FAIR OF ATTRACTION?

A QUANTITATIVE STUDY OF THE EFFECT OF RECRUITER FRIENDLINESS AND UNFRIENDLINESS ON PERCEIVED EMPLOYER AND ORGANIZATIONAL ATTRACTIVENESS AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract:

Devoting effort to being an attractive employer has become crucial for organizations and it has gained focus both in the industry as well as in research. Thus, employer branding processes such as early recruitment activities present a critical opportunity to attract future talent. One such activity is career fairs for university students, in which organizations have the chance to build an attractive employer brand among students. The purpose of this thesis was to examine the potential role recruiter behavior plays in the employer branding process of creating employer attractiveness. Additionally, secondary motive were to investigate if recruiter behavior also influences organizational attractiveness and pursuit and if individuals' cynicism relates to achieved outcomes. This quantitative study was conducted using an online questionnaire, including a written scenario, and distributed to Swedish university students. Results revealed that the level of recruiter friendliness matters and may have an impact on the level of attractiveness towards the organization. Notably, unfriendly recruiter behavior harms the employer and organizational attractiveness. However, individuals' cynicism traits appear to weakly relate to observed outcomes.

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Definitions

Attraction: "something that makes people want to go to a place or do a particular thing" (Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus, n.d).

Brand: "a distinguishing name and/or symbol intended to identify the goods or services of either one seller or a group of sellers, and to differentiate those goods or services from those of competitors" (Aaker, 1991, p. 7).

Brand equity: "a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand that add or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or that firm's customers" (Aaker, 1996, p. 7-8).

Company: "an organization that sells goods or services in order to make money" (Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus, n.d).

Cynicism: "a disposition to disbelieve in the sincerity or goodness of human motives and actions" (Dean Jr et al., 1998, p. 342).

Early recruitment activities: "a communication process in which organizations attempt to persuade potential applicants to pursue opportunities . . . " (Allen et al., 2007, p. 1696)

Organization: "a group of people who work together in an organized way for a shared purpose" (Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus, n.d).

Service encounter: "the dyadic interaction between customer and service provider" (Surprenant & Solomon, 1987, p. 87).

Contents

1. Introduction

Beechler and Woodward (2009) propose that as we are in the 21st-century knowledge economy, the business environment is more complex and demanding than ever. At the same time, with students graduating from various disciplines and institutions, attracting and retaining the best talent to shape the future of the organization is becoming a pressing matter for employers (Branine, 2008).

Early recruitment activities, such as career fairs, are said to help form potential applicants' initial expectations of a potential employer (Eveleth et al., 2015). As such, recruiting activities present a critical opportunity for companies to create an attractive employer brand, which can influence intentions to apply and join a firm (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). Potential applicants' perception of an employer may also be influenced by recruiter behavior. For example, recruiter friendliness and unfriendliness in the early stages of the recruitment process may influence organizational outcomes (Giannantonio et al., 2019).

Prior experience of attending Handelsdagarna, an influential career fair in Scandinavia (Handelsdagarna, 2022), sparked curiosity to explore how recruiter behavior may influence perceived attractiveness among students. In our experience, many students spoke fondly about companies where they had met friendly and welcoming company representatives during the fair, even if they had no prior knowledge of the company. Equally, unfriendly representatives sparked annoyance and disappointment. To explore why this may be, this thesis will take support from the literature that has used an employer branding approach, exploring attraction and organizational outcomes in relation to traditional brand equity theory (Cable & Turban, 2001; Gardner et al., 2011). Since employer brand research crosses paths with organizational attractiveness (Gardner et al., 2011), it will be relevant to explore recruiter behavior with organizational outcomes in terms of both employer and organizational attractiveness. Further, we will employ signaling theory which suggests that when facing incomplete information and uncertainty, we tend to use the information available to us (such as recruiter behavior) as signals about e.g., the organization (Allen et al., 2007). Lastly, this thesis will also investigate if individuals' cynical tendencies relate to the possible effect of interacting with a recruiter and his/her behavior. The reason is that, just like cynical consumers believe they are forced to be a part of a mistrusted system (Helm et al., 2015), some researchers argue that it is important not to oversell jobs as this may spark cynicism among potential applicants (Ruth Prickett, 1998).

Ultimately, just like companies attempts to build their brand among consumers, companies can manage their employer brand towards "HR customers". Therefore, this thesis will explore recruiter behaviors' potential impact on the employer branding process.

1.1.   Background

1.1.1. Recruiter behavior

According to Gatewood et al., (1993), the first step of the recruitment process can be considered the applicants' assessment of information coming from various recruitment sources. Even in the case of previous exposure to the organization, applicants' image of the employer can be positively influenced by the various information that is made available to them (Gatewood et al., 1993). Hence, instead of solely relying on the formal provided information, perceptions may be based to some extent on interactions with recruiters (Porter et al., 2004). Interactions with recruiters can therefore provide signals or cues when information is incomplete (Celani & Singh, 2011) and individuals' views of recruiters can be used to assess the overall organization (Breaugh & Starke, 2000). Authors such as Hausknecht et al., (2004) highlight the potential relationship recruiter behavior has on applicants' job perception, regard for the company, and intentions to accept a job offer. As such, the interaction with students during early recruitment activities on campus can have important implications for how the company is perceived down the line in the recruitment process (Harris & Fink, 1987).

1.1.2. Career fairs as an early recruitment activity

Career fairs are an early recruitment activity that allows students to learn more about different employment or specific employment opportunities (McGrath, 2002). Career fairs present one opportunity where students can make the shift from school to the workplace environment through research into the current job market (Brennan et al., 2004). During career fairs, recruiters (or company representatives) are typically from HR or other areas of operation representing their job. It is also common to bring those who are graduates from the university that a company visits to establish a closer connection (Silkes et al., 2010).

Based on a survey conducted by Universum in 2017, career fairs ranked third in the top five communication channels favored by students (Universum, 2017) and they remain an effective recruitment tool given the ongoing war for talent in an increasingly tough labor market (Hansen, 2006). Participating in career fairs held on university campuses thus presents a mutually beneficial activity for companies as well as students since companies can meet recruitment goals while students can gain knowledge in their area of interest (Silkes et al., 2010). Seemingly, career fairs provide companies with an opportunity to increase brand awareness as well as build their employer brand through recruiter face time with potential applicants (Hansen, 2006). Ultimately, these in-person events are argued to be one of the important pieces of the marketing mix to effectively build the employer brand for companies (Mosley, 2014).

1.1.3. Background on employer brand and branding

Ambler and Barrow (1996) are pioneers within this area of research, defining the employer brand as "the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment and identified with the employing company" (Ambler & Barrow, 1996, p. 187). The authors also explain that the employer brand brings functional, economic, and psychological benefits similar to that of consumers purchasing products, making "traditional" marketing techniques applicable (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). Other studies support Ambler and Barrow's work, indicating that individuals seek emotional, ideological, and social context in their work in addition to simply monetary benefits (Parment & Dyhre, 2009).

Employer branding then, can be defined as "the process by which branding concepts and marketing, communications and HR techniques are applied to create an employer brand" (Martin et al., 2011, p. 3619). As such, the employer brand is the outcome in the form of a unique identity from having communicated and shaped the brand both externally and internally (Sharma & Prasad, 2018) with the employer value proposition being the backbone and vision of this identity (Sengupta et al., 2015).

1.2. Problem formulation

According to ManpowerGroup (2021), for the first time since the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak, companies are once again beginning to report a positive outlook, indicating strong hiring intentions globally. In Sweden, companies have begun picking up the pace, with 30% of employers anticipating an increase in hiring (ManpowerGroup, 2021). Yet, according to ManpowerGroup (2021), we are currently seeing the highest global talent shortage in 15 years. Given the importance of attracting talent and university students being one such potential source, the objective of this thesis is to explore if recruiter behavior during career fairs affects students' perceived employer and organizational attractiveness. This is to better understand how and if recruiter behavior will influence students' perception of a potential employer in a certain way, and what implications this may pose for companies' process of building their employer brand among future talent. Career fairs are chosen due to them being one of the more favored channels by students, making them relevant to explore as part of employer branding processes.

1.3. Research question and purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to gain a better understanding of the potential importance of recruiter behavior as part of the employer branding process. Hence, the primary research question to be examined is:

Does recruiter behavior during career fairs have any effect on perceived employer attractiveness?

Moreover, to gain a more holistic perspective on how perceived attractiveness may be influenced by recruiter behavior, two secondary research questions will also be examined:

Does recruiter behavior during career fairs have any effect on perceived organizational attractiveness and intentions to pursue?

Does individuals' cynicism relate to the potential effect of recruiter behavior on employer attractiveness and organizational attractiveness?

1.4.　Delimitations

This thesis is subject to formalities and limited resources and is therefore delimited in the following aspects. Firstly, all data is collected following the General Data Protection Regulation, GDPR (European Union, 2016). Respondents of the distributed survey are required to give their consent to participate in the study. Only necessary personal data is collected for the sake of this thesis, such as gender, age, and information about current studies. Secondly, for convenience reasons, we geographically limit ourselves to Sweden and Swedish students. This is to limit possible cultural variations in career fair expectations as well as variations in what can be considered unfriendly or friendly recruiter behavior. Lastly, to narrow down our scope, our thesis does not focus on all dimensions contributing to perceived attractiveness that the recruiter's behavior could influence during employer branding processes.

1.5.　Expected contribution

Since students are an attractive target group for companies, it is of interest to explore how recruiter behavior during career fairs can impact perceived attractiveness. Much research has been done relating to early recruitment activities, employer branding, and to some extent student experiences during career fairs or campus recruitment (see e.g. Brennan et al., 2004; Karavasilev et al., 2019; Silkes et al., 2010; Wildes & Tepeci, 2004). There is, however, to our knowledge, no study attempting to investigate recruiter behavior during career fairs and its potential influence on students' perceived attractiveness. Thus, this thesis contributes to research by investigating this gap, and what managerial implications this may have. Lastly, while previous experimental studies on recruiter behavior such as e.g., Goltz & Giannantonio, (1995) and Giannantonio et al., (2019) have been made, these only compare manipulated scenarios. We also include a control condition in our thesis to compare the manipulated scenarios with, therefore contributing with an attempt to isolate the effects of the recruiter behavior as the independent variable for a deeper analysis.

2. Literary review and theoretical foundation

The primary sources used for literature research were library databases such as SSE Library and Scopus. Keywords such as recruiter behavior, recruiter friendliness, career fairs, brand, brand equity, employer brand, employer branding, attractiveness, organizational attractiveness, and service encounter, were used to find previous research and literature. We did not find any previous studies focusing on recruiter friendliness's effect on students' perceived attractiveness in the context of career fairs.

2.1.   Recruiter behavior

Breaugh and Starke (2000) discuss in their paper how recruitment literature over the years has explored how activities such as recruiters, recruiting sources and realistic job previews influence e.g., the outcomes of the recruitment process. The impact of recruiters appears noteworthy, as research suggests that they signal unknown organizational attributes for potential candidates and may thus have beneficial effects (Breaugh & Starke, 2000). Exploring the impact of the recruiter can involve both who does the recruiting (e.g., age, gender) but also how the recruiter him/herself behaves (e.g., friendliness) and is often used as a predictor to explain applicant attraction (Chapman et al., 2005). Other findings indicate that perceived recruiter personableness and informativeness are two of the most important characteristics which affect perceived job attributes and assessment of the company (Harris & Fink, 1987). Hence, carefully selecting company representatives and understanding how their behavior may influence applicant perception is argued to be of great importance (Gordon et al., 2014).

2.1.1. Recruiter behavior influence on students

To build or reinforce a certain image and associations, companies can engage with a selected target group, through various channels ranging from online to on-campus career fairs (Mosley, 2014). As such, many students form their perceptions of companies based on the relationships established during career fairs (Sciarini & Woods, 1997).

According to Connerly and Rynes (1997), there is a supposed strong relationship between initial impressions during early recruitment activities and final recruiting outcomes. Thus, when recruiting students, several researchers note the possible influence of recruiter behavior. Recruiters' actions are said to become representative of the potential employer, which can influence the students' views, interests, and overall assessment of the company (Harris & Fink, 1987; Parment & Dyhre, 2009; Silkes et al., 2010). Research also indicates that both the attitude towards and the perceived attributes of a potential employer can be influenced through exposure to early recruitment activities (Collins & Stevens, 2002). In turn, these attributes can form a favorable

perception, thus increasing the number of suitable applicants applying for a position (Moroko & Uncles, 2008).

2.1.2. Recruiter friendliness, unfriendliness and outcomes

Friendliness is one recruiter behavior that is possibly one of the most important behaviors during the recruiting process, as it can influence the outcome in terms of applicant attraction (Uggerslev et al., 2012). In the context of career fairs, friendly and enthusiastic company representatives are highly expected among students (Roehling & Cavanaugh, 2000). Since students may only know about a company through the recruiter, it is important to ensure that recruiters are personable and competent, avoiding coming across as impolite or uninformed, as they influence potential candidates' perception of the company. Authors such as (Parment & Dyhre, 2009) stresses the importance of choosing the right person to represent the company. They argue that (a) having informed and enthusiastic employees are essential since they "radiate energy, attractiveness and represents the organization's values and culture" (Parment & Dyhre, 2009, p. 150) and (b) have a high number of representatives present, as this increases the likelihood of capturing the interest of a broad variety of student applicants. Recruiters making a good impression is thus essential as students will remember their career fair experiences when they enter the job market (Silkes et al., 2010).

