

Rapport Matters in Corporate Career Websites

Personal, Supportive, Responsive – Effective!

Masterthesis

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ABSTRACT

Corporate career websites are gaining strategic importance in the recruiting mix which leads to innovative developments regarding their form, content and function. This study investigated 129 respondent's reactions to *personal*, *supportive* and *responsive* elements on corporate career websites, all of them aiming at building rapport. Only students in the end phase of their study or recent graduates took part. Two real websites of banks were chosen as stimuli. One contained all of the three characteristics – and the other contained none of them. Assigned to one of two conditions, the participants imitated job seekers looking for career information on the particular company's website. A pre- and a post-task questionnaire asked for *familiarity*, *reputation*, *website attitude* and *applicant attraction*. Indeed, participants confronted with the “bank plus website” containing all the characteristics used it more intensely and reported a higher *applicant attraction*. Increased *familiarity* and *reputation* due to the website visit were found to be more important than *the website usage* itself. Other than the *familiarity* and *reputation* before usage the increase of *familiarity* and *reputation* had considerable influence on *website attitude* and *applicant attraction*. However, the characteristics as operationalized by means of concrete website features were found to be less influential than the mere perception of the characteristics. Respondents oftentimes attested a website a *personal touch*, *supportiveness*, or *responsiveness* without actually having used the assigned features. It was concluded that the mere perception of the characteristics is even more important than how they are actually implemented. Building rapport in terms of the three characteristics makes a difference and matters in corporate career websites.

1. INTRODUCTION

"If you want to find all career opportunities that a company offers, you have to go to their own career website. Events, campaigns, contacts, assessments, career opportunities and application form - the best chance to find everything is to go straight to the source."

(Ziesing, Head of Research at Potentialpark, cited by Onrec, 2009)

The Internet can doubtlessly be called *the* medium of the new millennium. Many people are online today - and so are most services and sectors. There is online dating, online shopping, online gaming, online banking, online tax form filling, online advertising and online flight booking. Naming something that can *not* be found on the Internet seems to be a real challenge these days.

It is therefore not surprising that the recruitment of talents has also gone online. Of course there are still employment advertisements in newspapers and recruiting events in universities. A big part of organizational recruiting for higher educated professionals, however, takes place on the Internet (Anderson, 2003; Cober, Brown, Keeping, & Levy, 2004a). The World Wide Web offers a broad range of possibilities for online recruiting: Posting vacancies on job boards such as Monster.com, searching talents via job networks like Xing.com and recruiting via social networking sites such as Facebook are only some options.

Online recruiting becomes more and more interesting as both technical possibilities on the Internet and challenges in personnel marketing increase. A so-called "war for talents" has broken out on today's job market – and the Internet is the main place where this war is waged.

One seemingly simple and self-evident but also very effective online recruitment instrument is a company's website. No matter where job seekers hear or read about an organization or a vacancy, they will probably visit the company's corporate career website¹ at one point (Peters, 2001). Corporate career websites, i.e. the parts of companies' homepages where the firm as an employer is presented, are the foundation of online recruiting - a fact that most organizations, especially the bigger and well-known ones, seem to have understood and internalized. Once job seekers have entered a particular career page it is essential to bond them, to capture their interest and to motivate them to explore the site as long and detailed as possible. By stimulating visitors' search

¹ All of the following considerations on websites will be focused on "corporate career websites" in particularly. Besides the term of "corporate career websites" these kinds of web appearances are referred to also as "recruitment websites", "career websites" or simply "websites". All these terms are used synonymously.

behaviour, companies raise the probability that job seekers make informed decisions on whether they like the website and the company behind it - and whether they fit the organization.

Career websites per se are not a new phenomenon. Almost every notable company has one and most of the sites are very professional (Capelli, 2001). There are even rankings that list the best and most attractive career sites (for example Potentialpark, 2010). What has been observable for a few years is that there is a new generation of corporate career websites coming up – *personal* (including faces, names and stories), *supportive* (providing tips and hints for a successful application) and oftentimes even *responsive* (giving immediate feedback about the person-organization fit or about a visitor's skills).

While of course there are further innovations observable on corporate career sites these three characteristics are chosen as they are expected to be especially interesting with regard to this particular cutting point of human resources and website-based communication. They further have something in common as they all advance the establishment of *rapport*², defined as a “sympathetic relationship or understanding” (Collins English Dictionary, 2011).

Corporate career websites as recruiting instruments are a current and, what's even more important, a scientifically *and* practically relevant topic. Although a lot of research on recruiting in general has been conducted, research on online recruiting and especially on corporate career websites is still in its infancy (Cober et al., 2004a).

This is surprising for two reasons: First, online job searching has become very popular: Every day, about 4 million people open their browsers to search for jobs on the Internet. Especially among students it is totally normal to solely use the Internet in order to get informed about possible career perspectives. 9 out of 10 students go online to find career-related information (Potentialpark Result Release, 2010). Second, not only the meaning of the Internet as a job searching medium in general is increasing but also the significance of corporate career websites in particular: Two thirds of the students going online to find career information consult corporate websites whereas the importance of job portals such as monster.com is decreasing (ibid.).

Most companies (around 70%) have identified the chances of web-based recruitment and make use of it (Berry, 2005). Among Fortune 500 companies,

² When talking about *rapport* in this thesis, the considerations always refer to the three characteristics of *personal touch*, *supportiveness* and *responsiveness* aiming to develop this strong kind of relationship.

even 94% use their websites for recruitment purposes (Greenspan, 2003). Compared to 29% of Fortune 500 companies using this channel in 1998 this is a remarkable increase (ibid.). Beside the rising demand for online job information on the part of job seekers, potential cost reductions are a further motivation for companies to invest in their corporate career sites: Up to 95% of recruitment costs can be saved when using the official website as a recruiting tool (Buckley, Minette, Joy, & Michaels, 2004).

Although the listed numbers and facts clearly underline the importance and topicality of web-based recruitment, most existing studies have so far “scarcely scratched the surface” (Ployhart, 2006, p. 875). What has mainly been neglected in the research so far is the mediating role of *website usage*. While several researchers have investigated the attitude towards career websites, almost no one has studied how people really use those sites and how they behave on them (Cober et al., 2004a). This is a pity in so far as “the information obtained by job seekers is dependent not only on what is available on the website, but also on their own browsing behaviour” (ibid., p. 633). A model which includes *website usage* has been developed by Cober et al. (2004a) and will – due to its coherence and sophistication – serve as a basis of the thesis.

Website usage is an interesting variable in so far that it is likely to affect the further recruiting process – the *website attitude* and the outcome of *applicant attraction* which is especially critical to the hiring companies in this early recruiting stage. Job seeker's *familiarity* with a company and a company's *reputation* among the relevant target group are further interesting constructs as they 1) exist already before *website usage* and might influence the whole recruiting process and 2) can be enhanced or increased due to the website visit. The research questions guiding this thesis will hence be as follows:

- 1. To what extent does rapport (in terms of personal touch, supportiveness and responsiveness) in corporate career websites influence applicant attraction and which roles do website usage and website attitude play in this process?**
- 2. Which roles do familiarity with the hiring organization and its perceived reputation play?**

The research questions will function as a leitmotif of this paper, guiding the literature review (chapter 2) and of course the subsequent two-step empirical part (chapters 3 and 4). Beginning with the potential and effect of corporate career websites in general, it will first be discussed why single website characteristics actually have the power to affect the whole recruiting process (chapter 2.1.1).

Afterwards, a coherent *theoretical* concept displaying job seekers' reactions to and use of corporate career websites will be introduced (chapter 2.1.2). A critical reflection on how important variables have been conceptualized and measured in *empirical* studies will follow (chapter 2.1.3). After the more general chapter 2.1 concentrating on the greater process of attracting applicants via recruitment websites, chapter 2.2 will focus on the theoretical meaning and effect of the innovative characteristics *personal touch*, *supportiveness* and *responsiveness*. A research model on how rapport is supposed to influence applicant attraction will finally conclude chapter 2. Eight hypotheses will put the visual model into concrete words.

Afterwards, the two-step experimental design will be displayed: First, the content analysis of the Top 30 career websites of Europe (Potentialpark, 2010) will show the relevance of *personal*, *supportive* and *responsive* elements in real life corporate career websites (3.1) and will lead to the experimental material (3.2).

Second, the final survey with students or recent graduates will complement the theoretical considerations and the content analysis and will give deeper insight into the actual behaviour of this important target group on corporate career websites – dependent on the sites' degrees of *personal touch*, *supportiveness* and *responsiveness* – and the consequences for *applicant attraction*.

2. RECRUITING VIA CORPORATE CAREER WEBSITES

This chapter is a literature section consolidating relevant and up-to-date theoretical and empirical findings regarding recruiting via corporate career websites. The main questions answered in this chapter are: What makes recruiting via a company's official website so promising? Why can even single website characteristics have big effects? How do job seekers use such sites and react to it? Which variables play important roles and how can you measure them? How can website-based recruiting be advanced, and the final outcome *applicant attraction* be enhanced? The answers to these questions will lead to a research model and eight hypotheses on how in detail applicant attraction might be influenceable by *personal*, *supportive* and *responsive* website elements.

2.1 POTENTIAL AND EFFECT OF CORPORATE CAREER WEBSITES

“Corporate employment Web sites will continue to have a dramatic effect on employee recruitment for years to come.”

(Cober, Brown, Levy, 2004b, p. 214)

2.1.1 The Signalling Effect of Single Website Characteristics

Even single corporate career website characteristics can have big effects as many job seekers transfer the website's qualities and characteristics to the hiring organization (Braddy, Meade and Kroustalis, 2006). This phenomenon can be explained with 'Signalling Theory' (ibid., 2006). Applying this theory to corporate career websites will help to illuminate how a website's *personal touch*, its *supportiveness* and *responsiveness* might influence website visitors' perceptions of the company as an employer.

'Signalling Theory' has originally been used in economic research to explain the role of information possessed by both buyer and seller (Braddy et al., 2006). It can, however, also be applied to the recruiting context where the potential applicant and the recruiting organization are the critical subjects having varying information (ibid.). Basically, 'Signalling Theory' says that in the absence of other information one draws inferences based on peripheral cues.

Only some years back, 'Signalling Theory' in the recruitment context was mainly used to investigate the critical role of recruiters who are representing the company in the further steps of the recruitment process, for example in job

interviews. The signalling effect is simple: If the recruiter is friendly and competent, applicants will probably transfer these qualities to the company (Braddy et al., 2006). Nowadays, job seekers do not have to wait until a possible interview. They can make inferences to the organization one step earlier: Thanks to content-rich corporate career websites, cues can be received already in the job searching phase. Job seekers don't have to wait until the advanced application process to make inferences about organizational culture; they don't have to wait until they meet with an organizational representative. Instead, they can draw conclusions about potential future employers as early as possible based on cues of their recruitment websites - such as website design or usability (Braddy et al., 2006).

Braddy et al. (2006) took a closer look at the impressions viewers gain when searching through corporate career websites. By means of a laboratory experiment among 48 undergraduate students, the researchers wanted to investigate which site characteristics convey which cultural dimension³. The students were (one at a time) asked to explore four randomly chosen websites out of a pre-selected list of Fortune 500 companies, and to assume that they were job seeking and all information about the jobs on the websites was equivalent (equally interesting, equally paid etc.). Through asking them afterwards which sites were more strongly associated with which cultural dimensions, conclusions were drawn on which features are likely to influence certain cultural perceptions. *Website design features* were among other characteristics identified as important factors influencing the formation of culture perceptions (ibid.).

While the qualitative setting of the study is well-thought-out and based on real existing websites, some limitations are given because of the sample. The participants were 19 years on average and only 19% of them had prior experience with job applications via the Internet (ibid.). Those undergraduate (just beginning) students were probably not representative of the actual target group. While they of course can *assume* that they are job seekers which have recently graduated this still might lead to some biases.

Nevertheless, the study by Braddy et al. (2006) underlines the strategic importance and signalling value even *single* website features can have – which is

³ The cultural dimensions defined in this study were: innovation, emphasis on reward, supportiveness, outcome-orientation, attention to detail, team-orientation, aggressiveness, decisiveness and diversity. The first eight dimensions were taken from a study by Judge and Cable (1997) who in turn adopted them from O'Reilly, Chatman and Caldwell (1991). The ninth dimension, diversity, was added by Braddy et al. (2006) themselves – based on the prevalence of this dimension on today's Fortune 500 websites.

a basic assumption of this thesis. If a website has particular positive characteristics (such as a *personal touch*, for example), potential applicants might transfer these characteristics to the hiring organization.

Serving as a good resume, the same authors formulated the following in another paper two years later:

“[A]n organization’s recruitment website has salient signalling value for job seekers under many different circumstances, particularly when they have little knowledge about, or familiarity with, the hiring organization (Braddy et al., 2008, p. 2994).”

Braddy et al. (2006) are not the only ones using ‘Signalling Theory’ in this context. There is considerable support for that in recent literature (Sylva & Mol, 2009; Thompson, Braddy, & Wuensch, 2008).

Sylva and Mol (2009) came to similar conclusions as Braddy et al. (2006) when researching applicants’ perception of an online application system. With the help of a study among 1360 applicants, they measured applicants’ satisfaction with an application tool and the relative importance of certain variables. Beside the basic result that reactions towards the web-based application procedure were generally favourable, the researchers identified *website features*, *perceived efficiency* and *user-friendliness* as the most important determinants of applicant satisfaction. The conclusion drawn was as follows:

“Applicant perceptions and organizational attraction may be rather easily influenced at this early stage of the selection process by means of efficiency and user-friendliness improvements. This suggestion is also in line with ‘Signalling Theory’ (Sylva & Mol, 2009, p. 319).”

Other than the study by Braddy et al. mentioned above, the research carried out by Sylva and Mol was of quantitative nature and included many more participants. While the study is based on one company and thus on one application tool only, it investigates the satisfaction with this particular tool on a very representative basis. The sample was based on people actually having applied for a particular job in a real multinational company. Naturally, the participants were on average older (33 years) and most of them (over 80%) had prior experience with online job searching and applying (Sylva & Mol, 2009).

The study by Sylva and Mol focuses on a phase in the recruitment process which goes one step further – the phase where job seekers actually send their applications via the website. The conclusions drawn about website characteristics influencing applicant satisfaction are therefore limited to this later phase, and to application tool characteristics rather than career site

characteristics. As application tools are meaningful parts of current corporate career websites, this is probably closely related, though.

In sum, website characteristics play a key role in the success of corporate career websites as they signal how the company (behind the website) might be. If the particular characteristics of *personal touch*, *supportiveness* and *responsiveness* influence *applicant attraction* still has to be proven. Beside the website characteristics, and as already noted in the introduction, five other important constructs are supposed to play a role in the recruiting process as well: *website usage*, *website attitude and applicant attraction* (RQ1), *familiarity* with the hiring company and its *reputation* (RQ2). To get an idea how website characteristics can interplay with all these variables a broader conceptual model on how job seekers react to career websites will be displayed and discussed in the following.

2.1.2 Job Seekers' Use of and Reactions to Corporate Career Websites

A coherent conceptual model of job seekers' reactions to and use of recruitment sites was first developed by Cober, Brown, Keeping and Levy (2004a). With this model (Fig. 1) Cober et al. (2004a) developed an ideal starting point a) for my theoretical considerations and b) for the empirical part giving special importance to the mediating role of what they call *search behaviour* that will follow later on.

Throughout their paper, Cober et al. (2004a) present 15 testable propositions that should be used to guide future research. The researchers did not test the propositions themselves, though. They developed them based on a literature review covering four important fields of research: recruitment literature (to better understand website recruitment), consumer literature (to gain insight into attraction to advertisements), social psychology (to comprehend attitudes and affects), and human-computer interaction (to understand the unique factors playing a role when humans use websites) (Cober et al., 2004a).

The holistic model incorporates website characteristics, several mediating constructs, *website attitude* and *applicant attraction*. According to the authors, the “model explicates the website factors and processes relevant for understanding a job seeker's affect, attitudes, behaviours, and eventual attraction to an organization” (Cober et al., 2004a, p. 624).

The conceptual model hereby concentrates on the first stage of the recruitment process, on the acquisition of applicants, and takes a closer look at how those job seekers interact with the recruitment site. It starts with the, according to Cober et al. (2004a), most important characteristics of websites: *aesthetics* and *playfulness*. In the researchers' opinion, the first affective reactions evoked by a

website are the critical ones and the first visual impression – or facade - of a site is mainly influenced by *aesthetics* and *playfulness*⁴.

