

# **The Influence of Emotions in Online Job Reviews on Causal Attribution, Corporate Image, Perceived Usefulness, and Intention to Apply**

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Master of Science

in Management

Submitted to Marion Garaus, PhD

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## **AFFIDAVIT**

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## ABSTRACT

Organizations worldwide face the challenge of finding the best-suited employees, as the quality of the workforce has directly been linked to the level of success within a company. This is especially relevant in current times, as the labor market is still in recovery after the global COVID-19 pandemic. While companies are increasingly hunting for skilled workers, employers are focusing their attention on job seekers' intentions to apply for an open position. With the rise of the internet, the applicants' opportunities to gain information about the job market have comprehensively changed. Job candidates are provided with massive electronic word-of-mouth platforms, that allow individuals to share their experiences with a company they have previously worked for or are currently employed at. Studies have suggested that these online reviews play a critical role in employees' willingness to apply to an organization. The topic of electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM), as well as its link to employee's job application intention, has extensively been researched, however, few studies have investigated the role of specific emotions utilized within these online job reviews. Moreover, as the effect of the negativity bias within online job reviews could further be developed, this research paper will specifically focus on the expression of negative emotions.

To address the currently existing research gap, this thesis quantitatively investigates how the three negative emotions anger (1), sadness (2), and fear (3) in online job reviews influence an individual's evaluation of a review, their causal attributions, the perceived usefulness, corporate image, and intention to apply for an advertised position. A one-factor between-subjects experiment with 256 participants was implemented, in which respondents were exposed to one of three online job reviews, which included emotional keywords representing either anger (1), sadness (2), or fear (3). The results of the experiment revealed that anger promotes a stronger negative evaluation of an online job review than sadness and fear. Moreover, it was found that the more negative an online job review is, the stronger the causal attribution toward the company is. Additionally, causal attribution negatively affects corporate image, while positively impacting the perceived usefulness of a review. Furthermore, it was revealed that corporate image has a statistically significant impact on an individual's intention to apply to a job, while the perceived usefulness of an online job review does not have a significant effect on an individual's intention to apply. Overall, the results of the experimental study denote the significance of negative online job reviews, corroborating various previous findings within this field.



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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

ANOVA – Analysis of Variance

eWOM – Electronic Word-of-Mouth

H – Hypothesis

RQ – Research Question

WOM – Word-of-Mouth



## 1 INTRODUCTION

The spread of the internet has caused the rise of a multitude of new digital media channels, providing individuals with the ability to exchange information online (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). Through the variety of different Web 2.0 tools, such as social network sites or job review sites, increasing amounts of consumers are communicating their opinions on products, services, work-related experiences, or companies (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). This digital exchange, or spread of information, has caused a new form of word of mouth to arise, namely electronic word of mouth, which researchers commonly refer to as one of the most influential forms of informal media (Huete-Alcocer, 2017).

Multiple online platforms are currently providing their customers with the means to share their experiences and opinions in regard to products, services or firms within almost all industries, to aid other users in their decision-making process (Könsgen et al., 2018). This new marketing tool has led to an amplification of the impact that individual reviews have on the reputation of a firm (Könsgen et al., 2018). A recent survey from 2021 suggests that 99.9% of consumers sometimes, or more often, actively read online reviews when shopping online (*Survey: The Ever-Growing Power of Reviews*, 2022). Moreover, 96% of consumers stated that they actively seek out negative reviews, signifying the importance that this information has to them (*Survey: The Ever-Growing Power of Reviews*, 2022). A multitude of researchers have investigated this heavily used tool, establishing electronic word of mouth to be an essential factor in consumer's information search, deeming it a highly significant marketing topic to investigate (Cheung & Thadani, 2012).

With the rise of the internet, the job market has completely shifted, providing job candidates with massive electronic word-of-mouth platforms, that allow individuals to share their experiences with others (Dellarocas, 2003). Digital employee review sites enable former and current members of staff to share their positive and negative feedback in relation to a specific organization (Könsgen et al., 2018). Some of the most commonly utilized websites that potential employees visit while considering a new employer include Glassdoor (<https://www.glassdoor.at/index.htm>), Great Place to Work (<https://www.greatplacetowork.com>), or Kununu (<https://www.kununu.com>) (Kaur & Dubey, 2014). Employee review sites provide the ability to both anonymously and publicly review an employer, making them a highly significant, independent, and uncontrolled source of information for individuals (Kaur & Dubey, 2014). Additionally, these websites supply customers with massive amounts of information. For example, the website Glassdoor currently has nearly 50 million online reviews, focusing on more than one million companies (Glassdoor, 2023). It has been suggested that this has become an increasingly important variable in job-seekers' decision-making processes when applying for a new job, as individuals view this information to be more trustworthy than corporate websites (Glassdoor, 2023). This is due to the weight that self-standing online articulations hold, which can directly shape

both the attitudes and behaviors of peers, and therefore also the image of the firm itself (Glassdoor, 2023). Research suggests that 74% of users of such platforms read through at least four reviews when forming an opinion about an organization (Glassdoor, 2023). This information is highly relevant to companies, because organizations worldwide face the challenge of finding the best-suited employees, as the quality of the workforce has directly been linked to the level of success within a company (Amini & Bienstock, 2014). This is especially significant in current times, as the labor market is still recovering from the massive shocks of the global COVID-19 pandemic (*The post-COVID-19 Rise in Labor Shortages*, 2022). As the job market is currently still in recovery, the job market has recuperated and employees are facing plenty of employment opportunities, forcing employers to try their best to attract the top talent (Glassdoor, 2023). While companies are increasingly hunting for skilled workers, employers are focusing their attention on the influences of job seeker's intention to apply for an open position (Lin, 2015). Since various studies suggest that online reviews play a key role in employee's willingness to apply to an organization, this information is becoming progressively more crucial for companies (Lin, 2015). Organizations recognize that in order to successfully hire top talent for their company, they need to understand their past, current, and potential future employee's needs and desires, for which they can utilize online job review platforms, in order to adapt to the current marketplace and become attractive for potential applicants (Glassdoor, 2023).

A recent study conducted by one of the most prominently utilized online job review websites, Glassdoor, has highlighted various significant assumptions concerning the relevance of online job reviews. The survey found that 86% of employees and job seekers are actively researching company reviews when deciding whether or not to apply for an open position (*40+ Stats for Companies to Keep in Mind for 2021*, 2021). This statistic signifies the relevance of electronic word-of-mouth in the job market, underpinning why it is such an important area of research. Additionally, respondents indicated that an employee's voice is three times more credible to them than the CEO's when discussing the working conditions within a firm (*40+ Stats for Companies to Keep in Mind for 2021*, 2021). This suggestion that electronic word-of-mouth is seen as more credible and trustworthy by consumers has also been proposed by a variety of different researchers, such as Cheung and Thadani (2012) or Fan and Miao (2012). Another interesting finding is that 50% of candidates indicated that they would not want to be employed by a company with a bad reputation, even for a higher salary (*40+ Stats for Companies to Keep in Mind for 2021*, 2021). This relates to another relevant aspect of electronic word-of-mouth, which is the influence it has on a variety of different variables, such as corporate image. Therefore it is vital to research the influence of electronic word-of-mouth in the context of online job reviews on corporate image, perceived usefulness, and intention to apply.

While the concept of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) has gained lots of popularity through the increased usage of digital tools as a form of marketing, there is still not enough research

about the emotions entailed within online reviews. Emotions are an essential construct of traditional word of mouth, but are even more abundant in eWOM, as consumers utilize explicit emotional expressions to compensate for the inability to communicate non-verbally online (Kim & Gupta, 2012). Research suggests that emotions in eWOM lack nonverbal cues such as the tone of voice or facial expressions, that are required for reciprocal affective responses, leading to the assumption that emotions in eWOM influence their receivers through a cognitive process (Kim & Gupta, 2012). Therefore, investigating the effect of emotions in online reviews on an individual's causal attribution is of essence to understanding the influences on different constructs. Attribution theory can be used as an underlying approach when explaining the reactions of individuals to online job reviews, as it refers to the readers' search for logic to aid them in investigating the cause of this review (Reimer & Benkenstein, 2018). Therefore, attribution theory explains the process of individuals questioning the reasoning of others when posting a review, which could influence the reader's perception of trust, credibility, and usefulness of the information (Reimer & Benkenstein, 2018). When investigating the role of attributions, it is important to also consider the influence of the negativity bias, which relates to the phenomenon that negative information has a greater influence on the perception, behavior, and decision-making process of an individual (Norris, 2021). Since negativity has a stronger impact on our behavior than something positive, it would be interesting to examine specific negative emotions, to test the influence of this, as well as its relation to the attribution theory (Norris, 2021).

Since job review websites are gaining traction from researchers, a specific focus on negative emotional key-words will benefit the currently existing investigations. At the moment, no research specifically focuses on the emotions of fear (1), anger (2), and sadness (3), and how these directly influence individuals' beliefs and actions. This paper does not only aim to uncover how each of these three emotions influences the evaluation and causal attribution of participants, but also how this in turn affects their perceptions of perceived usefulness, corporate image, and intention to apply.

## 1.1 Research Aims and Objectives

To investigate the topic of negative emotions within online job reviews, the following research questions have been formulated:

**RQ1:** What impact do different kinds of negative emotional words have on a job candidate's evaluation of an online job review?

**RQ2:** What impact do different kinds of negative emotional words have on a job candidate's causal attribution?

**RQ3:** What impact do different kinds of negative emotional words have on a job candidate's perceived usefulness of a job review?

**RQ4:** What impact do different kinds of negative emotional words have on a job candidate's perception of an organization's corporate image?

**RQ5:** How do negative emotional words in job reviews influence a job candidate's intention to apply?

**RQ6:** How does the perceived usefulness of a job review influence a job candidate's intention to apply?

**RQ7:** How does the perceived corporate image of a company influence a job candidate's intention to apply?

With the purpose of gathering generalizable findings to answer these seven research questions, an online experiment utilizing a sample acquired through an online panel will be administered. This experimental design will be utilized to test the causal relationships between three different negative emotions (anger, sadness and fear) embedded within online job reviews, and causal attribution, perceived usefulness, corporate image, and application intention. The online experiment will entail three groups, which each involve an emotion as a stimulus, to directly test the impact of each against the others.

## **1.2 Thesis Structure**

The following section aids as a brief description of the structure of this research paper, which can be deducted into five main sections: introduction (1), literature review (2), methodology (3), results (4) and discussion & conclusion (5).

Subsequently to the introduction, the literature review will follow, which utilizes relevant existing scientific research on the most important topics in relation to this thesis. This allows for the gathering of relevant insights into the subjects of electronic word of mouth, online job reviews, emotions, the causal attribution theory, corporate image, perceived usefulness, and intention to apply.

The third section of this research paper is the methodology, which focuses on explaining the chosen study design, research model, and procedure. This segment involves information regarding the structure of the online experiment, the sampling method utilized to gather participants, as well as the data collection.

This is then followed by the depiction and analysis of the findings of the online experiment. Within this section, relevant statistical tests will be utilized to answer all of the proposed research questions.

Lastly, the final section includes an explanation of the limitations of this study and proposals for improvements in future studies. This can then be implemented to employ relevant managerial implications.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The following section of this master thesis summarizes and discusses existing literature related to the topic of the influence of emotions within online job reviews, as these will guide the further quantitative research conducted within this paper. The relevant literature and theories that are discussed within this chapter are a necessary prerequisite when answering the six prompted research questions. This section can be divided into eight subcategories, which are: a definition of electronic word of mouth (section 2.1), job reviews (section 2.2), a definition of emotions (section 2.3), causal attribution theory (section 2.4), corporate image (section 2.5), intention to apply (section 2.6), and the hypotheses of this thesis (section 2.7). The literature review begins with the concept of electronic word of mouth since this is the essential marketing outcome variable that will further be investigated within the context of the second subsection, job reviews. Understanding emotions is highly relevant within this research approach, as the online experiment will investigate negative emotional keywords (anger, sadness and fear) that will be manipulated within an online experiment. In addition to this, the causal attribution theory will serve as a theoretical basis for developing an understanding of how these emotional key-words influence corporate image (section 2.5), perceived usefulness (section 2.6.1) and intention to apply (section 2.6). Lastly, all relevant hypotheses as well as a conceptual framework will be developed to highlight the interconnectivity of all individual parts of these sections.

### 2.1 A Definition of Electronic Word of Mouth

#### 2.1.1 Traditional Word-of-Mouth

Humans are social beings that are naturally inclined to share their opinions, beliefs, or experiences with others (Southall, 2017). When making a decision such as purchasing a product, trying out a service, or applying for a new job, research suggests that individuals tend to seek out information from others whom they see as a trusted source (Gildin, 2003). These reviews or testimonials that are shared among individuals act as informal advice about products, services, or jobs, and are commonly referred to as word-of-mouth (WOM) (Carl, 2006). Defining the term word-of-mouth (WOM) is difficult, as this is a complex marketing theory that has undergone a variety of changes throughout the age of digitalization, as the power dynamic between customers and organizations has rapidly shifted (Carl, 2006). One of the earliest definitions of WOM was proposed by Arndt (1967), who suggested that it can be described as face-to-face communications that are not tied to a commercial entity. The researcher Bone (1992) later added that this marketing concept refers to a group phenomenon, rather than to an individual communication, making the overall definition more complex. With the rise of electronic mediums, this definition was adapted by Buttle (1998) to fit the ever-changing environment of marketing. Buttle (1998) added that WOM can be electronically mediated, and may entail rewards or incentives

from companies to consumers. For the purpose of this thesis, with regard to the various definitions currently available, the term WOM will be defined as: “face-to-face (or person-to-person) verbal communication in non-commercial contexts” (Nakayama et al., 2010, p. 2).

Studies suggest that consumers highly value opinions that are directly expressed to them, especially if a recommendation is coming from a trusted source (Bughin et al., 2010). While marketers focus a vast majority of their time and resources on the creation of traditional advertising campaigns, consumers still tend to highly rely on personal recommendations in their decision-making (Bughin et al., 2010). As companies witnessed that their audience is significantly losing trust in their traditional advertising methods, WOM gained popularity, due to the persuasiveness of this communicational form (Nakayama et al., 2010). With the massive amounts of rapid information consumers have available to them, it quickly becomes overwhelming for individuals, who therefore become skeptical of the traditional marketing and advertising techniques companies utilize (Bughin et al., 2010). Interpersonal exchanges allow individuals to gain knowledge about a product, service, or job that goes beyond what the company is portraying through their advertisement, making it more valuable to consumers (Huete-Alcocer, 2017). This has led to a significant shift in the power dynamic between consumers and companies, as the way individuals make their purchasing decisions has changed (Bughin et al., 2010). Studies suggest that WOM is seen as the most important source of information for customers, influencing both their buying decision and intended behavior (Huete-Alcocer, 2017). This is especially true in regard to intangible products or anything difficult to evaluate before having consumed it, such as services, tourism, or jobs (Huete-Alcocer, 2017). Therefore, WOM has heavily been used as a consumer-dominated marketing strategy, appealing to marketers because its ability to overcome consumers' resistance to a product, service, or job is linked to significantly lower costs than traditional advertising (Trusov, 2010).

WOM is highly versatile and exists in a variety of different forms, such as oral, written or electronic (Berger and Iyengar, 2013). Oral word-of-mouth includes all forms of communication that only occur orally, therefore in the form of a face-to-face conversation or a phone call (Berger and Iyengar, 2013). In contrast to this is written WOM, which can be found in emails, text messages or letters, therefore existing over a wider range of mediums than oral WOM (Berger and Iyengar, 2013). Oral and written WOM are both categorized as traditional forms of word-of-mouth, while electronic WOM is a newer and more complex marketing concept (Berger and Iyengar, 2013). To gain a greater understanding of eWOM, this concept will be investigated in detail within the following subsection.

### **2.1.2 Electronic Word-of-Mouth**

With the rise of the internet in the mid-1990's, consumers' methods of interacting with one another rapidly changed, leading to the formation of a new marketing method called electronic

word of mouth (eWOM) (Chu, 2021). Quickly becoming one of the most commonly utilized consumer-dominated marketing strategies, eWOM is an adaptation of the two previously mentioned traditional forms of WOM (Nakayama et al., 2010). Through rapid digitalization and the rise and expansion of the internet and social media platforms, eWOM has been able to materialize and can be defined as: “all informal communications directed at consumers through internet-based technology related to the usage or characteristics of particular goods and services, or their sellers” (Litvin et al., 2008, p. 461). Customers are enabled to post their reviews and opinions of products or companies on various mediums, such as review websites, social networking sites, blogs, or discussion forums (Cheung & Thandani, 2012). It is seen as a notably relevant informational source for customers, as users distinguish electronic word of mouth to have higher credibility and trustworthiness than knowledge directly coming from a company (Litvin et al., 2008). Findings from this heavily researched topic suggest that electronic word of mouth directly impacts customers’ attitudes, intentions, and behavior (Buttle, 1998). Additionally, the importance of this concept in marketing arises from its effectiveness in changing customer’s either neutral or negative attitude to positive, which is nine times as successful as advertisements (Day, 1971).

When discussing eWOM, it is of essence to differentiate between the various types of eWOM available to customers. The type, and therefore also the effect, of eWOM, highly depends on the electronic medium through which it is spread (Litvin et al., 2008). These can vary based on whether they are synchronous, such as sending a direct message, or asynchronous, such as blogs, and how many customers are being linked with each other (Litvin et al., 2008). Litvin et al. (2008) have presented a typology of the different forms of electronic word-of-mouth channels, as can be seen in Figure 1.