There is empirical support for recruiter friendliness (empathy, warmth) resulting in more favorable outcomes in an interview context (Chapman & Webster, 2006). Some authors argue this to be a result of the recruiter being symbolic of what other members and the environment at the organization are like (Breaugh, 2017). There is also support for recruiter behavior from experimental studies. For example, Goltz and Giannantonio (1995) let students observe a recorded campus interview in which a recruiter had been asked to behave as either friendly or unfriendly towards the interviewee. Participants who had viewed the friendly recruiter made much more positive inferences about the organization's overall characteristics and reported they were more attracted to the employment opportunity compared to those who had viewed an unfriendly recruiter. This led the authors to caution against negative behavior due to its undesirable impact which might also be difficult to reverse (Goltz & Giannantonio, 1995).

In another similar study, Giannantonio et al., (2019) conducted an experiment in which students were exposed to a recording of a recruiter posing as either friendly or unfriendly through primarily non-verbal behavior. When asking students to imagine themselves as the person in the recorded scenario, they found that students were more attracted to and more willing to pursue employment if they got to observe a friendly recruiter compared to an unfriendly recruiter. Giannnantonio et al., (2019) thus claim that consistent with previous research (Carless & Imber, 2007; Goltz & Giannantonio, 1995), the interaction with a recruiter is critical as it can be the first or only source of information encountered. As such, from a signaling theory perspective, Giannantonio et

al., (2019) argue that recruiter friendliness (warmth or empathy) and unfriendliness present a possible source of information (i.e., signal) about recruiter friendliness is regarded as a possible source of information about the organization at large (Giannantonio et al., 2019).

2.1.3. Service encounter implications for recruiter behavior

Findings in the service encounter literature are shown to be consistent in different marketing settings (Söderlund, 2016). This leads us to retrieve additional support from literature within this area to understand what may be regarded as friendly and unfriendly behavior when interacting with a recruiter.

Similar to how Parment and Dyhre (2009) argue that the recruiter at a career fair becomes representative of the organization at large, a common notion is that "the service employee is the organization from the customer's point of view" (Söderlund, 2016, p. 456). The service employee's behavior and attitude are likely to influence the customer's evaluation of the encounter and if it was in accordance with expectations (Guiry, 1992). The importance of employee behavior is advocated for by authors such as Söderlund (2016) who conducted an experimental study on employee behavior in relation to customer satisfaction. Positive behavioral examples include empathy, greetings, politeness, smiles, proactivity, and established eye contact, which positively influence the customer's evaluation of the interaction (Söderlund, 2016). Similar results have been found in recruiter behavior literature (as discussed in 2.1.2), categorizing it as friendly recruiter behavior, such as Giannantonio et al., (2019). On the contrary, the lack of such friendly behavior, like smiling, is likely to have negative implications and shows absence of friendliness (Sundaram & Webster, 2000). Sönderlund (2016) study also found, as supported by previous studies (Taylor, 1994), that the absence of an employee, or when an employee is not immediately visible, is generally associated with negative emotions. These findings are consistent with the notion that first impressions are particularly likely to have an impact on overall evaluations (Bhargave & Montgomery, 2013). And, according to Muthukrishnan and Chattopadhyay (2007), a negative first impression is more difficult to change than a positive first impression.

2.1.4. Cynicism

As discussed in 2.1.2 and 2.1.3, previous literature supports the importance of friendly recruiter behavior, as the recruiter seemingly becomes representative of the organization at large. However, cynical individuals and consumers believe that other peoples' and organizations' actions are made merely based on self-interest, manipulation, or hidden motives (Anson et al., 1986; Eisigner, 2000; Helm et al., 2015).

Cynicism can be viewed as beliefs of distrust, affect, and behavioral tendencies towards the world and other individuals (Dean Jr et al., 1998). In the context of interactions with

other humans, cynicism can be defined as "disbelief in the possibility of good" (Berman, 1997, p. 105). In general, individuals do not trust strangers offering their friendliness due to the belief that they have a hidden motive of self-interest (Fetchenhauer & Dunning, 2010). Most likely, however, this selfish behavior is not the actual truth (Fetchenhauer & Dunning, 2010).

Cynical individuals tend to possess a more critical behavior (Abraham, 2000) and doubt other people's motives. Thereby, they tend to be more skeptical of e.g., behaviors, actions, and what they hear (Biswas & Kapil, 2017; Dean Jr et al., 1998; Mohr et al., 1998). Helm et al., (2015) argue that there is a growing mistrust among consumers, resulting in consumer cynicism that is characterized by a systemic lack of integrity in the marketplace. As such, this growing cynicism towards companies results in consumers being more skeptical towards the actions and communication of companies (Helm et al., 2015).

2.1.5. Signaling theory and attraction

As mentioned in section 2.1.2, some authors have used signaling theory as an approach to understanding why recruiters' friendly and unfriendly behavior may influence students' attraction to an employer and organization.

Signaling theory originally stems from early research within economics and market job signaling which have since been adapted to other research areas (Suazo & Sandoval, 2009). Due to a lack of incomplete information, applicants draw inferences and conclusions about how it would be like to work for an employer based on the signals communicated during e.g., the recruitment process (Suazo & Sandoval, 2009). Potential employees, therefore, make use of cues from interactions, to form an overall impression about the organization (Cable & Judge, 1996; Powell & Goulet, 1996). Ehrhart and Ziegert (2005) propose as part of their environment processing metatheory that signaling theory helps explain how individuals under uncertainty develop unique and subjective views of the environment by processing characteristics from the actual environment. Thus, activities during the recruitment activities will be interpreted as a signal for unknown or unobservable attributes, thereby influencing applicant attraction (Goltz & Giannantonio, 1995; Turban et al., 1998).

Authors such as Turban (2001) support and stresses the importance of how information is communicated to applicants in the early stages of recruitment on campuses. Students are likely to have incomplete information about organizations meaning that for example, if recruitment materials come across as unimpressive, this will negatively impact attraction (Turban 2001). On the other hand, companies also have the opportunity to emphasize positive attributes by exposing potential applicants to information sending positive cues or signals (Turban, 2001). As Karavasilev et al., (2019) argue, prospective candidates' perception and evaluation is a critical consideration when attracting talent.

In their study, the authors found that job fair activities could enhance the attractiveness of a company among students, regardless of if they held any previous attitudes (Karavasilev et al., 2019). This reasoning is also supported by Celani and Singh (2011) who state attraction to an organization can be influenced by signals that potential applicant comes across during recruitment activities, although these signals may have varying impact. Thus, investing in the employer brand by participating in career fairs can signal that the employer cares for its workers (Wilden et al., 2010).

2.2. Employer branding and attraction

The field of employer branding integrates the research fields of branding and Human Resources, providing insight into how a company can market itself internally and externally as a potential employer (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Seeing that employer branding is the process of promoting a unique and attractive image among potential applicants (Theurer et al., 2018), one strategic approach that companies can take is targeting students (Parment & Dyhre, 2009). This is a potentially cost-effective and impactful way of communicating the employer brand as students are impressionable and prone to having their attitudes influenced (Parment & Dyhre, 2009).

Traditional marketing principles have been applied to communicate the employment offer to strengthen associations and awareness in terms of the employer brand and its attributes (Collins & Stevens, 2002; Edwards, 2009). Authors such as Collins and Stevens (2002) liken how potential future employees' beliefs of the company can be influenced via the company's marketing activities similar to the marketing mix can be used to affect the brand image consumers hold towards products in the marketplace. These efforts together then result in the added value of a favorable response towards the employer brand (Theurer et al., 2018).

Furthermore, Lievens and Highhouse (2003) argue that the employer brand can be broken down into two kinds of features, instrumental and symbolic. While instrumental factors include for example monetary rewards, the authors stress the importance of symbolic features that serve as the intangible, abstract, and subjective attributes potential applicants associate the company with, especially in the early recruitment stages. These associations serve as an important component of explaining initial attraction to a company, as potential applicants ascribe traits to the organization which then present e.g., self-expressive benefits (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). Companies can thus differentiate themselves by establishing a competitive advantage through their offered employer value proposition, reflecting what makes the workplace attractive as expressed in the employer brand (Love & Singh, 2011; Parment & Dyhre, 2009). Thus, the employer brand can also be seen as a way of expressing the organization's identity (Mahoney, 2000) through focused targeting and marketing among existing and potential employees (Moroko & Uncles, 2008).

2.2.1. Employer and organizational attractiveness

It is desirable for companies to achieve two outcomes: attraction to their employment opportunities, and intent to join the company by pursuing an offered opportunity (Giannantonio et al., 2019). Marketing research has attempted to capture constructs of attraction among potential applicants in several ways (Theurer et al., 2018). One is employer attractiveness, which can be defined as "the envisioned benefits that a potential employee sees in working for a specific organization" (Berthon et al., 2005, p. 151). Another similar and often-investigated construct in conjunction with employer attractiveness is organizational attractiveness (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). Based on previous research, Ehrhart and Ziegert (2005) defined organizational attraction as "getting candidates to view the organization as a positive place to work" (p. 205).

Since organizational attractiveness attempts to capture the perceived attractiveness of an organization as an employer (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003), it has also been referred to as "the power that draws applicants' attention to focus on an employer brand, encouraging existing employees to stay in the company" (Jiang & Iles, 2011, p. 106). Thus, organizational attractiveness can be regarded as a consequence of employer branding processes, resulting in an impact on the overall attraction towards the employer (Jiang & Iles, 2011).

Employer attractiveness

Berthon et al. (2005) attempt to operationalize perceived attractiveness among students through their Employer Brand Attractiveness (EmpAt) scale. The authors argue that the more value a potential applicant envisions from a given organization, the more attractive, and thus the stronger, the employer brand equity is of that organization. The authors measure five dimensions of attractiveness: (1) "Interest value" captures how attracted an individual is to an employer based on how intriguing and creative the work seems; (2) "Social value" captures the warmth and healthy working environment the employer provides; (3) "Economic value" assesses the individual's attraction towards an employer based on the monetary benefits provided; (4) "Development value" captures attraction based on the individual's belief that the employer provides self-development opportunities; lastly, (5) "Application value" assesses the attraction towards an employer based on the opportunity to apply and pass forward learned skills (Berthon et al., 2005). These five dimensions capture and build upon the work of Ambler and Barrow (1996), with interest and social value capturing psychological benefits, economic value the economic benefits, and lastly development and application value capturing the functional benefits associated with the employer brand (Berthon et al., 2005). As such, the value proposition of the brand can be expressed in terms of functional, self-expressive, and emotional benefits (Aaker, 1996).

Organizational attractiveness

Recent literature suggests that the behavioral intention of a potential employee combined with the individual's perceived attractiveness and prestige will ultimately impact the decision to pursue employment (Berthon et al., 2005; Highhouse et al., 2003; Moroko & Uncles, 2008). Organizational pursuit can thus be generated as a result of the employer brand and its activities (Agrawal & Swaroop, 2009; Gatewood et al., 1993).

A frequently used measure for organizational attractiveness is by Highhouse et al., (2003) who in their study measured applicants' general organizational attractiveness, intentions to pursue, and perceived prestige in an attempt to capture individuals' desire to pursue employment at a given organization. In their study, Highhouse et al. (2003) argued that general organizational attractiveness reflects passive affective and attitudinal thoughts towards the potential employer, while the intention item also captures more active intentions to pursue said employer. Both these measures center on the individual, whereas the prestige component attempts to capture the normative quality of the company (Highhouse et al., 2003).

2.3.   Hypotheses

Based on the literature review, it is notable that recruiters' behavior such as friendliness and unfriendliness may influence organizational outcomes. In the context of career fairs, as discussed in 2.1.2, recruiters' behavior during career fairs appears to play an important role in students' regard for a company (Silkes et al., 2010). Additionally, service encounter literature discussed in 2.1.3 gave some more insight into what kinds of behavior may be perceived as friendly or unfriendly.

From section 2.2, it was concluded that employer branding is the process of promoting an attractive employer image (Theurer et al., 2018), with attraction and pursuit being two noteworthy desirable organizational outcomes (Giannantonio et al., 2019). While there may be numerous approaches to explaining why recruiter behavior plays a supposed role in influencing attraction, one approach as discussed in 2.1.5. is signaling theory which proposes that recruiter behavior can serve as signals for potential applicants about the overall organization, which in turn influences attraction (Goltz & Giannantonio, 1995; Turban et al., 1998). Therefore, we believe that recruiter behavior will have implications for the employer branding process when participating in early-stage recruitment activities, influencing students' perceived employer attractiveness. Following Breaugh (2017) and Lievens and Highouse (2003) reasoning, we believe the recruiter's friendly or unfriendly behavior will serve as signals of what the organizational work environment is like, potentially presenting an attractive symbolic attribute of the organization and employer. This should then influence students' perceived employer attractiveness as the recruiter's friendliness signal greater or lesser social value, as captured by the second dimension of Berthon et al., (2005). Further,

organizational attractiveness is argued to be a consequence of employer branding processes (Jiang & Iles, 2011). Thus, following Highhouse et al., (2003) conceptualization of (general) organizational attractiveness and intentions to pursue, attitudinal measures focused on the individual, we believe that these two dimensions will also be influenced similarly to that of employer attractiveness. Hence, it is hypothesized that[1]:

H1a: Friendly recruiter behavior compared to control will generate greater employer attractiveness among students.

