An Exploration of Corporate Recruitment Descriptions on Monster.com

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AN EXPLORATION OF CORPORATE RECRUITMENT DESCRIPTIONS ON MONSTER.COM

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This article explores the ways in which corporations describe themselves in recruitment materials. Specifically, the study examines corporate descriptions provided to job seekers by firms advertising on the Internet site, Monster.com. The study also explores elements of corporate image presented in the descriptions and the way in which firms market their employer brands. The findings demonstrate how analysis of corporate descriptions reveals interesting insights into organizational recruitment tactics. Results suggest that firms focus predominantly on firm attributes and secondarily on employee advancement. Various industries approach recruitment advertising differently, with significant differences emerging between high-tech organizations, service organizations, and consumer product firms in the emphases of their corporate descriptions. Few firms present a distinct employer brand but tend to cluster together in brand types.

Keywords: recruitment; Internet; employer branding; content analysis; communication

The first step in developing competitive human capital in a firm is attracting the appropriate applicants. Unfortunately, applicant attraction is an inexact science, despite numerous studies examining the process by which job seekers choose an employer, and employers seek to attract viable candidates (e.g., Barber, 1998; Breaugh & Starke, 2000; Schneider, 1987). Attention to the issue of effective and appropriate applicant attraction is justified for a number of reasons. First, an appropriate match between the parties is critical to the well-being and productivity of individuals and organizations (Wanous, 1977, 1980, 1992). Second, organizations spend a great deal of money in the recruitment process and, without the right applicants, cannot hope to develop the level of competitive advantage necessary to compete in a volatile economy.

Recruitment advertising is one way in which organizations attempt to attract the right people for the applicant pool. For some firms, the right applicants may be

those who fit the job in terms of a match between their particular skills, abilities, and values and those desired by the organization. For other firms, the right applicants may be the best and brightest from the labor market, regardless of specific person-organization fit issues. Either way, the task of business communicators is to find the appropriate words to pique the curiosity of the desired potential workers and encourage them to continue through the application process. Although we know that recruitment advertising content is vitally important in establishing the first link to appropriate potential employees, little, if any, systematic research has been focused on the nature of "real world" recruitment advertising content in the attraction process. This knowledge is important to the recruitment function in the same way an understanding of product attribute attractiveness is important to marketers. However, before meaningful research can examine the relationship between recruitment message content and intent to apply, there must be an accepted way of analyzing recruitment message content. Presently, there is no widely accepted method to classify or quantify the language used in recruitment documents. A search for studies in the areas of human resources and communication relating to recruitment messages yields only a handful of studies that have touched on the classification of recruitment messages (see Barber, 1998).

Assessing the effectiveness of recruitment messages is difficult in the absence of reliable methods by which to measure the presence (or absence) of particular messages. Thus, it is important to first have the tools to classify the recruitment information, and second, to then seek relationships between the classified content and recruitment outcomes. This article fills the gap in recruitment and business communication literature by creating and testing a recruitment message content analysis methodology and developing an initial taxonomy that will lay the groundwork for further study and application. In particular, this article focuses on Internet recruiting, another relatively unexplored aspect of recruitment (Weare & Lin, 2000). The Internet has developed into one of the most popular sources of job information for job seekers. One market research study states that the market for online recruiting services worldwide will be worth more than $15 billion by 2006 ("Dot.coma," 2002). Monster.com is the leading Internet recruitment site, listing more than 80,000 jobs on any given day. One independent auditor estimates that Monster has more than 44 million hits per month ("Job Searching," 2002). Clearly, Monster and sites like it play a strong role in the recruitment process.

Monster is the industry standard for online recruiting, and hence was used as the data source for the present investigation. Specifically, the study examines the corporate descriptions that appear on Monster. These descriptions are the only pieces of information directly describing the firms using Monster as a recruitment venue. They are separate from the job postings and can be accessed by job seekers either by alphabetical lists, geographical lists, or links from job postings. Corporate descriptions are designed to provide the job seeker with information necessary to understand the organization as an employer. In addition, the present investigation uses an exploratory research design to content analyze the corporate descriptions of more than 200 corporations within 10 different industries.[1] Content analysis of the cor-

porate descriptions led to the development and presentation of an initial taxonomy. The study also looks at the elements of corporate image presented in the descriptions. By examining how firms market themselves as employers, their particular "employer brand" may be revealed. Employer branding, a relatively new practice in recruiting, is the promotion of a unique and attractive image of the firm as an employer—a distinct employer identity.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Business communication and staffing researchers have investigated the means of attracting qualified job applicants (e.g., Ralston & Brady, 1994). Recruitment of applicants by firms influences attitudes about the firm and its reputation (Rynes & Barber, 1990). Information conveyed in written recruitment materials is important

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The Internet has developed into one of the most popular sources of job information for job seekers.

