

VIRAL ATTRACTION

INCONGRUENCY IN JOB ADVERTS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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Viral Attraction: Incongruency in Job Adverts on Social Media

Abstract:

Organizations are facing increasing challenges when it comes to securing talent. Harsh competition and a young generation more inclined to bargain means more activities to stand out and become an attractive employer. One medium where the younger generation may be found is social media, and employer branding and recruitment activities may take place there. However, social media is a congested place with constant stimuli. Organizations have to explore new means of standing out, and one such tool is viral marketing through an incongruency framework. This thesis explores the impact of incongruent communication on the employer's attractiveness and intentions to pursue it. Another factor investigated regarding this strategy was the attitude towards the communication itself and word-of-mouth intention towards the brand. The study was conducted using a quantitative approach and distributed self-questionnaires physically on the Stockholm School of Economics campus and digitally through social media. It was distributed to students enrolled in Swedish universities. Results revealed that incongruent job advertisements for the given context had no significant effect on employer attractiveness, intentions to pursue the organization, ad attitude, or word-of-mouth intentions.

Key Words:

Viral Marketing, Incongruency, Employer Attractiveness, Social Media, Students, Professional Services, Ad Attitude, Young Adults

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Definitions

Advertisement: “a picture, short film, song, etc. that tries to persuade people to buy a product or service” (Cambridge University Press, n.d.a).

Ad attitude: “thoughts and emotions of consumer related to the ad” (Christian et al., 2014, p. 87).

Employer attractiveness: “the envisioned benefits that a potential employee sees in working for a specific organization” (Berthon et al., 2005, p. 151).

Employer brand: “the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment and identified with the employing company” (Ambler & Barrow, 1996, p. 3).

Employer branding: “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).

Expectancy: “the degree to which an item or piece of information falls into some predetermined pattern or structure evoked by the theme” (Heckler & Childers, 1992, p. 477).

General attractiveness: “individuals’ affective and attitudinal thoughts about particular companies as potential places for employment” (Highhouse et al., 2003, p. 4).

Incongruity: a “lack of fit” (Latta, 1999, p.104) that has two dimensions, relevancy and expectancy (Heckler & Childers, 1992) and “occurs when an object or piece of information does not fit with an individual’s activated schema structure.” (Törn, 2009, p. 11).

Intention to pursue: “thoughts about a company that specifically imply further action” (Highhouse et al., 2003, p. 4).

Job advertisement: “an announcement in a newspaper, on the internet, etc. about a job that people can apply for” (Cambridge University Press, n.d.b).

Professional services: “a service requiring specialized knowledge and skill usually of a mental or intellectual nature and usually requiring a license, certification, or registration” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.), for example, consultancy or banking services.

Relevancy: “the degree a stimulus contributes to clear identification of a theme or the message being communicated” (Törn, 2009, p. 12).

Schemas: “abstract representations of environmental regularities” (Mandler, 1982, p. 16)

Viral marketing: “online and offline marketing activities performed to influence consumers to transmit commercial messages and content to other consumers in their social network” (Petrescu & Korgaonkar, 2011, p. 211).

Word of mouth: “the process of telling people you know about a particular product or service, usually because you think it is good and want to encourage them to try it” (Cambridge University Press, n.d.c).

Positive word of mouth-intention (WOMI): “A person’s stated likelihood of sharing good information about a brand to others he/she knows” (Bruner, 2021).

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1. Introduction

Over the past decade, social media has been a part of mainstream media (Khater, 2012). Over its lifespan, various strategies have been brought forth, some of which have endured, such as the notion of *virality*. Viral marketing involves consumers willingly sharing messages, resulting in the organic spread akin to a contagious virus (Petrescu, 2014). As users spend more time on social media platforms, it becomes increasingly crucial for businesses to be seen, but also harder, as they compete for the attention of users (Törn, 2009; Loef, 2002). The significant rise in social media usage (Statista, 2023e) has elevated the importance of virality as a phenomenon in the business sphere (Petrescu, 2014). Particularly prominent in the business-to-consumer (B2C) realm, corporations leverage humor, fear, sadness, or shock to construct a viral message that elicits strong audience reactions (Petrescu, 2014). Virality offers companies an effective means to achieve widespread outreach with minimal investment through customer-to-customer (C2C) communication channels (Petrescu, 2014). Notably, this approach often extends its reach to traditional media channels (Libert & Tynski, 2013) and proves more profitable in acquiring customers through these means (Petersen et al., 2009).