H1b: Unfriendly recruiter behavior compared to control will generate lesser employer attractiveness among students.

H1c: Friendly recruiter behavior compared to unfriendly recruiter behavior will generate greater employer attractiveness among students.

H2a: Friendly recruiter behavior compared to control will generate greater organizational attractiveness among students.

H2b: Unfriendly recruiter behavior compared to control will generate lesser organizational attractiveness among students.

H2c: Friendly recruiter behavior compared to unfriendly recruiter behavior will generate greater organizational attractiveness among students.

H3a: Friendly recruiter behavior compared to control will generate greater intentions to pursue the organization among students.

H3b: Unfriendly recruiter behavior compared to control will generate lesser intentions to pursue the organization among students.

H3c: Friendly recruiter behavior compared to unfriendly recruiter behavior will generate greater intentions to pursue the organization among students.

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[1] It could have been enough to examine only the directions explained in hypothesis *a* and *b*, but we chose to include *c* as well. This was to make an exhaustive comparison between variables to capture all possible explanations to how the independent variable influences the dependent variables.

Lastly, with support from the cynicism literature in section 2.1.4, cynic individuals believe that other people's actions are made based on self-interest or by a hidden motive and do not trust strangers offering their friendliness (Fetchenhauer & Dunning, 2010; Helm et al., 2015). Further, since cynical consumers distrust companies, there is reason to believe that they also distrust the company employee, or company representative, that "is" the organization in the eye of the consumer, as stated in section 2.1.4.

In addition to examining the hypotheses, we add an explorative question[2] to examine the relationship between cynicism and the independent and dependent variables. Since it is important to not oversell jobs as it may spark cynicism (Ruth Prickett, 1998), we believe that individuals with a high score of cynicism will be distrustful of the motives of a friendly recruiter. Therefore, cynicism should negatively correlate with perceived recruiter friendliness. However, it could be that cynicism also relates to organizational outcomes, although unclear how. This resulted in the explorative question:

Does university students' cynicism score have a significant relationship with recruiter friendliness as well as employer attractiveness, organizational attractiveness and intentions to pursue, and if so, how?

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[2] Due to lack of literature discussing cynicism in our chosen context, we are not confident enough to formulate it as a hypothesis.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

The scientific approach of this thesis followed a deductive approach and can thus be further explained through ontological and epistemological considerations. As Bell et al., (2019) explain it, researchers aim to understand the reality which can be defined in different ways depending on the author's ontological position. Given this position taken, the ontological assumptions we make determine what we seek to research. There are two main positions: objectivism and constructionism. This thesis adopted an objectivist ontological positioning as it allows the acquisition of knowledge through direct or indirect observation (Bell et al., 2019). This position stemmed from our interest to investigate factors influencing perceived employer attractiveness among future potential employees.

Our objective stance on how to understand reality implied an epistemological stance of positivism. This determined our research approach, as it implies following a deductive approach to form hypotheses in which data is collected objectively. To achieve this, surveys are commonly used (Bell et al., 2019). Thus, we chose to employ a quantitative research strategy in the form of an experimental design using scenario analysis followed by an online self-completion survey.

We could have chosen to instead conduct structured interviews, as this method is regarded as similar to self-completion questionnaires (Bell et al., 2019). This could have allowed for additional probing and prompting as well as collecting additional data. However, the chosen research method presents favorable practicalities from a student's perspective of quick and wide distribution as well as cheapness. An additional advantage is that self-completion questionnaires limit interviewer effects and potential social desirability bias coming from respondents (Bell et al., 2019). Taking these practicalities together, the chosen research method was deemed appropriate. Nonetheless, we also acknowledge that there are limits to the objectivity in collecting data. According to Bell et al., (2019), researchers should be critical of how their values, biases, social, and cultural context may influence the generation of knowledge. We acknowledge that previous studies and our cultural context, may have influenced the chosen research method. Thus, reflexivity was exercised throughout the thesis.

3.2. Preparatory study

A trial of the questionnaire and scenario was distributed using convenience sampling of 9 people for pilot testing. Firstly, the most significant feedback was respondents perceived the scenarios as too similar, indicating that the manipulation of the recruiter's behavior needed revision. Notably, friendliness and control had to be revised as

respondents in the control perceived the recruiter as friendly. Second, we attempted to include the prestige component by Highhouse et al. (2003) (in addition to general organizational attractiveness and intentions to pursue) but was removed due to respondents' inability to answer these questions based on the scenarios. Other general feedback included the length of some questions as well as wording, requiring refinement of the translation to Swedish. Lastly, a promotional gift in the written scenario was initially included to see if the gift in combination with the recruiter's behavior would impact perceived attractiveness further. However, respondents did not take note of or explained that the gift felt misplaced. Hence, the promotional gift was removed. After having incorporated the feedback received by respondents of the pilot testing, the final questionnaire and written scenarios were constructed and distributed.

3.3. Experiment design

3.3.1. Population

We chose to sample Swedish students enrolled and studying at least part-time at the university level. For this thesis both students at the bachelor's and master's levels were considered relevant as they are part of the potential applicant population and are likely to attend career fairs. Out of the 159 participants that completed the survey, about 60% were women, as seen in Table 1. The majority of the participants were between 20 and 24 years old. The majority of the participants studied for a bachelor's degree or similar and represented a total of 22 universities in Sweden (see Appendix 5).

Table 1. Data sample overview for age and gender among complete respondents

Variable	N	n	% of the total sample	*M*
	159			
Gender				
Female		95	60%	
Male		64	40%	
Age (years)				25,09
20-24		100	63%	
25-29		47	30%	
30-34		7	4%	
> 35		5	3%	

Note: The alternatives for gender were man, woman, non-binary, other, prefer not to disclose. Percentage errors may occur due to the rounding of numbers.

3.3.2. Scenario based experiment

Inspired by Goltz and Giannantonio (1995), Giannantonio et al., (2019) and Claus Wehner et al., (2012) who used experimental designs with scenarios in written or recorded video format to explore recruiter processes, we took a similar experimental

design. A scenario-based study, or role-play experiment, is where the participant gets a description of a situation in a text format and is instructed to imagine being in the specific situation and act accordingly to it being the reality (Claus Wehner et al., 2012; Söderlund, 2010). These texts can be supplemented with pictures, illustrations, or videos (Söderlund, 2010). When comparing reactions to scenarios with a corresponding real situation, the results are similar (Bateson & Hui, 1992). Respondents' reactions can thus be tested and measured by distributing a scenario along with a questionnaire consisting of questions related to the scenario (Pilling & Eroglu, 1994).

As such, three manipulated text-based scenarios were incorporated into a self-completion questionnaire. Since questionnaires are frequently used for marketing experiences (Söderlund & Rosengren, 2008), it was chosen to record responses and measure variables.

3.3.3. Questionnaire

The self-completion questionnaire (see Appendix 11) was written in Swedish to target only Swedish students. The online questionnaire started with an introduction where brief information about the subject, general information, estimated completion time, and our contact information was stated. For every completed answer to the survey, we donated 10 SEK to UNHCR, as stated in the introduction of the survey.

After the introduction, the participants were informed that the study was conducted following GDPR to handle survey data correctly. Respondents were then asked if they consent to participate in the study under GDPR by answering "I have read the information above and consent to participate in this study" followed by filling in the date and their initials. Respondents who chose "No, I do not consent to participate in this study" were automatically sent to the end of the survey.

The questionnaire consisted of ten blocks with seven index questions and eleven additional questions related to the demographics and additional opinions of the participants. As recommended by Kung et al., (2018) control questions were used in the questionnaire in the form of one attention check and two control questions to check that the manipulation in the scenario was perceived correctly.

The first block consisted of the scenario, where the respondents were assigned one out of the three scenarios. The next block consisted of the respondent's perception of the recruiter's friendliness, using the scale by Price and Arnould (1999). The third and fourth blocks consisted of questions from the general organizational attractiveness scale and intentions to pursue scale from Highhouse et al., (2003). An attention check question was also used in the block of intentions to pursue to control the respondent's attention to the survey. Block five measured the social value dimension from the EmpAt scale (Berthon et al., 2005) to measure perceived employer attractiveness. The next block was a control question of the scenario to capture the respondent's understanding

of the manipulation. Block number seven consisted of questions about cynicism (Helm et al., 2015). The eighth block contained demographic questions of age and gender. The ninth block consisted of questions related to the respondents as students, such as what they study and their expected year of graduation. Lastly, the survey ended with four questions where respondents were asked to evaluate the quality of the questionnaire and scenario, as well as room for additional comments about the survey.

3.3.4. Survey flow and blocks
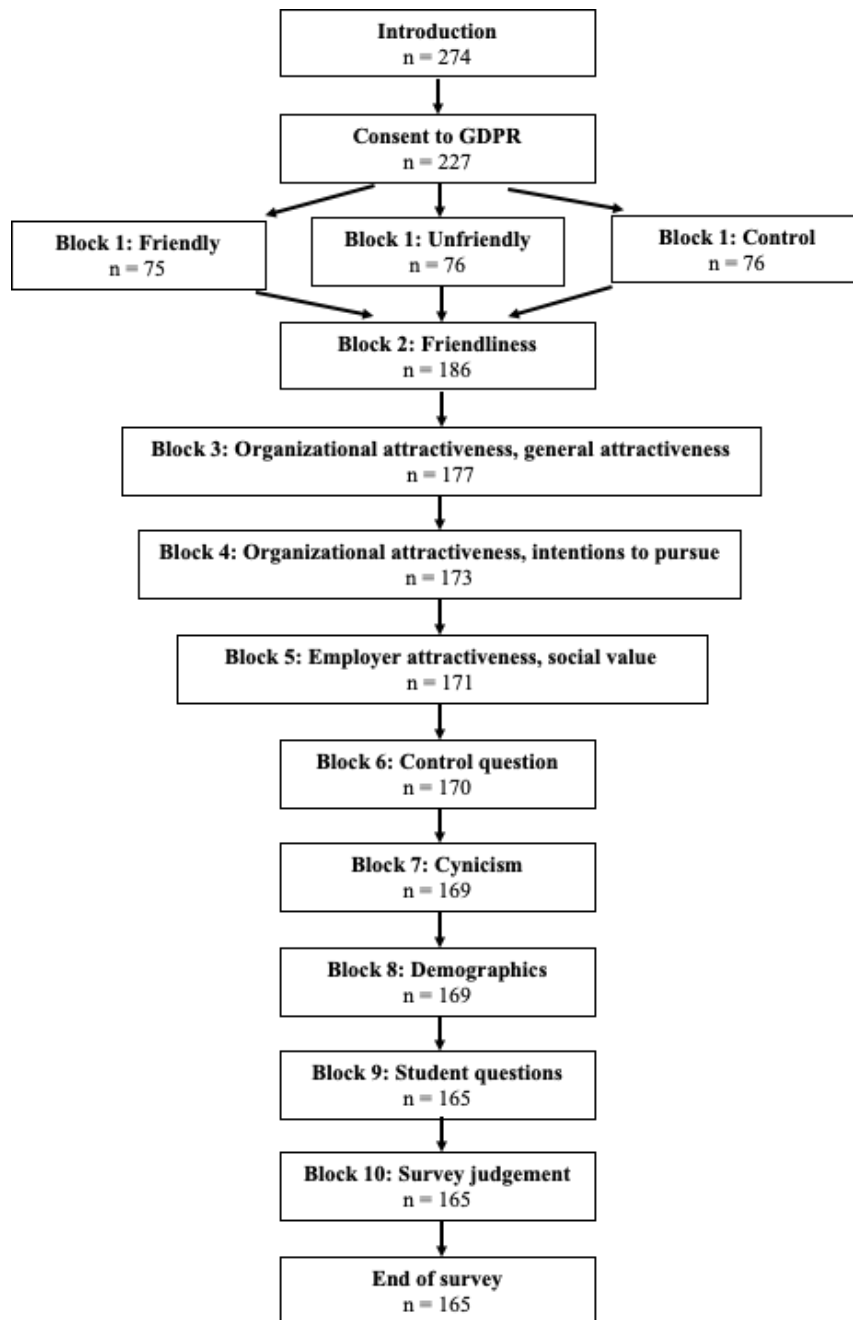
3.3.5. Independent variable

Recruiter friendliness

The independent variable of this thesis was recruiter friendliness. The original scale (Price & Arnould, 1999) consisted of 49 items to measure the customer and service provider's relationship, of which six questions measured the friendliness of the service provider. Out of these six questions, two were removed because of the lack of relevant information in the written scenario in the questionnaire. These remaining four items were used to measure the recruiter friendliness. The items were measured using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Similar to the study of Giannantonio et al., (2019), friendly recruiter behavior was presented in the written scenario including (but not limited to) descriptions of how the recruiter held direct eye contact and smiled towards the applicant, etc. Unfriendly recruiter behavior instead included opposite behavior, such as avoidance of eye contact.

3.3.6. Dependent variables

Employer attractiveness

This thesis measures employer attractiveness as a dependent variable as operationalized by the EmpAt scale by Berthon et al., (2005). The social dimension of the employer attractiveness was measured using the original measures, by asking respondents the degree to which they agreed to a total of 7 items, using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (to a very small degree) to 7 (to a very large degree). It should be noted that two additional measures from the development and application dimension were also included as, according to us, these also capture the social value. (See Appendix 3). Although only the social value dimension of the EmpAt scale was measured, it will henceforth be referred to as employer attractiveness.