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in attracting potential applicants. Herriot and Rothwell (1981) found that recruitment brochures influenced applicants' decisions to apply to an organization but did not indicate which characteristics were relevant. Breaugh and Starke's (2000) review of recruitment research describes studies that deal with recruitment messages at a micro level. Their review indicates that textual recruitment messages are more attractive when they are vividly written and include language that is concrete rather than abstract (Tybout & Artz, 1994). Messages that convey unexpected information (Kulik & Ambrose, 1993) or personally relevant information (Chaiken & Stangor, 1987) are also more attractive. Breaugh and Billings (1988) found that the recruitment message must be understandable and credible, whereas Jablin, Putnam, Roberts, and Porter (1987) suggested that it is important for the message to be written using the appropriate level of expression and correct language. Finally, Barber and Roehling (1993) noted that when organizations do not supply sufficient information, applicants are likely to regard the organization as having sloppy recruitment practices. Their findings show that applicants pay more attention to specific rather than general information.

The intent of written recruitment advertisements is to generate the desired reader response—a reinforcement or change in attitudes or beliefs (Hilton, Motes, & Fielden, 1989). Despite the research that has been conducted, Barber (1998) calls for further research to improve our understanding of the objective factors that influence potential applicants' attraction to an organization. This article posits that part

of this clarification includes the establishment of a method to catalogue the information regularly presented in initial attraction materials, a methodology that currently does not exist. The present article seeks to fill that gap. The conceptual framework for this exploratory study rests in four areas: recruitment materials studies as described above, the psychology of initial attraction, corporate image, and the new area of employer branding. The next sections continue to describe the relevance of each of these areas to this investigation.

Initial Attraction

Studies of attraction suggest that human attraction often begins with the experience of similarity. The greater the sense of similarity between self and other, the greater the sense of attraction becomes (Byrne & Neuman, 1992). The notion of similarity drives much of what we know about initial attraction to employers and job choice. The job search/recruitment process is a matching game. Schneider's (1987) attraction-selection-attrition model suggests that the prospective employee and the prospective employer make decisions about each other based on perceived similarity in values and personality. Written information is one of the first ways in which prospective applicants learn about the values of the organization.

Person-Organization Fit

Person-organization fit literature further develops the concept of attraction based on similarity. Studies suggest that employees select organizations on the basis of their perception of "fit" with that organization's values, using a variety of information available in the public domain, like recruitment materials (Cable & Judge, 1994, 1996; Chatman, 1989, 1991; Judge & Bretz, 1992). This research suggests that long-term positive outcomes result from a strong fit (Boxx, Odom, & Dunn, 1991; Chatman, 1991; O'Reilly, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1991). The person-organization fit literature is suggestive of the concept of identification, that is, the extent to which employees identify strongly with their organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). One obvious and important way of developing constructive organizational identification is when organizations attempt to communicate directly with present and future employees (Smidts, Pruyn, & van Riel, 2001). The content of the communication provides individuals with information about goals, values, and achievements of the organization that may strengthen identification and, in the case of recruitment, improve the likelihood that the person will be attracted to the organization (Cheney, 1983).

Our natural attraction to similar entities, supported in the communication, psychology, and human resources literature, has practical implications for corporate descriptions. It suggests that job seekers are looking for descriptions of attributes that match their own. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that firms should provide sufficient information that is available early in the job choice process so that prospective applicants can determine their own degree of fit. The study presented in this

article seeks to identify the types of information firms provide about themselves that might allow an applicant to make a reasonably informed decision about fit.

Organizational Image

Research suggests that organizational image contributes significantly to initial attraction. Early research in the area by Tom (1971) indicated that applicants are attracted to employers whose images are similar to their own self-image, suggesting that person-organization fit and assessment of image are important in the application process. Similarly, Rynes (1991) found that decisions to apply to a firm seemed to be based on a general sense of organizational image, but again, the components of image were not entirely clear. Belt and Paolillo (1982) discovered that a favorable image is more attractive to applicants than an unfavorable image. However, the authors did not provide information about what actually comprises image. Gatewood, Gowan, and Lautenschlager (1993), consistent with Rynes's (1991) suggestion, found that image is related to decisions to apply for a position with a firm. In their discussion, the authors suggested that potential applicants use corporate descriptions to develop their own sense of organizational image, and that they react positively to longer descriptions that further emphasize positive attributes of the firm (Gatewood et al., 1993).

Corporate social performance (CSP) of a firm is one of the only specific elements of image that has been studied in depth. Turban and Greening (1997) correlated published ratings of firms' CSP with participants' ratings of the attractiveness of those firms. They found that individuals are influenced by CSP when judging the attractiveness of a firm as an employer. When presented with data on firms' CSP ratings, participants in another study found highly rated firms more attractive than low-rated firms (Backhaus, Stone, & Heiner, 2002).