Recently, firms have adopted this type of constructed campaign in their communication with potential employees. For example, NASA's recent student internship advertisement employed a viral and unexpected approach that infused humor, resulting in a widespread campaign reaching millions (see Appendix A). This sparked our interest in the subject due to its incongruence with the typical image of NASA—an esteemed, high-tech professional employer—using methods seemingly divergent from our cognitive perceptions of the brand. Nevertheless, the campaign attracted millions of views and tens of thousands of interactions, indicating extensive reach. However, it raised critical questions: How effective is this advertising approach? What implications does it have on organizational attractiveness? Does this type of advert resonate with the intended target?

This thesis examines the effect of virally constructed ads using an incongruity theory approach, specifically focusing on the influence of incongruity on the employer brand in terms of organizational attractiveness.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Background on Viral Marketing

According to Petrescu (2014), viral marketing entails disseminating a message among users, which is subsequently shared within their network. Defined formally by Jurvetson and Draper (1997), viral marketing embodies online word-of-mouth transmitted and promoted through social networks. Central to this concept is using social platforms to transmit business information to create widespread dispersion potential of a marketing message. This has the potential to lead to exponential growth of message dispersion (Petrescu, 2014). An important note, however, is that consumers of the message must find reward in sharing it. This may derive from the entertainment value within the marketing content or incentivization through financial rewards, such as discounts. Practice suggests that effective marketing messages must exhibit innovation, distinctiveness, creativity, and novelty to evoke interest and intention to forward. This can be conceptualized through incongruity theory, the theoretical framework assumed throughout this study to explain viral content.

Viral marketing enables businesses to cultivate new customer bases and improve brand perception through C2C communication (Petrescu, 2014). Moreover, viral campaigns often require minimal investments and frequently garner free exposure through other mainstream media channels, including television and print (Libert & Tynski, 2013).

1.1.2 Background on Employer Recruitment Efforts & Employer Brand

Gatewood et al. (1993) propose that the initial phase of the recruitment process involves applicants' evaluation of information gathered from diverse recruitment sources. The recruitment sources could be recruiters, job advertisements, and, more recently, social media. Thus, in addition to formal information regarding a job offer, applicants may rely on informal information such as a social media post or the employer brand's social media presence (Porter et al., 2004). This suggests that an employer's communication strategy on social media channels could play an important role in an applicant's assessment of the organization as a whole (Breaugh & Starke, 2000).

Ambler and Barrow (1996) define employer brand as “the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment and identified with the employing company” (p. 3). Their research also suggests that “conventional” marketing approaches are relevant since the employer brand offers functional, economic, and psychological advantages

similar to those experienced by consumers when buying products (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). Parment and Dyhre's (2009) study suggests that, beyond monetary benefits, individuals also seek emotional, ideological, and social context in their work. Building upon this, Martin et al. (2011) define employer branding as “the process by which branding concepts and marketing, communications and HR techniques are applied to create an employer brand” (p. 3619).

1.2 Problem Formulation

As reported by Stockholm's Chamber of Commerce, Sweden faces unprecedented labor shortages, impacting the economy through reduced productivity and decreased long-term competitiveness for corporations (Stockholms Handelskammare, 2023). According to the Chamber of Commerce, affected fields include IT, communication, finance and qualified services within economics, law and technology (Stockholms Handelskammare, 2023). With the departure of the baby boomer generation from the workforce, the influx of Generation Z members is comparatively lower than in previous generations (Matuson, 2023). Additionally, this generation is more inclined to explore different options and engage in practices like “quiet quitting” (Marr, 2023; Bremen, 2023). The cluttered media environment, combined with a diminishing talent pool of potential young workers, intensifies competition, increasing pressure for employers to engage in activities to improve organizational attractiveness among potential applicants (Drury, 2016; Törn, 2009; Loef, 2002). Employers can stand out among competitors in the clutter by focusing on their marketing communication efforts, particularly emphasizing their online presence (Loef, 2002). Thus, this thesis aims to explore how viral content design might be used to market the organization, assessing its impact on employer brand attractiveness and the intent of individuals to pursue employment with the organization. The results will hopefully provide employers with insights on whether this approach is a viable way to market themselves to young adults entering the workforce. Viral marketing through job advertisements on social media is chosen as the mode of exploration due to its relevance to the young population.

1.3 Research Question & Purpose

This thesis investigates the effect of virally constructed social media job advertisements on employer branding measures and recruitment efforts on social media. The study revolves around two core focal points: first, individuals’ responses to the brand as an employer, and second, their responses to the recruitment efforts, or the advertisement itself. Consequently, the study aims to address the following research questions:

- Do virally constructed job advertisements on social media influence employer attractiveness and the intention to pursue opportunities within the organization?
- Do virally constructed job advertisements on social media influence individuals' attitudes toward the advertisement and their intention to share information about the organization?

