



Bachelor THESIS

Corporate Storytelling in External Employer Branding

*Investigating the Effects of Employee
Testimonials, and Employee Images with Eye
Contact Cues in LinkedIn Vacancy
Endorsement Posts*

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Abstract

Background: Recently, attracting talent with corporate storytelling on social network sites (SNS) like LinkedIn has become common practice among large global companies. However, little is known about the elements that make such corporate storytelling successful. This research attempts to close this gap. It analyses the effectiveness of common storytelling elements in job vacancy endorsement posts on SNS on students and young professionals by evaluating their effect on the brand equity outcomes intention to apply, perceived organizational attractiveness and electronic-word-of-mouth. It also explores a potential mediating effect of person-organization fit.

Methods: Two common corporate story elements, an employee testimonial, and an employee image with eye contact cues, were chosen. A LinkedIn vacancy endorsement post for a fictive organization was created and manipulated with both elements in a 2x2 design, yielding four conditions. An additional control condition was created, containing an informative text without storytelling elements. 184 respondents between 18 and 28 were chosen from various sources, and randomly exposed to one of the five conditions in an online questionnaire.

Results and Discussion: It was found that nearly all respondents recognized the manipulations, but the analysis, including an independent t-test and a two-way multivariate analysis, showed no significant effect on brand equity outcome. This lack of effect may be due to limitations of the study material and general design. The created posts were less vivid, hence, engaging, than content typically found on SNS, e.g., due to the lack of video. Also, all texts had to fit the LinkedIn character limit, possibly leaving critical information out. Moreover, the study did not consider background and motivation of the participants. Finally, additional unknown factors could have been missed, like facial expressions in the images.

Implications: Consequently, no concrete advice can be given to practitioners yet. However, this work stresses again that storytelling on SNS needs and deserves more research attention, while also providing many promising starting points.

Keywords: Employer branding, Corporate Storytelling, Employee testimonial, Eye Contact Cues, LinkedIn

Table of Contents

1 Introduction	3
1.1 – Research Goal and Research Question	4
1.2 – Content Overview	5
2 Theoretical Framework	6
2.1 – Employer Branding	6
2.2 – Employer Brand Image	7
2.3 – Employer Brand Equity	7
2.3.1 – Organizational Attractiveness	8
2.3.2 – Intention to Apply	10
2.3.3 – Electronic Word-of-Mouth	10
2.4 – Employer Branding and Storytelling	11
2.4.1 – Corporate Storytelling Characteristics	12
2.4.2 – Employee Testimonial	13
2.4.3 – Employee Image with Eye Contact Cues	15
2.4.4 – Employee Testimonial and Employee Image with Eye Contact Cues	16
2.5 – Person-Organization Fit	17
2.6 – Research Model	20
3 Method.....	21
3.1 – Research Design	21
3.2 – Stimulus Material	22
3.2.1 – Story Development	23
3.2.2 – Employee Testimonial development	25
3.3 – Measures	31
3.4 – Measurement Validity and Reliability	32
3.5 – Procedure	35
3.6 – Respondents	36
4. Results	38
4.1 – Manipulation Check	38
4.2 – Descriptive Statistics	39
4.3 – Multicollinearity Test	40
4.4 – Corporate Storytelling	40
4.5 – Employee Testimonial and Employee Image with Eye Contact Cues	41
4.5.1 – Interaction	42
4.5.2 – Employee Testimonial	43
4.5.3 – Eye Contact Cues	43
5. Discussion	44
5.1 – Corporate Storytelling	44
5.2 – Employee Testimonial	46
5.3 – Eye Contact Cues	46
5.5 – Limitations	47
5.7 – Conclusions	48
References	50
Appendix A – Stimulus Material	61
Appendix B – Job Vacancy Announcement Post	66
Appendix C – List of Questions	67
Appendix D – Descriptive Statistics by Condition	69
Appendix E – Multicollinearity Test	70
Appendix F – Literature Log	71

1 Introduction

"I noticed that the dynamic range between what an average person could accomplish and what the best person could accomplish was 50 or 100 to 1. Given that, you're well advised to go after the cream of the cream. A small team of A+ players can run circles around a giant team of B and C players." - Steve Jobs, as cited in Ramsay (2015)

As this quote by Steve Jobs, late CEO of Apple points out, attracting talented employees is crucial for an organization's success. However, attracting and retaining talented employees has become a major challenge in the globalized world. One driver behind this immense "war for talents" (Frasca & Edwards, 2017, p. 125) is a generally shrinking workforce due to demographic change, resulting in fewer potential applicants (Breaugh, 2008; Wilden, Gudergan, & Lings, 2010). Moreover, millennials and members of the generation Y that now enter the labor market are more mobile than ever. They are not bound to a specific area or country, but freely choose the employer that matches their personal requirements and wishes best (Mihalcea, 2017; Kuchеров & Zamulin, 2016). Hence, to succeed in business, organizations must communicate their employer values and work culture effectively, seeking more personalized ways to promote job advertisements. For this, in turn, they must choose the appropriate communication channels and communication techniques (Elving, Westhof, Meeusen, & Schoonderbeek, 2013).

A very promising new technique for this is storytelling. In recent years, storytelling has attracted immense attention among academics and practitioners in communicating brands (Pereira, 2019). Using stories allows organizations to communicate brands in a more credible and transparent way than traditional advertising (Costa-Sánchez, 2014, as cited in Roxo, 2020). Because stories can be engaging and memorable, they can also build emotional connections with target audiences (Roxo, 2020).

Past research has demonstrated the effectiveness of storytelling in strengthening loyalty, engagement, and organizational attractiveness among an organization's employees (Gill, 2011). Therefore, the promising potential of storytelling for communicating topics inside the organization might also be effective to attract potential applicants outside the organization. Indeed, researchers' work points towards this effectiveness. Moreover, Nilsson and Nordgren (2012) found that corporate storytelling is already successfully used by many organizations to attract talent.

Despite these achievements, however, it is still often unclear which storytelling elements a corporate story must entail to be effective (Janssen, van Hoof, & van Vuuren,

2012). For print, Hengeveld (2016) found that corporate stories either including or excluding employee testimonials and employee pictures did not improve the perception of brand concepts. However, print is losing relevance. Nowadays, major companies mainly use social network sites (SNS), a type of social media use, to communicate brands and attract talents (Mosley, 2015). There, they can communicate job vacancies in a more personal and appealing way to a very large and diverse audience. For example, big companies like Zalando SE or Amazon use stories with employee photos and testimonials in their posts to attract talent on the SNS LinkedIn, which has more than 645 million users (LinkedIn, 2020).

Although the combination of these elements is widespread practice on these sites, to the researcher's knowledge, no research has yet systematically and empirically investigated its effectiveness in employer branding in the special context of SNS.

For instance, researchers found positive effects of photos with eye contact on viewers' perception of brand concepts and behavior (Valentini, Romenti, Murtarelli, & Pizzetti, 2018), but it is unknown whether these effects also apply to employee images on SNS. Closing these knowledge gaps would not only improve the general understanding of corporate storytelling on SNS, but benefit organizations looking for effective ways to succeed in the talent war.

1.1 – Research Goal and Research Question

The goal of this research is to investigate the extent to which corporate storytelling characteristics in a vacancy endorsement post for a professional social network site impact students' and young professionals' intention to apply, perceived organizational attractiveness and electronic-word-of-mouth. For the social network site, LinkedIn has been chosen as example. With more than 645 million users internationally, it is the largest SNS for professional networking, job seeking and recruitment worldwide (LinkedIn, 2020). It is very popular among this study's target group of students and young professionals (Rynne, 2016, Brett, 2018). The following research question has been formulated.

To what extent do corporate storytelling characteristics, including employee testimonials and employee images with eye contact cues communicated in a LinkedIn vacancy endorsement post affect a) intention to apply, b) perceived organizational attractiveness and c) electronic word-of-mouth of students and young professionals of the millennial generation and generation Y?

1.2 – Content Overview

This research paper is structured into the sections theoretical framework, method, results, discussion, limitations and future research and conclusion. The theoretical framework will start with an overview of employer branding, addressing the relevance of potential applicants' intention to apply, perceived organizational attractiveness, electronic word-of-mouth and the role of the person-organization fit. Then, the relevance of corporate storytelling in the context of employer branding will be discussed, followed by current research on the elements of corporate storytelling. At the end of the framework, a research model and an overview of the established hypotheses will be given. After the framework, the method used in this study will be discussed, including research design, an overview of the procedure and detailed descriptions of the individual steps. In the results section, it will be elaborated on the results of the data analysis, ending with an overview of the supported and not supported hypotheses. The paper will conclude with discussing the results and the limitations of this research, providing recommendations for future research, and answering the research question.

2 Theoretical Framework

This section introduces the theoretical foundation of this work. As this research attempts to answer the research question in the light of employer branding and the SNS LinkedIn, it begins by defining the concept of employer branding. Then, with this concept, the notion of an employer brand image, describing the perception of an employer by potential applications, is introduced. Afterwards, metrics that specify the influence of the brand image on a potential applicant, the so-called employer brand equity, are presented. These metrics serve as dependent variables in this study. Following these definitions, the method of storytelling and its application in employer branding are described, highlighting relevant story characteristics. At the end, the concept of person-organization fit is introduced. This section concludes with a description of the research model used in this work and an overview of the established hypotheses.

2.1 – Employer Branding

Employer branding strategy originated in the late 1990s and found its first published definition in 1996. Tim Ambler, Senior Fellow of London Business School and Simon Barrow, Chairman of People in Business defined the employer brand as “the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company” (Ambler & Barrow, 1996, p. 187).

In the following years, employer branding attracted immense attention among practitioners as well as researchers. In only eight years, Google and Yahoo! searches produced more than 3,000 entries for the term “employer branding” (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Entering “employer branding” in Google in 2020 yields about 77.400.000 hits. These hits indicate the great relevance employer branding strategy has developed in roughly 25 years. This indicates the great relevance employer branding strategy has developed in roughly 25 years.

The definition of employer branding by Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) is one of the most cited definitions of the term in academic literature. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) define employer branding as distinction of an organization’s characteristics as employer from those of its competing organizations. Thus, the employer brand emphasizes the unique facets of an organization’s employment offerings or its environment (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). The concept brings together elements from marketing and recruitment (Otken & Okan, 2016). Opposed to traditional recruitment strategies, employer branding is a long-term strategy, following the purpose of maintaining a consistent and continuous stream of skills in the organization (Vinayak, Khan, & Jain, 2017). Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) differentiate between

internal and external employer branding. Internal employer branding is targeted to current employees of the organization, whereas external employer branding addresses potential applicants. Organizations' goal in external employer branding is to shape positive employer brand associations among the targeted potential applicants to become the employer of choice (Backhaus, 2016). These brand associations are emotional responses to information transmitted by an organization (Aaker, 1991). In line with the goal of this research, the focus of this paper lies on external employer branding.

2.2 – Employer Brand Image

The employer brand image in the recruitment context refers to potential applicants' perception of the organizational functional and symbolic attributes that they get attracted by (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Functional benefits are benefits perceived as desirable from an objective point of view, such as salary and other objective benefits, whereas symbolic attributes refer to personality attributes that potential applicants understand from the information they have available on an organization (Vinayak et. al., 2017). Examples for subjective attributes are perceived innovativeness, trendiness and prestige of an organization (Vinayak et. al., 2017; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). A strong employer brand can lead to several advantages for organizations when attracting talent. For example, with a strong brand, organizations gain better positions in the highly competitive labor market and have lower turnover rates (Kuchеров & Zavyalova, 2012).

Past research on employer brand image highlights the strong impact of perceived symbolic attributes of an organization on potential applicants' decision to apply or to accept a job offer. Objective benefits such as offered salary and the organizations' location are often rather similar among competing organizations, which makes it difficult for organizations to attract employees solely based on objective attributes in a competing environment (Firfiray & Mayo, 2017). In fact, potential applicants perceived an organization as an attractive place to work more often based on perceived symbolic attributes than on perceived functional benefits (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). Cable and Turban (2003) found that applicants were willing to earn less when the organization had an attractive brand image. Due to the importance of subjective attributes for potential applicants' recruitment outcomes this research sets focus on the subjective attributes of an organization as employer.

2.3 – Employer Brand Equity

The concept of brand equity evolved from brand image concepts and relates to brand strength (Jiang & Iles, 2011, p. 107). Brand equity measures the consumer demand for a brand,

consumer behavior such as buying behavior and attitudes towards a brand, such as affective feelings and attachments (Jiang & Iles, 2011). Employer brand equity is “the impact of a current or potential future employee’s employer brand perceptions on his or her behaviors, emotions, and associations related to employment decisions at a particular organization” (Collins & Kanar, 2014, p. 288).

In labor markets, potential employees only have limited access to knowledge about a brand (Wilden et. al, 2010). Most of the time, they only have incomplete and asymmetric information about a prospective employer (Wilden et. al, 2010). As employment in a specific organization will have long-term consequences for both employees and employers, these consequences motivate potential employees to invest information costs into gaining information about prospective employers to overcome the perceived information gap (Wilden et. al, 2010). Signaling theory originated by Spence (1973) is often cited for explaining this information seeking process. The theory implies that to avoid conflicting selection, information seekers make use of signals such as brands, which they receive from the employer to define judgments (Dobija, Mazurek, Roztocki, & Weistroffer, 2018). By sending signals via employer branding, employers can facilitate the information seeking process for potential employees and reduce their search information costs (Wilden et. al., 2010).

Employer brands as signals can impact several outcomes. These can range from a potential applicant’s reaction to recruitment practices, submitting a job application, and choosing the organization over its competitors, to positive or negative word-of-mouth (Collins & Kanar, 2014). The authors classify employer brand equity into surface- and complex employer brand associations (Collins & Kanar, 2014). Surface associations refer to organizational attraction and general impressions and attitudes toward a potential employer, whereas complex employer brand associations refer to symbolic attributes that explain additional variance in application intentions beyond perceptions of instrumental attributes. (Collins & Kanar, 2014).

Employer brand equity itself is rarely measured in empirical analyses, rather, the concept is operationalized in terms of specific outcomes (Collins & Kanar, 2014). In this research, both superficial and complex employer brand associations are measured as specific outcomes of employer brand equity. These are organizational attractiveness, intention to apply and electronic word-of-mouth.

2.3.1 – Organizational Attractiveness

The first outcome of employer brand equity under investigation is organizational attractiveness. That is, the more appealing an employer is perceived by potential applicants,

the stronger is that organization's employer brand equity (Collins & Turban 2012). The terms employer attractiveness and organizational attractiveness are often used interchangeably in employer branding literature and both refer to organizations as attractive employer (Bali & Dixit, 2016; Pattnaik & Misra, 2014; Elving et. al., 2013). In this research, the term organizational attractiveness is used, referring to organization as attractive employer.