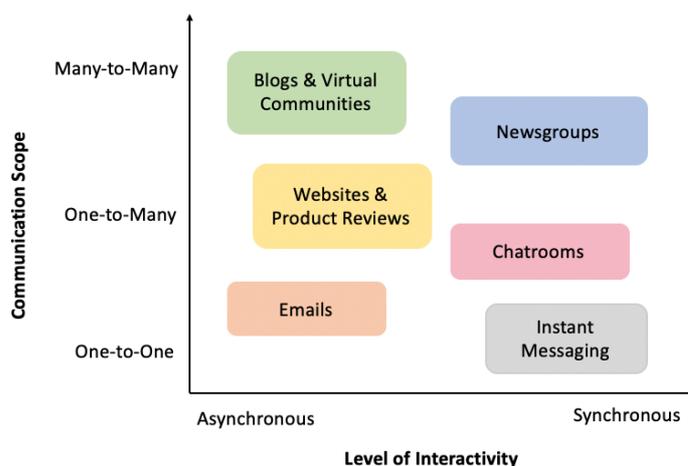


FIGURE 1: TYPOLOGY OF EWOM CHANNELS (LITVIN ET AL., 2008)

The typology seen in Figure 1 depicts the six different types of electronic word-of-mouth channels that Litvin et al. (2008) present within their respective research paper. When categorizing

the different eWOM channels, the communicational scope, ranging from one-to-one to many-to-many, as well as the level of interactivity, ranging from asynchronous to synchronous, was investigated (Hoffman & Novak, 1996). The first channel that is visible is emails, which is an asynchronous one-to-one medium focusing primarily on the aspect of privacy, similar to instant messages which are synchronous (Litvin et al., 2008). The use of email distribution as a form of word of mouth is especially lucrative in marketing, as it is a simple and highly efficient method of communication between an organization and its customers (Hoffman & Novak, 1996). The second type of medium is a website, which is categorized as an asynchronous one-to-many medium (Litvin et al., 2008). This can be utilized to create the first 'buzz' to encourage and enable further eWOM (Litvin et al., 2008). A simple tool to incorporate eWOM on a website is to allow customers the option to access the options of previous users, or to post their own experience (Hoffman & Novak, 1996). This technique is frequently used and can be viewed on almost every online purchasing page (Litvin et al., 2008). The additional channels include blogs and virtual communities, newsgroups, and chatrooms (Hoffman & Novak, 1996). These communication modes differ based on their level of interactivity and communication scope, but all offer organizations new digital means to create 'buzz' about their company or their products (Litvin et al., 2008). As the purpose of this research paper is to investigate online job reviews, the primary type of channel that will be focused on is the website and product reviews category.

The impact of eWOM is commonly seen as a highly effective marketing strategy, due to the large impact this form of social communication can have on individuals utilizing digital platforms (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). The term social communication can be defined as "the process by which an individual (the communicator) transmits stimuli (the verbal symbols) to modify the behavior of other individuals (communicatees)" (Hovland, 1948, p. 317). This concept of Hovland (1948) employs four main elements, which are:

- **The Communicator:** The individual, or the source of the information, who transmits information being communicated to others.
- **The Stimulus:** The message being sent from the communicator to others.
- **The Receiver:** The audience of the communicator, who respond to the stimulus they are presented with.
- **The Response:** The response that occurs due to the stimulus, which originates from the receiver.

Electronic word of mouth is a new type of social communication, as it incorporates digital content (stimulus) and evokes both customers that seek new information (receivers) and customers sharing their opinions (communicators) (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). The researchers Cheung & Thadani (2012) have mapped out an integrative model depicting the interrelationships among the previously discussed elements of social communication within electronic word of mouth, which can be seen in Figure 2.

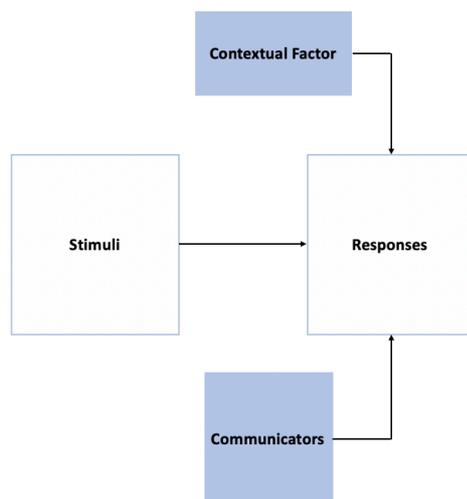


FIGURE 2: INTEGRATIVE FRAMEWORK OF THE IMPACT OF eWOM COMMUNICATION (CHEUNG & THANDI, 2012)

Figure 2 portrays the research model proposed by Cheung & Thandi (2012) in which the four previously described elements are visually portrayed. For this thesis, their originally highly complex model was broken down into a simpler construction, entailing the stimulus (1), which can include the valence or argument quality, the contextual factor (2), which is the platform, the communicators (3) consisting of trustworthiness, expertise, and attribution, and lastly the response (4) which can be measured as the purchasing intention (Cheung & Thandi, 2012). As can be seen in Figure 2, Cheung & Thandi (2012) reported a direct effect of the stimulus, contextual factor, and communicators on the response of consumers, suggesting that a multitude of different variables play a significant role in consumer's purchasing decisions. This highlights that the concept of eWOM is highly complex and dependent on a variety of different constructs which interplay with one another, influencing the effect that a message can have (Cheung & Thandi, 2012).

Simply put, customers read eWOM to help them decide on whether or not to make a purchasing decision, however, this decision is affected by personal attributes, the perceived quality or expertise of the communicator, trust, as well as many other factors (Fan & Miao, 2012). Commonly researched constructs concerning electronic word of mouth are attitude, trust, credibility, usefulness, purchase intention, and final purchase decision, which can act as either the communicators or responses to the implementation of eWOM communication (Cheung & Thandi, 2012). Fan & Miao (2012) report that the concepts of trust and credibility are closely intertwined and refer to how individuals determine what to expect from a certain situation, aiding in the reduction of uncertainty. As digital reviews hinder customers from physically interacting with products, services or jobs, they are forced to solely rely on their expertise when determining the level of credibility of an online review (Fan & Miao, 2012). A multitude of studies have suggested that both information usefulness and information credibility have a positive effect on eWOM adoption (Cheung & Thandi, 2012). Moreover, additional factors of the message itself, such as the valence, are also noted as persuasive effects in existing literature (Cheung & Thandi, 2012).

Positively framed eWOM focuses on the positive aspects of a product encouraging others to purchase this, while negatively framed eWOM discusses what is wrong with a problem, discouraging others from making a purchasing decision (Cheung & Thandi, 2012). Research suggests that customers focus on negatively valenced eWOM to a greater extent, giving more weight to negative reviews than to positive ones, leading to the conclusion that this has a stronger influence than positive eWOM (Cheung & Thandi, 2012). This occurs due to the negativity bias, which is the principle that “bad is stronger than good” (Baumeister, 1997). For this reason, within the realm of this research paper, primarily negative eWOM will be the focus of the further quantitative investigation.

The presented model is of essence to this research paper, as an individual’s response to specific stimuli, in the form of different emotions, will be measured. Due to the findings of the negativity bias, this research paper has decided to narrow down the emotions within online reviews and primarily focus on three negative emotions, which are anger, fear and sadness. The negative emotions will in this case portray the stimuli category, the contextual factor will be an online job review platform, and communicators such as usefulness and corporate image will interplay to investigate the response, measures as an individual’s intention to apply for a job.

### 2.1.3 WOM vs. eWOM

To gain a greater understanding of eWOM it is helpful to directly compare it to the more traditional forms of WOM, in order to highlight the changes that this marketing concept has gone through within the era of digitalization (Huete-Alcocer, 2017). The investigation of traditional WOM and eWOM conducted by Huete-Alcocer (2017) has resulted in the finding of four main differences between the two constructs, which include credibility (1), privacy (2), diffusion speed (3), and accessibility (4). These categories as well as the exact differentiation between WOM and eWOM can be seen in Table 1.

	<b>WOM</b>	<b>eWOM</b>
<b>Credibility</b>	The receiver of the information knows the communicator (positive influence on credibility)	Anonymity between the communicator and the receiver of the information (negative influence on credibility)
<b>Privacy</b>	The conversation is private, interpersonal (via dialogs), and conducted in real time	The shared information is not private, and because it is written down, can be viewed by anyone and at any time
<b>Diffusion Speed</b>	Messages spread slowly. Users must be present when the information is being shared	Messages are conveyed more quickly between users, and via the Internet, can be conveyed at any time
<b>Accessibility</b>	Less accessible	Easily accessible

TABLE 1: DIFFERENCES BETWEEN WOM AND eWOM (HUETE-ALCOCER, 2017)

### **Credibility:**

As depicted in Table 1, the first major difference between WOM and eWOM that Huete-Alcocer (2017) discussed was in terms of credibility as an information source, as this can directly influence consumer's attitudes regarding a product, service, or job. When utilizing traditional forms of WOM the information receiver already knows who is sharing information with them, which allows them to easily identify how credible or trustworthy this source is to them (Huete-Alcocer, 2017). However, through the internet eWOM encompasses anonymity between individuals which could negatively affect the messenger's credibility in the eyes of the receiver, especially when discussing intangible products which are seen as high risk, such as tourism services or job platforms (Huete-Alcocer, 2017). However, to counteract this potential pitfall of eWOM, companies have implemented features that allow customers to see whether or not a communicator has previous experience with what they are reviewing (Huete-Alcocer, 2017). Studies suggest that providing a form of previous experience gives an online review higher credibility, therefore reducing a consumer's perceived risk (Huete-Alcocer, 2017).

### **Privacy:**

The level of privacy of a message is a second feature that distinctly differentiates traditional WOM and eWOM (Huete-Alcocer, 2017). As traditional WOM is usually shared in face-to-face conversations or text messages that are only available to the people who are interacting, it is seen as more private than eWOM, which is visible to many anonymous people (Huete-Alcocer, 2017). Due to eWOM's massive scalability, information being presented is available to all consumers, rather than being limited to one's surrounding such as friends or family, when employing oral or written word of mouth, which shifts individual's intentions of spreading eWOM (Nieto & Munoz-Gallego, 2014).

### **Diffusion Speed:**

Another notable difference between the two forms of WOM is the diffusion speed of messages, which has significantly increased with the utilization of technological advances (Huete-Alcocer, 2017). Moreover, the reviews or comments being published online are not only spread quicker, and more accessible to consumers, but are also far more persistent than traditional word of mouth, due to the information being archived and therefore available for an infinite amount of time (Wang and Fesenmaier, 2004). Consumers are aware that their statements about a product, service, or job will have significantly different implications when made online, rather than when made in person (Huete-Alcocer, 2017).

### **Accessibility:**

The final distinction can be referred to as accessibility, which directly links to the main purpose of online platforms available for sharing information, which is to create easily accessible reviews

that are available to anyone and persistent over time (Huete-Alcocer, 2017). Electronic word of mouth incorporates both active and passive consumers, allowing individuals to either actively share their opinions, or to only passively consume what is readily available to them (Wang and Fesenmaier, 2004). Additionally, eWOM involves multiple methods of exchange, as it does not require all communicators to be present at the same time, unlike traditional WOM, making it more accessible to a greater amount of people (Wang and Fesenmaier, 2004).

It is important to note that eWOM provides a multitude of advantages to companies, as the use of technologies allows corporations to gain a greater understanding of their customer's opinions (Huete-Alcocer, 2017). Listening to customer's needs and wants has become significantly easier for companies through the use of eWOM, providing them with new opportunities to consider this feedback and make adequate adjustments to their products or advertising (Huete-Alcocer, 2017). Therefore, eWOM can be seen as a tool that is beneficial for both organizations and individuals, increasing the overall transparency of information in regard to products, services, or jobs (Huete-Alcocer, 2017)

After thoroughly having discussed traditional WOM, eWOM, and the differences between these two, the next section of the literature review will discuss the contextual factor that this thesis aims to investigate. Gaining an understanding of eWOM as a marketing method aids in creating a foundation necessary for further understanding job review platforms and emotions entailed within the reviews found on such websites.

## **2.2 Job Reviews**

Employees are often seen as one of the most valuable assets a company can have, as studies suggest that higher employee satisfaction and a greater focus on human resources can directly link to better organizational performance (Luo et al., 2016). This positive link between customer satisfaction and improved performance has been found in various studies, such as Shneider et al. (2003), who found that employee satisfaction with security, pay and workgroup positively impacts the companies' return on assets and earnings per share. Findings from Edmans (2011) align with those of Shneider et al. (2003), as the results suggest that organizations with higher employee satisfaction demonstrated higher long-run stock returns. Moreover, a more recent study conducted by Huang et al. (2016) investigated online job reviews on the platform Glassdoor and found that a statistically significant link exists between the job satisfaction of employees and their companies' market value. Findings from all of these studies help to highlight the significance of employee satisfaction, and therefore also the importance of understanding what causes employee satisfaction or dissatisfaction, and what impact online job reviews have on individuals who are looking for a new place of employment.

Through the rise of eWOM, online employee review sites have been gaining popularity, as websites such as Glassdoor now have millions of reviews available for their customer at any given

point in time (Könsgen et al., 2018). Online job review sites allow former and current employees to anonymously, yet publicly, write reviews about their either current or former employees (Könsgen et al., 2018). These reviews provide readers with insights into companies that go beyond what is published on their official websites, giving them relevant additional information they could not receive elsewhere (Könsgen et al., 2018). As employees, the internal stakeholders, have a greater amount of knowledge about a company than individuals who are considering applying, a form of informational asymmetry is created (Könsgen et al., 2018). The uneven distribution of information causes individuals who are seeking a job to search for as much information about a company as possible, to reduce the existing lack of information (Könsgen et al., 2018). Therefore, online job reviews aid individuals in the form of signals, that they can utilize within their decision-making process, shaping their opinion of certain companies (Könsgen et al., 2018). Similarly to other forms of eWOM, customer review sites are completely independent of a company, making them a more credible source of information for potential future employees (Könsgen et al., 2018).

Recent studies suggest that a company's online employee feedback can directly, either positively or negatively, influence a firm's attractiveness to employees, or even the organizations overall reputation (Könsgen et al., 2018). In comparison to other forms of eWOM, such as for the use of purchasing a product or service, online job reviews are utilized when making a decision on where to work, which necessitates a far greater fear of post-decision dissonance, as making the wrong choice will have high costs associated with it (Könsgen et al., 2018). Therefore investigating this very sensitive type of eWOM can be highly valuable, and significantly contribute to existing marketing literature (Könsgen et al., 2018).

Online job reviews are known to entail a wide range of cues that help readers evaluate the information being presented to them, such as the number of available reviews, the quality of the writing of the review, ratings from other users, or information about the writer of the review (Lopes et al., 2020). These cues can differ based on the source of the information, making them highly versatile and important to consider when studying online job review platforms (Lopes et al., 2020). To simplify all of the currently present types of online job reviews, this research paper will only investigate one specific website, which will be utilized as a basis for the online experiment that will later entail reviews with different emotional key-words.

To gain a greater understanding of online employee review sites, the example of the popular website "Glassdoor" will be investigated. Glassdoor defines itself as "a thriving community for workplace conversations, driven by a simple mission: helping people everywhere find jobs and companies they love" (Glassdoor, 2023). The purpose of this type of online job review platform is to enable the provision of complete transparency, to allow for positive changes within the workplace to be made (Glassdoor, 2023). Ensuring that a digital platform exists in which employees can discuss their experiences within a company, creates information transparency that

aims to reduce the abundance of toxic work environments, pay gaps, or discrimination, positively influencing organizations (Glassdoor, 2023). This website targets job seekers (1), whose application processes are simplified, as well as employees (2), who are encouraged to join conversations regarding their workplace, and also employers (3), who can gain valuable insights into their workforces opinions, while also being provided with the opportunity to respond to what is being said about them (Glassdoor, 2023). In 2023, the online job review platform has accumulated over 115 million online reviews, along with over 55 million unique monthly visitors, and 2.3 million employer clients (Glassdoor, 2023).

The website allows its users to search for any company that might interest them and then provides a company overview, entailing online reviews, jobs currently available, the salaries that have been provided by users, Q&A, interviews, benefits and diversity at the chosen organization (Glassdoor, 2023). When looking at the available online employee review, the following features are available, as can also be seen in Figure 3 (Glassdoor, 2023):

1. An overall rating that consists of the work/life balance (1), cultures & values (2), diversity & inclusion (3), career opportunities (4), compensation and benefits (5), and senior management (6).
2. A short title summarizing the reviewer's overall impression of the company, as well as the information available within the summary.
3. The status of the reviewer, which can either include being a former employee or a current employee, which includes the number of years the reviewer has worked at the company.
4. The online review is then structured into first the "pros" of the review and then the "cons" that the employee wants to highlight.
5. Lastly, online users are provided with the ability to indicate if the review they have read was helpful to them or not, to make it easier for future users to quickly find the most useful reviews.

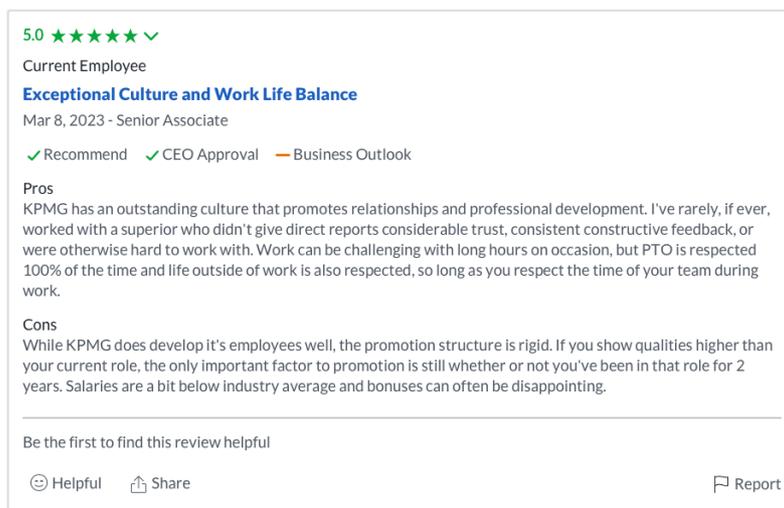


FIGURE 3: EXEMPLAR REVIEW OF THE COMPANY KPMG TAKEN FROM GLASSDOOR

### 2.3 A Definition of Emotions

Emotions play a highly significant role in everyday experiences, as they are fundamental to human lives (Gu et al., 2019). The topic and study of emotional behavior is vastly extensive, making the term “emotions” challenging to define. The terminology related to the topic of emotions is highly complex and often inconsistently used within existing literature, making it essential to differentiate between emotion (1), moods (2), and attitudes (3).

According to Bagozzi et al. (1999, p. 184), an emotion relates to: “a mental state of readiness that arises from cognitive appraisals of events or thoughts; has a phenomenological tone; is accompanied by physiological processes; is often expressed physicals (e.g., in gestures, posture, facial features); and may result in specific actions to affirm or cope with the emotion, depending on its nature and meaning for the person having it”. Researchers suggest that an emotion is “part of attitude and is a complex and stable evaluation and experience in physiology which is consistent with inherent feeling and intentions in attitude” (Yan et al., 2018; p. 349).