The extant research helped guide the present investigation in meaningful ways. For instance, knowing that image is a potentially strong driver of attraction, it would follow that firm descriptions would include information that acquaints the reader with the firm and its reputation, products, and services. Using Gatewood et al.'s (1993) conclusion that longer advertisements yielded more positive application intentions, one would speculate that an abundance rather than a dearth of information about the firm is preferable. Information about the firm's corporate social performance might also be included to attract applicants.

Employer Branding

Employer branding is fairly new in the practice of recruitment. The term *employer branding* was used as early as 1996 in a European marketing journal (Ambler & Barrow, 1996), and began to crop up frequently in the popular business press in the late 1990s (Cowe, 1998; Frook, 2001; "How to Build," 2001). The Conference Board, in its 2001 study of employer branding practices, proposed that "the employer brand establishes the identity of the firm as an employer. It encompasses

the firm's values, system, policies and behaviors toward the objectives of attracting, motivating, and retaining the firm's current and potential employees" (p. 3). These definitions indicate that employer branding involves promoting, both within and outside the firm, a clear view of what makes a firm different and desirable as an employer.

Employer branding's foundations are in marketing practices, employing product branding principles to marketing employer brands. As in product branding, the assumption in employer branding is that potential applicants are attracted to the firm based on their perceptions of the attributes of the firm, the perceived benefits, and their assessment of the brand image (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). Furthermore, to improve overall retention, employers use employer branding techniques to help applicants screen companies for the correct match between their values, priorities, and work styles and those of the organization (Bergstrom & Anderson, 2000). This is highly similar to the person-organization fit construct, but it represents a stronger effort on the part of the employer to exploit the "fit-drive" of potential employees and to position the employer brand image appropriately to recruit the desired applicants. Employer branding provides an important framework for this exploratory study. For instance, branding suggests that recruitment messages are differentiated by organizations to attract the applicants that fit the organization's image of itself. Thus, an important purpose for the study is to explore the extent to which this method of classifying corporate descriptions helps to reveal information about employer brands, and the messages organizations communicate to potential applicants.

This study explores the following two research questions:

> *Research Question 1:* How is the information in the corporate descriptions distributed across the various information categories? Specifically, how do firms compare in the way they depict employment within their organization, and do industries vary in their use of information?
>
> *Research Question 2:* Do firms' corporate descriptions depict unique employer brands?

METHODOLOGY

Firms have a multitude of information to convey about themselves as employers to attract applicants. This study seeks to break down this multitude of elements into categories, to classify and explicate systematically what is included in these descriptions. The data for the study are drawn from corporate descriptions posted at Monster.com in the spring of 2002. Monster's content offers particular advantages that lend themselves to the purposes of the investigation. First, Monster is the largest player in the Internet recruitment market. Internet recruitment experts indicate that Monster is a major job search site that has clear name recognition (Schreyer & McCarter, 1998). Second, the descriptions are provided as text only, eliminating the confounding variables presented by other Web page innovations like hyperlinks,

videos, photos, and other graphics (Dholakia & Rego, 1998). This provides an opportunity to classify Internet recruitment content apart from Web site features. With this classification system, future research could be conducted to determine how other Web features interact with different types of content. Third, the recruiting corporations themselves write the descriptions, not Monster.com. The company posts any corporate description submitted by the recruiting firm, and does not screen or edit them. The descriptions are found in a different location than the actual job vacancy postings, and Web surfers need to either follow a link from the job posting or enter the corporate description section from the home page of the Monster Web site.

Employer branding is fairly new in the practice of recruitment.

The study employs a quantitative content analysis methodology and approaches corporate recruitment information in a way similar to other content analyses in which types of information provided by a firm are catalogued to understand more about the firm and its influence on its stakeholders (Kohut & Segars, 1992). The first step in conducting the content analysis was to explore the corporate description messages and determine what they contained. The sampling unit is the corporate description statements posted on Monster. Twenty corporate descriptions were randomly selected and analyzed, recording the occurrence of descriptors used in the descriptions. These descriptors included those often used in corporate culture research (e.g., dynamic, creative, casual, competitive, supportive), terms used to describe the organization and its products (global, high-tech, large, growing), and terms used to describe the compensation and benefits offered by the organization. The initial master list of descriptors numbered more than 60 items (see the appendix). It was clear from the initial coding experience that the content to be analyzed was manifest and would not require much reading between the lines. The messages were straightforward, using language that is denotative, and would require very little individual interpretation, making the coding process inherently more reliable (Ritte, Lacy, & Fico, 1998).

To be certain that this sample of 20 included all the descriptors typically used in corporate descriptions, another 50 randomly selected corporate descriptions were reviewed, this time using the checklist of 60 terms established in the previous phase. To check the validity of this initial coding scheme, two senior-level management students went through the same process as the author. When their counts of any specific descriptors differed by more than 10% from mine, we reviewed and modified the coding scheme. In this second round of analysis, it also became clear that certain descriptors were more frequently mentioned than others.