As described earlier, employer branding includes creating and actively shaping an employer brand image that presents the organization as a distinctive and desirable employer (Bali & Dixit, 2016). Based on the information available to them, potential applicants form associations of the organizations that affect their perceived organizational attractiveness (Gatewood, Gowan, & Lautenschlager, 1993). Thus, organizational attractiveness is reflected in potential applicants' perception of the company as potential employer (Highhouse, Lievens, & Sinar, 2003).

Organizational attractiveness in the context of employer branding is the "the power that draws applicants' attention to focus on an employer brand and encourages existing employees to stay" (Jiang & Iles, 2011, p. 107). Organizational attractiveness has therefore two dimensions, internal attractiveness and external attractiveness, which both are measured separately (Jiang & Iles, 2011). The definition of organizational attractiveness in the context of employer branding aligns with the earlier described definition about employer branding by Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), which states that employer branding has an external and an internal component.

As the goal of this research is to attract potential employees outside of the organization solely, the focus lies on the external dimension of organizational attractiveness.

Organizational attractiveness is passive, as it does not imply that a person who finds an organization an attractive workplace will actually apply there (Highhouse, et. al., 2003). Depending on its goal, research conceptualizes organizational attractiveness as dependent or as mediator variable. Organizational attractiveness is used as dependent variable when the aim is to investigate the factors of an organization that potential employees are attracted by (e.g. Lievens, van Hove, & Schreurs, 2005; Firfiray & Mayo, 2017).

In this study, organizational attractiveness and intention to apply are both measured as dependent variables. The focus of this study lies on investigating intention to apply and organizational attractiveness both as general recruitment outcomes of employer branding. The aim is to find out whether also potential applicants of a different field, than those in line with the proposed job vacancy, find the organization attractive but would not apply to the presented

position as they operate in a different field of expertise, but would be likely to apply for a different position in the organization.

2.3.2 – Intention to Apply

The second facet of employer brand equity chosen for this research is potential applicants' intention to apply. In contrast to organizational attractiveness, the intention to apply is action oriented (Highhouse, Lievens & Sinar, 2003). The argument to this conclusion is that past research has demonstrated that intentions predict actions (Gibbons, Gerrard, Blanton, & Russel, 1998). The underlying reasoning lays within the theory of reasoned action by Fishbein and Aizen (1975), which states that a person's intention to perform a behavior is the central predictor of whether they actually carry out the behavior. It can therefore be argued that intention to apply leads to actual applications (Gomes & Neves, 2011).

2.3.3 – Electronic Word-of-Mouth

The third aspect this work focuses on is electronic word-of-mouth. Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is evolved in society from the world's digitalization and the increasing popularity of SNS. It can be defined as "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet" (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh & Gremler, 2004, p. 39). EWOM takes place on different platforms in different forms (Pasternak, Veloutsou, & Morgan-Thomas, 2017). In the context of SNS, eWOM activities are for example socializing with existing friends or making new friends to exchange information and experiences about products or services (Chu & Kim, 2011), but also the sharing of opinions and information itself (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). On LinkedIn, eWOM takes the form of users sharing, commenting or liking content as well as adding individuals to their professional network and exchanging messages with them (Roulin & Levashina, 2019). When users involve in eWOM activities on LinkedIn by for example liking, commenting or sharing the post, the activity becomes visible in the newsfeeds of the user's contacts (Carr, 2016).

In recruitment, the opinion of organizational independent sources is relevant for job seekers but also beneficial for organizations. As job seekers mostly only have limited and ambiguous information about organizations, they are affective to opinions of others to influence them in their job choice (van Hove, 2013). Oftentimes they consult people from their social environment such as friends and family members on potential workplaces (Wanberg, Kanfer, & Banas, 2000; van Hove & Lievens, 2007). Furthermore, past research indicates that employees hired through organizational independent sources show higher job satisfaction and

are less likely to turnover than employees hired through organizational sources such as job advertisements (van Hove & Lievens, 2009; Weller, Holtom, Matiaske, & Mellewigt, 2009). Thus, eWOM in the context of employer branding can have benefits in attracting targeted potential applicants and be beneficial in retaining employees after hiring.

2.4 – Employer Branding and Storytelling

Research identified storytelling as a powerful tool to communicate brands effectively.

Stories embrace meaning, often include moral judgment and can trigger strong emotional reactions (Brown, Gabriel, & Gherardi, 2009). The latter has been proven by research in the neuroscience field by showing that stories activate brain regions in charge of speech, empathy and pain (Sammer as cited in Mucundorfeanu, 2018). In addition, persons react to stories with their entire body, as stories lead to excretion of hormones making persons emotional (Sammer as cited in Mucundorfeanu, 2018). Stories are persuasive in that a person, who has been exposed to a story, oftentimes makes the idea presented in the story one of their own (Sammer as cited in Mucundorfeanu, 2018). These insights from neuroscience demonstrate the immense power stories can have on human brains. The ability of storytelling to evoke strong emotions makes it an important communication technique to communicate the emotional facets of an employer brand (Fog et. al., 2005; Nilsson & Nordgren, 2012).

Communicating the emotional facets of the employer brand is critical. Research found that humans are more likely to make decisions based on their emotions than on rational arguments (Wachtman & Johnson, 2009; Bechara, Damasio & Damasio, 2000). This finding is highly relevant for attracting potential applicants with employer branding, as it suggests that communication techniques that trigger strong emotions might be more successful for employer branding purposes than a text that only addresses rational facts in plain language.

Past research emphasizes the importance of emotions for employer brand decision making. Contributions to this topic root in dual-processing theories, proposed by cognitive and social psychology (Rampl, Opitz, Welp, & Kenning, 2016). According to dual-processing theories, individuals' perception and behavior are steered by two kinds of processes, which are fast, automatic and unconscious processes and slow, deliberative and conscious processes (Evans, 2008). Fast, automatic and unconscious processes can be labeled as emotional processes whereas slow, deliberative and conscious processes can be referred to as cognitive processes (Rampl et. al., 2016). Regarding the role of emotions in decision-making of first-choice employer brands, Rampl et. al. (2016) demonstrated through functional magnetic resonance imaging that decision-making for employer first-choice brands as opposed to less attractive employer brands is associated with increased activation in areas of the brain which

are linked to emotions and with decreased activation in brain areas related to working memory and reasoning. These findings stress not only the importance of a strong employer brand and the importance of communicating the emotional aspects of an employer brand, but also the relevance of storytelling in employer branding to trigger application intentions.

Research in both the general and employer branding areas argues that storytelling is essential for brand building. According to Lund, Scarles, and Cohen (2019, p. 4), storytelling is “at the heart of how brands are shaped”. The authors further argue that brands are only distinctive when they have a good story. Likewise, Fog, Budtz & Yakaboylu (2005) argue that storytelling is an essential tool for employer brand building. Storytelling also helps the target audience to gain a comprehensive understanding of the brand (Fog et. al., 2005; Smith, 2018). This notion can also be found in the study on storytelling in the context of brand experience by Lundqvist, Liljander, Gummerus, and van Riel (2013). The authors found that participants who were exposed to a story talked more and in a more positive manner about a brand than participants who were not exposed to the story. These findings suggest that storytelling in the context of the employer brand can likewise lead to increased organizational attractiveness as opposed to the merely listing of facts.

Storytelling has been identified as effective communication technique to achieve increases in eWOM. Research in the marketing field has demonstrated that using storytelling on SNS to communicate a brand draws persuasive power on consumers, based on which they act (Dessart, 2018). Users are also more likely to engage in emotional content on SNS, which they express on social media for example by liking the posted content (Schreiner & Riedl, 2018). Therefore, it is likely that storytelling increases eWOM behavior (Lund et. al., 2019).

It is interesting to find out whether the insights of marketing are transferable to the context of employer branding and whether the insights of employer branding apply in the context of this research. In addition, the conclusion can be drawn that communication techniques triggering positive emotions, such as storytelling, are crucial for successful employer branding and can lead to increased organizational attractiveness, intention to apply and eWOM as compared to plain informative texts.

2.4.1 – Corporate Storytelling Characteristics

Corporate storytelling concerns storytelling in the organizational context. The term refers to an organization’s strategic use of stories to achieve coherence and advancement in the context of the organizational brand, identity, and growth (Norlyk, Wolff, Lundholt, & Hansen, 2013).

Depending on their goal, corporate stories consist of different elements. For each story type to be effective, it requires a clear core message (Fog et. al., 2005). Stories also include

elements of coherence and temporal restriction (Spear & Roper, 2013; Dawson & Sykes, 2019; Boje, 2008). They regularly include corporate values (Nilsson & Nordgren, 2012). As the context of this research is employer branding, the corporate values have to focus on employer values as inherent part of the aforementioned value proposition.

Stories are centered around the journey of a main character and his/her supporters, which is in the organizational context the employees and the organization (Fog et. al., 2005). Attachment to characters plays a critical role in belief change through their strong presence in stories (Green & Brock, 2000). In their function as organizational source of information, people might develop a strong bond with the story characters (Green & Brock, 2000). Style plays a crucial role in corporate storytelling. Janssen et. al. (2012) found that the majority of corporate stories incorporates stylistic devices such as metaphors and positive adjectives (Janssen, et. al., 2012). In sum, the identified corporate storytelling elements for this study are elements of coherence and temporal restriction, employer values, a main character and his/her supporters and stylistic devices and a clear core message.

H1: A LinkedIn vacancy endorsement post using corporate storytelling has a higher impact on the perceived organizational attractiveness, intention to apply, and eWOM than a LinkedIn vacancy endorsement post using an informative text without corporate storytelling.

2.4.2 – Employee Testimonial

Employee testimonials are commonly used by organizations in employer branding. They are used in different forms and appear in different contexts. For the purpose of this research, an employee testimonial is defined as a text written from the perspective of a first-person narrator, who is regularly an employee of the organization, and as such, is able to offer his or her personal experiences as organizational member to the audience (Maargard, 2014).

Research has demonstrated the importance of an organization's current employees on the decision making of potential applicants. Researchers state that the employer brand perception of potential applicants is strongly affected by the perception of the organization's current employees (Foster, Punjaisri, & Cheng, 2010). Employee testimonials can then develop persuasive power on potential applicants (Walker, Bernerth, Field, Files, & Armenakis, 2009). In addition, they can be seen as a more personal way to communicate the corporate values of an organization (Hengeveld, 2016). Thus, employee testimonials serve as useful feature for corporate storytelling in the context of employer branding.

Including employee testimonials was found to positively affect perceived attractiveness of an organization and job seekers intention to apply. In their study on participants' reactions

to employee testimonials presented on a recruitment website, Walker et. al. (2009) presented as one of their main findings that participants were more attracted to organizations and perceived information as more credible when testimonials were included than when they were lacking.

The style of the employee testimonial is essential for its effectiveness. Research from the marketing field gives valuable insights into the effective style of testimonials. Tucker and Yu (2017) found that using testimonials is only effective if they do not include generalizing phrases, and the testimonials only voice their own experience. Likewise, research from the employer branding perspective shows that testimonials only lead to higher levels of organizational attractiveness, credibility and actual application when the employee and not the organization is in center of the recruitment message (van Hoya & Lievens, 2007). These findings underline the appropriateness of using employee testimonials in the context of storytelling, as stories are centered on a main character and focus on the experiences of this character.

Past research indicates an impact of employee testimonials on potential applicants' intention to apply. Cober et. al. (2000) created a framework for identifying design implications of organization's recruitment websites that enhances application intention. They recommended employee testimonials as more personal way to present information, as it supports potential applicants in their assessment of perceived fit to the organization (Cober et. al., 2000). As described in the previous paragraph, van Hoya and Lievens (2007) found an effect of employee testimonials on application intention in the context of corporate websites. Thus, it is likely that the finding also applies in the context of SNS.

Literature on the effect of employee testimonials on eWOM in the context of SNS in general and LinkedIn in particular is scarce. Due to the ability of employee testimonials to support potential applicants in their perceived personal-organizational fit assessment and evaluation of organizational attractiveness and intention to apply (Cober et. al., 2000; van Hoya & Lievens, 2007), it is to assume strongly that the information transmitted by the employee testimonials are perceived as useful to the potential applicant. In the marketing field, the perceived usefulness of content of social media posts was found to positively affect eWOM (Chang, Yu, & Lu, 2015). This leads to the consideration that employee testimonials are useful to potential applicants in conveying information and therefore trigger eWOM.

Based on these findings, the assumption is drawn that corporate storytelling including employee testimonials influence organizational attractiveness, intention to apply and eWOM.

H2a: A LinkedIn vacancy endorsement post using corporate storytelling including an employee testimonial has a higher impact on the perceived attractiveness of the organization, intention to apply and eWOM than without employee testimonial.

2.4.3 – Employee Image with Eye Contact Cues

Eye contact cues have long been known to affect human behavior. Usually, literature makes a distinction between direct and indirect gaze. Direct gaze means that the person in the image looks directly at the viewer (Wang, Wedel, Huang, & Lio, 2018). Indirect or averted gaze, in contrast, describes a person looking not directly at the viewer, but somewhere else (Adil, Lacoste-Badie, Droulers, 2018). Gaze direction is crucial in the context of face processing as well as social communication (Hu, Gendron, Liu, & Zhao, 2017). The human brain has a region called the fusiform face area that is more active while a person looks at faces than when he or she looks at miscellaneous objects (Kanwisher, McDermott, & Chun, 1997). Moreover, eye contact is a crucial non-verbal cue in the processing of social signals in human interaction (Zhang, Sugano, & Bulling, 2017). Thus, it is considered that gaze direction in employee images impacts the viewer's perception of the brand.

Employee images serve the purpose of both corporate storytelling and employer branding. In section 2.4.2 it was described that information on current employees are highly relevant for potential applicants (Foster et. al., 2010). In addition, photos of current employees or the CEO of an organization are oftentimes added to corporate stories (Janssen et. al., 2012). Past research has shown that images of persons trigger emotions (Freedberg & Gallese, 2007). Likewise, it was described in section 2.4, that evoking emotions is one of the outcomes of corporate storytelling. This fact emphasizes the relevance of including employee images in corporate storytelling. Moreover, statistics on LinkedIn posts suggest that including photos leads to a 50% increase in the comment rate (LinkedIn Marketing, 2020). This is an additional indicator for the importance of including photos of employees in an organization's LinkedIn post. Based on these insights it can be concluded that images of current employees serve both the goal of corporate storytelling and employer branding, hence, being a useful tool to enhance emotions and behavior among potential applicants towards to the organization.

Research findings indicate that gaze direction affects the user's eWOM behavior on SNS. In their study on the effects of digital visual engagement, Valentini, Romenti, Murtarelli, and Pizzetti (2018) found that when the person in the image gazes directly at the viewer, he or she is more likely to engage with the image, for example by sharing it, replying or following the brand, as compared to when the person in the image is looking sideways. Thus, it can be

assumed that an image of a current employee of the organization, in which the employee gazes directly at the viewer, enhances eWOM behavior.