Drawing the line between an emotion and a mood is seen as challenging in existing literature, however, these terms can be differentiated through the usage of time and intensity (Bagozzi et al., 1999). A mood is tends to last from a few hours to a few days, which is distinctly longer than a single emotion, while a mood is also referred to as having a lower intensity than an emotion (Bagozzi et al., 1999). Moreover, an emotion is said to have an object or referent, making it intentional, while moods are described as nonintentional (Bagozzi et al., 1999). Attitudes have been defined as evaluative judgments, which entail the two correlation components of affective and cognitive dimensions (Bagozzi et al., 1999). They are considered as instances of affect, that are utilized to express emotions (Bagozzi et al., 1999).

The complexity of distinguishing between an emotion (1), mood (2), and attitudes (3), arises from all three concepts being described as a “mental state of readiness” (Bagozzi et al., 1999, p.184). However, important to understand is that the state of readiness is more intense if characterized by an emotion, than it is in context with a mood or attitude (Bagozzi et al., 1999). Another aspect of differentiation originates from the way an emotion arises, as these are said to have a referent (Bagozzi et al., 1999). Emotions are a response to attitudes of other individuals in regard to something of relevance to a person (Bagozzi et al., 1999). Different individuals can have different emotional reactions to the same event, as it is not a circumstance that causes an emotion, but rather the personal psychological appraisal made by the person who is interpreting what is happening (Bagozzi et al., 1999).

After having identified an adequate definition of the relevant constructs in relation to the topic of emotions, discussing what types of emotions exist and how to classify these is of essence. Edell and Burke (1987) investigated emotions with respect to marketing in the form of advertisements and found that within their research, emotions fell into one of three scales, which include: upbeat feelings (1), negative feelings (2) and warm feelings (3). These findings are in line with those of Holbrook and Batra (1987), who similarly found three categories for emotions, which they named pleasure (1), arousal (2), and domination (3). The three-factor approach of the two mentioned researchers has also been referred to as a two-factor approach by other researchers, such as Westbrook (1987), who defined the factors as a positive effect (1) or negative effect (2). To visually demonstrate the emotions entailed in a two-factor approach, the two-factor structure of effect model created by Watson and Tellegen (1985) has been replicated in Figure 4.

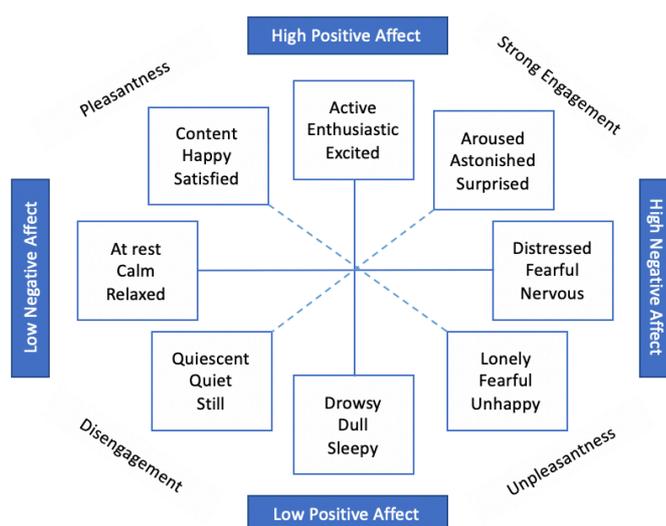


FIGURE 4: CONSENSUAL MOOD STRUCTURE DIAGRAM (WATSON & TELLEGEN, 1985)

The visual seen in Figure 4 depicts a model of the structure of emotions, which can be plotted around two orthogonal axes labeled high positive affect and low positive affect or high negative affect and low negative affect (Bagozzi et al., 1999). This research model suggests that

emotions can be placed in bipolar categories, such as happy-sad or calm-nervous, suggesting that emotions that are closer to one another are more similar, while the center can be seen as neutral (Bagozzi et al., 1999).

The different theories of emotions have been heavily researched over the centuries, originating from Darwin's (1872) basic emotion theory, which then led to the theoretical approach of the appraisal theory by various researchers such as Arnold (1963) and Frijda (1986). To gain the necessary understanding of emotions, within the scope of this research, the appraisal theory of emotions (1), the basic emotion theory (2), as well as the feelings as information theory (3) will individually be reviewed.

### **2.3.1 Cognitive Appraisal Theory**

After having investigated emotions, the relationship between thoughts, emotions, and actions will be discussed. In 1984, Lazarus and Folkman presented the concept of the cognitive appraisal theory, which argues that thoughts are required to feel an emotion. Therefore, the interpretation of something directly influences the emotions felt because of it (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) suggested that humans continuously, at any given time, appraise certain stimuli, which in turn causes emotions.

The appraisal theory of emotions presumes various basic assumptions, necessary for understanding the theory as a whole (Ellsworth & Scherer, 2003). These assumptions include the idea that emotions are a process and that an individual's evaluation of their current, remembered, or imagined circumstances can determine emotions (Ellsworth & Scherer, 2003). Within the appraisal theory of emotions, the concept of appraisal is seen as a significant component in an emotional episode, as the appraisal is described as a trigger (Moors et al., 2013). Appraisal theorists share the view that appraisal causes an emotion since it is a determinant of the physiological response, behavior, feeling, and quality of action (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

The cognitive appraisal theory is one of three commonly implemented approaches to studying emotions, alongside categories and dimensions (Watson & Spence, 2007). This approach specifically focuses on predicting emotions within a given context and how certain emotions influence human behavior (Watson & Spence, 2007). As previously mentioned, appraisals are what attribute meaning to an occurrence, and therefore directly determine the significance and emotional response of an individual (Biggs et al., 2017). More specifically, Moors et al. (2013, p. 3) defined the term appraisal as: "a process that detects and assesses the significance of the environment for well-being". As events are heavily dimensional and therefore complex, researchers have been trying to identify the number of appraisals at a certain event, but results differ, as Roseman (1991) suggests five appraisals, while Smith and Ellsworth (1985) have identified six, while others suggest the presence of even more (Watson & Spence, 2007). Within the realm of this research

paper, the following six appraisals will be discussed: outcome desirability (1), agency (2), certainty (3), fairness (4), attention (5), and coping potential (6).

### ***Outcome Desirability***

The first appraisal, outcome desirability is utilized for evaluating how desirable or undesirable, a given situation is for an individual (Watson & Spence, 2007).

### ***Agency***

The second type of characteristic an event can have that directly relates to emotions is referred to as agency (Watson & Spence, 2007). An agent is commonly known as the who or what is in control of an occurring stimulus event, which could include either the appraiser of an individual, another person, or even the circumstances (Watson & Spence, 2007). Researchers have found that this specific appraisal is more interrelated with negative emotions, rather than positive emotions, as negative events have a higher likelihood of causing individuals to try and understand what has happened (Peeters & Czapinski, 1990). When Folkes (1987) investigated the relationship between emotions and product failures of an airline, their findings suggested that an individual's inferences about the reason why a product failed directly correlates to the degree of anger they feel because of the circumstances. Moreover, Folkes (1987) suggest that the agency is also interlinked to the desire of an individual to complain about a problem or negative occurrence, suggesting that this attribution is highly relevant when investigating negative emotions, such as anger, fear and sadness.

### ***Certainty***

The next relevant concept that needs to be discussed is certainty. Certainty is commonly referred to as the perceived likelihood of something happening (Watson & Spence, 2007). Events that have occurred in the past are seen as certain, while anything that has not yet occurred is uncertain (Watson & Spence, 2007). The researchers Watson & Spence (2007) suggest that how certain an individual is of something occurring will influence their feeling about the situation. The findings of Watson & Spence (2007) are in line with the outcome of the investigation of Ruth et al. (2002), who suggested that a high connection between consumers' certainty and their emotions exist. In addition to this, Ruth et al. (2002) suggested that emotions such as love and happiness are directly linked to a high degree of certainty, while fear and uneasiness correlate to a high degree of uncertainty.

### ***Fairness***

Fairness is the fourth type of appraisal that this research paper will focus on, and relates to the extent that an occurrence is perceived as morally appropriate by an individual (Watson & Spence, 2007). The fairness appraisal has closely been linked with the agency, as deciding what

is fair directly relates to the ability to explain an individual's behavioral response to a certain circumstance (Watson & Spence, 2007).

### **Attention**

The appraisal of attention has been defined as the voluntary or involuntary focus of an individual's consciousness (Watson & Spence, 2007). This is of essence to the topic of cognitive appraisal theory, as an individual must first attend be focused or attentive towards something for it to be an appraisal, however, Watson & Spence (2007), argue that this is a proceeding step to the appraisal process.

### **Coping Potential**

The sixth, and final appraisal is referred to as coping potential and relates to an individual's perception of how possible it is for them to either change or deal with the given situation (Watson & Spence, 2007).

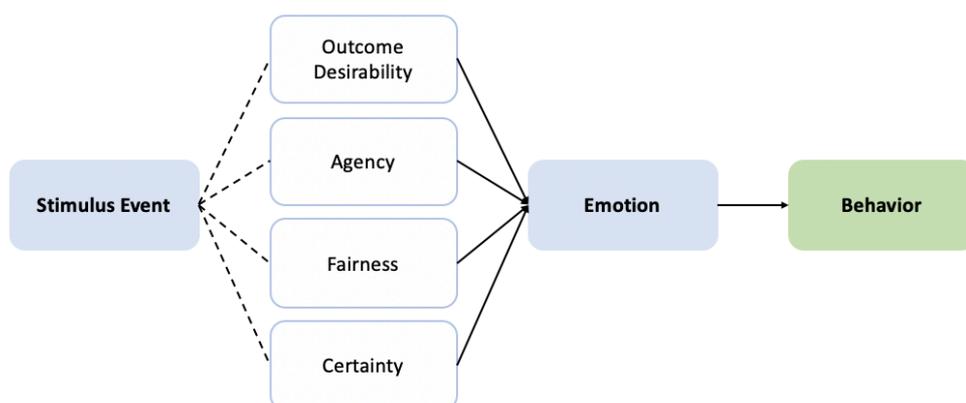


FIGURE 5: MODEL OF COGNITIVE APPRAISAL THEORY (WATSON & SPENCE, 2007)

Figure 5 depicts the model of the cognitive appraisal theory that was proposed by Watson & Spence in 2007. This theory signifies specific characteristics of a situation or circumstance that leads to emotions that then impact consumer's behavior (Watson & Spence, 2007). According to this theory, emotions act as a mediator between a situation and the outcome, or more specifically their resulting behavior (Watson & Spence, 2007). The findings of the researchers Watson & Spence (2007) suggest that consumption emotions are predictable through the use of four key appraisals, as previously discussed.

### **2.3.2 Basic Emotion Theory**

Within the study of emotions, one of the most commonly referenced theories is known as the basic emotion theory. This theory originated in ancient Greece and Russia, with Darwin being the first to publish his evolutionary theory of emotions in 1872. Within this theory, Darwin

(1872) discusses the idea that emotions could be seen as evolutionary adaptations, suggesting that emotions are genetically passed down, causing individuals with the same genes to feel the same emotions within the same event. The basic emotion theory has subsequently been researched by various psychologists, such as Ekman, who established and defined the six basic emotions in 1969 (Gu et al., 2019). Ekman et al. argued that emotions can be seen as a process that includes automatic appraisals which have been shaped by our past (Ekman et al., 1969). He suggests that they aid us in the preparation of dealing with something relevant without requiring lots of brain power (Ekman et al., 1969). Therefore, emotional responses occur universally, and naturally, without an individual actively choosing to feel them (Ekman et al., 1969). Moreover, within the basic emotion theory, researchers have suggested that emotions are a distinct and brief state that involves the physiological, subjective and expressive components that allow individuals to respond in evolutionarily adaptive ways (Keltner et al., 2019).

Within the context of the basic emotion theory, the word “basic” entails that emotions are discrete (1) and have evolved through natural adaptations of humans throughout time (2) (Ekman & Cordaro, 2011). The first characteristic of basic emotions, being discrete, refers to their ability to be distinguishable from one another, through the use of facial, vocal, and event-based data within research (Ekman & Cardaro, 2011). In addition to this, Ekman & Cordaro (2011) have suggested that every basic emotion occurs due to human biological mechanisms that we require to react to universal and fundamental life tasks.

To further understand the basic emotion theory, it is of essence to discuss which criteria must be met for the classification as a basic emotion. Izard (2009) suggests that all emotions fall into one of two categories, which are either basic emotions (1) or emotion schemas (2) (Scarantino, 2012). Basic emotions were defined as: “affective processes generated by evolutionarily old brain systems upon the sensing of an ecologically valid stimulus” (Izard, 2009, p.7). On the other hand, Izard defined emotional schemas as: “emotion interacting dynamically with perceptual and cognitive processes to influence mind and behavior” (Izard, 2009, p.8). According to Tracy & Randles (2011), basic emotions need to be discrete, entail a fixed number of neural and bodily expressed components, as well as a selected fixed feeling throughout a longstanding interchange with stimuli. In addition to this, basic emotions are commonly referred to as primitive, which refers to emotions either originating in subcortical brain structures, or them being involved in emotional processing (Tracy & Randles, 2011). Another relevant criterion for the categorization of basic emotions is that they occur with very little behavioral or cognitive regulation (Tracy & Randles, 2011). More specifically, Yarwood (2019) has suggested that four criteria must be met for an emotion to be categorized into the basic emotional theory, which are as follows (Yarwood, 2019):

1. Animals and humans experience the same basic emotions.
2. All animals and humans need to show the same behavioral and physiological changes due to a certain emotion; the same event should cause the same emotion for all animals and humans.
3. Emotions are inherited, there an emotion needs to be expressed early in life.
4. Each emotion was designed to solve a unique adaptive problem, there for each emotion is required to cause a unique component change.

The basic emotion theory suggests that human beings feel a limited number of emotions, which can be both biologically and psychologically categorized as “basic” (Gu et al., 2019). According to Izard (1977) the social and biological functions of basic emotions are of essence in human evolution and adaption, as these are utilized for general life tasks. An example of this would be that certain emotions, such as fear and anger, are essential for survival, allowing us to understand when to fight in defense or to flight in defense (Gu et al., 2019). While this is a commonly accepted theory among various psychologists, uncertainties in regard to the number of basic emotions that humans have continued to exist (Gu et al., 2019). Originally, Ekman identified the six basic emotions to entail: anger, surprise, disgust, enjoyment, fear, and sadness, however to date, his current research suggests there to be a seventh basic emotion, namely contempt (*Paul Ekman Group, 2022*). However, the researcher Robert Plutchik defines eight basic emotions within this research, which are: anger, fear, sadness, disgust, surprise, anticipation, trust, and joy (Gu et al., 2019). Moreover, a more recent study conducted by Jack et al., (2014) suggests that there are only four basic emotions (fear, anger, joy, and sadness), which aligns with the findings of various other researchers, such as Wang and Pereira (2016). To gain a greater understanding of the basic emotion theory, the six basic human emotions proposed by Paul Ekman (1969) will be focused on within the realm of this research paper.

The researcher Paul Ekman (1969) has defined six basic emotions, which all entail a variety of other shades of emotions, as described in further detail within Table 2:

Basic Emotion	Description	Shades of Emotions
<b>Happiness</b>	“Feelings that are enjoyed, that are sought by the person” (Ekman & Corado, 2011, pg. 365)	Joy, Relief, Contentment, Bliss, Delight, Euphoria, Amusement, Pride, Thrill, Satisfaction (Niwlakar, 2022)
<b>Sadness</b>	“The response to the loss of an object or person to which you are very attached” (Ekman & Corado, 2011, pg. 365)	Grief, Sorrow, Gloom, Despair, Depression, Loneliness, Self-Pity (Niwlakar, 2022)

<b>Anger</b>	“The response to interference with our pursuit of a goal we care about. Anger can also be triggered by someone attempting to harm us (physically or psychologically) or someone we care about” (Ekman & Corado, 2011, pg. 365)	Fury, Outrage, Resentment, Wrath, Animosity, Hostility, Violence, Hatred (Niwlikar, 2022)
<b>Fear</b>	“The response to the threat of harm, physical or psychological” (Ekman & Corado, 2011, pg. 365)	Anxiety, Nervousness, Concern, Dread, Fright, Terror, Panic, Phobia (Niwlikar, 2022)
<b>Surprise</b>	“The response to a sudden unexpected event” (Ekman & Corado, 2011, pg. 365)	Shock, Astonishment, Wonder, Amazement (Niwlikar, 2022)
<b>Disgust</b>	“Repulsion by the sight, smell, or taste of something” (Ekman & Corado, 2011, pg. 365)	Revulsion, Distaste, Aversion, Distain, Scorn (Niwlikar, 2022)

TABLE 2: THE SIX BASIC EMOTIONS (EKMAN & CARDARO, 2011)

The basic emotion theory is highly beneficial in providing a basis for the understanding of emotions and how individuals react to certain situations (Ekman & Cardaro, 2011). However, within the realm of this research paper, it is of essence to not only understand which basic emotions exist, but also how individuals process these emotions and what they utilize them for. To gain a greater understanding of the interplay of emotions and human processing, the feelings as information theory will be discussed in the following chapter.

### 2.3.3 Feelings as Information

The subjective experiences of humans, such as the way individuals think, feel certain moods or experience emotions is a highly complex topic (Schwarz, 2010). Previous research confirms the idea that a person’s affective state influences their evaluative judgements in regards to a variety of elements, such as their level of satisfaction or their evaluation of other individuals (Schwarz, 2010). This occurs because human thinking is directly linked to various subjective experiences, such as emotions, moods, or metacognitive feelings (Schwarz, 2010). The theory of feelings as information is based on the assumption that affective states provide us with information about the state we currently reside in (Schwarz, 2010). This suggests that human’s feeling act as an informational source to them, as different types of feelings correlate to different emotions

(Schwarz, 2010). This concept is closely linked to the previous two theories that have been discussed, as the type of information that an emotion includes relates to its underlying appraisals (Schwarz, 2010).

This theory originates from social and cognitive psychologists, who investigated the interrelationship between moods and memory accessibility (Schwarz, 2010). Bower's (1982) findings suggested that moods are linked with mood-congruent information within human's memories, leading to the conclusion that while in a certain mood, individuals are more likely to think of aspects in their life that attained to that same emotion (positive mood to positive memory or negative mood to negative memory). These early findings fostered a greater amount of researchers to investigate this topic, leading to today's idea that feelings, or emotions, directly lead to judgements (Schwarz, 2010).

