reasons. First, the adopted recruitment sets might not relate to the measured outcomes, as the assumed intra-set synergies are not large enough. Second, the fact that a key informant approach (i.e., addressing CEOs and heads of HR) was used might account for missing relationships. Given that the adoption of a particular recruitment set reflects a strategic choice – which falls in respondents' area of responsibility – admitting poor recruitment outcomes might have been problematic, hence variance in the observed outcomes is suppressed. In particular, when considering the relevance of the capabilities of the members of the HR department for the effectiveness of HR practices (Huselid/Jackson/Schuler 1997), answers regarding recruitment outcomes might have been overstated due to social desirability (e.g., Podsakoff/Organ 1986).

The latter perspective is also supported when looking at **firms' reputation as an employer**, which was measured by means of an external data source. In this case, differences in outcomes due to set adoption were observed. The results indicate that the most favorable reputation (i.e., highest overall rating) was achieved by firms adopting an online high-cost set. This is consistent with the online focus and the willingness to use resources for this particular set, which might also include practices that foster activity on employer review sites such as creating and maintaining a firm's profile or managing conversations (e.g., Godes et al. 2005). In this regard, an important finding is that the adoption of an online high-cost set was found to result in higher ratings of employer reputation compared to the adoption of a formal highcost set. Given

that adoption of the latter was argued to result from family members' motivation to create a favorable reputation, strategic choices in terms of set adoption may need to be reconsidered. This might be of high relevance for family firms, as a favorable reputation can contribute to their prosperity and longevity (Deephouse/Jaskiewicz 2013).

In a similar vein, the offline informal set was associated with high reputation ratings. As this set stands out in terms of **stimulating positive word-of-mouth** by employees, it is possible that these in turn might engage in spreading positive word-of-mouth via employer review sites (Melián-González/Bulchand-Gidumal 2016), also increasing a firm's rating. Thus, it would be interesting to see in future research which exact motives and organizational actions drive employees to provide employment-related word-of-mouth on these sites (van Hoya 2014).

4.6 Limitations, future research, and conclusion

Limitations need to be considered when interpreting the results of our study. First, the collected data is – with the exception of the external ratings – cross-sectional and single source. Therefore, the conceptual-derived relationships we examined were not tested regarding their causality. Furthermore, we rely on self-reported measures facing the threat of common method bias (Podsakoff/MacKenzie/Podsakoff 2012), which might explain some of the missing relationships. Nonetheless, the factor analysis showed that we rely on statistically distinct concepts. The overall response rate was quite small (24.23 %), albeit this is not unusual, given the sample was collected through e-mail addresses and as we addressed members of the top management or heads of human resources. Consequently, the achieved response rate is reasonable. However, the generalizability of our results is limited, which has implications for their validity. Nonetheless, research regarding the nature of sampling has found that the use of convenience samples can be beneficial (Landers/Behrend 2015).

For the external outcomes of the adopted recruitment sets, strength of our study is that those relationships are based on multisource data. This approach reduces the above-mentioned artifacts and biases. Yet this has the drawback that the sample size was rather small, as family firms needed to provide their

consent to their name being used to acquire additional information. Furthermore, not all firms providing this information were rated on the selected platform. Overall, this reduces the statistical power and generalizability of the prediction.

Our explorative study offers four major **contributions** as well as **opportunities for future research**. First, our findings reduce the dearth of research regarding HR practices in family firms (Ferraro/Marrone 2016) as we add to a better understanding of **recruitment practices in family firms**, thus answering calls made by prior research (Tabor et al. 2018). In particular, we have shown that family firms significantly differ from each other in their way of recruitment. This suggests that the assumption of homogeneous recruitment practices, such as the fact that family firms mainly rely on informal recruitment practices (e.g., Gómez-Mejía et al. 2011), may need to be reconsidered. We identified five different approaches to recruitment: reduced, online high-cost, full scope, offline informal, and formal high-cost recruitment. Accordingly, we contribute to the literature on recruitment in family firms, showing that within the population of family firms, different sets of recruitment are adopted and related to outcomes of the recruitment process, such as external ratings. To further advance our understanding of recruitment in family firms, research could focus on these specific sets in trying to evaluate the consequences of these sets more in detail.

Second, the concept of **socioemotional wealth** (Gómez-Mejía et al. 2007) proved to be predictive above and beyond other characteristics considered as important for family firms, such as family ownership or generational influences, as well as organizational size. We found that different dimensions of the FIBER scale predicted different set memberships, which further underlines the importance of considering socioemotional wealth not as a single and one-dimensional concept, but as a multi-dimensional approach to understanding differences between family firms. We, therefore, contribute to the understanding of the way in which strategic choices are made within family firms (Hauck et al. 2016), especially regarding the role of identification of family members with the firm and binding social ties. Further research could use these results to apply the multi-dimensional approach to socioemotional wealth in order to predict other strategic behavior within family firms. While

there is more and more evidence regarding the role of socioemotional wealth and decisions within family firms (Vandekerckhof et al. 2017), other firm behaviors such as other HR practices (Astrachan/Kolenko 1994) or ethical behavior (Kidwell/Hoy/Ibarreche 2012) might benefit from a multi-dimensional investigation of socioemotional wealth. More generally, socioemotional wealth might also be a fruitful way to understand the selection of goals (Chua et al. 2018) or financing policies (Lardon/Deloof/Jorissen 2017) within family firms.

Third, through investigating how recruitment outcomes are affected by the composition of recruitment practices, we contribute to **recruitment research** as we overcome one of its central weaknesses, that is, studying the effects of one particular practice in isolation (Saks 2014). In particular, as we found evidence for a relationship between specific sets of recruitment practices and various outcomes, we extend recruitment research in several ways. On the one hand, by focusing on key practitioner metrics (i.e., applicant pool quantity/quality), we help to bridge the often criticized gap between science and recruitment practice (Carlson/Mecham 2014). This also resonates with calls for linking recruitment practices more with organizational-level outcomes (Breaugh 2014). On the other hand, we add to the emerging body of recruitment research focusing on electronic word-of-mouth (Lievens/Slaughter 2016), as we found evidence for a relationship between specific recruitment sets and external ratings on employer review sites (e.g., Melián-González/Bulchand-Gidumal 2016). In this regard, an interesting finding is that both the online high-cost recruitment set and offline informal recruitment set were related to higher external ratings of employees. This should be investigated in more detail, such as the underlying motives of employees for rating their employer and whether they differ between these sets.

Fourth, and finally, we extend the sparse research that uses **latent-profile analysis in the field of family firms** (Dekker et al. 2012; Stanley/Kellermanns/Zellweger 2017). As the person-centered approach is a fruitful way to better understand complex interactions (e.g., Morin et al. 2016), research on family firms might offer ample opportunities to use such an approach. Based on a latent-profile analysis, the dimensionality and possible profiles of socio-

emotional wealth might be investigated, which might help to explain differences between family firms and non-family firms, but also differences among family firms.

5 Electronic word-of-mouth via employer review sites: The effects on organizational attraction ^{5 6 7}

5.1 Introduction

Almost as soon as the internet appeared, organizations used it for employee recruitment (Ployhart 2006). This development is not surprising, as the web offers organizations an efficient way to reach job seekers and for job seekers to search for employment (e.g., Pfieffelman/Wagner/Libkuman 2010; Maurer/Cook 2011). The topic of **web-based recruitment** has received significant attention from practitioners and academics, which has been reflected in the considerable amount of research on this particular recruitment source (e.g., Lievens/Harris 2003; Breugh 2013). The web has substantially changed how job seekers look for positions and learn about potential employers, and it has increased the speed and quantity of the information it provides (e.g., van Hove/Lievens 2007a; Thompson/Braddy/Wuenssch 2008).

With regard to the amount of information available online, job seekers face a multitude of organization-dependent and organization-independent sources of information (van Hove/Lievens 2007a). Both kinds of sources provide employment-related information about specific jobs and organizations. Therefore, these information sources are important antecedents of the employer image (Lievens/Slaughter 2016). The employer image in turn plays a central role in organizations' ability to differentiate themselves from their competitors in the labor market (Lievens/Highhouse 2003; Slaughter/Cable/Turban 2014).

So far, research in the field of web-based recruitment has focused on the effects of organization-dependent information sources which are directly controlled or at least supplied by organizations, such as organizational web sites

⁵ Dieser Beitrag ist in Zusammenarbeit mit Lena Evertz und Stefan Süß entstanden. Die Anteile an diesem Beitrag betrugen etwa 40 % (Kollitz), 40 % (Evertz) und 20 % (Süß). Der Autor der vorliegenden Arbeit war an der Konzeption der Studie, ihrer Durchführung, ihrer Auswertung sowie an der Diskussion der Ergebnisse maßgeblich beteiligt.

⁶ This is a slightly modified version of an accepted manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis Group in The International Journal of Human Resource Management on 13 July 2019, available online: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09585192.2019.1640268>.

⁷ Eine vorherige Fassung dieses Beitrags wurde auf dem Herbstworkshop der Wissenschaftlichen Kommission Personal im VHB in Paderborn (22.09.2017) sowie auf dem 5th European Network of Selection Researchers (ENESER) meeting „Recent Developments in Recruitment and Selection“ in Edinburgh (28.06.2018) präsentiert.

(e.g., Cober et al. 2004; Allen/Mahto/Otondo 2007; Dineen et al. 2007) and online job boards (e.g., Jattuso/Sinar 2003; Dineen/Noe 2009). In contrast, research on the effects of organization-independent sources of information, such as social media, is comparatively scarce (e.g., Breaugh 2013; Lievens/Slaughter 2016), even though social media provide the **online version of word-of-mouth** (i.e., electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM); Cheung/Thadani 2012) to job seekers (van Hoya/Lievens 2007a; McFarland/Ployhart 2015; Lievens/Slaughter 2016).

By generally focusing on holistic employer image perceptions (Lievens/Slaughter 2016), research on face-to-face word-of-mouth has provided evidence for its effects on organizational attraction (e.g., van Hoya/Lievens 2005, 2007b; Keeling/McGoldrick/Sadhu 2013) and similar evidence has started to emerge with regard to its electronic venue (e.g., van Hoya/Lievens 2007a; van Hoya et al. 2016). However, given the growing number and diversity of social media that provide eWOM to job seekers, recent recruitment research has called for a more nuanced understanding of how organizational attraction is affected by particular subtypes of eWOM (van Hoya 2014).

Among these, the organization-independent web sites stand out whose primary purpose is to provide employment-related word-of-mouth, also referred to as employer review sites (Lievens/Slaughter 2016; Melián-González/Bulchand-Gidumal 2016). These sites operate similar to the wellknown product review sites allowing applicants as well as employees and former employees to provide third-party insider information about organizations to a large number of job seekers (Cable/Yu 2006; Melián-González/Bulchand-Gidumal 2016). In recent years, employer review sites have seen intense usage: For example, in April 2018, glassdoor.com reported 51.8 million unique visitors from the United States (Statista 2018), and 36 percent of internet users in Germany reported having visited an employer review site at least once (Bitkom 2018).

Although job seekers might consult employer review sites to get information about potential employers, little is known about how the eWOM provided by these sites influences organizational attraction (Melián-González/Bulchand-Gidumal 2016). In particular, important determinants of the impact of word-

of-mouth, such as the characteristics of the message, the characteristics of the source, and the characteristics of the recipient (van Hove et al. 2016) have not been investigated. Given the specific characteristics of the eWOM provided by employer review sites, such as the anonymity between sender and receiver or the communication being one-to-many (Dabirian/Kietzmann/Diba 2017; Huete-Alcocer 2017), it is not clear to what extent prior findings regarding word-of-mouth can be transferred to the context of employer review sites. This uncertainty is critical, as it could hinder the alignment of organizations' recruitment practices.

Against this background, the present **study's aim** is to investigate the effects of eWOM provided by employer review sites on organizational attraction. In particular, we seek to reduce the paucity of research on the determinants of its impact, so we proceed as follows. Based on the elaboration likelihood model of persuasive communication (ELM; Petty/Cacioppo 1986), we derive hypotheses with regard to the determinants of an eWOM message's impact (i.e., the quality of the presented arguments, the source's expertise, and the recipients' prior job search experience). We then test hypotheses by using a quasi-experimental design and data from 386 participants being characterized by having heterogeneous levels of job search experience. The results reveal that the exposure to a positive employer review can improve participants' evaluations of organizational attraction. However, as the effects were found to vary across experimental conditions, our results advocate a more fine-grained perspective on the effects of the eWOM that is provided by employer review sites. This provides several implications for both theory and practice. We discuss them together with limitations and avenues for future research.

5.2 Conceptual background and development of hypotheses

5.2.1 Electronic word-of-mouth as a recruitment source

Despite the considerable progress that has been made in the study of recruitment (Harold/Uggerslev/Kraichy 2014), so far no general theory of recruitment has emerged (Breaugh 2013). Rather, studies in the field of recruitment have been criticized for lacking sufficient theoretical foundation (Breaugh/Starke 2000). To advance the field of recruitment with regard to the development of a general theory, it has been suggested to conceptualize the

recruitment process as a process of attitude formation and change with individuals (i.e., job seekers and applicants) forming an impression of what working for an organization would be like (Breaugh 2013). In this regard, recruitment success is largely determined by the organization's ability to influence individuals' attitudes at each of the three stages that can be delineated within the recruitment process (i.e., generating applicants, maintaining applicant status, and influencing job choice; Barber 1998; Harold/Uggerslev/Kraichy 2014). Consequently, **organizational attraction** (i.e., an individual's attitude towards the organization as an employer) is an important construct in the recruitment process which has been shown to be related to behavioral outcomes such as application decisions and job offer acceptance (van Hove/Saks 2011).

As extant research suggests, it is of particular importance to know which factors predict job seekers' initial attraction to the organization (Carlson/Connerley/Mecham 2002; van Hove 2012). This draws on the sequential nature of the recruitment process, as those job seekers who do not enter the applicant pool cannot be targeted by the organization's subsequent recruitment activities and will never enter the organization. Among the factors that might influence job seekers' initial attraction, recruitment sources have been stated to play a key role (van Hove/Lievens 2009). This might be little surprising, given that early in the recruitment process job seekers' information about job and organizational characteristics is largely a result of exposure to recruitment sources (Allen/Mahto/Otondo 2007). In this regard, a great deal of previous research has provided evidence for the effects of recruitment sources an organization directly controls such as recruitment advertisement (e.g., Avery 2003; Walker et al. 2008) and organizational web sites (e.g., Dineen/Ash/Noe 2002; Dineen et al. 2007).

However, there is a growing trend in recruitment research to study the effects of sources of information which are not directly controlled by the organization (van Hove/Lievens 2007a). Among these, **word-of-mouth**, defined as an "interpersonal communication, independent of the organization's recruitment activities, about an organization as an employer or about specific jobs" (van Hove/Lievens 2005, p. 180), has recently received increased attention (Lievens/Slaughter 2016; van Hove et al. 2016; Theurer et al. 2018).

Considering word-of-mouth as a recruitment source is propelled by the idea to advance research on job seekers' attitude formation and decision-making by incorporating sources of information that have been suggested by the marketing literature (Cable/Turban 2001). This draws on the **conceptual parallels of both marketing and recruitment** (Maurer/Howe/Lee 1992). In both disciplines organizations compete to attract individuals (i.e., consumers vs. job seekers), who in turn invest resources in a chosen alternative (i.e., product vs. employer; Cable/Turban 2001). In particular, applying a marketing metaphor to recruitment suggests that an organization's task in recruitment is that of marketing jobs in the labor market, which represent mainly intangible commodities. On the individual level, it implies to regard job seekers in the recruitment process as consumers, who must make a cognitively demanding decision (i.e., whether or not to enter into a long-term relationship with the employer; Maurer/Howe/Lee 1992). Given that this decision is based upon limited and often ambiguous information, communication and persuasion are inherent in both marketing and recruitment (van Hoya 2014). Therefore, to explain job seekers' decision-making, recruitment research might draw on the marketing literature and its extensive study of consumers' information gathering and decision-making (Maurer/Howe/Lee 1992).

As for the marketing literature, there is substantial evidence for noncommercial product-, service-, and brand-related person-to-person communication (i.e., word-of-mouth; Arndt 1967) to strongly affect consumers' attitudes and behavior (e.g., Dichter 1966; Herr/Kardes/Kim 1991; Bone 1995; Buttle 1998; Laczniak/DeCarlo/Ramaswami 2001; Sweeney/Soutar/Mazzarol 2008). Therefore, studies that have focused on **employment-related word-of-mouth** have borrowed heavily from this body of research with regard to theories and conceptualizations (van Hoya 2014). These studies have provided evidence that word-of-mouth affects pre-hire outcomes such as organizational attraction and job choice decisions (e.g., Collins/Stevens 2002; van Hoya/Lievens 2005; Jaidi/van Hooft/Arends 2011; Keeling/McGoldrick/Sadhu 2013; van Hoya et al. 2016). According to van Hoya (2014), these findings can be summarized in a way that word-of-mouth seems to be an influential source of positive employment-related information, whereas findings for negative word-of-mouth are inconsistent.

In addition to its face-to-face venue, word-of-mouth in a recruitment context can be provided via the internet, and especially via social media (Dellarocas 2003; van Hove/Lievens 2007a; van Hove 2014). Social media are relatively easy to operate, which in turn gives a large number of internet users the ability to share opinions about (potential) employers and specific jobs (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004; McFarland/Ployhart 2015). In recent years, social media have experienced tremendous growth in usage (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2010) and there has been a remarkable increase in the online version of word-of-mouth being provided via **employer review sites** (Melián-González/Bulchand-Gidumal 2016; Bitkom 2018). These sites have their origin in web-based opinion platforms that provide word-of-mouth for all sorts of consumption decisions, including restaurants (e.g., Yelp), hotels (e.g., TripAdvisor) or movies (e.g., IMDb; Dabirian/Kietzmann/Diba 2017).

Web-based opinion platforms for consumption information and platforms for employment-related information (i.e., employer review sites) have in common that they remove information barriers, as they provide easy accessible third-party information to a multitude of people and institutions (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004; McFarland/Ployhart 2015; Kluemper/Mitra/Wang 2016). Due to their easy accessibility, job seekers might consult employer review sites early in the recruitment process, when there is limited information about employers. In particular, employer review sites allow job seekers to gather information that to a lesser extent can be received from organization-dependent sources of information, such as information about internal culture and climate of an organization (McFarland/Ployhart 2015; Dabirian/Kietzmann/Diba 2017). Given the experiential nature of the employment relationship and the associated risk that comes with it (Gardner/Erhardt/Martin-Rios 2011), this information may alter the beliefs job seekers hold about potential employers. Therefore, we argue that the eWOM that is provided by employer reviews sites has the potential to affect job seekers' attraction to organizations.

By drawing on prior research in both marketing (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004) and recruitment (van Hove/Lievens 2005) we conceptualize this **subtype of eWOM** as any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former employees about an organization as an employer or about specific

jobs, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via this specific type of web site.

5.2.2 Understanding the effects of electronic word-of-mouth: The elaboration likelihood model

While research on employment-related eWOM is scarce, the marketing literature so far has provided an extensive body of research on the effects of product- and brand-related eWOM (e.g., King/Racherla/Bush 2014; You/Vadakepatt/Joshi 2015). According to recent reviews (Chan/Ngai 2011; Cheung/Thadani 2012), most of this research has drawn on the **elaboration likelihood model of persuasion** (ELM; Petty/Cacioppo 1986) as a theoretical foundation. This tendency can be traced back to the ELM's having been shown to provide an appropriate framework for understanding attitude change in social-influence settings (e.g., Wood 2000). In particular, it has been stated that "the ELM sets sound theoretical perspectives on the consumer-information process with regard to online consumer reviews" (Chan/Ngai 2011, p. 499). Hence, we argue that the ELM is also an appropriate framework for analyzing the effects of employment-related eWOM that occurs in the form of employer reviews. This consideration also resonates with recruitment research which has started to apply the ELM to explain how recruitment-related information affects potential applicants' attraction to organizations (Uggerslev/Fassina/Kraichy 2012; Harold/Uggerslev/Kraichy 2014; Evertz/Süß 2017).

The ELM posits that the way persuasive communication leads to attitude formation or change is determined by the recipient's motivation (e.g., personal involvement) and ability (e.g., cognitive competence) to scrutinize the issue-relevant information in a message (Petty/Cacioppo 1986). When conditions cause both motivation and ability to be high the "elaboration likelihood" is also high, which means that an individual is likely to engage in thinking about the issue in such a way that employs an extensive amount of cognitive resources, including drawing from experiences and knowledge to consider the true merits of the information presented (Petty/Cacioppo 1986). Thus, when an individual is in this temporary psychological state, persuasion is largely a function of argument quality (e.g., Jones/Shultz/Chapman 2006), which refers to the persuasive strength of arguments embedded in an informational

message (e.g., Bhattacharjee/Sanford 2006). Changes in or formation of attitudes that occur via this “central route” are thought to be persistent over time and predictive of behavior (Petty/Cacioppo/Goldman 1981; Petty/Haugtvedt/Smith 1995). On the other hand, when elaboration likelihood (motivation and/or ability) is low, individuals are likely to rely on heuristics and simple cues like the source’s expertise or physical attractiveness. Attitudes that are formed or changed via this “peripheral route” are thought to be temporary and not predictive of behavior (Petty/Cacioppo 1986).

Applying these theoretical considerations to explain job seekers’ processing of eWOM, we argue that it is necessary to take into account the characteristics of the **message**, the characteristics of the **source**, and the characteristics of the **recipient**. As the present study’s aim is explorative in nature, in terms of valence we focus solely on positive word-of-mouth. This consideration is based on prior recruitment research which has concluded that, with regard to attraction outcomes, the effects of positive word-of-mouth are widely generalizable and robust, whereas the effects of negative word-of-mouth are inconsistent and might vary depending on the respective study’s design and characteristics (van Hoya 2014). Further, the choice to focus on positive word-of-mouth is based on practical considerations, as it is the type of information organizations seek to stimulate (van Hoya et al. 2016).

Regarding message characteristics, there is evidence that the content of word-of-mouth – that is, what is said or written – matters (van Hoya/Lievens 2007a; Keeling/McGoldrick/Sadhu 2013; van Hoya et al. 2016). Whereas van Hoya and Lievens (2007a) showed that word-of-mouth about the organization increases organizational attraction to a greater extent than word-of-mouth about individual employees, more recent studies have drawn on the instrumental-symbolic framework (Keller 1993; Lievens/Highhouse 2003; Lievens/van Hoya/Schreurs 2005) to hypothesize that the effects of word-of-mouth differ significantly depending on whether the instrumental (i.e., more tangible) or symbolic (i.e., more intangible) attributes of the organization are communicated. These studies have provided mixed findings (Keeling/McGoldrick/Sadhu 2013; van Hoya et al. 2016). However, in line with extant research, we consider the content of word-of-mouth to be integral to explaining its effects

(van Hoya 2014). Instead of investigating distinct categories of attributes, applying an ELM perspective suggests argument quality being predictive of attitude formation (e.g., Bhattacharjee/Sanford 2006). In so doing, we argue that the quality of arguments presented in an eWOM message explains differences in job seekers' evaluative reactions to an organization as an employer (i.e., organizational attraction; Cable/Turban 2001; Chapman et al. 2005). Consequently, Hypothesis 1 is formulated as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Argument quality of an eWOM message has a positive effect on organizational attraction.

As for source characteristics, research has shown that the source's expertise is a determinant of the impact of word-of-mouth (van Hoya/Lievens 2009; Keeling/McGoldrick/Sadhu 2013; van Hoya et al. 2016). This finding is in line with the ELM, which highlights source expertise as a determinant of message-based attitude formation (e.g., Yi et al. 2013). Source expertise has been defined as the degree of knowledge and experience a source holds about a job or recruiting organization (Bone 1995; van Hoya/Lievens 2009) and it is also a component of source credibility (Fisher/Ilggen/Hoyer 1979; Pornpitakpan 2004). As job seekers are usually interested in obtaining correct information about working conditions, they should be more motivated to process information that is provided by an expert, which is likely to be valid and correct, than information from a non-expert (Cable/Turban 2001; Clark et al. 2012). Therefore, it is likely that arguments provided by an expert source are processed more centrally, thereby enhancing the effects of argument quality on organizational attraction:

Hypothesis 2a: The expertise of the source of an eWOM message positively moderates the relationship between the argument quality of an eWOM message and organizational attraction.

In addition to moderating the impact of a persuasive message (Buda 2003), prior research provides evidence that source expertise is directly related to attitude formation (Petty/Cacioppo/Goldman 1981; Stoltenberg/Davis 1988). Individuals' implicit assumption about an expert's opinion is usually that it is adequately justified by his or her expertise, so an expert's advocacy is likely

to invoke agreement, regardless of the arguments he or she presents (Mad-dux/Rogers 1980; Clark et al. 2012). Therefore, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 2b: The expertise of the source of an eWOM message has a positive effect on organizational attraction.

Regarding recipient characteristics, the ELM suggests that an individual's ability to process information is affected by his or her previous experience with the attitude object (e.g., Sher/Lee 2009). Walker and colleagues (2008) found that job seekers that had little job search experience had less ability to identify and process the issue-relevant information from recruitment advertising, so they relied more on peripheral cues (i.e., the physical attractiveness of those shown in recruitment materials) than did their more experienced counterparts. As source expertise has been shown to function as a peripheral cue (Petty/Cacioppo 1986), it is likely, therefore, that job seekers' previous job search experience will influence their reliance on the source's expertise. In particular, as inexperienced job seekers might lack ability because they are unfamiliar with how to process employment-related information (e.g., eWOM on employer review sites) they should be prone to engage in peripheral processing. As this means to rely more heavily on peripheral cues, the source's expertise might account for more of the difference in how the recipient evaluates an organization's attractiveness than does the argument quality. Hence, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 3a: For individuals with little job search experience, an eWOM message that is low in argument quality from an expert source has a stronger effect on organizational attraction than does an eWOM message that is high in argument quality from a non-expert source.

According to prior research, job seekers with job search experience are better able to evaluate the true merits of employment-related information than are those with little job search experience (Walker et al. 2008). So when being compared to inexperienced ones, experienced job seekers should be more likely to carefully scrutinize and elaborate upon the information provided by employer reviews. Consequently, experienced job seekers' evaluations of an organization's attractiveness should be more influenced by the quality of the

arguments presented than are inexperienced job seekers' evaluations (Jones/Shultz/Chapman 2006):

Hypothesis 3b: For individuals with job search experience, an eWOM message that is high in argument quality from a non-expert source has a stronger effect on organizational attraction than it has for individuals with little job search experience.

Figure 5.1 presents the hypothesized relationships between argument quality, source expertise, job search experience, and organizational attraction, as proposed by the ELM.

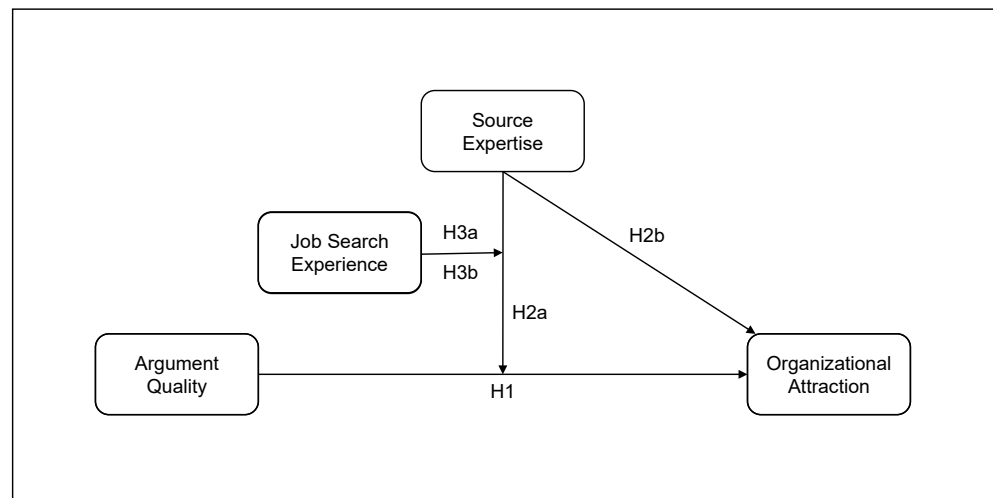


Fig. 5.1: Research model

5.3 Method

5.3.1 Participants

In order to include participants with varying levels of job search experience, we drew a **heterogeneous sample**, following suggestions from Walker and colleagues (2008). Data was gathered from April to July 2017 by means of an online questionnaire, which was sent out via various channels that were selected with the intent to address participants with varying levels of job search experience. More experienced participants ($n=224$; average age=40.14 years, $SD=11.08$; average job search experience=4.76 times, $SD=6.50$) were recruited via several recruiting agencies, transfer agencies, and the alumni network of a mid-sized university in Germany. Less experienced participants ($n=162$; average age=18.19 years, $SD=3.09$; average job search experience=2.40 times, $SD=2.56$) were recruited from those who had signed

up for a newsletter at a German job board that served individuals who were looking for vocational training positions. Several secondary schools in Germany were also asked to encourage their older students to participate in the study. Most of the more experienced participants (72.3 %) reported that they had visited an employer review site before, whereas this was less common among the less experienced participants (31.5 %). Both groups of participants indicated moderately positive attitudes about employer review sites (more experienced $M=5.78$, $SD=1.34$); less experienced $M=5.59$, $SD=1.46$).

After data from both subsamples had been acquired, we tested whether there were any differences in participants' first ratings of organizational attraction (see "Design and Procedure") that would be attributable to mere subsample membership. A t-test for unpaired samples revealed that before being exposed to the employer review, there was no statistically significant difference in ratings of organizational attraction ($t(384)=-0.651$, $p=.516$) between the more experienced ($M=5.18$, $SD=1.08$) and the less experienced subsample ($M=5.11$, $SD=1.19$). Based on this finding, we aggregated both subsamples resulting in a final sample consisting of 386 participants. The sample comprised 208 (53.9 %) females and 178 males (46.1 %), with an average age of 30.93 years ($SD=13.88$, age range 14-64 years), an average work experience of 9.84 years ($SD=11.75$), and an average job search experience of 3.77 times ($SD=5.35$).

5.3.2 Design and procedure

We conducted a **vignette-based quasi-experimental study** using a $2 \times 2 \times 2$ between-subjects factorial design with argument quality (high or low), source expertise (high or low), and job search experience (high or low) as experimental variables. This design allowed us to manipulate selected aspects of the written stimulus (review of the employer) while controlling for confounding sources of variability. Doing so would have not been easy to achieve in a real-life setting (Evans et al. 2015). With regard to the recruitment process, we chose a single-stage design as our aim was to learn about the effects of a specific recruitment source (i.e., eWOM via employer review sites) at one stage of the recruitment process on a specific recruitment outcome (i.e., organizational attraction) (Saks 2014).

Participants were asked to act and think as they would if they were looking for a job (e.g., Barber/Roehling 1993; Jones/Shultz/Chapman 2006; van Hoya et al. 2016) and were introduced to some general information (e.g., industry) about a fictitious company (“Marzeo”). Then participants were asked to rate the degree to which they were attracted to the organization overall. Next, they were randomly assigned to one of the four experimental conditions, where a written scenario (review of the fictitious employer) was presented (argument quality [high; low] $\times$ source expertise [high; low]) that provided information about working conditions at the company. Levels of job search experience were operationalized ex-post via a median split. To enhance external validity, the layout of the scenario text was designed as a real review of the employer (Melián-González/Bulchand-Gidumal 2016; van Hoya et al. 2016). Participants read the scenario and rated the organization’s attractiveness for a second time. Finally, they completed a questionnaire containing an assessment of individual differences, a manipulation check, and several control measures.

5.3.3 Materials and pilot studies

Manipulation of the argument quality of the eWOM message generally followed a procedure Petty and Cacioppo (1986) suggested that had also been applied in the context of recruitment advertising (Walker et al. 2008). Following these recommendations, we generated a large pool of statements that targeted various job and organizational attributes that could affect one’s view of working conditions at the fictitious organization.

The formulation of the statements was guided by prior research on the effects of word-of-mouth, which suggested providing information about various aspects, such as salary, benefits, career opportunities (van Hoya/Lievens 2005). As these statements provided primarily instrumental (more tangible) information, we also added some symbolic (less tangible) information, such as “The company is prestigious” (Keeling/McGoldrick/Sadhu 2013; van Hoya et al. 2016). These two steps resulted in a pool of twenty-two statements. Then three researchers in the field of human resource management screened individually an employer review site (glassdoor.com) and collected additional statements (arguments) that fulfilled the criteria of being perceived positively and not already being in the item pool (e.g., “The company cares about its employees by providing coffee and food at affordable prices”). We discussed

arguments that were independently collected from the employer review site, which were rejected if there was no consensus regarding their meeting the two criteria for inclusion. After this procedure, the final item pool consisted of twenty-eight arguments, which were intended to be either compelling (high argument quality) or specious (low argument quality).

As the sample we used in the main study consisted of participants with heterogeneous levels of job search experience, our first pilot study pre-tested our manipulation of argument quality in both inexperienced participants ($n = 39$) and experienced participants ($n = 30$). Participants in this pilot study rated the arguments on an eleven-point scale from unpersuasive to persuasive, as suggested by Walker et al. (2008). Statements that received high persuasiveness ratings (those in the upper quartile, inexperienced $M = 8.65$, $SD = 0.22$; experienced $M = 8.50$, $SD = 0.20$) were determined to be higher in argument quality, whereas the least persuasive (those in the lower quartile, inexperienced $M = 6.81$, $SD = 0.19$; experienced $M = 5.89$, $SD = 0.36$) were considered lower-quality arguments. Then arguments that were considered high-quality by both samples were matched, as were arguments that were considered low-quality. Thus two messages resulted: one low-quality and one high-quality, containing four statements each.

Using both types of messages, participants in the second pilot study ($n = 34$) (who were not involved in the first pilot study) rated the persuasiveness of the two messages using the same eleven-point persuasiveness scale. In line with the argument-quality manipulation, a t-test for unpaired samples revealed that participants perceived the message with high-quality arguments ($M = 8.50$, $SD = 1.25$) as more persuasive ($t(32) = 3.248$, $p < 0.01$) than the message with low-quality arguments ($M = 6.56$, $SD = 2.16$). Further, participants rated the fictitious organization's attractiveness based on the information in the messages and rated the organization described in the message with high-quality arguments ($M = 5.91$, $SD = 0.93$) more attractive ($t(32) = 3.207$, $p < 0.01$) than the organization described in the message with low-quality arguments ($M = 4.69$, $SD = 1.28$).

To **manipulate source expertise** in the main study, we varied the sender's employment status, as shown in the headline of the review of the employer, as well as the introductory sentence of the posting, where the sender provided

information about himself or herself. In the high-expertise condition, the sender stated that he or she was currently employed by the fictitious company and had been working for the company for more than six years. In the low-expertise condition, the sender stated that he or she was a former applicant who had interviewed with the company but who had not worked for the company (e.g., Cable/Turban 2001; van Hove et al. 2016).

In order to avoid confounding effects, participants in the second pilot study received no information about the sender's employment status when the messages were presented. Instead, the participants rated two randomized items using a 5-point scale, where 1 = totally disagree and 5 = totally agree: "Imagine the sender of this message was an applicant (employee for six years) of the organization, would you say the sender possesses expert knowledge about the organization?" A t-test for paired samples provided evidence that participants in the second pilot study assigned significantly more expertise to the employee condition ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 0.92$) than they did to the applicant condition ($M = 2.12$, $SD = 1.18$) ($t(33) = 6.405$, $p < 0.001$).

5.3.4 Measures

Organizational attraction was measured before and after participants were exposed to the eWOM message (review of the employer) using five items suggested by Aiman-Smith and colleagues (2001). Participants answered these items using a seven-point rating scale, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. An example item is "I find this a very attractive company". The internal consistency of the scale was .93 at time one and .96 at time two. Based on the measurement at two points in time, we calculated gain scores for organizational attraction by subtracting the values measured at time one from those measured at time two.

Job search experience was measured using a single item from Walker and colleagues (2008). Participants were asked how many times they had searched for a new occupation in their lifetimes (e.g., a vocational training position, an internship, full-time employment). We assigned participants to high and low job search experiences using a median split (low: ≤ 3 ; high: > 3).

Source expertise was measured with three items suggested by Fisher and colleagues (1979). Using a 5-point Likert scale, participants responded to

items like “This person really knows a lot about this company” and “I consider this person to be an extremely credible source of information about the company”. The latter item was modified in terms of to refer to the company (instead of to a job), as the content of the eWOM message in the main study was not related to any specific job. Internal consistency was .91.

We measured several **demographic variables**, including the participants’ age, gender, prior work experience (“How many years have you been working?”), and employment status. Further, we asked participants whether they had visited an employer review site before and, moreover, measured their attitude about employer review sites. This last, we measured using four items suggested by Lin (2010), which we modified with regard to employer review sites (e.g., “Using employer review sites is a good idea”). Internal consistency was .85.