After capturing the 60 descriptors occurring most frequently in corporate descriptions, the 60 descriptors were narrowed to 10 categories. This was an important step in providing "replicative and valid inferences from the data to their context" as advised by Krippendorff (1980, p. 21). One purpose of the study was to develop a consistent method of categorizing companies for future application to studies of organizational attraction. In their study of job choice and attraction, Turban, Forret, and Hendrickson (1998) developed five scales related to job attraction, supportive work environment, firm attributes, advancement opportunities, challenging work, and location. Although challenging work and location are self-explanatory, it is helpful to define specifically what the others mean. Supportive work environment is defined as warmth and concern for employees; firm attributes as size, growth-rate, and profitability of the firm; and advancement opportunities as possibilities of career growth. These five broad categories captured the essence of many of the descriptors and provided a means of collapsing many descriptors into broader categories. For the next phase of categorization, five additional categories that corresponded with other literature on organizational attraction and employer branding were added. Corporate social responsibility, or the extent to which the organization emphasizes its responsibilities to multiple stakeholders (Turban & Greening, 1997); customer orientation, the extent to which the firm focuses on customer satisfaction (Swenson & Herche, 1994); climate, the everyday work environment (Schneider, 1987); work/family balance, the ways in which the firm assists workers in meeting extra-work responsibilities (Honeycutt & Rosen, 1997); and compensation/benefits (Cable & Judge, 1994). Together, these 10 categories were exhaustive in covering the recruitment themes found in the Monster descriptions, and also capture the themes established in the recruitment literature.

The first coding scheme used words as the syntactical unit of analysis. Changing to the sentence as the syntactical and recording unit facilitated the move to a thematic analysis. This phase of the content analysis utilizes "grouping," as defined by Deese (1969). In this method, content is simply placed into groups when the recording units share common attributes. Thus, each sentence was coded as belonging to one of the 10 categories or groups. If a sentence did not fit any category, it was coded as NA. At the end, each description received a ratio score for each category, based on the number of times the category appeared in relation to the total number of sentences in the description. Thus, if the entire corporate description was dominated by information about firm attributes, it would receive a score of 100% for the firm attribute category and zero for all other categories.

The coding scheme could be finalized without further validation. Krippendorff (1980) has provided time-tested standards for conducting and validating content analysis. For a single-coder study, a main concern is semantic validity, the extent to which words placed together in categories correspond to the category in the same way. To measure semantic validity, five senior-level management students reviewed the list of 60 descriptors from phase one of the study, and placed them into the 10 categories. Defining the reliability coefficient as the proportion of all codings where a majority of coders agree, the reliability coefficients for the 10

categories ranged from a high of 95% for advancement opportunities to a low of 74% for corporate social performance. These were considered acceptable. To ensure that the coding was consistent with a wider group of individuals, the students coded 10 corporate descriptions using this methodology. My coding agreed with the majority of the students' coding in 90% of the coded sentences. This level of reliability was considered acceptable.

RESULTS

The previous section described the process by which the categories of information were established. In this section, the two research questions are addressed. First, how is the information in the corporate descriptions distributed across the various information categories? As indicated in the previous section, the data were recorded as ratios. The use of ratios allowed a wide variety of quantitative analysis techniques. This section and the discussion report the quantitative analyses and the implications of those analyses.

To describe the data, means of the proportions for each category were calculated. In other words, the means show us the average amount of space allocated to each category of information by the firms. Table 1 provides these means, as well as the intercorrelations of the categories. By looking at the intercorrelations, one can see the similarities among the categories.

As Table 1 suggests, categories differed in terms of the proportion of text assigned to them. However, without further statistical analysis, we cannot conclude that the means are meaningfully different. Therefore, chi-square analysis was conducted to determine whether the differences among the proportions were statistically significant (Williams, 1992). The analysis shows that there are significant differences in the means of the proportions (see Table 2). To market themselves as potential employers, firms in the study tended to focus squarely on firm attributes. The term *firm attributes* refers to descriptions of the products, processes, size, scope, profitability, and success of the company. The firms included in the study devoted the greatest proportion of text to themselves, with an average of 66% of their description used for this purpose. Twenty-four percent of firms included information solely about firm attributes to the exclusion of all other information, and only 3% of firms completely omitted any firm attribute information.

The leading words in the firm attributes are *successful* and *large*. Of the firms in the study, 74% used the word *large* or a synonym to describe their operations, scope, size of clientele, or numbers of employees. The descriptions of large varied. Some organizations used words that implied their size by describing their reach or scope, for example, "licensed to operate in 47 states" or "employ over 15,000 workers in locations around the globe." Other companies simply stated that they are the largest firm in their industry sector or geographic area.