In the same study, Valentini et. al. (2018) found that the gaze direction of the person in the image impacts the viewer's likelihood to act. More specifically, they found that direct gaze of a person in an image on SNS can enhance the purchase intention of consumers (Valentini et. al., 2018). In behavioral studies, eye contact cues led to persuasive outcomes. In a study with the purpose to investigate littering behavior, a sign with eye contact cues had the effect that people behaved more pro-socially and reduced littering (Bateson et. al., 2013). These insights from marketing and behavioral science indicate that the direct gaze can lead viewers to act, which in the present study is the intention to apply.

It can be argued that images with employees including eye contact cues can also affect organizational attractiveness. Avoided eye contact is often associated with unfavorable traits of the person such as insecurity and deceptiveness (Larsen & Shackelford, 1996). Strong visual engagement created through the direct gaze of a person in an image can lead to more favorable evaluations of attractiveness of the person. Research by Ewing, Rhodes and Pellicano (2010) demonstrated that if a person in an image looks directly at the viewer, the person is more likely to be perceived as more attractive than a person in an image gazing in the image. Thus, it is interesting to find out whether this finding is transferable to the organization the employee in the image represents.

In sum, it is hypothesized that images of employees including eye contact cues impact potential applicants' intention to apply, eWOM behavior, and perceived organizational attractiveness.

H3a: A LinkedIn vacancy endorsement post using corporate storytelling including an employee image with eye contact cues has a higher impact on intention to apply, organizational attractiveness and eWOM than without eye contact cues.

2.4.4 – Employee Testimonial and Employee Image with Eye Contact Cues

Past research findings indicate that the combination of employee testimonial and image with eye contact cues can enhance organizational attractiveness.

The way in which a human brain processes information affects a person's evaluations of the information. According to Schwarz (2004), the human brain can recall and process some information more easily than other and processes some new information more fluent than other information. The ease with which these two processes advance is referred to as processing fluency (Schwarz, 2004). Processing fluency is "a subjective feeling of ease or

difficulty associated with any type of mental processing” (Graf, Mayer & Landwehr, 2017, p. 394). Enhanced processing fluency is linked to more favorable attitude building (Lee & Aaker, 2004). Marketing research has demonstrated that the presentation of congruent information enhances processing fluency and thus lead to more favorable brand evaluations (van Rompay, de Vries & van Venrooij, 2010; Peracchio & Meyers-Levy, 2005).

It can be argued that the combination of employee testimonial and employee image with eye contact cues is congruent. For the purposes of this study, an employee testimonial was earlier in this framework defined as text with a first-person narrator. When a person addresses another person in a direct conversation, the person speaking usually looks directly at the listener to keep his or her attention (Zhang et. al., 2017). Thus, it can be argued that the employee image with eye contact cues and the employee testimonial combined are congruent information. Therefore, it is investigated whether combination of the employee testimonial and image with eye contact cues in a LinkedIn vacancy endorsement post increase organizational attractiveness.

H4a: A LinkedIn vacancy endorsement post using corporate storytelling including an employee testimonial and an employee image with eye contact cues has an impact on organizational attractiveness.

2.5 – Person-Organization Fit

The concept of person-organization fit (P-O fit) has drawn considerable attention among academics. P-O fit can be described as the perceived fit between the potential employee’s values and beliefs with those of the organization (Lauver & Kristof-Brown, 2001).

In addition, potential employees relate attributes of their potential co-workers to their own (Devendorf & Highhouse, 2008). Potential applicants are more attracted to organizations that have the same values as them (Lievens, Decaesteker, Coetsier, & Geirnaert, 2001; Sivertzen, Nilsen, & Olafson, 2013). Thus, it is crucial in employer branding that organizations communicate their values effectively.

According to the theory by Schneider (1987), P-O fit is grounded in the person-environment paradigm that builds up on the suggestions that attitudes and behaviors are the consequence of the congruence between characteristics of a person in an environment. In course of the P-O fit assessment, potential employees compare the perceived employer brand image with the extent it fits to their own values and personalities (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

An employer brand is effective when it can attract those employees whose characteristics make the best fit with the organization (Srivastava & Bhatnagar, 2010).

In sum, the employer brand helps employees to assess whether their personal values and skills match an organization or not. Outcomes of these fitness assessments are the perceptions of organizational attractiveness, and their application intention (Cober, Brown, Blumental, Doverspike, & Levy, 2000; Pattnaik & Misra, 2014; Turban & Keon, 1993). Thus, following pertinent literature on P-O fit, the construct is investigated as mediator variable.

H2b: The relationship of a LinkedIn vacancy endorsement post using corporate storytelling including an employee testimonial on intention to apply, and organizational attractiveness is explained by P-O fit.

H2c: The relationship of a LinkedIn vacancy endorsement post using corporate storytelling without employee testimonial on intention to apply, and organizational attractiveness is explained by P-O fit.

H3b: The effect of a LinkedIn vacancy endorsement post using corporate storytelling including an employee image with eye contact cues on intention to apply and organizational attractiveness is explained by P-O fit.

H3c: The relationship of a LinkedIn vacancy endorsement post using corporate storytelling including an employee image without eye contact cues on intention to apply and organizational attractiveness is explained by P-O fit.

H4b: The relationship of a LinkedIn vacancy endorsement post using corporate storytelling including an employee image with eye contact cues and an employee testimonial on organizational attractiveness is explained by P-O fit.

Table 1*Overview of Hypotheses*

#	Hypothesis
1	A LinkedIn vacancy endorsement post using corporate storytelling has a higher impact on the perceived organizational attractiveness, intention to apply, and eWOM than a LinkedIn vacancy endorsement post using an informative text without corporate storytelling.
2a	A LinkedIn vacancy endorsement post using corporate storytelling including an employee testimonial has a higher impact on the perceived attractiveness of the organization, intention to apply and eWOM than without employee testimonial.
2b	The relationship of a LinkedIn vacancy endorsement post using corporate storytelling including an employee testimonial on intention to apply, and organizational attractiveness is explained by P-O fit.
2c	The relationship of a LinkedIn vacancy endorsement post using corporate storytelling without employee testimonial on intention to apply, and organizational attractiveness is explained by P-O fit.
3a	A LinkedIn vacancy endorsement post using corporate storytelling including an employee image with eye contact cues has a higher impact on intention to apply, organizational attractiveness and eWOM than without eye contact cues.
3b	The effect of a LinkedIn vacancy endorsement post using corporate storytelling including an employee image with eye contact cues on intention to apply and organizational attractiveness is explained by P-O fit.
3c	The relationship of a LinkedIn vacancy endorsement post using corporate storytelling including an employee image without eye contact cues on intention to apply and organizational attractiveness is explained by P-O fit.

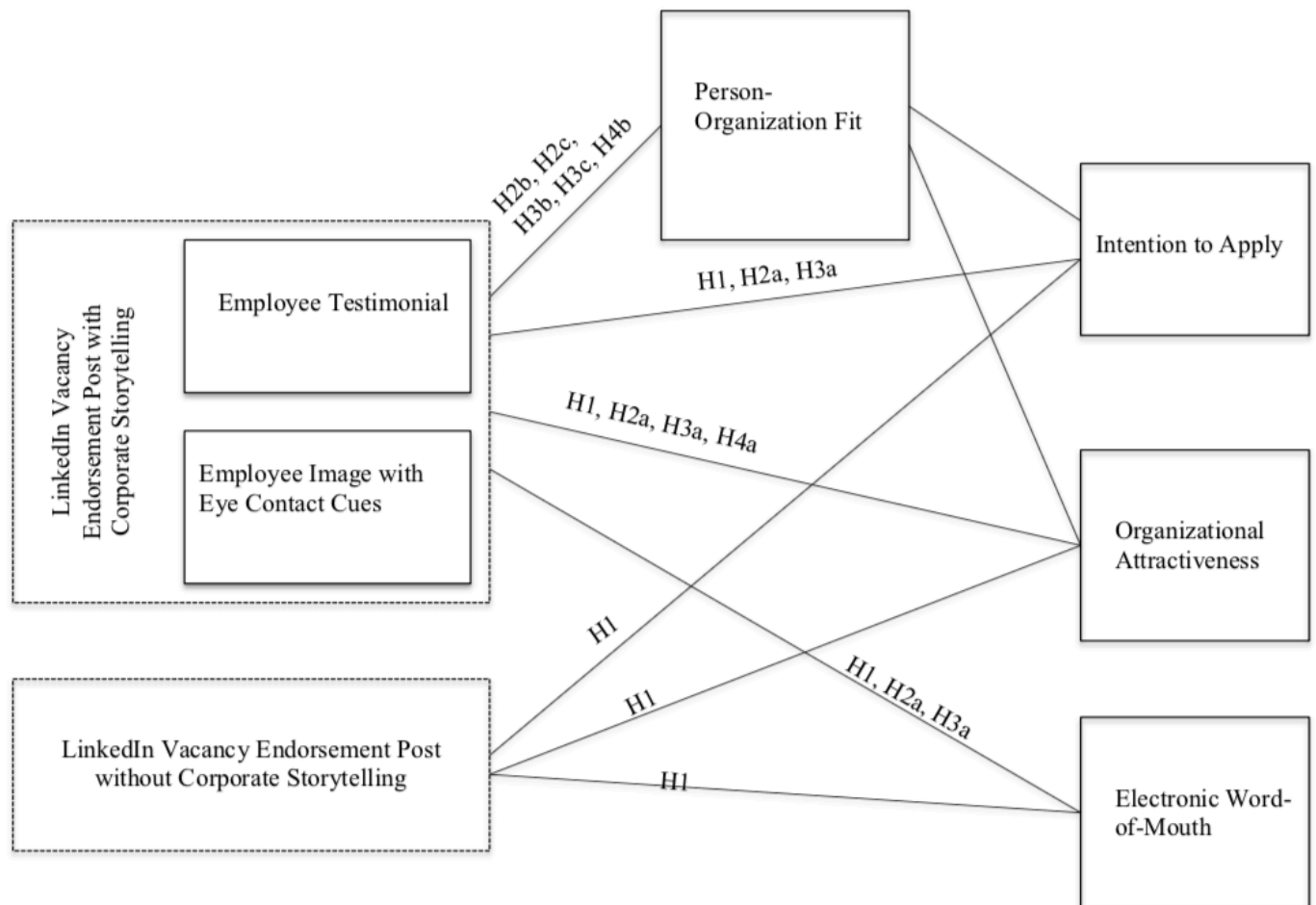
- 4a A LinkedIn vacancy endorsement post using corporate storytelling including an employee testimonial and an employee image with eye contact cues has an impact on organizational attractiveness.
- 4b The relationship of a LinkedIn vacancy endorsement post using corporate storytelling including an employee image with eye contact cues and an employee testimonial on organizational attractiveness is explained by P-O fit.
-

2.6 – Research Model

Based on the previously presented information and hypotheses, a research model has been created

Figure 1

Research Model



3 Method

The following paragraphs elaborate on the method that was used to answer the research question.

3.1 – Research Design

This study had two main objectives. First, it investigated the extent to which texts with corporate storytelling characteristics in LinkedIn vacancy endorsement posts affect students' and young professionals' intention to apply, organizational attractiveness, and eWOM. Second, it explored possible main effects and an interaction effect of adding an employee testimonial and an employee image with eye contact cues to such an endorsement post. A possible mediation effect of P-O fit on the dependent variables was explored.

This research study analyzed five conditions, following a 2 (employee testimonial present or absent) x 2 (employee image with eye contact cues present or eye contact cues absent) design with control condition. Table 2 provides an overview of the used manipulations and conditions. The manipulations *employee testimonial present or absent* and *employee image with eye contact cues present or absent* were combined with a text with corporate storytelling characteristics. In addition, a control condition was designed, consisting of an informative text without storytelling characteristics, that neither included employee image nor testimonial. The content in all five conditions is identic. For the purpose of this research, a textual quote was chosen as form for the employee testimonial, as testimonials in the form of quotes are frequently used by organizations like Zalando SE in their LinkedIn posts.

Table 2

Overview of Study Conditions and Manipulations

	Corporate storytelling	Manipulations	
		<i>Employee testimonial</i>	<i>Eye contact cues in employee image</i>
Condition 1	present	absent	absent
Condition 2	present	present	present
Condition 3	present	absent	present
Condition 4	present	present	absent
Control condition	absent	absent	no image

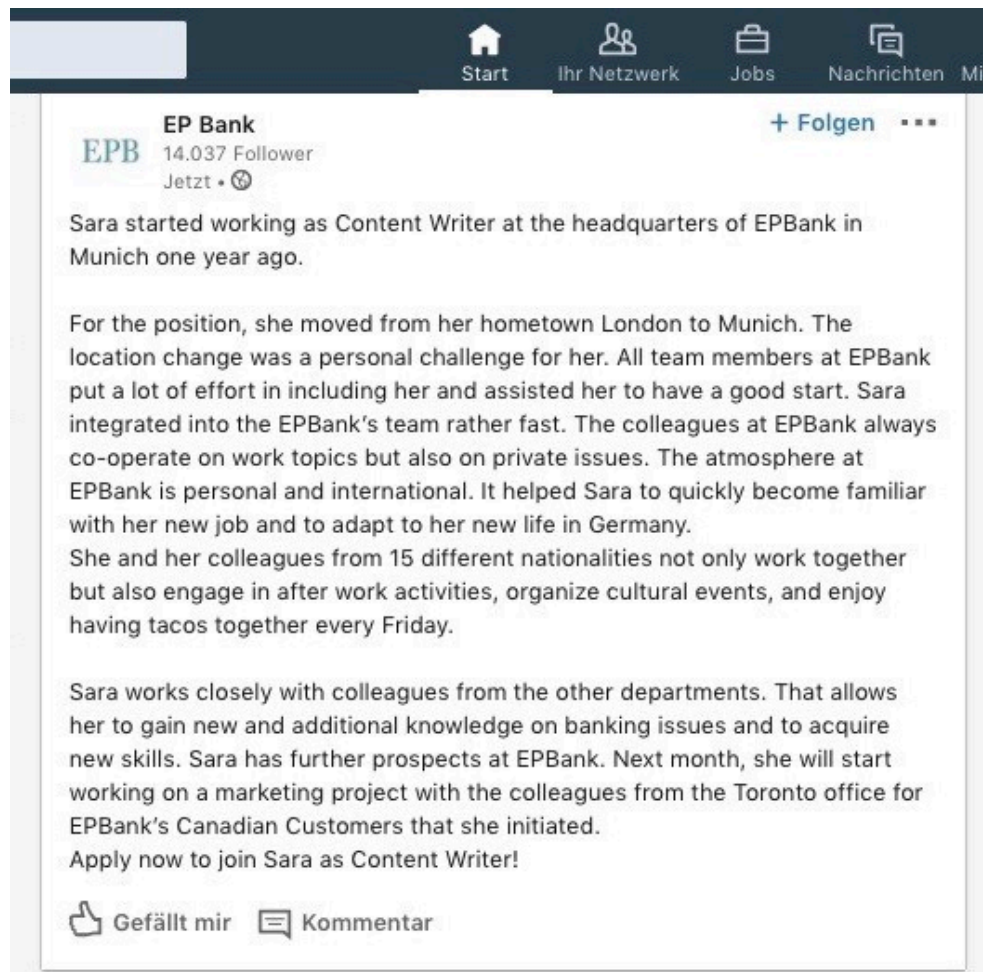
3.2 – Stimulus Material

The following paragraphs elaborate on the steps taken to set up the research design and develop the materials for the questionnaire. An overview of the manipulations can be found in table 2. All stimulus material can be found in Appendix A. The LinkedIn vacancy endorsement posts were centred around the fictive organization EPBank. It has been created specifically for this study. The EPBank combines digital banking with modern designs and has three key employer values. These are *diversity*, *low hierarchies*, and *skills promotion*. To create an image of the work atmosphere at EPBank, and to give an impression of its current employees, three subjective traits characterizing employees at EPBank have been defined. These subjective traits are *open-mindedness*, *self-activation* and *team player*. As this research focused on corporate storytelling in the context of employer branding, employer values were at the core of the content. In addition, EP Banks's work culture was also addressed, because research found that work culture is an effective antecedent for organizations to be perceived as employer of choice in the context of employer branding (Rampl, 2014).