5.4 Results

5.4.1 Manipulation check

We conducted **t-tests** to determine whether our manipulation of argument quality and source expertise in our scenarios was successful. The results confirmed that participants who were assigned to the high argument quality conditions ($M = 8.26$, $SD = 2.05$) rated argument quality significantly higher ($t(384) = 7.705$, $p < 0.001$) than did those in the low argument conditions ($M = 6.37$, $SD = 2.72$). Perceived source expertise was lower ($t(384) = 10.355$, $p < 0.001$) if the sender was an applicant ($M = 3.16$, $SD = 1.45$) than it was if the sender were an employee ($M = 4.65$, $SD = 1.35$), which shows that participants assign actual members of an organization higher expertise than they do non-members. After viewing the review of the employer, participants indicated whether the sender was an applicant or an employee and were excluded from the study ex-post if their answers were not consistent with the source-expertise manipulation of the scenario to which they were assigned (Stockman/van Hoya/Carpentier 2017). We also checked for differences between groups in terms of their perceptions of the organization’s attractiveness after they saw the general information about the organization by means of a **one-way ANOVA** with the scenarios as an independent grouping variable and the participants’ first assessments of the organization’s

attractiveness as a dependent variable. The results suggested that there were no significant differences in the perceptions of the organization between groups before they were shown the review of the employer ($F(7, 378) = 1.04$, $p = 0.40$). We also acquired the URL of the fictitious company (www.mar-zeo.de) to ensure participants would not find contradictory information about the company, as we were not able to control for any additional information search due to usage of an online questionnaire. Website statistics (Google Analytics) did not indicate any increase in site-visits during the period in which the study was conducted.

5.4.2 Hypotheses testing

To determine how organizational attraction is affected by eWOM on employer review sites, we conducted a **three-way ANOVA** with gain scores of the fictitious organization's attractiveness ("Gain OA") as the dependent variable and argument quality, source expertise, and job search experience as experimental variables. Table 5.1 shows the means and standard deviations for the experimental conditions, broken down by the independent variables.

Job Search Experience	Low				High			
Argument Quality	Low		High		Low		High	
Source Expertise	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High
Gain OA Means	0.01	0.03	0.54	0.97	-0.11	0.38	0.74	0.70
Gain OA SD	0.89	0.81	0.71	1.01	0.98	0.82	0.68	0.71
N	47	53	56	56	52	41	49	32
Scenario	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Note. OA = Organizational Attraction.								

Tab. 5.1: Means and standard deviations across each experimental condition

As Table 5.2 shows, the analysis revealed a statistically significant main effect of argument quality ($F(1, 378) = 57.80$, $p < 0.001$, part. $\eta^2 = 0.133$), providing support for **Hypothesis 1**. We also found support for **Hypothesis 2b**, as there is a statistically significant main effect of source expertise ($F(1, 378) = 6.62$, $p < 0.05$, part. $\eta^2 = 0.017$). **Hypothesis 2a**, that source expertise moderates the effects of argument quality, is not supported, as we observed no statistically significant interaction effect of argument quality and source expertise ($F(1, 378) = 0.11$, $p = 0.75$, part. $\eta^2 = 0.000$). As for Hypothesis 3a,

we tested whether changes in the ratings of organizational attraction varied based on whether an individual was assigned to Scenario 2 or Scenario 3 (Table 5.1). To do so, we conducted a t-test for unpaired samples using gain scores of organizational attraction as the dependent variable. The results showed that the means of both groups differ significantly ($t(107) = 3.496$, $p < 0.01$) but not as hypothesized. Contrary to Hypothesis 3a, for individuals who were low in job search experience, eWOM with high argument quality from a non-expert source leads to higher ratings of organizational attraction ($M = 0.54$, $SD = 0.71$) than does eWOM with low argument quality from an expert source ($M = 0.03$, $SD = 0.81$) (Table 5.1). Therefore, **Hypothesis 3a** is not supported.

Tests of between-subjects effects						
Dependent Variable: Organizational Attraction (Gain Scores)						
Three-way ANOVA	Type III SS	df	MS	F	Sig.	part. η^2
JSE	.171	1	.171	.241	.624	.001
AQ	41.023	1	41.023	57.797	.000	.133
SE	4.701	1	4.701	6.623	.010	.017
JSE $\times$ AQ	.482	1	.482	.679	.410	.002
JSE $\times$ SE	7,38E-02	1	7,38E-02	.000	.992	.000
AQ $\times$ SE	.075	1	.075	.105	.746	.000
JSE $\times$ AQ $\times$ SE	5.019	1	5.019	7.071	.008	.018
Error	268.295	378	.710			
Total	386.480	386				
Corrected total	324.078	385				
R-squared = .172 (adjusted R-squared = .157)						
Note. JSE = Job Search Experience; AQ = Argument Quality; SE = Source Expertise.						

Tab. 5.2: Three-way ANOVA results

The same procedure was applied to test Hypothesis 3b using Scenario 3 and Scenario 7 as independent groups (Table 5.1). Comparison of Scenario 3 ($M = 0.54$, $SD = 0.71$) and Scenario 7 ($M = 0.74$, $SD = 0.68$) revealed no significant differences ($t(103) = 1.496$, $p = 0.138$), so **Hypothesis 3b** has no support.

However, we found a significant three-way interaction effect of argument quality, source expertise, and job search experience ($F(1, 378) = 7.07$,

$p < 0.01$, part. $\eta^2 = 0.018$). After splitting the data set in half by the dichotomous variable job search experience, we conducted **two additional two-way ANOVAs** (van Hove/Lievens 2007b; Liu/Keeling/Papamichail 2016) with argument quality and source expertise as independent variables (Table 5.3).

Tests of between-subjects effects						
Dependent Variable: Organizational Attraction (Gain Scores)						
Two-way ANOVA (low JSE)	Type III SS	df	MS	F	Sig.	part. η^2
AQ	28.426	1	28.426	38.352	.000	.156
SE	2.672	1	2.672	3.606	.059	.017
AQ $\times$ SE	2.183	1	2.183	2.945	.088	.014
Error	154.164	208	.741			
Total	222.960	212				
Corrected total	187.748	211				
R-squared = .179 (adjusted R-squared = .167)						
Two-way ANOVA (high JSE)	Type III SS	df	MS	F	Sig.	part. η^2
AQ	14.643	1	14.643	21.811	.000	.114
SE	2.094	1	2.094	3.119	.079	.018
AQ $\times$ SE	2.837	1	2.837	4.226	.041	.024
Error	114.131	170	.671			
Total	163.520	174				
Corrected total	136.316	173				
R-squared = .163 (adjusted R-squared = .148)						
Note. JSE = Job Search Experience; AQ = Argument Quality; SE = Source Expertise.						

Tab. 5.3: Results of two-way ANOVAs for inexperienced and experienced individuals

We found no statistically significant interaction effect of argument quality and source expertise for individuals with low job search experience ($F(1, 208) = 2.95$, $p = 0.088$, part. $\eta^2 = .014$), but a statistically significant interaction effect of argument quality and source expertise on organizational attraction for individuals with high job search experience ($F(1, 170) = 4.23$, $p < 0.05$, part. $\eta^2 = .024$) (Figure 5.2).

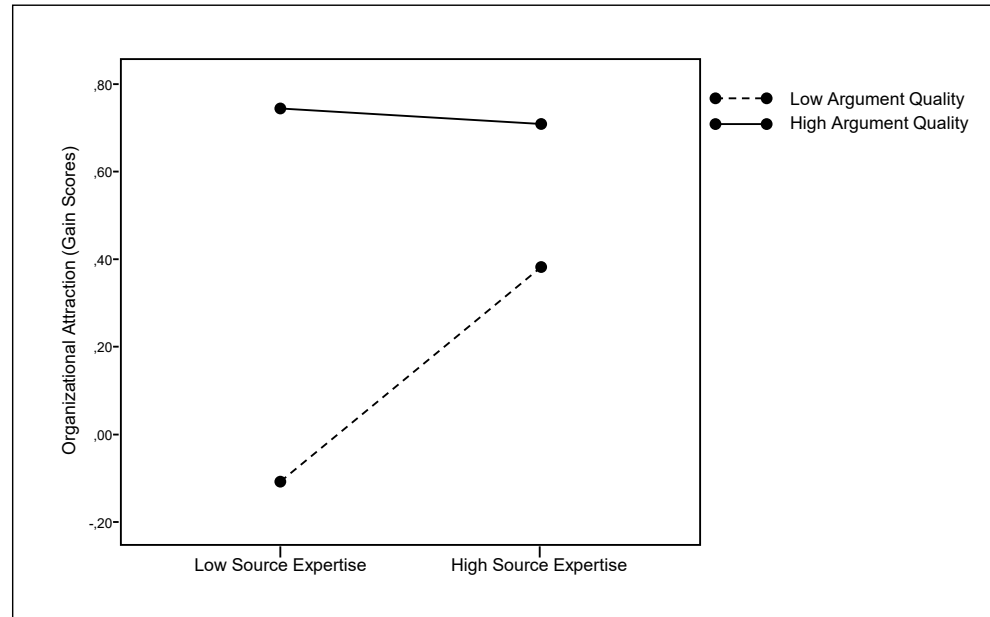


Fig. 5.2: Interaction effect of argument quality and source expertise on organizational attraction for individuals with high job search experience

5.5 Discussion

The present study provides valuable insights into how organizational attraction is affected by the eWOM provided by employer review sites. Thus, our findings **contribute to the emerging body of research** that focuses on word-of-mouth as an organization-independent recruitment source (e.g., van Hoya/Lievens 2005; Keeling/McGoldrick/Sadhu 2013; van Hoya et al. 2016). In particular, by investigating the effects of employer review sites as a subtype of eWOM, we respond to Lievens and Slaughter (2016), who called for more research on the effects of these sites. We also provide further empirical evidence regarding the applicability of the ELM to the context of web-based recruitment (e.g., Dineen/Noe 2009; Chen/Lin/Chen 2012; Walker et al. 2012; Gregory/Meade/Thompson 2013), as suggested by Maurer and Cook (2011).

Our results indicate that job seekers' perceptions of organizational attraction are enhanced by positive eWOM on employer review sites, an indication that is in line with the extant recruitment research that has provided empirical evidence of the effects of positive word-of-mouth on organizational attraction in both offline environments (e.g., Collins/Stevens 2002; van Hoya/Lievens 2005) and online environments (e.g., van Hoya/Lievens 2007a; Melián-Gon-

zález/Bulchand-Gidumal 2016). Therefore, our results corroborate the suggestions made by van Hoya (2014), who concluded that the **effects of positive word-of-mouth are generalizable and robust**.

Our methodology allowed us to gain additional insight regarding message characteristics, source characteristics, and recipient characteristics. In so doing, our findings contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the effects of eWOM provided by employer review sites. Thus, we extend research that has focused on this particular subtype of eWOM (Cable/Yu 2006; Melián-González/Bulchand-Gidumal 2016).

Regarding **message characteristics**, the quality of a message's arguments has a statistically significant main effect, which is in line with extant research in the field of message-based persuasion (e.g., Haugtvedt/Petty/Cacioppo 1992). Thus, our findings provide additional evidence for the content of word-of-mouth being an important determinant of its effects (van Hoya/Lievens 2007a; Keeling/McGoldrick/Sadhu 2013; van Hoya et al. 2016). Moreover, our findings might extend research that has focused on the content dimension of employment-related word-of-mouth, as the present study is, to the best of our knowledge, the first to manipulate arguments' persuasive strength experimentally. Therefore, while holding the valence of word-of-mouth constant, persuasive strength of the presented arguments may be able to explain variance in recipients' perceptions of organizational attraction.

With regard to **source characteristics**, we observed a statistically significant main effect of source expertise. While confirming earlier findings in the field of persuasion research (Petty/Cacioppo/Goldman 1981; Stoltenberg/Davis 1988), this finding suggests that job seekers' attitudes are influenced to a greater extent if the source is an expert than if he or she is not. Hence, our findings support recruitment research that has highlighted source expertise as a determinant of word-of-mouth's impact (e.g., Fisher/Ilgen/Hoyer 1979; van Hoya/Lievens 2009; Keeling/McGoldrick/Sadhu 2013; van Hoya et al. 2016).

However, the moderating role of the source's expertise (Buda 2003; van Hoya 2014) was observed only in experienced job seekers. Given our a priori theoretical considerations regarding **recipient characteristics**, this finding was

not expected; we expected experienced job seekers to be more likely to elaborate information received than inexperienced job seekers (Larsen/Phillips 2002; Walker et al. 2008), so we thought that perceptions of organizational attraction would be determined primarily by the arguments' quality (Jones/Shultz/Chapman 2006).

This effect was observed when the arguments were of high quality, providing evidence that under certain conditions job seekers might consider **applicants as a reliable source of information** about employers, which suggests that not only former or present employees, but also applicants may act as an influential source of employment-related information (Keeling/McGouldrick/Sadhu 2013). In contrast, when low-quality arguments were presented, experienced job seekers seemed to attach more importance to the expertise of the source that provided the message than they did to the arguments. As Figure 5.2 shows, even though the low-quality arguments sought to portray the organization as a good employer, when the arguments were provided by a non-expert source, no improvement in organizational attraction ratings was observed.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings might be explained by considering Clark and colleagues (2012), who showed that **proattitudinal advocacy** is likely to elicit more scrutiny when it is presented by a non-expert source, rather than an expert source. It is possible that the fact that participants' average ratings of organizational attraction were relatively high before the participants were exposed to the review of the employer ($M = 5.01$ on a 7-point Likert scale) led to more intense scrutiny of arguments presented by the non-expert source.

From a more practical point of view, these findings can be attributed to the **operationalization** of the low-expertise condition in the study's design, where the sender was described as an applicant who had interviewed with the organization. Since individuals use perceptions of the recruitment process to infer an organization's attributes (e.g., Ryan et al. 2000), participants may have considered the low quality of the arguments presented by the applicant as indicating how the organization fulfills its role as an employer. In particular, as participants with high levels of job search experience are likely to be familiar with being both interviewed and hired by the same organization, they

might be particularly aware that applicants' expectations are usually inflated before they actually begin to work for an organization (Breaugh 2008). If experienced participants considered the low-quality eWOM message from the applicant source as a manifestation of these overstated expectations, such a conclusion may have caused participants to discount the information provided, suppressing any possible increase in organizational attraction.

In summary, our findings suggest that, based on **individual differences in job search experience**, job seekers do not process the information obtained during an eWOM communication in the same ways. In line with the extant research, the recipients' individual differences can be considered a key determinant of the effects of word-of-mouth (van Hove 2014). Further, from an ELM perspective, this conclusion provides additional empirical support for prior experience being a component of the ability to process recruitment information (Larsen/Phillips 2002; Walker et al. 2008).

Besides complementing prior research on the effects of employment-related eWOM, the findings of our study have several **practical implications**. In general, organizations should be aware of the influence of organization-independent sources of information, such as employer reviews, when planning their recruitment practices, as they can affect job seekers' attraction to the organization. Although the information provided on employer review sites is not directly manageable by organizations, there are various ways to benefit from it:

First, as the eWOM on employer review sites was found to affect organizational attraction, it seems to have implications for an organization's image as an employer (Lievens/Slaughter 2016; Melián-González/Bulchand-Gidumal 2016). Thus, organizations may consider to (systematically) **monitor** how they perform on these sites (Godes et al. 2005) and to integrate such information in their employer image management. In particular, as employer review sites often provide their information at no cost, they offer organizations a cost-efficient way to get a glimpse of how they are perceived by job seekers.

Second, organizations might consider creating a favorable employer image by **stimulating positive eWOM** that is provided by their own employees. In this regard, there is the possibility to encourage highly committed employees

to create employer reviews, which even can be done by offering monetary incentives (van Hoya et al. 2016). Based on our results, employers trying to stimulate positive eWOM should sensitize their employees to the importance of the persuasive strength of the presented arguments, for example, by highlighting the necessity to undergird arguments by objective data. However, if monetary incentives are offered, it is important to bear in mind that if recipients are aware of this practice, it can reduce the impact of eWOM, as they might perceive the source as having a self-interest in promoting the organization as an employer (van Hoya et al. 2016).

Third, as our study provides evidence that **employer reviews provided by applicants** can influence organizational attraction, for organizations it might be valuable to stimulate positive word-of-mouth by this particular group of outsiders. This offers a link to organizational impression-management, which refers to those actions carried out to influence a particular audience's perception of the organization (Elsbach/Sutton/Principe 1998), such as perceptions of applicants during recruitment (Cable/Graham 2000). According to meta-analytic evidence, applicants' perceptions of the recruitment process (e.g., fairness perceptions) positively affect both their attraction to the organization and recommendation intentions (Hausknecht/Day/Thomas 2004; Chapman et al. 2005). So organizations that have established a fair and transparent selection system and manage to convey this information to applicants are likely to cause them to spread more positive word-of-mouth (van Hoya 2014). This should also manifest itself in more positive employer reviews.

5.6 Limitations and future research

The present study has several limitations that need to be acknowledged. Similar to most experimental research that has investigated the effects of word-of-mouth (van Hoya 2014) we employed a scenario design, which is why the **generalizability of our findings** might be restricted (van Hoya et al. 2016). The presence of this limitation is amplified by the convenience sample on which the study was based (Landers/Behrend 2015). However, given that our sample included individuals with diverse levels of previous work and job search experience, our study might overcome a central threat to the generalizability of findings, that is, using a mere student sample (Gardner/Er-

hardt/Martin-Rios 2011). Nevertheless, we encourage future research to replicate our findings with another sample and to assess the generalizability of these findings to the field.

In addition, the **external validity** of our findings might be limited because of the study's design. Although the written stimulus we employed (i.e., the review of the employer) was an appropriate approximation to a real review, when job seekers visit a real employer review site, they are often confronted with a large number of sometimes contradictory reviews (Könsen et al. 2018). Since the participants in our study were exposed to a single positive review, future research could analyze job seekers' reactions when they are exposed to multiple positive, negative, or contradictory reviews. In particular, as there is emerging evidence in the marketing literature for the effects of negative reviews (e.g., Aggarwal et al. 2012; Huang/Korfiatis 2015), we encourage future studies to look at the effects of those reviews portraying organizations as bad employers.

Besides, marketing literature holds several findings and suggestions that can stimulate future research on employment-related eWOM via employer review sites. For instance, given the anonymity in the online context, it has been questioned whether existing theories that draw on concepts such as source credibility, source similarity, and tie strength might be able to properly explain the influence of eWOM on product evaluations (Huang/Hsiao/Chen 2012). Transferred to recruitment, this implies that future research on employer reviews might address the applicability of theories that so far have served as an explanation for the effects of employment-related word-of-mouth (e.g., the recipient-source-framework; see van Hove 2014). Thus, it would be interesting to gain more insight into **how the eWOM via employer review sites is processed**, as there is neither a pre-existing relationship between recipient and source nor clear information regarding source characteristics. As for the latter, our findings so far support a view that job seekers might draw inferences about sources based on specific informational cues provided by the respective employer review site, such as the employment status assigned to the source (e.g., employee, applicant, or others).

Drawing on this, future research might analyze the heuristics job seekers use to evaluate eWOM messages on employer review sites, especially when messages occur in large numbers. In this regard, a promising topic of inquiry is to investigate how job seekers react to numerical ratings of employers – what the marketing literature has termed “**the salience of valence**” (King/Rachlerla/Bush 2014, p. 170). From an ELM perspective, it is possible that job seekers consider this aggregation of word-of-mouth information to be a peripheral cue, as it allows them to form an attitude regarding an employer without elaborating the arguments in the reviews.

As for the theoretical foundation of the present study, we drew on the ELM which was found to be an appropriate framework for analyzing the effects of employment-related eWOM that occurs in the form of employer reviews. However, there are **limitations based on the ELM** which are related to our inability to control for or even manipulate all of the factors that could have affected participants’ information-processing (Petty/Cacioppo 1986). For example, as we used an online survey, we could not control whether participants were distracted while taking the survey. Since distraction in a persuasive setting can prevent the recipient from engaging in elaboration (O’Keefe 2013), bias in the observed responses is possible. We also did not experimentally manipulate the participants’ motivation to process the information, another determinant of elaboration likelihood (Petty/Cacioppo 1986). Although we considered participants to be generally motivated to process employment-related information because both our sampling and the study were located in a job search context (Cable/Turban 2001), we suggest further experimental studies that manipulate the motivational and ability components simultaneously (Jones/Shultz/Chapman 2006).

5.7 Conclusion

By taking message characteristics, source characteristics, and recipient characteristics into account, the present study demonstrates the effects of eWOM provided by employer review sites on organizational attraction. In particular, our findings suggest that the quality of the message’s arguments and source expertise are determinants of eWOM’s effects. We also found evidence that **differences in job search experience play a significant role** in job seekers’

information-processing. Based on our study's design, we argue that our findings can be interpreted as an extension of Walker and colleagues (2008), who concluded that job search experience should be considered when predicting job seekers' reactions to job advertisements. Hence, it could be hypothesized that job search experience influences job seekers' reactions to recruitment information in general. However, further empirical evidence is required.

In sum, the evidence from the present study suggests that – depending on the persuasive strength of the arguments they present – reviews of employers that applicants and employees post can affect an organizations' attractiveness. Therefore, our findings can help organizations to estimate the extent to which actual job seekers are influenced by information provided on employer reviews sites. This finding can help organizations determine whether to allocate resources to employer review sites (e.g., in terms of monitoring activities) (Godes et al. 2005) or to encourage employees to drive the employer image through their postings on these sites (Lievens/Slaughter 2016).

6 How to deal with negative online employer reviews: An application of image repair theory ^{8 9 10}

6.1 Introduction

A recent change in recruitment is that **employer review sites**, such as Glassdoor and Kununu, allow job seekers access to company information that was previously unavailable to organizational outsiders (McFarland/Ployhart 2015). Employer review sites, which have recently seen an uptake in usage, operate similarly to peer-review sites used for consumption decisions (e.g., TripAdvisor, Yelp). Instead of providing product evaluations, however, employer review sites allow employees to review their employers and share their working experiences with others (Dabirian/Kietzmann/Diba 2017; Melián-González/Bulchand-Gidumal 2017). According to prior research, employer reviews can be considered as a specific type of electronic (i.e., web-based) word-of-mouth (eWOM), and can contain both positive and negative information (Stockman/van Hoya/da Motta Veiga 2020; Evertz/Kollitz/Süß 2021).

If negative information is provided, this poses a **threat** to an organization's attractiveness as an employer (Melián-González/Bulchand-Gidumal 2016; Stockman/van Hoya/da Motta Veiga 2020) or the holistic employer image, respectively (Lievens/Slaughter 2016). As a consequence, employers need to contend with such negative reviews and decide whether to ignore or respond to them (van Noort et al. 2015; Dineen et al. 2019). In this regard, research has recently started to provide evidence that responding to negative employer reviews might be superior to remaining silent, as it can positively affect job seekers' attitudes and intentions (Könsgen et al. 2018; Carpentier/van Hoya 2021). However, to date, a comprehensive framework that informs research on the broad variety of employer response strategies has yet to be established. In other words, little is known about the "how" of responding, that is, the

⁸ Dieser Beitrag ist in Zusammenarbeit mit Sascha Ruhle und Annika Wilhelmy entstanden. Die Anteile an diesem Beitrag betrugen etwa 60 % (Kollitz), 20 % (Ruhle) und 20 % (Wilhelmy). Der Autor der vorliegenden Arbeit war an der Konzeption der Studie, ihrer Durchführung, ihrer Auswertung sowie an der Diskussion der Ergebnisse maßgeblich beteiligt.

⁹ This is the pre-peer reviewed version of an article submitted to the International Journal of Selection and Assessment.

¹⁰ Eine vorherige Fassung dieses Beitrags wurde auf der Wissenschaftlichen Kommission Personal im Verband der Hochschullehrer für Betriebswirtschaft (VHB) in München (13.09.2019) präsentiert.

specific ways in which an employer's response should be framed to offset the damaging effects of a negative review. Accordingly, there have been calls for more research on the effects of different response strategies (Könsgen et al. 2018), their underlying mechanisms and boundary conditions such as the review's content (Carpentier/van Hove 2021). Addressing these calls is crucial because other research domains such as complaint management and crisis communication indicate that response strategies matter with regard to stakeholders' perceptions and behavior after negative events (e.g., Claeys/Caubergh/Vyncke 2010; Dutta/Pullig 2011; Dens/De Pelsmacker/Purnawirawan 2015; Johnen/ Schnittka 2019).

Therefore, the present research aims to **examine a broad variety of employer response strategies** to negative employer reviews, their effect on employer image including potential mechanisms, and the influence of the review's content. We first provide a multidisciplinary review of the literature on specific response strategies that employers may use. Based on this review, we introduce image repair theory (IRT; Benoit 1995, 2015) from crisis communication literature as a promising theoretical foundation to systematize employer response strategies. We then apply IRT's general response strategies (i.e., Denial, Evasion of Responsibility, Reducing Offensiveness, Corrective Action, and Mortification) together with a no response strategy in an experimental study ($n = 383$) to test if these image repair strategies can mitigate a negative employer review's effect on the holistic employer image (Lievens/Slaughter 2016; employer image hereafter). Moreover, we examine whether the two components of a persuasive attack that IRT proposes, namely attribution of responsibility and perceived offensiveness (Benoit 1995), mediate the effects of image repair strategies on employer image. Furthermore, we explore whether the influence of negative reviews and image repair strategies depend on the review's content (i.e., instrumental vs. symbolic information; Lievens/Highhouse 2003).

This paper makes four **contributions** to the recruitment literature. First, we go beyond past work on employer responses to negative reviews by examining **what** strategies exist. We provide an overview of frameworks and typologies from a broad range of literature to enhance our understanding of the

multifaceted strategies with which employers can respond to negative employer reviews. We argue that IRT (Benoit 1995, 2015) is particularly helpful to differentiate and comprehend employer responses to negative reviews. Indeed, findings from a pilot study with field data from Kununu suggest that the five general strategies that IRT proposes are useful to reliably capture the range of employers' responses. Second, we provide evidence of **how effective** each of these strategies is. Specifically, we show that the strategies of Denial, Corrective Action, and Mortification are particularly promising in preventing the tarnishing of an employer image by a negative review. Third, we extend prior research on employer responses by explaining **how** response strategies can consolidate the employer image. Whereas IRT proposes attribution of responsibility and offensiveness as potential mechanisms – depending on what strategy is used – our findings suggest that attribution of responsibility serves as the main mechanism for most strategies. Finally, we go beyond past research on response strategies by examining review content as contingency factor that might influence **when** strategies are effective. For example, Carpentier and van Hoya (2021, p. 287) pointed out that “the effectiveness of a response might also depend on the review content”. In our study, we show that negative reviews tend to be more harmful when they contain instrumental instead of symbolic information by increasing attributions of responsibility. In contrast, we find that the mitigating influence of responses seems largely independent of review content, with Reducing Offensiveness and Mortification being exceptions.

6.2 Conceptual background and development of hypotheses

6.2.1 Employer responses to negative reviews

Online employer reviews represent evaluations that current or former employees or applicants post online and that entail ratings, text, video, or any combination of these elements (Carpentier/van Hoya 2021). Research on online employer reviews has just started to emerge, but initial findings suggest that positive employer reviews can enhance employer image perceptions (Evertz/Kollitz/Süß 2021), whereas the opposite seems to hold about negative reviews (Melián-González/Bulchand-Gidumal 2016; Stockman/van Hoya/da Motta Veiga 2020). When negative information is provided, this causes a substantial threat to the employer image, calling for employers to intervene.

In this regard, a recent finding by Carpentier and van Hoya (2021) is that employers can **mitigate negative effects by responding** to the respective reviews and thus providing job seekers with their own view of the situation. In addition, they found that Denial, where the organization denies responsibility for the problems described in the review, can lead to more favorable perceptions of an employer than an accommodative response, which accepts responsibility, and not responding at all. Interestingly, an accommodative response was found to be as ineffective as providing no response, suggesting that response strategy matters. However, the authors indicate that more nuanced research is needed that considers a broader range of different strategies, their effects, mechanisms, and interactions with review content.

Consequently, a fruitful next step is to develop a more profound understanding of the different **response strategies** employers can use to mitigate a negative review's effects. We argue that to gain a more nuanced perspective on response strategies, recruitment research look to other fields that have long-established research on response strategies to negative events. For example, conceptualizing employer reviews in terms of eWOM suggests drawing on the growing body of research on webcare (e.g., Lee/Song 2010; van Noort/Willemsen 2012; Lee/Cranage 2014; Chang et al. 2015; Dens/De Pelsmacker/Purnawirawan 2015; Sparks/So/Bradley 2016; Weitzl/Hutzinger 2017; Weitzl/Hutzinger/Einwiller 2018; Johnen/Schnittka 2019), defined as “the act of engaging in online interactions with (complaining) consumers, by actively searching the web to address consumer feedback (e.g., questions, concerns, and complaints)” (van Noort/Willemsen 2012, p. 133). Moreover, theories and findings from research on trust repair (e.g., Kim et al. 2004), organizational legitimacy management (e.g., Elsbach 1994), or public relations management (e.g., Claeys/Caubergh/Vyncke 2010) could help us understand how employers can respond to negative employer reviews. In the field of public relations management, the question of how organizations respond to crisis (i.e., a sudden event threatening an organization's reputation; Coombs 2007) to alter stakeholders' perceptions has been of great interest (Arendt/LaFleche/Limperopulos 2017). In particular, crisis communication literature offers various established typologies of organizational response strategies (e.g., Allen/Caillouet 1994; Benoit 1995; Bradford/Garrett 1995;

Hearit 2006; Coombs 2007) that can guide communication within the context of social media (Cheng/Cameron 2017).

As this illustrates, multiple research domains offer different avenues to conceptualize and analyze how employers respond to negative employer reviews. Therefore, we screened and summarized publications from multiple research domains to identify typologies of responses to negative events or information. To facilitate future research on responses to negative employer reviews, we provide an **overview of the typologies and taxonomies** that resulted from our literature review (see Table 6.1).

Source	Research context	Type of paper	Response strategies	Key dependent variable(s)	Key moderator(s)	Key mediator(s)	Main findings regarding response strategies
Benoit 1995	CC	Conceptual	<i>Denial</i> 1. Simple Denial 2. Shift the Blame <i>Evading of Responsibility</i> 3. Provocation 4. Defeasibility 5. Accident 6. Good Intentions <i>Reducing Offensiveness</i> 7. Bolstering 8. Minimization 9. Differentiation 10. Transcendence 11. Attack Accuser 12. Compensation <i>Corrective Action</i> 13. Corrective Action <i>Mortification</i> 14. Mortification	Organizational image		Responsibility Offensiveness	- Introduces Image Restoration Theory (also known as “Image Repair Theory” according to Benoit 2015) - Presents a typology of five categories of image repair strategies, three of which have variants

Note. Sources are organized according to the category “type of paper” and appear in alphabetical order. Pivotal frameworks of response strategies are shown in bold. Italics indicate categories of response strategies. CC = Crisis Communication, CM = Complaint Management, Res. = Response to negative employer reviews, OLM = Organizational Legitimacy Management, TR = Trust Repair.

Tab. 6.1: Overview of response typologies used by previous research

Source	Research context	Type of paper	Response strategies	Key dependent variable(s)	Key moderator(s)	Key mediator(s)	Main findings regarding response strategies
Coombs 2007	CC	Conceptual	<i>Deny Crisis Response Strategies</i> 1. Attack the Accuser 2. Denial 3. Scapegoat <i>Diminish Crisis Response Strategies</i> 4. Excuse 5. Justification <i>Rebuild Crisis Response Strategies</i> 6. Compensation 7. Apology <i>Bolstering Crisis Response Strategies</i> 8. Reminder 9. Ingratiation 10. Victimage	Organizational reputation		Responsibility	- Elaborates on the theoretical underpinnings of Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) - Presents a refined list of SCCT's proposed response strategies (for SCCT's origins see Coombs 1995; Coombs/Holladay 2002)
Note. Sources are organized according to the category "type of paper" and appear in alphabetical order. Pivotal frameworks of response strategies are shown in bold. Italics indicate categories of response strategies. CC = Crisis Communication, CM = Complaint Management, Res. = Response to negative employer reviews, OLM = Organizational Legitimacy Management, TR = Trust Repair.							

Tab. 6.1 (continued): Overview of response typologies used by previous research

Source	Research context	Type of paper	Response strategies	Key dependent variable(s)	Key moderator(s)	Key mediator(s)	Main findings regarding response strategies
Davidow 2003	CM	Conceptual	<i>Organizational Response Dimensions^a</i> 1. Timeliness 2. Apology 3. Redress 4. Facilitation 5. Credibility 6. Attentiveness	Post-complaint customer behavior	Situational contingencies	Perceived justice	- Introduces the Post-complaint Customer Behavior Responses Model - Presents a framework that divides organizational responses to customer complaints into six separate dimensions
Bradford/Garret 1995	CC	Conceptual and empirical (Experimental study; n = 340 individuals)	1. No Response 2. Denial 3. Excuse 4. Justification 5. Concession	Organizational image	Situation		- Introduces the Corporate Communicative Response Model - Presents a typology of five response strategies - The experimental test of the typology showed that No Response can negatively affect organizational image. - Response strategies' effectiveness was contingent on the situation. Concession was the most effective and robust strategy.

Note. Sources are organized according to the category "type of paper" and appear in alphabetical order. Pivotal frameworks of response strategies are shown in bold. Italics indicate categories of response strategies. CC = Crisis Communication, CM = Complaint Management, Res. = Response to negative employer reviews, OLM = Organizational Legitimacy Management, TR = Trust Repair.

^a Given its prevalence in the literature, the model suggested by Davidow (2003) was included although it distinguishes dimensions of a response instead of different strategies.

Tab. 6.1 (continued): Overview of response typologies used by previous research

Source	Research context	Type of paper	Response strategies	Key dependent variable(s)	Key moderator(s)	Key mediator(s)	Main findings regarding response strategies
Carpentier/van Hove 2021	Res.	Empirical (Two experimental studies: Study 1, n = 142 individuals; Study 2, n = 205 individuals)	1. Denial 2. Accommodative Response 3. No Response	Organizational Attractiveness	Consensus	Review credibility Trustworthiness of the organization	Denial led to more favorable perceptions of the employer than not responding. The effect was explained by lower review credibility and higher organizational trustworthiness. Accommodative Response was as effective as No Response. Company response was not found to affect organizational attractiveness if consensus information was added.
Chang et al. 2015	CM	Empirical (Experimental study; n = 282 individuals)	1. Accommodative Response 2. Defensive Response	Negative word-of-mouth		Attribution of locus Attribution of controllability Organizational reputation	Response strategies affected customers' attributions of locus, which were negatively related to organizational reputation and positively related to negative word-of-mouth. Response strategies did not affect customers' attributions of controllability.
Note. Sources are organized according to the category "type of paper" and appear in alphabetical order. Pivotal frameworks of response strategies are shown in bold. Italics indicate categories of response strategies. CC = Crisis Communication, CM = Complaint Management, Res. = Response to negative employer reviews, OLM = Organizational Legitimacy Management, TR = Trust Repair. Tab. 6.1 (continued): Overview of response typologies used by previous research							

Source	Research context	Type of paper	Response strategies	Key dependent variable(s)	Key moderator(s)	Key mediator(s)	Main findings regarding response strategies
Claeys/Cauby/Vyncke 2010	CC	Empirical (Experimental study; n = 316 individuals)	<i>Deny Crisis Response Strategy</i> 1. Scapegoat <i>Diminish Crisis Response Strategy</i> 2. Excuse and Justification <i>Rebuild Crisis Response Strategy</i> 3. Compensation and Apology	Organizational reputation	Locus of control		Use of a rebuild strategy led to the most positive reputational restoration. Locus of control moderated the relationship between crisis response strategy and organizational reputation.
Conlon/Murray 1996	CM	Empirical (Field study; n = 121 organizational responses to consumer complaint letters)	1. Apology 2. Excuse 3. Justification 4. Apology and Justification 5. Avoid Issue 6. Request of Product Return 7. Compensation vs. No Compensation	Complainant satisfaction with the response Willingness to do future business with the company			Responses in which a company accepts responsibility for a problem, such as justifications and apologies, resulted in the most favorable pattern of complainant reactions. Compensation also improved complainant reactions.
Note. Sources are organized according to the category “type of paper” and appear in alphabetical order. Pivotal frameworks of response strategies are shown in bold. Italics indicate categories of response strategies. CC = Crisis Communication, CM = Complaint Management, Res. = Response to negative employer reviews, OLM = Organizational Legitimacy Management, TR = Trust Repair. Tab. 6.1 (continued): Overview of response typologies used by previous research							

Source	Research context	Type of paper	Response strategies	Key dependent variable(s)	Key moderator(s)	Key mediator(s)	Main findings regarding response strategies
Dawar/Pillutla 2000	CC	Empirical (Mixed design: Field study (n = 178 consumers) and two experimental studies (Study 1, n = 171 individuals; Study 2, n = 164 individuals))	1. Unambiguous Support 2. Ambiguous Response 3. Unambiguous Stonewalling	Brand equity	Consumer expectations		Participants interpreted organizational response based on their prior expectations about the organization. The expectation-response interaction was shown to affect post-crisis brand equity.
Dean 2004	CC	Empirical (Experimental study; n = 291 individuals)	1. Appropriate Response 2. Inappropriate Response	Attitude towards the organization	Company reputation for social responsibility prior to the event		Appropriate response led to more favorable attitudes than inappropriate response. Surprisingly, inappropriate response by a company with a bad reputation resulted in an increase in brand attitudes, whereas the same response by a company with good reputation resulted in a decrease in brand attitudes.
Note. Sources are organized according to the category "type of paper" and appear in alphabetical order. Pivotal frameworks of response strategies are shown in bold. Italics indicate categories of response strategies. CC = Crisis Communication, CM = Complaint Management, Res. = Response to negative employer reviews, OLM = Organizational Legitimacy Management, TR = Trust Repair.							