Organizational attractiveness

The measure by (Highhouse et al., 2003) was used to capture general organizational attractiveness to offer a deeper analysis of the perceived attractiveness of an employer. Respondents were asked the degree to which they agreed to 5 items, using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (absolutely not) to 5 (yes, absolutely). Henceforth this construct will be referred to as organizational attractiveness.

Intentions to pursue

The measure by (Highhouse et al., 2003) was used to capture organizational intentions to pursue. Respondents were asked the degree to which they agreed to 5 items, using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (absolutely not) to 5 (yes, absolutely).

In line with recommendations by Jiang and Iles (2011) organizational attractiveness and intentions to pursue the organization were measured and treated as separate dimensions as opposed to being bundled into one organizational attraction construct. Henceforth this construct will be referred to as intentions to pursue.

3.3.7. Possible effects of cynicism

To capture the participants' overall cynicism towards organizations, the cynicism scale from (Helm et al., 2015) was used. We modified the consumer cynicism final scale to include only the best-performing items according to the original item-to-total correlation. Additionally, the original study used a five-point item scale, whereas we modified the scale to a seven-point Likert scale. The cynicism scale was used as an interaction effect to measure the cynicism's possible effect on the dependent variables.

3.3.8. Manipulation of the independent variable

The participants in the survey were exposed to one of three written scenarios (see Appendix 10) which they were asked to imagine as real. The online tool Qualtrics XM's *question randomization* feature was used together with *evenly display questions* to distribute all three scenarios randomly. The scenarios described an interaction with a recruiter at a career fair and were complemented with a picture of a career fair. The texts were designed to walk the participant through the scenario (Baker et al., 2002).

The recruiter's behavior was manipulated to be perceived as either friendly or unfriendly, inspired by the service encounter literature and the studies by Giannantonio and Goltz (1995), Giannantonio et al., (2019), and Carless and Imber, (2007). All other stimuli were kept constant between the three scenarios. We also added a control scenario to compare the manipulated scenarios with.

The first scenario described a friendly recruiter that was e.g., smiling and keeping eye contact. The friendly behavior was stated five times throughout the text. In the second scenario, the recruiter's behavior was manipulated to be unfriendly. For example, the recruiter neither kept eye contact nor answered questions. The unfriendly behavior was stated six times throughout the text. The control was equal to the other scenarios, aside from having no description of the recruiter's behavior, i.e., absence of behavior that was considered friendly or unfriendly in previous studies.

To test if the manipulation of the recruiter's friendliness was successful, two manipulation checks were included. Firstly, the significance of perceived recruiter friendliness between groups was tested using an ANOVA analysis (see Appendix 8 for complete results). It was found that the manipulation produced statistically significant differences in mean scores between scenarios, $F(2,156) = 379.11$, $p = <.001$. Results can be illustrated in Figure 1, in which the mean values according to each scenario are

shown in a 95% confidence interval. Notably, the friendly and control group did not differ significantly from one another.
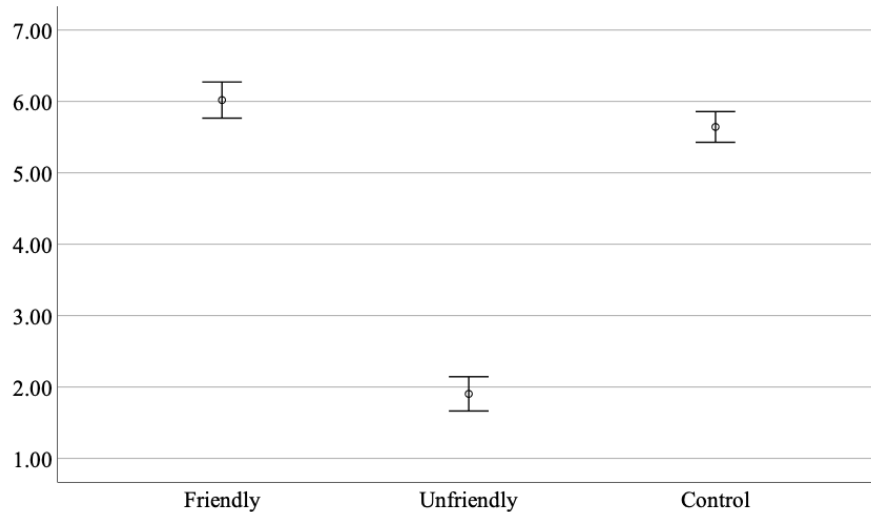

Figure 1. 95% CI Error bar graph showing the results of the perceived recruiter friendliness according to each scenario

Secondly, a manipulation check, as recommended by Hoewe (2017) was included to see if participants understood and perceived the manipulation of the independent variable to the extent we intended to. As such, if there are measured perceived differences between the manipulations, i.e., the manipulation check is successful, the authors can then investigate the relationship between the independent and dependent variables (Hoewe, 2017). The results of the manipulation check from this study are found in Table 2. Despite revision after the pilot testing, it appears that many respondents in the control still perceived the recruiter to be friendly. However, no respondents were dropped due to failing to answer the manipulation check correctly. See Appendix 2 for a detailed drop-out analysis.

Table 2. Results of manipulation check for perceived vs actual scenario for complete respondents according to each scenario

	Perceived scenario			
Actual scenario	Friendly behavior	Unfriendly behavior	Control	Correct answer
Respondents in friendly group (n= 50)	47	3	0	94%
Respondents in unfriendly group (n=55)	1	49	5	89%
Respondents in control group (n=54)	28	1	25	46%

3.4. Data collection and analysis

3.4.1. Data collection

In an attempt to secure the quality of data collected, we decided to follow Simmons et al., (2011) recommendations for authors. Therefore, rules for data collection and rules for disqualification were determined beforehand, and more than 20 observations had to be collected for each cell (Simmons et al., 2011). As such, Once the questionnaire was complete and ready to be distributed on the 4th of April, we decided that the questionnaire should be closed on the 23rd of April. Additionally, we set a required minimum of n = 50 complete respondents for each scenario before distributing the survey. The questionnaire was distributed via Facebook groups for university students (see Appendix 1), as well as on LinkedIn. We also administered the self-completion questionnaire via email to respondents of the same university, using the internal email catalog. In total 166 complete responses were generated.

Our social channels for accessibility were used and as such, the sample should be regarded as a convenience sample that cannot be generalized due to it not being fully representative of the population (Bell et al., 2019). As for the participants from Facebook groups, they could either be regarded as falling within or outside what characterizes a typical convenience sample. However, given the feasibility of joining the groups to distribute the questionnaire, we regarded these groups to be characterized by relative ease and accessibility. Given the small sample size and the considerations for generalizability and representativeness, we will treat the dataset collected through our chosen means of distribution as a convenience sample out of caution.

3.4.2. Data quality

Including all participants who started the survey, the total number amassed to 274 individuals. For the respondents' answers to be regarded as complete, the respondents had to a) agree to GDPR terms and b) respond to the survey in its entirety (i.e., 100% progress). All participants accepted the GDPR terms, however, some respondents were excluded on other grounds. 109 respondents did not fully complete the survey, four participants did not answer the attention control question correctly and two participants reported they were not university students. Hence, these 115 participants were excluded (see Appendix 2). In total, 159 responses were regarded as fully complete.

3.4.3. Data analysis

The questionnaire was distributed via the online tool Qualtrics XM, and SPSS Statistics 28 was used for the analysis of the collected data.

Each scenario was analyzed using a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). ANOVA was considered appropriate to test our hypotheses thanks to its ability to test for

statistical significance between mean values of groups (Herzog et al., 2019). Significant results were followed by a post-hoc analysis using Tukey's honestly significant difference (HSD) test for multiple comparisons, for each dependent variable and their means. The post-hoc analysis was chosen as it is an easy and commonly used technique to perform pairwise comparisons to show exact sampling distribution and its significance (Abdi & Williams, 2010). For our exploratory question, a Pearson coefficient correlation analysis was performed, as it is well-established to measure the strength and direction between two variables (Sedgwick, 2012).

3.5. Reliability and validity

3.5.1. Reliability

Reliability concerns whether or not measures used in a study are stable and consistent, as well as if the results are repeatable under similar circumstances (Bell et al., 2019). Cronbach's alpha is a commonly used test to check the internal reliability of a study (Bell et al., 2019). Therefore, to assess the reliability of the multiple-indicator measures used in this thesis, Cronbach's alpha was tested. The measure is a coefficient ranging between 0 (no internal reliability) and 1 (perfect internal reliability) with a computed alpha of 0.7 is said to denote an acceptable level of internal reliability (Bell et al., 2019). However, some authors advise caution for applying a cutoff criterion automatically at this specific number, as e.g., a value of 0.69 is no worse than 0.7 (Cho & Kim, 2015). Furthermore, strategically deleting items to improve alpha may not be ideal as it does not necessarily improve reliability (Peterson, 1994).

Bearing these cautions in mind, Cronbach's alpha was calculated for each multiple-indicator measure. The alpha measures on an individual level, shown in Table 3, scored between 0.72 (recruiter friendliness in the control scenario) and 0.94 (employer attractiveness in the friendly scenario). The alpha on an individual level is lower than on an aggregated level, which is likely due to the lower number of participants when dividing the measures into three different scenarios. However, as no individual score gave a lower score than 0.7 and aggregated levels gave similar results to those from the original studies (despite adjustments in some scales) the reliability of our multiple-items scales was considered adequate, requiring no further adjustments.

Table 3. Overview of Cronbach's alpha results for multiple-item scales used, as shown according to each scenario and on an aggregated level compared to the original study

Index item	Friendly	Unfriendly	Control	Aggregated alpha	Result in original study
Recruiter friendliness*	0.81	0.77	0.72	0.96	-
Organizational attractiveness	0.86	0.79	0.83	0.91	0.88
Intentions to pursue	0.86	0.85	0.76	0.88	0.82
Employer attractiveness**	0.94	0.84	0.91	0.95	0.96
Cynicism	0.82	0.83	0.88	0.85	0.89

Note: Two items were removed from the scale and no Cronbach's alpha was reported in the original study to compare with

**Note:* Two additional items were included to measure social value in this thesis compared to the original study and may thus not be directly comparable

3.5.2. Validity

Validity can be described as something which concerns the "integrity of conclusions that are generated from a piece of research" (Bell et al., 2019, p. 46). In general, the scenario analysis design enables researchers to ensure that participants are only exposed to relevant information (Kelman, 2017), allowing control over other variables and the immediate measure of manipulations after exposure (Söderlund, 2016). However, to more thoroughly assess the validity of the thesis, construct and external validity are considered as follows:

Construct validity

Construct, or measurement validity refers to whether or not a measure successfully captures the concept as claimed (Bell et al., 2019) This thesis builds upon previous research, using measures that have been validated and published when gathering data on concepts relevant to this thesis. Modifications such as translating measures into Swedish were necessary given the design of the study, however, this does not necessarily have to compromise the validity of the original scales used (Heggestad et al., 2019). Furthermore, measurements were translated back and forth between Swedish and English several times in an attempt to ensure consistency even in the instances where modifications in terms of wording or expressions were necessary.

External validity

This area concerns whether the results of a study can be generalized beyond the specific research context (Bell et al., 2019). For this thesis the relevant population was Swedish students, meaning that using students as subjects when collecting data, did not have to act as surrogates for other members of the population at large. As such, the use of students as subjects should not threaten the external validity and generalizability of the findings of this thesis. However, some areas of concern include the sample being small

and a convenience sample. We also note that findings may not be generalizable to other cultures due to cultural differences among the student population. Equally, our findings may not be generalizable to e.g., adult job seekers. Taking these factors into account, generalization will be exercised with caution.

3.5.3. Questionnaire evaluation

In the final part of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to evaluate the survey on a 5-point Likert scale to further assess validity, as shown in Table 4. In terms of clarity, 92% of the respondents found the questions to be clearly formulated and 94% found the answers alternatives to be clearly formulated. 92% of the respondents found the scenario to be realistic. Finally, roughly 70% of the respondents answered that they felt that the questions did not try to influence their answers in some way.

Table 4. Total results (in percentage) of the survey evaluation of respondents who were considered complete answers

N = 159					
	Yes, absolutely	Essentially yes	Doubtful	Essentially no	No, absolutely not
The questions were clearly formulated	47%	45%	4%	4%	0%
The answer alternatives were clearly formulated	54%	40%	4%	2%	0%
The scenario was realistic	55%	37%	6%	3%	0%
The questions tried to influence my answers	4%	6%	22%	30%	38%

Note: Rows may not sum to 100% due to rounding errors.

All respondents were able to leave an optional comment at the end of the questionnaire. In total, ten people of the total 165 respondents that completed the questionnaire chose to leave a comment. A general trend was the desire to re-read the scenario or go back in the questionnaire. Some of the respondents expressed critique for the recruiter's behavior being overly emphasized, and that we did not consider factors that they believe are more important when interacting with a potential future employer.