They claim that together with system features of the recruitment site, the initial affective reactions which could be either negative or positive will influence perceptions of usability. The logic behind it – i.e. that in people's perceptions “[w]hat is beautiful is usable” as well – has also been assumed and approved by Tractinsky, Katz, & Ikar (2000).



* mediating relationships

Fig. 1: “Organizational website recruitment framework” (Cober et al., 2004, p. 626; emphasis added);

Affective reactions and the perceived usability will - constantly mediated by job seekers' *search behaviour* and *website attitude* – ultimately predict *applicant attraction*, Cober et al. (2004a) suppose. The basic idea is that websites provide their visitors with vivid, rich and dynamic experiences (very different from what traditional advertising materials such as brochures or flyers can offer) and that this in turn invites the users to actively interact – and not only passively absorb. The site characteristics *aesthetics* and *playfulness* are assumed to highly influence the immediate spontaneous emotion towards the career site (ibid.) but they are not supposed to be the only influencing factors. In some cases, job seekers have formed an attitude towards an organization *before* visiting the website and have a certain image in mind. *Image* and *familiarity* are therefore named as two moderating factors that influence the whole process.

⁴ While *aesthetics* refer to stylistic considerations such as colours, fonts and pictures, the unity of design and the contrasts drawn, *playfulness* refers to entertaining features such as sounds, vivid images, videos and animations (Cober et al., 2004a).

Cober et al. (2004a) were the first to take a closer look at the strategic importance of what they call *search behaviour* on recruitment websites. According to them, the initially evoked emotions and the perceived usability influence the website *search behaviour* in three ways: When the emotions evoked are rather positive and the site is indeed easy-to-use, users are assumed to stay longer on the career site, to click on more options, and to remain in those options chosen longer than in the opposite scenario (i.e. negative emotions and a difficult navigation). The researchers call the three dimensions of search behaviour *effort*, *breadth of search* and *depth of search*, with effort referring to the whole amount of time spent on the sites, breadth as the number of options chosen, and depth as the time spent on each option.

Beside the effects on *search behaviour*, Cober et al. (2004a) stress that initial emotions and perceived usability also influence the image formed about the organization. If a website is for example well-structured and contains hints for job seekers how to formulate an ideal application, the organization is supposed to appear as caring and considerate. As extended search behaviour is proposed to lead to an increased *familiarity* with the company and therefore to a more fact-based and sounder attitude towards it, the *website attitude* is closely connected to this. Job seekers who search through a website form their opinion not only based on particular characteristics but on their overall evaluation of their online experience (ibid.).

In the end, an interplay between the *search behaviour*, the *image* and the *website attitude* influences *applicant attraction* according to Cober et al. (2004a). *Applicant attraction* is chosen as the critical outcome because it is the most important objective of the first recruiting stage which definitely raises the probability of actual application (ibid.).

Basically, the considerations made by the researchers are well-thought-out, sophisticated, and plausible. The model incorporates different research fields and points of view and includes the most basic elements. It stays – nevertheless – a *theoretical* model that has to be tested empirically in order to definitely assess its explanatory power. The researchers have admittedly chosen the variables they “*feel* are the most central features” (Cober et al., 2004, p. 639; own accentuation). It has to be proven if their choices were legitimate.

Moreover, the terms used by them have to be reflected critically. Especially the term *search behaviour* is not clear: Does it refer only to *search* behaviour? Or does it also include non-specific website browsing and could therefore better be named *website usage*?

Furthermore, the characteristics *aesthetics* and *playfulness* are probably arguable and surely not the only ones influencing people's choices, emotions, behaviour and attitudes. As they are fairly broad and relevant for many kinds of websites (not only career sites) the choice in this thesis is made for three other characteristics that are observable especially on corporate career websites.

Although other researchers have not investigated recruiting via corporate career websites in such a coherent model (also including *website usage*) as Cober et al. (2004a) have done, several authors have at least taken single variables out of the model under closer inspection. Alongside the broad theoretical model introduced in this chapter, concrete empirical findings are available at least for single parts of it.

2.1.3 Variables of Special Interest and How to Measure Them

On a theoretical basis, Cober et al. (2004a) have described recruiting via corporate career websites quite plausibly. Their model is based on recent literature from relevant fields so it is not surprising that in general the main variables displayed by Cober et al. (2004a) re-emerge in many empirical studies – not all at the same time but at least partly and backfilled with concrete measures and data. This chapter aims to show how selected variables out of the model developed by Cober et al. (2004a) (which I feel are most critical in order to investigate the effects of rapport) can be concretized and actually measured empirically.

Applicant attraction as the final outcome is considered in almost every study dealing with recruitment websites (Allen, Matho, & Otondo, 2007; Dineen, Ash, & Noe, 2002; Hu, Su, & Chen, 2007; Van Hove & Lievens, 2007; Williamson, King, Lepak, & Sarma, 2010). *Website Attitude* (Allen et al., 2007; Chen & Wells, 1999), *familiarity* (Allen et al., 2007; Braddy et al., 2008) and *reputation* (Allen et al., 2007; Williamson et al., 2010) have also evoked considerable attention. *Website Usage* has been dealt with only marginally (as one out of many control variables beside for example age and gender) by Walker, Feild, Giles, Armenakis and Bernerth (2009).

The main questions now are: How have the variables been measured or quantified concretely in the past? And which measures are best applicable for answering my research questions?

To start with, *familiarity* refers to *how much* people know about (or have experienced with) a hiring company. Are they rather familiar with the company or is it alien to them? *Familiarity* is normally measured before respondents use a

website. In former research it has partly been measured with one item only - for example by Braddy et al. (2008) which based on Turban (2001) simply asked: "In general, how familiar are you with this company?" A multi-item measurement for *familiarity* as developed by Laroche, Kim, and Zhou (1996) or alternatively Simon and Ruth (1998) (all authors using it in a brand *familiarity* context) seems more appropriate as it displays the different facets *familiarity* can have (for example prior information, prior experience *and* over-all *familiarity*). The brand context is without problems transferable to this particular context as in recruiting processes the employer brand plays a critical role as well.

Reputation refers to *what* people know about a hiring company. Has the company a really good *reputation* or rather a fairly bad image? As *familiarity*, *reputation* is mostly asked for before the actual website visit. Although a company's *reputation* can also be measured with one question only (for example as done by Braddy et al., 2008: "Overall, how would you evaluate this company's image as an employer?") it is for the same reasons as for *familiarity* advisable to use multi-item measures. Turban, Forret and Hendrichson (1998) developed a measurement specifically for *employer reputation* as a variable driving organizational attraction, consisting of four statements to which respondents were expected to indicate their agreement (for example: "I have heard a lot of good things about this company" or "this company has an excellent reputation on campus").

Website usage of course refers to how people behave on a website. Cober et al.'s (2004a) theoretical conceptualization (*effort*, *depth of search* and *breadth of search*) has only partly been used in practice: Walker et al. (2009) surveyed the total time spent on a website and the number of links visited for control purposes. They did not find any correlations between usage and other variables, which is not surprising as the website conditions were not altered in order to stimulate usage differences. The general procedure to observe usage instead of relying on self-reports seems appropriate and reasonable, though. It also makes sense to distinguish between different items: the total time spent on the website, the number of options chosen, and possibly also the time spent per option. The latter, though, results from the total time spent and the number of pages chosen so it might be sufficient to concentrate on just two dimensions in order to measure *website usage*.

Website attitude means the attitude toward the website itself. It is likely that people build an attitude towards a website depending on website characteristics. It is also probable that an attitude is formed fairly fast and even during the

process of exploring the website. The *website attitude* can therefore be inquired directly after the website visit. An often used method to measure it is giving users Likert-Scales or semantic differentials that for example go from *good* to *bad* or from *like* to *dislike* (Coyle & Thorson, 2001). As this is quite vague and not very meaningful, another (probably better) way of measuring *website attitude* is to ask people for their agreement with certain statements such as “*I feel comfortable in surfing this website*” (Chen & Wells, 1999). By asking respondents to think about particular statements they are more challenged to reflect what they are really thinking.

Finally, how could one best measure the final outcome - *applicant attraction*? This question is more difficult to answer as many terms, concepts and measures exist for this last step of the first recruitment phase. Highhouse, Lievens, & Sinar (2003) emphasize that a positive attitude is not automatically a 100 % precursor of the actual behaviour that will follow. As human behaviour is very complex, the researchers propose that attitude influences behaviour only in so far as it influences the intention to *engage* in that behaviour (Highhouse et al., 2003). This seems reasonable because what people really do in the end is oftentimes unpredictable. Nevertheless, evoking a positive attitude is a good start which is likely to at least influence job seekers' intention to engage in applying for a job.

Coyle and Thorson (2001) suggest that behavioural intention measures are best applicable to quantifying the effectiveness of persuasive websites⁵ but carefully distinguish between a weaker indicator of commitment – the *intention to return* – and a higher indicator – the *intention to purchase* (Coyle & Thorson, 2001). These measures are, in an adapted mode, usable for recruitment websites as well as the latter are persuasive in nature as well. A two-fold conceptualization of *applicant attraction* as used by Coyle and Thorson (2001) seems appropriate and reasonable as it also captures a weaker commitment which might change into stronger commitment later on.

In sum, concrete approaches on how to measure crucial variables in the website-based recruiting context have been discussed now. The signalling value of website characteristics has been explained right at the beginning of the chapter, and a theoretical idea of how relevant variables might interplay has been presented as well. What is still missing now is a closer inspection of the particular website characteristics of interest: *Personal touch*, *supportiveness* and *responsiveness* have not been illuminated in detail so far. They deserve a closer

⁵ In their study they investigate marketing websites.

inspection so a chapter about site characteristics with special focus on them will follow.

2.2 ADVANCING RECRUITING BY BUILDING RAPPORT

“[T]he emergence of organizational web sites for recruitment purposes has introduced unique variables to the recruitment context.”

(Cober, Brown, Keeping, & Levy, 2004a, p. 624)

2.2.1 The Basic Corporate Career Website Characteristics

Career websites have to meet some basic criteria before companies can think about incorporating additional innovative characteristics such as *personal touch*, *supportiveness* and *responsiveness*. This chapter gives a short overview of characteristics which have already been investigated fairly well in the context of website-based recruiting.

The most and probably best investigated independent variables are *usability / navigation* and *design / aesthetics*. Most researchers take these two characteristics⁶ to investigate websites' effects on people's *website attitude*, *applicant attraction* or other before named outcomes (Braddy et al., 2008; Thompson et al., 2008; Cober et al., 2003). The concentration on these two aspects is prevalent and noticeable. Not surprisingly, the basic consensus is that easy navigation and good design have positive effects on people's perception of the website and hence of the company as an employer.

Further characteristics which have been surveyed in more detail in the context of career sites are *content / information* (Williamson et al., 2010), *playfulness* (Cober et al., 2004a), *vividness* (Williamson et al., 2010), *efficiency / speed* (Sylva & Mol, 2009) and *formatting* (Thompson et al., 2008), which is closely related to design. When rather affective components such as vividness or playful features were chosen they were mostly investigated in contrast to more rational characteristics such as the content of a website (Williamson et al., 2010).

Playful and *vivid* websites were found to better be able to reach people emotionally than sites without these characteristics (Cober et al., 2004a; Williamson et al., 2010). Short charging times and well-thought-out formatting which allowed for selective scanning were also detected to be positively correlated with *website attitude* and people's attraction to the company.

⁶ Partly they refer to it in slightly modified terms.

In the following, the focus will be on the characteristics of *personal touch*, *supportiveness* and *responsiveness* – three fairly unexplored but very up-to-date and practically relevant corporate career site characteristics aiming to build rapport. Career websites are more and more expected to offer more than nice aesthetics, an easy navigation and basic information. The demands become more sophisticated which is understandable as the competition is ubiquitous and the potential of the web steadily increasing. Companies are under pressure to use the full potential of their recruitment pages and to create an inspired, *personal*, ideally even *supportive* and *responsive* web presence.

2.2.2 Personal Touch

The begin with, the following sections on *personal touch*, *supportiveness* and *responsiveness* are all structured analogically: They begin with a short general description of the particular characteristic, then go on with a theory which can be applied to it, proceed with a critical reflection on selected relevant literature and studies, and finally conclude with an own operationalization.

Beginning with *personal touch*, showing the human face of a company is a strategy which is fairly widespread on leading corporate career websites (Potentialpark Result Release, 2010). Particularly on the jobs and careers section of organizational websites it is highly important to give job seekers an authentic and congenial impression of the company. The more authentic and personal the potential employer appears, the more likely it is that people feel a connection with it.

Realistic insights into work places, typical tasks and processes, personal development chances and so forth - as told from the perspective of actual employees - enable job seekers to form concrete ideas on how it would be to work for a particular company (Walker et al., 2009). In the career parts of the official websites it is probably especially beneficial to show the human face of a company as in this section it is all about the human resources of a firm – it is all about the people who work there or potentially will do so in the future.

On their career sites, companies can demonstrate that people indeed are their most critical and highly valued assets – and that they treat them as such. As announced by the Potentialpark of 2010, most high ranking career sites are very personal: faces, names and stories are prevalent (Potentialpark Result Release, 2010).

A possible answer to the question why integrating faces, names and personal stories on a website is advantageous, lies in 'Social Presence Theory' (originally

formulated by Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976). The central idea of this theory is that a medium's effectiveness is highly dependent on the degree of social presence which the medium affords to its users. Social presence is hereby defined as the "degree of salience of the other person in a mediated communication and the consequent salience of their interpersonal interactions" (Short et al., 1976, p. 65). Two constructs build the foundation of social presence: *immediacy* and *intimacy*. While *immediacy* refers to the psychological distance between people (for example the immediacy of feedback), *intimacy* alludes to the physical distance (for example the seating position).

Different media naturally have different degrees of social presence and new media channels such as websites normally have much lower degrees of social presence than for example face-to-face communication. Corporate career sites can compensate for their natural lack of social presence by mimicking the salience of others as well as possible. By integrating certain pictures, videos or statements, they can create an atmosphere that seems very *personal* to visitors. While immediacy can be established to a certain degree, intimacy is harder to set up. Physical closeness is naturally not given in human-computer interaction but cues such as pictures or videos of smiling or gesticulating people may nevertheless convey the feeling of nearness.

Social presence can be created and conveyed with the help of (employee) testimonials. In the context of human resources, testimonials are presentations of employees who give arguments why the company they are working for is a good employer. On company websites, testimonials can for example assume the shape of statements, interviews or stories.

Basically, employee testimonials can have two effects: They can be counter-productive when they are not credible and very productive when they are authentic and likeable (Van Hove and Lievens, 2007). In order to achieve the latter no perfect statements or portrayals are needed but on the contrary testimonies that are as authentic and down-to-earth as possible.

Van Hove and Lievens (2007) investigated employee testimonials on career websites and compared them with independent web-based recruitment sources such as blogs or autonomous forums. They found that testimonials of individual employees telling their experiences were fairly effective when published on corporate career websites.

Their research was embedded into the 'Source Credibility Framework' which postulates that more credible sources of information are more persuasive in both changing attitudes and gaining behavioural compliance. Word-of-mouth, or 'word-

of-mouse' as it is called in their article, can be seen as an independent recruitment source that is hardly controllable by organizations. Normally, independent sources have a natural credibility advantage over dependent sources such as employee testimonials. How can their findings be explained then?

While web-based word-of-mouth is generally perceived as more credible, the results of Van Hoyer's and Lieven's study among 108 nurses (being potential applicants for a head nurse position) also suggested that the *content* of the message can moderate its effect. Their findings showed that credibility always also depends on the type of information given by the recruitment source: Whereas users liked official testimonials much better when they gave *personal* and individual information, messages about the organization as a whole were more effective when communicated via independent sources.

Company-dependent employee testimonials can have considerable impact and the study by Van Hoyer and Lievens underlines this. Employee testimonials on career websites are not automatically labelled as *not authentic*: If cleverly implemented and designed, they have the potential to show a company's human face - to represent the kind of people who typically work in this certain firm. Moreover, company initiated testimonials are supposed to have more expertise than independent sources posting their opinions on independent websites, oftentimes without having to give their full name and identity (ibid.).

Walker et al. (2009) also investigated employee testimonials on recruitment websites. Their study was fairly representative and meaningful as 1010 people of the probably most relevant target group (young professionals seeking entry-level employment) took part. The researchers found out that participants were generally more attracted to organizations and perceived information as more credible when testimonials were included on the websites.

Their special research interest was to investigate whether the media richness of testimonial presentations had a critical influence on their effect. The findings indeed showed that testimonials delivered via video with audio had higher attractiveness and perceived credibility than those delivered via text and pictures only (Walker et al., 2009).