Tab. 6.1 (continued): Overview of response typologies used by previous research

Source	Research context	Type of paper	Response strategies	Key dependent variable(s)	Key moderator(s)	Key mediator(s)	Main findings regarding response strategies
Dens/De Pelsmacker/Pumawirawan 2015	CM	Empirical (Experimental study; n = 973 individuals)	1. Refutation 2. No Response 3. Apology Only 4. Apology and Prospective Explanation 5. Apology and Compensation 6. Apology and Prospective Explanation and Compensation	Attitude towards the organization Patronage intentions Positive word-of-mouth-intentions	Review balance	Perceived trust in the response	Effectiveness of response strategies was contingent on review balance. The interaction effects of review balance and response strategy on review readers' attitudes and intentions were mediated by their perceived trust in the response.
Dutta/Pullig 2011	CC	Empirical (Experimental study; n = 134 individuals)	1. Denial 2. Reduction-of-Offensiveness 3. Corrective Action	Brand confidence Brand attitude Brand consideration	Type of brand crisis		The relative effectiveness of response strategies depended on the type of crisis. As for a performance-related crisis, Corrective Action was uniquely the most effective response strategy. Regarding a values-related crisis, Reduction-of-Offensiveness was nearly as effective as Corrective Action. Denial was the least effective response strategy regardless of crisis type.

Note. Sources are organized according to the category "type of paper" and appear in alphabetical order. Pivotal frameworks of response strategies are shown in bold. Italics indicate categories of response strategies. CC = Crisis Communication, CM = Complaint Management, Res. = Response to negative employer reviews, OLM = Organizational Legitimacy Management, TR = Trust Repair.

Tab. 6.1 (continued): Overview of response typologies used by previous research

Source	Research context	Type of paper	Response strategies	Key dependent variable(s)	Key moderator(s)	Key mediator(s)	Main findings regarding response strategies
Elsbach 1994	OLM	Empirical (Mixed design: Two qualitative studies (Study 1, semistructured interviews with 15 organizational informants; Study 2, structured interviews with 15 informants from groups relevant to the public perception of the cattle industry) and one experimental study (n = 68 individuals))	1. Denial 2. Acknowledgement	Organizational legitimacy	Content of verbal account		Acknowledgements led to higher ratings of legitimacy than denials. Responses combining acknowledgements with references to institutionalized characteristics were more effective than responses with only one of these components.
Einwiller/Steilen 2015	CM	Empirical (Field study; n = 5023 threats on social networking sites containing complaints and organizational responses)	1. Corrective Action 2. Compensation 3. Explanation 4. Further Information 5. Gratitude 6. Regret 7. Understanding 8. Apology 9. Active Transfer 10. Passive Transfer 11. Denial	Complaint satisfaction			Nearly half of the complaints voiced on social networking sites did not receive an organizational response. Overall, organizational response was positively related to complaint satisfaction as were accommodative responses while defensive response strategies were not.
Note. Sources are organized according to the category “type of paper” and appear in alphabetical order. Pivotal frameworks of response strategies are shown in bold. Italics indicate categories of response strategies. CC = Crisis Communication, CM = Complaint Management, Res. = Response to negative employer reviews, OLM = Organizational Legitimacy Management, TR = Trust Repair.							

Tab. 6.1 (continued): Overview of response typologies used by previous research

Source	Research context	Type of paper	Response strategies	Key dependent variable(s)	Key moderator(s)	Key mediator(s)	Main findings regarding response strategies
Johnen/Schnittka 2019	CM	Empirical (Mixed design: Field study (n = 395 organizational responses to online complaints) and three experimental studies (Study 1, n = 217 individuals; Study 2, n = 570 individuals; Study 3, n = 287 individuals))	1. Accommodative Response 2. Defensive Response	Observers' purchase intention	Contextual benefits sought by observers Level of complaint reasoning Communication style	Observers' perceived benefits	Introduced contextual benefits as a moderator for the effectiveness of response strategies. It was shown that a defensive response can be superior in hedonic contexts but inferior in utilitarian contexts. Perceived benefits mediated behaviour and complaint reasoning and communication style were identified as relevant boundary conditions.
Kim et al. 2004	TR	Empirical (Two experimental studies: Study 1, n = 200 individuals; Study 2, n = 444 individuals)	1. Apology 2. Denial	Trusting intentions	Violation type Confirmation	Trusting beliefs	The effectiveness of Apology versus Denial for repairing trust depended on the type of trust violation. The interaction of violation-type and response strategy on participants' trusting intentions was mediated by their trusting beliefs. Confirmation affected whether trust was repaired more successfully with an apology or a denial.
Note. Sources are organized according to the category "type of paper" and appear in alphabetical order. Pivotal frameworks of response strategies are shown in bold. Italics indicate categories of response strategies. CC = Crisis Communication, CM = Complaint Management, Res. = Response to negative employer reviews, OLM = Organizational Legitimacy Management, TR = Trust Repair.							

Tab. 6.1 (continued): Overview of response typologies used by previous research

Source	Research context	Type of paper	Response strategies	Key dependent variable(s)	Key moderator(s)	Key mediator(s)	Main findings regarding response strategies
Könsen et al. 2018	Res.	Empirical (Experimental study; n = 311 individuals)	1. Constructive Response 2. No-Response	Intention to avoid employment Intention to pursue employment		Trustworthiness of the organization	Constructive Response positively affected the organizations' trustworthiness. Trustworthiness mediated the relationship between response and the intention to avoid employment as well as the intention to pursue employment.
Lee 2004	CC	Empirical (Experimental study; n = 385 individuals)	1. Denial of Crisis Responsibility 2. Acceptance of Crisis Responsibility	Perceived organizational responsibility for the crisis Negative impression of the organization Sympathy towards the organization Trust in the organization			Denial of responsibility resulted in significantly higher scores on judgments of responsibility and negative impression of the organization than acceptance of responsibility. In contrast, acceptance of responsibility led to significantly higher scores than the denial of responsibility regarding sympathy towards the organization, and trust in the organization.
Note. Sources are organized according to the category "type of paper" and appear in alphabetical order. Pivotal frameworks of response strategies are shown in bold. Italics indicate categories of response strategies. CC = Crisis Communication, CM = Complaint Management, Res. = Response to negative employer reviews, OLM = Organizational Legitimacy Management, TR = Trust Repair. Tab. 6.1 (continued): Overview of response typologies used by previous research							

Source	Research context	Type of paper	Response strategies	Key dependent variable(s)	Key moderator(s)	Key mediator(s)	Main findings regarding response strategies
Lee/Cranage 2014	CM	Empirical (Experimental study; n = 241 individuals)	1. No Response 2. Accommodative Response 3. Defensive Response	Change in attitudes towards the organiza- tion	Response Strategy	External attribution	Electronic word-of-mouth consensus determined potential consumers' processing and reaction to an online complaint. The effects of negative electronic word-of-mouth consensus on external attributions and attitude changes were contingent on organizational response strategies.
Lee/Song 2010	CM	Empirical (Two experimental studies: Study 1, n = 400 individuals; Study 2, n = 234 individuals)	1. Accommodative Response 2. Defensive Response 3. No Response	Company evaluation		Attribution of responsibility	Individuals exposed to a defensive response were more likely to conclude that the organization is responsible than individuals in the no-response condition, whereas no differences were found with regard to the accommodative-response condition. Individuals exposed to an accommodative response were more likely to positively evaluate the organization than those in the defensive- or no-response condition.
Note. Sources are organized according to the category "type of paper" and appear in alphabetical order. Pivotal frameworks of response strategies are shown in bold. Italics indicate categories of response strategies. CC = Crisis Communication, CM = Complaint Management, Res. = Response to negative employer reviews, OLM = Organizational Legitimacy Management, TR = Trust Repair.							

Tab. 6.1 (continued): Overview of response typologies used by previous research

Source	Research context	Type of paper	Response strategies	Key dependent variable(s)	Key moderator(s)	Key mediator(s)	Main findings regarding response strategies
Li/Cui/Peng 2018	CM	Empirical (Mixed design: Field study (n = 3012 organizational responses to online complaints) and one experimental study (n = 296 individuals))	1. Defensive Response 2. Accommodative Response 3. No Response	Sales revenue Purchase intention	Type of Review	Causal attribution	Accommodative response to a product failure review and defensive response to an ordinary negative review were effective at increasing sales and enhancing purchase intentions. The effect of response was mediated by the reduced attribution of the negative review to the organization.
Rose/Blodgett 2016	CM	Empirical (Experimental study; n = 255 individuals; follow-up study based on the original data and data from additional 133 individuals)	1. Apology with Assurance of Future Satisfaction 2. Apology with Corrective Action 3. No Response	Organizational reputation	Proportion of negative to positive reviews Controllability Attributions		Organizational response to negative reviews led to a more favorable organizational reputation than no response. Organizational response had a greater impact on reputation when negative online reviews were attributed to controllable factors. Comparison of the two variants of an apology revealed no significant differences regarding the organization's reputation.

Note. Sources are organized according to the category "type of paper" and appear in alphabetical order. Pivotal frameworks of response strategies are shown in bold. Italics indicate categories of response strategies. CC = Crisis Communication, CM = Complaint Management, Res. = Response to negative employer reviews, OLM = Organizational Legitimacy Management, TR = Trust Repair.

Tab. 6.1 (continued): Overview of response typologies used by previous research

Source	Research context	Type of paper	Response strategies	Key dependent variable(s)	Key moderator(s)	Key mediator(s)	Main findings regarding response strategies
Sparks/So/Bradley 2016	CM	Empirical (Experimental study; n = 820 individuals)	1. Response 2. No Response	Trust inferences Customer concern inferences			If compared to no response, the provision of an organizational response led to more favorable customer inferences regarding the organization's trustworthiness and customer concern.
Van Noort/Willemsen 2012	CM	Empirical (Experimental study; n = 163 individuals)	1. Proactive Webcare Response 2. Reactive Webcare Response 3. No Response	Brand evaluation	Platform type	Human voice	Webcare was an effective means to induce favorable brand evaluations after exposure to negative electronic word-of-mouth. Its effectiveness depended on the type of strategy and platform being used. Human voice was identified as an underlying mechanism for the interaction between platform type and webcare strategy on brand evaluation.
Note. Sources are organized according to the category "type of paper" and appear in alphabetical order. Pivotal frameworks of response strategies are shown in bold. Italics indicate categories of response strategies. CC = Crisis Communication, CM = Complaint Management, Res. = Response to negative employer reviews, OLM = Organizational Legitimacy Management, TR = Trust Repair. Tab. 6.1 (continued): Overview of response typologies used by previous research							

Source	Research context	Type of paper	Response strategies	Key dependent variable(s)	Key moderator(s)	Key mediator(s)	Main findings regarding response strategies
Weitzl/Hutzinger 2017	CM	Empirical (Two experimental studies: Study 1, n = 731 individuals; Study 2, n = 361 individuals)	<i>Marketer-initiated Accommodative Response</i> 1. Apology 2. Redress 3. Apology and Redress 4. Apol., Explanation, Redress <i>Marketer-initiated Defensive Response</i> 5. Deny Fault 6. Accuse Customer 7. Accuse Third Party <i>Brand advocate-initiated Accommodative Response</i> 8. Apology and Explanation <i>Passive Response Conditions</i> 9. No Response 10. Request of Direct Contact by the Organization <i>Specific Defensive Responses</i> 11. Vouching 12. Trivializing 13. Doubting	Brand-related favorable outcomes: Brand attitudes Brand trust Purchase intentions Positive word-of-mouth intention Brand-related unfavorable outcomes: Purchasing risk Negative word-of-mouth intention Failure attribution	We care credibility We care source		If compared to no-response, accommodative organizational responses resulted in significantly more favorable brand-related outcomes while defensive responses did not. Combination of accommodative organizational responses led to significantly more favorable reactions than an isolated accommodative response. Unfavorable brand-related outcomes could be mitigated by specific defensive responses. Highly, as compared to lowly, credible we care increased favorable outcomes, whereas the same did not hold for mitigating unfavorable outcomes.

Note. Sources are organized according to the category "type of paper" and appear in alphabetical order. Pivotal frameworks of response strategies are shown in bold. Italics indicate categories of response strategies. Apol. = Apology, CC = Crisis Communication, CM = Complaint Management, Res. = Response to negative employer reviews, OLM = Organizational Legitimacy Management, TR = Trust Repair.

Tab. 6.1 (continued): Overview of response typologies used by previous research

Weitzl/Hutzi- nger/Einwiler 2018	CM	Empirical (Quasi-experimental study; n = 812 individuals)	1. No Response 2. Defensive Response 3. Accommodative Response	Post-webeare satis- faction Negative word-of- mouth intention	Prior failure experi- ences Brand advocate initi- ated webeare	Attribution of locus Attribution of con- trollability Attribution of stabil- ity	The ability of a response to mitigate complainants' un- favorable failure attributions and consequently negative word-of-mouth depended on both complainants' prior failure history with the or- ganization and the online comments of other custom- ers.
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Note. Sources are organized according to the category "type of paper" and appear in alphabetical order. Pivotal frameworks of response strategies are shown in bold. Italics indicate categories of response strategies. CC = Crisis Communication, CM = Complaint Management, Res. = Response to negative employer reviews, OLM = Organizational Legitimacy Management, TR = Trust Repair.

Tab. 6.1 (continued): Overview of response typologies used by previous research

6.2.2 Literature review

Our **review of the literature** on response strategies revealed that some studies apply a dichotomous perspective contrasting a single type of response vs. no response (e.g., Sparks/So/Bradley 2016; Könsgen et al. 2018), or specific forms of verbal accounts such as denial and acknowledgment (e.g., Elsbach 1994), whereas others have compared multiple strategies (e.g., Dawar/Pillutla 2000; Dutta/Pullig 2011), or scrutinized combinations of different strategies (e.g., Claeys/Caubergh/Vyncke 2010; Dens/De Pelsmacker/Purnawirawan 2015; Weitzl/Hutzinger 2017). In particular, there is a growing body of research in the field of online complaint management drawing on the defensive-accommodative distinction (Marcus/Goodman 1991) based on which response strategies can be categorized as either defensive, which means they deny responsibility for a negative event, or accommodative, which comprises the acceptance of responsibility, the promise of remedial actions, or both (e.g., Lee/Song 2010; Lee/Cranage 2014; Chang et al. 2015; Li/Cui/Peng 2018; Weitzl/Hutzinger/Einwiller 2018; Johnen/Schnittka 2019). However, crisis communication literature seems most prolific because it offers more fine-grained typologies of organizational response (e.g., Benoit 1995; Bradford/Garrett 1995; Coombs 2007).

Among these, **image repair theory** (IRT; Benoit 1995, 2015) has been stated to be the most comprehensive and widely applied typology of response strategies (Seeger/Griffin Padget 2010). Drawing on research on verbal accounts, IRT offers five general image repair strategies that an organization may use to defend or rebuild its threatened image. These general strategies rely on the basic principles of persuasive communication (Benoit 2015) and can thus be applied to other contexts such as recruitment (e.g., Steiner/Byrne 2019). As such, we consider IRT to be the most fruitful typology for the purpose of our study, using it as a theoretical foundation in our subsequent analysis.

6.2.3 Image repair theory

In a basic image repair situation, an entity accuses another of wrongdoing (i.e., a persuasive attack, for example in a negative employer review), and the accused entity creates a message to repair that attacked image (i.e., employer response). According to IRT, the “wrongdoing” is referred to as the act, which

is construed broadly and can, for example, include failure to perform expected actions or having acted poorly (Benoit 2015). In the eyes of job seekers, such an act – something that an employer did wrong – can put them off from wanting to work for that employer.

A persuasive attack consists of two components that are both fundamental to understanding what puts the image at harm, and how repair processes may function. First, the accused must be held **responsible** for the act in question. In other words, IRT suggests that when job seekers read a negative employer review, they will form an impression of whether the organization (i.e., in our case the employer) is to be held responsible for the act, which can then alter their image perceptions. Second, if nothing happened or what did happen is not considered as being **offensive**, the employer's image is not threatened. In other words, actions can vary in the degree of perceived offensiveness with more offensive actions causing greater damage to an employer's image. It is worth noting that for both components – attribution of responsibility and perceived offensiveness – attributions and perceptions of the relevant audience (i.e., job seekers) are more important than reality (Benoit 2015).

Consequently, if the persuasive attack makes the relevant audience think that the employer is responsible and believe that the act is offensive, the image is at risk. When applying IRT to employer responses to negative reviews, we need to consider job seekers' perceptions of both the employer's responsibility for and the offensiveness of the situation portrayed in the negative review. Accordingly, we conceptualize negative employer reviews as persuasive attacks and employer responses as image repair strategies. Next, we develop hypotheses about the effects of image repair strategies on the employer's image and the underlying mechanisms. Our conceptual model including these strategies and mechanisms is summarized in Figure 6.1.

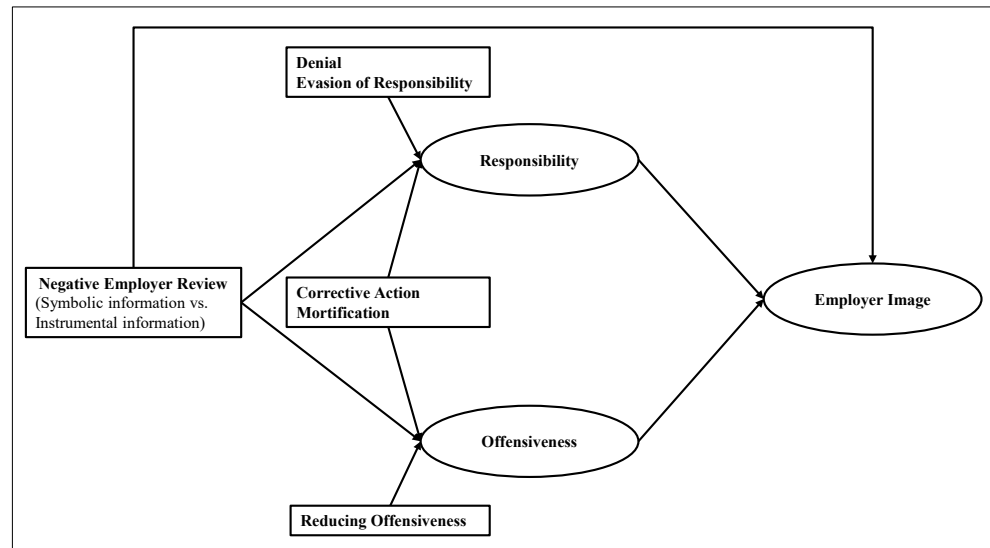


Fig. 6.1: Conceptual model of image repair strategies buffering a negative employer review's effects

6.2.4 Image repair strategies and their mechanisms

IRT offers five general image repair strategies, three of which have variants (see Table 6.2). These strategies address either the perceived responsibility, the offensiveness of the act, or both (Benoit 2015).

To reduce the attributed responsibility, an employer can use a **Denial** strategy where it denies that the act in question occurred or that it was performed by the employer (Benoit 2015). This might be done either by simply denying any link to the act, or by shifting the blame to others. For example, employers who are accused of providing employees with poor working conditions might simply deny that this is the case.

Employers can also choose **Evasion of Responsibility** as a response strategy, which also strives to reduce responsibility (Benoit 2015). However, in contrast to Denial, the employer claims that the wrongful act was provoked by another party or that the employer cannot be held fully responsible due to a lack of information or control over the situation. Alternatively, an employer can try to convince the audience that the wrongful act happened accidentally or was performed with good, rather than bad, intentions.

Image repair strategy	Key characteristic	Example quote	Coder agreement (%)	Prevalence in real data (%)	Correct assignment by SMEs (%)
Denial					
Simple Denial	Did not perform act	“For this very reason, we will comment on the assertion that we ourselves write positive reviews with exactly the wording that is appropriate for this: The assertion is wrong.” (Employer Response No. 18)	95.95	3.10	82.14
Shift the Blame ^b	Act performed by another	-	100	-	-
Evasion of Responsibility					
Provocation	Responded to act of another	“The cuts you mention are the result of strategic decisions that follow the longterm implementation of corporate goals and ensure the competitiveness of [company name].” (Employer Response No. 5)	97.30	2.48	21.43
Defeasibility	Lack of information or ability	“In a company of the size of [company name], it is a great challenge to ensure an optimum flow of information at all times.” (Employer Response No. 42)	91.89	1.86	85.71
Accident ^b	Act was a mishap	-	100	-	-
Good Intentions	Meant well in the act	“Cooling elements were newly adjusted by the property management, which should immediately counteract the heat development. If this did not work in some places, we can understand your displeasure.” (Employer Response No. 59)	98.65	0.62	78.57

Note. Image repair strategies and key characteristics adapted from Benoit (1997, p. 179). Strategies whose effects were experimentally tested are shown in bold. Dash indicates that no example was found within the data. ^a Compensation was excluded from the coding procedure a priori. ^b Strategy excluded from the validation procedure a priori.

Tab. 6.2: Overview of image repair strategies

Image repair strategy	Key characteristic	Example quote	Coder agreement (%)	Prevalence in real data (%)	Correct assignment by SMEs (%)
Reducing Offensiveness					
Bolstering	Stress good traits	"[Company name] is a fair, reliable and modern employer. We offer our employees first-class qualifications, a wide range of development prospects, very good social standards and good opportunities for participation." (Employer Response No. 2)	89.19	32.23	85.71
Minimization	Act not serious	"[As for cohesion among colleagues], in our regular surveys we score good to very good. This value is relatively stable over many years. Even here at kununu you can validate this." (Employer Response No. 18)	94.59	6.20	60.71
Differentiation	Act less offensive	"You have landed here on [name] corporate group's site. I could see from your review that it rather refers to one particular store." (Employer Response No. 46)	97.30	0.62	32.14
Transcendence	More important considerations	"Regarding your criticism of 'restructuring', I would like to point out that such a process is unfortunately always associated with some fundamental changes. The aim of the measures is to modernise and strategically align [company name] in order to be successful in the future and to be able to offer good jobs." (Employer Response No. 65)	91.89	2.48	46.43
Note. Image repair strategies and key characteristics adapted from Benoit (1997, p. 179). Strategies whose effects were experimentally tested are shown in bold. Dash indicates that no example was found within the data. ^a Compensation was excluded from the coding procedure a priori. ^b Strategy excluded from the validation procedure a priori.					

Tab. 6.2 (continued): Overview of image repair strategies

Image repair strategy	Key characteristic	Example quote	Coder agreement (%)	Prevalence in real data (%)	Correct assignment by SMEs (%)
Reducing Offensiveness (continued)					
Attack the Accuser	Reduce credibility of accuser	“However, we would also like to make it clear that we do not comment on statements based on speculation and hearsay.” (Employer Response No. 18)	90.54	9.30	75.00
Compensation	Reimburse victim	- ^a			
Corrective Action	Plan to solve or prevent problem	“We have taken your feedback on the subject of educational opportunities as an opportunity to further sensitize cybersecurity executives to this topic.” (Employer Response No. 59)	97.30	39.67	85.71
Mortification	Apologize for act	“We are sorry you had to go through these experiences.” (Employer Response No. 68)	98.65	1.86	100

Note. Image repair strategies and key characteristics adapted from Benoit (1997, p. 179). Strategies whose effects were experimentally tested are shown in bold. Dash indicates that no example was found within the data. ^a Compensation was excluded from the coding procedure a priori. ^b Strategy excluded from the validation procedure a priori.

Tab. 6.2 (continued): Overview of image repair strategies

Consequently, if employers choose to use the image repair strategies of Denial (e.g., stating that the working conditions portrayed in a negative review are not true), or Evasion of Responsibility (e.g., dodging the blame), job seekers would, in theory, hold the employer less responsible. This in turn should buffer the negative employer review's harmful effect on the employer image. Therefore, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 1: Exposure to a Denial-Response will lead to a) less negative employer image perceptions and b) this relationship will be mediated by a reduction of the attribution of responsibility.

Hypothesis 2: Exposure to an Evasion of Responsibility-Response will lead to a) less negative employer image perceptions and b) this relationship will be mediated by a reduction of the attribution of responsibility.

Further, employers can focus on decreasing the perceived offensiveness of the situation described in the review by using the **Reducing Offensiveness** strategy (Benoit 2015). To reduce offensiveness, an employer can try to strengthen the audience's positive affect towards itself by highlighting positive attributes or reminding the audience of positive actions that the employer has performed in the past. By doing this, the amount of negative affect from the accusation remains the same, but positive feelings toward the actor can partially offset the negative feelings associated with the act (Benoit 2015). Besides strengthening the audience's positive affect, the employer can also attempt to minimize the amount of negative affect associated with the offensive act by convincing the audience that the offensive act is not as offensive as it might seem. Alternatively, offensiveness can be reduced by contrasting the negative act with similar, even worse, actions that could have been performed, or by placing the act into a different, more favorable context. Adopting a more offensive stance, the employer can also consider striking back by verbally attacking the accuser to reduce the credibility of the source and thus diminish the damage of the accusation. In addition, an employer can offer employees pecuniary compensation which, if sufficient and accepted by the accuser, may outweigh the negative affect from the undesirable act. However, this strategy variant can be expected to fit better in a product- or service context, where monetary reimbursement is more likely to occur.

Overall, Reducing Offensiveness aims to repair the image, but does not target the employer's responsibility. Instead, the idea is to decrease offensiveness by increasing job seekers' esteem of the employer or by finding other ways of counteracting potential negative feelings induced by the review. We thus expect the following relationships:

Hypothesis 3: Exposure to a Reducing Offensiveness-Response will lead to a) less negative employer image perceptions and b) this relationship will be mediated by a reduction of perceived offensiveness of the situation.

Finally, to repair its image, an employer can use strategies that influence both responsibility and offensiveness, such as Corrective Action and Mortification. **Corrective Action** entails the promise that future actions are carried out to restore the state of affairs and/or to ensure that the offensive act would not occur again (Benoit 2015). According to IRT, Corrective Action is not necessarily the same as admitting guilt. However, this strategy should have an influence on the audience's attributions of responsibility. For example, Lee (2004) stated that in a crisis context, Corrective Action represents the greatest possible acceptance of responsibility because by identifying and fixing the source of the problem, the organization not only shows an effort to prevent future crisis but also exhibits responsibility for the current crisis. Employers that make use of **Mortification** (also referred to as apology; Benoit 1997) repair their image by claiming full responsibility for the act (Conlon/Murray 1996). For example, they can explicitly accept the blame, express regret, or ask for forgiveness.

Despite the potential for negative consequences that may result from accepting responsibility, organizations still make extensive use of Corrective Action and Mortification as response strategies (Kim/Avery/Lariscy 2009; Arendt/LaFleche/Limperopulos 2017; Ferguson/Wallace/Chandler 2018). This suggests there are positive effects of accepting responsibility that might outweigh the negative ones. Findings on apology as a response to a trust violation show that the effectiveness of an apology builds on the notion that its benefits (based on potential redemption) outweigh its costs (based on acceptance of responsibility; Kim et al. 2004). Accordingly, if job seekers accept an employer's apology or believe that the employer is striving to fix the problem,

they may choose to pardon the wrongful act, which would offset the negative effects related to attributions of responsibility. Therefore, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 4: Exposure to a Corrective Action-Response will a) overall lead to less negative employer image perceptions and this relationship will be mediated by b) an increase in the attribution of responsibility and c) a reduction of perceived offensiveness of the situation.

Hypothesis 5: Exposure to a Mortification-Response will a) overall lead to less negative employer image perceptions, and this relationship will be mediated by b) an increase in the attribution of responsibility and c) a reduction of perceived offensiveness of the situation.

6.2.5 Review content as contingency factor

In addition, we argue that the effects of negative reviews and image repair strategies might depend on what information the review entails, that is, its content. According to the instrumental-symbolic framework (Lievens/Highhouse 2003), an important differentiation is instrumental vs. symbolic information: **Instrumental** information describes the employer in factual, concrete, and objective terms. In contrast, **symbolic** employment information uses intangible, abstract, and subjective terms. Research on positive employment-related word-of-mouth found that symbolic employment information can have stronger effects on employer attractiveness than instrumental information (van Hove et al. 2016). However, whether this finding holds for negative online employer reviews is yet to be determined.

Regarding responsibility, communication of instrumental employment information should be less susceptible to misinterpretations (i.e., knowledge bias; Eagly/Wood/Chaiken 1978) by the source than symbolic employment information. It would therefore lead to less attribution of the negative review to internal (i.e., reviewer-related) reasons. As for negative reviews, marketing research supports this view. Consumers are more likely to attribute a negative review to the reviewer's internal reasons if a hedonic compared to an utilitarian product is reviewed (Sen/Lerman 2007), with the latter being primarily

functional and instrumental (Dhar/Wertenbroch 2000). In the case of instrumental information, job seekers may exclude the reviewer as a reason for the negative review and instead hold the employer responsible, making the employer less attractive according to IRT.

Regarding offensiveness, we also expect instrumental information to have stronger effects than symbolic information. For example, job seekers who read a description of poor instrumental attributes (e.g., low pay, no promotion opportunities, or high working hours) should perceive this as a stronger violation of the principle of reciprocity than when reading a description of poor symbolic attributes (e.g., low innovativeness or low prestige). Thus, job seekers would evaluate the offensiveness of the portrayed working conditions differently depending on the review content, with instrumental content creating particularly strong perceptions of offensiveness and harm to the employer image. Taken together, instrumental review content should have stronger effects on attributions of responsibility, perceived offensiveness, and the employer image than symbolic review content. Thus, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 6: The effect of negative employer reviews is contingent on the review's content such that instrumental employment information will lead to a) higher attribution of responsibility, b) higher perceived offensiveness of the situation, and c) less positive employer image perceptions than exposure to a negative employer review providing symbolic employer information.

Yet, review content may not only influence the effects of negative employer reviews, but also be a **contingency factor** with regard to the effects of image repair strategies. For example, research on response to negative online reviews has shown that response strategies' effects can vary based on the review's content. Li and colleagues (2018) found that to preserve consumers' purchase intentions, accommodative responses were particularly effective for product failure reviews and defensive responses were particularly effective for ordinary negative reviews. Similarly, crisis communication research drawing on IRT provides evidence for a contingency-based view on the effects of image repair strategies. As Dutta and Pullig (2011) showed, image repair strategies' effectiveness can differ depending on whether they are used in a

performance-based crisis, which affects confidence in a brand's ability to deliver functional benefits, or in a value-based crisis, which affects confidence in a brand's ability to deliver symbolic benefits.

Together, these findings suggest that research exploring the interaction effects between review content and image repair strategies in response to negative employer reviews is warranted. Yet, theoretical arguments or evidence on specific interaction effects do not exist, so we lack the ability to formulate exact hypotheses. Hence, to offer an **initial exploration** of the influence of review content on the buffering effects of response strategies, we propose the following research question:

Research Question 1: Is the effect of image repair strategies contingent on the review's content (i.e., instrumental vs. symbolic employment information)?

6.3 Pilot study: Development and validation of experimental material

6.3.1 Overview of the stepwise approach used in the pilot study

We used a vignette methodology to test Hypotheses 1-6 and to explore Research Question 1. For this methodology, we needed a negative employer review to which the employer could respond to, where employer responses would reflect the distinct image repair strategies suggested by IRT. Therefore, we conducted a pilot study in which we employed a stepwise approach to develop and validate our experimental material. First, we developed and validated negative employer review vignettes (Step 1). We then drew on IRT to systematize employer response strategies and develop prototypical employer response vignettes that reflected pure image repair strategies (Step 2). We validated these employer response vignettes (Step 3) before we finally tested our hypotheses in a 2 x 6 between-subjects factorial design in the main study.

6.3.2 Development and validation of negative employer review vignettes

6.3.2.1 Participants, design, and procedure

Step 1 served to develop and validate the fictitious negative reviews to be used as stimuli in our main study. To develop the negative review vignettes,

we drew on prior research on instrumental and symbolic employer attributes to formulate ten negative statements that targeted these attributes (e.g., Lievens/Highhouse 2003; Lievens/van Hove/Schreurs 2005; Lievens/van Hove/Anseel 2007; Schreurs et al. 2009; van Hove/Saks 2011; van Hove et al. 2013; van Hove et al. 2016). Additionally, we used two positive statements to manipulate the review's sidedness (one-sided review vs. two-sided review), as this allowed for a more comprehensive test of the realism of the different reviews within our pilot study. Specifically, the factor sidedness was included based on previous research (e.g., Pentina/Bailey/Zhang 2018) that suggests that negative online reviews can be either one-sided (i.e., contain only negative information) or two-sided (i.e., contain negative, but also positive information).

Participants were 146 German undergraduate business administration students who voluntarily took part in the study. 83 participants were female (56.8 %), 58 male (40.6 %), two individuals reported other (1.4 %), and three did not provide gender information (2.1 %). Age ranged from 18 to 34 years with an average of 20.99 years ($SD = 2.33$) and one to eleven semesters of study with an average of 3.33 semesters ($SD = 1.18$). Participants indicated moderately positive attitudes about employer review sites ($M = 5.14$, $SD = 1.13$). Further, 71 participants (48.6 %) reported having experience with employer review sites.

The study employed a 2 (instrumental employment information; symbolic employment information) $\times$ 2 (one-sided review; two-sided review) **between-subjects factorial survey pre-post design**. Participants in the instrumental employment information condition read information about educational opportunities, advancement, job security, working hours, and pay. In contrast, participants in the symbolic employment information condition were provided with information that described the employer's sincerity, competence, prestige, robustness, and innovativeness. Note that to enhance realism, content categories used in the vignettes were labelled according to those provided by kununu.com, therefore to some extent differing from the employer attributes described here. As for the review's sidedness, participants in the one-sided review condition were exclusively presented with five (instrumental or

symbolic) negative statements. In the two-sided review condition, participants were shown four (instrumental or symbolic) negative statements with the fifth statement saying that pay was good and beyond average (positive instrumental statement) or that the company was very innovative and would foster research and development (positive symbolic statement).

Further, given that reviewer characteristics can account for differences in an employer review's effects (Evertz/Kollitz/Süß 2021), these were held constant across conditions. More specifically, following suggestions by Evertz and colleagues (2021), the reviewer at the beginning of each review stated to be currently employed by the fictitious company and to have worked for the company for more than six years. Further, the review length was comparable across the scenarios.

Our **procedure** was guided by previous studies (e.g., Carpentier/van Hoya 2021; Evertz/Kollitz/Süß 2021). Participants were asked to act and think as they would if they were looking for a job and were introduced to some general information about a fictitious retail employer called "Marzeo". Then they were asked to indicate the extent to which they were attracted to the organization (T1). Having rated the organization's overall attractiveness, participants were randomly assigned to one of the four experimental conditions, where a negative review of the employer was presented that provided information about working conditions at the company. To enhance external validity, the layout of the fictitious review was designed to look like a real review of the employer (Stockman/van Hoya/da Motta Veiga 2020; Carpentier/van Hoya 2021; Evertz/Kollitz/Süß 2021). More specifically, we structured the information in the review to reflect content categories provided by kununu.com, a large employer review site in Europe (Dabirian/Kietzmann/Diba 2017). After having read the review, participants rated the organization's attractiveness for a second time (T2). Finally, they completed a questionnaire containing various checks, an assessment of attitudes about the review as well as employer review sites, and several control measures.

6.3.2.2 Quality of vignettes and measures

We checked whether the review was considered negative by assessing the **valence** of the review using the item "How negative was the review?" on a 7-

point Likert-type scale from 1 = not negative at all to 7 = completely negative (Lee/Koo 2012). The average valence was 5.53, assessment did not significantly differ between the four vignettes ($F(3,146) = 2.067$, $p = .102$), and indicates that the review was considered negative.

As a **stimulus check** (Ejelöv/Luke 2020), to test whether participants correctly identified the review content, we provided participants with two sets of content categories reflecting either the categories of the instrumental or the symbolic condition and asked them to indicate which set of content categories was congruent with the preceding review. In the instrumental condition, 59 out of 66 participants correctly identified content categories ($n = 3$ did not answer), as did 64 out of 76 participants in the symbolic condition ($n = 1$ did not answer). Accordingly, most participants understood the stimulus correctly. We removed individuals whom did not provide correct answers from the study. Nonetheless, the results remained robust when all individuals were included.

Regarding the **employer image**, we followed the holistic approach (Lievens/Slaughter 2016) and measured overall organizational attractiveness using a scale from Aiman-Smith and colleagues (2001) drawing on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Cronbach's α was .93 at T1 and .93 at T2. Congeneric reliability was equally good, with .94 at T1 and .96 at T2. An example item is "I find this a very attractive company". Employer image was assessed before the checks described above to avoid a potential effect on participants' responses.

Following prior research (Evertz/Kollitz/Süß 2021), we also measured attitudes about employer review sites by adapting four items originally developed by Lin (2010). An example item is "Using employer review sites is a good idea". Cronbach's α was .86 and congeneric reliability was .89.

6.3.2.3 Results

To provide evidence for the negative effect of the negative reviews, we used a **repeated-measures analysis of variance** (ANOVA) in IBM SPSS 26. The repeated measures ANOVA determined that mean change in the employer image differed significantly between the measurement times ($F(1,142) = 171.468$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .547$), with a mean of 5.01 ($SD = 1.19$) prior the

manipulation and 2.95 ($SD = 1.22$) after the review. This supports the harmful effect of the negative review, which is in line with the scarce research on negative employer reviews (Melián-González/Bulchand-Gidumal 2016; Stockman/van Hoya/da Motta Veiga 2020). Furthermore, we found that exposure to a one-sided negative employer review led to a greater decrease in employer image perceptions than exposure to a two-sided negative employer review, which is why we focused on one-sided reviews in our further procedures. Together with the evidence from above, the vignettes can be considered suitable as stimuli for the main study.