Similarly, 88% of firms described themselves as successful. Most often the word *success* or *successful* was actually used, and that word usually appeared in the first

Table 1.   Means and Intercorrrelations

	Attributes	Corporate Social Performance	Customer Orientation	Climate	Supportive Work Environment	Work/Family Balance	Advancement	Challenge	Compensation	Location
Attributes	.66									
Corporate social performance	−.35**	.024								
Customer orientation	−.19**	−.03	.027							
Climate	−.42**	.12	.00	.036						
Supportive work environment	−.53**	.10	.00	.24**	.051					
Work/family balance	−.13	.17*	−.03	−.04	.03	.003				
Advancement	−.57**	.10	−.03	.06	.16*	.01	.07			
Challenge	−.42**	.07	.01	.24**	.14*	.03	.18*	.03		
Compensation	−.41**	.13	−.12	.10	.13*	.05	.09	.04	.05	
Location	−.21**	−.07	−.06	−.02	−.05	.00	−.05	−.03	.08	.009

NOTE: Means are on the diagonal.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Table 2.   Chi-Square Analysis

Variable	M	χ^2	df	Significance
Attributes	.66	1,144.07	95	.000
Corporate social performance	.024	4,432.87	32	.000
Customer orientation	.027	3,686.52	32	.000
Climate	.036	3,853.51	41	.000
Supportive environment	.051	4,107.90	49	.000
Work/family balance	.003	1,561.85	8	.000
Advancement	.07	3,619.91	56	.000
Challenging work	.03	3,656.31	37	.000
Compensation/benefits	.05	3,397.17	46	.000
Location	.009	2,390.88	13	.000

or second paragraph of the description. Frequently, the word was used in the description of their employees, and often was couched in such a way that the firm was asking for newcomers to come in and join their already successful employees. Many descriptions used the word to describe projects, products, or services and how they were able to meet the needs of clients. Promises and reports of growth are another firm attribute that appeared in many corporate descriptions. Seventy-five percent of firms described themselves as growing, expanding, or developing in terms of sales, clients, products, workforce, or locations. Firms also emphasized global or international operations. "Going global" is an idea that presented itself in 70% of corporate descriptions. In the area of firm attributes, which is so clearly emphasized, firms appeared to attempt to present an image of a large, successful, growing, international enterprise. Interpretations of this implication are covered in the discussion. We now proceed to the next most popular category, employee advancement.

Employee advancement ranked as the second most prevalent category of information in the organizational descriptions. On average, firms devoted 7.4% of text to promises of employee advancement, growth, training, and development. This is obviously a huge decrease from the attention devoted to size, scope, sales, and success. In fact, only 45% of firms provided any information about advancement opportunities in their descriptions. Statements about employee advancement included things like promises of promotion from within or career growth, opportunities for advancement, professional development programs, training opportunities, and mentoring programs. This category has two particular aspects of advancement included: training and promotional opportunities. However, it is impossible to separate the two, as most descriptions used language like Bloomingdale's: "Our training programs provide our employees uncommon opportunities for career growth and advancement." So for many of the firms that are concerned about presenting employee advancement information, emphasis is on the link between learning and growth. Some firms choose to focus specifically on promotional

opportunities, like White Castle: "Our commitment is demonstrated by adhering to our philosophy of promotion from within."

As the old saying goes, "money talks," but in the case of corporate descriptions, firms seem to allow other aspects of their organization to have the floor. Firms in the study devoted an average of only 5% of text to descriptions of compensation and benefits. Only 41% of firms even mentioned compensation or benefits. In the descriptions that did touch on compensation or benefits, there was a blanket statement promising "competitive salary and benefits." Thirty-five percent of descriptions included an overall "competitive salary statement." When benefits were mentioned, most descriptions opted for a bulleted list format to itemize the various benefits. When that occurred, the number of benefits mentioned ranged from 5 to 26. Although the mainstays of the benefits list are medical, dental, 401(k) and pension plans, and various forms of paid leave, some firms are very creative in the benefits areas. Among the unique benefits listed were Cigna's "healthy babies program," adoption reimbursement, work/life balance support, domestic partner benefits, free meals, all-day coffee bar, dry cleaning delivery, and fitness club memberships.

An average of only 3% of text was used to describe employee support. Thirty-seven percent of firms made some mention of support for employees. Most of these statements used language like, "We create a supportive environment for our employees," or Caterpillar's "We support our employees every step of the way." As support is often seen as the flip side of challenge, firms also accorded 3% of text, on average, to descriptions of the challenges they provide for employees. Thirty-two percent of firms mentioned a "challenging workplace" or "challenging and demanding work" their employees do. In all cases, the word *challenge* was couched in positive terms, demonstrating the advantages of a challenging workplace.