1.4 Delimitations

As a bachelor's thesis, this study operates within restricted resources, leading to specific delineations. Firstly, the research is limited to students enrolled in Swedish universities and is subject to a common convenience sample despite the potential advantages of a broader dataset (Bell et al., 2019). These constraints stem from both time and financial limitations inherent in the context of the bachelor's thesis. Furthermore, the possibility of cultural differences in expected levels of formality in recruitment efforts may lead to more interpretational differences between countries concerning the manipulation. This is another reason this thesis focuses on a Swedish context. Lastly, this study is limited to the professional services industry as there may be differences in the reception of the experiment between industries. Professional services were chosen for their familiarity with the authors and relevance to the sample.

1.5 Expected Contributions

In the face of labor shortages and a bargaining younger generation, securing talent has become increasingly challenging for companies, as outlined in the problem formulation (Stockholms Handelskammare, 2022; Drury, 2016). Standing out to potential employees has become critical, and considering the significant time young individuals spend on social media platforms, that could be a beneficial advertising medium. However, the social media space has become exceedingly cluttered (Petrescu, 2014), posing a challenge for brands. One tactic brands employ in B2C is leveraging incongruity to violate mental schemas, creating a distinct impression (Petrescu, 2014). However, the application of this approach to market job opportunities or an employer brand lacks comprehensive research. To the authors' knowledge, no research exists within the particular approach of this study. As shown throughout the literary review, the content of virality has been much further explored in B2C.

Therefore, this study aims to fill this apparent gap, exploring the connection between viral marketing through incongruity theory to the employer brand. This will be done by investigating the impact of incongruity on attitude toward job advertisements, intentions to pursue the organization, employer attractiveness and word-of-mouth (WOM) intentions. In conclusion, this study hopes to contribute, even if simply to a minimal degree, to how incongruity may be used by recruiters in social media job advertisements to stand out in a cluttered media landscape when recruiting students.

2. Literature Review

This section examines previous research related to the topic of study. Online library databases such as the Stockholm School of Economics Library and Scopus were used as the primary sources of retrieval of previous research and theory. Keywords such as employer attractiveness, organizational attractiveness, intentions to pursue, viral marketing, incongruity theory, incongruity, mental schemas, and employer branding were utilized. The authors found no previous research on the topic of viral marketing or incongruity concerning employer branding theory.

2.1 Viral Marketing, Mental Schema Theory & Incongruity

2.1.1 Viral Marketing

One of the first known usages of the term “viral marketing” was in *PC User* magazine about Macintosh in 1989 (Kirby & Marsden, 2006; Okazaki, 2008; Petrescu, 2014), and was seen as a method of “seeding a product to get others involved to copycat it” (Wilde, 2013, p. 6). While Professor Rayport of Harvard is known to have mentioned the term in 1996, the origin of “viral marketing” is often attributed to Jurvetson and Draper (1997), who define it as “online word-of-mouth which is transmitted and promoted through the use of social networks” (Petrescu, 2014, p. 2). The article by Jurvetson and Draper (1997) covered the example of the free emailing service Hotmail, which, at the time, included a clickable URL to each email sent by an existing user. In doing so, Hotmail utilized its existing users as communicators to spread the word about the advantages of its free service. Ultimately, this marketing strategy enabled Hotmail to reach 12 million customers in 18 months (Dobele et al., 2005).

Since then, many researchers and scholars have produced definitions of the emerging and more relevant term (Petrescu, 2014). Helm (2000) defined viral marketing as “activities to make use of customers’ communication networks to promote and distribute products” via the Internet (p. 158). Plummer et al. (2007) defined it as “a marketing strategy that encourages consumers to pass along messages to others in order to generate added exposure” (p. 263). Thus, an emphasis is put on *social networks* and the *internet* (Petrescu, 2014). The emergence of the internet has enabled communication through online social networks to far outreach, with respect to the time of information spread and reach, all prior ways of communication (Wilde, 2013). For example, the Procter & Gamble July 2010 “Old Spice” campaign gained over 23 million views on YouTube within the first 36 hours. This is nearly twice the reach Hotmail experienced in the 1990s, in a fraction of the time period.

However, for companies to partake in the benefits of social networking, offering consumers an incentive to forward the content within their networks is essential. The definition of viral marketing given by Petrescu and Korgaonkar (2011) captures this aspect, and the pair define it as “online and offline marketing activities performed to influence consumers to transmit commercial messages and content to other consumers in their social network” (p. 211). Therefore, knowing how to create such influence becomes vital when attempting to create a viral marketing communication (Petrescu, 2014).