4. Results

4.1. Testing of hypotheses

An initial descriptive analysis was first performed to get an overview of the data, before moving on to the ANOVA analysis. As shown in Table 5, the 50 participants in the friendly scenario reported a higher mean score on all variables (employer attractiveness score, organizational attractiveness score as well as intentions to pursue score) when compared to the unfriendly group. Notably, however, the mean score of the control group for each dependent variable was similar (and slightly higher) compared to the friendly scenario for all dependent variables.

Table 5. Descriptive measures for each of the dependent variables, according to each scenario

Dependent variable		Employer attractiveness		Organizational attractiveness		Intentions to pursue	
Scenario	n	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Friendly	50	5.11[a]	1.09	4.42[a]	0.86	3.46[a]	0.59
Unfriendly	55	2.70[b]	0.89	2.71[b]	0.99	2.56[b]	0.62
Control	54	5.15[c]	0.95	4.63[c]	0.56	3.55[c]	0.42
Total	159	4.29	1.51	3.90	1.20	3.18	0.71

Note: [a], [b], [c] mean is significantly different from the scale's midpoint at p.05 according to a one-sample t-test. See Appendix 9 for details.

To test the hypotheses stated in 2.3, an ANOVA analysis was performed in SPSS. For all dependent variables, the ANOVA revealed that there was a statistically significant difference between at least two groups, as Table 6 shows.

Table 6. Descriptive statistics of ANOVA results for the dependent variables

Dependent variable		Employer attractiveness		Organizational attractiveness		Intentions to pursue	
	df	F	Sig	F	Sig	F	Sig
Between groups	2	111.55	<.001	88.69	<.001	53.97	<.001
Within groups	156						
Total	158						

As can be observed in Figure 2 and 3, the results of the ANOVA indicate that there are statistically significant differences in means between the groups. Figure 2 shows the mean for employer attractiveness on a seven-point scale for each of the scenarios. Figure 3 shows the mean for organizational attractiveness and intentions to pursue on a clustered graph, on a five-point scale for each of the scenarios. Both figures show that

when comparing friendly and unfriendly, as well as unfriendly and control, the means differ.
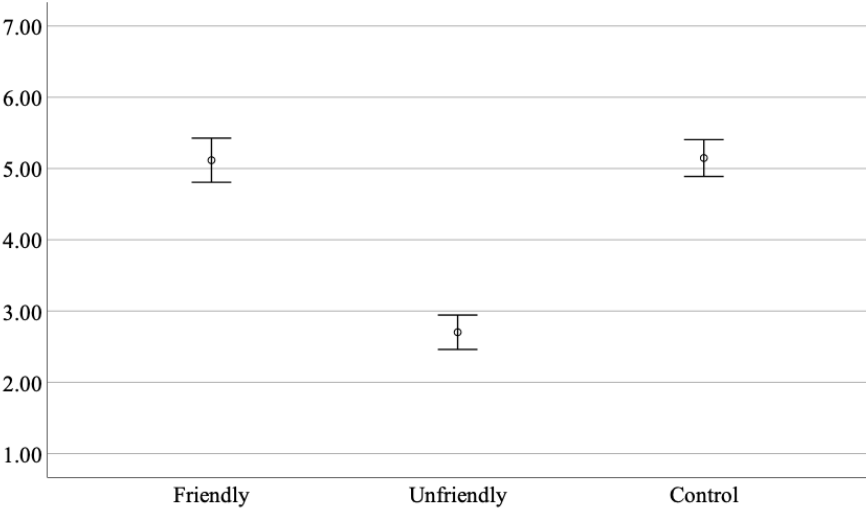

Figure 2. Error bar graph displaying a 95% CI for employer attractiveness, for each scenario, on a scale of 1-7
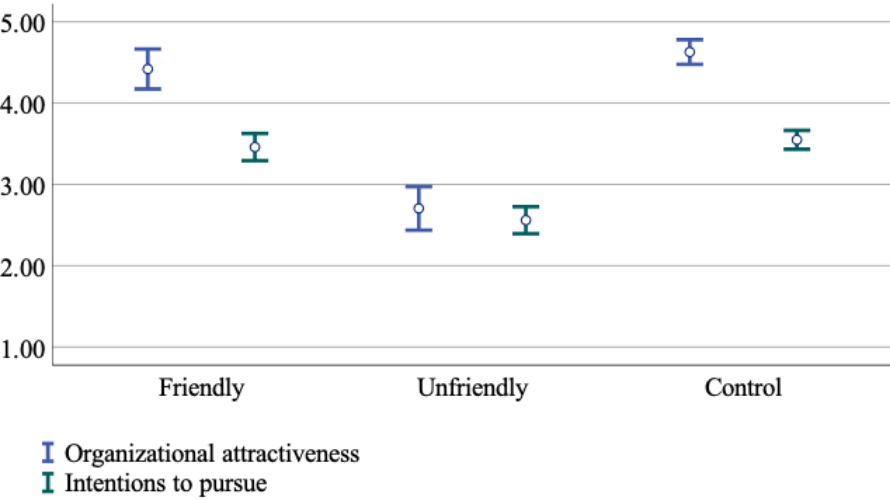
Figure 3. Error bar graph displaying a 95% CI for organizational attractiveness and intentions to pursue, for each scenario, on a scale of 1-5

Since the result from the ANOVA was significant[3], a post-hoc Tukey HSD test was performed. The results in Table 7 shows that the mean value for perceived employer attractiveness was significant between the friendly and unfriendly scenario.

---

[3] A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was also performed to in parallel with the ANOVA analysis to check if it yielded similar results when testing the effects of recruiter behavior on the dependent variables simultaneously. The MANOVA yielded same statistically significant results, see Appendix 4.

Additionally, the mean value for perceived employer attractiveness was significant between the unfriendly and control scenario. However, there was no statistically significant difference between the friendly and control scenario. The same results can be found for organizational attractiveness, as seen in Table 8, and for intentions to pursue, as can be seen in Table 9.

Table 7. Post-hoc Tukey HSD multiple comparisons test results for employer attractiveness according to each scenario

Dependent Variable	(I) Scenarios	(J) Scenarios	Mean Difference (I-J)	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Employer attractiveness	Friendly	Unfriendly	2.41*	<.001	1.96	2.86
		Control	-0.03	.986	-0.48	0.42
	Unfriendly	Friendly	-2.41*	<.001	-2.86	-1.96
		Control	-2.44*	<.001	-2.88	-2.00
	Control	Friendly	0.03	.986	-0.42	0.48
		Unfriendly	2.44*	<.001	2.00	2.89

Note:. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 8. Post-hoc Tukey HSD multiple comparisons test results for organizational attractiveness according to each scenario

Dependent Variable	(I) Scenarios	(J) Scenarios	Mean Difference (I-J)	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Organizational attractiveness	Friendly	Unfriendly	1.71*	<.001	1.33	2.10
		Control	-0.21	.400	-0.59	0.17
	Unfriendly	Friendly	-1.71*	<.001	-2.10	-1.33
		Control	-1.92*	<.001	-2.30	-1.55
	Control	Friendly	0.21	.400	-0.17	0.59
		Unfriendly	1.92*	<.001	1.55	2.30

Note:. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 9. Post-hoc Tukey HSD multiple comparisons test results for intentions to pursue according to each scenario

Dependent Variable	(I) Scenarios	(J) Scenarios	Mean Difference (I-J)	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Intentions to pursue	Friendly	Unfriendly	0.90*	<.001	0.64	1.15
		Control	-0.10	.684	-0.34	0.17
	Unfriendly 1.00	Friendly	-0.90*	<.001	-1.15	-0.65
		Control	-0.99*	<.001	-1.24	-0.74
	Control 1.00	Friendly	0.09	.684	-0.17	0.34
		Unfriendly	0.99*	<.001	0.74	1.24

4.2.　　　Additional analysis

Finally, to analyze our explorative question of if and how cynicism scores have a significant relationship with the independent and dependent variables, a Pearson correlation coefficient was computed.

This produced an overview of the relationship between all variables. For the correlation between cynicism and the independent variable recruiter friendliness, Table 10 shows a small significant positive relationship in the unfriendly scenario.

Table 10. Summary of Pearson correlation coefficient results for cynicism and the independent variable, according to each scenario

Variable	Recruiter friendliness			Cynicism		
Scenario	Friendly	Unfriendly	Control	Friendly	Unfriendly	Control
Recruiter friendliness	1	1	1	-.17	.31*	-.11
Cynicism	-.17	.31*	-.11	1	1	1

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Results were mixed for the cynicism scores and the dependent variables. In Table 11, all correlations are presented for each variable according to each scenario. In the friendly scenario, a negative but non-significant correlation was found for the cynicism correlation with employer attractiveness (-.28). For the unfriendly scenario, the correlation is close to insignificant (.06). On the other hand, in the control scenario, a small but significant negative correlation between cynicism score and organizational attractiveness (-.35) and intentions to pursue (-.32) was found.

Table 11. Summary of Pearson correlation coefficient results for cynicism and all dependent variables, according to each scenario

Variable Scenario	Emp. Attract.			Org. Attract			Intent. Pursue			Cynicism		
	Frien.	Unfr.	Contr.	Frien.	Unfr.	Contr.	Frien.	Unfr.	Contr.	Frien.	Unfr.	Contr.
Emp. Attract.	1	1	1									
Org. Attract	.73**	.58**	.39**	1	1	1						
Intent. Pursue	.75**	.70**	.54**	.83**	.77**	.50**	1	1	1			
Cynicism	-.28	.06	-.22	-.21	-.07	-.35**	-.15	.00	.32*	1	1	1

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The results in Table 11 also gave additional insight by showing a statistically significant positive relationship in all scenarios between dependent variables. There appears to be, although in varying strength, a positive relationship between employer attractiveness and organizational attractiveness, employer attractiveness and intentions to pursue as well as between intentions to pursue and organizational attractiveness.

4.3.   Summary of analyses

From the ANOVA and the post-hoc Tukey HSD, we found statistically significant results between respondents in the friendly and unfriendly recruiter behavior as well as between unfriendly recruiter behavior and the control for all dependent variables. However, we did not find empirical support for H1a, H2a, and H3a, i.e. when comparing the friendly group with the control. The hypotheses are summarized in Table 12.

The Pearson correlation coefficient computations provided insights for the explorative question. Cynicism appears not to have an important relationship with recruiter friendliness and organizational outcomes (employer attractiveness, organizational attractiveness as well as intentions to pursue).

All results from section 4 will be further discussed in section 5.

Table 12. Summary of hypotheses results

H1a	Friendly recruiter behavior compared to control will generate greater employer attractiveness among students.	Not empirically supported
H1b	Unfriendly recruiter behavior compared to control will generate lesser employer attractiveness among students.	Empirically supported
H1c	Friendly recruiter behavior compared to unfriendly recruiter behavior will generate greater employer attractiveness among students.	Empirically supported
H2a	Friendly recruiter behavior compared to control will generate greater organizational attractiveness among students.	Not empirically supported
H2b	Unfriendly recruiter behavior compared to control behavior will generate lesser organizational attractiveness among students.	Empirically supported
H2c	Friendly recruiter behavior compared to unfriendly recruiter behavior will generate greater organizational attractiveness among students.	Empirically supported
H3a	Friendly recruiter behavior compared to control will generate greater intentions to pursue the organization among students.	Not empirically supported
H3b	Unfriendly recruiter behavior compared to control will generate lesser intentions to pursue the organization among students.	Empirically supported
H3c	Friendly recruiter behavior compared to unfriendly recruiter behavior will generate greater intentions to pursue the organization among students.	Empirically supported

5. Discussion

The purpose of this thesis was to explore whether recruiters' behavior during career fairs has an effect on students' perceived employer and organizational attractiveness. And if so, to better understand what implications this may pose for companies' process of building their employer brand among future talent. Thus, the primary research question was, as stated in section 1.3, to explore:

Does recruiter behavior during career fairs have any effect on perceived employer attractiveness?

Furthermore, the secondary motives were to explore if recruiter behavior has any effect on perceived organizational attractiveness as well as if and how university students' cynicism scores have a significant relationship with recruiter friendliness and attractiveness outcomes.

5.1.   Conclusions and implications

As found earlier in this thesis, it is desirable for companies to achieve attraction and intention to pursue their offered employment opportunities (Giannantonio et al., 2019). We chose to capture students' perceived employer attractiveness using the social dimension of Berthon et al (2005) and organizational attractiveness and intentions to pursue were measured by Highhouse et al. (2003). We also took into consideration that students are likely to have incomplete information about organizations (Turban, 2001), thus drawing support from signaling theory to understand our findings.

In an attempt to isolate the effects of the recruiter's behavior, a control was designed to be absent of friendly and unfriendly behavior. Further, information regarding the job and organization that the recruiter represented was kept constant. We speculated the recruiter's behavior would signal information about the social value of the employer, which would explain changes in overall employer attractiveness. However, even though the control had been refined from pilot feedback, roughly half of the respondents perceived the recruiter as friendly (see 3.3.8). The information kept in the control scenario was considered necessary to provoke a response among respondents, making us believe respondents made inferences about what they *thought* the recruiter must have been like. Roehling and Cavanaugh (2000) propose students expect the recruiters during a career fair to be friendly, which could be one explanation for the cause of these inferences. It also leads us to speculate that the recruiter's friendliness could be a hygiene-factor.

Previous literature from Carless and Imber (2007), Giannantonio et al., (2019), and Goltz and Giannantonio (1995) discuss what positive and negative implications of friendly and unfriendly recruiter behavior in interview settings may have, respectively.