Now let us turn our attention to the second component of the first research question, that is, do industries vary in the ways firms within them describe themselves. The data exploration continued by industry to examine how different industries used different patterns of information in their descriptions. Literature supports the notion that industries might differ in their recruitment tactics. Industry structural characteristics have an influence on the strategy and profitability of firms (Dess, Ireland, & Hitt, 1990). It seems logical that firms within an industry would be likely to share recruitment strategies as well. Using primary business activity as a criterion, firms were categorized into 12 groups by industry. It was clear before conducting any statistical analysis that employment-marketing practices differed by industry. It appeared that high-tech organizations, including software firms, telecommunications, information technology, and electronics firms, relied most heavily on descriptions of their activities, markets, and products to attract applicants. It also appeared that service firms, restaurants, and retail outlets used an applicant-centered approach—guaranteeing training and advancement opportunities and a fun working environment to attract applicants.

A test of analysis of variance confirmed the patterns that appeared to emerge during the data-gathering phase. Table 3 shows the statistical significance of the

differences in information distribution for each category. Significant differences among industry categories were found for the information areas of firm attributes, corporate social performance, work-family balance, and advancement. There was no significant difference among industries in the allocation of text to the categories of challenging work, customer emphasis, or corporate social responsibility.

> One purpose of the study was
> to develop a consistent method
> of categorizing companies.

Whereas firms in the help supply category, which included temporary agencies and placement firms like Adecco or Gateway Group, devoted the most text to descriptions of the firm (averaging 87%), software firms like Cimetric, information technology firms such as Decision One, and business services firms like Baygroup used more than 75% of text to describe themselves. At the other end of the spectrum, consumer products firms like Avery-Dennison or Johnson & Johnson and restaurants like Olive Garden or Hard Rock Café devoted about 40% of text to firm descriptions, allowing them to provide much more employee-centered information in their description. Of all industries, restaurants averaged the most space (26%) devoted to descriptions of employee advancement. Consumer products firms allocated an average of 13% of text to employee advancement.

The second research question asked whether firms' corporate descriptions depict unique employer brands. A brand, according to the American Marketing Association, is defined as "a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or combination of them which is intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors" (*Building Brands*, 2003). Employer branding is "concerned with building an image in the minds of the potential labour market that the company, above all others, is a great place to work" (Ewing, Pitt, de Bussy, & Berthon, 2002, p. 12). These definitions also suggest that to establish an employer brand, a firm must develop and differentiate its identity as an employer, and then communicate that differentiated brand to its audiences, in this case, the job seeker. It is particularly important for firms in the same industry to differentiate their employer brand because organizations in the same industry seem very similar (Thomas & Wise, 1999). Using these data, the concept of employer brand was explored, testing the extent to which this method of classifying corporate descriptions reveals the existence of distinct employer brands.

Although there is good evidence to suggest that having a distinct employer brand is important to attracting applicants (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003), on the surface, the data suggest that at best there are broad categories of employer brand types. The brands are not unique because they are shared by multiple organizations. K-means

Table 3.   Proportion of Text in Each Category by Industry

		df	F	*Significance*
Attributes				
Between groups	4.071	11	5.15	.000
Within groups	14.442	201		
Total	18.513	212		
Corporate social responsibility				
Between groups	0.185	11	5.13	.000
Within groups	0.659	201		
Total	0.844	212		
Customer orientation				
Between groups	0.135	11	1.883	.043
Within groups	1.324	203		
Total	1.460	214		
Climate				
Between groups	0.039	11	0.856	.585
Within groups	0.842	201		
Total	0.881	212		
Supportive environment				
Between groups	0.148	11	1.758	.063
Within groups	1.537	201		
Total	1.684	212		
Work family				
Between groups	0.013	11	2.015	.029
Within groups	0.121	203		
Total	0.134	214		
Advancement				
Between groups	0.761	11	5.013	.000
Within groups	2.788	202		
Total	3.548	213		
Challenging				
Between groups	0.056	11	1.554	.115
Within groups	0.662	202		
Total	0.718	213		
Compensation				
Between groups	0.103	11	1.363	.193
Within groups	1.376	201		
Total	1.478	212		
Location				
Between groups	0.018	11	0.887	.554
Within groups	0.373	203		
Total	0.391	214		

cluster analysis was used to explore whether cases would group together based on similarities in multiple variables. After repeated analyses, the differences were most meaningful with 10 clusters. With fewer than 10 clusters, the differences among the clusters were difficult to see. With more than 10, there were too many one-member clusters whose differences were too subtle to differentiate. Although