6.3.3 Development of employer response vignettes based on image repair strategies

6.3.3.1 Data

Although the application of IRT is theoretically sound, there is no empirical evidence on the extent to which its proposed strategies cover employer responses to negative reviews. In Step 2, we therefore decided to **screen and code real employer responses** according to image repair strategies to provide initial evidence for the applicability of IRT. Further, this allowed for a more profound understanding of how image repair strategies could be operationalized within the context of employer review sites.

We collected data for the 30 DAX-listed companies (i.e., the 30 major German companies trading at the Frankfurt stock exchange; <https://boerse-frankfurt.de/indices/dax>) and the companies that in 2019 were listed in either the students' or young professionals' top 100 employer ranking of the Trendence Institute (<https://trendence.com>). Data were retrieved from Kununu (<https://kununu.com>), a popular employer review site that has served as a data source in prior research on employer reviews (e.g., Könsgen et al. 2018). Our search resulted in 144 companies of which 74 (51.4 %) were found to have responded to negative employer reviews at least once on Kununu. This sample size is comparable to similar coding procedures in prior research (e.g., Waung et al. 2017). Interestingly, this suggests that nearly half of the employers we reviewed opted for a no response strategy when it comes to dealing with negative employer reviews.

6.3.3.2 Coding procedure and results

For each of the 74 companies, two of the authors coded the most recent response individually. We excluded the strategy Compensation from the coding procedure a priori. In contrast to a product- or service context, the assignment of tangible resources to compensate for a failure (e.g., the refund of money, change of the good or service, or discounts for a future purchase; del Río-Lanza/Vázquez-Casielles/Díaz-Martín 2009) does not apply to a long-term exchange relationship like the one between employee and employer (Gardner/Erhardt/Martin-Rios 2011). Consequently, we coded the 13 repair strategies, reflecting the five general image repair strategies, as suggested by IRT.

Overall, authors' agreement regarding strategies being used was, on average, 95.63 % (for coder agreement per strategy see Table 6.2). The most frequent strategies used by employers in our sample were Corrective Action (64 times; 39.67 %) and Bolstering (52 times; 32.23 %) followed by Attack the Accuser (15 times; 9.30 %). In fewer instances, employers were found to make use of Minimization (10 times; 6.20 %) and Simple Denial (5 times; 3.10 %), whereas Provocation (4 times; 2.48 %), Transcendence (4 times; 2.48 %), De-feasibility (3 times; 1.86 %), and Mortification (3 times; 1.86 %) were used rather seldom. Differentiation (1 time; 0.62 %), and Good Intentions (1 time; 0.62 %) were only identified once. No response was found that included Shift the Blame (0 times; 0 %) or Accident (0 times; 0 %). Further, it is noteworthy that employers not only used single image repair strategies, but also to a varying extent combinations of strategies within a single response ($M = 2.18$; $SD = 1.06$). Overall, we found that the responses we coded were covered by IRT.

6.3.3.3 Development of the employer response vignettes

To ensure theoretical alignment with IRT (Benoit 1995, 2015), one author, who was not involved in the coding procedure described above, designed employer response vignettes based solely on theoretical considerations. Following the general description of image repair strategies provided by IRT (and thus possibly differing from real employer responses), 13 vignettes were created. Another author, who was involved in the coding procedure, developed employer response vignettes reflecting the responses found on Kununu. Both kinds of vignettes were then discussed and merged to achieve **vignettes that**

were both **theoretically sound and realistic**. Regarding the strategies Shift the Blame and Accident, consensus was reached that such vignettes would not be realistic. As well, given that these two strategies were not identified within the real data, we excluded them from subsequent analysis. Having developed prototypical vignettes for the remaining eleven image repair strategies, these were then validated and refined in the next step.

6.3.4 Content validation of employer response vignettes

6.3.4.1 Participants and procedure

To validate the employer response vignettes, in Step 3 we used **subject matter experts** (SMEs) to bring together a theoretical and practice-oriented perspective. This approach was chosen to balance the requirements of theoretically sound and yet realistic vignettes.

We conducted a **validation study** with 28 SMEs from the field of human resource management, including both practitioners ($n = 15$) and researchers ($n = 13$). SMEs were first provided with a short description of each of the eleven strategies. Next, for each image repair strategy, a vignette of an employer's response to an employer review was presented. The employer review itself was not displayed because image repair strategies are supposed to work independently of the respective type of crisis (or, in our case, a negative employer review). After reading each response (i.e., the vignette), participants were asked to indicate which image repair strategy the employer was most likely using in their response. Following this logic, participants were asked to assign an image repair strategy to each of the eleven vignettes which were displayed in random order. Further, participants were asked to provide additional, qualitative feedback regarding content, realism, and the communication style of each vignette.

6.3.4.2 Results

To assess the validity of response vignettes, we calculated the **percentage of SMEs' correct assignment** to the underlying image repair strategy for each vignette. We found that employer response vignettes differed significantly with respect to their distinctiveness. While the majority of SMEs correctly identified Simple Denial (82.14 %), Defeasibility (85.71 %), Good Intentions

(78.57 %), Bolstering (85.71 %), Minimization (60.71 %), Attack the Accuser (75.00 %), Corrective Action (85.71 %), and Mortification (100 %), there was less consensus regarding Provocation (21.43 %), Differentiation (32.14 %), and Transcendence (46.43 %).

Consequently, not all image repair strategies in our vignettes were correctly identified. This was also indicated by the **qualitative feedback provided by SMEs**, which we used for further refinement of our vignettes. For some vignettes, it was stated that they were not formulated clearly enough to be unambiguously identified (e.g., for Corrective Action: “In my opinion, it is not absolutely clear that the criticized action will not happen again.” SME #18). Consequently, we modified the vignettes for clarity following SMEs’ suggestions.

Further, the qualitative feedback provided by SMEs pointed at some **overlap between strategies**, leaving room for ambiguous interpretations. For example, concerning Good Intentions a SME commented “Within this response, I identify two potential strategies: Good Intentions and Transcendence” (SME #9), and for Denial, a comment was “In my opinion, it is a Denial combined with an attack on the accuser” (SME #18). Given that SMEs indicated that in the context of employer review sites these strategies might be not easily distinguished from other strategies, we decided to narrow the number of vignettes down to one strategy (i.e., one strategy for Denial, Evasion of Responsibility, Reducing Offensiveness, Corrective Action, and Mortification, respectively). Therefore, for those general strategies that encompass variants (Denial, Evasion of Responsibility, and Reducing Offensiveness), we focus on those strategies that were most clearly identified by SMEs and were most prevalent in the real data (see Table 6.2).

6.4 Main study

6.4.1 Method

6.4.1.1 Design and procedure

To test whether Denial, Evasion of Responsibility, Reducing Offensiveness, Corrective Action, and Mortification had the hypothesized effects, we used the validated negative employer review and the validated response strategies

within an experimental design. Further, we explored the role of content to answer Research Question 1.

More specifically, we employed a 2 x 6 **between-subjects factorial design** in which we manipulated the content of the review (instrumental vs. symbolic employment information) and the employer's response (Denial, Evasion of Responsibility, Reducing Offensiveness, Corrective Action, Mortification, and No Response). The vignette study was administered via an online survey.

Identical to the **procedure** of the review validation, participants first received the same general information and were asked to indicate the extent to which they were attracted to the organization overall (T1). Then, they were randomly assigned to one of the twelve experimental conditions, where the negative review of the employer together with the employer's response was presented, except for the No Response-Conditions, where the negative review but no response was presented. Afterward, we asked participants to rate the offensiveness of the situation portrayed in the review and the extent to which the employer is to be held responsible for the situation with both scales being presented in random order. Finally, participants rated the organization's overall attractiveness for a second time (T2) and completed a questionnaire that contained items to detect survey inattentiveness, a manipulation check, an assessment of attitudes about employer review sites and source expertise, and several control measures.

6.4.1.2 Data, sample, and checks

Following previous work on the effects of employer reviews (Könsgen et al. 2018), we recruited our sample via Clickworker, a German crowdsourcing platform where individuals can be contacted to perform different computer tasks. We aimed for 450 participants and offered 1.50 € for survey completion. This equals an hourly compensation of approximately 10.00 € when taking the average time spent on the survey into account, which was 8 minutes and 47 seconds ($SD = 6.95$ min). As part of the sampling, participants were informed that incorrectly answering items detecting survey inattentiveness ("attention checks") would result a lack of compensation.

Based on the correct answers to the attention checks, which comprised two items that instructed participants to choose a specific answer (Barber/Barnes/Carlson 2013) and a single item asking for the employment status of the reviewer, participants were either included or excluded from the sample. This resulted in 502 participants that finished the online survey. Due to the nature of the sample and the primary financial incentive to participate, we applied strict criteria to identify careless responses (Meade/Craig 2012). However, we conducted all analyses with the initial and final samples to test for the robustness of the effects. Overall, 60 participants (11.95 %) did not correctly answer the attention checks required for payment. Tests of this drop-out revealed that this missingness was unrelated to the manipulation, age, or gender of the participants.

In addition, we used an instructional attention check regarding the employers' reaction that was unrelated to the payment to identify within-sample careless responses. This resulted in the exclusion of another 59 (13.34 %) participants that did not correctly identify that the employer did (not) respond to the review. Again, this was unrelated to the manipulation, age, or gender. Further, we conducted the same stimulus check regarding the content of the review that was used in Step 1, in which only seven individuals failed to answer correctly. We decided to retain these individuals within the sample, as they correctly identified all other checks and tests. The results however were robust with and without these individuals.

As a result, the final sample consisted of 383 completed surveys. 241 participants were male (62.9 %), 140 female (36.6 %), and two individuals reported other as gender (0.05 %). Further, age ranged from 18 to 67 with an average of 38.86 years ($SD = 12.27$) and professional experience ranged from 0 to 47 years with an average of 16.66 years ($SD = 12.19$). 256 participants (66.8 %) reported that they had experience with employer review sites. Participants' attitudes about employer review sites on average were neither extremely positive nor extremely negative ($M = 4.62$, $SD = .64$).

6.4.1.3 Measures

All measures used a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

As in our pilot study, we measured **employer image** at both points in time with the same overall attractiveness scale suggested by Aiman-Smith and colleagues (2001). Cronbach's α was .95 at T1 and .96 at T2 and congeneric reliability was equally good, with .95 at T1 and .96 at T2. Employer image measured at T1 served as a control variable in our analyses.

To measure **offensiveness** (i.e., the first potential mediator), we adapted six items of Tata's (2000) and Jones and colleagues' (1987) offensiveness scales, which we considered as suitable to assess perceived offensiveness in the context of employer review sites. Moreover, instead of using scales that were anchored with opposing labels (e.g., acceptable/unacceptable), participants had to indicate their agreement to statements such as "Taking all information into account, the situation is inappropriate". Cronbach's α was .88 and congeneric reliability was .90.

To measure a company's **responsibility** (i.e., the second potential mediator), four items were adapted from Griffin et al. (1992) and Kaltcheva et al. (2013). Cronbach's α was .92, congeneric reliability was .92, and an example item is "The company is responsible for the situation".

Equal to the pilot study, we used four items developed by Lin (2010) to measure attitudes about employer review sites. Cronbach's α was .88 and congeneric reliability .89.

6.4.2 Results

We conducted a **confirmatory factor analysis** for a four-factor model and evaluated the model fit using the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), standardized root-mean residual (SRMR), and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). We also used changes in the chi-square statistic to evaluate model comparison and calculated Cronbach's α as well as the congeneric reliability for each construct (Cho 2016). Although the χ^2 test is significant ($\chi^2(134) = 265.47, p < .001$) the results of the fit indices indicate that the four-factor model fits the data well, with CFI = .97, SRMR = .040, RMSEA = .051. For robustness, we also ran the model including all 502 initial participants. This model showed a worse fit ($\chi^2 = 740.99, df = 284, p < .001, CFI .95, SRMR = .045, RMSEA = .057, \Delta\chi^2(0) = 148.92$), which can be considered evidence that supports the exclusion of the respective participants. As for the

offensiveness scale, we decided to remove one item from it (“Taking all the information into account, the situation is unjustified.”) as the factor loading was low (.42). All other items had factor loadings ranging from .71 (offensiveness) to .93 (employer image at T2). Overall, this suggests that both measures of employer image, offensiveness, and responsibility are separate constructs.

To test the effects of image repair strategy and review content on offensiveness, responsibility, and the change of employer image (Hypotheses 1-6), we used the **MIMIC approach** in Mplus (Breitsohl 2019). Latent means by condition appear in Table 6.3. The observed mean of employer image was 5.12 (SD = 1.20) before the manipulation (i.e., after the general information) and 3.16 (SD = 1.22) after the manipulation (i.e., after review and response).

Content	Variables	Strategy						
		Denial	EOR	RO	CA	Mort.	NR	Overall
Instrumental	Responsibility	4.20	4.71	4.76	4.76	4.92	4.73	4.68
Symbolic		4.11	4.53	4.30	4.43	4.95	4.50	4.47
Instrumental	Offensiveness	4.23	4.15	4.32	4.44	4.22	4.91	4.30
Symbolic		4.19	4.48	4.33	4.01	4.38	4.36	4.29
Instrumental	Change in OA	-1.41	-2.26	-2.18	-2.11	-2.16	-2.29	-2.07
Symbolic		-1.41	-1.97	-1.54	-1.78	-2.24	-2.15	-1.84
Note. Standard deviations are omitted for the sake of clarity. Responsibility, offensiveness, and organizational attractiveness were measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale. Change in organizational attractiveness is the difference between the pre- and post-measure of organizational attractiveness. OA = Organizational attractiveness, EOR = Evasion of Responsibility, RO = Reducing Offensiveness, CA = Corrective Action, Mort. = Mortification, NR = No Response.								

Tab. 6.3: Latent means of the main study

As we could not show strict invariance across groups (Breitsohl 2019), we used dummy codes for both the review content (instrumental vs. symbolic employment information) and the image repair strategies (using No Response as reference category) and calculated the direct, indirect, and total effects on employer image. All results for standardized effect sizes can be found in Table 6.4. To check for robustness, we calculated MANOVAs and the results were in line with the MIMIC results. First, Denial had no direct effect on employer image ($\beta = .006$, $p = .896$), but was related to both offensiveness ($\beta = -.175$, $p = .006$) and responsibility ($\beta = -.272$, $p < .001$) with a standardized total effect on employer image of $B = .203$, $p < .001$, thus supporting **Hypothesis 1**. Second, neither Evasion of Responsibility nor Reducing Offensiveness had

a direct or indirect effect on offensiveness, responsibility, or employer image, as such **Hypotheses 2 and 3** were not supported. Third, Corrective Action had a significant negative effect on offensiveness ($\beta = -.151$, $p = .028$) and through that, a specific indirect effect on employer image ($B = .039$, $p = .041$) via offensiveness. Yet, it had no total significant effect on employer image, thus only providing partial support for **Hypothesis 4**. Finally, we found a competitive mediation for Mortification, which showed a direct positive effect on employer image ($B = .109$, $p = .031$), but a negative indirect effect via responsibility ($B = -.115$, $p = .002$), resulting in an insignificant total effect ($B = .015$, $p = .826$), accordingly **Hypothesis 5** was not supported.

	Offensiveness		Responsibility		Employer Image T2	
Variables	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Intercept	6.03*	.019	5.32*	.037	3.60*	.072
Content	-.028	.053	-.121*	.051	-.006	.039
Denial	-.175*	.064	-.272*	.070	.006	.047
Evasion of Responsibility	-.087	.065	.050	.062	.058	.053
Reducing Offensiveness	-.083	.067	-.020	.065	.081	.047
Corrective Action	-.151*	.074	-.035	.065	.006	.045
Mortification	-.080	.053	.208*	.059	.109*	.050
Controls						
Employer Image T1	-.097	.058	-.066	.056	.363*	.043
Mediator						
Offensiveness					-.261*	.058
Responsibility					-.555*	.055
R-squared	3.2 %		16.4 %		54.3 %	
Total standardized effects						
Content					.068	.049
Denial					.203*	.065
Evasion of Responsibility					-.052	.063
Reducing Offensiveness					.114	.062
Corrective Action					.064	.060
Mortification					.015	.042
Note. n = 383. Standardized coefficients, strategies are coded in contrast to a No-Response Strategy, Content (1 = instrumental, 2 = symbolic), *p < .05.						

Tab. 6.4: MIMIC results for the main study

With regard to **Hypothesis 6**, we found that symbolic employer information was negatively related to responsibility ($\beta = -.121$, $p = .017$), supporting Hypothesis 6a. Yet, content was unrelated to offensiveness ($\beta = -.028$, $p = .594$) and the employer image ($\beta = -.006$, $p = .875$), thus Hypothesis 6b and Hypothesis 6c were not supported.

To obtain a clearer picture of each image repair strategy and its possible interaction with the content of the review, as outlined in **Research Question 1**,

we explored each strategy on its own. We used five models that included employer image at both measurement times, offensiveness, responsibility, the respective strategy, the content, as well as the interaction between the two. Figure 6.2 depicts the findings for each model.

Overall, we found that Responsibility was always significantly negatively related to employer image, while the role of perceived offensiveness was less consistent, as it was unrelated to employer image when Evasion of Responsibility or Corrective Action were used. With regard to the interaction between content and strategy, few significant interactions were found. There was a significant interaction between Reducing Offensiveness and review content on employer image. In an instrumental setting, Reducing Offensiveness had no effect, while in the symbolic setting, Reducing Offensiveness significantly increased employer image. Further, Mortification and content interacted with regard to offensiveness, as Mortification was ineffective when the content was symbolic, but perceived offensiveness decreased when the content was instrumental.

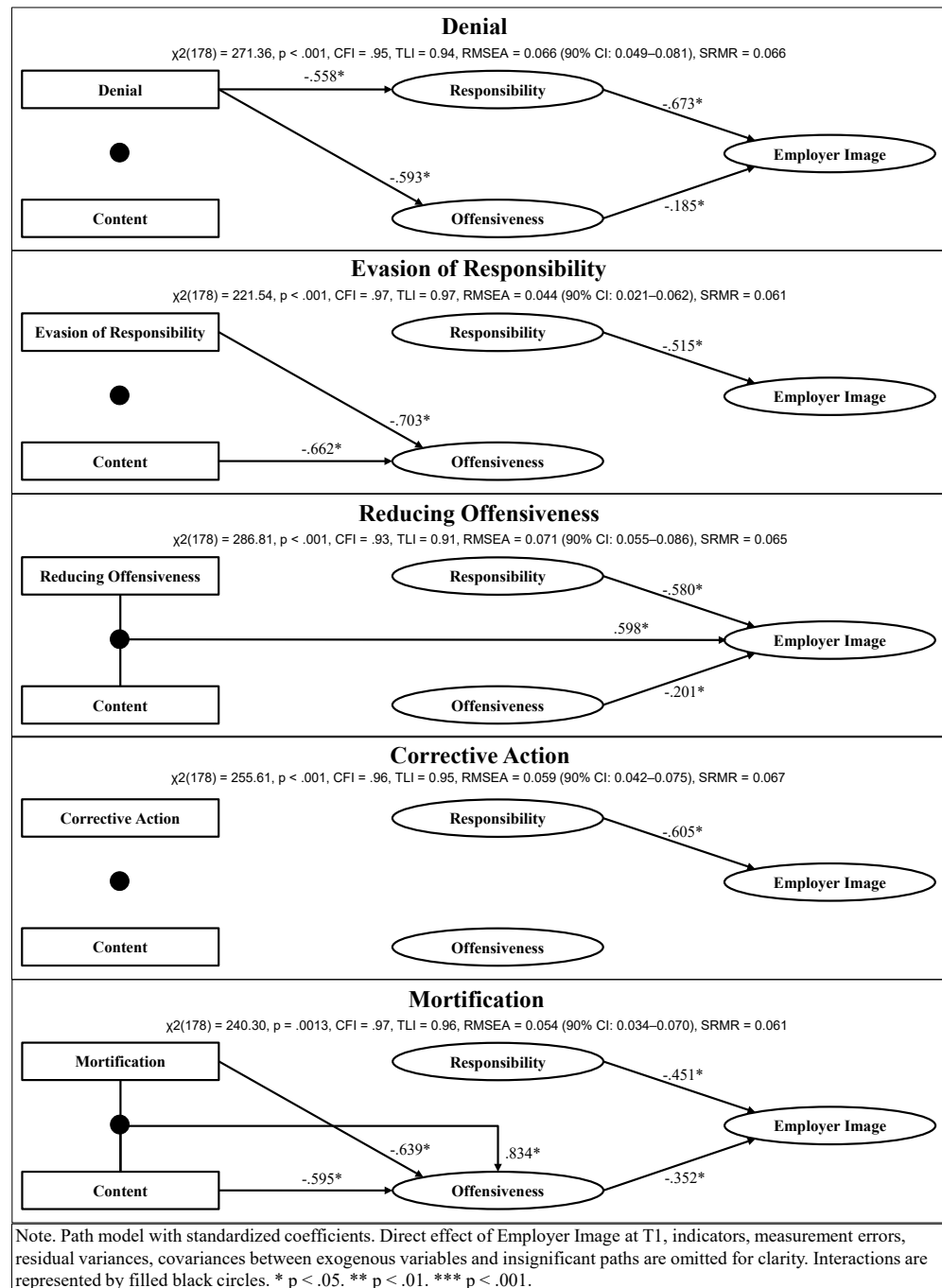


Fig. 6.2: Interactions of image repair strategies and review content

6.5 Discussion

The present research opened with the question of how employers could (or even should) respond to negative employer reviews. To answer this question and advance our understanding of responses to employer reviews, we drew on IRT from the crisis communication literature (Benoit 1995, 2015). IRT not only allows for a fine-grained systematization of employer response strategies, but also sets sound theoretical perspectives on job seekers' processing of both a negative employer review and an employer's response. Our experimental investigation of image repair strategies' effects revealed that providing a response to a negative review is not automatically beneficial for the employer image if compared to remaining silent. Instead, effects largely depended on the response strategy chosen. In addition, our findings indicated that attributions of responsibility rather than perceived offensiveness is a mediator in the relationship between response strategy and employer image perceptions. Furthermore, when negative reviews contain instrumental rather than symbolic information, job seekers attributed more responsibility to the employer. In addition, the mitigating effect of response strategies seemed largely independent of the review content.

The present research holds valuable **theoretical implications** for the literatures on employer image management and image repair theory. First, our work provides initial insight to the strategies that employers use to respond to negative reviews. Recently, research has started to examine the effects of negative online employer reviews on job seekers' attitudes and intentions (Melián-González/Bulchand-Gidumal 2016; Stockman/van Hoya/da Motta Veiga 2020) and how an employer's response can mitigate these effects (Könsen et al. 2018; Carpentier/van Hoya 2021). To date, however, a comprehensive framework of the broad variety of employer response strategies was lacking. For this reason, our work provides a multidisciplinary review of different conceptualizations and the ways in which employers can respond to negative employer reviews. We identified that responses can be systematized as strategies of IRT and provided **initial evidence for the applicability of the IRT** (Benoit 1995, 2015) on employer reviews. Findings from our pilot study indicate that Bolstering and Corrective Action are used most frequently when

employers respond to negative reviews, which parallels findings in crisis communication (Kim/Avery/Lariscy 2009).

In addition, we extend prior research by examining the effects of a broad range of different response strategies. Our results not only show that responding as an employer is not automatically better than not responding, but also that the effects of image repair strategies differ. Most differences were found between Denial, Corrective Action, and Mortification. Consistent with previous research on employer responses (Carpentier/van Hoya 2021), our findings suggest **Denial** is superior to other response strategies in mitigating the adverse effects of a single negative employer review. Interestingly, we found that Denial might not only be related to attributions of responsibility, but also to perceived offensiveness, which was unexpected given our a priori theoretical considerations based on IRT. We found that if the employer declares that accusations raised in the negative review are simply not true, this can significantly buffer negative perceptions of an employer's image by decreasing both attributions of responsibility and perceived offensiveness. This is important because it may answer Carpentier and van Hoya's (2021) question of whether a Denial could still result in improved attitudes, even if the employer is not able to provide counterevidence.

Regarding **Corrective Action**, our findings do not support the view that it maximizes attributions of responsibility (Lee 2004), as we found it to be solely related to perceived offensiveness. This is interesting, as it suggests that if the employer vows to fix the problems in the future, the significance of the current incident seems to be reevaluated. As for **Mortification**, we found that it led to an increase in attribution of responsibility, which supports the notion that an apology represents an acceptance of responsibility (Conlon/Murray 1996). However, contrary to our expectations based on IRT, Mortification was unrelated to offensiveness and did not buffer the impairment of employer image perceptions, but instead had a direct positive effect on the employer image. As Mortification did not offset the negative effects of the employer review, it seems that its benefits do not outweigh its costs (Kim et al. 2004). More specifically, although the use of Mortification seems to be rewarded with an enhanced employer image, it is offset by increased perceptions of offensiveness, which, in turn, impairs the employer image. As these

effects run contrary to each other, this explains why Mortification did not result in more favorable employer image perceptions.

Another interesting finding arises when comparing the results of Denial, Corrective Action, and Mortification from a **defensive-accommodative perspective** (Marcus/Goodman 1991; Coombs 1998). While there is evidence to suggest that accommodative responses, in general, outperform defensive ones (e.g., Lee/Song 2010; Weitzl/Hutzinger 2017), recent research has challenged this view by providing evidence that defensive responses can be superior depending on the respective context (Johnen/Schnittka 2019). Together with the findings provided by Carpentier and van Hoyer (2021), our findings broaden this perspective by showing that in the context of employer review sites, a defensive response (i.e., Denial) can be superior to an accommodative response (i.e., Corrective Action and/or Mortification) when mitigating a (single) negative review's effects.

In addition, we provide evidence on how response strategies can consolidate the employer image. To the best of our knowledge, the present study is among the first to investigate how **responsibility and offensiveness** are simultaneously affected by image repair strategies. Interestingly, our findings suggest that attribution of responsibility serves as the main mechanism for most strategies even though IRT generally proposes both responsibility and offensiveness as potential mechanisms. Consequently, our findings indicate that job seekers are primarily concerned with whether the employer is to be held responsible for what happened rather than how "bad" it was. This suggests that similar to research on complaint management (e.g., Lee/Song 2010; Chang et al. 2015; Weitzl/Hutzinger/Einwiller 2018), recruitment research can fruitfully draw on attributional processes, particularly attribution of responsibility, to explain the effects of response strategies on company evaluations.

Furthermore, we extend prior research and respond to calls in the literature (e.g., Carpentier/van Hoyer 2021) by building on the instrumental-symbolic framework (Lievens/Highhouse 2003) and examining whether the influence of negative employer reviews and response strategies are **contingent on the review's content**. Our results show that negative reviews tend to be more fatal for the employer's image when they consist of instrumental information rather than symbolic information by increasing attributions of responsibility.

This is in line with the assumption that job seekers consider instrumental employment information to be less susceptible to misinterpretations by the reviewer, therefore, leading to less reviewer-related and more employer-related attribution. An alternative explanation for this finding may lie in job seekers' perceptions of controllability (i.e., the degree to which the cause for an inconvenience is subject to volitional alteration), which are linked to inferences of responsibility (Weiner 2000). That is, job seekers might expect employers to be more in control of instrumental attributes so that criticism regarding these attributes results in higher attributions of responsibility. Interestingly, this is contrary to the finding that job seekers are more influenced by symbolic versus instrumental information regarding employer attractiveness (van Hoya et al. 2016). This may suggest that employer reviews need to be considered a unique source of employer information with different boundary conditions than other word-of-mouth sources, such as family members, friends, or acquaintances (van Hoya/Lievens 2009).

With regard to response strategies, we found that their overall effect on employer image was largely independent of the negative review's content. However, we found that the specific influences of two strategies, Reducing Offensiveness and Mortification, differed depending on what information the review contained. For **Reducing Offensiveness**, we found no effects when the negative review contained instrumental information, but a positive direct influence on the employer image when the negative review contained symbolic information. A possible explanation could be that it is easier to change job seekers' minds about an accusation when the accusation is about symbolic attributes (e.g., bad working atmosphere) that are more abstract and vague and thus more easily overridden, than instrumental attributes (e.g., low pay) that are more actual and concrete (Keeling/McGoldrick/Sadhu 2013). In contrast, for **Mortification**, we found no effects when the negative review contained symbolic information, but a decrease of perceived offensiveness when the negative review contained instrumental information. In other words, it seems particularly beneficial for employers to apologize when an accusation is about instrumental attributes (e.g., low pay) because job seekers tend to perceive the shortcoming as less severe due to the apology. A possible explanation could be that, according to an attributional perspective, if the employer

apologizes for a concrete issue, job seekers anticipate the issue to improve in the immediate future (i.e., considering the cause for the inconvenience as unstable; Weiner 2000), which propitiates the job seekers and makes the issue seem more acceptable.

Besides the implications for theory, several **practical implications** can be derived from our findings. When it comes to dealing with negative reviews, our findings advocate that employers should take an active stance and respond to offset its detrimental effects. As for the “how”, Denial stands out, as it was found to significantly reduce both attributions of responsibility and the perceived offensiveness, which in turn buffered the impairment of employer image perceptions after a negative review. This suggests that it can be beneficial for organizations to refute accusations of being a bad employer, which is of high relevance given that employer review sites provide anonymous reviewers with the opportunity to harm an organization’s employer image (Dabirian/Kietzmann/Diba 2017).

Although evidence for the superiority of Denial emerges (e.g., Carpentier/van Hoya 2021), we suggest that this response strategy be used with caution. That is, employers should **not flat-out deny any complaint** that can be found online, as the effectiveness of Denial might depend on various contingencies. For example, research in the field of service recovery suggests that refutation of negative reviews is only acceptable if review balance (i.e., the ratio of positively and negatively valenced reviews; Purnawirawan/Dens/De Pelsmacker 2012) is positive, whereas if the review balance is neutral or negative, Denial is the worst option (Dens/De Pelsmacker/Purnawirawan 2015). This suggests that Denial may serve to effectively protect the employer image under certain circumstances, but also has the potential to do an employer’s image more damage than good. As for these contingencies, however, our findings indicate that the type of criticized employer attributes seems to play an inferior role. That is, employers that opt to deny a negative review may do so regardless of whether the review entails information about instrumental or symbolic employer attributes.

Our findings further indicate that **providing positive information** about one’s company in response to a negative review (i.e., Reducing Offensiveness in the form of Bolstering) might be particularly helpful when the company is

accused of negative symbolic attributes. In contrast, **apologizing** might be particularly helpful when the company is accused of negative instrumental attributes. Thus, employers should be mindful of what exactly the accusation in the negative review is about, and choose their response strategy accordingly.

6.6 Limitations and future research

The present study has several limitations. Similar to most experimental research on the effects of word-of-mouth, we employed a scenario design (van Hoya 2014). Therefore, the **generalizability** of our findings might be restricted (van Hoya et al., 2016). To overcome this limitation, the layout of both the employer review and the response was guided by real employer review sites. We also sought to enhance the realism of our stimulus materials by drawing on real employer responses and considering SMEs' advice. Nevertheless, we encourage future research to further assess the generalizability of our findings, by replicating our findings using both reviews about real organizations and actual job seekers. In particular, given that research has recently shown that job seekers seem to be less receptive to negative word-of-mouth about organizations they are familiar with, using real organizations instead of fictitious ones is a promising avenue for future research (Stockman/van Hoya/da Motta Veiga 2020).

Another limitation is related to the **external validity** of our findings. Similar to previous research (e.g., Carpentier/van Hoya 2021), job seekers were exposed to a single negative employer review. This is in contrast to real-life scenarios, as job seekers who consult employer review sites will seldom find a single negative (or positive) review. Rather, just like consumers on product review sites, they will sift through a set of reviews (Purnawirawan et al. 2015). In this regard, consumer research offers ample opportunities for future research, such as studying how readers are affected by balance and sequence of online review sets (e.g., Purnawirawan/Dens/De Pelsmacker 2012), factors that may also determine the effectiveness of organizational response strategies (e.g., Dens/De Pelsmacker/Purnawirawan 2015). Therefore, we suggest that further research explore how job seekers react to a set of reviews and whether exposure to multiple reviews shapes the impact of an employer's response.

With regard to **response strategies**, we limited our analysis to one specific strategy per general image repair strategy of the IRT due to considerations of their applicability and parsimony. Consequently, for some general strategies, specific strategies were left out (e.g., Minimization), which future research could analyze to broaden the perspective provided by the present study. Further, as we provide initial evidence for IRT strategies in the context of employer review sites, we focused on the effects of pure image repair strategies, that is, we were interested in the isolated effects of strategies rather than in the effects of a combination of strategies. However to some extent, this contradicts reality, as employers would integrate different strategies when responding to negative reviews. Therefore, a fruitful area for further work would be to experimentally test combinations of different strategies. For example, crisis communication literature suggests that Bolstering would work best as a supplement to other strategies (Coombs 2007) and there is evidence in the field of service recovery where a combination of accommodative responses can lead to significantly more favorable reactions than an isolated accommodative response (Weitzl/Hutzinger 2017). Future research could scrutinize different elements of employers' responses by applying a discourse perspective and analyze whether there is a typical structure of rhetorical moves used by employers to manage their employer image (Zhang/Vásquez 2014).

Finally, an avenue for future research would be to shed light on the role of **complainant characteristics** as well as **additional aspects of the response**. For example, current employees, as well as ex-employees or applicants might also be relevant sources of word-of-mouth (Dineen et al. 2019). In support of this view, evidence has been found that, under some circumstances, positive employer reviews provided by applicants can positively affect employer images held by job seekers (Evertz/Kollitz/Süß 2021). Therefore, it would be interesting to see whether negative reviews provided by sources other than current employees can harm an organization's employer image and if so, whether any damage can be averted by means of an employer's response.

As for the aspects of the response, previous research highlights several key attributes, such as the respondent's position within the organization, communication style, or the speed of responding to a review (Sparks/So/Bradley

2016). These factors are also important to study in the context of employer review sites, as findings would provide organizations with valuable insights regarding their employer image management. For example, future research could experimentally manipulate the respondent's position (e.g., student intern vs. head of the HR department) to help organizations determine who would have the most success offsetting the detrimental effects of a negative employer review.

7 Employer responses to negative online reviews: A genre analysis and avenues for future research ¹¹

7.1 Introduction

Online employer reviews represent evaluations that current or former employees or applicants post online about an employer and that can entail text, video, and/or ratings (Carpentier/van Hoyer 2021). As these evaluations are independent of an employer's recruitment activities, they can provide **negative information about employers** to a large audience of job seekers (Dabirian/Kietzmann/Diba 2017). When reviews provide negative information, this has been shown to negatively affect employer images held by job seekers (Melián-González/Bulchand-Gidumal 2016; Stockman/van Hoyer/da Motta Veiga 2020). Hence, negative online employer reviews can be considered a substantial threat, calling for employers to intervene in the process of job seekers being influenced. In this regard, research has started to provide evidence that employers can mitigate negative employer reviews' negative effects by providing job seekers with their views through responses to reviews (Carpentier/van Hoyer 2021; Kollitz/Ruhle/Wilhelmy 2021).

However, the so far existing evidence suggests that responses' ability to mitigate the detrimental effects of negative reviews is limited. More specifically, only denying the allegations mentioned in a review was found to be beneficial, whereas other variants of response seem to be rather ineffective (Carpentier/van Hoyer 2021; Kollitz/Ruhle/Wilhelmy 2021). This is surprising, as it contrasts sharply from the literature on complaint management and crisis communication that both provide evidence for the effects of a wide array of different responses (e.g., Claeys/Caubergh/Vyncke 2010; Dutta/Pullig 2011; Weitzl/Hutzinger 2017).

A possible explanation for these unexpected findings lies in the **characteristics of employer responses**. These may differ from those of communication in related fields, such as complaint management and crisis communication, where organizations respond to negative consumer reviews or address the

¹¹ Eine vorherige Fassung dieses Beitrags wurde auf der Wissenschaftlichen Kommission Personal im Verband der Hochschullehrer für Betriebswirtschaft (VHB) in Düsseldorf (17.09.2020) präsentiert.

general public after negative events. However, it is unclear whether this explanation is correct, as the characteristics of employer responses have not been investigated so far. That is, we do not know how employers actually respond to negative online reviews. This lack of knowledge is crucial, as it prevents research from developing a profound understanding of employer responses and their effects, respectively.

Against this background, the **aim of the present study** is to explore the characteristics of employer responses to negative employer reviews. To achieve this aim, I build on complaint management research (i.e., Zhang/Vásquez 2014). This research has shown that studying online responses from a discourse perspective allows gaining profound insights into the ways how organizations use this text type to manage dissatisfaction. More specifically, following suggestions by Zhang and Vásquez (2014) the present study seeks to provide evidence on the discourse characteristics of employer responses by answering two overarching questions: (1) What is the generic structure of employer responses (i.e., their typical textual elements and organizational patterns thereof)? and (2) How do employers organize key aspects that can be expected to shape the effectiveness of a response (i.e., intertextuality and tone-of-voice)?

To answer these questions, I conceptualize **employer responses as genre** (i.e., a class of communicative events; Swales 1990) and analyze their generic structure by applying move analysis (Swales 1981, 1990) to a corpus of 73 real employer responses to negative employer reviews. In so doing, I provide evidence regarding the types of rhetorical moves carried out by employers including their frequencies and pattern of occurrence. In addition, I shed light on to what extent responses and preceding reviews are intertextually connected and what tone-of-voice is used by employers when responding to negative reviews.