These findings can aid in the understanding of how emotions in eWOM influence individuals, as the theory of feeling as information suggests that our emotions serve as information (Schwarz, 2010). Xie et al. (2023) found that within the realm of online reviews when people are required to make judgments in regard to trust, they utilize emotions to influence their opinion. Additionally, the findings of Xie et al. (2023) illustrate that positive emotions within online reviews directly link to trust in the receivers of this information, because positive emotions can increase an individual's positive perceptions of risk, which in turn causes increased positive decision-making.

The extent to which certain emotions cause judgments depends on a variety of different factors, such as the perceived relevance of the judgment and whether or not the judgment is made for oneself or someone else (Schwarz, 2010). Schwarz (2010) suggests that the impact that a specific emotion has on an individual's judgment is heightened when the judgment is significantly relevant to an individual, and when the judgment relates to an individual's actions or life. Therefore, it can be said that within the context of eWOM in the form of online job reviews, the feelings of individuals reading the review highly correlate to their judgement, as the decision of where to apply for a job is significantly relevant to an individual's own life. Moreover, as previously discussed, a multitude of studies has found a significant relationship between eWOM and the decision-making process of individuals, which in combination with the feelings as information theory could suggest that emotions expressed within online job reviews cause emotions within individuals, which they utilize as information and therefore alters their judgment. Due to this significant linkage, the theory of feelings as information is highly useful within the realm of this research paper, aiding the researcher in understanding how individuals view the emotions embedded in reviews and in which way they process this emotional trigger. However, to understand the direct linkage between emotions and online job reviews, the following subsection of the literature review will have a greater focus on how specific emotions are embedded within online job reviews.

### 2.3.4 Emotions in Online Reviews

As this research paper's primary aim is to gain an understanding of the influence of emotions embedded within online job reviews, it is of essence to discuss emotions in the context of eWOM. Research suggests that online communication, such as eWOM entails a greater amount of emotional expressions than traditional WOM, because individuals tend to feel the need to compensate for their inability to utilize verbal signals (Craciun & Moore, 2019). Moreover, emotions that are embedded in online reviews greatly differentiate from those present in traditional word of mouth, as they will not directly lead to affective reactions from the reader (Hatfield et al., 1994). Rather than having an affective reaction, readers tend to go through the process of having an emotional understanding, which is utilized for understanding which emotions are present within a review, why they are being expressed, and how to react to this (Planalp, 1999). The human understanding of emotions within eWOM is a highly complex topic that is closely interrelated with the causal attribution theory, which will be described in section 2.4 of this thesis.

Electronic word of mouth in the form of online reviews can contain content that is either cognitive or emotional (Zablocki et al., 2019). The writers of online reviews decide to either share factual information, or information about their emotions (Zablocki et al., 2019). Within the realm of this research paper, eWOM in online job reviews will focus on emotional content, with a specific view on three emotions embedded in the form of keywords. The significance of this type of content arises from findings of previous research that suggest that emotional content has a significantly higher impact on the attitudes of their readers (Moore, 2015).

When investigating emotions within online reviews, various researchers have focused on testing relevant keywords that are directly related to an emotion (Ullah et al., 2015). Through the investigation of the specific language employed within reviews, the emotions that a writer is trying to express is highlighted, making this an interesting topic for researchers (Ullah et al., 2015). It is important to note, that within the research on emotions, a magnitude of studies have focused on the topic of valence, rather than the investigation of specific emotions (Ullah et al., 2015). The term valence can be defined as: "the evaluative direction of the review and can be positive, neutral, or negative" (Purnawirawan et al., 2012, p. 245). It is important to note that there is a distinct differentiation between the topic of specific emotions and the valence of online reviews, however, the topics are interlinked (Zablocki et al., 2019). Valence within eWOM has been heavily researched, and findings suggest that an online review's valence can directly influence reader's attitude, perceived usefulness, or credibility (Purnawirawan et al., 2015). Through the investigation of valence, all emotions are categorized as either positive or negative, and tested against each other (Ullah et al., 2015). Ullah et al. (2015) is an exemplar study that aimed to find the most commonly employed emotional key-words within over 15,000 online reviews, which were then grouped based on valence. The findings of Ullah et al. (2015) reveal a list of the most relevant emotionally based key-words that are being used within digital platforms, which can

aid as an essential basis for a further expansion on valence. While the current thesis aims to investigate three specific negative emotions, the list of emotional key-words of Ullah et al. (2015) can be beneficial in understanding the language used within eWOM, and can aid in the further linkage of negative emotions with distinct keywords. A shortened version of this list is depicted in Figure 6.

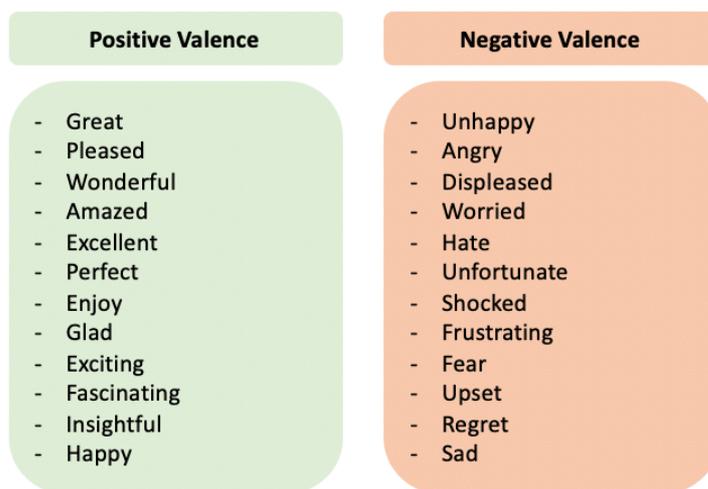


FIGURE 6: EMOTIONAL WORDS EMBEDDED IN ONLINE REVIEWS (ULLAH ET AL., 2015)

After having gained a general understanding of the emotional words used to express positive and negative valence in eWOM, specific emotions are discussed in the following. While discussing the valence of a review can be of essence, previous research suggests that a focus on valence within online reviews has some limitations, as emotions within the same valence category cannot be differentiated (Lerner & Keltner, 2000). Panksepp (1982) investigated emotions that are of the same valence and found that significant differences between individual emotions can be found in an individual's physiological experiences. Moreover, emotions differ in cognitive appraisals, as a specific emotion can be interpreted by an individual differently than the overall valence would (Zablocki et al., 2019). Therefore, it can be said that due to the complexity of the study of emotions, the utilization of valence is an oversimplification (Zablocki et al., 2019).

As previously mentioned, this research paper aims to investigate negative eWOM in the form of fear (1), anger (2), and sadness (3). This consideration is based on the findings of Malik & Hussain (2017) who also investigated emotional keywords within existing eWOM and categorized them into seven emotions of trust (1), anticipation (2), joy (3), surprise (4), anxiety (5), anger (6), sadness (7), and disgust (8). Due to the nature of this thesis, the words associated to anxiety (5), anger (6), and sadness (7) are depicted in Table 3, as they aid in the creation of the stimulus used within the online experiment.

Emotion	Keywords in Online Reviews
Anxiety	Tearful, Suppression, Snake, Slam
Anger	Clash, Denounce, Defense, Disobey
Sadness	Alienated, Deteriorating, Decay, Depressed

TABLE 3: KEY-WORDS RELATED TO ANXIETY, FEAR, AND SADNESS IN EWOM (MALIK & HUSSAIN, 2017)

Table 3 aids in the understanding of which specific words relate to the expression of a specific negative emotion within online reviews, which can also be applied to online job reviews present on websites such as Glassdoor. Through the investigation of previous studies that have quantitatively tested emotions in a digital setting, a greater understanding of online reviews in terms of valence and specific emotional words was acquired. This understanding aids as a basis for further discussions on causal attribution (2.4), corporate image (2.5), and the intention to apply for a job (2.6).

After having elaborated on three different emotional theories in the context of online reviews, as well as having considered in which form emotions are present in online reviews, the cognitive appraisal theory has been deemed as the most suitable theoretical framework for the current thesis. This theory focuses on individuals having a cognition prior to expressing their emotions (Watson & Spence, 2007), which is most likely the case when evaluating job reviews. The selection of a job is a highly cognitive process and hence, neither the basic emotion theory nor the feelings as information hypotheses seem to be appropriate for this particular context. Therefore, cognitive appraisal theory will be used as a theoretical framework to explain the causal attribution of emotions in online job reviews.

## 2.4 Causal Attribution Theory

To understand the influence of emotions within online job reviews, it is of essence to elaborate on theories that help to better understand how and why individuals react to emotions in online job reviews. The most significant theory in relation to this thesis' topic is called the attribution theory. This theory is based on the fundamental idea that human thoughts guide their behaviors, and that therefore changes in thinking lead to changed actions (Weiner, 1988). To define and investigate the causal attribution theory, it is of essence to first understand what the term "attribution" relates to. According to Harvey and Martinko (2009), an attribution is a form of explanation for a certain event. The process of forming attributions is of essence for overcoming daily challenges and adapting to alterations in our environment, which is why this has become automatic to humans, who do not even realize when they are doing it (Harvey & Martinko, 2009). Attributions aid in the understanding of what has caused positive outcomes, so they can be reenacted, or in the understanding of negative outcomes, so that they do not happen again

(Harvey & Martinko, 2009). Therefore, the theory of attributions relates to how individuals make causal explanations, focusing on the information they utilize when making causal inferences, and as well as what they use their gathered information for (Kelley, 1973).

Researchers have suggested that human beings possess an innate need to recognize what causes our behaviors and the situations we find ourselves in (Harvey & Martinko, 2009). This concept also applies within the setting of online job reviews, as individuals reading reviews will all automatically feel the need to understand why someone else would communicate a specific message about a company (Laczniak et al., 2001). Therefore, within the extent of this research paper, which focuses on eWOM that entails negative emotions, the causal attribution theory can be highly beneficial in understanding how the reader interprets the writer's motives for sharing their online job review (Laczniak et al., 2001). For this research, the term "causal attribution" will be defined as: the cognition an individual reading an online job review generates in order to understand the cause of a writer's sharing of information (Laczniak et al., 2001).

The attribution theory can be used as an underlying approach when explaining the reactions of individuals to online job reviews, as it refers to the readers' search for logic to aid them in investigating the cause of this review (Reimer & Benkenstein, 2018). This theory explains the process of individuals questioning the reasoning of other's when posting a review, which could influence the reader's perception of trust, credibility, and usefulness of the information (Reimer & Benkenstein, 2018). For example, if the reader has a positive attribution of the motivation behind posting a review, they are more likely to believe that it is trustworthy, increasing the effect that this newly gained knowledge will have on them (Reimer & Benkenstein, 2018). This phenomenon occurs, because an individual's attribution for an outcome directly shapes their response and in turn also their behavior, as can be seen in the simplified Attribution-Emotion-Behavior Process in Figure 7 (Harvey & Martinko, 2009).



FIGURE 7: ATTRIBUTION-EMOTION-BEHAVIOR PROCESS (BASED ON HARVEY & MARTINKO, 2009)

Figure 7 depicts the simplified Attribution-Emotion-Behavior Process from Harvey & Martinko (2009), which has been slightly adapted to fit the research intentions of this paper. This model depicts what occurs when individuals are confronted with online job reviews, as the reviews a potential applicant reads will automatically lead to a highly individual attribution, which in turn shapes their emotional response and influences their behavior, or in this case their intention to apply at a company. This model is of essence to the realm of this research paper, as it provides a simplified basis of what will occur within an individual when they are presented with an online review, which an online experiment will quantitatively investigate further in this research paper.

In accordance to the previously discussed process, various researchers, such as Harvey and Martinko (2009) or Laczniak et al. (2001), have investigated the relationship between eWOM and causal attributions, which has led to significant findings that help provide a theoretical foundation for the current thesis. One relevant example would be the research on the relationship between negative eWOM, the attribution theory and brand evaluations, conducted by Laczniak et al. (2001). Laczniak et al. (2001), similarly to Harvey and Martinko (2009) use the causal attribution theory to help explain individual's reactions to negative eWOM, while also focusing on brand evaluations. A simplified version of their proposed research model, which was used in the creation of the conceptual framework of this research paper can be seen in Figure 8.

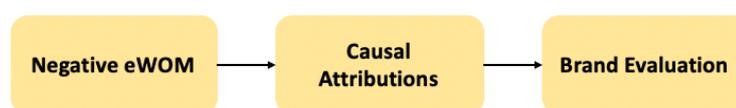


FIGURE 8: ATTRIBUTIONAL PROCESS FOR RECEIVERS OF NEGATIVE ELECTRONIC WORD OF MOUTH (LACZNIAK ET AL., 2001)

The quantitative studies conducted by Laczniak et al. (2001) demonstrated a significant relationship between being exposed to negative eWOM and the generation of causal attributions, while also suggesting that causal attributions directly influence brand evaluations. Moreover, they found that causal attributions aided the readers of online reviews to dissociate the message they were receiving from the brand it was discussing (Laczniak et al., 2001). This finding suggests that causal attributions helped readers remove what they found to be false negativity toward a brand and therefore improved their personal brand evaluation (Laczniak et al., 2001). These findings are essential to the further quantitative investigations of this research paper, as negative eWOM, causal attributions, and corporate image will be investigated. However, not only does it focus on the three variables depicted in the research model, but the studies' findings additionally amplify previous studies, such as Herr et al. (1991), that have suggested that negative eWOM is closely linked to perceived usefulness (Laczniak et al., 2001).

Through the study of the attribution-emotion-behavior process (Harvey & Martinko, 2009) and the attributional process for receivers of negative eWOM (Laczniak et al., 2001), a greater understanding of the variable's interrelationships could be gathered, which is utilized within the creation of this paper's conceptual framework.

## 2.5 Corporate Image

After having discussed eWOM, emotions, and the causal attribution theory, the final sections of the literature review will focus on corporate image. The in-depth research of emotions in online job reviews and their influence on the causal attribution of individuals was necessary, to now discuss the three chosen factors that could potentially be affected by eWOM.

The first relevant concept to understand as a prerequisite to this research paper's investigation into emotions within online job reviews is the corporate image. The term corporate image can be difficult to define, due to the vast majority of definitions available within different literature (Gray, 1998). Moreover, the terms corporate image, corporate identity, and corporate reputation are often used in the same context and given the same meaning, although they distinctly differ (Gray, 1998).

The term corporate image was introduced in the 1950s, where it at first referred to a construct within an organization that includes both a functional and emotional meaning to consumers (Kennedy, 1977). As researchers quickly found a significant link between corporate image and the purchasing intention of customers, the concept increasingly gained popularity, becoming one of the key components to a competitive advantage in today's literature (Tran et al., 2015). This multi-dimensional construct is said to be the sum of perceptions or impressions that stakeholders of a company hold, as it is "the association created from personal experience, word-of-mouth, advertising, and promotion (Tran et al., 2015, p. 7). These associations are highly emotional and can easily grow into feelings or attitudes toward a company, which are noted to be ever-changing (Tran et al., 2015). Moreover, corporate image can also be defined through its four main indicators, which include the personality of an organization (1), reputation (2), value in relation to the corporate culture (3), and corporate identity (4) (Tran et al., 2015).

The idea of the corporate image is based on the assumption that customers purchase products from a brand not solely because of their qualities, but also due to a bias, also known as a disposition to products from a specific organization (Spector, 1961). This occurs because individuals tend to create attitudes towards brands, perceiving them to have characteristics they find appealing or appalling (Spector, 1961). Negligent of the type of perception individuals have, it can be said that the image of an organization can directly influence customer's choices (Spector, 1961). When viewing a product, customers have an immediate mental picture of the organization they are purchasing from, influencing their decision-making, which is what is known as the corporate image (Tran et al., 2015). Researchers suggest that customers tend to "humanize" companies, meaning that they attribute certain human personality traits to them, which in sum shapes the corporate's image to an individual (Spector, 1961). As greater amounts of research on the concept of corporate image are available, corporations are utilizing these findings and purposefully employing their marketing resources and internal operations to construct their desired image for their stakeholders (Tran et al., 2015).

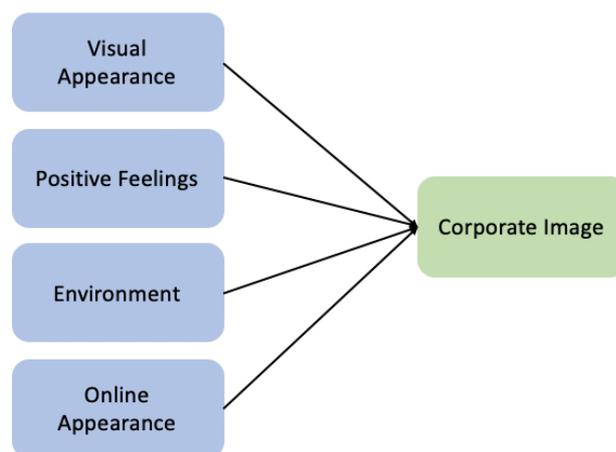


FIGURE 9: FACTORS WITHIN THE CORPORATE IMAGE FORMATION PROCESS (TRAN ET AL., 2015)

To gain a greater understanding of how the formation of the corporate image occurs within individuals, the researchers Tran et al. (2015) tested various key dimensions of corporate image, some of which can be seen in Figure 9. Originally the researchers focused on seven elements, however, for the purpose of this research paper, four will be highlighted, as these are the most relevant to the current research, while the others are excluded for concision (Tran et al., 2015). The constructs that will be explained in greater detail include visual appearance (1), positive feelings (2), environment (3) and online appearance (4) (Tran et al., 2015).

### Visual Appearance

The first element, named visual appearance, relates to how corporations communicate their strategy to the public, which can include visual cues within the logo, the symbol they utilize, or their presented slogan (Tran et al., 2015). The findings of Tran et al. (2015) suggest that a company's logo and slogan needs to be memorable for consumers to have a positive impact within their corporate image formation process. This information can be crucial within the realm of this research, as online job review websites are known to also visually present corporations, which includes their logo and pictures (Glassdoor, 2023).

### Positive Feelings

The second element that was investigated by Tran et al. (2015) is the positive feelings of stakeholders, which are closely linked to the trust they have in a corporation. This construct focuses on the personal perceptions and feelings of stakeholders, which are highly significant, as they directly shape individual's opinions (Tran et al., 2015). The relationship between feelings and corporate image is of essence to this thesis, as this is directly related the main focal point of the conducted experiment, which investigates how emotions influence various factors, such as corporate image.

## **Environment**

The environment of an organization, which includes the industry and settings it operates in, is highly relevant for individuals, as this is what they utilize to evaluate the respectability and impressiveness of a company (Tran et al., 2015). This element is especially significant in the context of online job review platforms, as one of the most frequently discussed factors of the work life is the environment of the company (Glassdoor, 2022).