2.1.1.1 Viral Marketing Characteristics

Not all marketing content goes viral. Much like for a biological virus, there are conditions for contagion that must be present, and ultimately created by marketers, in order for the spreading and success of a marketing virus (Petrescu, 2014). According to Kirby and Marsden (2006), the marketing message must be persuasive in the sense that the consumers feel compelled to engage and interact with the content, the brand, and the product or service. According to Petrescu (2014), successful viral campaigns need to be different and controversial, where the controversial message comes from sources such as provocation (through sexual images, shock, or surprise), humor, or *incongruency*. Petrescu (2014) further states that the “[...] link between controversy and contagion is the key characteristic of viral messages that gives them the viral potential...” (p. 41).

2.1.2 Schema Theory

Schema theory suggests that individuals organize information by structuring their memory into nodes and links between them (Fiske & Taylor, 1984). The nodes symbolize concepts,

and the links represent associations between the concepts (Törn, 2009). Through the combination of nodes and links, beliefs or propositions are formed; as Törn (2009) exemplifies, “Rolex is luxurious” (p. 9). When combined, the beliefs and propositions form a knowledge structure or *schema*. According to Mandler (1982), *schemas* are defined as “abstract representations of environmental regularities” (p. 16). Referencing the work of Fiske and Taylor (1984), Loef (2002) writes, “Schemas provide general expectations that guide processing of specific data” (p. 12). Thus, consumer expectations and knowledge regarding products, brands, and ads are referred to as *mental schemas* (Loef, 2002).

2.1.3 Incongruency Theory

The antonym of incongruence is congruence and is defined as “corresponding in character or kind; appropriate or harmonious” (American Heritage, 2022). The concept of congruence initially emerged in research related to cognition in the late 1970s, as noted by Hastie and Kumar (1979), and subsequently entered the marketing literature shortly after that (Maille & Fleck, 2011). Throughout its lifetime, congruence has had three different types of conceptualization (Maille & Fleck, 2011). The first conception linked congruence to *relevancy*, as noted by Aaker and Keller (1990) and Park et al. (1991). The second linked congruence to the idea of *matching expectations* by, for example, Meyers-Levy & Tybout (1989), Ozanne et al. (1992), and Stayman et al. (1992). In contrast, other authors linked congruence to- and defined it in relation to both *relevance* and *expectancy* (Maille & Fleck, 2011). This conceptualization was first seen in psychology (Goodman, 1980), to later be followed by marketing.

Thus, incongruence can be seen as a two-dimensional concept relating to both expectancy and relevancy. Referencing the work of Heckler and Childers (1992), Törn (2009) states that *relevancy* refers to “the degree a stimulus contributes to clear identification of a theme or the message being communicated” (p. 12). Moreover, *expectancy* refers to “the degree to which an item or piece of information falls into some predetermined pattern or structure evoked by the theme” (Heckler & Childers, 1992, p. 477). Thus, congruent stimuli is perceived by the observer as expected-relevant, moderate incongruent stimuli as unexpected-*relevant*, and extreme incongruent stimuli as unexpected-*irrelevant*.

In conclusion, incongruency can be defined as a “lack of fit” (Latta, 1999, p.104) that has two dimensions: relevancy and expectancy (Heckler & Childers, 1992). In alignment with a broader schema theory perspective, Törn (2009) posits that “an incongruity occurs when an

object or piece of information does not fit with an individual's activated schema structure.” (p. 11).

2.1.3.1 Incongruity & Mental Schemas

According to Törn (2009), when discussing the topic of incongruity, it is essential to firmly establish what an object is incongruent *with* as people form schemas on different levels. Cumulatively, Törn (2009) and Loef (2002) presented four levels related to advertising, brands and products. The first is the interest of Törn's (2009) research being “communications which are incongruent with consumers' established associations to the brand.” (Törn, 2009, p. 12), or *brand schema* (Loef, 2002). The second is incongruity with expectations for specific product category attributes in relation to other products, so-called *product schema* (Loef, 2002). The third is incongruity violating the expectation of advertising generally, or *general advertising schema* (Loef, 2002; Dimofte et al., 2003). For example, one would expect a TV commercial to feature sound rather than complete silence (Törn, 2009). Lastly, the one of particular interest to this thesis and related to the execution of ads is incongruity relating to communications deviating from product category standards, the so-called *ad schema* (Loef, 2002). For example, car ads are generally associated with certain types of elements or attributes and are, thus, likely to be, and expected to be, similar (Stafford & Stafford, 2002).