By analyzing employer responses as genre for the first time, the present study offers a new analytical perspective on this text type. The insights gained contribute to a deeper understanding of the characteristics of employer responses and allow for the identification of **numerous avenues for future research**.

These avenues are explicated at the end of this chapter and can help researchers planning their further steps toward a better understanding of employer responses or their effects, respectively.

7.2 Conceptual background and development of research questions

7.2.1 Employer responses to negative online reviews: Time for the qualitative turn

Recently, **employer review sites**, such as Glassdoor and Kununu, have emerged, which are dedicated to the rating of the employer role of organizations (Melián-González/Bulchand-Gidumal 2016). Employer review sites operate similar to product review sites (e.g., TripAdvisor or Yelp), but instead of providing consumer reviews, they allow employees, ex-employees, and applicants to anonymously review employers (Dabirian/Kietzmann/Diba 2017; Melián-González/Bulchand-Gidumal 2017). These reviews represent a specific type of electronic (i.e., web-based) word-of-mouth and can contain both positive and negative information (Stockman/van Hove/da Motta Veiga 2020; Evertz/Kollitz/Süß 2021). While positive reviews can positively affect a job seeker's view of an employer (e.g., Evertz/Kollitz/Süß 2021), the opposite holds for negative reviews, which poses a substantial threat to employers or their images, respectively (e.g., Stockman/van Hove/da Motta Veiga 2020).

However, employers are not defenseless when it comes to negative reviews. Employer review sites offer employers the opportunity to react to the criticism expressed in reviews through responses. These **employer responses** can be conceptualized as persuasive messages that aim to create or change perceptions of the employer (Benoit 2015; Kollitz/Ruhle/Wilhelmy 2021). To provide some guidance for employers regarding the “if” and “how” of response, recruitment research has started to experimentally test the effectiveness of different response strategies in mitigating negative reviews' negative effects.

As for the “if”, Könsgen and colleagues (2018) found that a so-called constructive response is superior to not responding at all, as it positively affects jobs seekers' intention to pursue employment via enhancing the perceived trustworthiness of the organization. As for the “how”, more recent studies have started to compare the effectiveness of different response strategies in

mitigating the negative effect of negative reviews on the general employer image (Carpentier/van Hoya 2021; Kollitz/Ruhle/Wilhelmy 2021). More specifically, Carpentier and van Hoya (2021) drew on the defensive-accommodative distinction (Marcus/Goodman 1991), which is prominent in the complaint management literature, to test the effects of defensive (i.e., Denial) as compared to accommodative responses. They found that Denial, where the employer denies responsibility for the problems described in the review, can lead to more favorable employer image perceptions than an accommodative response, which accepts responsibility, and not responding at all. In addition, an accommodative response was found to be as ineffective as providing no response. Similarly, by drawing on image repair theory (Benoit 1995, 2015) from the crisis communication literature, Kollitz and colleagues (2021) showed that among image repair theory's five general response strategies, only Denial was effective in buffering a negative review's negative impact.

Together, this empirical evidence supports the view that employer response options are rather limited. However, this contrasts sharply with findings in related research domains. For example, research on complaint management that has compared defensive with accommodative responses has found evidence for the effectiveness of accommodative responses (e.g., Weitzl/Hutzinger 2017). In particular, in some instances, accommodative responses have been shown to be even superior to defensive ones (e.g., Lee/Song 2010). Paralleling these findings, research on crisis communication applying image repair theory has shown that response strategies other than Denial, such as Corrective Action or Reducing Offensiveness, can be beneficial, as they positively affect brand-related outcomes (Dutta/Pullig 2011).

These **contradicting findings** suggest that employer responses to negative reviews may differ from responses to negative online reviews or events, as studied in complaint management and crisis communication. These differences could have various reasons. For example, responses may differ based on the incidents to which they refer (i.e., accusations due to poor working conditions vs. consumer dissatisfaction vs. crisis) or the audiences they address (i.e., job seekers vs. consumers vs. the general public). In addition, the applicability of response strategies across research domains might not always be given (e.g., promising monetary compensation hardly matches the context

of employment). Whether this reasoning holds, however, remains uncertain due to the lack of research on the characteristics of employer responses.

Therefore, I argue that research on employer responses should step back from the ad hoc experimental investigation of response strategies borrowed from other domains and devote attention to a more **profound understanding of the characteristics of employer responses**. In other words, research on employer responses would benefit from turning to the qualitative analyses of actual employer response and its characteristics, respectively. This would form the basis for future research to delve deeper into employer responses and carve out their specific characteristics that account for the yet (un-)observed effects.

Following this line of thought, the present research adopts the notion of Zhang and Vásquez (2014) and conceptualizes employer responses as a specific genre (i.e., class of communicative events; Swales 1990). This allows drawing on the analytical framework of genre/move analysis to gain more insight into the way how employers respond online.

7.2.2 Genre analysis based on rhetorical moves and its application to online business responses

By the term **genre**, research has referred to a culturally recognized message type that possesses a conventional internal structure, such as a research article or a business memo (Biber/Connor/Upton 2007). More specifically, Swales (1990, p. 58) stated that „a genre comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes [...] and exhibit various patterns of similarity in terms of structure, style, content and intended audience”.

Analysis of genres (i.e., genre analysis) was developed in the 1970s and 1980s as a part of the wider growth of discourse analysis. However, it was Swales (1981) who developed **genre analysis using rhetorical moves** (i.e., move analysis) within the field of English for Specific Purposes (Kanoksilpatham 2007). Move analysis represents a top-down approach to analyze the discourse structure of texts from a genre, with the text being described as a sequence of “moves” (Biber/Connor/Upton 2007). These moves, in turn, represent rhetorical units that each perform a coherent communicative function in

a text but also contribute to the overall purposes of the genre (Swales 2004; Kanoksilpatham 2007).

Extending the notion of rhetorical moves to **online business responses**, Zhang and Vásquez (2014) showed that move analysis provides an effective means to learn more about the characteristics of this computer-mediated text type. More specifically, by applying move analysis to a corpus of 80 hotel responses to negative online reviews, the authors identified 10 moves that are most common in hotel responses as well as a typical order in which these moves appear. In so doing, the authors provided initial evidence regarding the generic structure of hotel responses. In addition, their research indicates that our understanding of business responses benefits from scrutiny of two aspects that are central to responses' effectiveness, namely responses' intertextuality (i.e., their intertextual connections to the preceding reviews) and tone-of-voice (i.e., style of communication; Zhang/Vásquez 2014).

These findings did not only provide a foundation for future research on the genre of hotel responses (e.g., Cenni/Goethals 2020) but have also stimulated research on discourse characteristics of related genres, such as restaurant responses (Napolitano 2018). More precisely, research that has scrutinized rhetorical moves in restaurant responses has shown that the work by Zhang and Vásquez (2014) can serve as a template for the analysis of related genres (Napolitano 2018). That is, moves originally identified in hotel responses can serve as a conceptional foundation when exploring moves in other types of business responses. Furthermore, differences in intertextuality and tone-of-voice could be observed between the related genres of hotel and restaurant response (Zhang/Vásquez 2014; Napolitano 2018). Accordingly, analyzing these aspects contributes to a better understanding of a genre, even if they have already been studied in related genres.

Drawing on this, I argue that analyzing employer responses to negative reviews as genre can advance our understanding of the characteristics of this text type and that the work by Zhang and Vásquez (2014) can stimulate this analysis. Following this line of thought, in the subsequent sections of this chapter, I briefly summarize the moves originally identified in hotel responses (7.2.3) and describe the concepts of intertextuality and tone-of-voice (7.2.4).

This forms the conceptual basis for answering the research questions aimed at broadening our understanding of the genre of employer responses (7.2.5).

7.2.3 Moves in hotel responses to negative online reviews

By analyzing 80 hotel responses to negative online reviews on the travel website TripAdvisor, Zhang and Vásquez (2014) in their study identified 10 moves that are most commonly used by hotels. In addition, the authors describe a general sequence in which these moves appear.

As for the **beginning of a response**, hotels typically start with Opening pleasantries. By this move, they directly address the customer but do not provide any content that is related to the actual feedback that the review entails. This move is often followed by Express gratitude, which serves to thank customers (i.e., for their stay, feedback, or in general) and is the most common move that is applied in hotel response. However, Express gratitude is not limited to appear at the beginning of a response, as it can also be found in the middle or the end of a response. By the move Apologize for sources of trouble, the hotel apologizes for the problem(s) that the customer has experienced during his or her stay. Similar to Express gratitude, this move can occur at various positions in the response and, moreover, can occur multiple times within the same response.

While the so far mentioned moves are rather fixed in terms of their order of appearance, the structure of the so-called **main body of a response** is more fluid. That is, the main body of responses typically comprises any combination of Proof of action, Acknowledge complaints/feedback, Refer to customer reviews, and Avoidance of reoccurring problems. By Proof of action, the hotel makes some reference to the review and provides reassurance for customers that actions have been taken that are related to the review's content. The description of these actions, however, can vary in terms of specificity (i.e., detailed explanations vs. general accounts). In addition, hotels may state that they Acknowledge complaints/feedback mentioned by the customer. Hotels may also more explicitly Refer to customer reviews by addressing a specific aspect of the negative review. However, this reference can vary significantly in the extent to which it refers in detail to the customer review. Furthermore, hotels that want to ensure customers that the causes for their inconvenience

are one-time incidents and will be eliminated in the future may integrate Avoidance of reoccurring problems in their response.

Similar to the beginning of a response, the **ending of a response** is more fixed in terms of structure. In the specific case of hotels' responses, the Invitation for a second visit often functions as a pre-closing move. That is, this move signals the upcoming closing of the response. As for the response's actual ending, hotels may offer the opportunity for further communication, which, as a move, has been labeled Solicit response. However, in most cases, the definite ending of the response is indicated by Closing pleasantries, which often entail respondent names, professional titles, and/or corporate affiliations.

7.2.4 Intertextuality and tone-of-voice

By **intertextuality**, Zhang and Vásquez (2014) in their study refer to the extent to which responses refer back to the original reviews. Consideration of intertextuality is based on the notion that businesses' responses are reactive (i.e., textually dependent on the reviews that precede them). Therefore, they can possess more or less explicit intertextual connections to the reviews. These connections, in turn, may signal whether the responding organization values the feedback provided by reviews (Zhang and Vásquez 2014) and can have implications for how the response is perceived by the audience (Roozen/Raedts 2018).

With regard to intertextuality, an important issue is whether a response entails any reference to the content of the preceding review or is unrelated to the review (i.e., a general response). This is because vague and underspecified responses contrast sharply from the commonly detailed negative reviews and raise questions about the respondent's claims and him valuing the provided feedback. In this regard, Zhang and Vásquez (2014) provided evidence that general responses can be an indication for the organization using a "copy+paste" approach or templates to formulate their responses.

By **tone-of-voice**, it is generally referred to as the language styles that an organization uses in written communication to express a distinctive personality or set of values (Delin 2007). More specifically, research has distinguished

between “conversational human voice”, which describes an engaging and natural style of organizational communication (Kelleher 2009), and “corporate voice”, which refers to a style that is more formal and distant in nature (Park/Cameron 2014; Hübner-Barcelos/Dantas/Sénécal 2018).

As for social media communication, it has been stated that conversational human voice plays a pivotal role as evidence emerges that its use can benefit organizations in various ways (Park/Cameron 2014; Dijkmans et al. 2015). For example, research shows that the use of conversational human voice positively correlates with relational outcomes, such as trust and commitment (Kelleher 2009), influences purchase intentions (Hübner-Barcelos/Dantas/Sénécal 2018), and can lead to more positive observer perceptions of complaint handling than corporate voice (van Noort/Willemsen 2012; Javornik/Filieri/Gumann 2020). Accordingly, it is to be expected that the tone-of-voice chosen within an online business response will affect how the response is perceived by the listening audience.

7.2.5 Analyzing employer responses to negative online reviews as genre

Consideration of employer responses to negative online reviews as genre builds on the notion that the members of this class of communicative event (i.e., employer responses) share (1) a set of communicative purposes and address (2) an intended audience. However, it is (3) their patterns of similarity in terms of **content**, **structure**, and **style** whose analysis can advance our understanding of the characteristics of employer responses (Swales 1990).

(1) As for communicative purposes, employer responses to negative reviews in general serve to maintain a favorable impression with regard to an intended audience. In other words, they seek to prevent the employer’s regard from taking any damage based on negative reviews (e.g., Carpentier/van Hoya 2021).

(2) As for the intended audience, it can be thought of the readership of employer review sites. This comprises various constituents, such as job seekers, current applicants, or (former) employees. However, employer review sites primarily address job seekers who want to acquire information about internal

aspects of organizations, such as culture and climate (McFarland/Ployhart 2015; Evertz/Kollitz/Süß 2021).

Accordingly, with regard to (2), it is job seekers who represent the intended audience of employer responses. With regard to (1), it is job seekers' mental representations of an employer's attributes (i.e., their employer image; Lievens/Slaughter 2016) that responses strive to preserve.

(3) As for employer responses' patterns of similarity in terms of content, structure, and style, empirical evidence is missing. To address this issue regarding **content** and **structure**, research that has analyzed business responses as genre suggests to scrutinize the move types most common in the genre together with their typical pattern of occurrence (Zhang/Vásquez 2014; Napolitano 2018). Regarding employer responses, this would allow to identify some common rhetorical strategies used by employers to manage their employer image online. Following these suggestions, the present research seeks to provide evidence regarding the most common moves in employer responses and the sequence in which these moves typically occur. Hence, the following two research questions (RQ) are formulated:

RQ 1: What are the most common move types that appear in employer responses to negative online employer reviews?

RQ 2: Is there a typical structure of moves within employer responses to negative online employer reviews?

With regard to patterns of similarity in terms of **style**, I scrutinize responses' intertextuality and tone-of-voice, as these can be expected to be central aspects of an employer's response (Zhang/Vásquez 2014). Consideration of intertextuality is based on the idea that employer responses represent a reactive genre. Thus, it is to be expected that employers' responses to some extent will possess intertextual connections to the preceding reviews. This, in turn, may affect the effectiveness of an employer's response. For example, by making a reference to a specific aspect of a review, a response may indicate that the employer has dealt with the review. Such a response, therefore, could help to signal the employer attribute of employee care (Gardner/Erhardt/Martin-Rios 2011), which compared to an unspecified response may enhance employer image perceptions held by job seekers.

However, empirical evidence on the extent to which intertextual connections actually exist within employers' responses is missing. Moreover, previous findings on the intertextuality of related genres can hardly be transferred, as the degree of intertextuality can differ both between and within genres. For example, while the majority of the hotel responses examined by Zhang and Vásquez (2014) entailed some explicit reference to the original reviews, this seems to be less common for responses from restaurants (Napolitano 2018). Even within a genre (i.e., restaurant response), the degree of intertextuality may vary, for example, due to cultural differences of the respondents (Napolitano 2018). Accordingly, to reduce the paucity of research on the intertextuality of employer responses, the following research question is formulated:

RQ 3: To what extent do employer responses refer back to the preceding reviews?

Similarly, research has not explored what tone-of-voice (i.e., conversational human voice vs. corporate human voice) employers use when responding to negative reviews, although it may affect responses' effectiveness (Zhang/Vásquez 2014). In this regard, arguments can be found both for the use of a conversational human voice and a corporate voice. On the one hand, given that employer review sites represent a type of social media, employers might try to leverage the benefits that arise from conversational human voice (e.g., van Noort/Willemsen 2012; Javornik/Filieri/Gumann 2020). On the other hand, if employers regard employer review sites as a professional context, they might consider a corporate voice as more appropriate. This would be congruent to behavior of brands, which opt for a formal communication style in professional networks, such as LinkedIn (Johnen/Schnittka 2019). To provide some clarity regarding these competing lines of thought, the fourth and final research question seeks to explore what tone-of-voice employers use when responding to negative reviews:

RQ 4: Which tone-of-voice do employers use when responding to negative reviews?

7.3 Method

7.3.1 Data

In February 2019, a total of 74 employer responses together with their negative preceding reviews were collected. Data were gathered as a part of a validation step during another research project (i.e., Kollitz/Ruhle/Wilhelmy 2021) that aimed at a quantitative test of employer response strategies derived from image repair theory (Benoit 1995, 2015) and was not concerned with responses' structure, intertextuality, or tone-of-voice. More specifically, for the 30 companies listed in the German DAX and the companies that in 2019 were listed in either the students' or young professionals' top 100 employer ranking of the Trendence Institute, data were retrieved from the employer review site Kununu, which has served as a data source in prior research on employer reviews (e.g., Könsgen et al. 2018).

For the resulting 144 companies under scrutiny, 74 (51.4 %) were found to have responded to negative employer reviews at least once on Kununu. For each of the 74 companies, the most recent employer response together with the preceding review served as the unit of analysis. However, one pair of responses and reviews was written in English instead of German. Therefore, it was excluded from the data set (i.e., corpus), as the upcoming analysis would require all responses and reviews to be composed in the same language. Accordingly, **the final data set** comprised 73 responses (and reviews), which is comparable to data that served in previous research extending the notion of rhetorical moves to business responses (Zhang/Vásquez 2014; Napolitano 2018).

As for **employer responses**, the average word count was 119 (SD = 98.8). Response length varied considerably with the shortest response comprising 26 words and the longest response consisting of 601 words. All the text excerpts presented in the subsequent sections are translated from German to English by the author. Due to ethical considerations, both company and respondent names have been anonymized (Zhang/Vásquez 2014). Companies whose responses are under investigation were heterogeneous in terms of industry (e.g., retail, construction, automotive, or media) and size, with an average employee count close to a hundred and fifteen thousand ($M = 114219$).

and ranging from 2366 to 667748 employees ($SD = 135171$). On average, employers' profiles on Kununu showed 579150 views ($SD = 613235$) and 69 employer responses ($SD = 90.3$). A comparison of profile views and responses in 2019 for each employer with the corresponding data from 2020 shows that both profile views and responses per employer have increased on average by 27.1 % and 501.1 %, respectively.

As for the **preceding employer reviews**, the average word count was 218.8 ($SD = 212.7$). There was substantial variation in review length with the shortest review comprising 20 words and the longest review consisting of 1404 words. In terms of content, employer reviews included information on a wide array of employer attributes, with supervisor behavior and organizational climate being mentioned most frequently. This was indicated by the frequencies in which employer attribute categories occurred in the corpus of negative reviews (see Table 7.1).

Employer Attribute Category	Absolute Frequency
1 Supervisor Behavior	52
2 Organizational Climate	46
3 Communication	45
4 Career/Training opportunities	45
5 Cohesion of Colleagues	45
6 Work-Life-Balance	44
7 Interesting Tasks	44
8 Working conditions	44
9 Salary/Social benefits	43
10 Image	39
11 Gender Equality	35
12 Treatment of older colleagues	32
13 Environmental/social awareness	29

Tab. 7.1: Employer attribute categories mentioned in negative reviews ($n = 73$)

As for employer attribute categories on Kununu, it is worth noting that they have not to be addressed entirely by reviewers, so their use served as a proxy for review content. However, categories chosen and actual review content do not necessarily match. Therefore, for an excerpt of about 15 % of the corpus, it was coded whether the respective categories chosen fit the feedback provided under these categories. Then, an average matching-index for the excerpt was calculated potentially ranging from 0 (i.e., total mismatch) to 1 (i.e., perfect match). The numerical value of this index was .85, which suggests that

reviewers in general were able to adequately chose categories according to their feedback.

7.3.2 Procedure

To answer the study's research questions, I applied move analysis (Swales 1981, 1990) to the corpus of employer responses to negative reviews as described above. More specifically, I followed in large parts the corpus-based approach for conducting move analysis as outlined by Upton and Cohen (2009), as it provides clear guidelines for how to conduct move analysis using large text corpora.

Similar to previous research conducting **move analysis** (e.g., Maswana/Kanamaru/Tajino 2015), I drew on an existing move structure (see 7.2.3) that served as an analytical framework. This allowed for straightforward pilot-coding and full-text segmentation, respectively (Upton/Cohen 2009). For segmentation (i.e., coding) purposes, I used the MAXQDA software (Version 12) that has been fruitfully applied in previous research conducting move analysis (e.g., Kwan 2006). For descriptive statistical analyses regarding move types and structure, I employed Microsoft Excel spreadsheets (e.g., Groom/Grieve 2019) and IBM SPSS 26. It is to be mentioned that the linguistic analysis of moves as an analytical step was left out given the primary purpose of the present research, which was to provide initial evidence regarding the moves typical for employer response and their overall organizational pattern. This is not unusual, however, as research often omits particular steps of move analysis (Kanoksilapatham 2007).

As for research questions three and four in particular, I followed but also extended the procedure suggested by Zhang and Vásquez (2014). That is, regarding **intertextuality** I analyzed to what extent employer responses in the corpus referred back to specific details found in their preceding reviews. For example, by including moves such as Refer to employer reviews and Proof of action. Going beyond Zhang and Vásquez's (2014) procedure, I complement these findings with additional data from Kununu to provide evidence on whether employers use templates or "copy+paste" approaches to create responses that are unrelated to their preceding reviews. More precisely, for those employers providing responses unrelated to the preceding reviews, I

analyzed whether they use identical or nearly identical responses when responding to other reviews.

Regarding **tone-of-voice**, I analyzed several linguistic features that may represent an indication of tone-of-voice. First, I analyzed whether addressing the reviewer by means of Opening pleasantries was done in a formal as compared to an informal way, again extending the procedure used by Zhang and Vásquez (2014). Second, I scrutinized the occurrence of first-person singular and plural pronouns (i.e., I, me, and my vs. we, us, and our) using the concordancing software AntConc (Version 3.5.8). Specifically, this allowed forming an impression of whether authors of responses refer to themselves as individuals or a corporate collective (Zhang/Vásquez 2014). Third, drawing on the specifics of the German language, I analyzed the form of address, that is, to what extent the more formal “Sie” vs. the informal “Du” was used within responses. This builds on the notion that German distinguishes between familiar (i.e., “Du”) and polite (i.e., “Sie”) pronouns, whose differential use can signal interpersonal distance, power differential, or a lack of solidarity between speakers (Semin 2007). Fourth, I analyzed Closing pleasantries with regard to whether the respondent could be identified as an individual or an entity (i.e., a specific department of the organization; Zhang/Vásquez 2014).

7.4 Results

7.4.1 Moves in employer responses to negative online reviews

Following the procedure outlined above, I identified 11 moves that are most common in employer responses to negative online reviews (see Table 7.2). In addition, the analysis provided insight into moves’ typical pattern of occurrence within employer responses (see 7.4.2).

As for moves being used within employer responses, it can be stated that not all moves suggested by Zhang and Vásquez (2014) could be identified within the data. More precisely, employers did not use the move “Invitation for a second visit”, which is likely to result from the specific context of employment. In addition, move analysis revealed that employers use two additional yet unexplored moves, namely “Attribution to the reviewer” and “Stressing positive attributes”. These moves do not only vary significantly in terms of their prevalence within responses, with Attribution to the reviewer being more

frequently used than Stressing positive attributes, but also in their respective functions. By **Attribution to the reviewer**, employers suggest that the reason for the preceding negative review may lie in the person of the reviewer himself. In contrast, when using **Stressing positive attributes**, employers highlight aspects that they consider strengths with regard to how they fulfill their employer role. Interestingly, realizations of both these moves were found to sometimes include references to the preceding reviews. Therefore, they can be considered as being of relevance regarding employer responses' intertextuality (see 7.4.3).

Moves in employer responses	Connection to the preceding review	Indicative for tone-of-voice	Frequency of move in the corpus	Number of responses including this move
1 Closing pleasantries		X	73	73
2 Express gratitude			72	61
3 Opening pleasantries		X	54	54
4 Solicit response			48	46
5 Refer to employer reviews	X		57	44
6 Apologize for sources of trouble			47	43
7 Acknowledge complaints/feedback			47	43
8 Attribution to the reviewer	X		38	24
9 Avoidance of reoccurring problems			15	14
10 Stressing positive attributes	X		14	14
11 Proof of action	X		6	6

Tab. 7.2: Overview of moves identified in employer responses (n = 73)

Beyond the question, what move types most commonly appear in employer responses, the analysis revealed that there are both quantitative and qualitative differences when comparing moves within hotel and employer responses (Zhang/Vásquez 2014). As for **quantitative differences**, moves in employer responses differed significantly from those in hotel responses in terms of frequencies. For example, while Apologize for sources of trouble being much

more common in hotel responses, the opposite seems to hold for Solicit response. As for **qualitative differences**, it was found that there are specific nuances that distinguish moves in employer responses from their respective counterparts in hotel responses. In other words, moves in employer responses vary to some extent in the ways in which they are carried out. For example, while by Express gratitude hotels show gratitude for being chosen as a service provider, employers use this move to thank employees for engaging in the employer-employee relationship.

Together, these findings provide an initial indication that employer responses, while related to hotel responses, represent a genre on their own. To provide a more nuanced understanding of this genre and its typical moves respectively, the 11 moves displayed in Table 7.2 are described in detail in the subsequent paragraphs of this section.

Move 1: Closing pleasantries

By means of Closing pleasantries, the employer signals a response's ending. This move was found in all 73 responses of the present corpus.

“Nevertheless, we wish you all the best for your future career!” (E11)

“Yours sincerely, [respondent's first and last name] head of HR management” (E65)

“Your [company name] career team” (E12)

As illustrated by the examples, Closing pleasantries can include a reference to a specific respondent in terms of actual names, professional titles, and/or corporate affiliations displayed in the signature line. Also, they can include a general reference, that is, the denomination of the team or division within the company that is responsible for the response. As these aspects can provide an indication for the tone-of-voice used by employers, they will be discussed in more detail in a subsequent section (see 7.4.4).

Move 2: Express gratitude

The move Express gratitude serves to thank reviewers and was found in 61 of the total 73 responses. As Table 7.2 illustrates, this move can appear multiple times within the same response. Also, it can be categorized into three distinct subtypes:

(1) Employers thank employees for engaging in an employer-employee relationship or having performed collaborative tasks.

“Thank you for the path we have taken together.” (E28)

“We thank you for the collaboration.” (E38)

(2) Employers show gratitude for the employee providing feedback.

“Thank you for your detailed feedback.” (E1)

This subtype of gratitude, however, can also be expressed in a more nuanced way. That is, employers sometimes differentiate between the actual feedback (i.e., the content of the review) and the rating on Kununu. Moreover, some employers even explicitly express gratitude for the use of an employer review site as an outlet of the employee’s feedback.

“Thank you for your feedback and rating on Kununu.” (E10)

“Thank you for sharing your assessment of [company name] on this platform.” (E16)

(3) Also, employers show their general gratitude by thanking reviewers in a more general manner. This subtype often occurs near the end of the response.

“Thank you very much.” (E63)

Move 3: Opening pleasantries

Opening pleasantries, which were found in 54 of the total 73 responses, function as an opening of the main content of a response. By this move, the employer addresses the reviewer instead of providing any information with respect to the review. Within responses, it was found that the form of address can vary in terms of formality, which is indicative for tone-of-voice and, therefore, will be discussed in more depth in a subsequent section (see 7.4.4). When addressing the reviewer, employers generally can be found to either opt for

(1) a formal way of speech, which one would expect in business letters

“Dear Sir or Madam” (E35)

or (2) an informal way of speech, which would be expected if respondent and addressee are somehow familiar

“Hello dear colleague” (E70).

Move 4: Solicit response

In 46 responses, the employer by the move Solicit response invites reviewers to further engage in a dialog. This can take several forms, such as providing reviewers with an e-mail address or other contact information that allows for further communication. In some cases, employers even invite reviewers to a personal conversation, since they are employed by the responding company when writing the review.

“Please send us detailed feedback on this to myreview.de@[company name].com or directly to your HR partner.” (E23)

“We would like to offer you to find a solution together, and encourage a personal, confidential discussion with your HR partner.” (E21)

Move 5: Refer to employer review

Among the 73 employer responses, 44 included the move Refer to employer review, which in several responses even occurred multiple times (see Table 7.2). That is, these 44 responses included one or more specific references that go beyond the information that can simply be derived from the review’s headline or the reviewer’s status on the employer review site. These references thus can be considered highly indicative for responses’ intertextuality (see 7.4.3).

As became apparent from the data, references vary in the extent to which they refer to the preceding review in detail, such as by providing detailed explanations regarding the factors that drove the reviewer’s inconvenience. In other words, although a response addresses a specific aspect of a review, its reference can still be either (1) superficial or (2) detailed.

(1) To refer to a specific aspect of the preceding review without providing any detailed information, some employers simply restate issues that the reviewer has addressed.

“That you have the impression that the development of our employees is “not very transparent”, should not be the case.” (E64)

(2) In contrast, some employers provide detailed explanations with regard to specific aspects the reviewer has criticized. For example, when being criticized for not providing equal pay, an employer responded:

“You criticize equal treatment in terms of pay: pay is based on collective agreements which do not differentiate between men and women, but take into account tasks, job and professional experience.” (E71)

Move 6: Apologize for sources of trouble

By this move, which appeared in 43 responses, the employer in some way seeks to apologize for the negative experiences that led to the negative review. However, this move can take various forms, as with regard to an apology conceptual clarity is missing. For example, Benoit (2015) stated that there is no universally agreed conception about the exact components an apology must include. That is, an apology can comprise (1) an explicit acceptance of blame, (2) an expression of regret or remorse, and/or (3) a request for forgiveness. While none of the responses under scrutiny included (3) a request for forgiveness, there are instances in which the employer (1) accepts blame

“We are sorry that the working atmosphere in your store was anything but perfect.” (E28)

or (2) expresses regret regarding the problems the reviewer experienced during his or her period of employment:

“We very much regret that you have obviously had negative experiences during your employment at [company name].” (E7).

Move 7: Acknowledge complaints/feedback

Among the 73 responses, 43 included the move Acknowledge complaints/feedback. This move acknowledges the review and serves to signal that the employer takes the feedback seriously.

“We take your criticism seriously.” (E22)

“However, we appreciate your comments and take your feedback very seriously.” (E31)

When using this move, employers in many cases even emphasize that they value feedback because it is a resource for further improvements.

“We also take negative experiences very seriously – after all, they show us in which areas we can still improve as an employer.” (E41)

“The honest feedback of our employees is very important to us because this is the only way we can improve.” (E34)

In a few cases, Acknowledge complaints/feedback is intertwined with the move Stressing positive attributes (see move 10). That is, while showing appreciation for the provided feedback, employers also stress their positive attributes.

“As a company that values dialogue between employees and managers, we are always grateful for honest feedback, which we gladly accept as an impulse for possible changes.” (E37)

“As the satisfaction of our employees is very important to us and feedback helps us to constantly improve, we take your evaluation very seriously.” (E23)

Move 8: Attribution to the Reviewer

By means of the newly explored move “Attribution to the reviewer”, the employer tries to shift the problem to the reviewer. In other words, the employer suggests in some way that the reason for the negative review lies in the person of the reviewer, that is, in his or her knowledge, motives or prior behavior. This move appeared at least once in 24 of the total 73 responses. However, in several responses it could be identified multiple times (see Table 7.2). When looking closely at the ways how employers realize this move, three subtypes can be identified, which will be termed according to the kind of reviewer-related suspicion they might evoke (see parenthesis in the following).

(1) The employer suggests that the reviewer’s issue-relevant knowledge is questionable (“**Imply lack of knowledge**”). For example, the employer can claim that the reviewer might not have the necessary information to justify the criticism expressed in the review.

“However, we would also like to make it clear that we do not comment on statements that are based on speculation and hearsay.” (E18)

(2) The employer raises concerns regarding the reviewer’s motives for writing the negative review (“**Imply bad motives**”). For example, the employer can

claim that the content of the review is made up by the reviewer. This may raise questions about why the reviewer provided the negative information (e.g., seeking vengeance; van Hove/Lievens 2009).

“All in all, I remain highly skeptical that the situation you have described has actually taken place.” (E24)

(3) The employer questions the reviewer’s previous behavior (“**Imply wrong behavior**”). For example, the employer can pose the question of whether the reviewer has already sought a discussion with the responsible persons within the organization to solve the problems mentioned.

“During your time at [company name], have you already discussed these issues with your supervisors or your HR department?” (E1)

It is worth mentioning that when using Attribution to the reviewer, employers sometimes include references to the preceding review’s content. Thus, this move can represent an intertextual connection to the preceding review (see 7.4.3). For example, in the following realization of *Imply lack of knowledge*, the employer challenges the reviewer’s understanding of project work. This could make the reviewer’s knowledge or ability to judge seem questionable.

“In addition, you complain that your contract was not renewed after the end of the project period and criticize this circumstance in flowery rhetoric. Forgive me for asking directly, but isn’t it a characteristic of project work that it ends at some point?” (E24)

Move 9: Avoidance of reoccurring problems

By means of this move, which was found in 14 responses, employers strive to ensure the reviewer that the causes of his or her inconvenience will be eliminated in the future. This move is somehow similar to the move *Proof of action*. However, its distinguishing feature is that the corrective actions described will be carried out in the (near) future, and have not already taken place. Further, it can be stated that employers do not provide any specific information regarding the measures they will take. Rather, they provide general accounts which suggest that the situation can be expected to improve.

“We will definitely use your criticism to further optimize our communication processes.” (E64)

“However, we will closely examine the situation internally and take the opportunity to further optimize the working environment at the [company name] headquarters.” (E29)

Move 10: Stressing positive attributes

This newly explored move was found within 14 responses and serves employers to emphasize positive attributes. Mostly, this move equals a statement that highlights that the employer cares about its employees or their satisfaction, respectively.

“The satisfaction of our employees is very important to us.” (E65)

However, some employers provide more nuanced information about the attributes they consider to be strengths. Similar to simply emphasizing the attribute of employee care, this can be done without any reference to the preceding review.

“[Company name] is a fair, reliable and modern employer. We offer our employees first-class qualifications, a wide range of development prospects, very good social standards, and good opportunities for participation.” (E2)

Also, Stressing positive attributes can serve to restate positive attributes the reviewer has already mentioned. In so doing, the employer makes some reference to the review, which is why this realization of Stressing positive attributes can be considered an intertextual link (see 7.4.3). However, it requires what literature has called a two-sided negative review, that is, a review that includes a certain amount of positive information the employer can pick up (Pentina/Bailey/Zhang 2018).

“First of all, we are pleased about your positive evaluations of our training opportunities and the good cohesion among colleagues. We also see the diverse development opportunities and the collegial environment at [company name] as one of our strengths.” (E41)

Move 11: Proof of action

Of the 73 responses under scrutiny, six included the move Proof of action. By using this move, the employer reassures reviewers that measures have been taken to counteract the negative aspects mentioned in the review. However,

there is considerable variation regarding how detailed the respective actions are described. That is, some employers only provide general accounts of what has been done. For example, when being criticized for offering poor training opportunities, one employer responded:

„We have taken your feedback on the subject of training opportunities as an opportunity to further sensitize cybersecurity executives to this topic.” (E58).

In contrast, some employers provide detailed descriptions of the actions that have been taken. For example, when being accused of offering low salaries and not having established career paths, a response was:

“Since this year we have introduced positive changes both in terms of remuneration (in addition to the yet extensive range of benefits and free fruit and drinks) and development opportunities: More specifically, we are currently establishing development paths in the form of expert levels for all areas (QA, Edit, Styling, Photography, Art Direction). Advancement regarding skills and remuneration is therefore accessible for all employees of [company name].” (E70).

As illustrated by the above excerpts, when using Proof of action employers can make some reference to the preceding review’s content. Hence, this move provides a further way to link the response intertextually to the review (see 7.4.3).

7.4.2 Move structure in employer responses to negative online reviews

Analysis of the pattern in which moves occur revealed that a **typical sequence of moves** in employer responses can be delineated by three distinct segments (see Table 7.3). The first segment (i.e., the response’s beginning) is rather fixed. That is, responses typically start with Opening Pleasantries (73.9 %). Then, this move in most cases is followed by Express Gratitude (i.e., 58.9 % of all cases start with Opening Pleasantries being followed by Express Gratitude).

In the second segment or main body, the structure becomes looser. Employers provide any combination of Refer to employer reviews, Apologize for sources of trouble, Acknowledge complaints/feedback, Attribution to the reviewer,

Avoidance of reoccurring problems, Stressing positive attributes, and Proof of action.

Moves in employer responses	Example	Segments
(1) Opening pleasantries	“Hello dear colleague” (E70)	I Beginning
(2) Express gratitude	“Thank you very much” (E63)	
(3) Some combination of the following:		II Main body
Refer to employer reviews	“In particular, the issue of “workplace bullying” is not to be tolerated in our view.” (E37)	
Apologize for sources of trouble	“We are sorry that you had to go through this experience.” (E67)	
Acknowledge complaints/feedback	“We take your criticism seriously.” (E22)	
Attribution to the reviewer	“[...] I remain highly skeptical that the situation you have described has actually taken place.” (E24)	
Avoidance of reoccurring problems	“We will definitely use your criticism to further optimize our communication processes.” (E64)	
Stressing positive attributes	“The satisfaction of our employees is very important to us.” (E65)	
Proof of action	„We have taken your feedback [...] as an opportunity to further sensitize cybersecurity executives to this topic.” (E58)	
(4) Solicit response	“Please contact me: respondent-name@de.companyname.com” (E47)	III Ending
(5) Closing pleasantries	“Yours sincerely, [respondent’s first and last name] head of HR management” (E65)	

Tab. 7.3: Typical sequence of moves identified in employer responses (n = 73)

The third and final segment (i.e., the response’s ending) comprises Solicit response and Closing pleasantries. More specifically, Solicit response being followed by Closing pleasantries in 43.8 % of the cases represents the ending of a response. Irrespective of preceding moves, Closing pleasantries is in 100 % of the responses the final move.