## **Online Appearance**

The online appearance of a company could include their website's architecture, design, or social media (Tran et al., 2015). However, an organization's online appearance goes far beyond what they present on their website or within their advertisements, as eWOM can play a major role in the formation, or reformation of corporate image (Christensen & Cornelissen, 2010). The online appearance of an organization needs to show consistency throughout both online and offline mediums, which can be difficult with the massive information platforms, such as Glassdoor, that stakeholders have immediate access to (Tran et al., 2015).

The findings of Tran et al. (2015) aid in the understanding of corporate image, while providing various factors which could potentially influence the formation process within individuals. Studying the formation of corporate image is of essence when quantitatively investigating this highly complex concept, especially with respect to the application decision process within the job market (Gatewood et al., 2014).

Within the realm of the job application process, researchers have suggested that corporate image is a significant determinant of an individual's intention to apply to a company (Gatewood et al., 2014). When potential applicants are in the early stages of their decision making process, they have very limited access to relevant information, leading them to heavily rely on their existing corporate image (Wei et al., 2016). Through the use of their preexisting knowledge regarding the corporate image of a company, individuals infer about the employment conditions, which influence how attractive an employer is for them, and how likely they are to seek out a position there (Tsai & Yang, 2010).

As the purpose of this research is to investigate how emotions within online job reviews influence corporate image, understanding the interrelationship of online job reviews with the corporate image and the application intention of individuals is of essence. To further understand these connections, the conceptual framework of Kissel and Büttgen (2015) has been recreated in Figure 10.

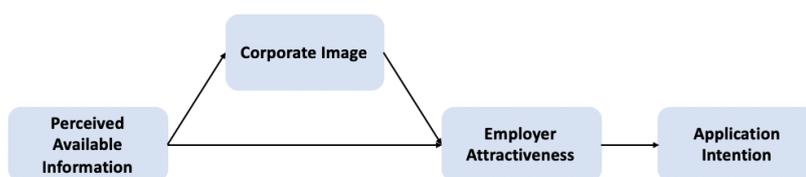


FIGURE 10: THE INFLUENCE OF CORPORATE IMAGE ON THE APPLICATION INTENTION (KISSEL & BÜTTGEN, 2015)

Kissel and Büttgen (2015) focused their research on investigating how information and messages online impact corporate image, an employer’s attractiveness, and therefore also the intention of an individual to apply to a company. Findings suggest that an employer’s attractiveness is a combination of an individual’s pre-existing corporate image and the information they have gathered online (Kissel & Büttgen, 2015). Moreover, these findings further support that an employer’s attractiveness is directly linked to the application intention of individuals (Kissel & Büttgen, 2015). These results and implications are of essence, as they further strengthen the evidence for a direct correlation between eWOM, corporate image and application intention, to exist, which this research will further investigation.

While there is preliminary evidence that corporate image influences the application intention of individuals, to what extent emotions play a role, has not yet been investigated. Therefore, this research paper aims to investigate the role of negative emotions in relation to the concept of corporate image with respect to online job review platforms.

## 2.6 Intention to Apply and Perceived Usefulness

As previously discussed, a multitude of researchers agree that electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) has a significant impact on individuals, however for eWOM to be utilized in an employee’s decision-making process, various attributes of the online review need to be considered (Craciun & Moore, 2019). Therefore, it is of essence to investigate how potential employees are perceiving the information that is being transmitted to them in the form of online reviews, to gain an understanding of what exactly is influencing their intention to apply (Craciun & Moore, 2019).

Through digitalization and the rise of eWOM, individuals’ costs associated with their search for information have significantly decreased, as websites such as Glassdoor provide extensive reviews without charging any fees (Liu & Park, 2015). However, as these lower costs are directly associated with large amounts of information, individuals are forced to be more precautions with what information they utilize, therefore requiring them to efficiently judge the contents of online job reviews (Liu & Park, 2015). Previous researchers have focused on a variety of different

potential factors that could affect on individual's intention to apply to a job, such as trust, credibility, message characteristics, or usefulness (Cheung et al., 2008). While all of these factors could be significant and potential interplay with one another, within the realm of this research paper, only the perceived usefulness of an online review will be investigated. The specific concentration of perceived usefulness occurs, as the relationship between individual emotions and perceived usefulness has not been researched in great depth, therefore an expansion on this would be beneficial. More specifically, the impact of the three negative emotions (anger, fear, and sadness) on an individual's causal attribution, and therefore perceived usefulness and corporate image, will be tested to see whether or not this can be linked to an intention to apply.

After having investigated corporate image within section 2.5, another construct that could be influenced by emotions within job reviews will be discussed, which is perceived usefulness. Digitalization is providing online users with large masses of information and online reviews, which consumers, according to the Limited Capacity Model of Motivated Mediated Messages Processing (Lang, 2000), and the Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 1988), cannot all process within a short time frame (Lopes et al. 2020). Human beings are said to have a limited cognitive capacity, leading them to utilize short-cuts when forming an opinion to later use in their decision making process (Kolomiiets et al., 2016). Research suggests that this causes individuals to be highly selective with the information they find in online reviews, making it significantly important to understand which reviews individuals see as useful (Lopes et al., 2020)

According to Cheung et al. (2008), individuals define an online review as useful if it: provides information that satisfies their needs (1), and aids them in their decision-making process (2). In accordance with similar research that has been conducted in the field of eWOM, the construct of perceived usefulness will be interpreted as "a measure of perceived value in the decision-making process" (Mudambi & Schuff, 2010, pg. 186). This construct specifically aids online users in managing the overload of information they are presented with on websites, to ease their decision-making process (Lopes et al., 2020).

The construct of perceived usefulness can be utilized as a significant predictor of whether or not a reader will comply with the given review, which is highly valuable information, as individuals perceive certain reviews differently from others, influencing their judgment and therefore also their reaction (Willemson et al., 2011). Online job reviews that readers view as useful provide a greater value to them, as they consider the information to be more beneficial, affecting how likely they are to accept the information and utilize it when making a decision (Lopes et al., 2020). This understanding has led to a greater focus on investigating which specific factors lead to an online review being perceived as more useful to users (Park & Lee, 2008). According to Liu & Park (2015) this information is of value to individuals who might write online job reviews in the future, as well as marketers, website hosts, or companies who are confronted with online reviews.

Understanding how individuals decide which online reviews they see deem as useful or not is highly complex and can be affected by a multitude of factors (Liu & Park, 2015). Multiple studies have investigated a variety of different factors, of which this literature review aims to briefly discuss a few. Some of the proposed factors have been listed in Table 4, below.

<b>Factors Affecting Perceived Usefulness</b>	<b>Source</b>
<b>Review Rating</b>	Mudami & Schuff, 2010
<b>Elaborateness of a Review</b>	Mudami & Schuff, 2010
<b>Identity Disclosure</b>	Racherla & Friske, 2012
<b>Message Content &amp; Style</b>	Schindler & Bickart, 2012
<b>Perceived Enjoyment</b>	Mathwick & Rigdon, 2004

TABLE 4: POTENTIAL FACTORS AFFECTING THE PERCEIVED USEFULNESS OF AN ONLINE REVIEW

The findings of various previous researchers suggest that the construct of perceived usefulness is a key determinant of an individual’s intention to accept, comply, and make a decision based on the given information (Liu & Park, 2015). Understanding what directly influences this construct is highly complex, as a multitude of different factors have been identified in previous research (Liu & Park, 2015).

Various researchers, especially within the realm of quantitative studies, have focused on investigating different characteristics of online reviews, such as the ratings of a review or the length (Mudami & Schuff, 2010). In addition to these two factors, Mudami & Schuff (2010), also suggested that the identity of the author of an online review can be significant, as this can directly be linked to the confidence and trust a reader has in a review, which is further directly linking to perceived usefulness. The findings of Mudami & Schuff (2010) are also strengthened by Racherla and Friske (2013), whose findings suggest that an author’s reputation and expertise can lead to an increase in the perceived usefulness of an online review. Another important factor that was investigated by Schindler and Bickart (2012) is an online review’s message contents and style, which aid in making the review more appealing, and therefore also useful to readers. The final factor that will be noted within this literature review is the level of perceived enjoyment, which was quantitatively tested by Mathwick and Rigdon in 2004.

After having discussed a multitude of different potential factors that could, to some extent, influence the perceived usefulness of an online review, the model of Cheung et al. (2008) will further be investigated. The researchers Cheung et al. (2008) aimed to investigate information

adoption in readers of online reviews through the linkage of argument quality, source credibility, and information usefulness, as can be seen in Figure 11.

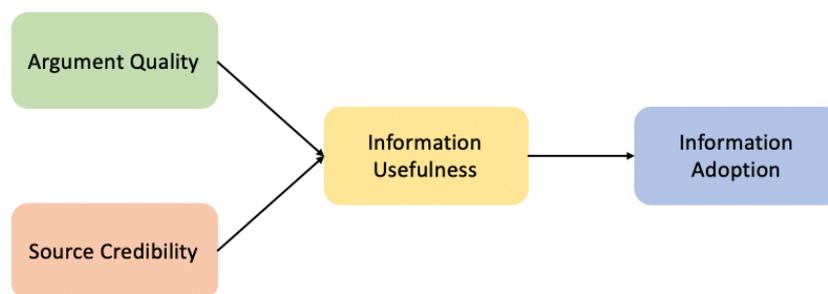


FIGURE 11: THE INFORMATION ADOPTION MODEL (CHEUNG ET AL. 2008)

Electronic word of mouth has been said to create a basic information transfer, that is highly complex, as the content of a review can cause a variety of different responses, depending on how the individual being exposed to the review is receiving the given information (Cheung et al. 2008). To understand how individuals internalize knowledge, Cheung et al. (2008) utilized dual process theories, through which they have created the Information Adoption Model, which has visually been presented in Figure 11. The model presented in Figure 10 has been simplified for the purpose of this thesis, as the original model also includes the subcategories of argument quality and source credibility. The factor argument quality is made up of four items, which are relevance (1), timeliness (2), accuracy (3), and comprehensiveness (4) (Cheung et al., 2008). In accordance with this, source credibility entails the source expertise (1) and the source trustworthiness (2) (Cheung et al. 2008). The findings of this study suggest that while the argument quality and source credibility did not have a significant impact on information usefulness, though, the usefulness of an online review directly influences the level of information adoption (Cheung et al. 2008). These findings are of essence to this research, as they provide a basis for understanding how argument quality and source credibility of an online review are linked to information usefulness, and how this, in turn, shapes the knowledge, opinion, and actions of individuals. While this paper does not specifically investigate argument quality or source credibility, it is highly beneficial to see how previous researchers have tested similar constructs and how findings from this research could broaden our understanding of perceived usefulness.

After having gathered relevant information on multiple factors that could influence an individual's perceived usefulness of an online job review, this paper will now have a greater focus on specifically negative online reviews. The specific interest in testing negative emotions arises from the existence of the negativity bias, which has not yet been investigated within online job reviews. Previous research suggests that human's processing of positive and negative information is not symmetric (Norris, 2021). The negativity bias is the human tendency for something negative to have a stronger impact than something positive (Norris, 2021). Baumeister et al. (2001, p.325) stated that "bad things will produce larger, more consistent, more multifaceted or

more lasting effects than good things". Due to our innate predispositions, as well as our experiences, humans tend to give greater weight to something negative than they do to anything positive (Rozin & Royzman, 2001). The behavior adaptive theory is often utilized to explain the occurrence of this bias, as looking out for bad things increases the likelihood of someone surviving threats, as they are more adaptive to dangers than others (Yin et al., 2010). This concept also applies to the online environment, as this can be seen as highly risky and individuals focus on their potential losses to a greater extent than what they have to gain (Yin et al., 2010). This negativity bias is of essence within the realm of this research, as it suggests that negative information has a greater influence on an individual's memory, perception, attention, behavior, and decision-making, than positive information (Norris, 2021). When presented with multiple sources of information, individuals tend to utilize negative information, and will then evaluate the whole as more negative than the part's averages (Kanouse, 1984).

Utilizing the previously presented information adoption model, with a specific focus on negative emotions due to the existence of the negativity bias, a theoretical framework for the purpose of this research paper will be created and proposed within the next section of this literature review.

## 2.7 Hypotheses and Theoretical Framework

Through the exploration of a multitude of previously conducted studies, it can be concluded that findings suggest, that different negative emotions have different impacts on factors such as perceived usefulness, corporate image, and intention to apply. Through the utilization of the attribution theory and the negativity bias, these varying impacts can be explained, as the emotions anger (1), sadness (2), and fear (3), are said to have distinct levels of attributions to a company. Therefore, with regard to the examined literature, a conceptual framework along with five hypotheses, focusing on the attributions of the tested negative emotions, has been created, as can be seen below.

**H1:** The emotion anger (1) promotes a stronger negative evaluation than sadness (2) and fear (3).

**H2:** The more negative a review is evaluated, the stronger the causal attribution to a company is.

**H3:** The causal attribution of negative emotions has a negative impact on an individual's perceived corporate image.

**H4:** The causal attribution of negative emotions has a positive impact on an individual's perceived usefulness of an online job review.

**H5:** The perceived corporate image of an individual has a positive impact on their intention to apply to a job.

**H6:** The perceived usefulness of an online job review positively impacts an individual's intention to apply to a job.

To visually demonstrate the interlinkage of the variables and previously stated hypotheses within this research paper, a conceptual framework is depicted in Figure 12.

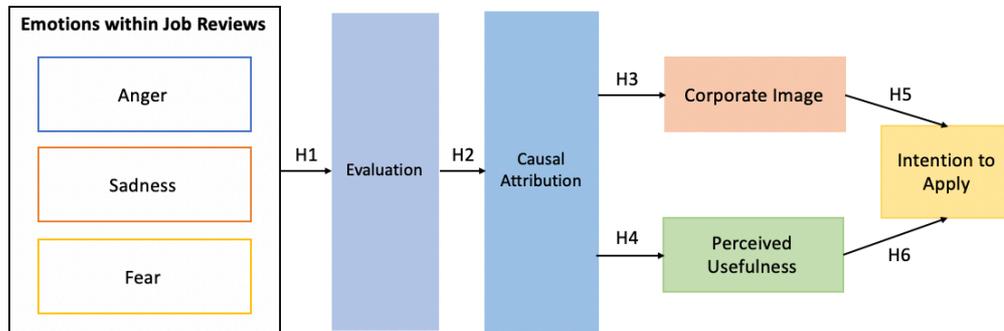


FIGURE 12: THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### 3 METHODOLOGY

This section of the research paper focuses on the chosen data collection method that is utilized to investigate the impact of negative emotions within online job reviews on causal attribution, perceived usefulness, corporate image, and intention to apply at an organization. The chapter thoroughly discusses and evaluates the chosen research design, the selection and acquisition of participants, and the methods applied to the data analysis.

#### 3.1 Research Design

To investigate the impact of negative emotions in online job reviews on causal attribution, perceived usefulness, corporate image, and intention to apply, a quantitative research approach has been deemed most applicable. An experimental design, commonly referred to as causal or explanatory research, has been chosen, to statistically investigate the causal relationships between the main variables of the research framework.

In a basic sense, quantitative research methods focus on the collection and analysis of structured and numeric data (Goertzen, 2017). According to Creswell (2014), quantitative research can be defined as a design that aims to gather explanations, resulting from the collection of numeric data, which are statistically analyzed. Through the utilization of numerical data and mathematically-based methods, a quantitative research design has the objective to measure social reality (Sukamolson, 2007). Moreover, quantitative research identifies research problems, which are statistically investigated, to uncover answers related to behaviors and trends (Sukamolson, 2007). As described by Mertler (2019) within a quantitative design, researchers aim at describing situations through the establishment of relationships between variables.

A quantitative research method has been chosen, as it allows for the representation of complex problems through variables, which generate results that can be summarized, compared and generalized (Sukamolson, 2007). When investigating emotions within eWOM, quantifying and assessing findings in a numeric form is of essence, as the aim of this research paper is to gain a greater understanding of the relationships between the variables within the research framework, to provide generalizable findings. Moreover, as quantitative research can easily be replicated over time, it is highly advantageous in the study of online job reviews, which are continuously evolving (Sukamolson, 2007).

Within a quantitative approach, researchers are presented with four types of methods to choose from, which are survey (1), causal-comparative (2), correlational (3), or experimental (4) (Lowhor, 2007). For this thesis, an experimental research approach has been deemed most appropriate and will be applied. Experimental research designs are used when examining the accuracy of a theory, by testing if, and to what extent, the independent variables affect the dependent

variable (Lowhor, 2007). This specific quantitative method allows researchers to create conditions in which only the impact of a treatment is investigated, as all other potential influences can be controlled for (Creswell, 2014). Therefore, experimental designs provide the ability to manipulate independent variables within an artificial or natural setting, controlling external factors and ensuring that extraneous relationships do not intervene (Holton & Burnett, 2005). An experimental design has been selected, as each one of the three emotions (anger, sadness, and fear) is being independently manipulated within an online job review, to test the influence on the evaluation, causal attribution, corporate image, perceived usefulness, and intention to apply. Through the application of an experimental design, cause and effect relationships between these variables can be measured, as the controlled environment allows for a great amount of established causality and internal reliability (Lowhor, 2007). However, the controlled setting of an experiment is not an accurate representation of reality (Creswell, 2014).

As experiments facilitate an environment in which independent variables can be manipulated, while external factors are being controlled, this method is highly prevalent within existing research in the field of electronic word of mouth. A variety of studies that have investigated causal relationships between emotions within electronic word of mouth and corporate image, perceived usefulness, or intention to apply have chosen a quantitative research design in the form of an experiment. Examples of this include Zablocki et al. (2019) and Kim and Gupta (2012), who have examined emotions within online reviews. Zablocki et al. (2019) investigated the role of emotions in online reviews and how these affect product attitudes through the use of quasi-experiments within three different studies. Similarly, Kim & Gupta (2019) applied a between-subject factorial experiment in order to test emotional expressions in online reviews. Through the use of an experimental research design, both studies have been able to provide valuable insights for marketing managers, while also verifying the findings of previous research in regard to emotions and online reviews (Zablocki et al., 2019; Kim & Gupta, 2012).