2.1.3.2 Effects of Incongruity

Incongruity leads to individuals needing to engage in more effortful or elaborate processing to resolve the faced incongruity (Heckler & Childers, 1992). Numerous researchers have found various positive marketing communication reactions generated by this elaborate processing. Incongruity can cause *improved memory* of 1) the unexpected elements of the brand communication, 2) the brand, and 3) other elements of the communication (e.g., Hastie & Kuman, 1979; Meyers-Levy & Tybout, 1989; Wansink & Ray, 1996; Arias-Bolzmann et al., 2000). According to Lee and Mason (1999), incongruent ads (unexpected-relevant) generate higher *ad- and brand attitudes* than congruent ads (expected-relevant). Additionally, incongruent ads draw consumers' *attention* by making the incongruent stimuli salient, which helps them to stand out amidst the current cluttered media environment (Goodstein, 1993; Loef, 2002; Törn, 2009).

Table 1. Overview of research referenced regarding incongruity.

Study	Type of participants	N	Design & Method	Results
Hastie & Kumar (1979)	Undergrad students	96	Design. Experimental. Method. Three experiments.	Recall is higher, due to additional elaborative effort, for incongruent behavior than congruent behavior.
Heckler & Childers (1992)	Students	E1: 177 E2: 113 E3: 89	Design. Experimental 2x2, full factorial, randomized, between-subjects. Method. Three experiments (E1, E2 & E3) examining the effects of the two dimensions of incongruity: <i>expectancy</i> and <i>relevancy</i> .	Unexpected and relevant pictorial elements generate greater recall and more detailed encoding of the individual pictorial element in the ad than expected or irrelevant elements.
Goodstein (1993)	Undergrad marketing students	302	Design. Experiential. Method. Repeated-measures experiment. Executed in two phases.	“Ads typical of an evoked schema elicit relatively less extensive processing and evaluations, while those atypical of the schema motivate more extensive processing and evaluations.” (p. 87).
Lee & Mason (1999)	Undergrad students	120	Design. 2x2x2 factorial design. Method. Questionnaire.	Ads containing unexpected-relevant information elicit more favorable attitudes than ads with expected-relevant information.
Arias-Bolzmann et al. (2000)	Undergrad students	121	Design. 2x2 between-subjects experimental design. Method. Group-based experimental method with individual assessments.	Subjects with negative PCA (prior consumer attitude) show higher brand name recall in the absurd ad condition compared to the non-absurd ad condition. The opposite was shown for subjects with positive PCA.

However, other researchers have found the relationship between incongruity and evaluations to be negative (e.g., Aaker & Keller, 1990). The pair argue that to build a strong brand, consistency and congruity must be central concepts (Aaker, 1996 & Keller, 2003). One uniform message should be distributed, and the brand's marketing mix should be internally consistent, using McDonald's and Marlboro as star examples (Törn, 2009). In alignment with the above, the communications manager at Silverton Bank writes in an opinion piece that "*consistency builds familiarity, familiarity leads to comfort, and we all know that people want to do business where they feel comfortable.*" (Kirisits, 2008, p. 54).

Nevertheless, despite the advantages of brand consistency, even the advocate Kevin Keller acknowledges that "consistency does *not* mean, however, that marketers should avoid making any changes in the marketing program. On the contrary, the opposite can be quite true" (Keller, 2003, p. 636). Thus, the negative relationship between incongruity and evaluations may be attributable to the inverted U-shaped nature of the relationship between incongruity and attitude (Mandler, 1982; Meyers-Levy & Tybout, 1989). Thus, as stated by Törn (2009), "the benefits of incongruity (for example in terms of improved evaluations) are achieved when there is moderate incongruity, as opposed to congruity, or extreme incongruity" (p. 21).

2.2 Employer Branding & Organizational Attraction

As defined by Ambler and Borrow (1996), the *employer brand* is the "package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company" (p. 8). Collins and Stevens (2002) define *employer brand image* as "potential applicants' attitudes and perceived attributes about the job or organization" (p. 2). Employer branding can thus be defined as the process of promoting a distinctive and attractive image among prospective employees (Backhaus, 2004; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Theurer et al., 2018). This can be done via marketing communication efforts, as research has shown that a company's marketing activities can influence the beliefs regarding the company among potential future employees (Collins & Stevens, 2002). Ultimately, companies desire two outcomes, which are to 1) increase employment opportunity *attraction* and 2) increase *intentions to pursue* an offered opportunity (Giannantonio et al., 2019). Given the highly impressionable nature of students, implementing a marketing strategy that targets this group may be an impactful and cost-effective way to convey the employer brand (Parment & Dyhre, 2009).