7.4.3 Intertextuality in employer responses to negative online reviews

As for the assessment of intertextuality, Refer to customer review and Proof of action are to be considered (Zhang/Vásquez 2014). Findings on these

moves indicate that employer responses vary significantly in both the extent to which they refer back to the preceding review and provide detailed explanations. Of the 57 times employers used **Refer to employer review**, 29 references can be considered detailed as they contain detailed explanations. In contrast, 28 can be considered superficial, as they do not contain detailed explanations. Similarly, of the six times **Proof of action** was used, two times employers provided detailed descriptions of the actions taken, whereas four times only general accounts were given.

In addition, findings related to the newly explored moves Attribution to the reviewer and Stressing positive attributes suggest that these moves are indicative for intertextuality too. As for **Attribution to the reviewer**, it was found that respondents sometimes refer to the preceding review's content when questioning the reviewer's knowledge on particular issues. Thus, Attribution to the reviewer represents another way of referring to negative information that reviews include. In contrast, findings regarding **Stressing positive attributes** revealed that employer responses not only refer back intertextually to problems mentioned in the review, but also can make references to positive information the reviewer has mentioned. However, whether this move can be carried out by an employer is determined by the preceding review's sidedness, as it requires an at least slightly two-sided negative review (Pentina/Bailey/Zhang 2018).

Analysis of intertextual connections further revealed that 19 of the 73 employer responses under scrutiny (26 %) did not include any of the intertextual relevant moves Refer to employer review, Proof of action, Attribution to the reviewer, and Stressing positive attributes. Accordingly, they did not entail any reference to the preceding review's content, which means they can be considered as **general responses**. To provide evidence on whether these general responses reflect a "copy+paste" approach, for each response I analyzed the four responses surrounding the response on Kununu. More precisely, I collected two responses before (or above) the focal response, and two after (or beneath) the focal response, and analyzed whether these responses were identical or nearly identical. That is, whether the respondent uses the same syntactic and lexical patterns.

In doing so, it was found that the majority of these responses seemed to be unrelated with regard to their syntactic and lexical patterns. However, in a few cases, employers were found to use **nearly identical responses**, such as:

“Thank you very much for your honest feedback. We appreciate it very much and make every effort to continuously increase the satisfaction of our employees.” (E46a)

“Thank you very much for your evaluation. We appreciate it very much and are continuously working on improving our employee satisfaction.” (E46b).

In addition, in some instances employers seemed to use a **template**, where they fill in the respective aspects of the review they want to respond to (see underlined sentences):

“We are very sorry that you were not satisfied with the internship/work-ing student activity/application process. It is very important to us that our employees feel comfortable working with us/the application process is a positive experience and we take your feedback very seriously [...]. We will pass on your feedback to the specialist department in an anonymous form. Only in this way do we have the opportunity to detect and react to situations/processes that need improvement.” (E26a/b/c).

Moreover, in one case, the employer used the exact same general response in all five responses under scrutiny:

“Hello,

Thank you very much for your evaluation and your honest feedback on [company name] as an employer.

Best regards HR Marketing,

[company name] Germany

HR Marketing & Recruitment” (E61).

7.4.4 Tone-of-voice in employer responses to negative online reviews

With regard to tone-of-voice, I explored whether employers tend to use a conversational human voice (i.e., an engaging and natural style of communica-

tion; Kelleher 2009) as compared to a corporate voice (i.e., a formal and distant style of communication; Park/Cameron 2014; Hübner-Barcelos/Dantas/Sénécal 2018) when responding to negative reviews. This was done by analyzing (1) the way how the reviewer was addressed within Opening pleasantries (i.e., formal vs. informal), (2) the use of first-person pronouns (singular vs. plural), (3) the use of formal as compared to informal pronouns (“Sie” vs. “Du”), and (4) the type of respondent as identified in the move Closing pleasantries (individual vs. organizational entity). Considering the results as described in (1) – (4), it becomes apparent that employers seem to be inconsistent regarding the tone-of-voice they use. That is, while Opening/Closing pleasantries signal conversational human voice, when providing the main content employers opt for use of formal pronouns and first-person plural pronouns, which, in turn, represents an indication for corporate voice. In other words, employers in general seem to put a businesslike message into an amicably written frame.

(1) As for the move **Opening pleasantries**, which in total occurred in 54 responses, it was found that respondents in 12 responses (22.2 %) opt for a formal way of addressing the reviewer as one would expect in business communication where respondents do not personally know each other (e.g., “Dear reviewer/employee” E29/E33). In contrast, in 42 responses (78.8 %), Opening pleasantries were informal (e.g., “Hello!”, “Dear colleague”; E18, E20), as one would expect when speakers are somewhat familiar. On the lexical level, this was for example indicated by respondents addressing the reviewer as “colleague”, which was the case in 61.9 % of the informal Opening pleasantries. By colleague, individuals refer to “either a person who works in the same organization and with whom one is familiar, or a person who works in the same organization and also works in the same field” (Reuter/Löschke/Betzler 2020, p. 1009). Accordingly, it seems that by means of Opening pleasantries employers rather try to convey a conversational human voice than a corporate voice.

(2) As for **first-person pronouns**, a word frequency list was developed which is displayed in Table 7.4. It was found that first-person singular pronouns (I, me, and my; n = 64) were much less used than first-person plural pronouns (we, us, and our; n = 439). This suggests that respondents tend to refer to

themselves as a corporate collective, which in turn may signal distance and thus can be seen as an indication for corporate voice (Zhang/Vásquez 2014).

First-Person Singular Pronouns		First-Person Plural Pronouns	
I	36	We	243
Me	25	Us	154
My	3	Our	42
Sum	64	Sum	439

Tab. 7.4: Frequencies of pronouns within employer responses

(3) As for the use of **formal vs. informal pronouns**, it was found that respondents in most cases (68.9 %) addressed the reviewer by the formal “Sie”, and to a lesser extent used the informal “Du” (24.7 %). Moreover, in a few cases (6.4 %), the respondent did not directly address the reviewer at all. For example, the latter was the case when respondents simply provided facts:

“Comment on the item “Equal rights”:

Since May 2011, [name of female board member], has been a member of the Supervisory Board of [company name].

More information is available at <http://www.companyname.com/> [...]“ (E9).

Together with the findings regarding (2) the use of first-person singular as compared to first-person plural pronouns, employers’ tendency towards formal pronouns suggests that the main content of responses is characterized by a corporate tone-of-voice.

(4) As for the **type of respondent**, it was found that in 50 cases (68.5 %) the respondent identified himself or herself as a specific person (i.e., by providing a name and/or professional title), whereas in the 23 remaining cases (31.5 %) the respondent was an entity of the organization. For the 50 individual respondents, it was found that 48 provided their name, which represents 65.8 % of all responses of the corpus and provides an indication for a conversational human voice (Zhang/Vásquez 2014).

Furthermore, the analysis of Closing pleasantries granted initial insights regarding the question of who (i.e., which person or entity within an organiza-

tion) is responsible for responding to negative reviews. As for **individual respondents**, a large portion identified themselves as belonging to either the Human Resources (HR)-, HR Marketing-, or Employer Branding staff (see Table 7.5).

HR	n	HR-Marketing	n	Employer Branding	n	Other titles	n	Σ	%
Team member	3	Team member	2	Team member	3	Team member (e.g., Career)	10	18	36
Officer	1	Officer	4	Officer	0	Officer (i.e., Development)	1	6	12
Expert/Specialist	0	Expert/Specialist	4	Expert/Specialist	6	Expert/Specialist (e.g., Talent Management)	3	13	26
Manager/Director/Head of	5	Manager/Director/Head of	2	Manager/Director/Head of	3	Manager/Director/Head of	0	10	20
Unspecified company representatives							3	3	6
							Σ	50	100

Tab. 7.5: Overview of professional titles as indicated in the respondents' signature lines

However, there was significant variation in the extent to which professional titles in detail referred to a specific position within the organization (e.g., Social Media Manager Employer Branding (E22) vs. a member of the HR team (E29)). In addition, respondents seemed to be located at various management levels with 20 % of respondents having managerial responsibility. Interestingly, it was found that the actual respondent and the owner of the company's account at the employer review site were not always the same person (e.g., E17, E50). This suggests that within organizations, respondents might share the responsibility for responding to negative reviews.

When the respondent was an **entity**, in most cases the response was sent by the HR team, as can be seen in Figure 7.1. Interestingly, in one case the response came from a general Social Media Team, which might not be exclusively dedicated to employer image management concerns. In addition, one employer was found to have a so-called "Kununu Team". However, the data

does not show whether this is simply a term for all those employees who react sporadically to reviews, or whether it refers to a permanent team whose main task is to care for the employer's appearance on Kununu.

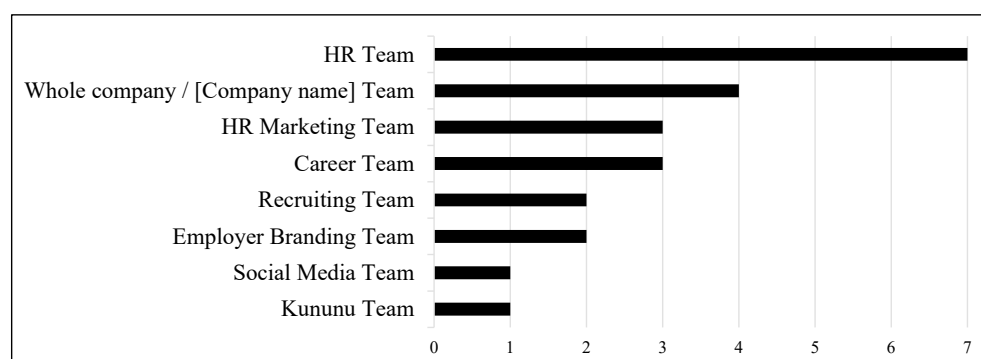


Fig. 7.1: Organizational entities responding to negative employer reviews

7.5 Discussion

The aim of the present study was to explore the characteristics of employer responses to negative employer reviews. To achieve this aim, I conceptualized employer responses as genre and analyzed their generic structure, intertextuality, and tone-of-voice. Doing so was inspired by complaint management research that fruitfully extended the analytical framework of genre/move analysis (Swales 1980, 1991) to the study of online business responses (i.e., Zhang/Vásquez 2014). Largely using this research as a template, four research questions were formulated. These aimed at broadening our understanding of the genre of employer responses, which had not been analyzed yet. Based on the provided results, the present study helps to answer these research questions and, moreover, highlights avenues for future research on employer responses and their effects, respectively (see 7.6).

As for move types to appear most common in employer responses (**RQ 1**), findings revealed that there are 11 moves that can be distinguished. To a large extent, these mirror those identified within hotel responses (Zhang/Vásquez 2014). However, Zhang and Vásquez's (2014) taxonomy of moves had to be extended in significant ways, as employers were found to make use of two additional moves, namely Attribution to the reviewer and Stressing positive attributes. The communicative functions of these rhetorical units have been described extensively (see 7.4.1). However, how they may contribute to the

overall purpose of the genre of employer responses (i.e., defending the employer image) has yet not been discussed, although the concept of move would suggest this (Swales 2004). Hence, in the following, I will theorize how each of the newly explored moves might help to protect an employer's image from taking damage based on negative reviews.

The description of **Attribution to the reviewer** revealed that it serves to shift the problem away from the employer by implying that the reason for the negative review lies in the person of the reviewer. As being already indicated by the designation of this move, the rationale for doing so can be derived from attribution theory, which identifies the study of perceived causation (Kelley/Michela 1980). According to attribution theory, when job seekers read a negative review, they assess whether the employer described or whether the reviewer describing is to be held responsible for the negative information. This in turn may affect their reactions to the review (Carpentier/van Hove 2021). More specifically, if job seekers attribute the negative information to reviewer-related dispositions, the review should be perceived as less reflecting reality thus being less persuasive. Accordingly, Attribution to the reviewer might contribute to the protection of the employer image by stimulating job seekers' reviewer-related attributions that, in turn, reduce the persuasiveness of a negative review. However, depending on what subtype of this move is used, there might be different attributional mechanisms at play that cause the reduction of review persuasiveness. For example, different subtypes might foster different kinds of inferred communication biases that can shape review persuasiveness (Eagly/Wood/Chaiken 1978). In this regard, *Implied lack of knowledge* might stimulate job seekers' inferences that the communicator's knowledge is nonveridical (i.e., knowledge bias). In contrast, *Implied bad motives* may create the belief that the communicator's willingness to provide correct information is compromised (i.e., reporting bias; Eagly/Wood/Chaiken 1978).

As became apparent by the description of **Stressing positive attributes**, this move serves employers to emphasize their strengths. How this move preserves the employer image might be explained by image repair theory, which postulates various message-based response strategies to protect an organiza-

tion's image (Benoit 1995, 2015). More specifically, Stressing positive attributes corresponds fairly to what image repair theory has termed "bolstering" (Benoit 1995, p. 77). When using bolstering as a response strategy, an organization accused of wrongdoing emphasizes its positive attributes or favorable actions that have been performed in the past to protect its threatened image. This builds on the notion that increasing positive feelings towards the organization might partly offset the negative feelings about the wrongdoing. This in turn may lead to a relative improvement in the organization's image (Benoit 1995, 2015). Hence, Stressing positive attributes could help employers to protect their image by counterbalancing the negative information provided in a negative review.

As for the typical structure of moves within employer responses (**RQ 2**), it was found that there is a common order in which moves appear, which can be subdivided into three distinct segments (i.e., beginning, main body, and ending). In particular, employer responses in most cases were found to begin with Opening pleasantries and, in all cases, to end with Closing pleasantries. Hence, they reflect the conventional structure of the traditional business letter, which is characterized by a salutation at the beginning, followed by the main body and, at the end, a detailed signature that entails the sender's name and designation (e.g., Bhatia 2008). These findings largely parallel with those on the structure of hotel responses and, therefore, corroborate the idea that conventions within new genres of computer-mediated communication may result from already existing genres (Zhang/Vásquez 2014).

Interestingly, when further comparing the structure of employer responses with the structure of hotel responses, it can be found that Apologize for sources of trouble as a move is less fixed in position (Zhang/Vásquez 2014). While in hotels responses Apologize for sources of trouble generally can be considered an element of the response's more rigid beginning, in employer responses it is located in the main body of the response, which is rather fluid. In addition, while being the second most common move in hotel responses (Zhang/Vásquez 2014), Apologize for sources of trouble was midrange in terms of frequencies in employer response. Taken together, this suggests that an apology is a less integral component of the genre of employer responses. This might be critical, as according to complaint management research

providing an apology can lead to favorable observer reactions (Weitzl/Hutzinger 2017).

As for the extent to what employer responses refer back to their preceding reviews (**RQ 3**), it was found that in most cases responses possess one or more intertextual connections to the reviews' content. In other words, employer responses are largely shaped by the reviews that precede them. Accordingly, it can be stated that employer responses represent a genre that is characterized by a high degree of intertextuality. In this regard, a central finding is that intertextual connections within employer responses are heterogeneous. They were found to vary in terms of specificity (e.g., superficial vs. detailed explanations) and review content to which they refer (e.g., positively vs. negatively evaluated employer attributes). In addition, differences could be observed with regard to whether intertextual connections are realized in more accommodative (e.g., Proof of action) or more defensive move types (e.g., Attribution to the reviewer; van Noort/Willemsen 2012). Given these qualitative differences of intertextual connections found in the present study, intertextuality is not only to be considered an integral but also a multi-faceted aspect of employer responses.

As for the tone-of-voice employers use when responding to negative reviews (**RQ 4**), an inconsistent picture emerged. While employers by means of Opening- and Closing pleasantries were found to signal conversational human voice, the responses' main content was characterized by a more corporate tone-of-voice. This supports the view that organizations in reality not only can use a tone-of-voice that is either human or corporate, but can realize any "degree of humanness" (Hübner-Barcelos/Dantas/Sénécal 2018, p. 62). However, whether the – in these terms – moderate degree of humanness found in employer responses benefits responses' effectiveness remains questionable. For example, using a more conversational human voice could evoke perceptions of social presence (e.g., Park/Cameron 2014), a factor that in the context of social media plays a crucial role in shaping applicants' employer perceptions (Carpentier et al. 2017). Thus, findings obtained by the present study provide an initial indication that employers might not choose their tone-of-voice according to scientific criteria. Instead, findings suggest that employers

draw on existing, more formal genres not only in terms of structure (see RQ (2)), but also in terms of their communication style.

7.6 Avenues for future research

By analyzing employer responses as genre for the first time, the present study provided profound insights into the characteristics of this previously unexplored text type. These insights allow to outline avenues for future research that are meaningful to advance our understanding of employer responses. In particular, the present study's findings can help to identify those areas of further inquiry that have practical relevance for employers or the management of their image, respectively. This is based on the notion that the observed variability in some response characteristics may point at possible scope for design, the use of which requires an evidence-based foundation. Given that employer responses represent persuasive messages (Benoit 2015), avenues for future research in the following are organized along (1) message, (2) source, and (3) recipient characteristics, a systematization commonly used in research on message-based persuasion (e.g., Walker et al. 2008; van Hove et al. 2016; Evertz/Kollitz/Süß 2021).

(1) As for **message characteristics**, a finding of the present research was that there is considerable variation in length of employers' responses. This could indicate that employers are uncertain whether to opt for brief or lengthier responses. As complaint management research shows that this decision can affect observer's reactions to a response (Javornik/Filieri/Gumann 2020), more research on the effects of **employer response length** is required. In this regard, it would be interesting to see whether there is a response length that is optimal at all times, or whether a more contingency-based approach is helpful (e.g., adjusting response length to the length of the review).

Apart from the quantity of information, a response provides, there arise also questions about the quality of the information or the **response's content**, respectively. Considering responses as a sequence of moves suggests that future research could analyze whether there is an optimal composition of moves that allows preserving the employer image. From another angle, it would be also worth studying whether the integration of certain moves can weaken the overall persuasive strength of a response. For example, employers in the present

study were found to integrate both accommodative (e.g., Proof of Action) and defensive moves (e.g., Attribution to the reviewer) within the same response. It could be that such a combination of moves is detrimental for the effectiveness of a response, as it sends mixed signals to job seekers.

In addition, employers in the present study were found to repeat certain moves (e.g., Refer to employer review) and use some moves at various positions within responses (e.g., Express gratitude). This calls for research on the value added by **repetition and order of moves**, factors that prior research on the effects of employer responses has not scrutinized yet (Könsen et al. 2018; Carpentier/van Hoya 2021; Kollitz/Ruhle/Wilhelmy 2021).

In general, research should be conducted on how the move types identified in this study contribute to employer image defense. Future studies could delve into **subtypes of particular moves** and analyze their underlying mechanisms. For example, subsequent studies could analyze how it benefits the employer image when employers use different variants of Apologize for sources of trouble (Benoit 2015) or trigger different attributional mechanisms depending of what subtype of Attribution to the reviewer is used (Carpentier/van Hoya 2021). This would contribute to a more nuanced perspective on moves within employers' responses and their effects, respectively.

Complementing the suggestions for further studies that result from the compositional analysis of employers' responses, several avenues for future research can be derived from the findings on intertextuality and tone-of-voice. As for **intertextuality**, it was found that the genre of employer responses is characterized by a high degree of intertextuality and that intertextual connections vary along multiple dimensions (e.g., specificity and move type being used). However, as outlined earlier, research on employer responses has made no attempts to systematically analyze this message characteristic so far. Rather, it has treated intertextuality inconsistently. For example, while in Carpentier and van Hoya's (2021) study all employer responses included intertextual connections to their preceding reviews, the study by Kollitz and colleagues (2021) tested the effects of different kinds of general responses. This lack of research contrasts sharply with research on hotel responses, which has provided evidence for the crucial role of intertextuality in responses' effectiveness (e.g., Wei/Miao/Huang 2013). Therefore, future research should be

devoted to studying intertextuality in employer responses. An initial step could be to compare general employer responses with those possessing intertextual connections to their preceding reviews. Moreover, subsequent studies could shed light on whether the effects of intertextual connections differ depending on the ways in which they are realized.

Another topic concerned with intertextuality arises when acknowledging that job seekers are often exposed to a set of reviews (Könsen et al. 2018). In this regard, a finding of the present research was that some employers use templates or even the same general response to react to multiple reviews. It would be interesting, therefore, to learn more about how job seekers react when they become aware of employers using this **minimum effort approach** in dealing with negative reviews.

As for **tone-of-voice**, a question that almost naturally appears is whether it plays a role for employer responses' effectiveness. According to research in related domains, it should (van Noort/Willemsen 2012; Javornik/Filieri/Gumann 2020). However, based on the present study's findings, it would be also worth analyzing what drives employers' choice of tone-of-voice. As outlined earlier, the moderate degree of humanness identified in employer responses might indicate that their communicative style is inspired by existing, more formal genres of business communication. However, it could also be that employers opt for the tone-of-voice they do as they regard employer review sites as a hybrid context that is located somewhere between a professional and private social network. Future research could help to answer this question by interviewing organizational representatives responsible for responses to employer reviews.

Further, a greater focus on the **specific indicators of tone-of-voice** used in the present study could produce interesting findings that advance our understanding of this message characteristic. For example, based on the notion that employers can signal tone-of-voice by means of both the main content of a message and its frame (i.e., Opening/Closing pleasantries), interactions could be explored. In other words, research on tone-of-voice could scrutinize whether any main content can be fruitfully combined with any type of frame. In addition, future research could further investigate the linguistic features

indicative for tone-of-voice. As there are other languages that distinguish between familiar and polite forms of personal pronouns (e.g., French or Turkish; Semin 2007), research could analyze pronoun use in employer responses written in these languages. Relating these insights to those provided by the present study would enhance the generalizability of findings on tone-of-voice within employer responses.

(2) As for **source characteristics**, the findings of the present study revealed that there is no definite answer to the question who in practice responds to negative employer reviews. Although it was found that the respondent mostly was an individual, in a considerable number of cases an entity within the organization provided the response. Even within these categories of respondents substantial variation could be identified. Individual respondents held various positions (e.g., HR director vs. HR officer) and organizational entities varied in terms of function (e.g., HR Marketing Team vs. Kununu Team). This is the first indication that organizations locate responsibility for employer responses differently. Whether this variation in terms of respondents may or may not affect the impact of a response is a question that, according to research on hotel responses (e.g., Sparks/So/Bradley 2016), is worth asking. However, research on the effects on employer responses has not tapped this issue yet (Könsgen et al. 2018; Carpentier/van Hove 2021; Kollitz/Ruhle/Wilhelmy 2021). Hence, future studies could explore whether the type of respondent is a determinant of an employer response's impact. In this regard, interactions with message characteristics might even exist. For example, it could be that job seekers expect conversational human voice rather to come from individual respondents with low organizational position than from those with high organizational position or organizational entities.

(3) As for **recipient characteristics**, prior research drawing on the elaboration likelihood model of persuasion (Petty/Cacioppo 1986) has shown that job seekers' individual differences affect how they react to persuasive communication in a recruitment context (e.g., Walker et al. 2008; Evertz/Kollitz/Süß 2021). More specifically, job seekers' employer images were differently influenced by message characteristics (i.e., argument quality) and source characteristics (i.e., expertise or physical attractiveness) depending on their prior work and job search experience. According to the present

study, similar mechanisms might be at play when it comes to the processing of employer responses. For example, general responses could represent messages with low argument quality, whereas those entailing detailed explanations in relation to reviews might be of higher argument quality. Respondent's organizational position might serve as a proxy for source expertise and a respondent's picture, which some employer review sites allow to display, could signal physical attractiveness. It may be that the interplay of these factors is affected by job seekers' prior experience, which future research could explore. This would allow estimating to what extent the effectiveness of responses is shaped by factors outside the employer's control.

7.7 Limitations

When interpreting the findings of the present study, several limitations need to be acknowledged. First, identification (i.e., coding) of moves was conducted by as single coder (i.e., the author). Thus measures of reliability (e.g., interrater reliability) can not be calculated. However, to increase reliability, both the coding strategy as well as the results were discussed with other researchers familiar with research on employer review sites, and all analytical steps were described in detail. Due to the nature of the study, measures of reliability were balanced with the depth of engagement of one investigator (Levitt et al. 2017). While this increases reliability, results are rooted in the perspective of the author and future research should elaborate on the generalizability of the results.

Second, employer responses in the present corpus were retrieved from one employer review site (i.e., Kununu). It may be that characteristics of this website (e.g., its interface) shaped the way how responses were formulated, so bias in the results is possible. For example, in the time the study was conducted, Kununu stated to not support emoticons in employer responses. As these represent an integral aspect of an informal communication style (Gretry et al. 2017), this could have affected findings on tone-of-voice.

Third and related to the issue of single-source data is the fact that only employer responses in German were analyzed. As prior research has shown that studying the same genre in different cultural contexts can lead to different

results (Napolitano 2018), it may be that generalizability of findings is limited.

A fourth and final limitation to mention results from the sampling of organizations. Given that responses were collected for the 30 DAX-listed companies and top employers as ranked by the Trendence Insitute, large organizations are overrepresented. Since large organizations might handle responses differently than small ones, which are characterized by a smaller number of formal HR departments or professionals (Cardon/Stevens 2004), the results obtained could differ from those based on a more heterogeneous sample.

8 Beiträge und Schlussfolgerungen

8.1 Zusammenfassung der Beiträge zu Ursachen und Wirkungen der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation in der Rekrutierung

8.1.1 Beiträge zur Diskussion über Ursachen

Die Diskussion über die Ursachen arbeitsbezogener Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation fokussiert individuelle Ursachen sowohl auf Seiten des Informationssenders als auch auf Seiten des Informationsempfängers. Organisationale Ursachen erfahren im wissenschaftlichen Diskurs hingegen vergleichsweise geringe Beachtung, obwohl diese für Organisationen einen Ansatzpunkt darstellen, positive Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation zu fördern und negativer Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation präventiv entgegenzuwirken (vgl. 1.2). Vor diesem Hintergrund wurde in der vorliegenden Arbeit die **Analyse organisationaler Ursachen** fokussiert. Im Speziellen trägt die vorliegende Arbeit zu diesem noch kaum entwickelten Forschungsstrang bei, indem sie Erkenntnisse zu (1) organisationalen Eigenschaften und (2) der Beziehung zwischen organisationalen Eigenschaften und Handlungen generiert.

(1) Die Ergebnisse der Studie in Kapitel 7 geben Aufschluss darüber, welche arbeitsbezogenen Inhalte im Rahmen negativer Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation thematisiert werden. Dies ermöglicht Rückschlüsse darauf, welche organisationalen Eigenschaften, im engeren Sinne **Arbeitgebereigenschaften**, ursächlich für die Entstehung negativer Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation sind. Die in Kapitel 7 dargestellten Studienergebnisse verdeutlichen diesbezüglich, dass sowohl die Ausprägung greifbarer Arbeitgebereigenschaften (z. B. Gehalt) als auch die der in geringerem Maße greifbaren Arbeitgebereigenschaften (z. B. Arbeitsatmosphäre) ursächlich für die Entstehung negativer Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation sein kann. Zudem zeigt ein Vergleich beider Eigenschaftskategorien, dass in geringerem Maße greifbare Arbeitgebereigenschaften tendenziell häufiger die Ursache negativer Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation sind. Diesbezüglich ist insbesondere das Verhalten von Vorgesetzten hervorzuheben, das den Ergebnissen folgend die mit Abstand häufigste Ursache darstellt. Ausgehend von diesen Befunden trägt die Studie in Kapitel 7 in zweifacher Hinsicht zur Diskussion über die Ursachen arbeitsbe-

zogener Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation bei. Zum einen ergänzt sie bisherige Forschung zum Zusammenhang zwischen Arbeitgeberereignissen und positiver Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation (vgl. van Hove 2008). Zum anderen bereichert sie die Diskussion um die Frage, welche Mechanismen dazu führen, dass es sich beim Vorgesetztenverhalten um eine zentrale Ursache für die Entstehung negativer Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation handelt. Dabei handelt es sich um eine Frage, die in Ermangelung empirischer Evidenz auch nicht ohne Weiteres seitens der Führungsforschung zu beantworten ist (vgl. Dulebohn et al. 2012; Schyns/Schilling 2013; Mackey et al. 2021).

(2) Die Ergebnisse der Studie in Kapitel 4 zeigen auf, dass Familienunternehmen, die starke soziale Beziehungen sowohl innerhalb als auch außerhalb des Unternehmens aufweisen, zur informellen Rekrutierung tendieren. Diese umfasst die Förderung und Berücksichtigung arbeitsbezogener Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation. Die Ergebnisse untermauern damit zum einen die von Acikgoz (2019, S. 6) geäußerte Annahme, dass die Eigenschaften einer Organisation die Ausgestaltung der Rekrutierung beeinflussen. Zum anderen liefern sie Hinweise, dass das **Sozialkapital von Familienunternehmen**, bestehend aus positiven Netzwerkbeziehungen mit der Familie, Kunden und der Öffentlichkeit (vgl. Sorenson et al. 2009, S. 242), eine Ursache arbeitsbezogener Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation darstellt.

Darüber hinaus trägt die in Kapitel 4 dargestellte Studie zur Diskussion über Ursachen arbeitsbezogener Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation bei, indem sie neue Erkenntnisse zur Rolle der **Unternehmensgröße** generiert. Im Gegensatz zu bisherigen Studienergebnissen (vgl. z. B. Barber et al. 1999; Kotey/Slade 2005) liefern die Ergebnisse der Studie in Kapitel 4 keine Belege dafür, dass kleine Unternehmen allgemein zu einem informellen Rekrutierungsansatz tendieren. Stattdessen wird ersichtlich, dass kleine Unternehmen tendenziell einen in der Intensität reduzierten Ansatz in der Rekrutierung verfolgen. Eine mögliche Erklärung für diese inkonsistenten Befunde ist in der Berücksichtigung weiterer organisationaler Eigenschaften zu sehen. Während in bisherigen Studien der Erklärungsgehalt der Unternehmensgröße weitgehend losgelöst von weiteren organisationalen Eigenschaften analysiert wurde (vgl. z. B. Barber et al. 1999), wurden im Rahmen der Studie in Kapitel 4

zahlreiche organisationale Eigenschaften simultan berücksichtigt. Die Inkonsistenz der Befunde deutet somit darauf hin, dass eine isolierte Betrachtung organisationaler Eigenschaften im Allgemeinen und der Unternehmensgröße im Speziellen zu kurz greift, wenn es darum geht, deren Ursächlichkeit für die Entstehung arbeitsbezogener Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation zu analysieren.

8.1.2 Beiträge zur Diskussion über Wirkungen

Ausgehend vom fortgeschrittenen Forschungsstand zu den Wirkungen arbeitsbezogener Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation wurde in der Literatur dazu aufgerufen, die bestehende Forschung durch Erkenntnisse über die zugrunde liegenden Wirkmechanismen zu verfeinern (vgl. van Hoya 2014, S. 260-262). Diesem Ruf folgend leisten die empirischen Studien der Kapitel 4 bis 7 Beiträge zur Erforschung von (1) Nachrichteneigenschaften, (2) Moderatoren, (3) Mediatoren sowie (4) recruitment outcomes:

(1) Die Studien in Kapitel 5 und 6 fokussieren die Wirkungen elektronischer Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation in Form von Arbeitgeberbewertungen auf Arbeitgeberbewertungsportalen. Die Ergebnisse zeigen auf, dass Arbeitgeberbewertungen im Internet das Potenzial haben, die von Arbeitsplatzsuchenden wahrgenommene Arbeitgeberattraktivität zu beeinflussen. Die beiden Studien ergänzen damit bisherige Befunde, die darauf hindeuten, dass auch durch ein **Medium** (hier: Internet) vermittelte Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation einen Einfluss auf Arbeitsplatzsuchende ausübt (vgl. van Hoya/Lievens 2007a; van Hoya et al. 2016). Im Speziellen erweitern die Studien damit den noch jungen Forschungsstrang zu den Wirkungen von Arbeitgeberbewertungen (vgl. z. B. Könsgen et al. 2018) und werden zugleich der Forderung nach mehr Forschung zu den einzelnen Subtypen elektronischer Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation (z. B. E-Mail, soziale Netzwerke) gerecht (vgl. van Hoya 2014, S. 262; Lievens/Slaughter 2016, S. 419-420).

Die Ergebnisse der Studien in Kapitel 5 und 6 liefern zudem Belege dafür, dass sowohl positive als auch negative Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation in Form von Arbeitgeberbewertungen einen Einfluss auf die wahrgenommene Arbeitgeberattraktivität hat. Dadurch wird der Kenntnisstand zur Bedeutung

der **Valenz** der Nachricht erweitert. Im Speziellen untermauern die Ergebnisse zur Wirkung positiver Arbeitgeberbewertungen (Kapitel 5) die bisher vorherrschende Ansicht, dass die Effekte positiver Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation generalisierbar und robust sind (vgl. van Hoyer et al. 2016, S. 43). Bezogen auf die Wirkungen negativer Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation zeichnet sich innerhalb der bisherigen Forschung hingegen ein in geringerem Maße konsistentes Bild ab (vgl. 2.4.1; van Hoyer 2014, S. 257). Die Ergebnisse der Studie in Kapitel 6 helfen somit, die spezifischen Bedingungen zu identifizieren, unter denen negative Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation die wahrgenommene Arbeitgeberattraktivität beeinflusst. Dies trägt zu einem vertieften Verständnis der Wirkungen der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation bei.

Neben den Ergebnissen zur Rolle von Medium und Valenz, erweitern die Studien in Kapitel 5 und 6 die Forschung zu Nachrichteneigenschaften um Erkenntnisse zum **Inhalt der Nachricht**. In Kapitel 5 wird mit der sogenannten **Argumentqualität** eine Facette des Nachrichteninhalts identifiziert, deren Wirkung bisher zwar im Kontext produktbezogener Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation analysiert wurde (vgl. Cheung/Thadani 2012, S. 465), nicht aber im Kontext arbeitsbezogener Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation. Die Ergebnisse verdeutlichen, dass die Qualität der im Rahmen von Arbeitgeberbewertungen vorgebrachten Argumente maßgeblich deren attraktivitätssteigernde Wirkung beeinflussen. So führen überwiegend faktenbasierte und durch objektive Begründung charakterisierte Bewertungen (hohe Argumentqualität) zu einer deutlich höheren wahrgenommenen Arbeitgeberattraktivität als wenig faktenbasierte bzw. stark subjektive Bewertungen (niedrige Argumentqualität). Die Studie in Kapitel 5 liefert damit erste Belege dafür, dass die Argumentqualität bei gleicher (hier: positiver) Valenz der Nachricht Varianz in der von Arbeitsplatzsuchenden wahrgenommenen Arbeitgeberattraktivität erklärt. Somit erweitert die Studie bisherige Forschung zu Nachrichteneigenschaften (vgl. z. B. van Hoyer/Lievens 2007a; Keeling/McGoldrick/Sadhu 2013).

Die Studie in Kapitel 6 liefert zudem Evidenz, inwiefern kommunizierte Arbeitgeberereignisse und die Einseitig- bzw. Zweiseitigkeit einer Nachricht die Wirkungen negativer Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation in Form von

Arbeitgeberbewertungen beeinflussen. Im Hinblick auf **Arbeitgebereigenschaften** wurde untersucht, ob die Kommunikation von instrumentellen im Vergleich zu symbolischen Arbeitgebereigenschaften (vgl. 2.1; Lievens/Highhouse 2003) zu Unterschieden in der Attraktivitätswahrnehmung führt. Es wurde ersichtlich, dass kein Unterschied in der Attraktivitätswahrnehmung zu beobachten ist, obgleich die Organisation im Falle instrumenteller Arbeitgebereigenschaften mit größerer Wahrscheinlichkeit für die in der Bewertung geschilderte Situation verantwortlich gehalten wird.

Dieses Resultat steht in gewissem Widerspruch zu den Ergebnissen von van Hoya und Kollegen (2016). Die Forscher konnten zeigen, dass positive Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation in Form von E-Mails im Falle symbolischer Eigenschaften zu einer höheren wahrgenommenen Arbeitgeberattraktivität führen kann als im Falle instrumenteller Eigenschaften (vgl. 2.4.1). Ein Erklärungsansatz für die Inkonsistenz der Befunde besteht in der Art und Weise, wie elektronische Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation innerhalb der Studien operationalisiert wurde. So wird im Rahmen eines Vergleichs deutlich, dass beide Studien Unterschiede hinsichtlich des betrachteten Subtyps elektronischer Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation (Arbeitgeberbewertung vs. E-Mail) und der Valenz der Nachricht (negativ vs. positiv) aufweisen. Dies liefert erste Indizien dafür, dass **bisher unberücksichtigte Interaktionseffekte** zwischen Nachrichteneigenschaften bestehen, wodurch eine differenziertere Perspektive auf deren Wirkung nahegelegt und somit die bisherige Forschung erweitert wird.