In the study of Walker et al., participants were asked to evaluate a (fictitious) company career website to assist a (hypothetical) company. Participants were right from the start instructed to explore the whole website and to make a well-founded over-all evaluation. It would be interesting to see if people take notice of employee testimonials when they are asked to behave as always and to explore

the site as they would do at home – to check out if the employer might fit in the set of potential future employers.

Based on the literature review and the insights gained in the content analysis of benchmarking career websites (see chapter 3), *personal* (and respectively *personal touch*) means the following in the framework of this thesis:

A career website is in the context of this research called personal or is described as having a personal touch when it contains elements that show the human face of a company. Elements showing the human face of a company are mainly testimonials, i.e. faces, names, statements, interviews and stories which are assignable to individual employees. Employee testimonials include video, audio, pictures and written information dealing with personal experiences and personal opinions regarding the hiring organization.

Interviews or stories of CEOs and directors are excluded from this operationalization as those leading persons stand for an official representation of a company and are unlikely to function as identification figures for job seekers. Also not included are pictures showing random people without a clear reference to the company, pictures that are used to prettify the layout but cannot actively be chosen or clicked on.

2.2.3 Supportiveness

Beside the *personal* elements companies implement on their websites, another development is observable: More and more companies offer job seekers support for the application process. Website visitors are provided with help and tips on how to apply successfully. The support of applicants ranges from checklists about important components of good applications to interview tips and tricks to virtual coaching rooms where applicants can train via web cams. Companies do a lot to give applicants a clear impression of what is expected and how they can score. Beside the content-related support, technical support regarding the online application tool is given on many career sites.

Providing applicants with detailed information and hints is beneficial for both the company and the applicants. The reasons for this win-win situation can best be described in terms of the 'Dual Capacity Model' (Sitkin, Sutcliffe, & Barrios-Choplin, 1992). This model integrates two core capacities of media: the objective data carrying capacity and the (inter-) subjective symbol carrying capacity. According to Sitkin et al., "the communication of information necessarily involves both *data* (what is conveyed) and *meaning* (how it is interpreted)" (Sitkin et al., 1992, p. 564). Regarding *supportive* elements of corporate career sites this means that they not only convey data (for example tips which elements to include in the perfect application) but also symbolic meaning (for example that the hiring

organization is caring and considerate). Of course, not only *supportive* elements have a dual capacity – but they are probably the ones where this two-fold capacity is most evident. Pieterse (2009) neatly summarizes the message of the ‘Dual Capacity Model’:

“First a medium is seen as a container for information. Media differ in this respect by how much information can be conveyed. Second, a medium can convey symbolic meaning; a medium serves a role depending on the situation (Pieterse, 2009, p. 100).”

The ‘Dual Capacity Model’ – and especially the two core capacities described above - can be considered as a basic foundation of ‘Signalling Theory’ (as described in chapter 2.2.3), which is used as a foundation by several authors in this context. The basic contribution ‘Signalling Theory’ makes to recruitment via websites is that in the absence of other information, job seekers draw inferences based on peripheral cues. This is only possible as website features normally have two capacities: one that is objective and immediately observable (the information it gives) and one that is more subjective and subtle (the meaning or symbol it conveys). This is especially applicable to *supportive* elements which are of course aimed at giving information but also to send signals about the company as an employer.

By providing applicant support, the company signals that it is caring, considerate, *supportive* and cooperative, all of which are without doubt likeable qualities that could create a strategic advantage. In addition, the organization profits from better applications that fulfil the (maybe special and unique) requirements of the firm. The probability that incomplete applications come in and additional documents have to be demanded later (which costs time and effort) decreases as well. A better selection can be made when the incoming applications are comparable and assimilated with regard to their components and formats.

For the job seekers it is of course also advantageous to get some help with the application. When applicants know the demands and standards they can naturally write better applications. When they get company specific interview tips they can prepare much better, being able to present themselves in a more favourable light. Some job seekers, however, might feel patronized when too much or too obvious information is given on the perfect application. It might also be that job seekers are discouraged by the number of tips, hints, and requirements and decide not to apply. This in turn is beneficial for the company as less dedicated job seekers screen themselves out automatically.

Braddy et al. (2006) put *supportiveness* as a characteristic of career websites in a broader context and conceive it as a cultural dimension⁷. Based on ‘Signalling Theory’ their aim was to identify website elements or cues that are likely to be associated with cultural dimensions such as *supportiveness*. *Supportiveness* was investigated not only with regard to the *supportive* treatment of applicants in the application process but with the *supportive* handling of actual employees as well. Among other factors, information sharing, respect for employees, the demonstration of the organization as a community, and the inclusion of employee pictures and testimonials were found to be associated with *supportiveness* (Braddy et al., 2006).

Similar to Braddy et al., and also in line with ‘Signalling Theory’, Cober et al. (2004b) stated that certain website characteristics are able to characterize an employer in a specific, intended way. Besides application support like “interview tips” and “resume tips” signalling job seekers that an employer is “caring and considerate” they extended the concept of *supportiveness* to an organisations’ philanthropic efforts (such as for example non-monetary rewards, work-life balance and free sport offers) (Cober et al., 2004b, p. 634).

Based on the theoretical findings and the content analysis *supportiveness* is operationalized in a more narrow sense in the framework of this survey. This of course has practical reasons, too, but is mainly motivated by the attempt to capture and investigate the rather *new* developments on corporate career sites – such as explicitly offered application support:

A career website is in the context of this research called supportive when it contains elements that support applicants within the application process on a content-related basis. Elements supporting applicants in terms of form and content are all kinds of help around the application process, be it the written application or later phases of the application process such as interviews. Supportive applications include written tips and checklists for the application as well as virtual helps and coaching for the interview which might follow.

Excluded from this description is every kind of technical support for using the online application tool. Giving technical help about how to use an e-recruiting tool is the minimum companies should provide and therefore not considered as notably *supportive*.

2.2.4 Responsiveness

Including *responsive* elements in corporate career websites is a fairly new development in online based human resources management. Nevertheless,

⁷ In chapter 2.2.3 this study has already been mentioned to explain how signalling theory helps to understand how job seekers perceive corporate career websites and the companies behind them.

some trendsetting organizations have started to implement quickly responding applications on their recruitment websites. In a recent article, Williamson et al. (2010) define *responsiveness* as the extent to which websites provide feedback to users and emphasize that more future research is needed to find out how *responsiveness* influences users' reactions.

When integrating *responsive* applications on websites, information is no longer only *customized* to specific target groups but *personalized* to particular persons. Depending on how a user responds to certain questions, on how he solves business-related tasks or scores in skill games or quizzes, individual feedback is provided directly afterwards.

Responsive applications are, similarly as *supportive* ones, advantageous for both the company and the website visitors. If job seekers are unsure about their fit with the company, *responsive* games and applications can be a real help and support them in deciding *for* or *against* writing an application – two effects are thinkable. People are either encouraged or they are discouraged and realize they don't fit the company.

For the organization, *responsive* tools help to make a pre-selection of applicants. When job seekers screen themselves out because they are told to not fit the company or because their skills (for example strategic thinking, memory, concentration or multi-tasking) are assessed as under average, the applicant pool automatically becomes smaller and better. In sum, *responsive* applications on recruitment websites are "saving job seekers and organizations time and effort" (Lee, 2007, p. 232) and therefore create a win-win situation.

Responsive elements are of special importance when little is known about a company beforehand. The less known an organization is, the more difficult it is for job seekers to assess their person-organization fit and their chances to be hired⁸.

The meaning of *responsive* elements on career websites and the ambiguous situation job seekers are in when having to assess their fit and hiring chances can be explained in the light of 'Media Richness Theory' (Daft & Lengel, 1986). The 'Media Richness Theory' (short: MRT) has become a general theory to describe and prescribe choices and use of media. Originally though, it has been developed to describe how managers use media and how they perform after having chosen a particular (at the time where the theory developed *traditional*)

⁸ This might especially apply to holdings and corporate groups that cannot be assigned to single products, services or market segments so easily.

medium (Pieterse, 2009). Subsequent research has added a prescriptive component to the MRT by asking which medium is suited best for which task. The main question behind the MRT is how organizations can best be designed to meet the needs for uncertainty and/or equivocality reduction. Uncertainty, i.e. the absence of information, can be reduced fairly easily by providing the necessary amount of information. Equivocality, i.e. ambiguity with multiple and sometimes conflicting interpretations, is more difficult to counteract. In order to reduce equivocality not the amount of information is critical but the richness. This is where the MRT can act as a support in the discussion of *responsive* elements on career sites.

The two notions of the MRT say that 1) media vary in their richness and can be ranked according to this (*richness notion*) and 2) different media fit different tasks (*task-medium notion*) (Pieterse, 2009).

Job seekers are oftentimes confronted with a relatively high ambiguity. Assessing one's abilities, skills and character traits and resulting from that, one's fit with a particular company, is a highly equivocal task. A rich medium, scoring high in the ranking, is therefore needed to reduce equivocality. Moreover, the medium has to fit the task.

To begin with the richness notion, *responsive* self-assessment or fit-tests are richer than normal website texts and are therefore able to reduce ambiguity – and not only uncertainty. They ideally offer personalized information which is an important criterion for a richer medium.

Beside *personalization*, *immediate feedback*, the *number of cues and channels used*, and *language variety* are named as important richness capacities. *Responsive* tools on corporate career websites can at least score in two of them - if not in three. In addition to adjusting the message to the perceiver (*personalization*), *responsive* elements offer *immediate feedback* which enables quick and effective communication. Ideally, the feedback also *varies in language* and tone, dependent on the kind of feedback which is derived from the performance or answers. Users who score fairly badly are probably approached differently than those who have performed very well.

That *responsive* tools have several capacities which are clear indicators of richness is surprising in so far that websites are normally not considered a very rich medium. Originally, new media of course were not part of the MRT ranking (developed in 1986) and retrospectively, Internet channels (represented by 'Electronic Mail' only) have been considered as not so rich, either (Fig. 2).

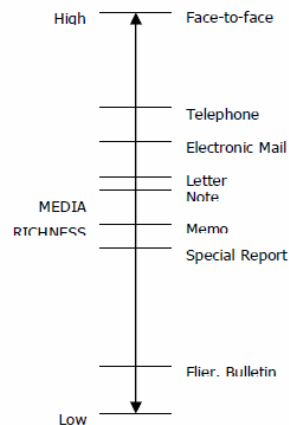


Fig. 2: The richness ranking of different media (Pieterse, 2009, p. 84)

The richness, however, has improved a lot in the last few years – thanks to fast developing technical possibilities and innovations. Whereas face-to-face communication of course stays on the top position of the richness ranking of media, websites are catching up.

Regarding the task-medium notion, *responsive* tools do not necessarily fit any company – but at least the big ones having to deal with huge amounts of applications coming in. Especially for bigger organizations, choosing other channels such as face-to-face communication or telephony in this early phase of fit assessment would be inconvenient (inadequate and time-consuming) for both parties.

Although the ‘Media Richness Theory’ is widely used and cited, there is much criticism about it based on mixed findings regarding its applicability and explanatory power (Pieterse, 2009). Among other criticism, the richness construct is criticised as it assumes that all four capacities are equally important. The MRT stays a theoretical model whereas in real life richness is more difficult to assess: “In practice, richness may vary according to the way the medium is being used” (ibid.). A website might even be able to provide more exact feedback than a single employee on the telephone can give. Nevertheless, the MRT is a good basis to understand how organizations try to design their application processes efficiently and effectively, using the best fitting media and features with relatively high richness thanks to technological standards.

Researchers have only recently started to investigate *responsive* elements on corporate career websites. Although Lee (2007) calls a pre-screening/self-assessment tool (or *subsystem*, as he calls it) – including questions on “levels of technical skills, personalities, interpersonal skill, work ethics, and aptitude” (Lee, 2007, p.84) – a critical and essential component of a holistic online recruiting system, little is actually known about the impact of immediate feedback:

“[R]esearch on how the provision of interactive diagnostic questionnaires influences applicant attraction is lacking. Given that the combination of online testing and feedback represents a powerful recruitment tool, it is of recruiters’ great interest to determine how this interactive technology predisposes applicants to the organization” (Hu, Su, & Chen, 2007, p. 2510).

The only slowly emerging research on the topic is explainable with the technical possibilities: “The use of Web technology to provide P-O fit feedback is a [...] recruitment tool that has only recently become available” (Dineen et al., 2002).

Dineen et al. (2002) were one of the first to investigate fit feedback in the context of company career websites and carried out an experiment with three different versions of the career section of a fictitious company. Different fit feedback was given to the 312 participants in order to find out how the feedback influenced their level of attraction. Generally, they found that fit feedback indeed influenced the level of *applicant attraction* (Dineen et al., 2002).

Their conceptualization of fit was hereby very differentiated. It was distinguished between objective person-organization fit, subjective person-organization fit, self esteem, agreement with the fit feedback and the levels of person-organization feedback. All these factors together were assumed to determine overall attraction. Offering feedback, though, does not automatically mean that receivers understand and accept it in the intended way⁹. Several factors such as the personal agreement with the feedback influence the effects of it.

Hu et al. (2007) carried out a related study, investigating the effects of manipulated real time feedback on fictitious recruitment websites. They detected that individuals regarding themselves as fitting the company were more likely to find the organization attractive. Real time feedback was in their setting operationalized with interactive diagnostic questionnaires, online testing and feedback.

In sum, *responsive* applications can be seen as adequate substitutes for face-to-face assessments processes, at least in an early pre-selection phase. Instead of assessing one's fit with the company and one's chances to be hired within

⁹ As the given fit feedback, for example, is not automatically consistent with the *perceived* fit, this potential discrepancy was supposed to influence the way in which feedback is internalized and in which it affects *applicant attraction*. Individuals were expected to not solely rely on the feedback given but also on the objective fit. Feedback which was lower than an individual's objective fit was nevertheless likely to reduce *applicant attraction* whereas feedback suggesting a high similarity was likely to raise attraction. The feedback given was indeed found to be more predictive of attraction if the agreement with it was high (Dineen et al., 2002). The objective fit, on the contrary, was found to be more predictive when the agreement with the feedback was low which is congruent with cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957). Self esteem moderated the relative effects named above. When feedback was rather negative (low level), people with low self esteem believed it more blindly, even if the objective fit was high. Subjective fit was found to play a role as well – but to be less influential than agreement and self esteem (Dineen et al., 2002).

interpersonal conversations (with friends, acquaintances, other employees etc.), a pre-assessment can be made via the Internet – anonymously and possibly more accurately. In fact, “real-time feedback on Websites facilitates interaction between the applicant and the organization prior to any direct contact between them” (Hu et al., 2007, p. 2511).

In the framework of this thesis, *responsiveness* of career websites is operationalized as follows:

A career website is in the context of this research called responsive when it contains elements that give job seekers quick feedback on their skills and/or fit with the company. Responsive elements include all tests, games and quizzes which help job seekers to assess their skills, knowledge and/or fit with the company nearly in real-time and individually, depending on the users' answers or performance.

2.2.5 Influencing Applicant Attraction – Hypotheses and Research Model

At this point, it is time to consolidate the insights gained – and to introduce the research model and hypotheses. Deeper insight has been given into the characteristics of *personal touch*, *supportiveness* and *responsiveness*; Dependent and independent variables (which are especially critical in the first phase of the recruitment process) have been discussed.

A special focus has been put on the fairly unexplored variable of *website usage* which is assumed to mainly influence *website attitude* and *applicant attraction*. *Familiarity* with and *reputation* of the hiring organization have been identified as critical constructs influencing the recruiting process even before the actual *website usage*. Based on the theoretical considerations and findings the following research model (Fig.3) has been developed:

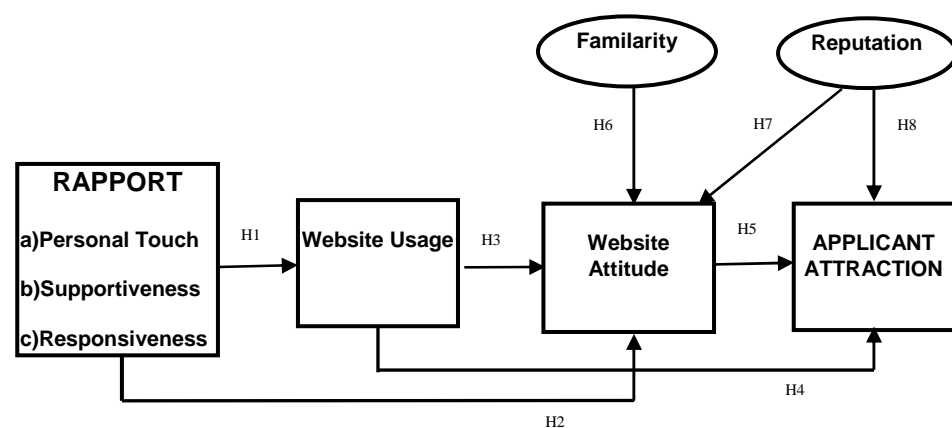


Fig. 3: How Applicant Attraction is Supposed to be Influenceable (Research Model)

The Research Model is based on the model of Cober et al. (2004a), which has been discussed in detail in chapter 2.2.2. Several modifications, however, have been made in order to adapt the model to the research approach of this study.