2.2.1 Employer Attractiveness & Intentions to Pursue

Highhouse et al. (2003) posit that organizational attraction consists of three components: general attractiveness, intentions to pursue, and prestige. *General attractiveness*, interchangeably used with company attractiveness, is defined as an “individuals’ affective and attitudinal thoughts about particular companies as potential places for employment” (Highhouse et al., 2003, p. 4). Thus, the term described can also be used interchangeably with *employer attractiveness*, which is defined by Berthon et al. (2005) as “the envisioned benefits that a potential employee sees in working for a specific organization” (p. 151). This component is passive in nature as it does not necessarily need to result in any actual action. Hence, an individual can find multiple employers attractive simultaneously and never actively pursue most of them (Highhouse et al., 2003). *Intention to pursue*, on the other hand, refers to “thoughts about a company that specifically imply further action” (Highhouse et al., 2003, p. 4), making it more active compared to employer attractiveness (Highhouse et al., 2003). Consequently, this implies that an individual’s subset for companies it intends to pursue will be smaller than those it finds generally attractive.

Fishbein and Ajzen’s (1975) theory of *reasoned action* connects the terms attitudes, intentions, and behavior, positing that intention to pursue is a function of attitude, which means that “attitudes influence behavior to the extent that they influence intentions to engage in that behavior” (Highhouse et al., 2003, p. 3).

2.2.2 Employer Attractiveness & Incongruity

Customer-based brand equity refers to consumers' perceptions and beliefs about a product or service's brand. Consumers' preferences and purchasing decisions are heavily influenced by brand equity (Keller, 1993; Aaker, 1996; Collins & Stevens, 2002). According to Cable and Turban (2001), the concept of brand equity can be extended to recruitment scenarios, where job seekers encounter challenges akin to those experienced by consumers, so-called *employer brand equity* or *employer brand image*. Thus, Collins and Stevens (2002) argue that the similarity in structure between product brand images and employer brand images means their effects may also be similar. Therefore, as incongruity in product advertisements leads to improved brand attitudes (Lee & Mason, 1999), incongruity in job advertisements may also lead to improved *employer brand* attitudes, ultimately resulting in higher employer attractiveness (Collins & Stevens, 2002).

Table 2. Overview of research referenced regarding employer attractiveness.

Study	Type of participants	N	Design & Method	Results
Gatewood et al. (1993)	Junior & senior university students	410	Design. Experimental. Method. Students were grouped into 5 groups.	The “initial job choice decisions are highly related to the image of an organization held by potential applicants. This image is, in turn, highly related to the information available to the applicant pool” (p. 426)
Highhouse et al. (2003)	Undergrad students	305	Design. Two-phased experimental design. Method. Survey.	Organizational attractiveness can be broken down into three components: company attractiveness, intentions toward the company, and company prestige. Additionally, “intentions appear to mediate the effects of company attractiveness” (p. 14).

2.3 Hypotheses

Literature supports that ads incongruent with existing ad schema can help companies stand out in the cluttered and competitive media environment (e.g., Loef, 2002; Törn, 2009; Petrescu, 2014); see Sections 2.1.1 and 2.1.3.1. However, there is limited research regarding the effectiveness of this type of advertisement strategy when what is being advertised is a job rather than a product, targeting potential- employees rather than customers. The theory of reasoned action suggests that behavior is influenced by an intention to perform the behavior, which is a function of attitude toward the behavior itself (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Highhouse et al., 2003). This research paper is limited in that it cannot measure behavior directly, however, it can measure the respondent’s *intention* to pursue a given job, which can indicate further action (Highhouse et al., 2003). Since incongruency leads to higher ad and brand attitudes (Lee & Mason, 1999), and intention to pursue is a function of attitudes (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), we hypothesize that job advertisements incongruent with ad schema for professional business services will potentially generate higher ad attitudes and intentions to pursue than congruent job advertisements.

H1: Incongruent job advertisements compared to congruent job advertisements will generate higher **ad attitudes** among students.

H2: Incongruent job advertisements compared to congruent job advertisements will generate higher **intentions to pursue** among students.