Mit der **Einseitig- bzw. Zweiseitigkeit einer Nachricht** wurde eine Facette des Nachrichteninhalts untersucht, die bisher zwar im Rahmen der Marketingforschung (vgl. z. B. Pentina/Bailey/Zhang 2018), nicht aber im Kontext arbeitsbezogener Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation Betrachtung erfährt. Anhand der Ergebnisse wird deutlich, dass eine einseitige Nachricht (hier: Arbeitgeberbewertung), die ausschließlich negative Informationen enthält, zu einer stärkeren Minderung der wahrgenommenen Arbeitgeberattraktivität führt als eine zweiseitige Nachricht, die überwiegend negative Informationen enthält.

Dieser Befund ist überraschend, da zweiseitige Nachrichten allgemein als vertrauenswürdiger und somit glaubwürdiger gelten als einseitige Nachrichten (vgl. z. B. Flanagin/Winter/Metzger 2020, S. 1041). Als ein Erklärungsansatz für dieses unerwartete Ergebnis dient ein Mechanismus, der in der Forschung zu zweiseitiger Werbung diskutiert wird (vgl. Crowley/Hoyer 1994, S. 563). Dabei handelt es sich um einen **Trade-off** zwischen dem durch Zweiseitigkeit erzielten Glaubwürdigkeitszugewinn und der insgesamt reduzierten Überzeugungskraft einer zweiseitigen Nachricht. Ein möglicher Glaubwürdigkeitszugewinn zweiseitiger Werbung, der aus einer differenzierten Darstellung von Vor- und Nachteilen resultiert, kann durch die nachteiligen Auswirkungen kompensiert werden, die aus dem Einbezug negativer Informationen resultieren (vgl. Eisend 2007, S. 617).

Da im vorliegenden Fall der Einbezug von Informationen über positive Arbeitgeberbereigenschaften in einer ansonsten negativen Arbeitgeberbewertung deren negativen Effekt insgesamt verringerte, liegt der Schluss nahe, dass der positive Effekt der bereitgestellten positiven Informationen den potenziellen negativen Effekt überwiegt, der aus der erhöhten Glaubwürdigkeit einer zweiseitigen Bewertung resultiert. Die im Rahmen der Studie in Kapitel 6 gewonnenen Ergebnisse zur Einseitig- bzw. Zweiseitigkeit einer Nachricht erweitern damit bisherige Forschung nicht nur, indem sie erste Erkenntnisse zu deren Wirkungen liefern, sondern auch, indem sie die Erforschung der zugrunde liegenden Wirkmechanismen anregen.

(2) Als Moderatoren bzw. Faktoren, die das Ausmaß der Wirkungen der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation beeinflussen, werden in der wissenschaftlichen Literatur zum einen die Eigenschaften sowie die Beziehung von Sender und Empfänger diskutiert, zum anderen die Eigenschaften und Handlungen der involvierten Organisation (vgl. 2.4.1). Die vorliegende Arbeit bereichert diese Diskussion, indem sie sowohl beteiligte Individuen als auch die involvierte Organisation betreffende Faktoren identifiziert, die die Wirkung der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation moderieren.

Die Studie in Kapitel 5 gibt Aufschluss darüber, inwiefern die **Eigenschaften des Informationssenders** die Wirkungen positiver Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation in Form von Arbeitgeberbewertungen beeinflussen. Im Speziel-

len wurde analysiert, ob die **Expertise des Senders** – bezogen auf die involvierte Organisation – das Ausmaß der Wirkungen der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation beeinflusst. Anhand der Ergebnisse wird deutlich, dass von Sendern mit hoher Expertise (hier: Mitarbeiter) ausgehende Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation im Allgemeinen zu einer höheren wahrgenommenen Arbeitgeberattraktivität führt, als es bei der von Sendern mit niedriger Expertise (hier: Bewerber) ausgehenden Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation der Fall ist. Dieser Befund bestätigt zum einen Ergebnisse bisheriger Forschung zum Einfluss der Expertise auf die wahrgenommene Arbeitgeberattraktivität (vgl. van Hoya et al. 2016, S. 50). Zum anderen erweitert er die bisherigen Erkenntnisse dahingehend, dass nicht nur bekannten, sondern auch anonymen Sendern – ausgehend von ihrem (vermeintlichen) Status der Organisationszugehörigkeit – eine unterschiedliche Expertise zugeschrieben wird.

Die in Kapitel 5 präsentierte Studie deutet zudem darauf hin, dass die Wirkungen von Nachrichten- und Sendereigenschaften bzw. von deren Zusammenspiel von den **Eigenschaften des Informationsempfängers** abhängig sind. Den Ergebnissen der Studie folgend hängen die Art und Weise, wie sich Argumentqualität und Expertise auf die wahrgenommene Arbeitgeberattraktivität auswirken, von der bisherigen **Erfahrung in der Arbeitsplatzsuche** des Empfängers ab. Unerfahrene Arbeitsplatzsuchende werden primär durch die Argumentqualität beeinflusst, während die Expertise eine untergeordnete Rolle spielt. Bei hoher Arbeitsplatzsucherfahrung lässt sich hingegen eine Interaktion von Argumentqualität und Expertise beobachten. Eine hohe Expertise kann den Ergebnissen zufolge nur bei geringer Argumentqualität eine attraktivitätssteigernde Wirkung entfalten, während bei hoher Argumentqualität keine durch die Expertise induzierten Unterschiede zu beobachten sind. Die Ergebnisse der Studie in Kapitel 5 liefern damit Hinweise, dass zwischen den Eigenschaften von Nachricht, Sender und Empfänger Interaktionen bestehen. Dieser Umstand trägt zu einem genaueren Verständnis der komplexen Wirkungsbeziehungen zwischen den Faktoren bei, deren Erforschung im Kontext arbeitsbezogener Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation noch am Anfang steht (vgl. van Hoya 2014).

Im Hinblick auf Moderatoren, die die involvierte Organisation betreffen, wurde in der Studie in Kapitel 6 untersucht, inwiefern **Arbeitgeberkommentare zu negativen Arbeitgeberbewertungen** deren attraktivitätsmindernde Wirkung reduzieren. Die im Rahmen der Studie durchgeführte multidisziplinäre Literaturanalyse verdeutlicht, dass Organisationen ein breiteres Spektrum an Antwortalternativen zur Verfügung steht, als dies in der Rekrutierungsforschung bisher Berücksichtigung erfährt (vgl. Könsgen et al. 2018; Carpentier/van Hoya 2021). Vor diesem Hintergrund wurden im Zuge der Studie in Kapitel 6 die Effekte verschiedener und zum Teil bisher nicht betrachteter Varianten von Arbeitgeberkommentaren experimentell getestet. Die Ergebnisse des Experiments liefern empirische Evidenz, dass nicht alle untersuchten Varianten dazu geeignet sind, die negativen Auswirkungen negativer Arbeitgeberbewertungen zu reduzieren.

Stattdessen wird ersichtlich, dass lediglich ein **Denial** bzw. eine Antwort, mittels derer die Organisation die Verantwortlichkeit für den geschilderten Sachverhalt gänzlich abstreitet, dazu geeignet ist, die negativen Effekte negativer Arbeitgeberbewertungen signifikant zu reduzieren. Dennoch sind Hinweise für Effekte von zwei weiteren Antwortoptionen zu finden, die bisher nur in Kombination analysiert wurden (vgl. Carpentier/van Hoya 2021). So zeigt sich zum einen, dass eine Entschuldigung für den kritisierten Sachverhalt einen direkten positiven Effekt auf die wahrgenommene Arbeitgeberattraktivität hat. Dieser wird jedoch durch einen mit einem Schuldeingeständnis einhergehenden negativen Effekt auf die wahrgenommene Arbeitgeberattraktivität nivelliert. Zum anderen führt das Geloben von Besserung in der Zukunft dazu, dass die im Rahmen der Arbeitgeberbewertung geschilderte Situation als in geringerem Maße unerwünscht wahrgenommen wird. Dieser Effekt ist den Ergebnissen zufolge jedoch nicht stark genug, um den Schaden einer negativen Bewertung zu reduzieren. Die Ergebnisse bestätigen damit nicht nur bisherige Forschung, der zufolge ein Denial die effektivste Variante eines Arbeitgeberkommentars darstellt (vgl. Carpentier/van Hoya 2021), sondern erweitern diese um eine feinkörnigere Perspektive auf die Effekte verschiedener Varianten von Arbeitgeberkommentaren.

Die Befunde zu den Effekten von Arbeitgeberkommentaren werden durch die in der Studie in Kapitel 7 gewonnenen Erkenntnisse zu den **Eigenschaften**

von Arbeitgeberkommentaren ergänzt. Dies trägt zu einem umfassenden Verständnis von Arbeitgeberkommentaren bei. Im Speziellen wurden, basierend auf einer genreanalytischen Perspektive (vgl. Swales 1981, 1990), erste empirische Ergebnisse zu typischen inhaltlichen Elementen von Arbeitgeberkommentaren sowie deren Struktur generiert. Zudem wurden mit Intertextualität und Tonalität erstmalig zwei Eigenschaften von Arbeitgeberkommentaren qualitativ untersucht, die, bisheriger Forschung im Beschwerdemanagement folgend, einen Einfluss auf deren Wirkung haben können (vgl. van Noort/Willemsen 2012; Roozen/Raedts 2018; Javornik/Filieri/Gumann 2020). Die Ergebnisse verdeutlichen, dass Arbeitgeberkommentare als Sequenz sogenannter rhetorischer Moves konzeptualisiert werden können, wodurch eine neue Sicht auf diese Kommunikationsform ermöglicht wird. Daneben liefern die Ergebnisse zum einen erste Hinweise darauf, dass es sich bei der Intertextualität um eine wesentliche und zugleich facettenreiche Eigenschaft von Arbeitgeberkommentaren handelt. Zum anderen wurde festgestellt, dass Arbeitgeberkommentare häufig eine inkonsistente Tonalität aufweisen. Die Studie in Kapitel 7 trägt auf diese Weise zu einem differenzierten Verständnis der Eigenschaften von Arbeitgeberkommentaren bei und dient damit als Ausgangspunkt für die weitere Erforschung dieses Moderators.

(3) Neben Moderatoren können auch Mediatoren bzw. Prozessvariablen einen Beitrag zur Erklärung der Wirkungen der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation leisten (vgl. 2.2.2; van Hove 2014). Diesem Gedanken folgend, wurden im Rahmen der Studie in Kapitel 6 zwei Mediatoren analysiert. Im Speziellen wurde untersucht, inwiefern die einer Organisation **zugeschriebene Verantwortlichkeit** für den in der Bewertung kritisierten Sachverhalt sowie dessen **wahrgenommene Unerwünschtheit** den Zusammenhang zwischen Nachrichteninhalt (hier: instrumentelle vs. symbolische Arbeitgeberereignisse) und wahrgenommener Arbeitgeberattraktivität medieren. Obgleich sowohl die zugeschriebene Verantwortlichkeit als auch die wahrgenommene Unerwünschtheit deutlich negativ mit der wahrgenommenen Arbeitgeberattraktivität zusammenhängt, weisen die Ergebnisse darauf hin, dass lediglich die Verantwortlichkeit den Zusammenhang zwischen Nachrichteninhalt und Arbeitgeberattraktivität mediert. Dieser Befund erweitert die bisherige For-

schung zu Prozessvariablen, die sich bisher überwiegend der Rolle der Glaubwürdigkeit gewidmet hat (vgl. 2.4.1) in zweierlei Hinsicht: Zum einen wird mit der Verantwortlichkeit eine Variable identifiziert, deren Mediationswirkung – ausgehend von bisheriger Marketingforschung – zwar zu vermuten ist (vgl. z. B. Lacznia/DeCarlo/Ramaswami 2001; Lee/Song 2010; Chang et al. 2015), deren empirische Überprüfung jedoch bisher noch ausstand. Zum anderen wird mit der Unerwünschtheit ein potenzieller Mediator überprüft, der in der bisherigen Literatur zur Wirkung von arbeitsbezogener Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation unerwähnt geblieben ist.

(4) Die vorliegende Arbeit trägt in mehrfacher Hinsicht zur Erforschung der von Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation beeinflussten **recruitment outcomes** bei. So liefern die Studien in Kapitel 5 und Kapitel 6 empirische Belege für den Einfluss der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation auf die **wahrgenommene Arbeitgeberattraktivität**. Diese untermauern zum einen die Ergebnisse früherer Studien zur Wirkung der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation (vgl. z. B. van Hoyer/Lievens 2005; Keeling/McGoldrick/Sadhu 2013), zum anderen unterstreichen sie die Relevanz der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation für die Erklärung von Rekrutierungserfolg. Diese Einschätzung beruht auf Forschung, die zeigt, dass die wahrgenommene Arbeitgeberattraktivität rekrutierungsrelevante Intentionen von Arbeitsplatzsuchenden beeinflusst (vgl. Gully et al. 2013), die wiederum deren Verhalten bzw. die Annahme von Arbeitsplatzangeboten erklären (vgl. Jaidi/van Hooft/Arends 2011).

Daneben generiert die Studie in Kapitel 4 Erkenntnisse, inwiefern bisher weitgehend unberücksichtigte **recruitment outcomes auf organisationaler Ebene** durch Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation beeinflusst werden. Im Speziellen wurden die Arbeitgeberreputation, die Qualität und Quantität des Bewerberpools, die Passung zwischen Bewerber und Stelle sowie die Passung zwischen Bewerber und Organisation betrachtet. Darüber hinaus floss der Unternehmenserfolg als Ergebnisgröße in die Analyse ein. Mit Ausnahme der Arbeitgeberreputation, deren Erhebung mittels externer Datenquelle erfolgte, wurden dabei alle Ergebnisgrößen durch Befragung von Unternehmensvertretern erhoben (vgl. 4.3.2).

Wenn die Arbeitgeberreputation ausgenommen ist, besteht – den Studienergebnissen in Kapitel 4 zufolge – **kein Zusammenhang** zwischen Word-of-

Mouth-Kommunikation und recruitment outcomes auf organisationaler Ebene. Gleiches zeichnet sich im Hinblick auf den Unternehmenserfolg ab. Diese Befunde sind überraschend, da bisherige Forschung Hinweise dafür geliefert hat, dass Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation recruitment outcomes auf organisationaler Ebene beeinflusst, darunter insbesondere die Qualität des Bewerberpools (vgl. 2.4.2).

Die Ergebnisse der Studie in Kapitel 4 lassen somit die Robustheit der bisher beobachteten Effekte anzweifeln. Gleichzeitig führen sie jedoch zu der Frage, ob das Ausbleiben der Effekte und die damit verbundene Inkonsistenz der Befunde in der verwendeten **Datenbasis** begründet liegen. So wird im Rahmen der Studie in Kapitel 4 insgesamt nur eine marginale Varianz in den Ergebnisgrößen erkennbar, die von Unternehmensvertretern berichtet wurden. Anders gestaltet sich dies hingegen im Hinblick auf die Arbeitgeberreputation, die mittels externer Datenquelle (Kununu) erhoben wurde. Hier sind erste Hinweise zu finden, dass durch bestimmte recruitment sets generierte Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation zu positiven Reputationswerten führt. Die Ergebnisse der Studie in Kapitel 4 erweitern somit die bisherige Forschung nicht nur um weitere Erkenntnisse hinsichtlich der durch Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation beeinflussten Ergebnisgrößen auf organisationaler Ebene. Vielmehr stellen sie die Frage nach der geeigneten Messung der durch Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation beeinflussten Ergebnisgrößen in den Raum und tragen so zur Diskussion über die Wirkungen von Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation bei.

8.2 Übergreifende Beiträge zur wissenschaftlichen Diskussion über Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation in der Rekrutierung

8.2.1 Beiträge zur theoretischen Fundierung der Forschung zu den Wirkungen der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation

Die Forschung zu den Wirkungen arbeitsbezogener Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation untersucht, wie Arbeitsplatzsuchende in ihren Einstellungen und Entscheidungen durch Informationen beeinflusst werden, die sie von anderen Individuen erhalten (vgl. van Hove 2014). In diesem Kontext besteht umfassende empirische Evidenz, dass Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation die von Arbeitsplatzsuchenden wahrgenommene Arbeitgeberattraktivität beeinflusst

(vgl. z. B. van Hove/Lievens 2005; van Hove/Lievens 2007b). Wie genau Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation diese Wirkung entfaltet, das heißt, welche Mechanismen dieser Wirkung zugrunde liegen, ist bisher kaum erforscht (vgl. 2.4.1; van Hove 2014, S. 255). Insbesondere lässt sich vor dem Hintergrund der zahlreichen Theorien im Bereich Arbeitgeberattraktivitätsforschung (vgl. Ehrhart/Ziegert 2005; Evertz/Süß 2017) feststellen, dass die bisherige Forschung eine vergleichsweise **enge theoretische Perspektive** auf die Wirkmechanismen eingenommen hat. So hat sie nahezu ausschließlich auf das Source Credibility Framework (vgl. Pornpitakpan 2004) und das Accessibility-Diagnosticity Model (vgl. Feldman/Lynch 1988) zurückgegriffen (vgl. 2.2.1; van Hove 2014, S. 254). Diese liefern allgemeine Erklärungsansätze für Persuasionsprozesse und die Änderung von Einstellungen (vgl. z. B. Herr/Kardes/Kim 1991; Aaker 2000; Metzger et al. 2003).

Die bisherige Fokussierung auf eine sehr geringe Zahl theoretischer Ansätze ist insofern begrüßenswert, als ein **übermäßiger theoretischer Pluralismus** die Entwicklung eines Forschungsfelds hemmen kann. So führt das Vorhandensein einer Vielzahl alternativer Theorien nicht nur zu konzeptionellen Problemen, sondern erschwert auch die Kommunikation und Evaluation von Forschungsergebnissen (vgl. Foss 1996, S. 3). Zudem ergibt sich die Gefahr des theoretischen Eklektizismus (vgl. z. B. Süß 2007, S. 53), der im Allgemeinen keine erfolgversprechende Art und Weise der theoretischen Fundierung darstellt (vgl. Nienhäuser 1996, S. 50-51). Zugleich birgt jedoch auch ein **zu geringer theoretischer Pluralismus** Risiken. So kann eine zu geringe theoretische Vielfalt dazu führen, dass Forschungsfelder erstarren und sich von der empirischen Realität entfernen (vgl. Foss 1996, S. 3).

In Anbetracht dieser Risiken ist für die Entwicklung eines Forschungsfelds allgemein weder ein übermäßiger noch ein zu geringer theoretischer Pluralismus empfehlenswert. Vielmehr ist ein Gleichgewicht zwischen dem Hinzukommen alternativer theoretischer Ansätze und deren Auswahl bzw. Anwendung anzustreben, was in der Literatur als **ausgewogener theoretischer Pluralismus** (engl. balanced pluralism; vgl. Foss 1996, S. 7-8) bezeichnet wird. Dieser erlaubt es, innerhalb eines Forschungsfelds Lerneffekte zu generieren (z. B. aufgrund eines geteilten Vokabulars) und dennoch alternative Theorien zu berücksichtigen.

Ein notwendiger Schritt, um einen ausgewogenen theoretischen Pluralismus in der Forschung zu den Wirkungen der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation herbeizuführen, stellt die **Erweiterung des bisherigen Theoriespektrums** dar. Dazu trägt die vorliegende Arbeit bei, indem sie erste Hinweise für die Anwendbarkeit von bisher nicht berücksichtigten Theorien liefert. Diese Theorien stammen, ähnlich wie das Source Credibility Framework (vgl. Pornpitakpan 2004) und das Accessibility-Diagnosticity Model (vgl. Feldman/Lynch 1988), aus der Persuasionsforschung (vgl. z. B. Wood 2000), so dass nicht von einer Inkommensurabilität auszugehen ist (vgl. z. B. Süß 2004, S. 234).

Die Ergebnisse der Studie in Kapitel 5 zeigen, dass zur Erklärung der Wirkungen der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation **Dual-Mode-Processing-Theorien** angewendet werden können. Diesen liegt die Annahme zugrunde, dass die Änderung von Einstellungen von der individuellen Motivation und Fähigkeit der Informationsverarbeitung abhängt (vgl. Wood 2000, S. 551).

Im Speziellen liefern die Studienergebnisse erste empirische Evidenz, dass das **Elaboration Likelihood Model** (ELM; vgl. Petty/Cacioppo 1986) als prominente Dual-Mode-Processing-Theorie dazu geeignet ist, die Wirkmechanismen arbeitsbezogener Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation zu erklären. Dadurch kommt es jedoch nicht zu einer bloßen Erweiterung des Theoriespektrums. Stattdessen erfolgt zugleich eine Erweiterung des Kenntnisstands zu den Wirkmechanismen, da andere als die bisher betrachteten Aspekte des Persuasionsprozesses in den Vordergrund gerückt werden. So zeigen die Ergebnisse zum einen, dass die bisher nicht berücksichtigte Argumentqualität eine zentrale Determinante der Wirkung arbeitsbezogener Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation darstellt. Zum anderen wird deutlich, dass der bisherigen Arbeitsplatzsucherfahrung als Facette der Fähigkeit zur Informationsverarbeitung ein Erklärungsgehalt zukommt.

Daneben liefert die Studie in Kapitel 6 erste Hinweise, dass die **Image-Repair-Theorie** (IRT; Benoit 1995, 2015) aus der Krisenkommunikationsforschung in den Kontext der arbeitsbezogenen Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation übertragen werden kann. Die Studie erweitert damit die bisherige Forschung zu Arbeitgeberkommentaren (vgl. Carpentier/van Hove 2021), die sich auf Signaling-Theorie (vgl. Connelly et al. 2011) und Attributionstheorie

(vgl. Kelley/Michela 1980) stützt, um eine weitere theoretische Grundlage. Diese zeichnet sich dadurch aus, dass sie explizit entwickelt wurde, um die Verarbeitung jener persuasiven Kommunikation zu erklären, die darauf abzielt, die Schäden verbaler Angriffe zu minimieren (vgl. Benoit 1995, 2015).

Die Ergebnisse der Studie in Kapitel 6 verdeutlichen dabei nicht nur, dass die IRT einen Erklärungsansatz für die Wirkungen von Arbeitgeberkommentaren darstellt, sondern zeigen auch exemplarisch auf, inwiefern eine **moderate Theorievielfalt dem Erkenntnisgewinn zuträglich** ist. So wird erkennbar, dass die einer Organisation zugeschriebene Verantwortlichkeit als ein zentrales Element der IRT einen Erklärungsbeitrag zu den Wirkungen von Arbeitgeberkommentaren leistet. Dieses Resultat ergänzt die Forschung von Carpentier und van Hoya (2021), die basierend auf der Attributionstheorie ebenfalls die Zuschreibung von Verantwortlichkeit als einen zentralen Wirkungsmechanismus identifizierten. Ausgehend von dem noch jungen Forschungsstand zur Wirkung von Arbeitgeberkommentaren erlaubt dies zwar noch nicht, abschließende Aussagen über die relative Eignung von IRT und Attributionstheorie zu treffen, jedoch kennzeichnen die Befunde in ihrer Gesamtheit das weitere Studium attributionaler Mechanismen als verfolgenswert und tragen so zur Entwicklung des Forschungsfelds bei.

Zusammengenommen erweitern die gewonnenen Ergebnisse zur Anwendbarkeit von Theorien aus der Persuasionsforschung (ELM und IRT) jedoch nicht nur die theoretische Fundierung der Forschung zu Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation, sondern auch die der **Arbeitgeberattraktivitätsforschung** im Allgemeinen. Arbeitgeberattraktivitätsforschung versucht die Frage zu beantworten, warum Individuen Arbeitgeber als attraktiv wahrnehmen und bezieht sich dabei zahlreicher Theorien (vgl. z. B. Evertz/Süß 2017). Diese lassen sich drei übergeordneten Kategorien bzw. sogenannten Metatheorien der Arbeitgeberattraktivitätsforschung zuordnen (Environment-Processing-, Interactionist-Processing- und Self-Processing-Metatheorie; vgl. Ehrhart/Ziegert 2005, S. 903). Die Interactionist-Processing- und die Self-Processing-Metatheorie befassen sich mit dem Entstehungsprozess der Passung (engl. fit) zwischen Individuum und Organisation bzw. der Rolle des Selbst in diesem Prozess. Die **Environment-Processing-Metatheorie** umfasst hingegen jene Theorien, die erklären, wie Individuen Informationen über organisationale

Eigenschaften verarbeiten und wie dieser Vorgang zu Einschätzungen hinsichtlich der Arbeitgeberattraktivität führt (vgl. Ehrhart/Ziegert 2005, S. 906). Durch die Ergebnisse zur Anwendbarkeit von ELM (vgl. Kap. 5) und IRT (vgl. Kap. 6) wird der bisherige Erkenntnisstand zur Environment-Processing-Metatheorie hinsichtlich deren (1) Geltungsbereich und (2) Umfang erweitert.

(1) Eine zentrale Aussage bezüglich der Environment-Processing-Metatheorie lautet, dass diese ungeachtet der Darreichungsform der zu verarbeitenden Information zur Erklärung der Entstehung von Arbeitgeberattraktivität angewendet werden kann (vgl. Ehrhart/Ziegert 2005, S. 911). Indem die Studien in Kapitel 5 und 6 erste Belege für die Anwendbarkeit von ELM und IRT zur Erklärung der Effekte von Online-Arbeitgeberbewertungen auf die wahrgenommene Arbeitgeberattraktivität liefern, wird der Geltungsbereich dieser Aussage erweitert.

(2) Wie Studienergebnisse von Steiner und Byrne (2019) verdeutlichen, erlaubt die IRT die Effekte negativer Publicity auf die wahrgenommene Arbeitgeberattraktivität unter Berücksichtigung organisationaler Reaktionen zu erklären. Die in Kapitel 6 gewonnenen Ergebnisse ergänzen diesen Befund und legen damit den Schluss nahe, dass es sich bei der IRT im Allgemeinen um eine geeignete Theorie zur Erklärung von Arbeitgeberattraktivität handelt. Dadurch wird die Environment-Processing-Metatheorie im Sinne einer Theoriekategorie erweitert.

8.2.2 Beiträge zur Diskussion über Arbeitgeberbewertungsportale

Da über Arbeitgeberbewertungsportale sowohl positive als auch negative Informationen verbreitet werden können, herrscht im Rahmen der wissenschaftlichen Diskussion die Ansicht vor, dass diese **zugleich Chancen und Herausforderungen für Organisationen** mit sich bringen (vgl. Melián-González/Bulchand-Gidumal 2016, S. 718; Könsgen et al. 2018, S. 167). Diese Ansicht wird durch die Ergebnisse der Studien in Kapitel 5 und 6 gestützt. So wird deutlich, dass positive Arbeitgeberbewertungen einen positiven Einfluss auf die wahrgenommene Arbeitgeberattraktivität aufweisen (vgl. Kap. 5), wohingegen sich negative Arbeitgeberbewertungen negativ auf die wahrgenommene Arbeitgeberattraktivität auswirken (vgl. Kap. 6).

Die vorliegende Arbeit trägt jedoch nicht nur zur Diskussion über Arbeitgeberbewertungsportale bei, indem sie Erkenntnisse zu den Wirkungen der dort bereitgestellten Informationen liefert. Vielmehr stellt sie die Diskussion auf eine breitere Basis, indem sie empirische Belege zu (1) der Nutzung der Portale durch (potenzielle) Bewerber und (2) der Nutzung der Portale durch Organisationen liefert. Zudem verdeutlicht sie aus Sicht der Forschung (3) das Potenzial von Arbeitgeberbewertungsportalen als Datenquelle.

(1) Bisherige Studien zeigen, dass Arbeitgeberbewertungsportale intensiv zur Beschaffung arbeitsbezogener Informationen genutzt werden (vgl. z. B. Bitkom 2018; Monster 2020a). Die vorliegende Arbeit ergänzt diese Befunde, indem sie differenziert nach Bewerbersegmenten (hier: Schüler vs. Studierende vs. Berufserfahrene) Erkenntnisse zu Erfahrungen und Einstellungen generiert, die sich auf die Nutzung von Arbeitgeberbewertungsportalen beziehen. Diese Erkenntnisse sind zugleich für die **zielgruppenspezifische Rekrutierung** (engl. Targeted Recruitment) von Bedeutung, die darauf abzielt, bestimmte Gruppen von Bewerbern zu attrahieren (vgl. Volpone et al. 2014, S. 111).

Im Hinblick auf die bisherige **Nutzungserfahrung** wird deutlich, dass in der Gruppe der Schüler knapp ein Drittel (31,5 %; vgl. Kap. 5) der Befragten bereits ein Arbeitgeberbewertungsportal besucht hat. Dieser Anteil ist in der Gruppe der Studierenden (48,6 %; vgl. Kap. 6) und in der Gruppe der Berufserfahrenen (72,3 %; vgl. Kap. 5 bzw. 66,8 %; vgl. Kap. 6) deutlich höher. Diese Ergebnisse verdeutlichen zum einen die allgemeine Relevanz von Arbeitgeberbewertungsportalen als Informationsquelle in der Rekrutierung. Zum anderen liefern sie Hinweise, dass Arbeitgeberbewertungsportale bereits von zukünftigen Berufseinsteigern intensiv genutzt werden, wodurch die Bedeutung der Portale für die Rekrutierung dieser Zielgruppe unterstrichen wird. Ergänzt werden diese Erkenntnisse auf Individualebene durch die im Rahmen der Studie in Kapitel 7 gewonnenen Ergebnisse. So zeigt ein Vergleich der Daten aus den Jahren 2019 und 2020 eine deutliche Zunahme der Aufrufe von Unternehmensprofilen auf Arbeitgeberbewertungsportalen (27,1 %), was als weiterer Beleg für die intensive Nutzung dieser Portale zu werten ist.

Hinsichtlich der **Einstellung zur Nutzung**, die indirekt einen Prädiktor für die zukünftige Nutzung darstellt (vgl. Fishbein/Ajzen 2010), ergibt sich ein weitestgehend einheitliches Bild. So geben Schüler (vgl. Kap. 5), Studierende (vgl. Kap. 6) sowie die in der Studie in Kapitel 5 befragten Berufserfahrenen gleichermaßen eine moderat positive Einstellung gegenüber der Nutzung von Arbeitgeberbewertungsportalen an. Interessanterweise stehen die Berufserfahrenen, die im Rahmen der Studie in Kapitel 6 befragt wurden, Arbeitgeberbewertungsportalen vergleichsweise skeptisch gegenüber. Diese Befragungsteilnehmer sind im Vergleich zu den befragten Berufserfahrenen in Kapitel 5 dadurch charakterisiert, dass sie ausschließlich über ein Crowdsourcing-Portal akquiriert wurden. Da es sich bei Arbeitgeberbewertungsportalen ebenfalls um eine Form der Crowdsourcing-Portale handelt (vgl. Dabirian/Kietzmann/Diba 2017, S. 198), deuten die Ergebnisse darauf hin, dass die Einstellung gegenüber Arbeitgeberbewertungsportalen durch individuelle Erfahrungen mit anderen Portalen oder gar Technologien geprägt wird. Es ist somit davon auszugehen, dass bei einer Bewerbersegmentierung anhand IT-spezifischer Erfahrungen Unterschiede in der Einstellung zu Arbeitgeberbewertungsportalen beobachtet werden können. Diese Annahme lässt weitere Aussagen über die Relevanz von Arbeitgeberbewertungsportalen für bestimmte Segmente von (potenziellen) Bewerbern zu und hat damit Implikationen für die Forschung zur zielgruppenspezifischen Rekrutierung.

(2) Bezüglich der Nutzung von Arbeitgeberbewertungsportalen durch Organisationen existieren zwar Hinweise, dass diese sich meist bewusst sind, dass sie auf den betreffenden Portalen bewertet werden (vgl. Monster 2020b, S. 22). Ob Organisationen jedoch mehr als nur die Rolle eines passiven Beobachters einnehmen, das heißt, inwiefern sie aktiv durch Gegenkommentare am Informationsaustausch auf Arbeitgeberbewertungsportalen partizipieren, ist bisher unklar. Die in Kapitel 7 gewonnenen Erkenntnisse zu Reaktionen auf negative Arbeitgeberkommentare reduzieren dieses Erkenntnisdefizit und erweitern dadurch das Wissen über die Rollen, die Organisationen im **Management sozialer Interaktionen** einnehmen (vgl. Godes et al. 2005). So wird zum einen ersichtlich, dass ca. die Hälfte (51,4 %) der betrachteten Unternehmen auf negative Arbeitgeberbewertungen reagiert. Zum anderen zeigt

ein Vergleich der Jahre 2019 und 2020, dass sich die Anzahl an Arbeitgeberkommentaren je Unternehmen verfünffacht hat (501,1 %).

(3) Des Weiteren verdeutlicht die vorliegende Arbeit, dass Arbeitgeberbewertungsportale für die Forschung von Bedeutung sind. Im Speziellen wird erkennbar, dass **Arbeitgeberbewertungsportale als Datenquelle** dienen können. Die Studie in Kapitel 4 zeigt, dass aggregierte Informationen auf den betreffenden Portalen als externe Datenquelle genutzt werden können. Dies erlaubt zum einen, erhebungsmethodische Probleme, wie sozial erwünschtes Antwortverhalten (vgl. Podsakoff/Organ 1986) oder Common Method Bias (vgl. Podsakoff/MacKenzie/Podsakoff 2012), zu reduzieren. Zum anderen ermöglicht es, der seitens der Rekrutierungsforschung geäußerten Forderung nach einer stärkeren Berücksichtigung von recruitment outcomes auf organisationaler Ebene nachzukommen (vgl. Saks 2014). Darüber hinaus zeigt die Analyse in Kapitel 7 auf, dass Arbeitgeberbewertungsportale es erlauben, arbeitsbezogene Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation inklusive organisationaler Reaktionen zu beobachten. Dies ermöglicht vertiefte Einblicke in den Kommunikationsprozess, da Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation traditionell bisher im Verborgenen bzw. für die Forschung nicht direkt beobachtbar stattfand.

8.2.3 Beiträge zum Employer Image Management

Die Forschung zum Employer Image Management untersucht, wie Organisationen das Arbeitgeberimage von (potenziellen) Bewerbern beeinflussen können (vgl. 2.1). Einen zentralen Forschungsgegenstand stellt dabei die **Entwicklung von Strategien** dar, die ein evidenzbasiertes Management des Arbeitgeberimages ermöglichen (vgl. Lievens/Slaughter 2016, S. 426-430). So postulieren Keeling und Kollegen (2013, S. 100) eine Strategie, die darauf abzielt, die von Mitarbeitern ausgehende Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation zu verbessern, und damit das Arbeitgeberimage zu beeinflussen. Ausgehend von der Persistenz und der Wirkung elektronischer Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation (vgl. 2.2.1; 2.4.1) sind jedoch nicht nur Strategien zur allgemeinen Stimulierung von Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation erforderlich. Vielmehr bedarf es zugleich Strategien, die den Umgang mit elektronischer Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation fokussieren.

Insbesondere ist aufgrund der Bedrohung des Arbeitgeberimages durch negative Arbeitgeberbewertungen die Entwicklung einer **Reaktionsstrategie** von Bedeutung, die das organisationsseitige Antwortverhalten auf Arbeitgeberbewertungsportalen zum Gegenstand hat. Da sich die Forschung zu Arbeitgeberkommentaren im Internet jedoch noch in einem frühen Stadium befindet (vgl. Kap. 6), steht die Entwicklung einer solchen Reaktionsstrategie bisher aus.

Ein Ansatz, um dieses Forschungsdefizit zu reduzieren, ist die Generierung empirischer Erkenntnisse zu **Entscheidungen**, die Arbeitgeber im Hinblick auf Kommentare zu im Internet geäußelter Kritik treffen müssen (vgl. van Noort et al. 2015). So ist für Arbeitgeber zu entscheiden, ob diese (1) überhaupt einen Kommentar verfassen wollen und, falls ja, (2) in welchen Fällen dies geschehen soll. Zudem ist im Falle eines Kommentars über (3) dessen Gestaltung zu entscheiden (vgl. van Noort et al. 2015, S. 81). Die vorliegende Arbeit liefert empirische Erkenntnisse zu jeder dieser Entscheidungen und trägt so zur Entwicklung einer Reaktionsstrategie bei, wodurch die Forschung zum Employer Image Management erweitert wird.

(1) Bisherige Forschung zu Bewerberreaktionen deutet darauf hin, dass Arbeitgeberkommentare zu negativen Arbeitgeberbewertungen im Vergleich zu deren Ausbleiben vorteilhaft sind (vgl. z. B. Könsgen et al. 2018). Die Ergebnisse der Studie in Kapitel 6 unterstreichen die **allgemeine Vorteilhaftigkeit von Kommentaren**. So wird deutlich, dass Kommentare zu negativen Arbeitgeberbewertungen tendenziell dazu führen, dass sich negative Arbeitgeberbewertungen in geringerem Maße schädlich auf das (holistische) Arbeitgeberimage auswirken. Darüber hinaus ergänzt die vorliegende Arbeit die bisherigen Befunde auf Individualebene um erste Erkenntnisse auf Ebene der Organisation. So wird anhand des in Kapitel 7 vorgenommenen Vergleichs der Jahre 2019 und 2020 ersichtlich, dass Arbeitgeber im Jahr 2020 um ein Vielfaches häufiger auf negative Bewertungen antworten. Da das Kommentieren negativer Bewertung den Einsatz von Ressourcen erfordert, ist es plausibel, anzunehmen, dass Unternehmen positive Erfahrungen mit Kommentaren gesammelt haben, die den Ressourceneinsatz rechtfertigen. Der beobachtete Anstieg der Arbeitgeberkommentare stellt somit ein weiteres Indiz für

deren positive Effekte dar, wodurch die Diskussion über die generelle Vorteilhaftigkeit von Arbeitgeberkommentaren erweitert wird.