Since we added a control scenario to compare the results of organizational outcomes for friendly and unfriendly, this provides additional insights to discuss previous literature in contrast with. At a glance, it appears that recruiter behavior, notably friendly, may not be as important in a career fair context as expected based on previous literature.

When comparing friendly to unfriendly recruiter behavior, there is a statistically significant difference in the resulting employer attractiveness. At the end of the survey, respondents were asked about what factors they value most in an employer which indicated that co-workers were the second most valued factor (see Appendix 7). Thus, we initially speculated that participants should have reacted to signals of social value, thereby drawing inferences about the working environment provided by the employer. However, since we found that employer attractiveness in the friendly group was not statistically significant to control, our implications are not as straightforward. We believe that while friendly behavior is necessary, going above and beyond in terms of friendly behavior may not be significant for impacting employer attractiveness. As such, the view of friendliness as a hygiene factor suggests limited implications for the employer attractiveness (at least in terms of social value).

On the flipside, unfriendly behavior did result in lesser employer attractiveness. Thus, another implication could be that recruiters should indeed be selected carefully, as unfriendly behavior leads to lesser attractiveness. If students have their career fair experiences in mind when they later join the job market as Silkes et al., (2010) suggest, then this further highlights the potential negative complications unfriendly recruiter behavior may have for employer branding processes. However, whether or not this negative impact on organizational outcomes is due to the recruiter's unfriendly behavior being a signal of poor social value or due to failure in reaching expectations and thus fulfilling a hygiene-factor, is uncertain. Nonetheless, choosing the right recruiter to represent the employer may be an important managerial implication to have in mind before paying to participate in career fairs for university students.

In addition to employer attractiveness, the same statistically significant differences between scenarios were observed for organizational attractiveness and intentions to pursue. Again, there was no difference between the friendly and control scenario, but unfriendly compared to control resulted in lesser organizational attractiveness and intentions to pursue. Thus, this initially led us to similar conclusions as discussed for employer attractiveness. Interestingly, however, when analyzing our explorative question of cynicism shown in Table 11, the results indicated a statistically significant correlation between employer attractiveness, organizational attractiveness and intentions to pursue across all groups. Notably, among all scenarios, the friendly scenario showed the strongest relationship between these variables. As such, the stronger association between dependent variables in the friendly scenario is of interest. We speculate the reason being that, "experiencing" friendly recruiter behavior (compared to inferring about it in control) could imply greater organizational attractiveness and intentions to

pursue, a desirable outcome of the employer branding process. Thus, we believe this supports the notion the recruiter may act as a representation for the employer brand and organization at large.

We also set out to explore if individuals' cynicism scores would relate to the measured independent and dependent variables. Interestingly, the friendly scenario showed a correlation that was weaker than expected and not statistically significant. In the unfriendly group, there were mixed but close to nonexistent correlations. On the other hand, the cynicism in the control had a statistically significant but weak correlation with organizational attractiveness and intentions to pursue. This could imply that cynical traits among individuals do negatively influence organizational outcomes to some extent. However, at large, individuals' cynicism traits do not appear to be an important factor to consider during employer branding processes.

If we would redo our thesis, a larger sample of participants would have been desirable as it would have allowed for further investigation of differences in answers between genders and job-seeking status. Also, it would have been of interest to include a broader range of job-seeking individuals to investigate if the importance of the recruiter's behavior on organizational outcome may differ compared to when only investigating students, as results cannot be generalized to the broader population. Another interesting focus area would be to examine the difference between lesser to greater friendly behavior.

To conclude, recruiter behavior during career fairs can have an effect on perceived employer attractiveness. Friendly recruiter behavior did not pose as significant as previous literature would suggest, however, unfriendly recruiter behavior resulted in lesser attractiveness, as expected. Results also indicated that unfriendly recruiter behavior can harm perceived organizational attractiveness and intentions to pursue. Lastly, cynicism does not appear to be a major factor needed to be taken into consideration for career fairs as part of the employer branding process.

5.2.   Limitations

We acknowledge that our thesis is not without its limitations and therefore discuss them as well as our accompanying reasoning in this following section.

Our thesis was inspired using previous literature in various areas, including signaling theory and research showing support for the importance of friendly and unfriendly recruiter behavior in an interview or experimental settings (see e.g., Carless & Imber, 2007; Goltz & Giannantonio, 1995, Giannantonio et al., 2019; Chapman, Derek & Webster, 2006). As such, it could be argued that we were pushing at open doors. However, Breaugh and Starke (2000) discuss in their literature review that while there is empirical support for friendly recruiters resulting in desirable organizational outcomes,

results have been modest or unsupportive of such claims (Breaugh & Starke, 2000). We argue our thesis yielded results that illustrate this complexity and the need for an improved understanding of how recruiter behavior may influence employer branding processes efforts during events such as career fairs.

There are also some potential limitations surrounding our chosen methodology. Firstly, there is a possible cultural limitation in our choice of operationalizing employer attractiveness using the Berthon et al., (2005) scale, which is originally from Australia. To measure employer attractiveness, translation was necessary. We also chose to only measure using a modified version of the social value index, which could have compromised reliability and replicability. However, our measured Cronbach's alpha in 3.5.1 did not differ significantly from the original study on an aggregated level. Hence, reliability should not have been impacted critically. We also believe this is the case for our other index measures, which also used previously established scales that could have been subject to similar limitations.

Another limitation is the use of scenario analysis as an experimental design. Söderlund (2010) proposes that the main weakness of this method is the difficulty in achieving the same strength in effects, as the participant is only able to imagine the scenario compared to being exposed to it in real life. Further, participants may not be able to submerge and imagine themselves in the scenario to an equal degree (Söderlund, 2010). Following this reasoning, conclusions, and implications from our results should be drawn with caution, as students' reactions and perceptions during career fairs may be influenced by additional factors that were kept constant in the scenario. Nonetheless, as discussed by Söderlund (2010), a scenario analysis still allows for real-life situations to be compressed and can capture an adequate effect when real-life testing is unavailable (Söderlund, 2010). Furthermore, previous research indicates that written scenarios are appropriate as long as the scenario can be regarded as realistic and something participants have experienced (Claus Wehnerr et al., 2012). In 3.5.3 roughly 90% of the respondents found the scenario to be realistic. On the other hand, the choice of using an online questionnaire presents a potential limitation in terms of sampling error due to the weaknesses of non-respondents and low response rates (Bell et al., 2019). As recommended by Bell et al., (2019) open questions were limited, and a progress bar, as well as a monetary incentive, were included in an attempt to improve response rates. Thus, despite the potential limitations of using scenarios and questionnaires, these were considered appropriate given our limited resources.

Given our design of scenario, aside from the signals of the recruiter, external environmental factors were kept constant. In reality, there are studies indicating that various surrounding factors may influence attractiveness. For example, company reputation is said to influence organizational attractiveness (Edwards, 2009) and social media presence can potentially be used to influence company reputation and in turn, intentions to join (Babikova & Bucek, 2019). Furthermore, as Ehrhart and Ziegert

(2005) discuss in their paper, numerous other theories can explain attraction, for example the individual's perceived fit as an individual with the organization (Ehrhart & Ziegert, 2005). Moreover, recruiter characteristics such as gender may also impact attraction (Chapman et al., 2005). As such, we acknowledge that reality is more complex and dynamic than what our scenario can capture. We speculate that in real-life students will in many cases at least have some prior knowledge about a potential employer before interacting with a recruiter during career fairs. However, we considered using signaling theory as a primary tool to explain our findings was appropriate given its extensive empirical support and usage in previous studies encountered (e.g., Breaugh & Starke, 2000; Celani & Singh, 2011) Further, when operationalizing employer attractiveness using the Berthon et al., (2005) scale, we focused only on social value even though four additional dimensions could interplay or weigh more heavily in terms of contributing to overall employer attractiveness than social value. Furthermore, depending on for example the industry, companies may wish to focus on building stronger associations in some dimensions than others. However, we considered concentrating only on recruiter behavior impact on attractiveness adequate due to our need of narrowing down the scope of this thesis.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Facebook groups joined for data collection

The online self-completion survey was distributed in several Facebook groups, summarized in Table 13. The groups were student housing or student study groups and used for convenience sampling in addition to making our own posts on Facebook and LinkedIn.

Table 13. Overview of groups joined

Name of group	Number of members	Date posted
Discussion forum for business students at Stockholm university	7,000	2022-04-07
Dom kallar oss studenter	27,400	2022-04-08
Vallgossen studentbostäder	380	2022-04-11
Idun 2022 (Norra stationsgatan 99)	1,300	2022-04-11
Jerum studentunion	1,800	2022-04-11
Kungshamrra hyresgästförening	1,681	2022-04-11
Områdesföreningen forum	981	2022-04-12

Appendix 2: Drop-out analysis and respondent assessment

Following Simmons et al., (2011) recommendations for authors, disqualification rules were determined before the distribution of the questionnaire. We determined that participants who declined to accept GDPR terms would automatically be excluded. Further, participants who did not fully complete the survey and/or failed the attention check question would also be excluded. However, no respondent was dropped if they failed the manipulation check, as this may increase bias. In total there were n = 109 incomplete answers, 88 of which did not complete the 1st block, leaving the first question empty. 9 individuals dropped out after the 3rd block, 2 after the 4th, 1 after the 5th, 1 after the 6th, and finally 4 dropped out after the 8th block. As such, 80% of the drop-out were before the main survey began, indicating no particular question posing a bottleneck, however, respondents may have been intimidated by the scenario and as such left the survey early, or indicates that the introduction, information regarding GDPR as well as the scenario together was a big enough threshold not to continue.

Descriptive statistics were run to see if there were any major deviations from the complete answers, shown in Table 14. A total of 21 respondents dropped out spreading over the 3rd to the 8th block. Out of these, all individuals responded to the recruiter friendliness index, measuring the independent variable. The results posed very similarly to those of the complete answers, indicating similarity in how respondents interpreted the manipulation of the scenarios. Further, despite the small number of respondents completing the remaining indexes, these too scored similarly. Overall, this led to the

conclusion that complete and incomplete answers are comparable, thus reducing the risk of bias.

Table 14. Descriptive statistics for drop-out group

Scenario		N	Minimum	Maximum	M	SD
Friendly	Recruiter Friendliness	9	5.00	7.00	6.19	.54
	Organizational attractiveness	6	3.60	5.00	4.43	.54
	Intentions to pursue	5	3.33	4.33	3.73	.43
	Employer attractiveness	3	3.86	4.71	4.24	.43
	Valid N (listwise)	3				
Unfriendly	Recruiter Friendliness	7	1.00	5.25	2.25	1.38
	Organizational attractiveness	4	2.20	3.80	3.05	.66
	Intentions to pursue	2	1.67	3.00	2.33	.94
	Employer attractiveness	2	1.86	4.00	2.93	1.51
	Valid N (listwise)	2				
Control	Recruiter Friendliness	5	5.25	7.00	6.05	.69
	Organizational attractiveness	2	3.80	4.60	4.20	.57
	Intentions to pursue	1	3.33	3.33	3.33	.
	Employer attractiveness	1	5.14	5.14	5.14	.
	Valid N (listwise)	1				

Lastly, the respondents' time was recorded and summarized in Table 15. Overall, the time spent on the survey averaged about 10 minutes, which was around the expected time required. Two respondents posed as potential outliers; however, these did complete the attention check question and did not produce straight-line answers and were therefore kept on basis of the pre-determined exclusion criteria.

Table 15. Overview of respondents' time spent on the survey

Scenario		N	Minimum	Maximum	M	SD
Friendly recruiter	Duration (in seconds)	50	144.00	4070.00	618.5	686.51
Unfriendly recruiter	Duration (in seconds)	55	212.00	8418.00	662.6	1101.43
Control scenario	Duration (in seconds)	54	212.00	2506.00	549.9	416.44
Total		159	144.00	8418.00	610.5157	788.15

Appendix 3: Social value items

Table 16. Items included in the modified Social Value dimension multi-item measure

"How important are the following to you when considering potential employer"	Factor in original study
A fun working environment	(2) Social
Having a good relationship with superiors	(2) Social
Having a good relationship with colleagues	(2) Social
Supportive and encouraging colleagues	(2) Social
A fun working environment	(2) Social
Recognition/appreciation from management	(4) Development value
Acceptance and belonging	(5) Application value

Appendix 4: MANOVA analysis of dependent variables

In addition to the ANOVA analysis presented in section 4, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed to ensure if the results were statistically significant between scenarios (friendly, unfriendly, control) for each dependent variable. The results (see Table 18) showed a statistically significant difference in employer attractiveness, organizational attractiveness and intentions to pursue based on the recruiter's behavior, $F(6, 308) = 33.74$, $p = < .001$; Wilks $\Lambda = 0.364$, partial $\eta2 = 0.40$.