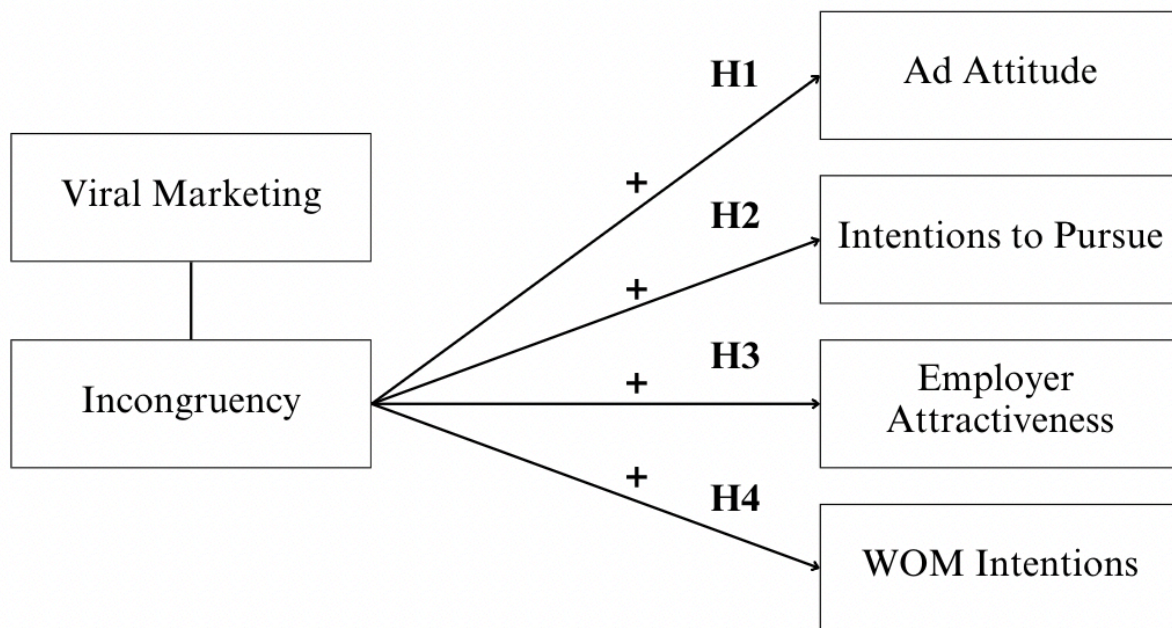
Research exploring the impact of incongruency on employer attractiveness is limited. However, since employer attractiveness is a measure of the envisioned benefits of working for an employer (Berthon et al., 2005) and could be reasoned to be akin to one's attitude toward working at a specific organization, in the context of incongruency increasing brand attitude (Lee & Mason, 1999), it would be of interest to research whether this carries over to *employer* brand attitude and thus potentially *employer attractiveness*. Therefore, we hypothesize that job advertisements incongruent with ad schema for professional business services will generate higher employer attractiveness than congruent job advertisements.

H3: Incongruent job advertisements compared to congruent job advertisements will generate higher **employer attractiveness** among students.

As detailed in Section 2.1.1, word-of-mouth is a vital component of viral marketing, contributing to its contagious nature (Petrescu, 2014). Consequently, incongruence, a prominent element in viral content (Petrescu, 2014), often produces high levels of word-of-mouth intention. Hence, we hypothesize that job advertisements incongruent with ad schema for professional business services will generate higher word-of-mouth intentions than congruent job advertisements.

H4: Incongruent job advertisements compared to congruent job advertisements will generate higher **word-of-mouth intentions** among students.

Figure 1. Visualization of the study’s various variables along with the four formulated hypotheses.



3. Methodology

The methodology section presents the methods and scientific approach for the preparatory and main study of the thesis. The research design of both studies will be discussed, as well as the reliability, validity, and measures used within the main study.

3.1. Research Design

Bell et al. (2019) explain that researchers must establish a research design when conducting research. This design will regard how the researchers view the relationship between theory and research and what type of research strategy they choose to employ. The employed scientific approach can be of two main types, deductive or inductive, and the chosen approach will have implications on the chosen research strategy. Every research strategy consists of ontological and epistemological assumptions dictating the research question investigated. The ontological position regards the assumptions made by researchers concerning the existence of social phenomena, or the “understanding of what reality is” (p. 29), and can be of two types: objectivist or constructionist (Bell et al.,2019). The chosen ontological position dictates the epistemological position taken by researchers. The epistemological position regards the assumptions made concerning how researchers can “gain knowledge of that reality” (p. 29) assumed by the ontological position (Bell et al.,2019).

This thesis employs a *quantitative* research methodology, utilizing a *deductive* scientific approach, meaning that research questions are formulated after existing research. In line with this, the research in this study is based on existing knowledge, as presented through the literary review, to formulate four hypotheses (Bell et al., 2019). Given the deductive approach, this thesis has taken an ontological position of *objectivism*, meaning it assumes that reality exists independently from social actors (Bell et al., 2019). Consequently, the epistemological assumptions are those of *positivism*. The positivist stance implies it is appropriate to gather data through direct observation or measure it using surveys or other means (Bell et al., 2019).