Industry Differences
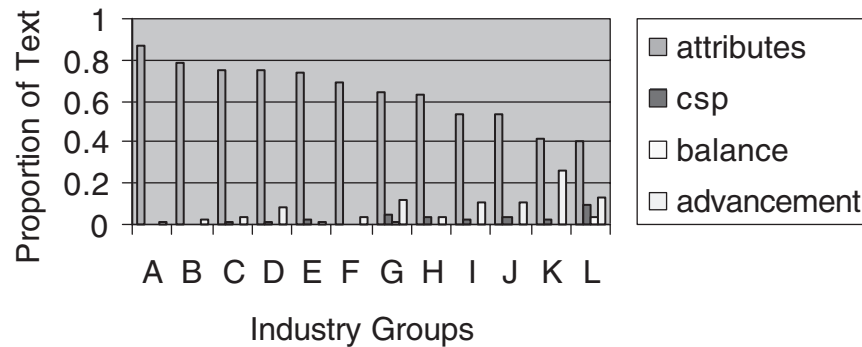
Industry Groups:

A Help Supply	E Healthcare	I Finance & Insurance
B Info Technology	F Computers & Electronics	J Retail
C Business Services	G Construction	K Restaurants
D Manufacturing	H Publishing	L Consumer Products

Figure 1.   Representation of Industry Differences
NOTE: CSP = corporate social performance.

not every cluster suggests a clear theme, 5 groupings were distinctive, and those are described next.

The largest cluster contains the organizations that marketed the attributes of their firm, their products, and services above all other factors, with virtually no mention of any other aspect of employment with them. This cluster included 118 firms, called the product/service-centered employer brand category. The second largest cluster included the organizations that provided a balanced picture of them-selves as employers as well as producers of products or services. Each dimension was included in their descriptions, with about 20% of the descriptions devoted to advancement and support. Including 70 firms, I call this the balanced-scorecard brand category. The other clusters are small in comparison. The career-centered cluster, used by 11 firms, emphasized opportunities for advancement and employee support more than descriptions of products and services. The culture-centered clus-ter, with only 5 firms, emphasized information describing the work environment, advancement opportunities, and compensation. The compensation-centered clus-ter, also containing 5 firms, emphasized its compensation and benefits as its main point.

In terms of true employer brand distinctiveness, there were only 3 firms in the 10-cluster model that did not cluster together with any others, suggesting that they

were more successful in presenting a unique brand. These firms were completely differentiated from the others in terms of their emphases. One firm used a CSR approach, devoting 46% of its text to descriptions of its CSR efforts and the ways in which employees benefit from this approach. One firm devoted its entire description to employee advancement, emphasizing the ways in which employees in the firm are trained, developed, and promoted. Finally, 1 firm devoted its entire text to customer issues. Implications of this for employer branding and recruitment are discussed in the next section.

DISCUSSION

The primary purpose of this investigation was to create and test a method of classifying corporate recruitment messages through content analysis. Furthermore, the study explored ways in which the information in the corporate descriptions is distributed across various information categories. It also examined how these descriptions and the methodology might reveal employer branding messages found in corporate descriptions. The data suggest that a quantitative content analysis provided an effective way to uncover and describe common categories of information in corporate descriptions. Ten specific information categories were revealed through the exploratory content analysis of the corporate descriptions found on Monster.com. With a means of coding the data and analyzing it, descriptions showed statistically significant variation by industry. The data also suggest that there are some distinct employer brand types that can be revealed through cluster analysis, but that unique employer brands are few and far between.

Although these data do not necessarily allow generalization beyond Monster's population of employers, the findings demonstrate how analysis of corporate descriptions might reveal some interesting insights into corporate recruitment tactics. From these data, the insights are contrary to our knowledge of organizational attraction. First, our sample of organizations emphasizes information that has been shown empirically not to contribute much to organizational attraction. In studies of attraction, supportive work environment, challenging and interesting work, and location (Turban et al., 1998) were shown to be most predictive of attraction. Studies of job attributes that predict job choice have indicated that type of work, advancement opportunities, and coworkers are important to job seekers (Turban, Eyring, & Campion, 1993). No empirical studies have supported the notion that organizational size, success, or global reach act as inducements to applicants, yet these corporate recruitment statements emphasize these attributes over all information. Because firms have only one chance to make a first impression, the absence of attractive elements in their own descriptions appears to be a tactical error (Cober, Brown, Blumental, Doverspike, & Levy, 2000). Based on prevailing literature, one might hypothesize that firms that present more personally compelling signals to the public would be more successful in attracting job candidates (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003).

Although these inducements have not been linked to attraction, social identity theory might provide some practical reasons for reliance on size and success information. Social identity theory suggests that individuals derive their identities from membership in certain social entities like organizations (Stets & Burke, 2000). Individuals may be attracted to organizations that they perceive as large, well-known, and prestigious because they feel that as members of such organizations, they, too, gain credibility and prestige. The grandiose descriptions that organizations present may satisfy a recruit's desire to embark on a career that will make him or her a respected member of society. Indeed, social identity theory supports one argument in favor of this type of corporate recruitment message. Another support is the findings regarding impressions of corporate image: Studies show that organizational image can positively influence organizational attraction (Gatewood et al., 1993), and size, success, and scope are elements of image.