As in Cober et al.'s Model, *website attitude* and *applicant attraction* are incorporated. *Website usage* is a central variable and mainly equivalent to what Cober et al. (2004a) call *search behaviour*. A more general term is used in this model to indicate that the usage of a website has not automatically to be congruent with a result-oriented search. Users do not necessarily have to search for something – they may as well browse through the site without looking for something specific. Similar to Cober et al.'s theoretical model, *familiarity* and *reputation*¹⁰ were incorporated as further influences which exist before the *website usage* and might change while using it. Both variables are expected to influence *website attitude*. Moreover, *reputation* is also expected to influence *applicant attraction*.

The main difference, beside some renamed and refined variables, is the adding of the three characteristics *personal touch*, *supportiveness* and *responsiveness* which are expected to mainly influence *website usage* and *website attitude*. Usage is expected to significantly determine *website attitude* and as a consequence *applicant attraction*. The hypotheses expressed in this model are the following:

H1: Job seekers' perceptions of the corporate career website's characteristics of interest (personal touch, supportiveness, responsiveness) will influence their website usage.

H1a: Job seekers' perceptions of the personal touch will influence their website usage.

H1b: Job seekers' perceptions of the supportiveness will influence their website usage.

H1c: Job seekers' perceptions of the responsiveness will influence their website usage.

H2: Job seekers' perceptions of the corporate career website's characteristics of interest (personal touch, supportiveness, responsiveness) will influence their website attitude.

H2a: Job seekers' perceptions of the personal touch will influence their website attitude.

¹⁰ What I call *reputation* is referred to as *organizational image* by Cober et al. (2004a).

H2b: Job seekers' perceptions of the supportiveness will influence their website attitude.

H2c: Job seekers' perceptions of the responsiveness will influence their website attitude.

H3: Job seekers' website usage will influence their website attitude.

H4: Job seekers' website usage will influence applicant attraction.

H5: Job seekers' website attitude will influence applicant attraction.

H6: Job seekers' familiarity with the hiring organization will influence their website attitude.

H7: Job seekers' perceptions of the hiring company's reputation will influence their website attitude.

H8: Job seekers' perceptions of the hiring company's reputation will influence applicant attraction.

In order to test the research model with its eight implicated hypotheses, a differentiated empirical research was carried out which will be described in detail in the following sections.

3. EXPERIMENT PREPARATION: CONTENT ANALYSIS AND MANIPULATION CHECK

This chapter describes the first step of a two-step experimental design. As a content analysis of awarded career websites was the foundation of the whole research this chapter introduces this analysis and its implications. It further gives insights into how the experimental material was chosen and checked for manipulation subsequently. The main questions posed and answered in this chapter are: What characterizes leading career sites? Do current corporate career websites really contain personal, supportive and responsive elements? Was the choice for these three characteristics legitimate and practically relevant? And further, which websites are suitable as experimental material?

3.1 RELEVANCE OF CHOSEN CHARACTERISTICS IN REAL LIFE CORPORATE CAREER WEBSITES

The main question at the very beginning of this research was: Do websites nowadays really contain *personal*, *supportive* and *responsive* elements such as observed by the researcher in daily life and as investigated by several researchers? To find out about this, a benchmark study of career websites was taken under closer inspection.

Since 2003, Potentialpark has yearly published a ranking of career sites, called the 'Top Employer Web Benchmark – The Career Website Study'. The studies of the international market research company headquartered in Sweden provoke a fairly big medial echo each year¹¹. Open to the public are first and foremost the list of the Top 30 (optionally for the whole of Europe, for Germany, or for France) and the official press releases shortly summing up the most important findings. The 2010 study was based on a survey among 16.345 students from 33 countries. The top 100 company career sites were beforehand ranked by experts. According to what the students expected and appreciated in career websites, the best 30 were awarded. The number one in Europe, the Allianz insurance won the race because its website contains most of the features rated as important by the students.

¹¹ The ranking has been named and discussed in print and online media all over the world. The Wall Street Journal, The Financial Times, The Guardian, Spiegel Online, La Tribune and many more have written about the Potentialpark ranking (Potentialpark, 2010).

In line with Cober et al. (2004b) it was distinguished between *content*, *function* and *form* of the particular websites in order to analyze the ranking's Top 30 for their characteristics (with special focus on *personal touch*, *supportiveness* and *responsiveness*). The latter, *form*, was in the analysis extended to *forms & genres*, as genres like testimonials came out to be essential elements of today's websites.

The starting point of the content analysis was a qualitative analysis of the Top 10 out of the European Top 30 ranking because those top sites can be assumed to be the most innovative ones containing the most and extraordinary features. In order to build an analogic coding scheme, every single element of these career sites¹² was noted down which resulted in a list of 126 different features. After similar elements were aggregated and very company-specific ones (which were not generalizable) were sorted out, 54 features remained. Of these elements, 46 were considered content-related elements which were then clustered into six main categories: *vacancies / job information*, *company hard facts*, *company soft facts*, *what we search for*, *what we offer*, and *contact / service*¹³.

Three features were found that were not primarily content-related but rather function-related: *application tools*, *application help* and *self-assessment- / feedback-tools*. *Application tools* refer to the e-recruiting portals companies implement on their career site to enable direct online applications. *Application help* covers all features providing content-related applicant support as defined in Chapter 2.3.3. Career sites offering such helps were automatically categorized as *supportive*. Career parts offering self-assessment or feedback-tools as defined in Chapter 2.3.4 were analogically categorized as *responsive*.

In addition to the six content-related and the three function-related elements, six form-related elements or genres were detected: *pictures*, *animations*, *video / audio*, *testimonials*, *menu bars* (structured according to target groups or along general categories) and *special sections for students / graduates*. All websites

¹² Usually, the English version of the career site was used. When the English version of the career site was a global doorwaypage on which you had to choose a particular country, a German version was chosen.

¹³ The *vacancies / job information* category contained the most basic element of recruitment website, the information about vacant positions. *Company hard facts* included general information about the organization as well as information about locations, departments, history, brands, divisions, fields of work and so on. *Company soft facts* on the other hand contained such softer categories as values, business lines, culture, and people. The category *what we search for* involved information about requirements, demanded skills and preferred target groups. *What we offer* included perspectives, development chances, learning and training opportunities, special programs, benefits, mentoring and networks, challenges, work-life balance, health management and so on. The last category *contact / service* contained both standard elements such as FAQ and contact information and additional service offers such as chats, service centers, newsletters, related helpful links and the opportunity to bookmark or link the career site to social networks.

containing testimonials as defined in chapter 2.2.2 were automatically classified as having a *personal touch*.

After having found these most relevant elements on the Top 10 Europe sites, all Top 30 websites were checked to see which ones were present on them and which not. An overview of the findings is given in table 1. The results revealed that certain elements are current standard while others are still rare. Especially the content-related elements were mostly standards that nearly every site contained.

Regarding the function-related features there were considerable differences among the Top 30 sites. While every site offered an online application tool, only 25 (83%) gave application support and tips. Merely nine out of 30 provided a self-assessment or feedback tool. While one could argue that *responsive* tools are not yet standard and therefore not meaningful in this context a closer look at the companies which actually *have had* such a tool on their website proved the opposite: The four sites heading the ranking had all implemented *responsive* applications. Including *responsive* tools might not be standard yet but it is without doubt a characteristic of the leading career websites and therefore worth taking a closer look at.

Table 1: Content Analysis Results (Top 30 European Career Websites)

Content	Number	Percentage	Derived Characteristics
Vacancies & Job Information	30/30	100%	
Company Hard Facts	30/30	100%	
Company Soft Facts	30/30	100%	
What we Search for	28/30	93%	
What we Offer	30/30	100%	
Contact / Service	30/30	100%	
Function			
Application tool	30/30	100%	
Application help	25/30	83%	Supportiveness
Self-Assessment / Feedback Tool	8/30	30%	Responsiveness
Forms & Genres			
Menu Bar Structured According to Target Groups	20/30	67%	
Special Section for Students / Graduates	30/30	100%	
Picture	30/30	100%	
Animation	26/30	87%	
Video / Audio	24/30	80%	
Testimonial	30/30	100%	Personalization

Some standards exist regarding the outer form of the websites as well: All of the Top 30 sites (100%) contained pictures and an own section for students or graduates, as well as testimonials, may it be video testimonials or testimonial pictures with written information. Animations were offered by 26 (87%) out of the 30 awarded sites, 24 (80%) offered videos or at least audio.

In sum, and according to the definitions of *personal touch*, *supportiveness* and *responsiveness* given in the chapters 2.2.2, 2.2.3 and 2.2.4, all 30 websites surveyed had a *personal touch*, 25 were classified as *supportive* and nine as *responsive*¹⁴.

Apart from the practice examples already given in the introduction, several innovative examples of *personal touch*, *supportiveness* and *responsiveness* were detected during the content analysis, which are worth being mentioned at this point. The Procter & Gamble career page opened with the eye-catching slogan “We hire the person, not the position” and underlined this credo with a prominently placed employee video (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4: Personal element from the Procter & Gamble career website

A nice example of *supportiveness* found during the content analysis was among others RBS which provided an own “Hints and Tips” centre where information all around the application was offered (Fig. 5).

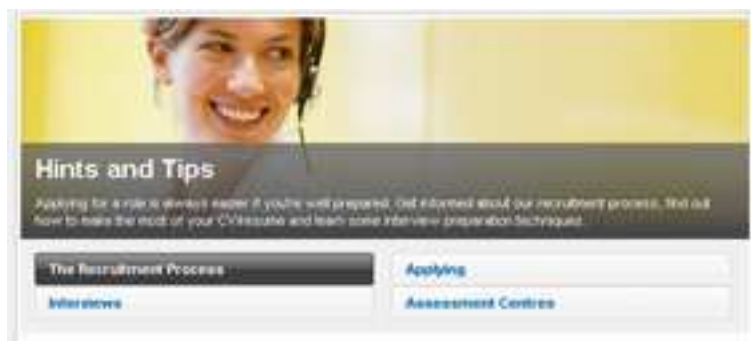


Fig. 5: Supportive element from the RBS career website

¹⁴ For a more detailed (company specific) overview of the results of the content analysis see appendix.

Deutsche Post even offered three different *responsive* tools: a career explorer test, a work-life balance explorer and a cultural explorer (Fig. 6).



Fig. 6: Responsive element from the Deutsche Post career website

The content analysis confirmed that the chosen characteristics are indeed meaningful and relevant. It has further offered a descriptive snapshot of what is possible today in corporate career website design.

3.2 ADEQUACY OF THE EXPERIMENTAL MATERIAL

The content analysis led to an important part of the experimental material: One extensive site was chosen out of the Top 30 career websites which contained all of the three characteristics in the centre of consideration – in the following referred to as the “plus website”. To make a comparison and to be able to make propositions about how the “plus website” works *better*, a contrasting example had to be chosen as well. Based on the site chosen after the content analysis, a second site has been selected – from the same business sector, comparable regarding layout and perceived usability but *not* containing the three characteristics as defined before – a “plain website”.

To make sure that the first impression of a website’s facade (named as a critical factor by Tractinsky et al., 2000, and Cober et al. 2004a) indeed was similar for both sites a manipulation check was carried out. A so-called “60-seconds-survey” tested several sites (nine websites in sum) for their first impression. The manipulation check was called “60-seconds-survey” to animate the participants to give quick and spontaneous answers¹⁵.

For validation purposes the contrasting websites were tested with the help of an online questionnaire sent to 30 people of the relevant target group (students in

¹⁵ Besides the two preferred contrasting sites, seven further sites (both “plus” and “plain” ones) were added to the manipulation check to protect against unexpected results. If the two sites preferred had scored significantly differently on first impression, two other contrasting sites would have been chosen.

the end phase of their studies). From the 30 people addressed, 27 filled out the questionnaire which contained screenshots of the starting pages of career websites. Under each screenshot it was asked: “What is your first impression of this career website?”. Participants answered on a 7-point scale ranging from “very negative” (1) to “very positive” (7).

Table 2: Manipulation Check Results (Test for First Impression)

Business Sector	Condition	Website	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Bank	"plus"	Website 7	4.6	1.4
Bank	"plain"	Website 5	4.6	1.3
Bank	"plain"	Website 2	4.2	1.2
Consultancy	"plus"	Website 9	4.0	1.4
Consultancy	"plain"	Website 3	3.5	1.5
Consultancy	"plain"	Website 6	4.5	1.3
Insurance	"plus"	Website 1	4.5	1.5
Insurance	"plain"	Website 4	4.7	1.0
Insurance	"plain"	Website 8	3.9	1.2

As displayed in table 2, the screenshots of welcome pages scored fairly similarly among the participants. This is probably due to the fact that the sites were chosen by the researchers just because of their perceived appealing design. Two sites from the same (bank) sector - a “plus” and a “plain” site - scored identically with a mean of 4.56. Even their standard deviations were very similar with 1.40 and 1.31. As these two sites (website 5 and 7) scored most comparably within the manipulation check, choosing them as experimental material for the actual research was the logical consequence. The websites chosen will further be described in the following chapter about the whole experimental design.

4. EXPERIMENT: STUDENTS' USE OF AND REACTIONS TO REAL LIFE CORPORATE CAREER WEBSITES

This chapter deals with the second step of the two-step experimental approach – and describes the design of the actual experiment. This chapter specifies how the actual experiment was created: Which participants were the right ones to get meaningful results? Which materials were chosen and why? Which procedure was used?

4.1 PARTICIPANTS

To find out more about innovative career websites and their effect on job seekers, students who were going to graduate in the following two years or have recently graduated were the ideal target group and thus asked to take part. A convenience sample was drawn as participants were approached via social networks, making use of the snowball effect by asking the researcher's contacts to forward it to *their* contacts. As a precaution, the study subject and (expected) year of graduation were also inquired in the questionnaire to be able to screen out persons not belonging to the target group later on. The choice for German-speaking websites automatically led to a sample of German-speaking participants.

4.2 MATERIALS

Two real life websites were chosen as materials for this research. The Deutsche Bank career website was after the manipulation check chosen as the “plus” version, i.e. the website version containing all three characteristics of interest (Fig. 7). This website which was number 14 in the 2010 Potentialpark ranking had it all: While a *personal touch* was conveyed via employee profiles showing “a day in the life of” chosen associates from different countries and departments, a *supportive* “frequently asked questions” (FAQ) section dealt with all issues concerning the application process, and a *responsive* “test your agile mind” game finally enabled website visitors to assess their own skills in relation to others who have had played these games before. Although the “plus” site contained all three

characteristics together it could be differentiated between the single characteristics' effects as the usage and perception of them was surveyed separately (as will be explained in detail when describing the measures).

The other, "plain" website, belonged to the NRW.Bank (Fig. 8). It was a standard career site which did not really disappoint but did not surprise either.