Therefore, the selection of an experimental research design has been made, due to the given ability to manipulate an online job review entailing one of the three emotions (anger, sadness or fear), while controlling potential extraneous variables, which is the same method that a multitude of pre-existing studies in the current field have employed. Within the following subsections of the methodology, the experiment is further adapted to the needs of this research paper. For this purpose, the experiment's stimulus (3.2.1), measurement scales (3.2.2), pre-test (3.2.3) and sampling method (3.2.4) are discussed in greater depth.

## **3.2 Experiment**

To quantitatively investigate the conceptual framework of this research paper, an online experiment was conducted. This was a one-factor (with emotions representing the manipulated factor) between-subject design, consisting of three separate online job reviews, each entailing one of the three negative emotions (anger, sadness, and fear).

Within this research design, respondents will be grouped based on their allocation into one of the three experimental conditions. While all groups are presented with the same structure and content within the online job reviews, the stimulus that is necessary for measuring the effects of the emotions differs in each group. Each respondent will be exposed to one of the three different online job reviews, which has visually been demonstrated in Figure 13 below. These group allocations will occur with a random assignment, in which every participant faces the same probability of being allocated to one of the three experimental groups, to ensure that reliable comparisons can be made, as the results need to be unbiased, with three equivalent groupings (Creswell, 2014). Random assignment is utilized as a form of control within the process, to strengthen internal validity and to aid in the avoidance of potential biases (Bhandari, 2020). Moreover, through the implementation of a random group allocation, this research design can be described as a true experimental method (Creswell, 2014).

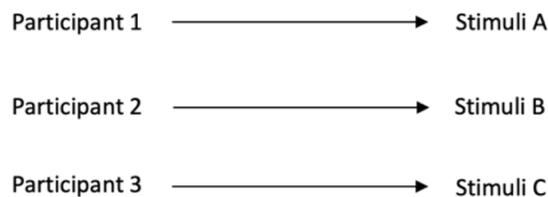


FIGURE 13: BETWEEN SUBJECT EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

The current research examines the influence of one of three negative emotions (anger, sadness and fear) in an online job review on the evaluation, causal attribution, corporate image, perceived usefulness, and intention to apply through an online experiment. The experiment is created with the online tool “ScoSci Survey”, in which all of the data is collected using closed-ended questions. The survey consists of seven sections, which each entails an individual purpose. The experiment includes one of the three negative online job reviews (anger, sadness, or fear) also known as the stimuli (1), a manipulation check (2), questions regarding: the evaluation (3) causal attribution (4), corporate image (5), perceived usefulness (6), intention to apply (7) and lastly the demographics of the respondents (8). The online questionnaire can be found in Appendix A.

In the first section of the experiment, respondents are introduced to an online job review that includes one of the three investigated emotions (anger, sadness or fear), representing the stimulus of the experiment. Three separate job reviews are formulated for the purpose of the questionnaire, which only differ in their embedded emotional keywords. Therefore, the remaining content and overall message of the online job review will remain the same. As previously mentioned, participants will be randomly allocated into one of the three treatment groups, where they are presented with the stimuli and a 30-second timer, which aims to ensure that each respondent takes the necessary time to read the online job review.

The following section, which is presented to all respondents directly after the stimulus exposure, involves the manipulation check. To investigate whether the manipulation was successful, participants are presented with multiple questions regarding the overall valence of the review and the emotions they witnessed. This section of the online questionnaire is essential, as further investigations into the influence of negative emotions within online job reviews can only be conducted if respondents successfully complete the manipulation check.

The main part of the online questionnaire contains the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> section, which consists of questions aiming to examine the relationships among the five variables evaluation (1), causal attribution (2), corporate image (3), perceived usefulness (4), and intention to apply (5). The exact items within each construct, as well as the implemented measurement scale and origin of the adaptation, will be discussed within subsection 3.2.2.

The online questionnaire's final section concludes with general questions regarding the demographics of respondents, which include their gender, age, nationality, and level of education. Additionally, respondents are also asked to indicate whether they are familiar with online job reviews. These questions allow for the researcher to gain a greater understanding of the participants of the survey, which will be essential when generalizations of the findings are made.

### **3.2.1 Stimulus**

The three manipulated online job reviews all entail the same two-part structure, consisting of first the positive (1) and then the negative (2) aspects of the discussed organization. This composition is directly adapted from the website "kununu", which is one of the largest online job review platforms in Austria. Due to the high accessibility and simplicity of kununu, the assumption is made that this is a website commonly known to Austrian individuals, increasing the likelihood that participants have encountered a similar online job review before.

Three fictitious online job reviews are created based on currently existing reviews, which are manipulated with emotionally embedded keywords to investigate the three emotions anger (1), sadness (2), or fear (3). The three different online job reviews are ensured to entail the same overall context and message, and for all factors, apart from the emotional keywords, to remain the same. Each review first contains the three identical positive aspects of the organization, which are listed at the top. These are then followed by five negative statements regarding the unnamed employer, in which every statement includes one word that is changed within each stimulus. The emotional keywords that correlate to anger (1), sadness (2), and fear (3) are adapted from Zablocki et al. (2019), in order to ensure that their direct link to the specific emotion has previously been investigated. The three online job reviews, translated into English, representing anger (1), sadness (2), and fear (3), can be found in Table 5.

Emotion	Manipulated Online Job Review
<p><b>Anger</b></p>	<p><b><u>What I like about the employer</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The job contains many exciting duties</li> <li>- There are always varying activities</li> <li>- The flexible working hours are an advantage</li> </ul> <p><b><u>What I dislike about the employer</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The working atmosphere of this company is unfortunately very <b>upsetting</b></li> <li>- The behavior of the work colleagues was extremely <b>frustrating</b> due to the work and time pressure.</li> <li>- There is consistently poor communication from management at this company, which is why you often get very unexpected <b>annoying</b> feedback</li> <li>- At this company, I often felt a lot of <b>hate</b> during my work.</li> <li>- In summary, I am now so <b>angry</b> because of this company that I will probably quit.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Sadness</b></p>	<p><b><u>What I like about the employer</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The job contains many exciting duties</li> <li>- There are always varying activities</li> <li>- The flexible working hours are an advantage</li> </ul> <p><b><u>What I dislike about the employer</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The working atmosphere of this company is unfortunately very <b>desperate</b></li> <li>- The behavior of the work colleagues was extremely <b>disappointing</b> due to the work and time pressure.</li> <li>- There is consistently poor communication from management at this company, which is why you often get very unexpected <b>regrettable</b> feedback</li> <li>- At this company, I often felt a lot of <b>misery</b> during my work.</li> <li>- In summary, I am now so <b>unhappy</b> because of this company that I will probably quit.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Fear</b></p>	<p><b><u>What I like about the employer</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The job contains many exciting duties</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- There are always varying activities</li> <li>- The flexible working hours are an advantage</li> </ul> <p><b><u>What I dislike about the employer</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The working atmosphere of this company is unfortunately very <b>uneasy</b></li> <li>- The behavior of the work colleagues was extremely <b>worrying</b> due to the work and time pressure.</li> <li>- There is consistently poor communication from management at this company, which is why you often get very unexpected <b>shocking</b> feedback</li> <li>- At this company, I often felt a lot of <b>nervousity</b> during my work.</li> <li>- In summary, I am now so <b>fearful</b> because of this company that I will probably quit.</li> </ul>
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TABLE 5: MANIPULATED ONLINE JOB REVIEWS

To ensure that participants are taking the necessary time to read through the presented online review, a 30-second timer is implemented, requiring participants to wait before continuing to the next section of the questionnaire. Additionally, the online job review is shown to participants a second time, before the main questions regarding the evaluation, causal attribution, corporate image, perceived usefulness, and intention to apply are presented.

### 3.2.2 Measurement Scales

To reliably measure all items within the constructs of the proposed conceptual framework, the implemented measurement scales are adapted from pre-existing research. As previously discussed, the five main constructs were: evaluation (1) causal attribution (2), corporate image (3), perceived usefulness (4), and intention to apply (5). The first construct of evaluation was adapted from research conducted by Chadwich (2010), and includes three items measured within a 7-point Likert Scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. The second construct, causal attribution, is adapted from McAuley et al., (1992) and is measured through four items, within a seven-point Likert scale that ranges from “the employee” (1) to “the company” (7). This is then followed by corporate image, which is comprised of three items based on Riordan et al. (1997)’s 7-point Likert Scale measurement, which ranges from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (7). Furthermore, the six items utilized to measure the perceived usefulness of respondents were adapted from Wang et al. (2015), who implemented the same 7-point Likert Scale as Riordan et al. (1997). Lastly, the nine items within the intention to apply originate from Könsgen et al., (2022) and are measured through the same 7-point Likert Scale as previously described. All of the individual items within the constructs, as well as the measurement scales and sources, can be found within the overview in Table 6.

Construct and Items	Scale	Original Source
<p><b><u>Evaluation</u></b></p> <p>The online job review conveyed the feeling of anger.</p> <p>The online job review conveyed the feeling of sadness.</p> <p>The online job review conveyed the feeling of fear.</p>	<p><b>7-Point Likert</b></p> <p>1=Strongly Disagree</p> <p>7=Strongly Agree</p>	<p>Chadwick (2010)</p>
<p><b><u>Causal Attribution</u></b></p> <p>Can be controlled by the employee – Can be controlled by the company</p> <p>The employee can regulate – The company can regulate</p> <p>Within the scope of the employee’s responsibility – Within the scope of the company’s responsibility</p>	<p><b>7-Point Likert</b></p> <p>1= Employee</p> <p>7= Company</p>	<p>McAuley et al. (1992)</p>
<p><b><u>Corporate Image</u></b></p> <p>After reading the online job review, I think that the company has a good reputation in the community.</p> <p>After reading the online job review, I think that the company has a good reputation in the industry.</p> <p>After reading the online job review, I think that the company is known as a good employer.</p>	<p><b>7-Point Likert</b></p> <p>1=Strongly Disagree</p> <p>7=Strongly Agree</p>	<p>Riordan et al. (1997)</p>
<p><b><u>Perceived Usefulness</u></b></p> <p>The online job review was useful.</p> <p>The online job review helped me to evaluate the organization.</p> <p>The online job review familiarized me with the organization.</p>	<p><b>7-Point Likert</b></p> <p>1=Strongly Disagree</p> <p>7=Strongly Agree</p>	<p>Wang et al. (2015)</p>

<p>The online job review helped me evaluate if the job could meet my needs.</p> <p>The online job review is factual.</p> <p>The online job review is trustworthy.</p>		
<p><b><u>Intention to Apply</u></b></p> <p>I would accept a job offer from this company.</p> <p>I would make this company my first choice as an employer.</p> <p>If this company invited me for an interview, I would go.</p> <p>I would go out of my way to work for this company.</p> <p>I would recommend this company to a friend who is looking for a job.</p> <p>I would avoid asking this company for job openings.</p> <p>I would avoid requesting information about job opportunities with this company.</p> <p>I would avoid searching the internet for information about jobs within this company.</p> <p>I would avoid requesting information on this job.</p>	<p><b>7-Point Likert</b></p> <p>1=Strongly Disagree</p> <p>7=Strongly Agree</p>	<p>Könsgen et al. (2022)</p>

TABLE 6: MEASUREMENT SCALES

### 3.2.3 Pre-Test

To ensure that the questionnaire has as few problems, misunderstandings, or inaccurate data collection instruments as possible, a pre-test was administered prior to the final online experiment. The pre-test was instigated to warrant that the manipulated online reviews, instructions, questions, and measurement scales were easily understandable for participants. This pre-test was distributed to 10 voluntary respondents, who were asked to complete the questionnaire and to report any misunderstandings or additional comments they had regarding the not yet finalized survey. The feedback of the volunteers primarily focused on the online job review.

Through the insights of the 10 pre-test participants, changes in regard to the wording of the online job review were administered before the final questionnaire was sent out.

### **3.2.4 Sampling Method**

To ensure that the results of the current research will be appropriate, the target population and sample size have been defined prior to the start of the data collection. This thesis aims to investigate the influence of emotions within online job reviews, for which reason the element and sampling unit will refer to individuals who are above the age of 18. Moreover, the scope further narrows down the geographic location of participants, as only individuals who currently reside within Austria will have access to the online questionnaire. Lastly, the survey will be available for a time period of one week, after which it will not be accessible for further responses anymore.

To achieve valid and reliable findings in this research paper, it is essential to ensure that an appropriate number of responses are gathered. With the purpose of understanding how many respondents should be achieved within each of the three experimental groups, the suggestions of Hair et al. (2006) and Schoenfelder et al. (2007) have been considered. Hair et al. (2006) denote that 20 respondents within each analyzed group are sufficient for obtaining the needed statistical power within further testing. However, Schoenfelder et al.'s (2007) recommendation is higher, stating that a minimum of 30 participants per group should be aimed for. In regards to the current investigation, these suggestions would lead to an overall sample size of 60 to 90 respondents. However, another relevant indicator for the size of the utilized sample are previously conducted findings within the same field. Researchers that have investigated the role of emotions within online job reviews, that have employed an experimental research approach, reported between 50 to 100 respondents per group. Therefore, taking into consideration the suggestions regarding the sample size and the employed number of responses in pre-existing literature as well as the requirement to have sufficient power to detect significant relationships, a sample size of 250 participants will be aimed at achieving.

The chosen sampling method within this research paper is panel data, which was funded through the acquisition of the Merit Scholarship of the Modul University Vienna. The Merit Scholarship administered a funding of € 900,00 to the researcher, through which 256 respondents were acquired. This type of sampling provides the opportunity to pre-define the target population, so that only respondents tailored to the previously mentioned requirements are gathered. As participants that are acquired through panel data receive monetary compensation for their completion of the questionnaire, a multitude of benefits for the researcher arise. By providing participants with an incentive to fill out the online questionnaire, the likeliness of them taking the time to honestly answer all prompted questions increases, improving the quality of the overall responses (Bhat, 2022). Through participants' increased willingness to complete the sur-

vey, the reliability and validity of the responses increase, ensuring that the collected data is beneficial for gathering generalizable findings (Bhat, 2022). This highly selective sampling method additionally provides researchers with a high completion rate (1), significant time-savings (2), increased screening resources (3), and an overall better sample (4) (Bhat, 2022).

### **3.3 Data Analysis**

Within this section, the process of the preparation of the gathered data, as well as the specific analysis procedures will be described. Within the data analysis, the preliminary analysis (1), main analysis (2) and the additional insights (4) will be discussed. Moreover, the sample characteristics of the respondents will be described.

#### **3.3.1 Data Preparation**

After the completion of the online questionnaire, the obtained data were downloaded from the survey website “ScoSci” into the statistical tool SPSS. This software allows for the usage of a multitude of statistical tests, in order to examine the six proposed hypotheses. The first preparation included removing the 10 responses from the pre-test, who had not actively participated in the final survey.

Due to the high quality of the collected data that was acquired through panel sampling, as well as the assurance that all questions were mandatory to be answered by participants, the remaining data points were considered valid. Moreover, as the experiment entailed an attention-check, which removed any participants from the survey who were unable to correctly attend to this check, no further data cleaning was required. Therefore, the final sample size included 256 responses, suitable for further testing. Lastly, to aid the researcher during the data analysis, composite scores of each variable were created, allowing for all of the items within each construct to be utilized within a test as one item.

#### **3.3.2 Data Analysis**

The analysis of the online experiment’s results can be separated into the following three chapters: preliminary analysis (1), main analysis (2), and additional insights (3). During the preliminary analysis, scale reliabilities through the use of Cronbach’s Alpha and Cronbach’s Alpha if item deleted were conducted, to ensure the validity and reliability of the items. This test allowed for the assessment of the internal consistency of the scales, as achieving consistency is a prerequisite for further testing. Moreover, to ensure that the manipulation of the online job reviews was successful, a manipulation check in the form of a MANOVA was conducted.

During the main analysis, the six developed hypotheses of this research paper were investigated through various statistical tools. The first hypothesis was tested with a one-way ANOVA, to reveal any significant differences between the three emotions and their influence on the overall

evaluation of the online job review. The following multiple simple regression analyses allowed for the investigation of the relationships of multiple variables at a time. These tests included the examination of negative evaluations and causal attributions (H2), causal attributions and corporate image (H3), causal attributions and perceived usefulness (H4), corporate image and intention to apply (H5), and perceived usefulness and intention to apply (H6).

Lastly, within the final section, additional insights in regard to the respondent's experience with online job reviews were examined. First, a general investigation of the overall experience of the respondents was conducted, which was then followed by a more thorough investigation by age group.

### 3.3.3 Sample Characteristics

Prior to examining the results of the online experiment, the most important characteristics of the participants will be presented in Table 7, and further discussed.

The online questionnaire was completed by a total of 256 participants. Of these 256 respondents, the majority were male (50.78%), while 48.83% were female, and 0.39% preferred not to say. This reveals that in relation to the gender of respondents, the questionnaire was relatively evenly balanced. An examination of the age of participants revealed that the youngest individual was 18 years old, while the oldest was 83 years of age, resulting in a range of 65 years. Moreover, the mean age of respondents was 47 years. The third investigated demographic included the level of education, which denoted that 14.84% of participants have obtained a University Degree in the past, 17.19% have completed high school, 20.70% have attended vocational school, 39.84% finalized an apprenticeship, and 7.42% have completed through compulsory schooling. Lastly, results regarding the nationality of participants disclose that the clear majority of respondents were Austrian, with 94.92%. Only a minority of the participants reported a different nationality, with 2.73% being German, 0.39% being Turkish, 0.39% Hungarian, and 1.56% not having given an answer. These findings are of essence, as they highlight that the utilized sample is representative of the Austrian population in regards to the age, education, and gender of respondents.

<b>Sample Size</b>		<b>n = 256</b>
<b>Gender (%)</b>		
Female		48.83%
Male		50.78%
Prefer not to say		0.39%
<b>Age</b>		
Minimum		18
Maximum		83
Mean		48.63
<b>Education (%)</b>		
University		14.84%
High School		17.19%
Vocational School		20.70%
Apprenticeship		39.84%
Compulsory Schooling		7.42%
<b>Nationality (%)</b>		
Austrian		94.92%
German		2.73%
Turkisch		0.39%
Hungarian		0.39%
Prefer not to say		1.56%

TABLE 7: SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

As participants were randomly allocated into one of the three stimuli conditions (emotions: anger (1), sadness (2), or fear (3)), it is interesting to investigate the outcome of this distribution, which has been summarized in Table 8.