Table 17. Descriptive statistics MANOVA for all dependent variables according to each scenario

	Scenarios	M	SD	N
Employer attractiveness	Friendly	5.11	1.09	50
	Unfriendly	2.70	.89	55
	Control	5.14	.95	54
	Total	4.29	1.51	159
Organizational Attractiveness	Friendly	4.42	.86	50
	Unfriendly	2.71	.99	55
	Control	4.63	.56	54
	Total	3.90	1.20	159
Intentions to pursue	Friendly	3.46	.59	50
	Unfriendly	2.56	.62	55
	Control	3.55	.42	54
	Total	3.18	.71	159

Table 18. Multivariate test for the dependent variables

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Scenarios	Pillai's Trace	.64	24.49	6.00	310.00	<.001	.32
	Wilks' Lambda	.36	33.74	6.00	308.00	<.001	.40
	Hotelling's Trace	1.73	44.04	6.00	306.00	<.001	.46
	Roy's Largest Root	1.72	88.63	3.00	155.00	<.001	.63

Lastly, given the significant results in the multivariate test, how the different dependent variables differ according to the independent variable can be established by from a test of between-subject effects. From Table 19 we can see that the recruiter's behavior has a statistically significant effect on all dependent variables i.e., employer attractiveness $(F(2,156) = 111.55$, $p = <.001$, partial $\eta2 = .59)$ organizational attractiveness $(F(2,156) = 88.69$, $p = <.001$, partial $\eta2 = .53)$ and organizational intentions to pursue $(F(2,156) = 53.97$, $p = <.001$, partial $\eta2 = .41)$.

Table 19. Test of between-subject effects for all dependent variables according to each scenario

Source	Dependent Variable	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Scenarios	Employer attractiveness	2	106.17	111.55	<.001	.59
	Organizational attractiveness	2	60.37	88.69	<.001	.53
	Intentions to pursue	2	16.19	53.97	<.001	.41
Error	Employer attractiveness	156	.952			
	Organizational attractiveness	156	.681			
	Intentions to pursue	156	.300			
Total	Employer attractiveness	159				
	Organizational attractiveness	159				
	Intentions to pursue	159				

Appendix 5: Distribution of universities

The distribution of universities is presented in Table 20. The highest percentage of 32,7% studied at Stockholm School of Economics, followed by Stockholm University. About 50% of the participants studied economics. The participants answering "other" studied a basic course at university (1), to become a teacher (1), a doctoral student (1), and lastly one studied civil engineering (1). A majority of the participants graduate in 2022.

Table 20. Participants' study situation overview

Variable	N	n	% of total sample
	159		
University			
Blekinge tekniska högskola		1	1%
Chalmers Tekniska Högskola		6	4%
Enskilda Högskolan Stockholm		1	1%
Ersta Sköndal Bräcke högskola		1	1%
Försvarshögskolan		2	1%
Gymnastik- och idrottshögskolan		1	1%
Göteborgs Universitet		11	7%
Handelshögskolan i Stockholm		52	33%
Högskolan i Borås		1	1%
Högskolan i Halmstad		4	3%
Högskolan i Skövde		1	1%
Karlstads Universitet		3	2%
Karolinska Institutet		3	2%
Kungliga Tekinska högskolan		9	6%
Linköpings Universitet		4	3%
Linnéuniversitetet		3	2%
Lunds Universitet		12	8%
Stockholms Universitet		26	16%
Södertörns Högskola		1	1%
Umeå Universitet		2	1%
Uppsala Universitet		12	8%
Örebro Universitet		3	2%
Level of education			
Bachelor or similar		104	65%
Master		51	32%
Other		4	3%
Field of study			
Artistic subjects		2	1%
Care and medicine		11	7%
Economics		79	50%
Interdisciplinary		9	6%
Liberal arts		9	6%
Science		9	6%
Social sciences		25	16%
Technology		15	9%
Expected year of graduation			
2022		85	53%
2023		39	25%

2024		17	11%
2025		15	9%
2026		1	1%
2027		2	1%

Note: Percentage errors may occur due to rounding of numbers.

Appendix 6: Student situation

The majority of the participants had a part-time job, over 57% looked for a job, and 106 out of 159 looks for a job right after graduation (actively searching for a job if graduating in 2022), as shown in Table 21.

Table 21. Participants' work situation overview

Variable	N	n	% of total sample
	159		
Working along with the studies			
Do not want to answer		2	1%
Do not work		58	36%
Full-time job		8	5%
Part-time job		91	57%
Currently looking for a job			
Do not want to answer		3	2%
No		91	57%
Yes		65	41%
When looking for a job after graduation			
After twelve months		1	1%
Do not want to answer		3	2%
Right after		106	67%
Within six months		5	3%
Within three months		43	27%
Within twelve months		1	1%
Years of working experience			
0-1		36	23%
2-3		54	34%
4-5		25	16%
6-7		21	13%
8-9		8	5%
10-11		8	5%
12-13		2	1%
14-15		5	3%

Note: Percentage errors may occur due to rounding of numbers.

Appendix 7: Overview of the most important factors when being employed

The participants could choose multiple factors when selecting the most important factors when being employed. The most valued factor was according to the survey benefits, ticked by 137 out of the 159 participants, as presented in Table 22. 120 of the 159 participants found co-workers valuable, making it the second most valuable factor in total. The third most valuable factor was interesting work tasks, ticked by 113 participants. Only one participant valued challenging tasks as an important factor.

The personal comments were: "Everything is equally important", "It is different now in the future", "Meaningful work", "Support and appreciation" and "Development opportunities".

Table 22. A frequency view of the most important factors when being employed is presented in a bar chart
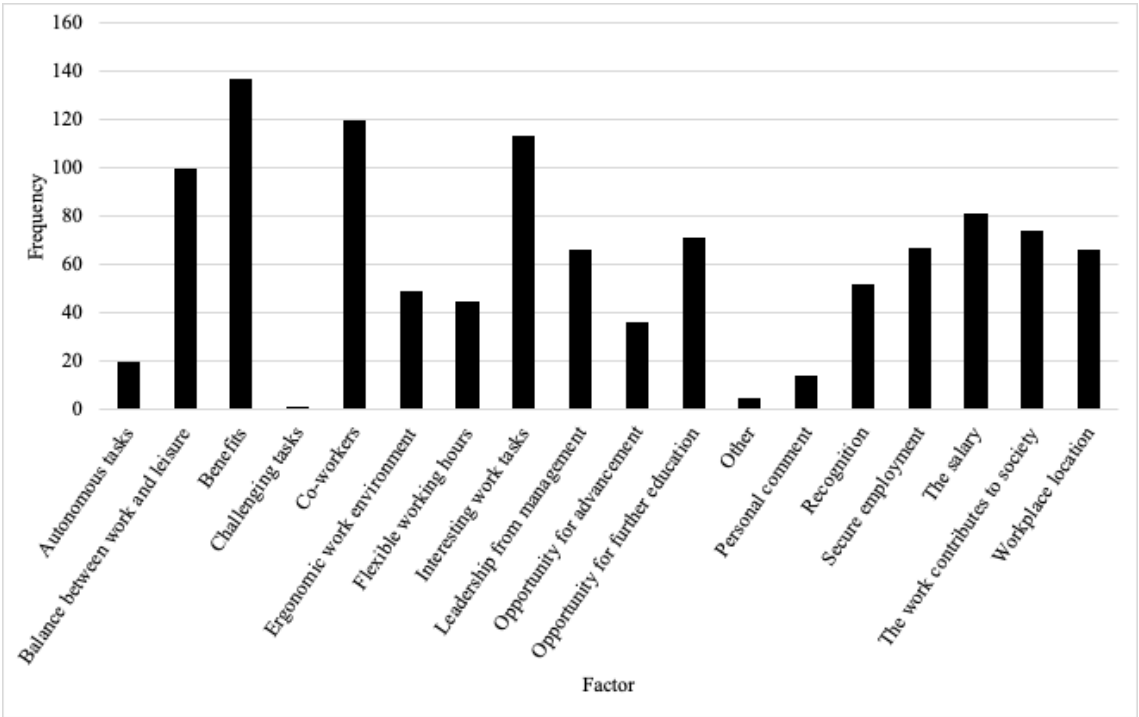
Appendix 8: Full results of recruiter friendliness manipulation check

An ANOVA analysis (see Table 23) indicated that there are statistically significant differences in means between the groups. As Table 23 shows, there is a significant difference between friendly and unfriendly means, but not between friendly and control means. This could partially be explained by participants in the control group noting that the recruiter's behavior was described as friendly, (as discussed in 3.3.8) when they had

actually received a scenario in which the recruiter's behavior was not described. This relates to feedback received during the pilot testing in which the control group was perceived as too friendly since the participant in the control scenario was content with the outcome of the information learned from the company representative.

Table 23. Descriptive statistics for recruiter friendliness ANOVA results

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	556.48	2	278.24	379.11	<.001
Within Groups	114.49	156	.73		
Total	670.97	158			

Table 24. Multiple comparisons recruiter friendliness ANOVA, Tukey post-hoc

(I) Scenarios	(J) Scenarios	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Friendly	Unfriendly	4.12*	.17	<.001	3.72	4.51
	Control	.38	.17	.068	-.02	.77
Unfriendly	Friendly	-4.12*	.17	<.001	-4.51	-3.72
	Control	-3.74*	.16	<.001	-4.13	-3.35
Control	Friendly	-.38	.17	.068	-.77	.02
	Unfriendly	3.74*	.16	<.001	3.35	4.13

Note*: The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Appendix 9:

In section 4.1, an initial descriptive analysis was first performed to get an overview of the data. As noted in table 5, a t-test was performed to see if the values of the independent variables differed significantly from the midpoint of each scale. Significant results were found for each scenario, which can be observed in Table 25, 26 and 27:

Table 25. One-sample t-test at p.05 to test significance from the employer attractiveness scale's midpoint, according to each scenario

Scenario	Variable	t	df	Significance		Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
				One-Sided p	Two-Sided p		Lower	Upper
	Employer attractiveness	7.26	49	<.001	<.001	1.12	0.81	1.43
Unfriendly	Employer attractiveness	-10.77	54	<.001	<.001	-1.30	-1.54	-1.05
Control	Employer attractiveness	8.92	53	<.001	<.001	1.15	0.89	1.41

Table 26. One-sample t-test at p.05 to test significance from the intentions to pursue scale's midpoint, according to each scenario

Scenario	Variable	t	df	Significance		Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
				One-Sided p	Two-Sided p		Lower	Upper
Friendly	Intentions to pursue	5.54	49	<.001	<.001	0.46	0.29	0.63
Unfriendly	Intentions to pursue	-5.29	54	<.001	<.001	-0.44	-0.61	-0.27
Control	Intentions to pursue	9.55	53	<.001	<.001	0.55	0.43	0.66

Table 27. One-sample t-test at p.05 to test significance from the organizational attractiveness scale's midpoint, according to each scenario

Scenario	Variable	t	df	Significance		Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
				One-Sided p	Two-Sided p		Lower	Upper
	Organizational attractiveness	11.62	49	<.001	<.001	1.42	1.17	1.67
Unfriendly	Organizational attractiveness	-2.20	54	.016	.032	-0.29	-0.56	-0.03
Control	Organizational attractiveness	21.56	53	<.001	<.001	1.63	1.48	1.78

Appendix 10: Written scenarios used for manipulation of independent variable recruiter friendliness

Scenario 1: Friendly

Du befinner dig på ditt universitet. Idag pågår en karriärsmässa, där flera företag deltar. Det är livligt med folk på mässan. Du blir nyfiken på ett av företagen och bestämmer dig för att ta reda på mer

Du går till företagets monter. En av representanterna från företaget hälsar dig genast välkommen med ett leende. Representanten säger att det är väldigt kul att få vara på mässan tillsammans med sina kollegor och att få prata med alla studenter.

Representanten undrar sedan om du har några frågor om företaget. Det har du. Ni börjar prata och du upplever att företaget bedriver verksamhet inom det område som du är intresserad av.

Representanten verkar glad och entusiastisk när den svarar på frågorna och behåller hela tiden ögonkontakt med dig.

Allt eftersom du och representanten pratar vidare, upplever du att företaget erbjuder möjligheter som matchar din kompetens och förväntningar. Du får även reda på utvecklingsmöjligheterna är förmånliga.

Ni skiljs sedan åt och du funderar över ditt intryck av företaget som möjlig arbetsgivare.

Scenario 2: Unfriendly

Du befinner dig på ditt universitet. Idag pågår en karriärsmässa, där flera företag deltar. Det är livligt med folk på mässan. Du blir nyfiken på ett av företagen och bestämmer dig för att ta reda på mer.

Du går till företagets monter. Det dröjer innan en representant från företaget kommer så att du kan ställa dina frågor. När representanten väl kommer får du ingen ögonkontakt.

Representanten undrar oengagerat om du har några frågor. Det har du. Representanten säger åt dig att titta på företagets hemsida för svar.

Representanten nämner att det inte är kul att vara på mässan, men att ingen annan från företaget ville delta.

Du försöker att ställa dina frågor. Representanten vill inte svara på allt. Du upplever dock att företaget bedriver verksamhet inom det område som du är intresserad av.

Du upplever också att företaget erbjuder möjligheter som matchar din kompetens och förväntningar. Du får även reda på att utvecklingsmöjligheterna är förmånliga.

Ni skiljs sedan åt och du funderar över ditt intryck av företaget som möjlig arbetsgivare.

Scenario 3: Control

Du befinner dig på ditt universitet. Idag pågår en karriärsmässa, där flera företag deltar. Det är livligt med folk på mässan. Du blir nyfiken på ett av företagen och bestämmer dig för att ta reda på mer.

Du går till företagets monter. Du får kontakt med en representant från företaget.