As starting point, the material for the control condition was developed. The endorsement post in the control condition presents the content in the form of a plain, informative text, without the manipulations employee testimonial and employee image. The writing style is neutral, whereas the employer values, description of the work culture and subjective traits of the EP Bank served as content for the text. To get an overview of the developed material, Figure 2 visualizes the control condition. All material can be found in Appendix A.

Figure 2:

Control Condition: LinkedIn Vacancy Endorsement Post using Informative Text without Corporate Storytelling



3.2.1 – Story Development

Based on the informative text for the control condition, a corporate story was developed. The requirements for this text were retrieved from the corresponding section in the theoretical framework. The identified story characteristics were elements of coherence and temporal restriction (Spear & Roper, 2013), a main character with supporters (Fog et. al., 2005), corporate values (Nilsson & Nordgren, 2012), a clear core message (Fog et. al., 2005), and stylistic devices such as metaphors and positive adjectives (Janssen et. al., 2012).

In the following, the application of the identified five characteristics of corporate storytelling in the developed text is discussed in detail. The story included elements of coherence and temporal restriction, a main character with supporters, and a clear core message. More specifically, the story was structured into beginning, middle and end paragraphs. It starts with the main character Sara joining the company, continues by describing her experiences and ends with an outlook to a future project and a hint for readers

to apply. The story is centered on Sara, who works as Content Writer at EPBank. The organization with its colleagues serves as helper in making her feel home away from her family and friends. In line with the goal of employer branding, the core message of the text is to present the fictive company as attractive employer.

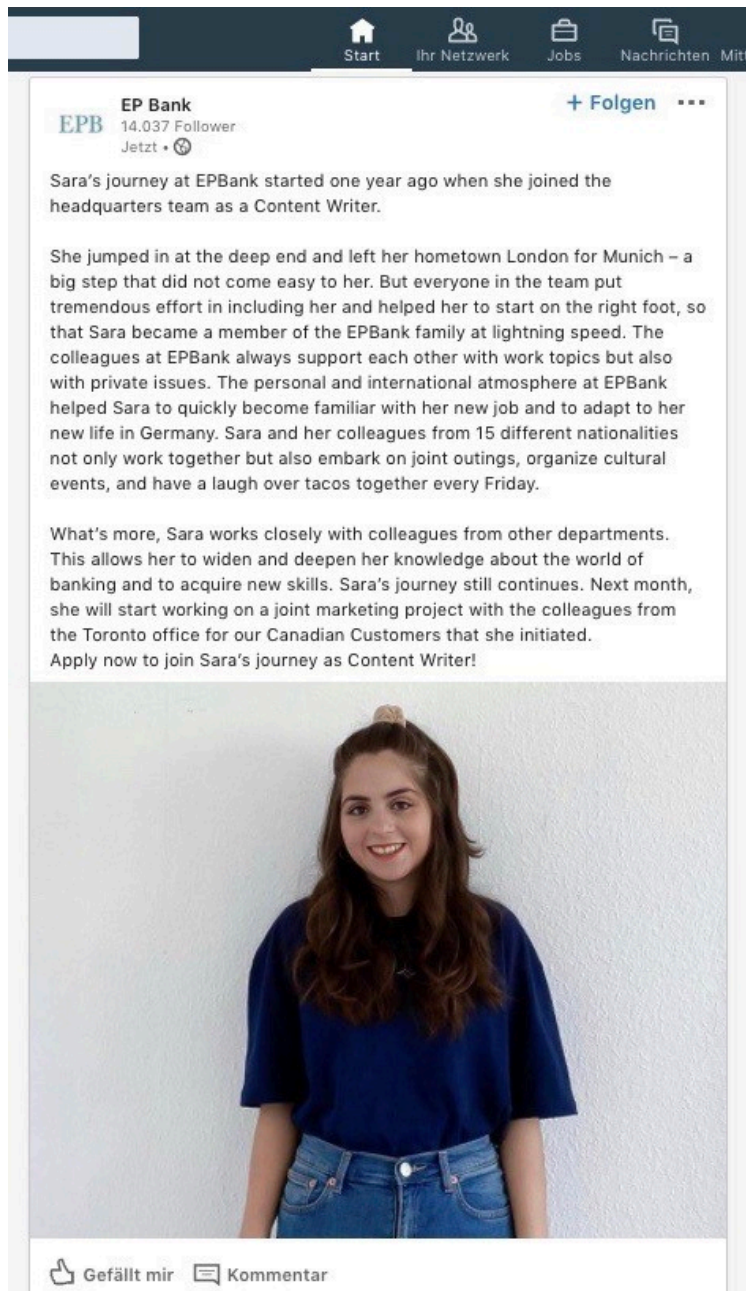
As this research is centered on employer branding, the presented corporate values refer to the previously described employer values of the EPBank. In addition, to serve the goal of employer branding, the subjective traits of current employees are included. For instance, the phrase *'She jumped in at the deep end and left her home in London for Munich – a big step that did not come easy to her'* in the developed story indicates that Sara is a native English speaker and open-minded, as she has moved from the United Kingdom to Germany for the job. The phrase *'the personal and international atmosphere at EPBank helped Sara to quickly become familiar with her new job'* highlights that the fictive organization has an international and personal atmosphere with low hierarchies, and addresses work culture and atmosphere. The phrase *'She and her colleagues from 15 different nationalities not only work together but also embark on joint outings, organize cultural events, and have a laugh over tacks together every Friday'* points out the values diversity and low hierarchies, as well as the subjective attribute team player and self-activation, as Sara enjoys team activities and organizes activities. The phrases *'What's more, Sara works closely with colleagues from other departments. This allows her to widen and deepen her knowledge about the world of banking and to acquire new skills'* as well as *'Next month, she will start working on a joint marketing project with the colleagues from the Toronto office for our Canadian Customers on her initiative'* represent the values skills promotion, work culture and the subjective trait self-activation, as she initiated the project.

The story included stylistic devices such as metaphors and positive adjectives. For example, *"She jumped in at the deep end and left her home in London for Munich – a big step that did not come easy to her."* Another example is *"But everyone in the team put tremendous effort in including her and helped her to start on the right foot, so that Sara integrated in the EPBank family at lightning speed"*. The EPBank is described as family, suggesting that it provides a very personal work atmosphere. "Tremendous" effort describes that everyone puts a lot of energy in integrating Sara. "At lightning speed" means that Sara was integrated extremely fast.

To give an overview of the two conditions without employee testimonial, figure 2 visualizes condition 3 as example. All material can be found in Appendix A.

Figure 2:

Condition 3: LinkedIn Vacancy Endorsement Post using Corporate Storytelling including Employee Image with Eye Contact Cues



3.2.2 – Employee Testimonial development

As described in the research design, two of the four LinkedIn conditions with corporate storytelling included an employee testimonial. In section 2.4.2, employee testimonials were defined as a text written from the perspective of a first-person narrator, who is regularly an employee of the organization, and as such, is able to offer his or her personal experiences as organizational member to the audience (Maargard, 2014). To implement such testimonial, a

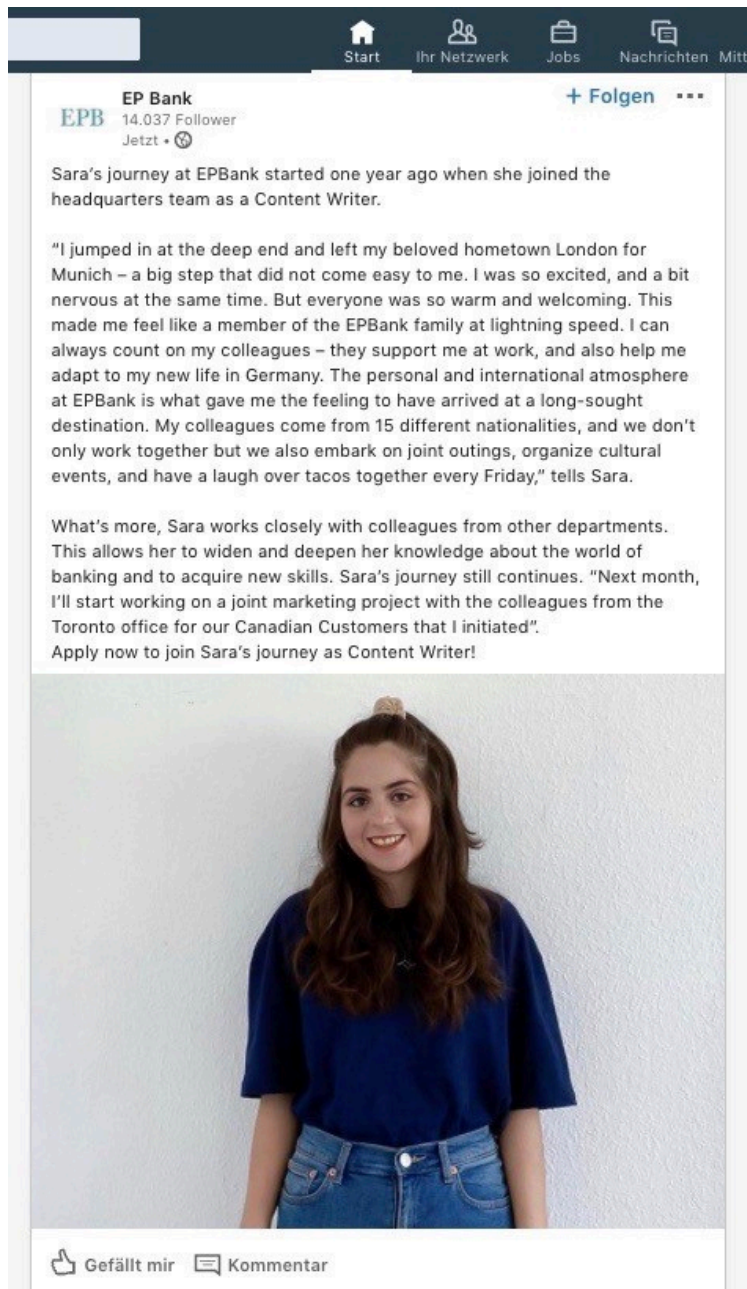
large proportion of the story developed in the previous section was adjusted. The original text was altered, so that it became a quote by the fictive organization's employee Sara.

In section 2.4.2, two criteria for an employee testimonial were established. The first criterion was that the employee testimonial had to focus on the personal experiences of the testimonial and to avoid generalizations (Tucker & Yu). The second criterion was that the employee must be in center of the testimonial, not the organization (van Hoyer & Lievens, 2007). The developed employee testimonial included the personal experience and feelings of the main character Sara, who is an employee at the EPBank. This is demonstrated for example in the sentence *"I was so excited, and a bit nervous at the same time. But everyone was so warm and welcoming. This made me feel like a member of the EPBank family at lightning speed"*. By means of the textual quote, Sara expressed how she perceived the employer values, culture, and work atmosphere at the organization. This becomes apparent in the statement *"My colleagues come from 15 different nationalities, and we don't only work together but we also embark on joint outings, organize cultural events, and have a laugh over tacos together every Friday"*.

To give an overview of the two conditions with employee testimonial, figure 3 exemplifies condition 4. All material is attached in Appendix A.

Figure 3:

Condition 2: LinkedIn Vacancy Endorsement Post using Corporate Storytelling including Employee Testimonial and Employee Image with Eye Contact Cues



3.2.3 – Employee Image development

In addition to the testimonial, this study uses employee images with and without eye contact cues. For the creation of these employee images, persons of the network of the researcher were approached, who were found to fit the fictive company in age, personality, and look. Five persons consented to voluntarily participate. They were asked to take two variants of a photo of themselves, one in which they look directly at the viewer and one in which they look in the

image. Thus, ten images in total were collected, of which five images included eye contact cues and five images were without eye contact cues.

3.2.4 – Pre-test

A pre-test was conducted to test which of the collected images with eye contact cues were most suitable for the main study. In addition, it was tested whether the respondents noticed the employee testimonial and perceived the story and informative text as intended. Respondents (N=12) between the age of 21 and 26 filled out an online questionnaire that was created for that purpose. The data gathered with the online questionnaire was analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 24.

In the first part of the questionnaire, respondents were presented with the ten images of five women that were created in the employee image development process. Each woman was presented with two images. In one image, the woman looked directly at the viewer, whereas in the second, she looked to the side. Respondents were then presented with 25 items in total. Images *with eye contact cues* were measured using four items, whereas images *without eye contact cues* were measured using a single item. All five items were measured on a seven-point Likert scale, where 1 stands for “strongly disagree” and 7 for “strongly agree”.

Figure 4

Image with eye contact cues, identified for the main study



Figure 5

Image without eye contact cues, identified for the main study



For all images *with eye contact cues*, the mean scores (*SD*) on perceived eye contact, visual connection, was calculated. In addition, the respondents were asked to which extent they found the woman in the images sympathetic and having a friendly expression, because the person in the image represents the fictive organization EP Bank and should therefore be perceived as likable. The mean scores (*SD*) of these criteria have been calculated as well. The overall scores are shown in table 3. For the images *without eye contact cues*, means scores (*SD*) were calculated for respondents' perceived eye contact with the person in images. The results can be found in table 4.