(2) Die Studie in Kapitel 6 gibt Aufschluss darüber, in welchen Fällen Arbeitgeberkommentare zu erwägen sind. Zum einen liefern die Ergebnisse zusätzliche empirische Evidenz, dass die bewerberseitige Wahrnehmung eines Arbeitgebers bereits durch eine **einzelne negative Bewertung** negativ beeinflusst werden kann (vgl. Carpentier/van Hoya 2021). Zum anderen dienen die Ergebnisse als erste Hinweise, inwiefern die Wirkung einer negativen Bewertung von deren Inhalt abhängt (hier: Arbeitgeberereignissen und Einseitig- bzw. Zweiseitigkeit der Nachricht).

Im Hinblick auf **Arbeitgeberereignissen** wird deutlich, dass Bewertungen mit Informationen zu instrumentellen Arbeitgeberereignissen tendenziell schädlicher sind als solche mit Informationen zu symbolischen Arbeitgeberereignissen, da die Organisation im Falle instrumenteller Arbeitgeberereignissen mit größerer Wahrscheinlichkeit für die in der Bewertung geschilderte Situation verantwortlich gehalten wird. Diese Erkenntnis deutet darauf hin, dass ein etwaiger Arbeitgeberkommentar tendenziell im Falle der Kommunikation instrumenteller Arbeitgeberereignissen erforderlich ist.

Ein ähnlich differenziertes Bild ergibt sich aus den Ergebnissen zur **Einseitig- bzw. Zweiseitigkeit der Nachricht**. Es wird ersichtlich, dass einseitige bzw. ausschließlich negative Bewertungen zu einem größeren Imageschaden führen als zweiseitige bzw. überwiegend negative Bewertungen, die auch vereinzelt positive Informationen enthalten. Im Falle einer völlig negativen Bewertung ist somit eher ein Arbeitgeberkommentar zu erwägen als im Falle einer moderat negativen Bewertung.

Zusammengenommen liefern diese Ergebnisse Hinweise darauf, dass **Unterschiede in der Erforderlichkeit eines Arbeitgeberkommentars** in Abhängigkeit des Nachrichteninhalts bestehen. So würde – ausgehend von den Ergebnissen – beispielsweise eine einseitige instrumentelle Bewertung eher einen Kommentar erfordern als eine zweiseitige symbolische Bewertung.

Interessanterweise deuten die Studienergebnisse in Kapitel 7 darauf hin, dass in der Praxis **keine Differenzierung des Antwortverhaltens** gemäß der in Kapitel 6 gewonnenen Resultate erfolgt. So zeigt sich zum einen, dass die von

Arbeitgebern kommentierten Arbeitgeberbewertungen vermehrt nur in geringem Maße greifbare und damit tendenziell symbolische Arbeitgebereigenschaften thematisieren. Zum anderen wird deutlich, dass Arbeitgeberkommentaren auch zweiseitige Bewertungen vorausgehen. Dies kommt in dem als „Stressing positive attributes“ bezeichneten Move zum Ausdruck, mit dem Arbeitgeber mitunter einen Rückbezug zu positiven Informationen in der vorangegangenen Bewertung herstellen (vgl. 7.4.1). Die Ergebnisse der Studien in Kapitel 6 und 7 erweitern somit die Diskussion um die Frage, weshalb Arbeitgeber im Hinblick auf Kommentare tendenziell einen undifferenzierten Ansatz verfolgen. Ein möglicher Erklärungsansatz hierfür liegt im bisherigen Mangel an empirischen Erkenntnissen. Ein anderer besteht darin, dass etwaige Einsparungen aufgrund eines differenzierten Ansatzes den durch Vernachlässigung weniger schädlicher Bewertungen entstehenden Imageschaden nicht kompensieren.

(3) Aus Perspektive von Arbeitgebern lassen sich als übergeordnete **Gestaltungsaspekte von Kommentaren** die Eigenschaften der Nachricht sowie die Eigenschaften des Verfassers identifizieren. Die Studien in Kapitel 6 und 7 erweitern die Forschung zu diesen Gestaltungsaspekten, die gegenwärtig noch am Anfang steht.

In Bezug auf Nachrichteneigenschaften zeigen die Ergebnisse der Studie in Kapitel 6 auf, dass Unterschiede in der Effektivität von Arbeitgeberkommentaren bestehen, die sich auf deren **Nachrichteninhalt** zurückführen lassen. So ist das Abstreiten von Kritik dazu geeignet, Imageschäden signifikant zu reduzieren. Auch das Geloben von Besserung führt zu positiven Konsequenzen, die sich in Form einer geringeren wahrgenommenen Unerwünschtheit der geschilderten Situation abzeichnen. Andere Antwortalternativen weisen hingegen überwiegend keine Effekte auf. Diese Ergebnisse stehen im Einklang mit jüngster Forschung (vgl. Carpentier/van Hoya 2021) und untermauern damit erste Befunde, die darauf hindeuten, dass es sich beim Nachrichteninhalt um einen zentralen Gestaltungsaspekt von Arbeitgeberkommentaren handelt.

Neben dem Inhalt eines Arbeitgeberkommentars spielt für dessen Effektivität – der Forschung im Marketing zufolge – auch der verwendete **Kommuni-**

kommunikationsstil eine Rolle (vgl. van Noort/Willemsen 2012; Javornik/Filieri/Gumann 2020). Diesbezüglich mangelt es im Hinblick auf Arbeitgeberkommentare bisher gänzlich an Erkenntnissen. Der Untersuchung der Effektivität des Kommunikationsstils vorgelagert ist dabei zunächst die Frage nach dessen möglichen Ausprägungen. Die Ergebnisse der Studie in Kapitel 7 tragen zur Beantwortung dieser Frage bei, indem durch sie aufgezeigt wird, dass die häufig angewendete dichotome Betrachtung von Kommunikationsstilen (conversational human voice vs. corporate voice; vgl. 7.2.4) im Kontext von Arbeitgeberkommentaren zu kurz greift. Stattdessen wird ersichtlich, dass Arbeitgeber bezüglich des Kommunikationsstils zu einer Mischform tendieren. Dies verdeutlicht eine mögliche bzw. zu berücksichtigende Gestaltungsoption im Rahmen von Arbeitgeberkommentaren, deren Vorteilhaftigkeit jedoch noch zu prüfen ist.

Die Studie in Kapitel 7 erweitert zudem den Wissensstand über die **Eigenschaften des Verfassers**, indem sie Erkenntnisse zum Spektrum potenziell zu berücksichtigender Eigenschaften generiert. Im Speziellen zeigen die Ergebnisse, dass die alleinige Berücksichtigung der Position des Verfassers innerhalb der Organisation (vgl. z. B. Sparks/So/Bradley 2016) möglicherweise zu kurz greift. So ist den Ergebnissen zufolge zum einen der Aspekt der Anonymität bzw. die Frage, ob der Verfasser namentlich in Erscheinung tritt oder nicht, in Betracht zu ziehen. Zum anderen verdeutlichen die Ergebnisse, dass der Verfasser nicht nur eine natürliche Person, sondern auch eine Entität innerhalb der Organisation sein kann (z. B. Karriere- oder Social-Media-Team). Demnach liefern die Ergebnisse der Studie in Kapitel 7 empirische Evidenz, dass es sich bei den Eigenschaften des Verfassers nicht um einen eindimensionalen, sondern um einen mehrdimensionalen Gestaltungsaspekt handelt.

8.3 Schlussfolgerungen

8.3.1 Praxisimplikationen

Die Rekrutierung von Personal stellt für zahlreiche Organisationen eine Herausforderung dar (vgl. 1.1). Die Rekrutierungsforschung kann Organisationen bei der Bewältigung dieser Herausforderung unterstützen, indem sie um-

fassend rekrutierungsbezogene Informationsquellen inklusive deren Wirkungen untersucht (vgl. z. B. Griffeth/Tenbrink/Robinson 2014). Denn dies erlaubt die Formulierung von evidenzbasierten Gestaltungsempfehlungen für die Rekrutierung bzw. die personalwirtschaftliche Praxis.

Vor diesem Hintergrund lassen sich basierend auf den Ergebnissen der vorliegenden Arbeit Empfehlungen für die Gestaltung der Rekrutierung ableiten. Diese beziehen sich auf den **Umgang mit elektronischer Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation in Form von Arbeitgeberbewertungen**, der eine hohe Relevanz für die Rekrutierung aufweist (vgl. 2.2.1; 8.2.2). Im Speziellen ergeben sich studienübergreifend Implikationen, die sich auf (1) die Nutzung von Arbeitgeberbewertungsportalen als Informationsquelle, (2) Möglichkeiten des Benchmarkings sowie (3) das Verfassen von Arbeitgeberkommentaren zu negativen Arbeitgeberbewertungen beziehen:

(1) Die im Rahmen der vorliegenden Arbeit gewonnenen Erkenntnisse verdeutlichen in mehrerlei Hinsicht, dass Organisationen **Arbeitgeberbewertungsportale als Informationsquelle** nutzen sollten. Die Ergebnisse der Studie in Kapitel 7 zeigen auf, dass Arbeitsplatzsuchenden auf Arbeitgeberbewertungsportalen zahlreiche negative arbeitgeberbezogene Informationen zur Verfügung gestellt werden. So sind auf diesen Portalen beispielsweise negative Informationen über das Verhalten von Vorgesetzten und die vorherrschenden Arbeitsbedingungen sowie Hinweise auf eine mangelnde Gleichbehandlung von Mitarbeitern zu finden (vgl. 7.3.1). Da diese Informationen in der Regel kostenfrei zugänglich sind, ermöglichen sie Organisationen mit moderatem finanziellem Aufwand die **Identifikation potenzieller organisationsinterner Problemfelder**, die ihre Rolle als Arbeitgeber betreffen. Werden diese Problemfelder durch geeignete Verbesserungsmaßnahmen adressiert, kann dies die von Mitarbeitern wahrgenommene Identität einer Organisation positiv beeinflussen, was mit einer erhöhten Identifikation (vgl. Lievens/van Hove/Anseel 2007) und vermehrtem kooperativem Verhalten von Mitarbeitern einhergehen kann (vgl. Dukerich/Golden/Shortell 2002).

Es ist jedoch generell zu bedenken, dass nicht alle auf Arbeitgeberbewertungsportalen zur Verfügung gestellten Informationen zwingend der Wahrheit entsprechen. So führt die auf den Portalen vorherrschende Anonymität mög-

licherweise dazu, dass frustrierte Mitarbeiter in ihren Darstellungen übertreiben oder sogar die Unwahrheit sagen (vgl. Dabirian/Kietzmann/Diba 2017, S. 198). Infolgedessen ist es empfehlenswert, zu überprüfen, inwiefern ein **Konsens** bzw. eine inhaltliche Übereinstimmung (vgl. Dineen et al. 2019, S. 189) innerhalb der Arbeitgeberbewertungen existiert. Treten bestimmte Inhalte vermehrt auf, deutet dieser Umstand darauf hin, dass den Bewertungen tatsächliche Problemfelder zugrunde liegen.

Die Studie in Kapitel 5 und eine großzahlige Bewerberbefragung (vgl. Talent Board 2019, S. 18) verdeutlichen zudem, dass auf Arbeitgeberbewertungsportalen Informationen über die bewerberseitige Wahrnehmung von Rekrutierungsprozessen gewonnen werden können, da Bewerber ebenso wie Mitarbeiter Arbeitgeberbewertungen verfassen. Diese Informationen können als Ausgangspunkt für die **Verbesserung des Rekrutierungsprozesses** bzw. der Kontaktpunkte von Bewerbern mit der Organisation dienen (vgl. Verhoeven 2016). Das Anstreben dieser Verbesserung ist für Organisationen, insbesondere vor dem Hintergrund des Fachkräftemangels (vgl. 1.1), von großer Bedeutung. So besteht zum einen metaanalytische Evidenz für den Zusammenhang zwischen der Gestaltung des Rekrutierungsprozesses und der wahrgenommenen Arbeitgeberattraktivität (vgl. Uggerslev/Fassina/Kraichy 2012). Zum anderen können negative Bewerbererfahrungen – Befragungsergebnissen zufolge – negative Konsequenzen nach sich ziehen, die über den Kontext der Rekrutierung hinausgehen. Dazu zählt beispielsweise ein geändertes Kaufverhalten zu Ungunsten der Organisation (vgl. Talentegy 2019, S. 5).

(2) Darüber hinaus ermöglichen die Informationen auf Arbeitgeberbewertungsportalen Organisationen ein **Benchmarking hinsichtlich des Arbeitgeberimages** (vgl. z. B. Lievens/Highhouse 2003, S. 98). Dieser Befund wird durch die Erkenntnisse der Studien in Kapitel 5 und 6 gestützt. Diese zeigen, dass sowohl positive als auch negative Arbeitgeberbewertungen die Wahrnehmung von Arbeitsplatzsuchenden beeinflussen können. Die auf Arbeitgeberbewertungsportalen vorhandenen Informationen ermöglichen Organisationen damit sowohl die Einschätzung des eigenen Arbeitgeberimages als auch die des Arbeitgeberimages von Konkurrenten. Dies stellt die Basis für einen

Vergleich zwischen Organisationen dar, beispielsweise innerhalb einer Branche, der dazu beitragen kann, einen etwaigen (Miss-)Erfolg in der Rekrutierung zu erklären.

(3) Für Organisationen besteht darüber hinaus die Frage, ob sie **Arbeitgeberbewertungen bewusst ignorieren oder kommentieren** sollten (vgl. Dineen et al. 2019, S. 212). Die Beantwortung dieser Frage weist dabei insbesondere im Hinblick auf negative Bewertungen eine hohe praktische Relevanz auf, da sowohl ein ausbleibender als auch ein von der Leserschaft schlecht aufgenommenen Kommentar mit negativen Konsequenzen verbunden sein kann (vgl. van Noort et al. 2015, S. 81). Die Ergebnisse der Studie in Kapitel 6 tragen zur Beantwortung dieser Frage bei. Sie zeigen zum einen, dass bestimmte Varianten eines Arbeitgeberkommentars zu negativen Arbeitgeberbewertungen deren negative Effekte auf die Arbeitgeberattraktivität mindern können. Zum anderen verdeutlichen sie, dass keine der betrachteten Varianten eines Arbeitgeberkommentars die negativen Effekte einer negativen Bewertung verstärkt. Bezogen auf die Frage nach dem „Ob“ eines Arbeitgeberkommentars, ist – ausgehend von den Ergebnissen – somit generell zu empfehlen, dass Arbeitgeber die sie betreffenden negativen Bewertungen kommentieren.

Diese Empfehlung wird auch durch den in der Studie in Kapitel 7 gewonnenen Befund gestützt, dass über die Hälfte der betrachteten Unternehmen negative Bewertungen kommentieren. Ausgehend von der Auswahl der betrachteten Unternehmen (vgl. 7.3.1.) liegt die Vermutung nahe, dass Arbeitsplatzsuchende bei großen Unternehmen Kommentare auf negative Bewertungen erwarten. Bleiben Kommentare aus, kann dies, unter Bezugnahme auf das Konzept der Legitimität (vgl. Suchman 1995, S. 574), mit einem **Verlust an Arbeitgeberlegitimität** (vgl. Williamson 2000, S. 28) einhergehen, wodurch das Erreichen von Rekrutierungszielen beeinträchtigt werden kann (vgl. Williamson 2000, S. 30).

Trotz dieser Überlegungen sollten Organisationen nicht in blinden Aktionismus verfallen und alle sie betreffenden negativen Bewertungen reflexartig mit standardisierten Kommentaren versehen. Basierend auf den Studienergebnissen in Kapitel 7 stellt solch ein Ansatz, der durch undifferenzierte und inhaltlich von der Bewertung losgelöste Kommentare gekennzeichnet ist, die

Ausnahme dar (vgl. 7.4.3). Sollte dieser dennoch verwendet werden, ist damit die Gefahr verbunden, dass das Kommentieren von negativen Arbeitgeberbewertungen als Teil des Employer Image Managements (vgl. 8.2.3) lediglich als **Legitimationsfassade** (vgl. z. B. Süß 2008, S. 64) wahrgenommen wird. Dadurch werden die intendierten Effekte möglicherweise nicht erzielt. Die generelle Empfehlung, negative Arbeitgeberbewertungen zu kommentieren, lässt sich somit – basierend auf den gewonnenen Erkenntnissen zum „Wie“ einer Antwort – verfeinern. Arbeitgeber sollten von einer übermäßigen Verwendung von pauschalen Kommentaren absehen und stattdessen einen Ansatz verfolgen, der durch differenzierte und personalisierte Kommentare charakterisiert ist. Diese Sichtweise wird auch durch Befunde in der Forschung zum Beschwerdemanagement gestützt (vgl. Roozen/Raedts 2018, S. 977).

8.3.2 Grenzen der Arbeit

Die vorliegende Arbeit unterliegt mehreren Grenzen, die bei der Interpretation der gewonnenen Ergebnisse zu berücksichtigen sind. Diese Grenzen ergeben sich durch die jeweilige Forschungsmethodik der in Kapitel 4 bis 7 vorgestellten Studien, die bereits in den jeweiligen Abschnitten (4.6; 5.6; 6.6; 7.7) diskutiert wurden. Ausgehend von einer studienübergreifenden Betrachtung lassen sich darüber hinaus weitere Grenzen identifizieren, die an dieser Stelle zu thematisieren sind.

Vor dem Hintergrund des Ziels der vorliegenden Arbeit, das in der Analyse der Ursachen und Wirkungen der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation in der Rekrutierung besteht (vgl. 1.3), ist es von Bedeutung, inwiefern die durchgeführten Studien eindeutige Aussagen über Kausalitäten erlauben. Diesbezüglich ist zu konstatieren, dass aufgrund der jeweiligen Studiendesigns **teilweise keine eindeutigen Kausalitäten** nachgewiesen werden können. So zielt die Studie in Kapitel 7 darauf ab, einen Faktor (hier: Arbeitgeberkommentare) zu explorieren, der die Wirkungen von Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation beeinflusst. Ausgehend von den Ergebnissen trägt die Studie auf diese Weise zwar zu einem tiefgreifenden Verständnis von Arbeitgeberkommentaren bei, liefert jedoch aufgrund der verwendeten qualitativen Forschungsmethodik keine eindeutigen Aussagen zu Ursache-Wirkungs-Beziehungen.

Ähnliche Grenzen sind in abgemilderter Form im Hinblick auf die Studie in Kapitel 4 aufzuzeigen. Die getätigten Aussagen über Ursache-Wirkungs-Beziehungen basieren, ausgehend vom quantitativ-explorativen Charakter der Studie, auf Analysen im Rahmen eines Querschnittsdesigns. Demnach können keine eindeutigen Kausalitäten nachgewiesen werden (vgl. z. B. Spector 2019, S. 126). Für die Interpretation der Ergebnisse folgt daraus, dass die Möglichkeit entgegengesetzter Wirkungsbeziehungen grundsätzlich in Betracht gezogen werden muss. Diese können zwar für den Großteil, nicht aber für alle in Kapitel 4 betrachteten Zusammenhänge konzeptionell ausgeschlossen werden. Exemplarisch zu nennen ist diesbezüglich der Zusammenhang zwischen HR-Praktiken und Unternehmenserfolg, dessen zugrunde liegende Wirkungsrichtung in der Literatur zum Teil kontrovers diskutiert wird (vgl. z. B. Wright et al. 2005, S. 419).

Die Grenze in Form einer eingeschränkten Kausalität wird durch die in den Studien in Kapitel 5 und Kapitel 6 genutzten Experimentaldesigns reduziert (vgl. Sedlmeier/Renkewitz 2013, S. 123-127). Dennoch ergeben sich auch hier übergreifende Limitationen, die aus den gewählten Studiendesigns resultieren und eine **eingeschränkte Generalisierbarkeit der Ergebnisse** mit sich bringen:

(1) Sowohl die Studie in Kapitel 5 als auch die in Kapitel 6 weisen einen **Fokus auf die erste Phase des Rekrutierungsprozesses** auf, innerhalb derer die initiale Attrahierung von Bewerbern im Vordergrund steht (vgl. 2.1). Ausgehend von diesem Fokus stellen die beiden Studien Realisationen eines sogenannten Single-Stage-Designs dar, in dessen Rahmen sowohl die unabhängigen als auch die abhängigen Variablen innerhalb derselben Phase des Rekrutierungsprozesses gemessen werden (vgl. Saks 2014, S. 468-469). Diese Art von Design zeichnet sich durch ihre Eignung aus, die Effekte von Informationsquellen innerhalb einer spezifischen Phase des Rekrutierungsprozesses tiefgreifend zu analysieren. Allerdings beschränkt sie zugleich die Aussagekraft der gewonnenen Ergebnisse im Hinblick auf die jeweils übrigen Phasen des Rekrutierungsprozesses (vgl. 2.1). Vor diesem Hintergrund ist die Übertragbarkeit der Ergebnisse der Studien in Kapitel 5 und 6 auf nachgelagerte Phasen des Rekrutierungsprozesses limitiert.

(2) Zudem unterliegt die Aussagekraft der Ergebnisse auch in Bezug auf die fokussierte Phase des Rekrutierungsprozesses zwei zentralen Grenzen. Erstens handelte sich es in beiden Studien um **künstliche Situationen**, in denen Probanden sich in die Lage von Arbeitsplatzsuchenden hineinversetzten und fiktive Arbeitgeber bewerteten. Dieses Vorgehen ist zwar in der Rekrutierungsforschung gängig (vgl. z. B. Barber/Roehling 1993; Jones/Shultz/Chapman 2006; Carpentier/van Hoya 2021), jedoch klammert es Effekte aus, die in der Realität die Reaktionen von Arbeitsplatzsuchenden beeinflussen können. Dazu zählen beispielsweise die vorherrschende Arbeitskräftenachfrage am Arbeitsmarkt (vgl. van Hoya 2012) und das bereits vorhandene Wissen über Arbeitgeber (vgl. Stockman/van Hoya/da Motta Veiga 2020). Zweitens wurde als Ergebnisgröße **ausschließlich die wahrgenommene Arbeitgeberattraktivität betrachtet**. Diese ist zwar – bisheriger Rekrutierungsforschung zufolge – ein geeigneter Prädiktor für die Intentionen und das Verhalten von Arbeitsplatzsuchenden (vgl. Jaidi/van Hooft/Arends 2011; Gully et al. 2013; Überschaer/Baum 2020), jedoch führt das Tätigen von Einschätzungen für Individuen im Vergleich zu tatsächlichem Verhalten, wie der Annahme eines Arbeitsplatzangebotes, zu geringen Opportunitätskosten (vgl. Rynes 1991, S. 436). Infolgedessen ist die Tragweite der gewonnenen Erkenntnisse im Hinblick auf das tatsächliche Verhalten von Bewerbern möglicherweise reduziert.

Darüber hinaus ist Folgendes anzumerken: Obgleich die vorliegende Arbeit durch die Betrachtung der organisationalen Ebene (vgl. Kap. 4; Kap. 7) der Kritik bezüglich einer reinen Fokussierung auf die individuelle Ebene entbehrt (vgl. Saks 2014, S. 479), findet dennoch eine **isolierte Betrachtung der Untersuchungsebenen** statt. Es ist somit nicht klar, inwiefern sich die gewonnenen Ergebnisse auf Ebene des Individuums bzw. dessen Wahrnehmung (hier: Arbeitgeberattraktivität) tatsächlich in Ergebnissen auf organisationaler Ebene (z. B. Größe des Bewerberpools) manifestieren. Dadurch wird die Aussagekraft der formulierten Praxisimplikationen limitiert, denn Multi-Level-Forschung zeigt, dass die Übertragbarkeit von Ergebnissen auf Individualebene auf die organisationale Ebene nicht zwingend gegeben sein muss (vgl. Ployhart/Kim 2014, S. 10).

8.3.3 Weiterer Forschungsbedarf

Die vorliegende Arbeit bietet zahlreiche Ansatzpunkte für zukünftige Forschung. Diese ergeben sich aus (1) den Grenzen und (2) den übergreifenden Beiträgen der Arbeit.

(1) Ein Ansatzpunkt für zukünftige Forschung besteht darin, die Kausalität der auf organisationaler Ebene explorierten Wirkungsbeziehungen zu überprüfen. Hierzu ist die **Nutzung longitudinaler Studiendesigns** geeignet (vgl. z. B. Ployhart/Vandenberg 2010). Diese erlauben eine zeitliche Trennung von Ursache und Wirkung. Sie weisen daher im Allgemeinen eine höhere Eignung zur Prüfung von Kausalität auf als Querschnittsdesigns, die in der vorliegenden Arbeit zur Anwendung kamen (vgl. Rindfleisch et al. 2008; Spector 2019).

Auf individueller Ebene fokussiert die vorliegende Arbeit die Erforschung der Wirkung von Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation auf die wahrgenommene Arbeitgeberattraktivität in der ersten Phase des Rekrutierungsprozesses. Ausgehend von dieser Fokussierung ergibt sich Forschungsbedarf zur **Wirkung von Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation in nachgelagerten Phasen des Rekrutierungsprozesses**. Dies beruht zum einen auf der Konzeption der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation, der zufolge Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation in allen Phasen auftreten kann (vgl. van Hove 2014, S. 254). Zum anderen verdeutlicht metaanalytische Evidenz, dass die Erklärungskraft von Prädiktoren der wahrgenommenen Arbeitgeberattraktivität über die Phasen des Rekrutierungsprozesses hinweg variiert (vgl. Uggerslev/Fassina/Kraichy 2012). Es ist somit möglich, dass die im Rahmen der vorliegenden Arbeit beobachteten Effekte in späteren Phasen des Rekrutierungsprozesses anders ausfallen.

Ausgehend von theoretischen Überlegungen ist dies sogar wahrscheinlich. So lässt sich basierend auf dem Elaboration Likelihood Model (vgl. Petty/Cacioppo 1986) argumentieren, dass Bewerber während des Anstrebens (Phase 2) und nach der Unterbreitung eines Arbeitsplatzangebots (Phase 3) ein höheres Involvement aufweisen als in der ersten Phase des Rekrutierungsprozesses. Dieses gesteigerte Involvement kann wiederum dazu führen, dass die Argu-

mentqualität im Rahmen der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation stärker ins Gewicht fällt (vgl. Petty/Cacioppo/Schumann 1983) und so zu anderen als zu den in der Studie in Kapitel 5 beobachteten Effekten führt.

Ähnliche Überlegungen lassen sich auch im Hinblick auf die Ergebnisse der Studie in Kapitel 6 anstellen. Die jüngste Forschung zeigt, dass das Vorhandensein von Employer Brand Equity bzw. bewerberseitigem Wissen über einen Arbeitgeber die negativen Effekte negativer Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation reduziert (vgl. Stockman/van Hove/da Motta Veiga 2020). Demnach ist zu vermuten, dass die Effekte negativer Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation in späteren Phasen des Rekrutierungsprozesses, die durch vermehrten Kontakt zwischen Organisation und Bewerber charakterisiert sind, schwächer ausfallen.

Zukünftige Forschung kann die weiteren Grenzen der im Rahmen der vorliegenden Arbeit durchgeführten Experimentalstudien überwinden, indem sie zum einen die betrachteten Wirkungszusammenhänge unter realistischeren Rahmenbedingungen untersucht. Zum anderen, indem sie sich von der alleinigen Betrachtung der wahrgenommenen Arbeitgeberattraktivität als abhängige Variable löst. Als Ansatzpunkt zur **Erhöhung des Realismus** sind Feldexperimente geeignet, die häufig in der Rekrutierungsforschung genutzt werden (vgl. z. B. Gilliland et al. 2001; Pallais/Glassberg-Sands 2016; Yu 2019). Diese ermöglichen analog zu Laborexperimenten eine Prüfung von Kausalitäten, erfordern aber nicht Probanden in künstliche Situationen zu versetzen, und führen somit zu stärker generalisierbareren Ergebnissen (vgl. Podsakoff/Podsakoff 2019, S. 25).

Um daneben zu aussagekräftigeren Ergebnissen hinsichtlich des Verhaltens von Arbeitsplatzsuchenden zu gelangen, ist im Rahmen zukünftiger Forschung zu elektronischer Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation deren Einfluss auf die Wirkungskette bestehend aus **Wahrnehmungen, Intentionen und Verhalten** genauer zu analysieren. Als Ansatzpunkt sind diesbezüglich longitudinale Feldstudien erwähnenswert (vgl. z. B. Saks/Ashforth 1997; Carless 2005). Deren Durchführung erweist sich jedoch im Kontext internetbasierter Rekrutierungsquellen unter forschungspragmatischen Gesichtspunkten als schwierig, weshalb zur Analyse der Wirkungskette Entscheidungssimulationen in Laborexperimenten geeigneter sind (vgl. Maurer/Cook 2011, S. 116).

Ein Anwendungsbeispiel hierfür liefert die Studie von Überschaer und Baum (2020). Die Forscher untersuchten im Rahmen eines Experiments, inwiefern die Wahrnehmung (hier: Arbeitgeberattraktivität) den Einfluss der rekrutierungsbezogenen Information (hier: Employer Award) auf das Verhalten (hier: Entscheidung zum Verfassen einer Bewerbung) mediiert. Um die Entscheidung zur Bewerbung bzw. die damit verbundenen „Kosten“ zu simulieren, mussten die Probanden für jedes Unternehmen einen kurzen Text verfassen, in dem sie die Beweggründe für die Bewerbungsentscheidung erläuterten (vgl. Überschaer/Baum 2020, S. 150). Daraus wird deutlich, dass im Rahmen von Laborexperimenten Designs existieren, die Einblicke in die zugrunde liegenden Wirkmechanismen erlauben und so zu substantielleren Aussagen hinsichtlich des Verhaltens von Arbeitsplatzsuchenden führen. Da diese Designs nicht zuletzt die Aussagekraft von Praxisimplikationen erhöhen, ist es empfehlenswert, dass sie auch in zukünftiger Forschung zum Einfluss elektronischer Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation verstärkt zur Anwendung kommen.

Ein letzter, sich aus den Grenzen der vorliegenden Arbeit ergebender Ansatzpunkt für weitere Forschung besteht darin, von einer isolierten Betrachtung der individuellen und organisationalen Ebene abzusehen und stattdessen ein **Multi-Level-Modell der Rekrutierung** zugrunde zu legen (vgl. z. B. Ployhart 2006; Gully/Phillips/Kim 2014; Phillips/Gully 2015; Acikgoz 2019). Bisherige Forschung betrachtet den Rekrutierungsprozess auf organisationaler Ebene und den Prozess der Arbeitsplatzsuche auf individueller Ebene weitgehend losgelöst voneinander. Diese Sichtweise wird der Realität jedoch nicht hinreichend gerecht, da diese Prozesse nicht losgelöst voneinander ablaufen, sondern sich häufig wechselseitig bzw. ebenenübergreifend beeinflussen (vgl. Acikgoz 2019, S. 2). Neuere Ansätze im Bereich der Multi-Level-Forschung (vgl. Acikgoz 2019, S. 2-3) argumentieren daher, dass ein vollumfänglicheres Verständnis über die Entstehung von Bewerberpools, wie es auch im Rahmen der Studie in Kapitel 4 angestrebt wird, dadurch entsteht, dass die individuelle und die organisationale Ebene der Betrachtung integriert werden. Daraus lässt sich für zukünftige Forschung zu Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation die Empfehlung ableiten, von einer isolierten Betrachtung der Untersuchungsebenen abzusehen und sich verstärkt der Analyse ebenenübergreifender Mechanismen zu widmen.

(2) Ausgehend vom gegenwärtigen Forschungsstand zu den Wirkungen der Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation wurde im Rahmen der übergreifenden Beiträge argumentiert, dass eine **Erweiterung des Theoriespektrums** anzustreben ist. Zudem wurde anhand der gewonnenen Ergebnisse illustriert, inwiefern eine moderate Theorievielfalt dem Erkenntnisgewinn zuträglich ist (vgl. 8.2.1). Auch wenn die vorliegende Arbeit den Fundus anwendbarer Theorien um bisher nicht berücksichtigte Theorien (hier: ELM und IRT) erweitert, lässt sich dieser dem Umfang nach weiterhin als sehr begrenzt bezeichnen.

Diese Einschätzung basiert auf einem jüngst erschienen Literatur-Review von Babić-Rosario und Kollegen (2020), die einen Überblick über die Theorien geben, die in den letzten 20 Jahren innerhalb der Marketingforschung zu elektronischer Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation genutzt wurden. Obgleich einige dieser Theorien bereits punktuell in der Forschung zu arbeitsbezogener Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation angewendet werden, z. B. die Media-Richness-Theorie (vgl. Daft/Lengel 1986) in der Studie von Cable und Yu (2006), lässt sich bei vergleichender Betrachtung noch immer eine mangelnde Theorievielfalt in der Rekrutierungsforschung konstatieren. Diese Erkenntnis liefert einen Ansatzpunkt für zukünftige Forschungsvorhaben, der in der Erweiterung der theoretischen Fundierung der Forschung zu arbeitsbezogener Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation besteht. Als Orientierungshilfe kann diesbezüglich sowohl der genannte Theorieüberblick (vgl. Babić-Rosario/de Valck/Sotgiu 2020) als auch die in Kapitel 6 dargestellte multidisziplinäre Literaturanalyse dienen.

Die vorliegende Arbeit verdeutlicht studienübergreifend, dass **Arbeitgeberbewertungsportale als Datenquelle für die Rekrutierungsforschung** dienen können (vgl. 8.2.2). Dennoch werden sie von der bisherigen Rekrutierungsforschung kaum als solche genutzt, was im Kontrast zur Forschung in anderen Bereichen steht. So zeigt eine Studie von Höllig (2021, S. 4343), dass aus Arbeitgeberbewertungen gewonnene Informationen bereits häufig in wissenschaftlichen Studien in den Bereichen Finance & Accounting, Management und Marketing genutzt werden, hingegen im Bereich Personalmanagement und damit der Rekrutierungsforschung kaum eine Rolle spielen.

Dieses Ergebnis ist überraschend, da Arbeitgeberbewertungen zum einen starken inhaltlichen Bezug zum Personalmanagement und insbesondere zu der Rekrutierung aufweisen. Zum anderen verdeutlicht die Forschung in den Bereichen außerhalb des Personalmanagements, dass Arbeitgeberbewertungen sowohl als unabhängige als auch als abhängige Variable fungieren können. Dies ermöglicht die Analyse zahlreicher Wirkungszusammenhänge auf organisationaler Ebene (vgl. Höllig 2021, S. 4343-4345).

Beispielsweise können Informationen aus Arbeitgeberbewertungen zur Vorhersage des Unternehmenserfolgs genutzt werden (vgl. Symitsi/Stamollampros/Daskalakis 2018) oder der Überprüfung potenzieller Determinanten der Mitarbeiterzufriedenheit dienen, z. B. der Zugehörigkeit zu einem Familienunternehmen im Vergleich zu einem Nichtfamilienunternehmen (vgl. Huang et al. 2015). Vor diesem Hintergrund erweist sich die verstärkte Nutzung von Arbeitgeberbewertungsportalen als Datenquelle als empfehlenswert und bietet zugleich Ansatzpunkte für zukünftige Forschung. So könnte in zukünftigen Studien die Erklärungskraft von Informationen aus Arbeitgeberbewertungen bezüglich rekrutierungsbezogener Ergebnisgrößen auf organisationaler Ebene überprüft werden, beispielsweise hinsichtlich der Qualität und Quantität des Bewerberpools (vgl. Höllig 2021, S. 4348). Des Weiteren könnten Bewertungen von Bewerbern genutzt werden, um die Faktoren zu explorieren, die zu Zufriedenheit mit dem Bewerbungsprozess führen.

Im Hinblick auf das Employer Image Management wurde diskutiert, dass aufgrund der Bedrohung des Arbeitgeberimages durch negative Arbeitgeberbewertungen die Entwicklung einer Reaktionsstrategie notwendig ist (8.2.3). Die Studien in Kapitel 6 und 7 tragen zur Entwicklung einer solchen Reaktionsstrategie bei, indem sie u. a. empirische Belege zu Gestaltungsvarianten von Stellungnahmen bzw. deren Wirkungen generieren. Darüber hinaus zeigen die Studien die Gestaltung von Stellungnahmen betreffenden Forschungsbedarf auf, der in den jeweiligen Abschnitten (vgl. 6.6 und 7.6) erläutert wurde. Ausgehend von einer studienübergreifenden Betrachtung wird dabei deutlich, dass der identifizierte Forschungsbedarf fast ausschließlich die Erforschung von Nachrichten- und Sendereigenschaften forciert. Diese Sichtweise greift jedoch zu kurz, denn es ist davon auszugehen, dass auch die **Eigenschaften des Informationsempfängers** (hier: Arbeitsplatzsuchende;

7.2.5) die Verarbeitung von Stellungnahmen und damit deren Effektivität beeinflussen. Diese Annahme wird durch Marketingforschung gestützt (vgl. Johnen/Schnittka 2019), die ebenfalls eine Vernachlässigung von Empfängereigenschaften konstatiert und zugleich empirische Evidenz dafür liefert, dass Empfängereigenschaften die Wirkungen organisationaler Stellungnahmen moderieren können. Um folglich zu einem umfassenderen Verständnis der Wirkungen von arbeitgeberseitigen Stellungnahmen und damit von Word-of-Mouth-Kommunikation zu gelangen, ist die Rolle von Empfängereigenschaften weiter zu ergründen, woraus zahlreiche Ansatzpunkte für weitere Forschung resultieren.

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