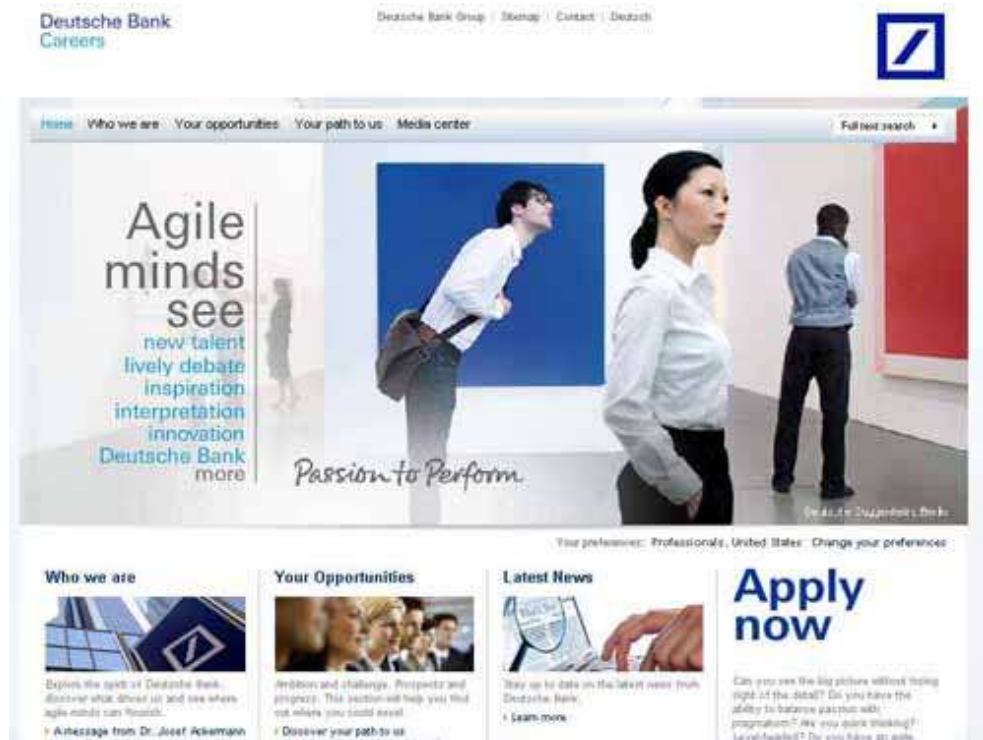


Fig. 7: Deutsche Bank's corporate career website, welcome page



Fig. 8: NRW.Bank's corporate career website, welcome page

Both websites were used in their German versions as the English release of the “plain” site was a slimmed-down version containing only the most necessary information. Regarding their image as employers, both banks joined the initiative “Fair Company”¹⁶ and were in the past awarded as excellent employers¹⁷. It can therefore be assumed that at least none of the banks had an image problem at that point in time. Beside the stimuli named before, several measures were used. All measures reported in the following are translations of the originally German questionnaire.

Measuring Familiarity and Reputation before Usage

In the research model it is assumed that participants’ prior *familiarity* with the organization influences their *website attitude* (H6). Therefore, a question about *familiarity* was included in the pre-task questionnaire.

The participants used three 7-point Likert scales to respond to the following question aimed at the particular *familiarity* with the hiring organization: *To what extent do you feel you have enough information to make an informed judgement about this company as an employer?* (1=not at all informed – 7=very well informed; 1=no experience – 7=a lot of experience; 1=not at all familiar – 7=very familiar). The measure was created based on existing items by Laroche, Kim, and Zhou (1996) (alphas between .67 and .83) and Simon and Ruth (1998) (alphas of .8 and .94).

In order to investigate if the perceived *reputation* of the particular bank had some influence on *website attitude* (H7) and *applicant attraction* (H8), *reputation* was also asked for in the pre-task questionnaire. Although asking for *reputation* at this early point might have led to a certain priming effect it was necessary in order to survey possible changes¹⁸. 7-point Likert scales (1=absolutely disagree – 7=absolutely agree) were used to measure which *reputation* the particular banks had among the participants. Four items, mainly based on Turban et al. 1998 (who investigated employer reputation; alpha of .91) but slightly adapted to the context, were used in order to find out how favourable the participants were towards the employer (for example: “*I can imagine that [name of the bank] has a reputation of being an excellent employer*”)

¹⁶ The initiative “Fair Company” was set up by the German magazine “karriere”. Companies joining this initiative commit to treating their interns fairly by paying them adequately and not replacing full time employees with them (karriere, 2010).

¹⁷ The NRW.Bank was awarded as one out of 50 excellent employers in Germany by the independent Corporate Research Foundation in 2008 (NRW.Bank, 2010); The Deutsche Bank was among many other awards labelled “Bank of the year” by the International Financing Review (IFR) in 2010 (Deutsche Bank, 2010).

¹⁸ If there really was a priming effect it was at least equal among samples.

Measuring Website Usage

Measuring *website usage* was crucial in H3 (*website usage* influences *website attitude*) and H4 (*website usage* influences *applicant attraction*). Slightly different from Cober et al. (2004a), only two measures were distinguished: *the total time spent* on the website (referred to as “effort” by Cober et al. 2004a) and the *number of pages* chosen (originally called “breadth of search”). The *time spent per page* (formerly named *depth of search*) was not considered as it strongly interrelates with the two other measures. When measuring the *number of pages* it was also surveyed *which* pages exactly were chosen to see if respondents actually used the website elements defined as *personal*, *supportive* or *responsive*.

Measuring Website Attitude

After having used the website participants were asked for their *website attitude* to see whether the intensity of usage had any effect on it (H3), whether the perceived *website characteristics* had significant influence (H2), and finally to be able to measure whether *website attitude* affected *applicant attraction* (H5).

The post-task questionnaire directly following the website visit opened with six questions measuring the participant's *website attitude*. On 7-point Likert scales (1=absolutely disagree – 7=absolutely agree) respondents had to indicate their agreement with statements such as “*I’m satisfied with the information provided by this website*” or “*I believe that visiting this website is a good way to inform about career perspectives at [name of the bank]*”. The measures (originally surveyed via 5-point scales) were mainly taken from Chen and Wells (1999) (alpha of .92) but were adapted to this specific context. Two questions were eliminated (“*I would like to visit this website again in the future*” as it was very similar to the *intention to return* which is already part of *applicant attraction*, and “*Compared with other websites I would rate this one as one of the worst / one of the best*” as it implies prior experience) and two questions asking for usability and appealing design were added (as these characteristics were identified as critical precursors of *website attitude*).

Measuring Website Characteristics

The perceived characteristics of *personal touch*, *supportiveness*, and *responsiveness* (as *rapport* establishing website characteristics) form the starting point of the research model. To survey if the perceived characteristics had any significant effect on *website usage* (H1a,b,c) or *website attitude* (H2a,b,c)

questions about the perceptions of *personal touch*, *supportiveness* and *responsiveness* were added to the post-task questionnaire.

The perceived characteristics have to be distinguished from the actually used assigned website elements. By measuring the actual usage it could afterwards be said whether the participants had actually *chosen* the website elements labelled beforehand as *personal*, *supportive* or *responsive*. In order to be able to state whether they have *noticed* certain characteristics without having *chosen* the elements assigned to them some additional measure were needed: In addition to the mere usage measured by software, three 4-item measures were developed and added to the questionnaire to ask for the participants' awareness of *personal touch*, *supportiveness* and *responsiveness* on each site. The participants again used 7-point Likert scales (1=absolutely disagree – 7=absolutely agree) to indicate to what extent they agreed with four statements measuring *personal touch* (for example: "*The website conveys the feeling that the [name of the bank] sets high value on the people in the company*"), four statements indicating *supportiveness* (for example: "*The website suggests that the [name of the bank] wants to support its applicants throughout the application process*"), and finally four statements aiming at *responsiveness* (for example: "*The website allows for job seekers to individually assess their employment chances*").

Measuring the Increase in Familiarity and Reputation after Usage

Similarly as in the pre-task questionnaire questions were posed about *familiarity* and *reputation* in the post-task questionnaire to see if any changes have occurred due to the website visit – if the participants have become more familiar with the particular bank and if the website has improved the bank's *reputation*. On three 7-point scales the participants were asked to answer the following question: *Do you feel that you are – now that you have used the site - better informed to make a well-founded judgement about the [name of the bank] as an employer?* (1=just as informed as before – 7=much better informed; 1=same experience as before – 7=much more experience; 1=just as familiar as before – 7=much more familiar). Moreover, participants again used 7-point scales to indicate if their attitude towards the company's *reputation* has changed by using the website, for example if they can "*understand better now why graduates are interested in the [name of the bank] as an employer*" (1=just as before – 7=much better).

Measuring Applicant Attraction

Measuring the final outcome *applicant attraction* was necessary in order to test H4 (*website usage* influences *applicant attraction*), H5 (*website attitude* influences *applicant attraction*) and H8 (*reputation* influences *applicant attraction*). Most importantly, the final outcome had to be quantified in order to investigate if any significant differences regarding *applicant attraction* occurred between the two website versions (with and without the three characteristics of interest).

Applicant attraction was measured with the help of two indicators: the *intention to return* to the website, and the *intention to apply*. This was done in the style of Kim and Biocca (1997), who differentiated between two levels of commitment. On the basis of their scales (alphas of .75 and .83) seven measures, to be answered on 7-point scales going from 1=absolutely disagree to 7=absolutely agree, were developed. The intention to return was for example measured with “*If I was searching for a job in this field, I would return to this site next time I need a job*” while a statement aiming at the intention to apply sounded as follows: “*If I was searching for a job in this field, I would apply at [name of the bank] the next time I search for a job*”¹⁹.

Respondents' Characteristics and Experience

In the last paragraph of the questionnaire, respondents were asked for their age, gender, and nationality. Moreover, participants were asked to name their study programme and the (expected) year of graduation to ensure that only students in their last years or graduates took part.

In order to be able to assess people's experiences, questions about the average weekly Internet use, the experience with online job searching in general, and the experience with corporate career websites in particular were posed. Furthermore, participants were asked whether they had searched for a job, extra job or internship in the last year, and whether they plan to do so in the next year.

¹⁹ Other than in the formulations of Kim and Biocca (1997), the questions were posed in subjunctive. As the participants were students or graduates with very different study programmes it could not be assumed that they were all actually interested in applying at a bank.

4.3 PROCEDURE

The study is based on online questionnaires including a short experimental task. The questionnaire existed in two versions, one for each company and its website. Both questionnaires were linked to software which led participants to the respective company's website and tracked their website navigation. While the software only tracked the *website usage* which is difficult to survey via questionnaires, the latter surveyed the other variables which are measurable on the basis of people's self-reports.

Before the actual usage a short text prepared the participants for the website visit and asked them to imagine the following situation:

- *someone suggested to you the [name of the bank] as an employer*
- *you are studying a fitting subject and the [name of the bank] indeed could be interesting for you in the future*
- *you decide to visit its career website to inform yourself about the [name of the bank] as an employer*

The participants were further asked to act as naturally as possible and to use the site to the extent and for the time they would do it for an employer that interests them in real life.

The two links to the two questionnaire versions were dispersed conveniently via social networks. The incoming data from the questionnaires was analysed with SPSS. The incoming data of the tracking tool was after a code conversion added to the SPSS variable set as well.

5. RESULTS

In this chapter, the results of the experiment are critically reflected and discussed: Which people actually took part? How did both the questionnaire and the software work? Which website was more effective? Could the hypotheses be provided with support? And further, did the hypotheses cover all interesting findings? After having answered all these questions chapter 5 concludes with a refined model incorporating all (expected and unexpected) findings of the experiment.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The questionnaires were online for two weeks. In that time, 270 answers came in from which 129 were complete and thus usable. Considered as complete answers were answers containing both the pre-task and the post-task questionnaire, and of course the data from the website visit. Incomplete questionnaires lacking whole components (pre-task questionnaire, post-task questionnaire or *website usage* data) were removed from the analysis.

The gap between started and completed questionnaires can be explained with the relatively long time it required to fill them out completely. People who dropped out before time stated that they did not have the time to visit the website wholeheartedly at that moment. No other difficulties such as usability problems or lacking interest in the bank sector were reported.

Out of the 129 respondents, 63 answered the “bank plus” questionnaire and visited its website, 66 did the same for the “bank plain”. It took participants about 15-30 minutes to take part, depending of course on how much time they spent on the particular website.

In order to analyze the data gained, several tests and analyses were used: To examine the group differences, t-tests and Mann-Whitney tests were applied. T-test could be used for all variables except *familiarity* (before and after usage) which did not have a normal distribution according to the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and *total time spent* which did not have homogeneity of variance according to the Levene test. For these three variables, Mann-Whitney test were used instead.

Stepwise linear regression analyses were used to investigate the hypothesized interrelations between the variables. All results reported in the following are significant on a 95% level ($p < .05$) minimum.

The results descriptions begin with a section on the respondents' characteristics. Afterwards, the quality of the instrument and all its measures will be specified. Differences between the samples will be shown in the following and afterwards, the hypothesized interrelations between the variables will be examined in detail. Finally, findings which were not covered by the hypotheses but add value to the considerations and the research model will be discussed.

5.2 RESPONDENTS' CHARACTERISTICS AND EXPERIENCE

Beginning with the respondents' characteristics (which are displayed in detail in table 3), the average age was 24.5 years with no nameable differences among the subgroups. More females than males took part in both samples, with the "bank plain" sample proportionally containing even more female participants than the "bank plus" sample. All respondents were German-speaking. 51 different study programs were reported.

Table 3: Respondents' Characteristics

	"Bank Plus"	"Bank Plain"
N	63	66
Age in Years (M)	24.7	24.4
Gender in %		
male	40.9	33.3
female	50.0	60.6
n/a	9.1	6.1
total	100	100
(Expected) Year of Graduation in %		
2009	5	9
2010	3	17
2011	35	32
2012	42	30
2013	9	9
n/a	6	3

As required in the introductory statement, only students who will graduate soon or who have recently graduated took part. The few participants who did not specify their (expected) year of graduation were not excluded from the samples as they (personally or in an open "announcements" field) told the researcher that they could not specify the graduation date exactly but hope to graduate in 2013 latest.

All in all, and as presented in table 4, most respondents were frequent Internet users (10-20 or 20-30 hours per week). However, more low frequency users (0-10 hours per week) and less high frequency users (more than 30 hours) were in the “bank plain” sample.

Most respondents were not only familiar with the Internet but also with job searching in general. Again, some notable differences were observable between the two subgroups: Respondents in the “bank plain” sample declared slightly more often to having searched for a job (including part time jobs and internships) in the last year. Contrarily, job searching plans for the next year were more often specified in the “bank plus” group.

Table 4: Respondents' Experience

	"bank plus"	"bank plain"
average weekly Internet use in %		
0-10 hours	7.6	15.2
10-20 hours	34.8	34.8
20.30 hours	27.3	27.3
more than 30 hours	24.2	19.7
n/a	6.11	3.0
job searching the last year (done) in %		
yes	74.8	84.8
no	18.2	12.1
n/a	6.0	3.1
job searching in the next year (planned) in %		
yes	81.8	53.0
no	12.1	43.9
n/a	6.1	3.1
experience with online job searching		
<i>M</i>	4.5	4.9
<i>SD</i>	1.7	1.6
experience with corporate career websites		
<i>M</i>	4.1	4.4
<i>SD</i>	1.7	1.8

The fact that the respondents were not equally divided among the samples in any respect had to be considered with caution as different answering patterns among subgroups (such as males or low frequency Internet users) could have led to biases. The variables which were (notably) unequally divided between the two samples were: *gender* (as there were relatively more females in the “bank plain” sample), the *average weekly Internet use* (as there were relatively more low frequency users and less high frequency users in the “bank plain” group), *job searching done* in the last year (as more respondents of the “bank plain” sample reported to having searched for a job) and *job searching planned* for the next

year (as less people had job searching plans in the “bank plain” group). Possible consequences of the unequal division of respondents will be taken into account when comparing the two samples’ answering patterns.

5.3 QUALITY OF THE INSTRUMENT

5.3.1 Quality of the Questionnaire

All measures used in the pre- and post-task questionnaires came out to be reliable and meaningful. As displayed in table 5, the inter-item correlations for the particular variables were fairly high so that all scales had a Cronbach’s alpha of at least .75. Several scales even had alphas of .90 and higher. With regard to these fairly high alpha values there was no reason to adjust scales by removing items.

Table 5: Cronbach’s Alpha for Scale Reliabilities

	"Bank Plus"	"Bank Plain"
Familiarity (Before Usage) (3)	.91	.93
Reputation (Before Usage) (4)	.77	.84
Website Attitude (6)	.90	.92
Personal Touch (4)	.86	.87
Supportiveness (4)	.87	.84
Responsiveness (4)	.87	.83
Increased Familiarity (3)	.91	.84
Increased Reputation (4)	.94	.94
Applicant Attraction (7)	.93	.95

5.3.2 Quality of the Software

The *website usage* was a special case as it has been measured with an observation of actual behaviour. Software specifically developed for this research tracked the following data for each respondent: *the total time spent* on the website and the URLs of all sub-pages he or she chose with the respective length of stay. So in addition to the two measures of *total time spent* and *number of pages* which are particularly interesting for the “bank plus” – “bank plain” *comparison*, the actual usage of the particular (*personal, supportive, responsive*) elements in the “bank plus” condition (as displayed in table 6) was surveyed. With the help of the list of all actually used URLs it could be said if a respondent has visited pages which were beforehand characterized as *personal, supportive* or *responsive*. All of the features of interest were on separate URLs so that the results were easily assignable. Unlike the multi-item measures for the other

variables the *website usage* items cannot simply be merged but have to be considered independently.