Ni börjar prata och du upplever att företaget bedriver verksamhet inom det område som du är intresserad av. När ni pratar vidare upplever du att företaget erbjuder möjligheter som matchar din kompetens och förväntningar.

Du får även reda på att utvecklingsmöjligheterna är förmånliga.

Ni skiljs sedan åt och du funderar över ditt intryck av företaget som möjlig arbetsgivare.

Appendix 11: Questionnaire

Hur uppfattar du företag?

Start of Block: Attityd till företag på karriärsmässa

Introduktion
Hur uppfattar du företag?

Välkommen till vår enkätundersökning! Denna enkät är grunden till vår kandidatuppsats inom ekonomi på Handelshögskolan i Stockholm där vi vill undersöka universitetsstudenters uppfattning om företag och behöver därför din hjälp!

Enkäten tar ungefär 7 minuter att svara på. Alla svar är anonyma och behandlas i enlighet med GDPR, mer information finns nedan. För varje fullständigt svar donerar vi 10 kronor till UNHCR. **Tack för att du deltar!**

Projekt: Kandidatuppsats i Marknadsföring

År och termin: 2022, vårtermin

Ansvariga studenter för undersökningen: Emelie Rydén och Emma Folkow Renberg

Uppgifter om dig som behandlas: initialer, dagens datum, kön, ålder, utbildning

Vid eventuella frågor: 24305@student.hhs.se

Klicka på pilen nedan för att starta enkäten:

Samtycke GDPR **Consent to participation in student's survey**

The student's project. As an integral part of the educational program at the Stockholm School of Economics, enrolled students complete an individual thesis. This work is sometimes based upon surveys and interviews connected to the subject. Participation is naturally entirely voluntary, and this text is intended to provide you with necessary information about that may concern your participation in the study or interview. You can at any time withdraw your consent and your data will thereafter be permanently erased.

Confidentiality. Anything you say or state in the survey or to the interviewers will be held strictly confidential and will only be made available to supervisors, tutors and the course management team.

Secured storage of data. All data will be stored and processed safely by the SSE and will be permanently deleted when the projected is completed. No personal data will be published. The thesis written by the students will not contain any information that may identify you as participant to the survey or interview subject.

Your rights under GDPR. You are welcome to visit https://www.hhs.se/en/about-

us/data-protection/ in order read more and obtain information on your rights related to personal data.

○   Jag har tagit del av informationen ovan och samtycker till att delta i denna studie. (Skriv dina initialer och dagens datum i rutan nedan) (1)

_____

○   Nej, jag samtycker inte till att delta i denna studie. (2)

End of Block: Samtycke GDPR

Start of Block: Scenario

Information Denna undersökningen handlar om studenters uppfattning av företag på karriärsmässor. Du kommer att få läsa ett kort scenario som du ska föreställa dig som verkligt. **Vänligen läs igenom scenariot noggrant. Du kan inte gå bakåt i enkäten och ändra dina svar eller läsa scenariot igen.** Efter att du har läst scenariot ombeds du att svara på ett antal frågor relaterade till situationen.

Tänk inte för länge på dina svar till frågorna. Försök att svara även om något är otydligt eller svårt!

End of Block: Scenario

Start of Block: Scenario

Vänlig

Du befinner dig på ditt universitet. Idag pågår en karriärsmässa, där flera företag deltar. Det är livligt med folk på mässan. Du blir nyfiken på ett av företagen och bestämmer dig för att ta reda på mer.

Du går till företagets monter. En av representanterna från företaget hälsar dig genast välkommen med ett leende. Representanten säger att det är väldigt kul att få vara på mässan tillsammans med sina kollegor och att få prata med alla studenter.

Representanten undrar sedan om du har några frågor om företaget. Det har du. Ni börjar prata och du upplever att företaget bedriver verksamhet inom det område som du är intresserad av.

Representanten verkar glad och entusiastisk när den svarar på frågorna och behåller hela tiden ögonkontakt med dig.

Allt eftersom du och representanten pratar vidare, upplever du att företaget erbjuder

möjligheter som matchar din kompetens och förväntningar. Du får även reda på utvecklingsmöjligheterna är förmånliga.

 Ni skiljs sedan åt och du funderar över ditt intryck av företaget som möjlig arbetsgivare.

Ovänlig

Du befinner dig på ditt universitet. Idag pågår en karriärsmässa, där flera företag deltar. Det är livligt med folk på mässan. Du blir nyfiken på ett av företagen och bestämmer dig för att ta reda på mer.

Du går till företagets monter. Det dröjer innan en representant från företaget kommer så att du kan ställa dina frågor. När representanten väl kommer får du ingen ögonkontakt.

Representanten undrar oengagerat om du har några frågor. Det har du. Representanten säger åt dig att titta på företagets hemsida för svar.

Representanten nämner att det inte är kul att vara på mässan, men att ingen annan från företaget ville delta.

Du försöker att ställa dina frågor. Representanten vill inte svara på allt. Du upplever dock att företaget bedriver verksamhet inom det område som du är intresserad av.

Du upplever också att företaget erbjuder möjligheter som matchar din kompetens och förväntningar. Du får även reda på att utvecklingsmöjligheterna är förmånliga.

Ni skiljs sedan åt och du funderar över ditt intryck av företaget som möjlig arbetsgivare.

Control

Du befinner dig på ditt universitet. Idag pågår en karriärsmässa, där flera företag deltar. Det är livligt med folk på mässan. Du blir nyfiken på ett av företagen och bestämmer dig för att ta reda på mer.

Du går till företagets monter. Du får kontakt med en representant från företaget.

Ni börjar prata och du upplever att företaget bedriver verksamhet inom det område som du är intresserad av. När ni pratar vidare upplever du att företaget erbjuder möjligheter som matchar din kompetens och förväntningar.

Du får även reda på att utvecklingsmöjligheterna är förmånliga.

Ni skiljs sedan åt och du funderar över ditt intryck av företaget som möjlig arbetsgivare.

Q1 Nu kommer ett antal frågor om scenariot som vi ber dig att svara på.

Först, vänligen svara på hur väl nedanstående påståenden stämmer överens med hur du upplevde representanten från företaget.

	Instämmer inte alls (1)	Instämmer inte (2)	Instämmer delvis inte (3)	Varken eller (4)	Instämmer delvis (5)	Instämmer (6)	Instämmer helt (7)
Representanten gillar att prata med människor (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Representanten är ovänlig (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Representanten försöker skapa en personlig relation (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Representanten är väldigt trevlig (4)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q2 Vänligen ange i vilken utsträckning nedanstående påståenden stämmer överens med din uppfattning av företaget i scenariot du just läst.

	Nej, absolut inte (1)	Nej, i stort sett inte (2)	Varken eller (4)	Ja, i stort sett (5)	Ja, absolut (6)
För mig skulle företaget vara en dålig arbetsplats (1)	○	○	○	○	○
Jag skulle bara vara intresserad av företaget som en sista utväg (2)	○	○	○	○	○
Företaget som arbetsplats är attraktivt för mig (3)	○	○	○	○	○
Jag är intresserad av att lära mig mer om företaget (4)	○	○	○	○	○
Ett jobb på det företaget är väldigt tilltalande för mig (5)	○	○	○	○	○

End of Block: Org. attr. - Allmän attraktionskraft

Start of Block: Org. attr. - Avsikter att gå med

Q3 Vänligen ange i vilken utsträckning nedanstående påståenden stämmer överens med din uppfattning av företaget i scenariot du just läst.

	Nej, absolut inte (1)	Nej, i stort sett inte (2)	Varken eller (3)	Ja, i stort sett (4)	Ja, absolut (5)
Jag skulle acceptera ett jobberbjudande från företaget (1)	○	○	○	○	○
Jag skulle göra företaget till ett av mina första val som arbetsgivare (2)	○	○	○	○	○
Om jag blev inbjuden till en anställningsintervju skulle jag gå (3)	○	○	○	○	○
Jag skulle anstränga mig mycket för att få arbeta för företaget (4)	○	○	○	○	○
Jag skulle rekommendera företaget till en vän som söker arbete (5)	○	○	○	○	○
Det är viktigt att vara uppmärksam under undersökningen. Tryck i svarsalternativet Nej, absolut inte (7)	○	○	○	○	○

End of Block: Org. attr. - Avsikter att gå med

Start of Block: EmpAt - Social value

Q4 Nu har du kommit igenom en stor del av enkäten!

Utifrån beskrivningen i scenariot så upplever jag att företaget som arbetsgivare kan erbjuda...

	I mycket liten utsträck ning (1)	I liten utsträck ning (2)	I något liten utsträck ning (3)	Var ken eller (4)	I något stor utsträck ning (5)	I stor utsträck ning (6)	I mycket stor utsträck ning (7)
en rolig arbetsmiljö (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
en bra relation med överordnade (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
en dålig relation med kollegor (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
stödjande och uppmuntrande kollegor (4)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
en glad arbetsmiljö (5)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
erkännande/upp skattning från ledningen (6)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
acceptans och tillhörighet (7)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q5 Vilket av följande påståenden stämmer överens med scenariot du läste?

○ Representanten var vänlig (1)

○ Representanten var ovänlig (3)

○ Representantens beteende beskrevs ej (5)

Q6 Tack! Nu är vi färdiga med frågorna relaterat till scenariot. Nu kommer några avslutande allmänna frågor.

Vänligen, svara på hur väl påståendena nedan stämmer överens med din bild av företag i allmänhet.

	Instämmer inte alls (1)	Instämmer inte (2)	Instämmer delvis inte (3)	Varken eller (4)	Instämmer delvis (5)	Instämmer (6)	Instämmer helt (7)
De flesta företag kommer att ta alla genvägar de kan för att förbättra vinstmarginalerna (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Företag ser konsumenter som enkla att manipulera (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Om jag vill få valuta för pengarna kan jag inte tro på vad ett företag säger (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
De flesta företag kommer att offra vad som helst för att göra vinst (4)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
De flesta företag har inget emot att bryta mot lagen; de ser bara böter och stämningar som en kostnad för att göra affärer (6)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q7 Vi vill avsluta med några demografiska frågor och en kort utvärdering av enkäten. Tack för att du svarar!

Vilket kön identifierar du dig som?

○   Man (1)

○   Kvinna (2)

○   Icke-binär (3)

○   Annat (4)

○   Vill inte svara (5)

Q8 Hur gammal är du?
Ålder: (35)

▼ 15 (1) ... 99 (85)

Q9 Vilket universitet/vilken högskola studerar du på?
Universitet/högskola: (4)

▼ Beckmans designhögskola (1) ... Örebro universitet ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ (308)

Q10 Vad studerar du? Välj det område som bäst stämmer överens med dina studier.
Studieområde: (4)

▼ Ekonomi (1) ... Vård och medicin ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ (48)

Q11 På vilken nivå studerar du?

○   Kandidat eller motsvarande (1)

○   Master (2)

○   Annat. Var vänlig skriv. (3)

     _____

Q12 Vilket år beräknas du ta examen/bli klar med dina studier?
År (4)

▼ 2022 (1) ... 2035 (14)

Q13 Jobbar du nu vid sidan av dina studier?

○   Ja, heltidsjobb (1)

○   Ja, deltidsjobb (2)

○   Nej (3)

○   Vill inte svara (4)

Q14 Ungefär hur många års arbetslivserfarenhet har du sammanlagt?
Antal år: (4)

▼ 0 (1) ... 15 (16)

Q15 Söker du just nu jobb?

- ○   Ja (1)

- ○   Nej (2)

- ○   Vill inte svara (3)

Q16 Hur snart efter det att du tagit examen är du villig att börja arbeta?

- ○   Direkt efter (1)

- ○   Inom tre månader (2)

- ○   Inom sex månader (3)

- ○   Inom tolv månader (4)

- ○   Efter tolv månader (5)

- ○   Vill inte svara (6)

Q17 Vad är viktigast för dig när du söker ett jobb? Du kan välja flera svarsalternativ.

☐   Arbetet bidrar till samhället (1)

☐   Arbetskamrater (2)

☐   Arbetsplatsens läge (3)

☐   Autonoma arbetsuppgifter (4)

☐   Balans mellan arbete och fritid (5)

☐   Ergonomisk arbetsmiljö (6)

☐   Erkännande (7)

☐   Flexibla arbetstider (8)

☐   Förmåner (9)

☐   Intressanta arbetsuppgifter (10)

☐   Lönen (11)

☐   Ledarskap från chefer (12)

☐   Möjlighet till avancemang (13)

☐   Möjlighet till vidareutbildning (14)

☐   Trygg anställning (15)

☐   Utmanande arbetsuppgifter (16)

☐   Annat (17)

☐   Egen kommentar: (18)

_____

Q18 Slutligen vill vi gärna veta vad du tycker om enkätundersökningen. Vänligen besvara frågorna nedan.

	Nej, absolut inte (1)	Nej, i stort sett inte (2)	Tveksamt (3)	Ja, i stort sett (4)	Ja, absolut (5)
Frågorna var tydligt formulerade (1)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Svarsalternativen var klart formulerade (2)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Scenariot var realistiskt (3)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Frågorna försökte påverka mina svar på något sätt (4)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

Q19 Övrig kommentar:

_____

Q20 Tack för ditt deltagande! Klicka på pilen nedan för att slutföra enkäten. Vi kommer då att donera 10 kronor till UNHCR som tack för ditt deltagande.