		<b>Group</b>		
		<b>Anger</b>	<b>Sadness</b>	<b>Fear</b>
<b>Age</b>	18-29	14.77%	15.29%	21.69%
	30-39	15.91%	16.47%	16.87%
	40-49	20.45%	15.29%	10.84%
	50-59	13.64%	23.53%	18.07%
	>59	35.23%	29.41%	32.53%
<b>Gender</b>	Female	47.73%	44.71%	54.22%
	Male	51.14%	55.29%	45.78%
	Prefer not to say	1.14%	0.00%	0.00%

TABLE 8: SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS WITHIN GROUPS

Table 8 depicts the dispersal of the respondents within the three experimental groups. It has been revealed that within all three conditions, the highest percentage of participants were

above the age of 59. The age groups with the greatest concentration in the anger condition were the 40-49 year old's, as well as individuals above 59 years old. Within the sadness group, most participants were aged within the 50-59 or above 59 years group. Lastly, within the fear condition, a greater percentage of respondents from 18-29 years had participated, however, individuals above 59 years old still accounted for 32.53%. In regards to the gender distribution of the respondents, it has been revealed that the anger and sadness group entailed a greater number of male respondents, while the highest number of female respondents were allocated to the fear condition (54.22%).

## 4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The fourth section of this research paper aims at displaying and discussing the results of the conducted statistical tests, to investigate the outcome of the online questionnaire. The chapter has been divided into four subcategories, which include the scale reliabilities (4.1), the manipulation check (4.2), hypotheses testing (4.3) and additional insights (4.4). The statistical tests have been visually incorporated into the previously presented conceptual framework within Figure 14.

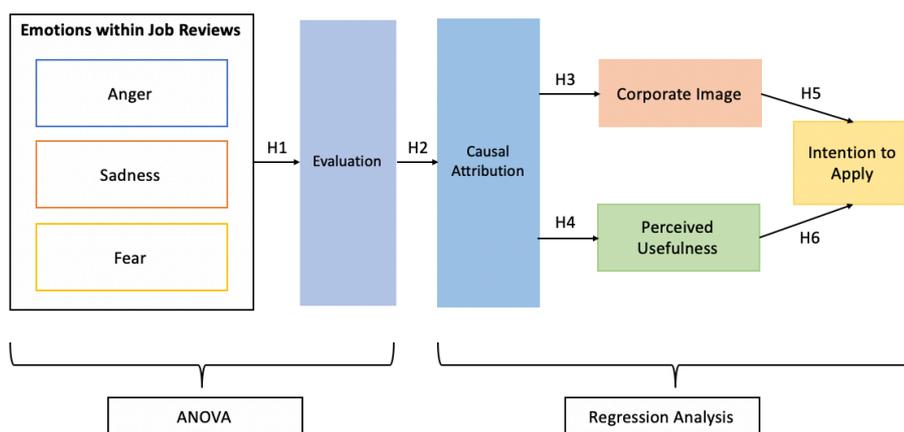


FIGURE 14: HYPOTHESES TESTING

### 4.1 Scale Reliabilities

Prior to testing the hypotheses of this thesis, the scale reliabilities have to be examined, to ensure consistency among the measured items within each construct. Therefore, a reliability analysis in the form of Cronbach's Alpha and Cronbach's Alpha if item deleted has been conducted. Table 5 depicts the results for each of the five constructs evaluation (1), causal attribution (2), corporate image (3), perceived usefulness (4) and intention to apply (5).

Construct & Item Measuring the Construct	Cronbach's Alpha if item deleted	Cronbach's Alpha
<b>Evaluation</b>		<b>0.798</b>
The online job review conveyed the feeling of anger.	0.777	
The online job review conveyed the feeling of sadness.	0.720	

The online job review conveyed the feeling of fear.	0.671	
<b><u>Causal Attribution</u></b>		<b>0.758</b>
Can be controlled by the employee – Can be controlled by the company	0.688	
The employee can regulate – The company can regulate	0.657	
Within the scope of the employee’s responsibility – Within the scope of the company’s responsibility	0.685	
<b><u>Corporate Image</u></b>		<b>0.920</b>
After reading the online job review, I think that the company has a good reputation in the community.	0.862	
After reading the online job review, I think that the company has a good reputation in the industry.	0.903	
After reading the online job review, I think that the company is known as a good employer.	0.888	
<b><u>Perceived Usefulness</u></b>		<b>0.869</b>
The online job review was useful.	0.831	
The online job review helped me to evaluate the organization.	0.847	
The online job review familiarized me with the organization.	0.842	
The online job review helped me evaluate if the job could meet my needs.	0.855	
The online job review is factual.	0.862	

The online job review is trustworthy.	0.842	
<b><u>Intention to Apply</u></b>		<b>0.843</b>
I would accept a job offer from this company.	0.821	
I would make this company my first choice as an employer.	0.834	
If this company invited me for an interview, I would go.	0.831	
I would go out of my way to work for this company.	0.826	
I would recommend this company to a friend who is looking for a job.	0.826	
I would avoid asking this company for job openings.	0.821	
I would avoid requesting information about job opportunities with this company.	0.821	
I would avoid searching the internet for information about jobs within this company.	0.841	
I would avoid requesting information on this job.	0.816	

TABLE 9: CRONBACH'S ALPHA RELIABILITY ANALYSIS

Within Table 9 the column on the right reveals that all values of Cronbach's Alpha are significant, indicating that all constructs entail a high reliability. This conclusion can be made, as the variables have resulted in values exceeding the threshold of 0.70. Table 9 additionally includes the "Cronbach's Alpha if item deleted" column, which assesses if it were beneficial to remove an item from the construct. Items that entail a "Cronbach's Alpha if item deleted" value lower than the Cronbach's Alpha are deemed reliable and should remain. Therefore, as not a single item within the five constructs resulted in a greater score than the Cronbach's Alpha, no items need to be removed.

## 4.2 Manipulation Check

After participants read through one of the three online job reviews, a manipulation check was conducted, which aimed at testing whether the participants understood that the previously presented online job review was communicating the feelings anger (1), sadness (2) or fear (3).

The manipulation check was conducted using a Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA), that examined if respondents had acknowledged which emotion was communicated in the online job review. After being exposed to the stimuli, respondents were asked to indicate to what extent they witnessed the emotion anger (1), sadness (2) or fear (3), on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (7). The analysis revealed a significant difference between the three groups, as Pillai’s trace = 0.232  $F(2, 256) = 4.18$ ,  $p = 0.017$  in regards to fear. Similarly, anger revealed a significant effect with  $F(2, 256) = 4.80$ ,  $p = 0.009$ , as well as sadness  $F(2, 256) = 3.04$ ,  $p = 0.05$ .

	Experimental Condition	Mean (Std. Deviation)
The online job review conveyed the feeling of <b>fear</b> .	Anger	4.38 (1.76)
	Sadness	4.44 (1.58)
	Fear	5.20 (1.89)
The online job review conveyed the feeling of <b>anger</b> .	Anger	5.10 (1.74)
	Sadness	4.38 (1.32)
	Fear	4.25 (1.77)
The online job review conveyed the feeling of <b>sadness</b> .	Anger	4.78 (1.70)
	Sadness	5.45 (1.43)
	Fear	5.00 (1.59)

TABLE 10: MANIPULATION CHECK

As depicted in Table 10, the feeling of fear was most prevalent within the fear experimental condition ( $M_{FE} = 5.20$ ), compared to anger ( $M_{AN} = 4.38$ ) and sadness ( $M_{SA} = 4.44$ ), resulting in the respondents of the fear group passing the manipulation check. Similarly, the question regarding the conveyed feeling of anger scored the highest mean within the anger condition ( $M_{AN} = 5.10$ ), in comparison to sadness ( $M_{SA} = 4.38$ ) and fear ( $M_{FE} = 4.25$ ). Lastly, respondents also scored the feeling of sadness the highest within the corresponding sadness condition ( $M_{SA} = 5.45$ ), as anger ( $M_{AN} = 4.78$ ) and fear ( $M_{FE} = 5.00$ ) reported lower mean values.

In conclusion, the results of the MANOVA demonstrate that the manipulation check within the online questionnaire had a positive outcome within all three experimental conditions, revealing that the check was overall successful. Therefore, the data analysis can continue with the hypotheses testing.

### 4.3 Hypotheses Testing

To statistically test the first hypothesis (*The emotion anger (1) promotes a stronger negative evaluation than sadness (2) and fear (3)*), a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted. For the purpose of this investigation, the emotions fear and sadness were combined into one group, in order to directly compare them to anger. The one-way ANOVA revealed that the emotion anger promotes a significantly stronger negative evaluation than sadness and fear  $F(1, 256) = 3.38$ ;  $p = 0.034$ ;  $\eta^2 = 0.018$ , on a one-tailed test level. Moreover, the eta squared within the analysis ( $\eta^2 = 0.018$ ) discloses a relatively small effect. The results of the emotion anger ( $M = 3.03$ ,  $SD = 1.61$ ) and sadness and fear ( $M = 2.59$ ,  $SD = 1.53$ ) have been visually depicted in Figure 15. This mean visualization demonstrates that anger scored an overall higher value than sadness and fear, which directly relates to its level of influence. The difference between the mean values of anger (1) and sadness and fear (2) is 0.44.

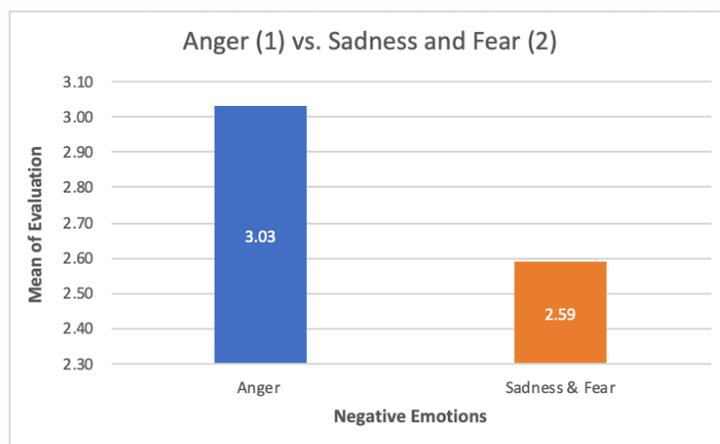


FIGURE 15: ONE-WAY INTERACTION EFFECT OF NEGATIVE EMOTIONS ON EVALUATION

Therefore, due to the significant result of the one-way ANOVA and visible mean difference between anger (1) and sadness and fear (2), H1 can be retained.

The second hypothesis (*The more negative a review is evaluated, the stronger the causal attribution to a company is*) was tested with a simple linear regression. The outcome demonstrated that a significant relationship exists between the evaluation of an online job review and the causal attribution to a company, as the ANOVA revealed a significant result:  $F(1, 256) = 6.45$ ,  $p = 0.12$ . The adjusted R square indicates the strength of the effect, and demonstrates ( $R^2 = 0.021$ ) that negative evaluations only account for 2.1% of changes in causal attributions to a company,

which is a rather small portion. Furthermore, the unstandardized coefficient B explains “the change in the outcome associated with a unit change in the predictor” (Field, 2009, p. 208). Therefore, this result reveals that when the evaluation of an online job review is increased by one point, an individual’s perceived corporate image would correspondingly decrease by 0.078 points. As the result of the simple linear regression is significant, as summarized in Table 11, H2 can be accepted.

	Causal Attribution			
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	Significance
	B	Std. Error	Beta	
<b>Evaluation</b>	-0.078	0.031	-0.158	0.012

TABLE 11: COEFFICIENT TABLE OF THE LINEAR REGRESSION ANALYSIS (H2)

With the purpose of testing the third hypothesis (*The causal attribution of negative emotions has a negative impact on an individual’s perceived corporate image*), a single regression analysis was estimated. The results demonstrated a significant effect between the variables of causal attribution and corporate image as  $F(1, 256) = 17.42, p < 0.001$ . Additionally, the adjusted R square results in a low effect size ( $R^2 = 0.064$ ), revealing that only 6.4% of causal attributions of negative emotions impact the perceived corporate image. According to the unstandardized coefficient B, as the causal attribution is increased by one unit, an individual’s perceived corporate image decreases by 0.284. Therefore, the results signify that H3 can be accepted (see Table 12).

	Corporate Image			
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	Significance
	B	Std. Error	Beta	
<b>Causal Attribution</b>	-0.284	0.068	-0.253	< 0.001

TABLE 12: COEFFICIENT TABLE OF THE LINEAR REGRESSION ANALYSIS (H3)

Similarly to the previous hypotheses, the fourth hypothesis (*The causal attribution of negative emotions has a positive impact on an individual’s perceived usefulness of an online job review*) is examined through the estimation of a simple linear regression analysis. The ANOVA resulted in a significant equation of  $F(1, 256) = 20.746, p < 0.001$ . Moreover, the adjusted R square revealed a low effect size ( $R^2 = 0.076$ ), demonstrating that only 7.6% of causal attributions of negative emotions impact the perceived corporate image. Additionally, the unstandardized coefficient B yields a positive result of 0.295. This outcome implies that as the causal attribution increases by one mathematical point, the perceived usefulness of an online review increases by 0.295 points.

According to the results of the simple regression analysis, as summarized in Table 13, H4 can be accepted.

	Perceived Usefulness			
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	Significance
	B	Std. Error	Beta	
Causal Attribution	0.295	0.065	0.275	< 0.001

TABLE 13: COEFFICIENT TABLE OF THE LINEAR REGRESSION ANALYSIS (H4)

With the purpose of testing the fifth hypothesis (*The perceived corporate image of an individual has a positive impact on their intention to apply to a job*) an additional simple linear regression was estimated, yielding a significant result of  $F(1, 256) = 116.727, p < 0.001$ . Additionally, the adjusted R squared reveals a moderate effect ( $R^2 = 0.315$ ). Moreover, this signifies that the corporate image of an organization would account for 31.5% of their intention to apply for a job at this company. The results also conclude that as the perceived corporate image increases by one unit, an individual's intention to apply for a job at this employer would increase by 0.463. These results, as have been summarized in Table 12, indicate that a significant positive relationship between the variable corporate image and the intention to apply to a job exists, which aligns with the proposed hypothesis, for which reason H5 can be retained.

	Intention to Apply			
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	Significance
	B	Std. Error	Beta	
Corporate Image	0.463	0.043	0.561	< 0.001

TABLE 14: COEFFICIENT TABLE OF THE LINEAR REGRESSION ANALYSIS (H5)

The sixth hypothesis (*The perceived usefulness of an online job review positively impacts an individual's intention to apply to a job*) continues with the estimation of a simple linear regression analysis. An overall significant model has been yielded within the ANOVA, resulting in  $F(1, 256) = 9.934, p = 0.002$ . The adjusted R squared revealed a weak effect of  $R^2 = 0.038$ , also signifying a weak model fit. In addition to this, these results indicate that the perceived usefulness of an online job review only accounts for 3.8% of an individual's intention to apply for a job within the organization. Moreover, the unstandardized coefficient B reports a value of -0.167. This result indicates that as the perceived usefulness of an online job review increases by one, an individual's intention to apply for a job at this employer would decrease by 0.167. These outcomes reveal that while a significant relationship between the perceived usefulness of an online job review and the intention to apply to a job exists, the unstandardized coefficient B portrays a

negative relationship, rather than the postulated positive hypothesis. Therefore H6 cannot be accepted. Table 15 reiterates the findings.

	Intention to Apply			
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	Significance
	B	Std. Error	Beta	
Perceived Usefulness	-0.167	0.053	-0.194	0.002

TABLE 15: COEFFICIENT TABLE OF THE LINEAR REGRESSION ANALYSIS (H6)

#### 4.4 Additional Insights

To gain a greater understanding of the respondents of the online experiment, further investigations have been conducted, as the survey entailed additional questions regarding gender, age, education, nationality and experience with online job reviews.

As this research paper’s primary focus is on electronic word of mouth in the form of online job reviews, investigating how familiar the respondents of the experiment are with this topic is of essence. Participants were asked to indicate whether they have ever read through an online job review prior to applying at a job within an organization. As can be seen in Table 16, the majority of respondents (59.61%) revealed that they feel unexperienced with online job reviews. This is a surprising finding, as recent studies suggest that more than 80% of job seekers have been actively searching for online job reviews during their application process (Glassdoor, 2021). Therefore, contrary to the findings of pre-existing literature, the majority of respondents within this sample are unfamiliar with online job reviews.

	Online Job Reviews	
	Experience	No Experience
Respondents	103 (40.23%)	153 (59.76%)

TABLE 16: EXPERIENCE WITH ONLINE JOB REVIEWS

To further explore the experience of the participants with online job reviews, Table 17 depicts the experience within each age group.

		Respondents	Experience	No Experience
Age	18-29	44 (17.19%)	26 (59.09%)	18 (40.91%)
	30-39	42 (16.41%)	18 (42.86%)	24 (57.14%)
	40-49	40 (15.62%)	17 (42.50%)	23 (57.50%)
	50-59	47 (18.36%)	18 (38.30%)	29 (61.70%)
	> 59	83 (32.42%)	21 (25.30%)	62 (74.70%)

TABLE 17: EXPERIENCE WITH ONLINE JOB REVIEWS BY AGE GROUP

As previously described within subsection 3.3.3, the sample is representative of the Austrian population. This implies that younger age groups are less represented, which might account for the difference between participants who have dealt with online job reviews and those who have reported no experience. Interesting to note is that as the age of respondents increases, their experience with online job reviews decreases. For example, within the group of 18 to 29 years old's, a clear majority of respondents (59.09%) have indicated that they are experienced with online job reviews, while within the group of 30 to 39 years old (42.86%) 16.23% fewer individuals have utilized these reviews. This decreasing pattern remains the same within the other groups, as each reports less experience with online reviews than the previous. The difference between groups is the most significant between 18-29 year old and 30-39 year old's, yielding a variation of 16.23%. This is subsequently followed by the gap between 50-59 years old and participants over 59, as the experience decreases by 12.69%.

#### 4.5 Summary of Findings

With the purpose of concluding the fourth chapter of the research paper, this section will reiterate the most important findings, which have been summarized in Table 18. The various statistical tests have revealed that five out of the six presented hypotheses can be accepted.