Table 6: Actual Usage of Personal, Supportive and Responsive Elements in the “Bank Plus” Sample

	Personal Elements	Supportive Elements	Responsive Elements
N	66	66	66
Used	29	36	11
	44%	55%	17%
Minimum Time Spent (in Seconds)	5	2	4
Maximum Time Spent (in Seconds)	83	180	60
Mean Time Spent (if Used) (in Seconds)	36	53	28

Generally, the software worked well and collected the data in the intended way. The data collected on *total time spent* and *number of pages* was more meaningful, though, as it was surveyed in both samples and therefore based on more case numbers. The data concerning the actual usage of *personal*, *supportive* and *responsive* elements was naturally limited to the “bank plus” sample which implicated smaller case numbers. Especially the *responsive element* was used by a very small number of participants only. The division into people who *have* and people who *have not* used the elements within the “bank plus” sample again led to sub-groups. Systematic differences resulting from the usage or non-usage of the elements were the following: Participants who used *personal* elements attested the website a higher *personal touch* ($t(59)=-2.72$, $p=.005$), people who used *responsive* ones analogically attested a higher *responsiveness* ($t(58)=-3.26$, $p=.001$). Moreover, respondents using *personal* ($t(59)=-2.18$, $p=.02$) and *supportive* ($t(59)=-2.04$, $p=.02$) elements had a more positive *website attitude*.

Despite the small case numbers the actual usage of elements apparently made a significant difference. Therefore, not only *total time spent* and *number of pages* are considered when examining the influence of website usage - but also the actual usage of the elements of interest.

5.4 FRONT-RUNNER “BANK PLUS” WEBSITE

Already at first sight it was observable that the means of the variables differed both *within* – but most importantly *between* samples. Generally and consistently, higher values could be observed in the “bank plus” group.

Table 7: Comparing the Samples: Differences in Familiarity and Reputation (Before Usage)

	"Bank Plus"			"Bank Plain"		
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
Familiarity (Before Usage)	63	2.3*	1.4	62	1.9	1.1
Reputation (Before Usage)	63	4.6**	1.1	65	3.5	1.0

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

Table 8: Comparing the Samples: Differences in Website Usage

	"Bank Plus"			"Bank Plain"		
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
Total Time Spent (seconds)	62	308.27**	172.32	66	149.12	92.30
Number of Pages	62	14.47**	5.82	66	10.77	6.10

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

Table 9: Comparing the Samples: Differences in Website Attitude, Perceived Characteristics, Familiarity and Reputation (After Usage), and Applicant Attraction

	"Bank Plus"			"Bank Plain"		
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
Website Attitude	62	5.1	1.4	63	4.8	1.2
Personal Touch	62	4.4**	1.3	66	3.8	1.2
Supportiveness	61	5.1*	1.1	64	4.6	1.2
Responsiveness	61	4.1*	1.4	63	3.6	1.3
Increased Familiarity	61	4.1	1.3	63	4.0	1.4
Increased Reputation	60	4.0	1.8	62	3.9	1.6
Applicant Attraction	59	5.5**	1.4	63	4.6	1.3

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

Tables 7 presents the descriptive statistics for the variables asked for in the pre-task questionnaire: *familiarity* and *reputation* before usage. In table 8, the strongly varying means of *website usage* among samples are displayed. Other than the questionnaire measures (table 7 and 9) which are to be interpreted on 7-point scales (with 7 being the highest value), the usage data contains seconds (indicating the time spent on the websites) and numbers (of pages chosen). Table 9 shows the descriptive statistics for all variables asked for in the post-task

questionnaire: *website attitude*, the perceived characteristics, *familiarity* and *reputation* after usage and *applicant attraction*.

To make sure that the unequal division of respondents did not significantly influence this leadership role of the “bank plus”, t-tests and Mann-Whitney-tests (for the variables which did not meet the prerequisites for the t-test) were made. To begin with, *gender* did not influence the answers given: males and females on average gave the same answers²⁰. Regarding the *average weekly Internet use*, neither the low frequency users (0-10 hours)²¹ nor the high frequency users (more than 30 hours)²² voted significantly differently from the average user (10-20 hours). The same was true for the people who *searched for a job* in the last year: Their answers were not significantly different from the answers that “non-“ job seekers gave²³. Even the strongly varying percentage of respondents planning to do job searching in the next year among the samples did not have any consequences: The fact if people had such plans did not significantly interfere with their answers²⁴.

In sum, the unequal division of respondents was no problem, as the before inspected subgroups did not systematically (and significantly) answer differently. It was therefore not necessary to build weighted averages in order to compare both samples.

²⁰ (*familiarity before usage*: U=1494.50, n1=49, n2=69, p=.27; *reputation before usage*: t(119)=-.97, p=.33; *total time spent*: U=1537.00, n1=48, n2=73, p=.24; *number of options*: t(119)=1.35, p=.18; *website attitude*: t(117)=-1.17, p=.24; *personal touch*: t(119)=-1.28, p=.20; *supportiveness*: t(118)=-1.59, p=.12; *responsiveness*: t(118)=-1.91, p=.06; *familiarity after usage*: U=1662.50, n1=48, n2=72, p=.72; *reputation after usage*: t(117)=-1.05, p=.30; *applicant attraction*: t(116)=-1.68, p=.09)

²¹ (*familiarity before usage*: U=279.50, n1=15, n2=47, p=.22; *reputation before usage*: t(62)=-.29, p=.77; *total time spent*: U=322.00, n1=15, n2=48, p=.54; *number of options*: t(61)=-.99, p=.33; *website attitude*: t(60)=-.36, p=.72; *personal touch*: t(62)=-.37, p=.72; *supportiveness*: t(59)=-.43, p=.67; *responsiveness*: t(59)=-.88, p=.38; *familiarity after usage*: U=315.50, n1=15, n2=45, p=.72; *reputation after usage*: t(58)=-.97, p=.34; *applicant attraction*: t(56)=-.27, p=.79)

²² (*familiarity before usage*: U=600.00, n1=47, n2=28, p=.52; *reputation before usage*: t(75)=1.40, p=.17; *total time spent*: U=693.00, n1=48, n2=29, p=.98; *number of options*: t(75)=-.95, p=.35; *website attitude*: t(74)=-.51, p=.61; *personal touch*: t(75)=-.10, p=.92; *supportiveness*: t(73)=-.31, p=.76; *responsiveness*: t(73)=-.35, p=.72; *familiarity after usage*: U=567.00, n1=45, n2=29, p=.34; *reputation after usage*: t(71)=-.41, p=.68; *applicant attraction*: t(69)=-.58, p=.57)

²³ (*familiarity before usage*: U=739.00, n1=19, n2=103, p=.08; *reputation before usage*: t(123)=-.15, p=.88; *total time spent*: U=856.50, n1=20, n2=105, p=.19; *number of options*: t(123)=1.83, p=.07; *website attitude*: t(121)=-1.09, p=.28; *personal touch*: t(123)=-.00, p=.99; *supportiveness*: t(121)=-.76, p=.45; *responsiveness*: t(121)=-.91, p=.37; *familiarity after usage*: U=952.00, n1=20, n2=102, p=.59; *reputation after usage*: t(120)=-.70, p=.37; *applicant attraction*: t(120)=-.02, p=.99)

²⁴ (*familiarity before usage*: U=1340.50, n1=34, n2=88, p=.36; *reputation before usage*: t(123)=-.55, p=.58; *total time spent*: U=1504.50, n1=37, n2=88, p=.50; *number of options*: t(123)=-.37, p=.71; *website attitude*: t(121)=1.55, p=.12; *personal touch*: t(123)=-.53, p=.60; *supportiveness*: t(121)=-.52, p=.60; *responsiveness*: t(121)=-.24, p=.81; *familiarity after usage*: U=1226.50, n1=36, n2=87, p=.06; *reputation after usage*: t(120)=-.72, p=.47; *applicant attraction*: t(120)=-.00, p=.99)

As the unequal division among samples did not interfere with the results, the next question was if the results could have been accidentally – and not significantly for the population. To check if the differences observable were indeed significant again t-tests and Mann-Whitney tests were used.

To get straight to the point, the differences between samples were significant for prior *familiarity* and *reputation*, for the *total time spent* on the website, for the *number of pages* chosen, for all of the perceived characteristics, and for *applicant attraction*.

More precisely, and starting with the variables with normal distribution, the means between the independent samples (“bank plus” and “bank plain”) according to the t-test did not differ significantly for *website attitude* ($t(123)=1.36$, $p=.09$) and *increased reputation* ($t(120)=.50$, $p=.31$). For the other variables (*reputation before usage*: $t(126)=5.28$, $p=.001$; *number of pages*: $t(126)=3.50$, $p=.001$; *personal touch*: $t(126)=2.91$, $p=.002$; *supportiveness*: $t(123)=2.06$, $p=.02$; *responsiveness*: $t(122)=2.11$, $p=.02$; and *applicant attraction*: $t(120)=3.69$, $p=.001$) there were significant differences between the groups.

As an alternative to the t-test the Mann-Whitney was used to test the *familiarity* and *total time spent* means for significant differences. Among the respondents with high *familiarity* (before usage) there were slightly more people of the “bank plus” sample which was significant ($U=1618.5$, $n_1=63$, $n_2=62$, $p=.045$). *Total time spent* came out to be significantly different between the samples, too ($U=882.50$, $n_1=62$, $n_2=66$, $p=.001$). For increased *familiarity* there were no significant differences, though ($U=1903$, $n_1=61$, $n_2=63$, $p=.46$).

In sum, there were a lot of significant differences between the two samples: Respondents of the “bank plus” sample were slightly more familiar with the company and attested a better *reputation*. The “bank plus” group’s participants also used the website more extensively – they on average stayed longer and opened more pages. Moreover, they on average perceived it as having a higher *personal touch*, *supportiveness* and *responsiveness*. Finally, and most importantly, they felt on average more attracted to the bank as an employer in the end. Variables which on the contrary were fairly similar among samples were the *website attitude* and *increased familiarity* and *reputation*.

Whereas most differences occurred as expected, the discrepancies in *reputation* were naturally not ideal for subsequent considerations. No nameable biases are expected, though, as the differences between the mean values were only small and the prior reputation’s effect on other variables came out to be little as well (as will be shown in the following chapter).

5.5 FIRST OVERVIEW OF CORRELATING VARIABLES

A first overview of which variables correlated how strongly (and how significantly) with each other is presented in the correlation matrices in table 10 (“bank plus” sample) and table 11 (“bank plain” sample)²⁵.

Table 10: Correlating Variables in the “Bank Plus” Sample (Pearson’s Correlation)

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.
1. Familiarity (Before)	-									
2. Reputation (Before)	.31*	-								
3. Total Time Spent	-.15	-.29*	-							
4. Number of Pages	-.20	-.18	.77**	-						
5. Website Attitude	.15	.22	.05	.11	-					
6. Personal Touch	-.04	.26*	.35**	.38**	.66**	-				
7. Supportiveness	-.16	.27*	.14	.32*	.53**	.69**	-			
8. Responsiveness	-.04	.15	-.01	.18	.63**	.65**	.64**	-		
9. Increased Familiarity	.11	.31*	.03	.07	.41**	.48**	.51**	.49**	-	
10. Increased Reputation	-.05	.15	.31*	.47**	.45**	.66**	.60**	.55**	.60**	-
11. Applicant Attraction	-.06	.39**	.13	.31*	.41**	.50**	.69**	.46**	.51**	.56**

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

Table 11: Correlating Variables in the “Bank Plain” Sample (Pearson’s Correlation)

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.
1. Familiarity (Before)	-									
2. Reputation (Before)	.29*	-								
3. Total Time Spent	-.22	-.10	-							
4. Number of Pages	-.19	.09	.78**	-						
5. Website Attitude	.10	.23	-.01	.03	-					
6. Personal Touch	.31*	.35**	.02	.03	.67**	-				
7. Supportiveness	.17	.19	-.13	-.03	.65**	.61**	-			
8. Responsiveness	.09	.20	-.06	.01	.61**	.62**	.50**	-		
9. Increased Familiarity	.34**	.16	.01	.06	.59**	.65**	.57**	.44**	-	
10. Increased Reputation	.22	.34**	.12	.16	.67**	.75**	.52**	.45**	.72**	-
11. Applicant Attraction	.13	.35**	.05	.05	.68**	.70**	.60**	.60**	.52**	.63**

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

²⁵ The values for *familiarity* (before and after usage) have to be considered with caution as they do not meet the criterion of normal distribution. The same applies to *total time spent* as this variable does not meet the criterion of homoscedasticity.

As one can see in both tables (10 and 11) the correlation patterns were fairly similar. Naturally, *personal touch*, *supportiveness* and *responsiveness* correlated moderately and significantly with each other. Moreover, *familiarity* and *reputation* before usage correlated weakly and significantly with each other in both samples. The *increased familiarity* also correlated highly and significantly with the *increased reputation*. Also observable in both samples were the moderate and significant correlations between *website attitude* and respectively *personal touch*, *supportiveness*, *responsiveness*, *increased familiarity*, *increased reputation*, and *applicant attraction*. In the “bank plus” group, the *total time spent* and the *number of pages* chosen correlated with more other variables than in the “bank plain” group, for example with the website’s *personal touch* and its *supportiveness*. The final outcome *applicant attraction* was in both samples significantly correlated with the prior *reputation* of the company, the *website attitude*, *personal touch*, *supportiveness*, *responsiveness*, and with the *increased familiarity* and *increased reputation*. Where do these first approaches lead us?

5.6 TESTING THE HYPOTHESES – AN EXPANDABLE MODEL

Hypothesis 1 (a,b,c)

H1 stated that job seekers’ general perceptions of the website’s characteristics of interest (H1), particularly its *personal touch* (H1a), *supportiveness* (H1b) and *responsiveness* (H1c), would influence their *website usage*.

The correlation matrix in table 9 has already revealed significant (but weak) correlations - but only in the “bank plus” sample and only between *personal touch* and both usage dimensions and *supportiveness* and the *number of pages* chosen. In order to further investigate H1 linear regressions were made considering the perceptions of the characteristics as asked for in the questionnaires in both groups.

When taking into consideration all respondents, out of the three perceived characteristics only *personal touch* significantly predicted the *total time spent*, ($b=.48$, $t(119)=3.87$, $p=.001$). All characteristics together explained a significant proportion of variance in total time spent ($R^2=.13$, $F(3,119)=5.89$, $p=.001$). Similar results were found for the second measure of *website usage*: Again, the website’s perceived *personal touch* was the only characteristic which significantly predicted the *number of pages* ($b=.25$, $t(119)=1.99$, $p=.049$). All three

characteristics explained a small but significant proportion of variance in the *number of pages* ($R^2=.08$, $F(3,119)=3.56$, $p=.02$).

Within the “bank plus” sample, the results were similar for the *total time spent*: only *personal touch* significantly predicted it ($b=.55$, $t(57)=3.27$, $p=.002$), while all characteristics together explained a significant proportion in variance in total time spent ($R^2=.20$, $F(3,57)=4.51$, $P=.01$). No single characteristic, however, significantly predicted the number of pages. All together, though, explained a significant proportion of the variance in number of pages ($R^2=.19$, $F(3, 57)=4.19$, $p=.01$). In the “bank plain” sample, no significant interrelations were detected.

Generally, the “umbrella hypothesis” H1 was provided with support: The three characteristics mainly influenced website usage. It was more difficult, though, to determine which characteristics in particular had which effects – and thus to find explicit support for the sub-hypotheses H1a, H1b and H1c. Out of the three sub-hypotheses, only H1a was provided with significant support. Perceived *supportiveness* (H1b) and *responsiveness* (H1c), however, did not significantly predict *website usage*.

Hypothesis 2 (a,b,c)

H2 said that job seekers’ general perceptions of the website’s characteristics of interest (H2), particularly its *personal touch* (H2a), *supportiveness* (H2b) and *responsiveness* (H2c), would influence their *website attitude*.

The regression analysis based on all respondents revealed that all three perceived characteristics significantly predicted *website attitude* (*personal touch*: $b=.39$, $t(116)=4.10$, $p=.001$; *supportiveness*: $b=.19$, $t(116)=2.12$, $p=.04$; *responsiveness*: $b=.26$, $t(116)=2.96$, $p=.004$). All characteristics together explained a high proportion of the variance in *website attitude* ($R^2=.53$, $F(3,116)=43.00$, $p=.001$).