Table 3

Mean scores (SD) for images with eye contact cues

	Image				
	1	3	6	7	10
Eye Contact	6.17 (1.19)	6.50 (0.52)	6.58 (0.51)	6.12 (1.58)	5.67 (2.23)
Visual Connection	5.5 (1.31)	5.92 (0.67)	5.67 (0.78)	5.92 (1.38)	5.75 (1.42)
Friendly Expression	5.92 (0.79)	4.25 (1.14)	5.00 (1.12)	6.42 (0.51)	6.25 (0.62)
Sympathetic	5.92 (1.08)	5.00 (1.28)	4.83 (1.28)	6.00 (1.13)	5.92 (0.90)
Total	5.88	5.42	5.52	6.11	5.90

*Measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree)

Table 4*Mean scores (SD) for images without eye contact cues*

	Image				
	2	4	5	8	9
Eye contact	1.75 (1.14)	1.58 (0.90)	1.50 (0.67)	1.83 (1.19)	1.75 (1.42)

*Measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree)

Table 3 shows that the seventh image scored the highest on three of the established four criteria and has the highest total mean score of all four criteria. Therefore, image seven (s. figure 2) was selected for the main study. Table 4 shows that the corresponding version of the image without eye cues ($M = 1.83$, $SD = 1.19$) is, as intended, perceived as not including eye contact cues.

In the second part of the pre-test, it was tested whether respondents recognized the employee testimonial, identified the organizational values and perceived the plain informative text and the text with storytelling as intended. To make the questionnaire not too time consuming for the respondents, only five items were asked per text. The items referred to whether the text included experiences of a character, stylistic devices, and incorporated an employee quote or not. An example question is “The text is centered on the experiences of a character”. These four items were measured by means of a seven-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree. To measure respondents’ overall perception of the texts, the item “To what extent to you perceive the text as plain text or story?” was measured using a polar scale, where 0 stands for “plain text without storytelling” and 10 stands for “story”. The results are presented in table 5.

Table 5*Mean Scores (SD) of Text Evaluations*

	Text type		
	Storytelling with Employee Testimonial	Storytelling without Employee Testimonial	Text without Storytelling
Experiences of a Character*	5.92 (1.44)	5.67 (0.65)	3.75 (1.76)
Employee Quote*	6.25 (1.48)	1.50 (0.67)	1.42 (0.67)
Stylistic Devices*	5.33 (1.56)	4.8 (1.34)	3.75 (1.76)
Organizational Values*	6.00 (0.74)	5.5 (1.56)	5.34 (0.65)
Text Type Perception**	7.83 (1.11)	5.92 (1.00)	3.67 (1.92)

*Measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree/ 7 = strongly agree)

** Measured on a 10-point polar scale (0 = plain text without storytelling/10 = story)

The results show that the main criteria of corporate storytelling were identified as intended in the corresponding texts. Most respondents noticed that one version of the text included an employee quote. In addition, most respondents recognized that the story with employee testimonial and the story without employee testimonial included more stylistic devices than the plain text without storytelling characteristics. Regarding the content of the text, respondents recognized that all three text versions incorporated organizational values. As intended, respondents indicated that both stories gave a better feeling of the work atmosphere than the plain text without storytelling. Looking at the results of the polar scale, the text with employee testimonial was identified as story most often, followed by the story without testimonial. The plain text without storytelling was identified correctly.

In sum, respondents correctly identified the manipulation employee testimonial in the corresponding text version, noticed the manipulation eye contact cues and perceived the text versions as intended. Consequently, only minor adjustments to the material was made. After concluding the pre-test, the five LinkedIn vacancy endorsement posts for the five conditions were created, using the pre-tested material. After the creation of the posts, a screenshot of each post was taken.

3.3 – Measures

A questionnaire was created with the software Qualtrics. The questionnaire including all items can be found in Appendix C. As described in the previous section, the questionnaire should measure the four variables organizational attractiveness, intention to apply, P-O fit, and eWOM introduced in the theoretical framework. This section describes by which items these measurements were implemented.

3.3.1 – Intention to Apply

The intention to apply describes the intention of an employee to actually apply for a job (Highhouse, et. al., 2003). As described in the theoretical framework, the intention to apply in this research refers to a specific job vacancy and not an organization. Therefore, in the questionnaire, scales were selected that reflect the intention to apply to a concrete job vacancy and not to the organization in general. Intention to apply was measured with seven items, each measured on a seven-point Likert scale, on which one stands for “strongly disagree” and seven stands for “strongly agree”. The items were adapted from Taylor and Bergmann (1987), Collins (2007), Djurdjevic, Rosen, Conroy, Rawski, and Sosna (2018). The items were slightly changed for the purpose of this research. An example item is “If I were searching for a job, I would apply to this job vacancy.”

3.3.2 – Organizational Attractiveness

Organizational attractiveness is “the power that draws applicants’ attention to focus on an employer brand and encourages existing employees to stay” (Jiang & Iles, 2011, p. 107). Literature differentiates between internal and external attractiveness, but this study concentrates only on the external component (see section 2.3.1). To measure this attractiveness, seven items were adapted and slightly changed from the scales developed by Highhouse, et. al. (2003), Turban and Greening (1997), Lievens et. al. (2001), and Turban and Keon (1993). Example items are “For me, this company would be a good place to work”, and “I am not interested in the company except as a last resort”. All items were measured using a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from one “strongly disagree” to seven “strongly agree”.

3.3.3 – eWOM

eWOM is “any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet” (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh & Gremler, 2004, p. 39). eWOM can have different forms, depending on context (see section 2.3.3). In this research, eWOM is measured in the context of LinkedIn. eWOM on LinkedIn consists of sharing, commenting, or liking content, as well as adding new individuals to professional network and exchanging messages with them (Roulin & Levashina, 2019). To the researcher’s knowledge, there are no scales for measuring eWOM on LinkedIn. Therefore, a scale with seven items has been created, using aforementioned definition as foundation. An example item is “I would leave a comment under this post”. All items were measured using a seven-point Likert scale ranging from one representing “strongly disagree” to seven, standing for “strongly agree”.

3.3.4 – P-O Fit

According to Lauver and Kristof-Brown (2001), P-O fit is the perceived fit between the potential employee’s values and beliefs with those of the organization (see section 2.5). To measure P-O fit, six items were used. The items were adapted by Cable and DeRue (2002), and Cable and Judge (1996). Again, all items were measured using a seven-point Likert scale on which one stands for “strongly disagree” and seven stands for “strongly agree.” An example item is “The things that I value in life are very similar to the things that this organization values”.

3.4 – Measurement Validity and Reliability

The validity and reliability of the scales were analyzed by conducting a factor analysis and a reliability analysis. First, a factor analysis was performed to investigate the validity of the

scales. All six variables of the model were included in this analysis. By means of a factor analysis, items are identified that do not sufficiently load on one of the main components and are consequently deleted in a second step (Matsunga, 2010). The results of the factor analysis are shown in table 6. Six items related to more than one factor and were deleted. The deleted items were not included in the table. These items were “If I were searching for a job as content writer, I would apply for this job vacancy”, “If I were searching for a job as content writer, I would not apply for this job vacancy”, “If I were searching for a job as content writer, applying for this job vacancy would be of no interest to me”, “I would recommend this job vacancy to someone from my LinkedIn network by sending him/her a link of this post”, “I would recommend this job vacancy to someone from my LinkedIn network by tagging him/her in the comment section below the post” and “My values, goals and personality prevent me from fitting in this organization” and “I would like this post on LinkedIn”.

To test the reliability of the scales, Cronbach’s Alpha was calculated. Cronbach’s Alpha measures the extent to which items correlate and it ranges regularly from 0.00 to 1.00 (Vaske, Baeman, & Sponarski, 2017). If a correlation among the items can be identified, alpha increases (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Literature indicates that if $\text{Alpha} > 0.70$ the scale instrument is sufficiently reliable (Taber, 2018). All measurement scales were reliable. The results of the reliability analysis are displayed in table 6.

Table 6*Rotation Component Matrix*

		Factor			
		1	2	3	4
Organizational attractiveness	“This company is attractive to me as employer”	.851			
	“For me, this company would be a good place to work”	.811			
	“A job at this company is very appealing to me”	.793			
	“I would really like to work for this company”	.774			
	“I am not interested in the in the company except as a last resort”	.772			
	“I would make this company one of my first choices as an employer”	.761			
	“I am interested in learning more about this company”	.734			
Person-Organization fit	“This organization’s values and culture provide a good fit with the things that I value in life”		.901		
	“My personal values match this organization’s values and culture”		.894		
	“My values, goals and personality match this organization and the current employees in the organization”		.838		
	“The values and ‘personality’ of this organization reflect my own values and personality”		.816		
	“The things that I value in life are very similar to the things that this organization values”		.769		
Intention to apply	“I would not apply for this job vacancy”			.885	
	“I would apply for this job vacancy”			.853	
	“If I were searching for a job, I would apply for this job vacancy”			.821	
	“Applying for this job vacancy is of no interest for me”			.763	
Electronic-Word-of-Mouth	“I would recommend this job vacancy to my LinkedIn network by sharing the post with it”				.875
	“I would share this post with my LinkedIn network”				.832
	“I would leave a comment under this post on LinkedIn”				.764
	“I would recommend this job vacancy to my LinkedIn network by liking the post”				.694
	“I would like this post on LinkedIn”				.652
Explained variance:		24.67%	19.47%	15.86%	15.56%
Eigenvalue:		5.18	4.09	3.33	3.27
Cronbach’s Alpha:		.94	.93	.92	.86

3.5 – Procedure

This research targeted students and recent graduates that are either part of the millennial generation or generation Y. Therefore, participants in the age range 18-28 were recruited. As the fictive organization EP Bank is international and supports diversity, no further sample characteristics for respondents were defined. Participants were sampled by means of convenience sampling and snowball sampling from the researcher's personal network. The respondents were approached via social network sites and the survey platform SurveySwap.

The study participants were presented with a multi-page questionnaire. At the beginning, information on the study was presented, including ethical considerations. After giving their informed consent, respondents were asked to answer items regarding their age, gender, highest educational level, current main occupation, LinkedIn account membership and frequency of LinkedIn use. After providing their demographics, respondents received information about the procedure of the study. Then, they were presented with a screenshot of a LinkedIn job vacancy announcement post, in which the EP Bank announces a job vacancy for the position as content writer. The purpose of this post was to provide context for the job vacancy endorsement post. The job vacancy announcement post can be found in Appendix B. Afterwards, respondents were randomly assigned to one of the five conditions (see table 2 for an overview), using the randomization function of Qualtrics. After reading the assigned job vacancy endorsement post, they were presented with the items described in section 3.3. Finally, they were presented with the assigned LinkedIn vacancy endorsement again, and three items were asked to test whether the respondents noticed the manipulations.

After completing data collection, the data was prepared for the analysis using IBM SPSS Statistics 24. The data was first exported from Qualtrics and then imported into SPSS. There, variables irrelevant to this research irrelevant such as recipient mail were removed from the data set. In addition, respondents who did not answer more than three items per measure were removed. Likewise, respondents with a survey completion time of less than 2.5 minutes were deleted, as it is not feasible to process the presented material comprehensively and answer the survey questions in this amount of time. Moreover, any respondents with an age less than 18 or higher than 28 were removed.

The study yielded 184 valid responses of the original 227 responses, divided over the five conditions. The aim was to collect a minimum of 30 respondents for each of the five conditions, yielding a minimum sample size of 150 respondents so that the sample has a satisfactory statistical degree of power (Park, 2009). Thus, the sample size was sufficient.

3.6 – Respondents

Most respondents were between 21 and 24 years old ($N = 113$, 61.4%), whereas the average age of all respondents was 23.27 years ($SD = 2.21$). This was to be expected, as most of the respondents said to be students ($N = 144$, 78.3%). The proportion of male and female respondents in this study is noticeably unequal. The number of female respondents ($N = 123$, 66.8%) in this study sample is approximately twice as high as the number of male respondents ($N = 61$, 33.2%). Most respondents indicated to be in the process of obtaining their bachelor's degree or already obtained their bachelor's degree ($N = 76$, 41.3%). Accordingly, a substantial proportion of respondents chose *high school diploma* as highest level of education. The most frequent main occupation after being a student was *working* ($N = 32$, 17.4%), followed by *between jobs* ($N = 8$, 4.3%). Most respondents had a LinkedIn account ($N = 132$, 71.5%), and stated to use it between once a week and several times a week ($N = 79$, 42.9%).

The respondents were divided over the five conditions. Table 7 gives an overview of the distribution of demographics over the different conditions. As visible, this distribution is not entirely equal. The proportion of male and female respondents differs between the conditions. Thus, a one-way analysis of variance was performed to test whether the distribution of gender over the five conditions was statistically significant. However, this was not the case, $F(4, 179) = 1.45$, $p = .22$.

Table 7*Distribution of Sample Characteristics*

		Condition 1 N=31	Condition 2 N=33	Condition 3 N=41	Condition 4 N=32	Control Condition N=47
Gender a)	Male	35.50%	45.50%	24.40%	40.60%	25.50%
	Female	64.50%	54.50%	75.60%	59.40%	74.50%
Age a)		M = 23.74 / SD = 2.00	M = 23.27 / SD = 2.00	M = 23.12 / SD = 2.28	M = 22.72 / SD = 2.33	M = 23.45 / SD = 2.20
Education c)	1)	32.30%	33.30%	29.30%	40.60%	48.90%
	2)	48.40%	45.50%	43.90%	34.40%	36.20%
	3)	19.40%	21.20%	26.80%	25%	14.90%
Occupation d)	1)	80.60%	81.80%	75.60%	81.30%	74.50%
	2)	16.10%	18.20%	17.10%	12.50%	21.30%
	3)	3.20%	0%	7.30%	6.30%	4.30%
LinkedIn account e)	Yes	77.4%	69.75%	70.7%	75%	68.1%
	No	22.6%	30.3%	29.3%	25%	31.9%
LinkedIn use f)		M = 3.92 / SD = .97	M = 4.05 / SD = 1.25	M = 3.76 / SD = .99	M = 3.88 / SD = 1.12	M = 3.00 / SD = 1.22

a) Percentage of division Male/ Female

b) Mean + SD of self-reported age

c) Percentage 1)=Highschool diploma or equivalent / 2)=Bachelor's degree / 3) Master's degree

d) Percentage 1)=Student, / 2)=Working, / 3)=Between jobs

e) Percentage of division LinkedIn account Yes/No

f) Mean + SD of LinkedIn use, measured 1=Never, / 2=Less than once a month, / 3=Once a month, / 4=Once a week, / 5=Several times a week

4. Results

The following section elaborates on the results of the study. This section starts with the results of the manipulation check. To explore the effect of text type (texts with storytelling vs. text without storytelling) on the dependent variables, an independent t test was conducted. To analyze possible main effects of the storytelling characteristics employee image with eye contact cues and employee testimonial, a two-way MANOVA analysis was performed. In order to gain an overview of the mean scores on the dependent variables, descriptive statistics of both analyses are presented in the second step. In the third step, results of the independent t test are presented. Lastly, the results of the two-way MANOVA are displayed.