Hypothesis	Statistical Test	Result
<b>H1:</b> The emotion anger (1) promotes a stronger negative evaluation than sadness (2) and fear (3).	ANOVA	Significant --> H1 accepted
<b>H2:</b> The more negative a review is evaluated, the stronger the causal attribution to a company is.	Single Regression	Significant --> H2 accepted
<b>H3:</b> The causal attribution of negative emotions has a negative impact on an individual's perceived corporate image.	Single Regression	Significant --> H3 accepted
<b>H4:</b> The causal attribution of negative emotions has a positive impact on an individual's perceived usefulness of an online job review.	Single Regression	Significant --> H4 accepted
<b>H5:</b> The perceived corporate image of an individual has a positive impact on their intention to apply to a job.	Single Regression	Significant --> H5 accepted
<b>H6:</b> The perceived usefulness of an online job review positively impacts an individual's intention to apply to a job.	Single Regression	Not Significant --> H6 rejected

TABLE 18: RESULTS OF HYPOTHESES TESTING

The final chapter of this thesis summarizes the findings from the online experiment, to provide appropriate and relevant future recommendations. In addition to this, the potential limitations within the current study, as well as recommendations for further research will be discussed.

## 5 CONCLUSION

Companies worldwide are increasingly hunting for skilled workers within an environment that provides job applicants with endless opportunities to gain information about organizations, which requires employers to progressively focus on job seeker's intentions to apply for an open position (Lin, 2015). Job candidates are bestowed with massive electronic word-of-mouth platforms in the form of online job reviews, that allow individuals to share their experiences with a company they have previously worked for or are currently employed at (Dellarocas, 2003). Since a multitude of studies have suggested that online job reviews are essential to the corporate image and an employee's willingness to apply to an organization, this information is becoming more crucial for companies (Lin, 2015).

As the effect of the negativity bias within electronic word-of-mouth has not yet been investigated, this thesis aimed to explore the impact of specific negative emotions within online job reviews on potential applicants. With the purpose of addressing the research questions and statistically investigating the six hypotheses that resulted from the theoretical investigation into pre-existing literature, an experimental between-subjects design was employed.

Utilizing the data gained from an online experiment, the six prompted hypotheses were tested through an ANOVA and a series of single regression analyses. The impact of negative emotions on the evaluation of an online job review was examined with an ANOVA in H1 *The emotion anger (1) promotes a stronger negative evaluation than sadness (2) and fear (3)*. The findings of the conducted ANOVA revealed a stronger correlation between anger and a negative evaluation, than sadness and fear. This outcome could have occurred for a multitude of reasons, such as the distinct differences between the emotions of anger (1), sadness (2), and fear (3), which would need to be further studied, requiring an additional in-depth investigation.

Moreover, with the purpose of further understanding the theory of causal attribution in relation to online job reviews, H2 *The negative evaluation of an online job review has a negative impact on the causal attribution to a company* was tested. Through the estimation of a linear regression, it was revealed that the more negative an online job review is evaluated, the stronger the causal attribution to a company is. These results align with the findings of Lacznik et al. (2001), who similarly found that a significant relationship between negative eWOM and causal attributions exists. However, Lacznik et al. (2001) also reported that causal attributions helped individuals to disconnect negative messages from the company being evaluated, which was not the case within this investigation. The findings of the current online experiment revealed that the negative online job reviews that were presented to individuals reflected more gravely on the organization, rather than on the employee, highlighting the negative impact eWOM could have on corporations.

Subsequently, to further investigate how the causal attributions that had occurred would impact other relevant variables, H3 *The causal attribution of negative emotions has a negative impact on an individual's perceived corporate image*, and H4 *The causal attribution of negative emotions has a negative impact on an individual's perceived usefulness of a review*, were formulated. These two hypotheses have been tested through simple linear regression models, which yielded statistically significant results for H3 and H4. These results were also visible within the attributional process for receivers of negative eWOM of Lacznia et al. (2001). Therefore, through the acceptance of the third and fourth hypotheses, this research paper found a significant negative relationship between causal attributions of negative online job reviews and corporate image and perceived usefulness.

To explore how the constructs present within the previously discussed hypotheses further affect the final decision of an individual to apply for a job, the variables corporate image and perceived usefulness were further analyzed. Corporate image was tested within the fifth hypothesis, H5 *The perceived corporate image of an individual has a positive impact on their intention to apply to a job*. The single regression analysis revealed a statistically significant result, indicating that an individual's perceived corporate image has a direct positive influence on their final decision of applying to an organization. Kissel and Büttgen (2015) reported similar findings, however additionally suggested that this correlation occurs due to the influence of corporate image on employer attractiveness, which they argue is the main influencer of an individual's intention to apply. Due to the complexity of corporate image, it can be speculated that extrinsic influences could intervene, for which reason a greater focus on potential intermediary variables would be advised if this research were to be advanced.

The relationship between perceived usefulness and an individual's intention to apply at an organization was investigated within H6 *The perceived usefulness of an online job review positively impacts an individual's intention to apply to a job*. The results of the single regression analysis revealed a statistically significant negative relationship, which lead to a rejection of H6. Therefore, the result of the sixth hypothesis does not correspond to the findings of Liu & Park (2015), who stated that the construct of perceived usefulness is a key determinant of an individual's intention to apply. A potential explanation for the negative result of the single regression analysis could be that this thesis was narrowed down to solely investigating negative emotions. As positive emotions were not tested, the high levels of perceived usefulness that pre-existing literature has suggested to correlate with negative emotions could have caused an overall negative impact. In conclusion, without sufficient variance of both positive and negative emotions, the sixth hypothesis cannot be accepted.

Lastly, the additional insights revealed that this thesis' objective to obtain a representative sample of the Austrian population was achieved. It was found that the majority of respondents were unfamiliar with the concept of online job reviews, as 59.61% had indicated no prior experience with this digital tool. A possible explanation for this could be the age distribution of participants,

as the largest group of respondents, accounting for 32.16%, were above the age of 59. Therefore, it could be inferred, that older generations are not as atoned to digitalization, as younger individuals are. This notion is further advanced by the trend visible within the experience by age group categorization, where the experience decreased with an increase in age.

With regard to the purpose and the corresponding research questions of this thesis, it can be deduced that negative emotions within eWOM influence individuals in regard to their evaluation, causal attribution, corporate image, perceived usefulness and intention to apply. The pre-existing literature, that was described within the second chapter of this thesis, reported that negative emotions cause negative evaluations, influencing causal attributions, which have an effect on an individual's perceived corporate image, and perceived usefulness. The online experiment conducted within this research paper can confirm that these findings were also reported within the investigated sample, with the exception of the sixth hypothesis, as this was rejected. Therefore, five out of the six proposed hypotheses can be utilized to answer the research questions, as negative emotions significantly impact the discussed factors, which are suggested to influence their intention to apply at a certain organization. The results of this experiment help to strengthen the previously mentioned literature regarding the significant correlations between negative emotions and causal attributions, corporate image, perceived usefulness, and intention to apply. However, as the negativity bias is a highly complex topic, that would require a direct comparison of positive and negative online job reviews, this research paper can neither confirm nor decline the occurrence of this.

## **5.1 Contribution to Knowledge**

The findings of this research contribute to pre-existing literature by providing general insights into how negative emotions within online job reviews influence individuals. The experiment was based on various well-established theories regarding the constructs of evaluation, causal attribution, corporate image, perceived usefulness and intention to apply, which were all investigated with respect to negative online job reviews.

The results of this thesis contribute to the literature on emotions within eWOM, as multiple variables have been combined that were previously investigated as separate constructs. Therefore, this research framework has resulted in a new amalgamation of findings that integrate the theory of causal attributions with corporate image, perceived usefulness, and intention to apply.

The findings suggest that online job reviews generate causal attributions, which can directly influence how individuals perceive and view an organization. This outcome aligns with the results of a multitude of researchers, such as Lacznik et al. (2001) and further emphasizes the importance of eWOM for organizations. Moreover, this is additionally advanced by the result that online job reviews and their associated creation of causal attributions also affect the perceived usefulness, which is a supplementary factor correlating to an individual's intention to apply for

a job. The investigation into the relationships between these specific variables sustains the findings of pre-existing literature, while also resulting in an advancement of a general framework regarding their effects.

Unlike many pre-existing studies that have investigated emotions within eWOM, the results of this thesis concentrate on the three specific emotions anger, sadness, and fear. A direct focus on these three emotions allowed for the examination of the negativity bias and the differences among specific emotions that are all negatively valenced. The results of the present study revealed that the three negative emotions anger (1), sadness (2), and fear (3), have distinct levels of influence on an individual's interpretation of how negative an online job review is. Utilizing these findings in support of understanding the implications of eWOM can be highly beneficial to managers, as it is of essence that organizations comprehend which emotions are being expressed online, and how these influence their potential job applicants. Moreover, in contrast with previous literature, this study tested the effect of emotions in eWOM within the Austrian market. As the collected sample is representative of the Austrian population in regards to gender, age, and education, the external reliability and generalizability of these findings are relatively high.

Therefore, also taking into consideration the existence of various limitations, which will be further discussed within section 5.4, this research paper aids as a further source to the previously discussed literature, or as a basis for additional investigations into the topic of emotions within online job reviews.

## **5.2 Implications for Relevant Stakeholders**

Gaining a greater understanding of how different negative emotions within online job reviews impact an individual's job application process can be essential for organizations. This is especially true in times where job seekers are presented with massive digital information platforms, which have the ability to affect an organization's corporate image and therefore an individual's willingness to be employed by a company.

It is necessary for organizations to understand which emotions are being presented about their company online, as these will directly impact potential job applicants. Recognizing which emotions cause the greatest threat, or provide the greatest benefit to the organization's corporate image is a prerequisite for working with online job review platforms. Moreover, an investigation into the influences of emotions within online job reviews can aid in the understanding of human behavior.

Investing time and effort into a specific digital platform can be expensive and potentially inefficient if the implications of this medium are not thoroughly examined. Therefore, this research paper aimed to explore online job reviews, to gain a greater understanding of their influences on corporate image, perceived usefulness, and an individual's intention to apply. The findings of

the online experiment signify that it is of essence that companies investigate online job reviews, as the results revealed that these directly impact their potential future employees. Due to the corroboration with existing literature, managers are advised to focus on which specific emotions their employees are expressing during work, as negative emotions online could be harmful to an organization. Moreover, the results yielded that out of the three tested emotions, anger promotes the strongest negative evaluation of an online job review, which implies that managers should aim to avoid the occurrence of this. Due to the existence of the negativity bias, individuals will be more aware of negative reviews than of positive reviews, which managers need to consider. Therefore, these findings also encourage employers to actively motivate their employees to leave positive online reviews, as these could benefit their corporate image and the intention of new individuals to apply.

However, contrary to the discussed literature, the findings of the online experiment do not signify that the majority of individuals are utilizing online job reviews. This occurrence can be linked to the representation of mainly older generations within the sample size, which denotes that the topic of online job reviews could more heavily impact younger generations. While this finding is not in support of previous research, it remains beneficial for managers. This specific revelation indicates that online job review websites are a significant source of information for potential job applicants, however, this platform might be targeting a younger audience.

Therefore, these findings emphasize how important online job reviews are, and how impactful negative reviews are, which highlights the necessity of managers to actively monitor the feelings of their employees and to observe the reviews that are being posted about them. If managers understand the importance of acquiring accurate and positive online reviews, while focusing on having as few negative reviews that entail anger as possible, their corporate image and amount or quality of job applicants could significantly improve.

### **5.3 Limitations and Future Research**

While the findings of this thesis provide additional insights as well as further corroborating the results of existing literature, there are important limitations that need to be addressed.

The implementation of an online experiment provided the researcher with a multitude of advantages, which have been discussed within the third chapter of this paper. However, the online experiment, rather than a field experiment, was not true to reality, as the survey might have had implications on the respondent's natural decision-making process. It is important to note that this study aimed at investigating the role of online job reviews through the implementation of a single review, rather than a platform containing various postings. If an individual were looking for online job reviews, then they would be receiving a multitude of reviews that could all be of relevance to them. This simplification was made to ensure that the only influencing factor would

be the emotion within the review. If respondents were presented with multiple postings, the experiment would have become too complex for the realm of this research.

Another factor that could have been improved on is the testing of the variable corporate image, as purposefully no organizations were named. This aspect could be adapted within a field experiment where participants would know which organization is being discussed. This addition could allow for more reliable results in regard to changes of the corporate image, as quantitative measurements could be made before and after the exposure to the stimulus. Therefore, if this research were to be replicated in the future, it would be advised to create a more realistic environment, which warrants multiple reviews, while potentially focusing on a specific corporate image.

Moreover, even though the online job review was given to respondents with a timer of 30 seconds before advancing to further questions, the possibility that participants did not actively read the stimuli needs to be considered. If this were the case, the individuals would not have been able to answer the following questions, which would impact the findings of this study. While this possibility prevails, one way to ensure that respondents have read and understood the review would be to remove any participants that failed the manipulation check. This implementation would ensure that the final data would only include individuals who understood the online job review.

Additionally, while the 7-point Likert scales were appropriate within the realm of this research, additional open-ended question options could have provided a deeper understanding of an individual's thinking process. This incorporation would be relevant in regards to the causal attributions of respondents, as they could have explained what caused their attribution to an individual or company. Moreover, further questions regarding the attitudes of respondents towards online job reviews could have provided further insights into this advancement.

After conducting this online experiment, it has become apparent that while the findings are relevant and generalizable to the Austrian population, there are various opportunities for improvement. Investigating emotions and human behavior is highly complex, which would benefit from a field experiment or even a mixed-methods approach. Moreover, as the topic of emotions in correlations with causal attribution is greatly individual, it would benefit the research to further explore participants' experiences and opinions on the topic. As digitalization will remain a present and continuously evolving topic in the future, an extension of this research might yield significantly different results. For this reason, the findings and limitations of this study encourage a greater amount of research into the topic of negative emotions within online job reviews, with a more specific focus on individual respondents and their perceptions.

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## APPENDIX

### Appendix A: Online Experiment

Sehr geehrte Teilnehmerin, sehr geehrter Teilnehmer,

In dieser Studie geht es um die Wahrnehmung unterschiedlicher Online-Jobbewertungen.

Ich garantiere Ihnen die Anonymität und Vertraulichkeit Ihrer Antworten, da diese ausschließlich zu wissenschaftlichen Zwecken verwendet werden.

Vielen Dank für Ihren Beitrag und Ihre Teilnahme.

Durch Anklicken des "Start"-Buttons bestätigen Sie, dass Sie die obigen Informationen gelesen haben und mit ihnen einverstanden sind, und dass Sie daher freiwillig an dem folgenden Fragebogen teilnehmen.

**1. Bitte stellen Sie sich vor, dass sie auf der Suche nach einem Job sind. Sie haben ein Stellenangebot gefunden, dass Sie interessiert und versuchen, zusätzliche Informationen über den Arbeitgeber herauszufinden. Sie finden im Internet folgende Online-Jobbewertung.**

Bitte lesen Sie sich folgende Online-Stellenbewertung durch.

#### **\* Online-Jobbewertung \***

**Gut am Arbeitgeber finde ich:**

- Der Job enthält viele spannende Aufgaben.
- Es gibt immer wieder abwechslungsreiche Tätigkeiten.
- Die flexiblen Arbeitszeiten sind von Vorteil.

**Schlecht am Arbeitgeber finde ich:**

- Das Arbeitsklima dieser Firma ist leider sehr ärgerlich.
- Das Verhalten der Arbeitskollegen war aufgrund von Arbeits- und Zeitdruck äußerst frustrierend.
- In diesem Unternehmen gibt es durchgehend eine mangelhafte Kommunikation des Managements, weshalb ich oft sehr unerwartetes Feedback bekomme habe, das mich sehr wütend machte.
- In diesem Job habe ich oft sehr viel Aggression während der Arbeit verspürt.
- In Summe bin ich mittlerweile wegen diesem Unternehmen derart sauer, dass ich wohl kündigen werde.

\*\*\*

Die "Weiter" Schaltfläche erscheint nach 30 Sekunden.

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4. Bitte kreuzen Sie bei dieser Skale genau den Mittelpunkt an:

1	2	3	4	5

	stimme gar nicht zu						stimme voll zu
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Die Online-Stellenbewertung hat es mir ermöglicht zu beurteilen, ob diese Stelle meinen Bedürfnissen entspricht	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Die Online-Stellenbewertung war nützlich.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ich bin der Meinung, dass die Online-Stellenbewertung sachlich ist.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Die Online-Stellenbesprechung hat mir geholfen, mich mit dem besprochenen Unternehmen vertraut zu machen.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ich bin der Meinung, dass die Online-Stellenbewertung glaubwürdig ist.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Die Online-Stellenbesprechung hat mir geholfen, die besprochene Organisation zu bewerten.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	stimme gar nicht zu						stimme voll zu
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Nach dieser Online-Stellenbewertung denke ich, dass das Unternehmen einen guten Ruf in der Branche hat.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Nach dieser Online-Stellenbewertung denke ich, dass das Unternehmen einen guten Ruf in der Gemeinschaft hat	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Nach dieser Online-Stellenbewertung denke ich, dass das Unternehmen als ein guter Arbeitgeber bekannt ist.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	stimme gar nicht zu						stimme voll zu
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Ich würde es vermeiden, das Internet zu durchsuchen, um Informationen über Arbeitsstellen bei diesem Unternehmen zu erhalten.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ich würde es vermeiden, dieses Unternehmen nach Stellenangeboten zu fragen.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Wenn dieses Unternehmen mich zu einem Vorstellungsgespräch einladen würde, würde ich hingehen.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ich würde dieses Unternehmen zu meiner ersten Wahl als Arbeitgeber machen.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ich würde es vermeiden, Informationen über Stellenangebote bei diesem Unternehmen anzufordern.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ich würde es vermeiden, im Internet nach Informationen über Stellen bei diesem Unternehmen zu suchen.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ich würde dieses Unternehmen einem Freund empfehlen, der eine Stelle sucht.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ich würde mich sehr bemühen, für dieses Unternehmen zu arbeiten.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ich würde ein Stellenangebot von diesem Unternehmen annehmen.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ich würde es vermeiden, Informationen über diese Stelle anzufordern.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**5. Haben Sie in der Vergangenheit bereits Online Jobbewertungen gelesen?**

- Ja
- Nein

Alter

**6. Höchste abgeschlossene Ausbildung**

[Bitte auswählen] ▼

**7. Geschlecht**

[Bitte auswählen] ▼

Nationalität

**8. Sind Sie momentan erwerbstätig?**

- Ja, ich bin erwerbstätig.
- Nein, ich bin arbeitslos.
- Nein, ich bin Rentner.
- Nein, ich bin Hausfrau oder Hausmann.
- Nein, ich bin nichts von alledem.

**Vielen Dank für Ihre Teilnahme!**

Wir möchten uns ganz herzlich für Ihre Mithilfe bedanken.

Ihre Antworten wurden gespeichert, Sie können das Browser-Fenster nun schließen.