When examining the samples separately, similarly clear results were gained. Two perceived characteristics were found to have significant influence in the “bank plus” sample: *Personal touch* ($b=.44$, $t(57)=3.10$, $p=.003$) and *responsiveness* ($b=.31$, $t(57)= 2.30$, $p=.03$) significantly predicted *website attitude*. All three perceived characteristics together explained a high and significant proportion of variance in *website attitude* ($R^2=.50$, $F(3,57)=17.70$, $p=.001$).

Two characteristics were found to have significant influence in the “bank plain” group: *Personal touch* ($b=.34$, $t(58)=2.79$, $p=.007$) and *supportiveness* ($b=.33$, $t(58)=2.91$, $p=.005$) significantly predicted *website attitude*. Also in this sample, all three characteristics together explained a high proportion of the variance in

website attitude ($R^2=.59$, $F(3,58)=25.93$, $p=.001$). Both the “umbrella hypothesis” (H2) and the sub-hypotheses (H2a,b,c) were provided with strong support.

Hypothesis 3

H3 expressed that *website usage* would influence *website attitude*. Both *total time spent* ($b=.05$, $t(123)=.35$, $p=.73$) and *number of pages* ($b=.08$, $t(123)=.58$, $p=.57$) did not significantly predict *website attitude* – not even when including all respondents. They could not explain a significant degree of its variance either ($R^2=.01$, $F(2,123)=.86$, $p=.43$). Furthermore, the actual usage of *personal*, *supportive* and *responsive* elements had no significant explanatory power ($R^2=.10$, $F(3,60)=2.03$, $p=.12$). Neither the use of *personal* elements ($b=.22$, $t(60)=1.62$, $p=.11$) nor the use of *supportive* ($b=-.14$, $t(60)=-1.05$, $p=.30$) or *responsive* ones ($b=.15$, $t(60)=1.08$, $p=.29$) predicted *website attitude*. No support could therefore be provided for H3.

Hypothesis 4

H4 stated that *website usage* would influence *applicant attraction*. When considering all respondents, both measures of *website usage* – the *total time spent* and the *number of pages* – were found to explain in combination a small but significant proportion of variance in *applicant attraction* ($R^2=.08$, $F(2,120)=4.95$, $p=.01$). No variable alone was able to significantly predict attraction, though. In the “bank plus” sample, the explained variance was higher ($R^2=.12$, $F(2,57)=3.70$, $p=.03$) and the *number of pages* was detected to significantly predict *applicant attraction* ($b=.48$, $t(57)=2.52$, $p=.02$). In the “bank plain” sample alone, no significant interrelations could be found.

The actual usage data did not lead to significant results: The use of the elements in general did not explain a significant proportion of variance in *applicant attraction* ($R^2=.06$, $F(3,57)=1.06$, $p=.37$). Neither the use of *personal* elements ($b=.13$, $t(57)=.91$, $p=.37$) nor the use of *supportive* ($b=.01$, $t(57)=.10$, $p=.92$) or *responsive* ones ($b=.16$, $t(57)=1.11$, $p=.27$) significantly predicted *applicant attraction*.

H4 can be provided with weak support only: *Website usage* influenced *applicant attraction* – but only when taking into account all respondents. While in the “bank plus” sample the interrelations were evident and significant, no clear results could be found based on the “bank plain” group.

Hypothesis 5

H5 predicted that *website attitude* would influence *applicant attraction*. As already expected based on the correlation matrices, the linear regression results including all respondents showed that *website attitude* significantly predicted *applicant attraction* ($b=.54$, $t(119)=6.91$, $p=.001$). *Website attitude* also explained a significant proportion of variance in *applicant attraction* ($R^2=.29$, $F(1,119)=47.70$, $p=.001$). Even the regressions made with the single samples led to highly significant results: In the “bank plus” sample *website attitude* significantly predicted *applicant attraction* ($b=.41$, $t(57)=3.34$, $p=.002$) and also explained a significant proportion of its variance ($R^2=.17$, $F(1,57)=11.15$, $p=.002$). In the “bank plain” sample, the regression analysis led to significant results as well ($b=.68$, $t(61)=7.15$, $p=.001$; $R^2=.46$, $F(1,61)=51.10$, $p=.001$). H5 was provided with significant support.

Hypothesis 6

H6 specified that *familiarity* (before usage) with the hiring company would influence *website attitude*. For this interrelation, significant support could be found neither when taking into account all respondents ($b=.14$, $t(120)=1.57$, $p=.12$; $R^2=.02$, $F(1,120)=2.47$, $p=.12$) nor when testing the samples individually (“bank plus”: $b=.15$, $t(61)=1.20$, $p=.24$; $R^2=.02$, $F(1,61)=1.42$, $p=.24$; “bank plain”: $b=.10$, $t(58)=.72$, $p=.47$; $R^2=.01$, $F(1,58)=.52$, $P=.47$). Accordingly, no support was provided for H6.

Hypothesis 7

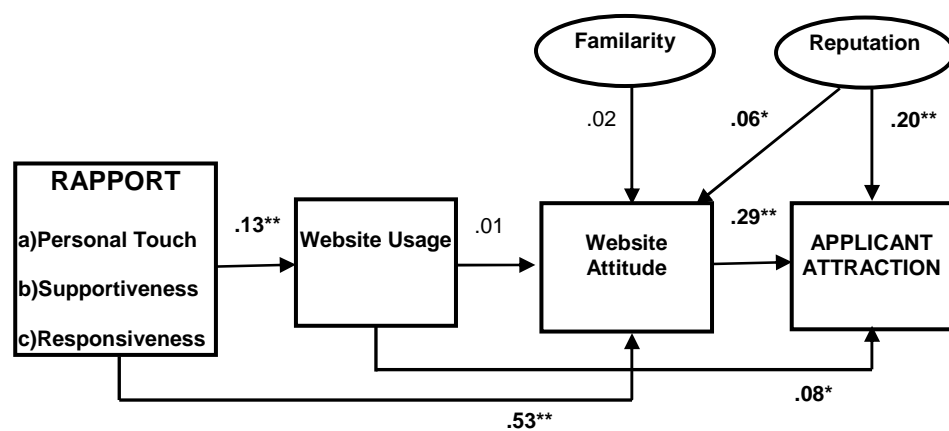
H7 predicted that *reputation* would influence *website attitude*. A linear regression analysis including all respondents indeed showed that *reputation* significantly predicted *website attitude* ($b=.25$, $t(123)=2.82$, $p=.01$) and that reputation explained a small but significant proportion of variance in *website attitude* ($R^2=.06$, $F(1,123)=7.95$, $p=.01$). No significant results could be found for the single samples, though. Again, the sample sizes were probably too small to detect little effects (“bank plus”: $b=.22$, $t(61)=1.72$, $p=.10$; $R^2=.05$, $F(1,61)=2.96$, $p=.10$; “bank plain”: $b=.23$, $t(61)=1.84$, $p=.07$; $R^2=.05$, $F(1,61)=3.40$, $p=.07$). H7 was nevertheless provided with weak support.

Hypothesis 8

H8 indicated that *reputation* would influence *applicant attraction*. The regression analysis based on all respondents led to supporting results: *reputation*

significantly predicted *applicant attraction* ($b=.45$, $t(120)=5.43$, $p=.001$) and explained the variance in *applicant attraction* to a significant degree ($R^2=.20$, $F(1,120)=29.45$, $p=.001$). Even the linear regressions made with the single samples led to significant results (“bank plus”: $b=.39$, $t(58)=3.21$, $p=.002$; $R^2=.15$, $F(1,58)=10.30$, $p=.002$; “bank plain”: $b=.35$, $t(61)=2.87$, $p=.01$; $R^2=.12$, $F(1,61)=8.24$, $p=.01$). Significant support was therefore provided for H8.

Fig. 9 gives an overview of the explained variances (according to linear regression) when taking into account *all* respondents. As one can see there only 6 out of the 8 hypothesized interrelations were indeed provided with significant support. Moreover, most interrelations were rather weak.



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

Fig. 9: How Applicant Attraction is Actually Influenceable (Research Model with explained variance (R^2) indication based on all respondents)

5.7 FINDINGS BEYOND HYPOTHESES – A REFINED MODEL

Beyond the hypotheses, further interesting results were found which complemented and partly deepened the findings named before. Most importantly, the perceived characteristics were found to have direct influence on more dependent variables than assumed in the primary research model.

More precisely, the perceived characteristics predicted not only *website usage* and *website attitude* but also *applicant attraction* ($R^2=.52$, $F(3,115)=41.08$, $p=.001$). *Personal touch* ($b=.26$, $t(115)=2.78$, $p=.01$) and *supportiveness* ($b=.39$, $t(115)=4.33$, $p=.001$) predicted *applicant attraction* even separately.

Furthermore, the perceived characteristics significantly influenced the increases in *familiarity* and *reputation*. Among all respondents, the perceived characteristics explained a significant proportion of variance in *increased familiarity* ($R^2=.38$, $F(3,118)=23.32$, $p=.001$). *Personal touch* ($b=.29$, $t(118)=2.74$, $p=.01$) and

supportiveness ($b=.30$, $t(118)=3.06$, $p=.003$) significantly predicted the *increase in familiarity*. In addition, the perceived characteristics explained the variance in *increased reputation* to a high degree ($R^2=.52$, $F(3,116)=38.95$, $p=.001$). *Personal touch* ($b=.53$, $t(116)=5.69$, $p=.001$) and *supportiveness* ($b=.19$, $t(116)=2.12$, $p=.04$) were significant predictors of the *increased reputation*.

The increase in *familiarity* and *reputation* in turn explained *website attitude* to a considerable degree: Enhanced *familiarity* explained a significant proportion of variance in *website attitude* ($R^2=.25$, $F(1,119)=38.19$, $p=.001$). Enhanced *reputation* even explained a higher proportion ($R^2=.30$, $F(1,119)=50.31$, $p=.001$). Moreover, the *increase in familiarity* explained the variance in *applicant attraction* to a considerable degree ($R^2=.25$, $F(1,118)=38.92$, $p=.001$). *Increased reputation* explained an even higher proportion in variance in *applicant attraction* ($R^2=.33$, $F(1,117)=55.80$, $p=.001$).

In RQ2 it was asked which roles *familiarity* and *reputation* play in the whole process. As described above, increased *familiarity* and *reputation* (after usage) play an important role. Prior *reputation* was detected to influence both *website attitude* and *applicant attraction* (H7 and H8) as well. Prior *familiarity* on the contrary did not influence *website attitude* (H6). For the interrelation between *familiarity* (before usage) and *attraction*, no hypothesis was formulated. An additional regression analysis showed that no significant proportion of variance in *applicant attraction* could be explained by prior *familiarity*, though ($R^2=.00$, $F(1,117)=.44$, $p=.51$).

What is noticeable is that apparently the extent and breadth of the *website usage* did not mainly influence the increase in *familiarity* and *reputation*. Considering all respondents, neither the *total time spent* ($b=-.04$, $t(123)=-.25$, $p=.80$) nor the *number of pages* ($b=.11$, $t(123)=.77$, $p=.45$) significantly predicted the *increase in familiarity*. The variance in *increased reputation* was significantly but only to a low degree explained by both usage measurements ($R^2=.10$, $F(2,120)=6.56$, $p=.002$). Only the *number of pages* significantly predicted the *increase in reputation* ($b=.32$, $t(120)=2.40$, $p=.02$).

To sum up the further findings, *website usage* was detected to influence the increase in *reputation* to a small but significant degree. More striking, the perceived website characteristics were found to strongly and significantly influence the increase in both *familiarity* and *reputation*. Increased *familiarity* and *reputation* in turn were detected to significantly influence both *website attitude* and *applicant attraction*. And most noticeable, the perceived characteristics influenced *applicant attraction* directly – and to a considerably high degree.

Therefore the influence of characteristics on *attraction* was not only indirect (via *website usage* and *website attitude*) but forthright as well.

The results mentioned above led to a redefined model (Fig. 10):

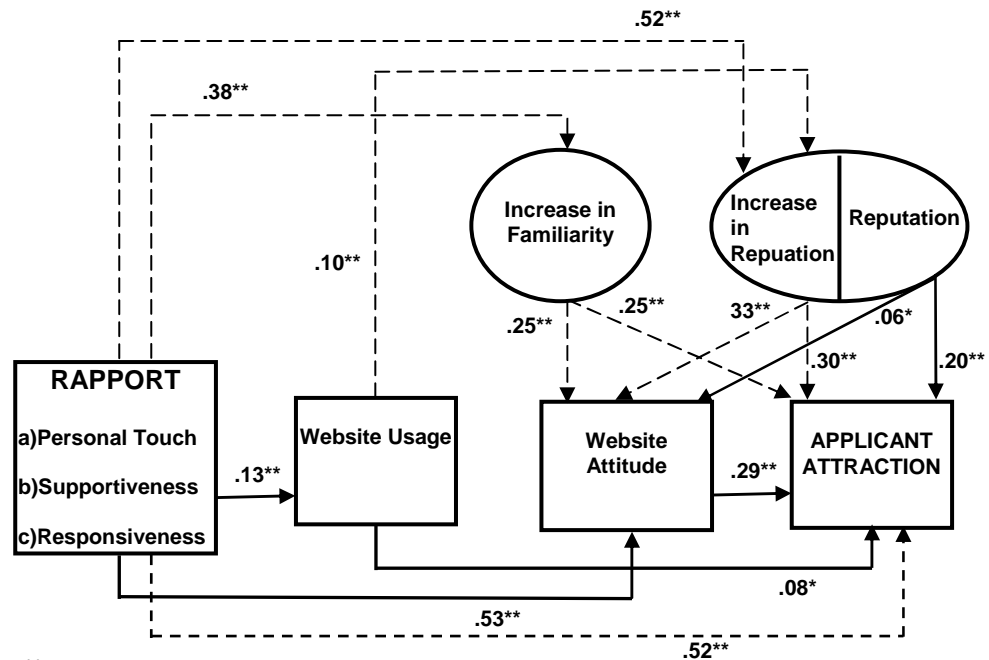


Fig. 10: Refined Research Model with explained variance (R^2) indication based on all respondents

The relatively high impact of the perceived website characteristics – compared with the small effects of actual *website usage* – led to a subsequent question: Did the actual use of *personal*, *supportive* or *responsive* elements even predict the perceived *personal touch*, *supportiveness* and *responsiveness*? Or did respondents attest for example a *personal touch* without having used the assigned feature? Linear regression analyses based on the “bank plus” sample revealed that the interrelation indeed was rather weak. While the use of *personal* elements explained at least a small significant proportion of variance in *personal touch* ($R^2=.09$, $F(1,60)=5.45$, $p=.02$), the use of *supportive* elements did not explain the variance in *supportiveness* at all ($R^2=.00$, $F(1,59)=.01$, $p=.95$). The use of *responsive* features explained only a small proportion of variance in *responsiveness* ($R^2=.18$, $F(1,59)=13.10$, $p=.001$).

6. CONCLUSION

Conclusion

Rapport matters in corporate career websites. This can be clearly said upfront. Six out of eight hypotheses were provided with support. As expected, the perceived website characteristics significantly influenced *website usage* (H1) and *website attitude* (H2). Respondents of the “bank plus” sample - who on average reported a higher *personal touch*, more *supportiveness* and more *responsiveness* - used the website on average more intensely, and liked it better afterwards. *Website usage* and *website attitude* both had significant influence on *applicant attraction* then (H4, H5), while both *attitude* and *attraction* were found to be influenced by the company’s prior *reputation* (H7, H8). Only for the hypothesized interrelations between *website usage* and *website attitude* (H3), and *familiarity* and *attitude* (H6) no support could be given. *Website usage* appeared not to have a nameable effect on *website attitude* – and nor did prior *familiarity*.

Beyond the mere hypotheses, further insights were gained which led to a refined and even more meaningful model: The perceived website characteristics came out to directly influence *applicant attraction* to a high and significant degree. Together with the indirect influence via *website attitude* which was also considerably strong, this means a really high impact of perceived characteristics. Moreover, the perceived characteristics were detected to significantly influence the increase in *familiarity* and *reputation* after usage. These variables in turn again influenced *website attitude* and *applicant attraction*. In sum, rapport in terms of *personal touch*, *supportiveness* and *responsiveness* came out to be a highly significant precursor of *applicant attraction*.

Coming back to the first research question (RQ1), it can now be responded that organizational *rapport* in terms of *personal touch*, *supportiveness* and *responsiveness* influences *applicant attraction* to a high degree. In the attempt to increase *applicant attraction* by building *rapport*, *website attitude* plays a more important role than *website usage*.