4.1 – Manipulation Check

To analyze the results of the manipulation check, a chi-square test and an independent t test were conducted. First, a chi-square test was performed to find out whether respondents noticed the image in the LinkedIn vacancy endorsement post. After being exposed to the vacancy endorsement post a second time at the end of the survey, respondents were presented with the item “was there a picture of an employee in the vacancy endorsement?” The test yielded a significant result, $\chi^2(4, N = 183) = 123.75, p < .001$. Thus, respondents interpreted correctly whether the vacancy endorsement in their condition included an employee image or not.

Second, an independent t test was performed for the manipulations eye contact cues and employee testimonial. The goal of an independent t test is to test whether the manipulations are significant, which means that the mean scores between the two groups significantly differ (Park, 2009). After answering the item regarding the presence of the image, respondents were presented with the items “The person in the picture was making eye contact with me” and “There was a quote of an employee in the vacancy endorsement”. The mean scores of the manipulations eye contact cues and employee testimonial are displayed in table 8. Respondents interpreted both manipulations correctly. There was a significant difference in the scores for images with eye contact cues ($M = 5.75, SD = 0.97$) and images without eye contact cues ($M = 1.74, SD = 1.03$), $t(125) = -22.46, p < .001$. In addition, the mean scores for the manipulation employee testimonial differed significantly for the conditions with employee testimonial ($M = 5.74, SD = 1.49$) and the conditions without employee testimonial ($M = 2.35, SD = 1.53$), $t(181) = -14.49, p < .001$.

Table 8
Group Statistics

		<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Quote*	absent	2.35	1.53
	present	5.74	1.49
EyeContactCues*	absent	1.74	1.03
	present	5.75	0.97

*Mean scores measured on 7-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree/7=strongly agree)

4.2 – Descriptive Statistics

To get an overview over the mean scores on the dependent variables, table 9 and table 10 entail information on the descriptive statistics of the independent *t* test and two-way MANOVA on the dependent variables respectively. Table 9 presents the mean scores (*SD*) on the dependent variables for the total four corporate storytelling conditions as compared to the control condition. Table 10 entails the mean scores (*SD*) on the dependent variables as a result of the two-way MANOVA analysis. An overview of the descriptive statistics on the dependent variables by condition is presented in Appendix D.

Table 9:
Group Statistics

	Storytelling Conditions		Control Condition	
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Intention to apply*	4.01	1.61	4.23	1.55
Organizational attractiveness*	4.72	1.26	4.79	1.30
Electronic-Word-of-Mouth*	3.36	1.31	3.20	1.30

*Measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree / 7 = strongly agree)

Table 10:*Descriptive Statistics of the Dependent Variables*

	Eye contact cues				Employee testimonial				Total	
	Present		Absent		Present		Absent			
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Intention to apply*	4.06	1.56	3.96	1.68	3.92	1.69	4.10	1.64	4.02	1.61
Organizational attractiveness*	4.79	1.36	4.65	1.13	4.65	1.29	4.79	1.23	4.73	1.26
Electronic-Word-of-Mouth*	3.47	1.43	3.23	1.15	3.42	1.29	3.30	1.33	3.36	1.31
Person-Organization fit*	4.78	1.00	4.75	1.12	4.86	.98	4.69	1.11	4.77	1.05

*Measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree/ 7 = strongly agree)

4.3 – Multicollinearity Test

Prior to the MANOVA analysis, a test for multicollinearity was conducted to test the stability of the model. Multicollinearity exists when the dependent variables correlate above $r = .90$ (Tabachnick, & Fidell, 2012). The results of the analysis are displayed in Appendix E. All tolerance values are below the critical value. Thus, multicollinearity does not exist among the dependent variables.

4.4 – Corporate Storytelling

An independent t test was conducted to test whether the mean scores between the total corporate storytelling conditions and the control condition significantly differed from each other. The mean scores are presented in table 9. There was no significant difference between the mean scores of the corporate storytelling conditions ($M = 4.01$, $SD = 1.71$) and the control condition ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 1.55$) on intention to apply, $t(182) = .79$, $p = .43$. In addition, the mean scores on organizational attractiveness did not significantly differ between the corporate storytelling conditions ($M = 4.72$, $SD = 1.26$) and the control condition ($M = 4.79$, $SD = 1.30$), $t(182) = .29$, $p = .77$. Finally, the mean scores on eWOM did not significantly differ between

the corporate storytelling conditions ($M = 3.35$, $SD = 1.32$) and the control condition ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 1.30$), $t(182) = -.70$, $p = .48$. Hypothesis 1 was not supported.

4.5 – Employee Testimonial and Employee Image with Eye Contact Cues

A two-way MANOVA was performed to investigate possible main effects and interaction effects of the manipulations *eye contact cues* and *employee testimonial* in the vacancy endorsement posts on the dependent variables. Table 11 presents the results of the analysis.

Table 11

Multivariate tests for variance

<i>Multivariate Tests</i>		<i>F-value</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
<i>Wilks' Lambda</i>			
	EyeContactCues	.33	.86
	EmployeeTestimonial	.94	.44
	EyeContact*Employee Testimonial (Interaction)	1.24	.30
<i>Tests of Between-Subjects Design Effects</i>		<i>F-value</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
EyeContactCues	Intention to apply**	.09	.76
	Organizational attractiveness**	.35	.56
	Electronic Word-of-Mouth**	1.29	.26
	Person-Organization fit**	.03	.86
EmployeeTestimonial	Intention to apply**	.39	.53
	Organizational attractiveness**	.44	.51
	Electronic Word-of-Mouth**	.30	.59
	Person-Organization fit**	1.13	.29
EyeContact*Employee Testimonial (Interaction)	Intention to apply**	.16	.69
	Organizational attractiveness**	.19	.67
	Electronic Word-of-Mouth**	.69	.41
	Person-Organization fit**	2.38	.13

To perform a mediation analysis, the independent variables must have a main effect on the mediation variable (van derWeele, 2016). Thus, an additional main effect of the two independent variables on P-O fit was explored. Prior to the analysis, the independent dummy variables *EmployeeTestimonial* and *EyeContactCues* were created. In line with the research goal, the variables only considered the four storytelling conditions.

4.5.1 – Interaction

As shown in table 11, there was no significant interaction effect between employee testimonial and eye contact cues on the dependent variables and the mediator variable, *Wilk's A* = .96, $F(4,130) = 1.24, p > .05$. Thus, there was no significant effect of the interaction of eye contact cues and employee testimonial on organizational attractiveness ($F = .19, p > .05$), and P-O fit, ($F = 2.38, p > .05$). No mediator analysis was conducted. Hypothesis 4a, 4b were not supported.

Figure 4

Mean Scores of the Interaction of Employee Testimonial and Eye Contact Cues on Organizational Attractiveness

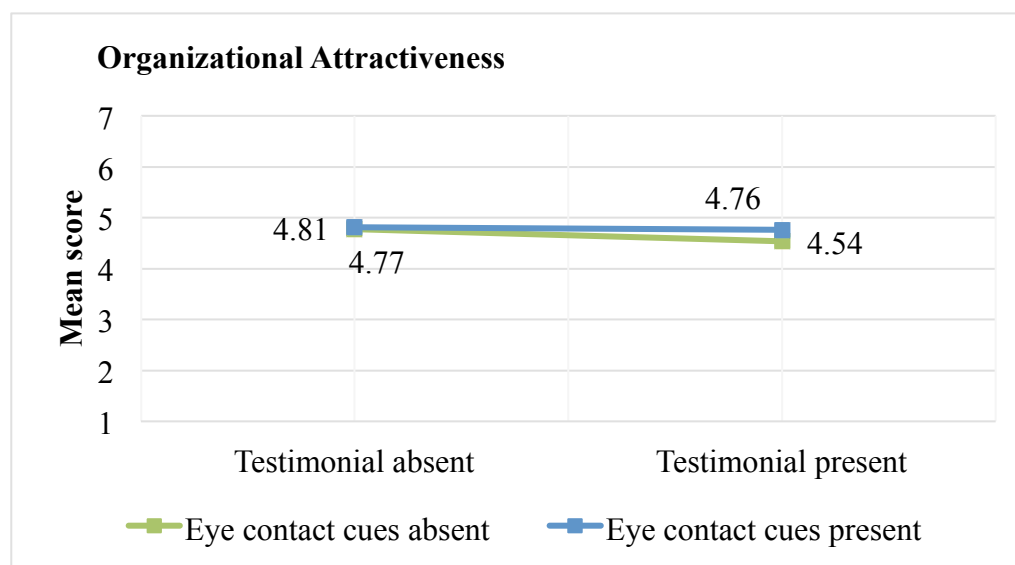
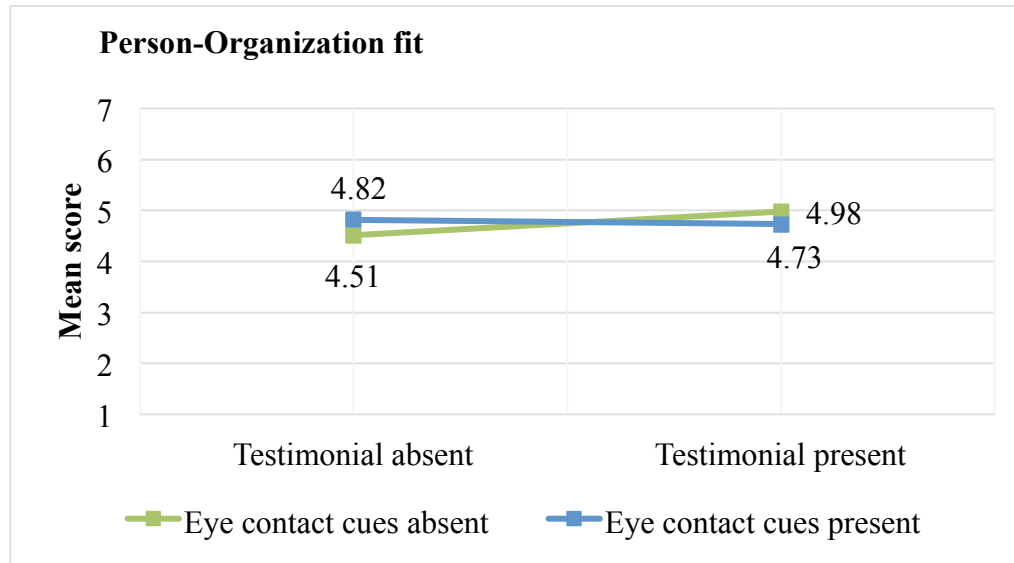


Figure 5:

Mean Scores of the Interaction of Employee Testimonial and Eye Contact Cues on P-O fit



4.5.2 – Employee Testimonial

As displayed in table 11, there was no significant difference in respondents' perception based on the manipulation employee testimonial, *Wilk's Λ* = .97, $F(4, 130) = .94$, $p > .05$. The manipulation employee testimonial did not have a significant effect on intention to apply ($F = .39$, $p > .05$), neither on organizational attractiveness ($F = .44$, $p > .05$), nor on eWOM ($F = .30$, $p > .05$) and P-O fit ($F = 1.13$, $p > .05$). As the effect on P-O fit was non-significant, no mediator analysis was conducted. Hypotheses 2a, 2b, 2c were not supported.

4.5.3 – Eye Contact Cues

Table 11 shows that respondents did not perceive a significant difference based on the manipulation eye contact cues, *Wilk's Λ* = .99, $F(4, 130) = .33$, $p > .05$. The presence of eye contact cues did not have a significant effect on intention to apply ($F = .09$, $p > .05$), on organizational attractiveness ($F = .35$, $p > .05$), on eWOM ($F = 1.29$, $p > .05$) and on P-O fit ($F = .03$, $p > .05$). Due to the absence of a main effect on the mediator variable P-O fit, no mediator analysis was performed. Hypotheses 3a, 3b, and 3c were not supported.

5. Discussion

This study followed two main targets. The first target was to demonstrate that corporate storytelling in LinkedIn vacancy endorsement posts is a successful technique in employer branding for achieving desired brand equity outcomes as opposed to a text without corporate storytelling. The second goal of this study was to confirm that the two specific manipulations employee testimonial and employee image with eye contact cues versus employee image without eye contact cues have a significant effect on the brand equity outcomes. Finally, it was expected that possible effects on organizational attractiveness and intention to apply are mediated by the P-O fit of a potential employee with the EPBank.

The following sections discuss the theoretical implications of the results. In addition, possible design limitations are identified. This section concludes with a summary of this work, considering practical implications.

5.1 – Corporate Storytelling

The results of the study show that corporate storytelling as communication technique was not effective.

Including experiences of a character had no significant effect on the different outcomes of employer brand equity. This finding contributes to previous research on investigating effective corporate story elements by Scheerder, Karreman, and de Jong (2017), as the researchers did not find a significant effect of including a character in corporate stories either.

The language style also did not lead to significant effects. More specifically, using stylistic devices did not lead to significant effects. In the introduction of this research, it was described that empirical research on the effectiveness of corporate story elements is scarce (Janssen et. al., 2012). Nonetheless, the authors found that multiple organizations use stylistic devices such as metaphors and positive adjectives in their corporate stories (Janssen et. al., 2012). Therefore, it was expected that the language effected the perception of respondents on the brand equity outcomes. A possible explanation is that the number of stylistic devices used in this text was not sufficient. Future research is advised to increase the number of stylistic devices.

In some respects, these results stand in contrast to past contributions on the topic presented in the theoretical framework. Literature indicated that corporate storytelling can be specifically relevant for communicating the emotional parts of an employer brand (Fog et. al., 2005; Nilsson & Nordgren, 2012). Researchers found that emotions are more influential in decision-making than rational arguments (Wachtman & Johnson, 2009; Bechara, Damasio & Damasio, 2000). That suggested that storytelling can be an effective communication technique

to attract applicants. However, respondents of this study did neither develop superficial or complex associations to the organization as employer nor were able to assess whether they fit the organization, having responded with “neither agree or disagree” in most questions. (see table 10).