Unique employer brands are
few and far between.

On the topic of image, despite the emphasis placed on image in these descriptions, organizations devote virtually no attention to ethics, corporate social performance, or diversity messages. Organizational stakeholders, people within and outside the organization, have a heightened awareness of corporate social performance (Greening & Turban, 2000). Research suggests that corporate social performance is an important part of organizational reputation and may affect organizational attraction (Backhaus et al., 2002; Greening & Turban, 2000; Turban & Greening, 1997). Despite this, corporate social performance, which included ethics, diversity, equal opportunity, and community involvement, garnered only 2.4% of text within the entire data set. It is ironic that although firms seem to be attempting to manage their corporate image and reputation, they are giving short shrift to the issues that have been shown to influence that very image.

Most organizations fail to differentiate themselves in any material way from their competitors, indicating that in most firms, the employer branding strategy has not successfully taken hold. Analysis by industry showed significant differences among the industries in the way they described their firms. This result suggests that there are norms within industries that establish appropriate ways to describe and market themselves. The clearest example was presented by the electronics industry. Descriptions were predominantly focused on product developments, service innovations, and boasts of technological growth. Little was mentioned about employee support, advancement opportunities, culture or climate, or work/family balance. In fact, the corporation itself was the center of the marketing effort. Restaurants, retail, and service industries, which traditionally face high turnover, were much more

employee focused, making promises of interesting and challenging work in which good performance would be recognized by promotion and salary increases. Although these differences manifested themselves across industries, it would be difficult to distinguish the description of one electronics firm from another, or one restaurant from another. Unless a company shuns these industry-wide traditions, they will have difficulty standing out from the crowd and could forfeit their competitive advantage when it comes to attracting job candidates. As branding grows in popularity, a firm without a distinct employer brand identity is not likely to succeed in the battle for the best and brightest candidates (Sullivan, 2002).

Prior to this investigation, little to no effort has been made to establish a means for classifying corporate descriptions used for recruitment. Moreover, little research has been conducted on Internet recruitment (Tomasello, 2001), despite the growing dominance of this recruitment source. Further research might utilize the content analysis techniques, as well as the categories that were presented in this study, to examine Internet recruitment materials and traditional recruitment brochures. Widespread testing of the categorization and the methodology would yield more uniform data about how organizations make initial contact with potential applicants. Researchers could study a number of attraction issues. First, this method presents an opportunity to conduct a profile matching approach, in which job seekers' preferences could be matched with the themes present in corporate descriptions to measure attraction and posthire outcomes. Second, using this method of categorizing, the information would allow for exploration of ways in which people are attracted differentially to organizations based on the information presented by the firm. Is the organization attracting the desired applicants? Third, individual perceptions of corporate descriptions might be compared with perceptions of the firms' broader image to study the relationship of corporate image with recruitment image as suggested by Gatewood et al. (1993).

Like all field research, the present study has limitations. For instance, one limitation of this research is the unitary source of corporate descriptions. Although Monster is a leading job posting site and the corporate descriptions are submitted by the recruiting firm, future research into this area might use a mixture of sources of written material, either various Internet sites or a combination of recruitment brochures and Internet materials. Further research might also extend this study by applying the methodology to corporate Web sites, examining employer branding strategies. Despite such limitations, however, the data reported on in this article begin to shed some light on employer branding and marketing in human resources. Indeed, the data indicate that firms have far to go in developing unique identities.

APPENDIX
Initial Descriptors Identified in Corporate Descriptions

Professional	Hard working	Day care/family care
Challenging	Employees are owners	Employee discounts
Excellence	Supportive	Fitness
Successful/highly ranked	Employees: key/primary/	Tuition reimbursement
Large, largest	number one	Vacation/holidays/sick
Learning organization/	Empowerment	Maternity/paternity
knowledge oriented	Autonomy/freedom	Concern for community
Global	Family focused	Environment
Technological emphasis	Customer is primary/	Diversity
Growth oriented	number one	Product quality
Passion/passionate	Customer service emphasis	Employee relations
Fun/spirited	Competitive salary	Ethics/integrity
Energetic	Competitive benefits	Career growth/
Exciting	Stock options/equity	advancement
Enthusiastic	Bonuses	Professional development
Dynamic	Profit sharing	Training
Creative	401(k)	Promotion from within
Innovative	Medical	Mentoring
Flexible	Dental	Travel
Team oriented	Vision	Good geographical area
Casual	Other insurance	Telecommuting
Comfortable	Domestic partner	Flextime

NOTE

1. Please contact the author for a comprehensive list of corporations used in the sample.

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