Answering the second research question (RQ2), especially the *increased familiarity* and *reputation* (after usage) are additional critical variables influencing *applicant attraction* and deserve a closer inspection in future research. *Prior familiarity* and *reputation* are less influential, though: Only *reputation* (before usage) has small effects on *website attitude* and *applicant attraction*. *Familiarity* (before usage) does influence neither *website attitude* nor *applicant attraction*.

Discussion

Surprisingly, it generally did not matter how intensely people used the website – the mere visit of the site was apparently sufficient to improve people's perceived *familiarity* with the company and the organization's *reputation*. Interestingly, the *perceived* characteristics as asked for in the post-task questionnaire were found to have considerable effects – oftentimes stronger effects than the actually *used* elements surveyed via software had. This indicated that the websites were able to transport a *personal touch*, *supportiveness* or *responsiveness* also with other means – and not only with the help of the elements defined in the framework of this thesis. The dual capacity of data is obviously hardly predictable: It is difficult to say beforehand which feature will convey which meaning to website visitors. Besides this difficulty which affected all characteristics, it was also challenging to assign the effects to the perceived characteristics.

While the effects of *personal touch* and *supportiveness* could be clearly assigned in most cases, the effects of *responsiveness* were harder to specify. *Responsiveness* alone could only be found to directly influence *website attitude*. Whereas strong and significant support was provided for the influence of all three characteristics together on *applicant attraction*, the influence of *responsiveness* in particular could only be proven indirectly – via *website attitude*. As the *website attitude* was detected to significantly predict *applicant attraction*, *responsiveness* can nevertheless – just as *personal touch* and *supportiveness* – be equated with an increased *effectiveness* of corporate career websites.

Implications

The findings regarding *responsiveness* in this research were too weak to make meaningful comments on theories such as the 'Media Richness Theory'. In order to show that new media is richer than assumed (and ranked) and very well able to offer responsive communication, more research is clearly needed.

For the influence of *personal touch*, however, explicit and significant support was given. In line with "Social Presence Theory" the website's *personal touch* (which is not equal but similar to the idea of social presence) influenced *applicant attraction* to a considerable degree. Obviously, also new media can convey the feeling of a *personal touch* and can compensate for physical and psychological distance.

Basically, the results gained supported also Cober et al.'s (2004a) testable propositions (as far as they have been part of my model) in many respects. The assumed influence of *website usage* (or respectively *search behaviour*) on

website attitude – an important interrelation in Cober et al.'s (2004a) model as well – could not be supported, though.

Although many respondents reported to not being very familiar with the particular company as an employer this obviously did not negatively influence their attraction. Possibly the respondents' relatively low *familiarity* even had an effect in the opposite direction and enhanced the signalling value of the website characteristics, such as proposed by Braddy et. al (2008) who stated that the signalling value of single characteristics is even higher when the *familiarity* with the employer is low.

Recommendations

The meaningful findings lead to a clear recommendation: Establish rapport with your corporate career website and you will be more successful in attracting the right applicants. Accentuate your company's *personal touch*, show its *supportive* side, be *responsive* – and your website-based recruiting will be more effective.

Limitations

Of course there are some limitations to this study. Most notably, convenience samples (the researcher's friends and friends of friends) were used. While the results were of course controlled for differences between the samples, the choice for convenience samples might have led to an overestimation of effects as the people approached might have spent more time on the website visit in order to support the researcher.

Moreover, two existing websites were used, which was on the one hand much more realistic and drawn from life than creating fictitious ones – but on the other hand more vulnerable to unexpected influences. Although the manipulation check had assured that the first impression of the two sites was comparable regarding design and layout, and despite the finding that both sites were perceived as similarly usable according to self reports of the actual respondents – it could have been that other factors than the three characteristics of interest have influenced choices and attitudes.

Another small limitation was the positive formulation of the *familiarity* and *reputation* questions after usage – the ones asking for immediate effects. The items implied that an enhancement had taken place. People who did not agree with that were only able to choose the 1 (on a scale from 1 to 7) which indicated the point of departure, the prior *familiarity* or *reputation*. It was possible for the respondents to indicate that both variables have not increased, or that they have

increased. It was not possible, though, to indicate a *decrease* in either *familiarity* or *reputation*.

A last limitation which has already been mentioned in the results chapter is the general difficulty to define characteristics, in this case those of *personal touch*, *supportiveness* and *responsiveness*. While it is for practicability reasons necessary to operationalize them it is fairly difficult to assign characteristics to specific website features. There will always be overlaps and what makes it even harder - differences in website visitors' subjective sensations.

Ideas for Future Research

For future research in this field it might be very insightful to take a closer look at how career websites can systematically steer and enhance *familiarity* and *reputation*, as those two variables were found to be considerably influential on *applicant attraction*.

Although this study has offered strong indicators that websites having the characteristics of *personal touch*, *supportiveness* and *responsiveness* are indeed more successful in attracting applicants there are a lot of open questions and toe-holds remaining. How do for example different *personal* elements (using video, audio or just written interviews, including one or more employees, offering job-related or rather private insights) affect *usage*, *attitude*, *familiarity*, *reputation* and *attraction*? Does it make a difference if applicant support is provided with a simple checklist only or if a high-tech virtual coaching room is offered on the website? Is it important how 'honest' a *responsive* tool really is? Finding out more about the different shades of *personal touch*, *supportiveness* and *responsiveness* will not only be interesting from a theoretical point of view, but also for practitioners. Possibilities might be found how even smaller companies with limited budgets can offer added value when including *personal*, *supportive* or *responsive* features.

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9. APPENDIX

APPENDIX A : QUESTIONNAIRE

APPENDIX B : CONTENT ANALYSIS OVERVIEW

[illegible]

Wie sehr stimmst du den folgenden Aussagen zu?

Ich kann gut verstehen warum sich Absolventen für die NRW.Bank als Arbeitgeber interessieren.

stimme gar nicht zu ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ stimme voll zu

Ich kann mir gut vorstellen, dass die NRW.Bank als exzellenter Arbeitgeber gilt.

stimme gar nicht zu ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ stimme voll zu

Ich kann mir gut vorstellen, dass die NRW.Bank einen exzellenten Ruf unter Studenten hat.

stimme gar nicht zu ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ stimme voll zu

Ich habe viele gute Dinge über die NRW.Bank gehört.

stimme gar nicht zu ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ stimme voll zu

Der erste Teil der Umfrage ist schon geschafft!

Nun geht's an die Praxis....

Bitte stell dir folgende Situation vor:

- Jemand hat dir die NRW.Bank als Arbeitgeber nahe gelegt
- du studierst das passende Fach und die NRW.Bank könnte in Zukunft tatsächlich interessant für dich sein
- du beschließt dir die Karriere Webseite anzuschauen um dich über die NRW.Bank als Arbeitgeber zu informieren

Wichtig: Bitte verhalte dich hierbei so natürlich wie möglich und durchsuche die Seite in dem Ausmaß und der Länge wie du es auch im Realfall bei einem für dich interessanten Arbeitgeber tun würdest. Eine Software wird mir anschließend übermitteln was du dir auf der Seite angeschaut hast.

Bitte klicke nun auf den folgenden Link zur Karriere Webseite der NRW.Bank, lass diese Umfrage aber in jedem Fall offen, damit du anschließend zu ihr zurückkehren kannst!

Link:

<http://www.onestart.de/compares/245177vq522>

Post-Task Questionnaire

Der aufwendigste Teil ist nun geschafft!

Bitte beantworte aber unbedingt noch die folgenden Fragen, da ich nur vollständig ausgefüllte Umfragen verwerten kann.

Am Schluss kannst du deine Email-Adresse angeben, wenn du am Gewinnspiel teilnehmen möchtest.

Wie sehr stimmst du den folgenden Aussagen zu?

Die Webseite macht es mir einfach eine Beziehung zur HRW.Bank aufzubauen.

stimme gar nicht zu ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ stimme voll zu

☐ Ich bin zufrieden mit den Informationen, die die Webseite bietet.

stimme gar nicht zu ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ stimme voll zu

Ich fühle mich beim Surfen durch die Webseite wohl.

☐ stimme gar nicht zu ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ stimme voll zu

Ich finde die Webseite ist ansprechend gestaltet.

stimme gar nicht zu ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☒ ☐ ☐ stimme voll zu

Ich fühle mich beim Surfen durch die Webseite wohl.

stimme gar nicht zu ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ stimme voll zu

Ich finde die Webseite ist ansprechend gestaltet.

stimme gar nicht zu ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ stimme voll zu

Ich finde die Websteite ist leicht zu bedienen.

stimme gar nicht zu ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ stimme voll zu

Ich glaube, dass der Besuch dieser Webseite ein guter Weg ist um sich über Karriereperspektiven bei der NRW Bank zu informieren.

stimme gar nicht zu ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ stimme voll zu

Wie sehr stimmst du den folgenden Aussagen zu?

Die Webseite vermittelt ein sehr menschliches Bild der HRW Bank.

stimme gar nicht zu



stimme voll zu

Die Webseite vermittelt ein klares Bild von der täglichen Arbeitswelt der Mitarbeiter.

stimme gar nicht zu



stimme voll zu

Die Webseite vermittelt das Gefühl, dass die HRW Bank viel Wert auf die Menschen im Unternehmen legt.

stimme gar nicht zu



stimme voll zu

Die Webseite vermittelt das Gefühl, dass echte Menschen und nicht bloß Technologie hinter ihr stecken.

stimme gar nicht zu



stimme voll zu

Wie sehr stimmst du den folgenden Aussagen zu?

Die Webseite vermittelt den Eindruck, dass die NRW.Bank ihre Bewerber im Bewerbungsprozess unterstützen möchte.

stimme gar nicht zu ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ stimme voll zu

Die Webseite vermittelt den Eindruck, dass Bewerber jederzeit Hilfe erhalten können.

stimme gar nicht zu ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ stimme voll zu

Die Webseite lässt die HRW Bank als fürsorglich gegenüber ihren Bewerbern erscheinen.

stimme gar nicht zu ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ stimme voll zu

Die Webseite vermittelt den Eindruck, dass die NRW Bank hohes Interesse daran hat, gute Bewerbungen zu erhalten.

[illegible]

Wie sehr stimmst du den folgenden Aussagen zu?

Anhand der Webseite können Jobsuchende gut einschätzen ob sie zur HRW Bank passen.

stimme gar nicht zu ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ stimme voll zu

Die Webseite ermöglicht es Jobsuchenden ihr Einstellungschancen individuell einzuschätzen.

stimme gar nicht zu ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ stimme voll zu

Die Webseite erleichtert es Jobsuchenden ihre eigenen Fähigkeiten einzuschätzen.

stimme gar nicht zu ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ stimme voll zu

Die Webseite geht auf jeden Jobsuchenden individuell ein.

stimme gar nicht zu ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ stimme voll zu

Fühlst du dich nun - nach Nutzung der Seite - besser informiert um ein begründetes Urteil über die HRW Bank als Arbeitgeber zu fällen?

ebenso informiert wie vorher	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	viel besser informiert
ebenso viel Erfahrung wie vorher	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	viel mehr Erfahrung
ebenso vertraut wie vorher	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	viel vertrauter

ebenso wie vorher ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ viel besser

ebenso wie vorher ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ viel besser

ebenso wie vorher ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ viel besser

ebenso wie vorher ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ viel mehr

Wie sehr stimmst du den folgenden Aussagen zu?

Wenn ich einen Job in diesem Bereich suchen würde, wäre es sehr wahrscheinlich, dass ich diese Seite erneut besuchen würde.

stimme gar nicht zu ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☒ ☐ ☐ stimme voll zu

Wenn ich einen Job in diesem Bereich suchen würde, würde ich zu dieser Seite zurückkehren sobald ich das nächste Mal auf Jobsuche bin.

stimme gar nicht zu ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ stimme voll zu

Angenommen ein Freund bitte dich um deinen Rat bezüglich seiner Jobsuche im Bankenbereich. Würdest du ihm empfehlen, die Karriere Seite der HRW Bank zu besuchen?

auf gar keinen Fall ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ auf jeden Fall

Wie sehr stimmst du den folgenden Aussagen zu?

Wenn ich nach einem Job in diesem Bereich suchen würde, wäre es sehr wahrscheinlich, dass ich mich bei der HRW Bank bewerben würde.

stimme gar nicht zu ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ stimme voll zu

Wenn ich nach einem Job in diesem Bereich suchen würde, würde ich mich bei der HRW Bank bewerben sobald ich das nächste Mal auf Jobsuche bin.

stimme gar nicht zu ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ stimme voll zu

Wenn ich nach einem Job in diesem Bereich suchen würde, würde ich mich definitiv bei der HRW Bank bewerben.

stimme gar nicht zu ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ stimme voll zu

Angenommen ein Freund bittet dich um deinen Rat bezüglich seiner Jobsuche im Bankenbereich. Würdest du ihm empfehlen sich bei der HRW Bank zu bewerben?

In der vorherigen Frage über den Freund ging es lediglich darum, ob du ihm den Besuch der Webseite empfehlen würdest.

Nun nur noch einige kurze Angaben über deine Person...

Bist du männlich oder weiblich?

- ☐ männlich
☐ weiblich

Wie alt bist du?

Bsp.: 24

Welche Nationalität hast du

Bsp.: Deutsch

Welches Fach studierst du oder hast du studiert?

DANIEL C. LEHRMAN, *Psychology*

--

In welchem Jahr wirst du voraussichtlich deinen angestrebten Studienabschluss erlangen oder hast ihn bereits erlangt?

Sep. 2014

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Wieviele Stunden in der Woche verbringst du schätzungsweise im Internet?

- ☐ 0-10 Stunden
- ☐ 10-20 Stunden
- ☐ 20-30 Stunden
- ☐ über 30 Stunden

Wie schätzt du deine Erfahrung mit der Online Jobsuche allgemein ein?

keine Erfahrung ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ **sehr viel Erfahrung**

Hast du innerhalb des letzten Jahres nach einem Job/Stellenjob/Praktikum gesucht?

- ☐ ja
☐ nein

Planst du innerhalb des nächsten Jahres nach einem Job/Stellenjob/Praktikum zu suchen?

- ☐ ja
☐ nein

Wie schätzt du deine Erfahrung mit Karriere Webseiten von Unternehmen ein?

keine Erfahrung ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ **sehr viel Erfahrung**

Geschafft!

Vielen Dank für deine Unterstützung!

Wenn du am Gewinnspiel teilnehmen möchtest, trage bitte noch deine Email-Adresse ein. Die Gewinner werden nach Abschluss der Umfrage benachrichtigt.

Viele Grüße

Jana

Email-Adresse

APPENDIX B: CONTENT ANALYSIS OVERVIEW

				1. Allianz	2. Bertelsmann	3. Deutsche Post DHL	4. PWC	5. Procter & Gamble	6. Ernst & Young	7. HSBC	8. UBS	9. KPMG	10. Bayer	11. Shell	12. Danone	13. IBM	14. Deutsche Bank	15. ING	16. RBS	17. J.P. Morgan	18. Roche	19. Accenture	20. BT	21. BP	22. Siemens	23. Société Générale	24. Deloitte	25. BMW	26. Roland Berger	27. Intel	28. E.ON	29. AstraZeneca	30. Nestlé
Europe Top 30 (2010)																																	
content	number	%	derived charact.																														
vacancies & job info	30/30	100%		+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
application help	25/30	83%	supportiveness	+	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	-	+	-	+	+	+	+	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
company hard facts	30/30	83%		+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
company soft facts	30/30	83%		+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
what we search for	28/30	83%		+	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
what we offer	30/30	83%		+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
contact/service	30/30	83%		+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
function																																	
application tool	30/30	100%		+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
self-assess./feedback tool	08/30	27%	responsiveness	-	+	+	+	-	+	-	-	-	-	+	+	-	+	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
form																																	
menu bar*	20/30	67%		-	+	+	+	-	+	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	-	+	+	-	+	+	-	-	+	-	-	+	+	+	+
special section**	30/30	100%		+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
picture	30/30	100%		+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
animation	26/30	87%		+	+	+	+	-	+	+	+	+	-	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	+	+	+	+
video / audio	24/30	80%		+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	+	+	+	-	+	+	+	+	-	+	+	+	-	+	-	+	+	+
testimonial	29/30	97%	personal touch	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	+	+	+	+	+

*structured according to target groups (in contrast to menu bar structured according to general categories)

** for students/graduates

(surveyed in October 2010)

Declaration of Authorship

I hereby declare that I have written this thesis without any help from others and without the use of documents and aids other than those stated above. I further declare that I have mentioned all used sources and that I have cited them correctly according to established academic citation rules.

Date and Signature

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