One reason for this lack of effect may be that the texts were too short. The text with employee testimonial only had 1251 characters, and the text without employee testimonial used 1249 characters. Corporate stories tend to be longer, comprising roughly between 1340 and 4000 characters (Janssen et. al., 2012). Hence, due to the shorter length, the created posts may have not fully behaved as a story. However, it is questionable if longer posts would yield better effects. First, LinkedIn posts have a strict limit of 1300 characters, which the current texts almost reach. Hence, there is little room for extension. But more importantly, the distractive digital environment impacts online reading (Copeland, Gedeon, & Caldwell, 2017). Hence, it is questionable if the potential target audience takes time to read long posts at all. An interesting alternative would be to create a short teaser post instead and complement it with a long post with story elements. On LinkedIn, the longer post could be created as an “article”, which permits almost arbitrary text lengths.

A related but different reason for the weak effect could be missing information. Respondents might have failed to connect the brand because they missed crucial information. From research on the employer attractiveness, it is known that potential employees look for specific traits in an employer (Mihalcea, 2017; Kuchеров & Zamulin, 2016). This study attempted to take these into account, but some aspects might have been lost or were unknown. Thus, recording the expected and received information in future experiments could help closing this gap. This, in turn, would provide insights into employee behavior on social media, which would be highly valuable to the field in general.

Finally, text could simply be the wrong format to tell a story on social media. In recent years, video has become the prevalent form of communication on most sites. Research shows that especially younger people tend to prefer watching over reading (Sukhraj, 2016). De Vries, Gensler and Leeftang (2012) found in their study on the popularity of brand posts that videos have highly vivid content and had a significant effect on the success of a post as opposed to content less in vividness such as pictures. This notion is also supported by LinkedIn. The company states that posts including videos are four times more successful than posts without videos (LinkedIn Marketing Solutions, 2020). Hence, telling a story with video instead of a long post could help conveying information to this audience more effectively. They are more accustomed to this format and therefore may be more receptive. Moreover, video could

provide organizations new opportunities to communicate. For instance, they could present office rooms, and include more than one employee testimonial to share their experiences about working at the organization. This would allow a more in-depth impression of the current employees. Hence, exploring video communication with corporate storytelling could be a promising avenue for future research.

5.2 – Employee Testimonial

There was no significant effect of including an employee testimonial in the LinkedIn vacancy endorsement post with corporate storytelling on organizational attractiveness, intention to apply, eWOM and P-O fit.

This finding stands in sharp contrast to findings presented in the theoretical framework, like the work by Cober et. al. (2000), and van Hove and Lievens (2007). An explanation for this gap could be context of corporate websites. This study, however, looked at social network sites. Job seekers behavior on social media vastly differs from behavior on traditional websites (Stone, Eveleth, Baker-Eveleth, 2019). For instance, users visit a corporate website to learn more about a specific company (Clair, 2016). On social media, in contrast, they discover a post among a huge number of messages from their network (Feng et. al., 2015). Thus, the interaction context of a post on social media is completely different. Likely, this also leads to a different perception of testimonials.

This different perception could also lead to different requirements to the form of the testimonial. This study used an employee testimonial in the form of a textual quote. However, textual quotes are low in vividness (Rehman, 2017). As discussed in section 5.1, on social network sites, low vividness could directly lower the success of a post (De Vries, Gensler and Leeflang (2012). Thereby, leading to the observed absence of effect (see table 11). This argument, though, is debatable. Empirical research on employee testimonials suggests that respondents do not perceive organizations or a job as more attractive based on the vividness of an employee testimonial (Morrison, 2017; Rehman, 2017). However, these works do not consider testimonials specifically in the context of SNS. Therefore, further research is required, focusing on employee testimonials in the context of LinkedIn vacancy endorsement posts.

5.3 – Eye Contact Cues

In this study, the presence of an employee image with eye contact cues in the vacancy endorsement post did not yield significant effects on organizational attractiveness, intention to apply, eWOM and P-O fit.

Despite this general lack of effect, the manipulation eye contact cues was significant (see section 4.1). Thus, indicating that eye contact has significance to most respondents. This is in accordance with the research findings by for example Valentini et. al. (2018) and Ewing et. al. (2010) presented in theoretical framework.

Contrary to prior assumption, though, participants of this study did not report higher organizational attractiveness under conditions with eye contact cues (see table 10). Existing research showed that viewers perceive persons in a photo more attractive when they look directly at the viewer (Ewing et. al., 2010). It was assumed that this attractiveness would translate to an organization. However, under conditions with eye contact and an employee testimonial together, participants even perceived lower organizational attractiveness than under conditions with images without eye contact (see Appendix D).

An explanation for this surprising effect could be the presence of additional non-verbal signals, that have not been considered. For instance, the shape and size of the eye could also play a role, as well as facial expression and body language of the depicted person.

Nevertheless, there is too little existing research to explain this surprising effect satisfactory. Researchers just recently started investigating effects of the gaze direction of a person in an image posted on SNS, e.g. on brand facets (Valentini et. al., 2018). To the researcher's knowledge, no prior research has investigated the effects of corporate storytelling using employee images with eye contact cues versus corporate storytelling using images of employees without eye contact cues on brand equity outcomes of potential applicants. Moreover, there is no research available on the presenting of congruent information in the context of SNS posts. This gap opens many possibilities for future work.

5.5 – Limitations

Limitations in the research sample could be identified. Research indicates that applicants tend to look for specific information about the potential job (van Hove, & Turban, 2015). It can be assumed that this information is also influenced by the specific field and prior experience. For instance, people seeking a position in IT may be looking for different qualities than a person looking for job in marketing. This study, in contrast, sampled participants with various educational backgrounds. Therefore, results regarding the intention to apply to the specific vacancy endorsement might have been more conclusive, if the sample only consisted of respondents who work in the related field of the presented vacancy, or follow a study of the same direction. Simply put, some respondents may have answered “neither agree nor disagree”, because they did not know which qualities to look for in a banking job.

A different but related limitation would be that as the largest proportion of respondents was students, they might not have been actually looking for a job when processing the material and answering the questions. In real-life scenarios, in contrast, people looking at job vacancy posts are actively seeking a new position. This different motivation could make them more perceptive to subtle manipulations as tested in this study. Hence, leading to stronger effects than the one observed.

An additional limitation of the study design could be an insufficient filtering mechanism. There may have been respondents who did not look at the stimulus materials for enough time. This study used a timer to filter responses that took less than 2.5 minutes to completion but did not use a timer to measure the duration spend specifically looking at the manipulation material. Respondents who looked at the material very briefly may have missed crucial information, making them unable to answer the questions. This could be one reason for the many “neither agree nor disagree” answers. For future research, it is recommended to include such a timer as well.

5.7 – Conclusions

This study explored to what extent corporate storytelling characteristics communicated in a LinkedIn vacancy endorsement post affected different employer brand equity outcomes among students and young professionals of the millennial generation and generation Y. In addition, it analysed the effect of an employee testimonial and an employee image with and without eye contact cues.

The results of the manipulation check indicated that the manipulations employee testimonial and eye contact cues were significant. Therefore, it can be inferred that these manipulations affect the perception of the respondents. Despite this promising result, this study could not measure significant effects of the corporate storytelling characteristics employee testimonial and employee image with eye contact cues on organizational attractiveness, intention to apply, and eWOM among students and young professionals.

Consequently, at this point, no concrete recommendations for communication practitioners can be derived yet. In general, this research indicates that communication practitioners should consider that the context of SNS requires different forms of storytelling than traditional media like a corporate website. On SNS, factors such as vividness of content may be more important.

Therefore, this work is important motivation for additional research in this emerging field. In addition, it forms multiple promising starting points for such. For instance, future research could explore the effects of storytelling characteristics, employee testimonials and

eye contact cues in employer branding on SNS in more detail. Moreover, it could investigate different post formats and their perception. For example, most corporations use video in their posts, which is known to be more vivid, often boosting engagement. Future work could explore the effect of a LinkedIn vacancy endorsement post consisting of a video that applies digital storytelling in combination with a video-based employee testimonial and compare it to a traditional post using text. A different interesting research direction could be to combine a short teaser post with an extensive blog article and analyze their respective effectiveness.

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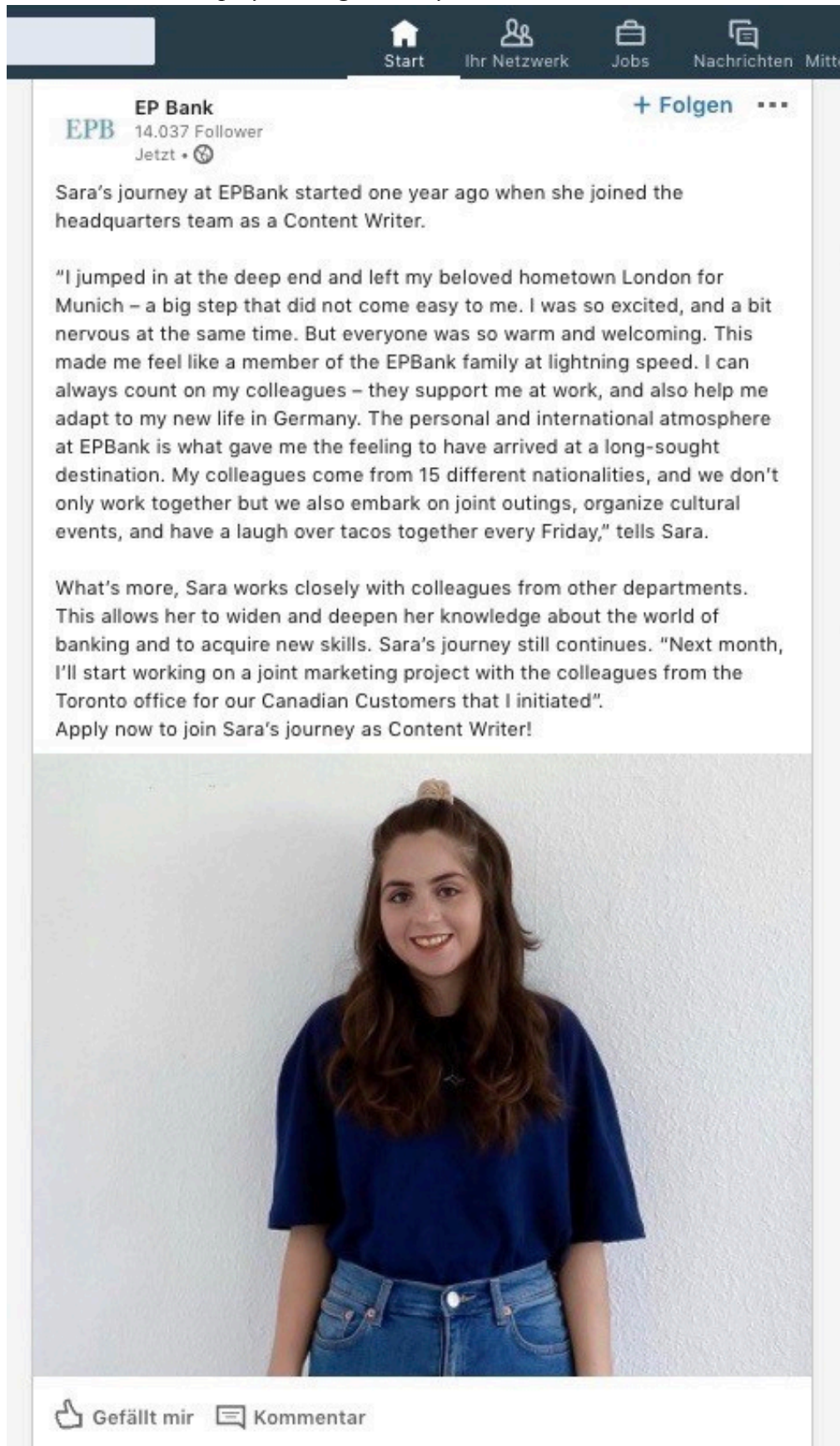
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Appendix A – Stimulus Material

LinkedIn Vacancy Endorsement Post using Corporate Storytelling including Employee Testimonial and Employee Image with Eye Contact Cues



The image is a screenshot of a LinkedIn post from the company page of EP Bank. The post features a testimonial from Sara, a Content Writer, and includes her photo. The post is in German and promotes a vacancy for a Content Writer.

EP Bank 14.037 Follower
Jetzt • 🌐


[+ Folgen](#) ...



Sara's journey at EPBank started one year ago when she joined the headquarters team as a Content Writer.

"I jumped in at the deep end and left my beloved hometown London for Munich – a big step that did not come easy to me. I was so excited, and a bit nervous at the same time. But everyone was so warm and welcoming. This made me feel like a member of the EPBank family at lightning speed. I can always count on my colleagues – they support me at work, and also help me adapt to my new life in Germany. The personal and international atmosphere at EPBank is what gave me the feeling to have arrived at a long-sought destination. My colleagues come from 15 different nationalities, and we don't only work together but we also embark on joint outings, organize cultural events, and have a laugh over tacos together every Friday," tells Sara.


What's more, Sara works closely with colleagues from other departments. This allows her to widen and deepen her knowledge about the world of banking and to acquire new skills. Sara's journey still continues. "Next month, I'll start working on a joint marketing project with the colleagues from the Toronto office for our Canadian Customers that I initiated".


Apply now to join Sara's journey as Content Writer!





 Gefällt mir  Kommentar


LinkedIn Vacancy Endorsement Post using Corporate Storytelling including Employee Testimonial and Employee Image without Eye Contact Cues

 Start

 Ihr Netzwerk

 Jobs

 Nachrichten

 Mitte

 **EP Bank**
14.037 Follower
Jetzt • [+ Folgen](#) 

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Apply now to join Sara's journey as Content Writer!


 Gefällt mir  Kommentar


LinkedIn Vacancy Endorsement Post using Corporate Storytelling, without Employee Testimonial, including Employee Image with Eye Contact Cues

 Start

 Ihr Netzwerk

 Jobs

 Nachrichten

 Mittl...

 **EP Bank**
14.037 Follower
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LinkedIn Vacancy Endorsement Post using Corporate Storytelling, without Employee Testimonial, including Employee Image without Eye contact Cues

Start

Ihr Netzwerk

Jobs

Nachrichten

Mitte

EPB

EP Bank

14.037 Follower

Jetzt •

+ Folgen


...

Sara's journey at EPBank started one year ago when she joined the headquarters team as a Content Writer.

She jumped in at the deep end and left her hometown London for Munich – a big step that did not come easy to her. But everyone in the team put tremendous effort in including her and helped her to start on the right foot, so that Sara became a member of the EPBank family at lightning speed. The colleagues at EPBank always support each other with work topics but also with private issues. The personal and international atmosphere at EPBank helped Sara to quickly become familiar with her new job and to adapt to her new life in Germany. Sara and her colleagues from 15 different nationalities not only work together but also embark on joint outings, organize cultural events, and have a laugh over tacos together every Friday.

What's more, Sara works closely with colleagues from other departments. This allows her to widen and deepen her knowledge about the world of banking and to acquire new skills. Sara's journey still continues. Next month, she will start working on a joint marketing project with the colleagues from the Toronto office for our Canadian Customers that she initiated.

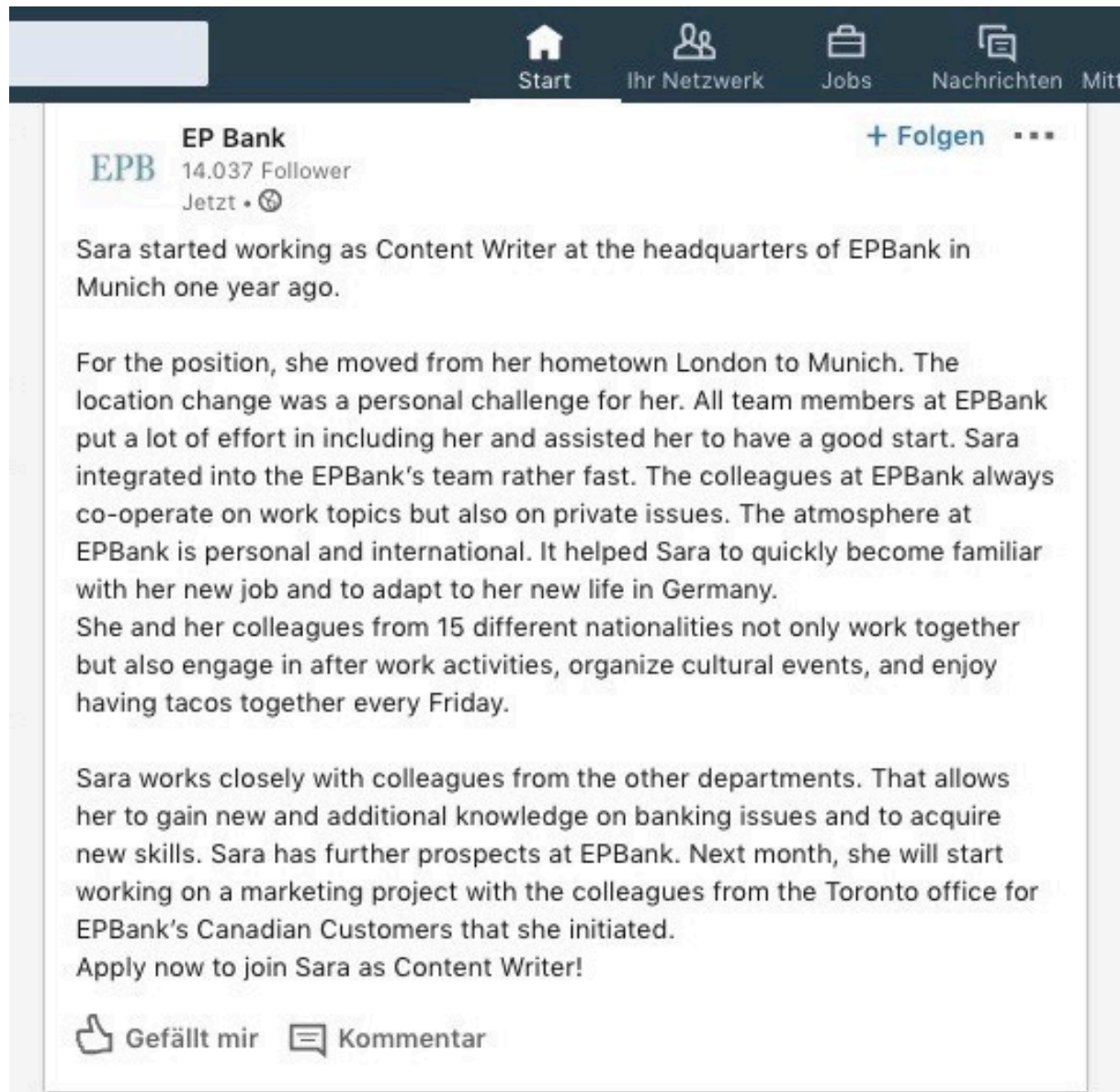
Apply now to join Sara's journey as Content Writer!



Gefällt mir

Kommentar

Control condition: LinkedIn Vacancy Endorsement Post using Informative Text without Corporate Storytelling Characteristics



The screenshot shows a LinkedIn interface with a dark blue header bar containing navigation icons for 'Start', 'Ihr Netzwerk', 'Jobs', 'Nachrichten', and 'Mitt'. Below the header, the profile of 'EP Bank' is visible, showing 14,037 followers and a 'Jetzt • 🌐' status. The post text describes Sara's role as a Content Writer at EP Bank in Munich, her move from London, and the company's international and personal atmosphere. It concludes with a call to action to apply for the position. At the bottom, there are icons for 'Gefällt mir' (like) and 'Kommentar' (comment).

EP Bank 14.037 Follower
Jetzt • 🌐

+ Folgen ...

Sara started working as Content Writer at the headquarters of EPBank in Munich one year ago.


For the position, she moved from her hometown London to Munich. The location change was a personal challenge for her. All team members at EPBank put a lot of effort in including her and assisted her to have a good start. Sara integrated into the EPBank's team rather fast. The colleagues at EPBank always co-operate on work topics but also on private issues. The atmosphere at EPBank is personal and international. It helped Sara to quickly become familiar with her new job and to adapt to her new life in Germany. She and her colleagues from 15 different nationalities not only work together but also engage in after work activities, organize cultural events, and enjoy having tacos together every Friday.


Sara works closely with colleagues from the other departments. That allows her to gain new and additional knowledge on banking issues and to acquire new skills. Sara has further prospects at EPBank. Next month, she will start working on a marketing project with the colleagues from the Toronto office for EPBank's Canadian Customers that she initiated.

Apply now to join Sara as Content Writer!

👍 Gefällt mir 💬 Kommentar

Appendix B – Job Vacancy Announcement Post

**EP Bank**

14.037 Follower
Jetzt • 



[+ Folgen](#) ...

Vacancy Content Writer!

We are looking for an inspired and dedicated Content Writer who always finds the right words that bring our corporate spirit to live. You will support our headquarters' team by creating texts which result in outstanding marketing campaigns and by optimizing SEO for our various communication channels. On top of that, your proofreading skills will make you the master of text quality. You are a real teamplayer, your English is excellent and words are your passion.

You want to get a closer look at how we work at EPBank? Read Sara's story about her work as Content Writer on our newsfeed.
<https://lnkd.in/eNySvp5>

And of course - check our vacancy!

 Gefällt mir  Kommentar

Appendix C – List of Questions

Question block 1: Demographics

1. “Age”
2. “Gender”
3. “Highest level of education”
4. “Current main occupation”
5. “I have a LinkedIn account”
6. “I use LinkedIn”

Question block 2: Intention to Apply*

1. “If I were searching for a job, I would apply for this job vacancy.”
2. “I would apply for this job vacancy.”
3. “I would not apply for this job vacancy.”
4. “Applying for this job vacancy is of no interest to me.”
5. “If I were searching for a job as content writer, I would apply for this job vacancy.”
6. “If I were searching for a job as content writer, I would not apply for this job vacancy.”
7. “If I were searching for a job as content writer, applying for this job vacancy would be of no interest to me.”

Question block 3: Organizational Attractiveness*

1. “For me, this company would be a good place to work.”
2. “I am not interested in the company except as a last resort.”
3. “I would make this company one of my first choices as an employer.”
4. “This company is attractive to me as an employer.”
5. “I would really like to work for this company.”
6. “I am interested in learning more about this company.”
7. “A job at this company is very appealing to me.”

Question block 5: Electronic-Word-of-Mouth*

1. “I would recommend this job vacancy to someone from my LinkedIn network by sending him/her a link of this post.”
2. “I would like this post on LinkedIn.”
3. “I would recommend this job vacancy to my LinkedIn network by liking the post.”
4. “I would leave a comment under this post on LinkedIn.”
5. “I would recommend this job vacancy to my LinkedIn network by sharing the post with it.”
6. “I would share this post with my LinkedIn network.”
7. “I would recommend this job vacancy to someone from my LinkedIn network by tagging him/her in the comment section below the post.”

Question block 6: Person-Organization fit*

1. “The things that I value in life are very similar to the things that this organization values.”
2. “My personal values match this organization’s values and culture.”
3. “This organization’s values and culture provide a good fit with the things that I value in life.”

4. “My values, goals and personality match this organization and the current employees in the organization.”
5. “The values and ‘personality’ of this organization reflect my own values and personality.”
6. “My values, goals and personality prevent me from fitting in this organization.”

Question block 7: Manipulation check

1. “Was there a picture of an employee in the vacancy endorsement?”**
2. “Was the person in the image making eye contact with you?”*
3. “Was there a quote of an employee in the vacancy endorsement?”*

**Measured on a 7-point Likert scale*

*** Measured with yes/no*

Appendix D – Descriptive Statistics by Condition

Descriptive Statistics Eye Contact Cues and Employee Testimonial

	Eye Contact Cues	Employee Testimonial	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
Intention to apply*	absent	absent	3.99	1.70	31
	absent	present	3.93	1.69	32
	present	absent	4.19	1.61	41
	present	present	3.90	1.51	33
Organizational attractiveness*	absent	absent	4.77	1.06	31
	absent	present	4.54	1.21	32
	present	absent	4.81	1.36	41
	present	present	4.54	1.37	33
Electronic-Word-of-Mouth*	absent	absent	3.26	1.01	31
	absent	present	3.19	1.28	32
	present	absent	3.33	1.54	41
	present	present	3.64	1.28	33
Person-Organization fit*	absent	absent	4.82	1.23	31
	absent	present	4.78	.95	32
	present	absent	4.69	1.01	41
	present	present	4.86	1.00	33

*Measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree/7=strongly agree)

Appendix E – Multicollinearity Test

Correlations

		Intention to apply	Organizational attractiveness	Eletronic- Word-of- Mouth	Person- Organization fit
Intention to apply	Pearson Correlation	1	.573	.363	.390
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
	N	184	184	184	184
Organizational attractiveness	Pearson Correlation	.573	1	.434	.511
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000
	N	184	184	184	184
Eletronic-Word- of-Mouth	Pearson Correlation	.363	.434	1	.253
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.001
	N	184	184	184	184
Person- Organization fit	Pearson Correlation	.390	.511	.253	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.001	
	N	184	184	184	184

Appendix F – Literature Log

Research question:

To what extent do corporate storytelling characteristics, including employee testimonials and employee images with eye contact cues communicated in a LinkedIn vacancy endorsement post affect a) intention to apply, b) perceived organizational attractiveness and c) electronic word-of-mouth of students and young professionals of the millennial generation and generation Y?

Sub research questions for literature search:

- What are desired outcomes of employer branding?
- What are the effects of corporate storytelling on organizational attractiveness, intention to apply and electronic-word-of-mouth?
- What are the effects of employee testimonials on intention to apply, organizational attractiveness and electronic-word-of-mouth?
- What are the effects of images with eye contact cues on intention to apply, organizational attractiveness and electronic-word-of-mouth?

Search Matrix

Constructs	Related terms	Broader terms	Narrower terms
Corporate storytelling	corporate stories, organizational storytelling	storytelling	corporate story
Employer branding	external employer branding, talent attraction, employer brand equity, employer brand image	talent attraction, applicant attraction, branding	employer brand
Organizational attractiveness	employer attractiveness, attractive organization, employer of choice	work place attractiveness	employer of choice
Intention to apply	application intention, intention to pursue	pursue behavior, action-oriented behavior	intention to apply
Electronic word-of-mouth	eWOM, electronic word-of-mouth	word-of-mouth, wom	sharing, liking, commenting
LinkedIn	LinkedIn recruitment,	social network sites, professional social	

	LinkedIn best practice	network sites	
Employee testimonial	employee testimonial	testimonials	employee testimonial
Eye contact cues	gaze direction, direct gaze, eye contact cues, watching eyes	gaze direction	eye contact

Log Book

	Date	Source	Search terms and strategies	Number hits
1	21-3-2020	Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY (“corporate storytelling”)	14
2	21-3-2020	Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY (“corporate stories”)	31
3	21-3-2020	Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY (“corporate stories” AND “employer branding”)	0
4	21-3-2020	Google Scholar	TITLE-ABS-KEY (“corporate storytelling” AND employer branding”)	27
5	21-3-2020	Google Scholar	TITLE-ABS-KEY (corporate storytelling” AND “definition” “since 2019”)	228
6	22-3-2020	Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY (“storytelling” AND “employer branding” “since 2016”)	0
7	22-3-2020	Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY (“employee testimonial”	7
8	22-3-2020	Google Scholar	“employee testimonial”	75
9	22-3-2020	Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY (“employee photo”)	2
10	22-3-2020	Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY (“corporate storytelling” AND branding”)	2
11	22-3-2020	Google Scholar	TITLE-ABS-KEY (“employer branding” AND “definition” “since 2016”)	3940
12	23-3-2020	Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY (“talent attraction” AND “employer branding”)	7
13	23-3-2020	Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY (“external employer branding”)	2
14	23-3-2020	Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY (“employer brand	14

			image”)	
15	23-3-2020	Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY (“employer attractiveness” OR “organizational attractiveness”)	211
16	05-04-2020	Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY (“employer brand equity”)	6
17	05-04-2020	Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY (“intention to apply” AND “employer branding”)	4
18	05-04-2020	Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY (“intention to apply”)	177
19	12-04-2020	Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY (“ewom” AND “recruitment”)	3
20	12-04-2020	Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY (“ewom” AND “employer branding”)	1
21	12-04-2020	Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY (“ewom”)	1035
22	12-04-2020	Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY (“direct gaze” AND “social media”)	1
23	16-04-2020	Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY (“ewom” AND “LinkedIn”)	2
24	16-04-2020	Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY (“LinkedIn” AND “employer branding”)	6

Reflection

At the beginning of the module, I firstly familiarized myself with the topics employer branding, and corporate storytelling by conducting extensive literature search in both directions. As starting point, I looked into definitions of the terms “corporate storytelling” and “employer branding” respectively. Specifically for employer branding, I realized that there is so much research existing in this regard that it is rather impossible not to combine the term with a different one to narrow the results down. By using Google Scholar, I did that foremost by using the publishing data filter, and adding search terms such as “corporate storytelling”- When using Scopus, I connected the term with other relevant terms for my research such as “talent attraction” and “external employer branding” as these were my fields of interest for my

research. Nonetheless, it was difficult to some extent to find literature from within the last four years, as much authors relate in their articles to the work of past authors.

I identified whether a source was relevant or not for my research by reading the headline, and the abstract. When the article appeared to have relevant information, I read it completely. I also checked for suggested articles on Scopus, as it was very useful.

In general, I first tried to find literature on Scopus, as it always presents scientific literature and presents the most recent literature at the top. In case I could not find fitting literature on Scopus, I used Google Scholar. In that way, I could identify the literature relevant for my research.