Thus, this study utilizes a quantitative research strategy constructed as an experimental design, including a self-completion questionnaire. The usage of self-completion questionnaires in favor of, for example, structured interviews, which can be considered similar research methods (Bell et al., 2019), is due to practical reasons. For example, self-completion questionnaires are quickly and easily distributed, which was of importance due to time constraints. Utilizing self-completion questionnaires compared to qualitative interviews also allowed a larger sample size to be collected, allowing the sample to be more representative and leading to a more accurate result (Bell et al., 2019). Furthermore, self-completion questionnaires offer an additional advantage by mitigating interviewer effects, safeguarding the study's results from potential interviewer biases that could influence the outcomes (Bell et al., 2019).

Moreover, as the experiment aims to simulate the experience on social media, the interviewer's presence could interfere with how people typically consume social media. Lastly, digital tools facilitate the seamless distribution of the two different versions of the questionnaire, adding another dimension to the convenience and effectiveness of employing a digital self-completion questionnaire. Given the context, the data collection method was considered appropriate. Still, the authors note the limitations of a deductive approach. For example, Deductive thinking may lead to confirmation bias, as researchers look for information that aligns with their expected results. This risk has been discussed among the authors in order to mitigate risks.

3.2 Experiment Design

This thesis utilizes an experimental design, meaning that it uses quantitative comparisons to examine how dependent variables vary between groups subjected to different conditions or levels of the independent variable (Bell et al., 2019). In this study, the independent variable, or *stimulus*, tested and manipulated was incongruency in social media job advertisements. Two test groups were formed at random: a control group and an experimental group. The control group was shown the standard or congruent job advertisement, while the experimental group was shown the incongruent job advertisement. After viewing the advertisement, respondents were asked to fill out a self-questionnaire, responding to questions regarding four dependent variables based on the advertisement they had been shown. Thus, the experiment formulated a 1x2 experiment, as visualized in Table 3.

Table 3. A visualization of the experiment design and the number of participants per group.

	Incongruent Content <i>(Unexpected-relevant)</i>	Congruent Content <i>(Expected-relevant)</i>
<i>n</i>	41	41

3.2.1 Preparatory Study

3.2.1.1 Selection of Advertisement Space

Today, the social media platform Instagram has just over 2 billion monthly active users (Statista, 2023a), of whom 61.1% are between the ages of 18 and 34 (Statista, 2023b). In addition, as of January 2023, Northern Europe, which includes Sweden, has the global leading social network penetration rate of 83.6% (Statista, 2023c). Sweden has an Instagram audience reach of 63.5%, meaning that around 6.6 million Swedes are users of the video and photo-sharing platform (Statista, 2023d). These factors make Instagram a prime online and social platform for companies to advertise and reach new talent. Since this study focuses on newly graduated students from Swedish universities, Instagram was chosen as the online advertising space.

A content analysis performed on nine of Sweden's largest professional services firms (see Appendix B) showed a pattern in how firms are seeking graduating business students on social media. The characteristics of such posts were a larger eye-catching grasping first line

such as “Summer Internship 2023”, “Become a part of the team!” or “We're hiring!” followed by the opportunity's operational dates in a slightly smaller font. The advertisement also featured 1-3 professional-looking young adults, often smiling, looking straight forward at the camera or at one another.

3.2.1.2 Selection of Manipulation

Following the design of Heckler & Childers' (1992) study, this thesis manipulates the pictorial element of the advertisement to test the effect of incongruency on the dependent variables. This is done by replacing a typical (congruent) element of professional services job advertisements with something atypical (incongruent).

Heckler & Childers (1992) speak of unexpected-relevant incongruency in product advertisements possibly taking form by replacing humans in ads with animals. Dogs are an animal often called “man's best friend”, and research has shown that the word “dog” is positively charged (Bradley & Lang, 1999). According to Sable (2013), simply looking at a dog can trigger the brain to release the hormone oxytocin, causing the viewer feelings of pleasure and ease of stress. Based on the above, it was decided to replace the three smiling professional-looking people from the congruent job advertisement format with dogs in the incongruent manipulation (see Appendix C).

3.2.1.3 Preparatory Study - Testing the Manipulation

A preparatory study was conducted through a convenience sample of 21 students studying at Swedish universities to test if the respondents perceived the manipulated pictorial element of a job advertisement as intended. Two manipulations were configured¹: one aimed to generate an *unexpected-relevant & atypical* condition (incongruent), and the second to generate an *expected-relevant & typical* condition (congruent). Thus, while the total sample count was 21, 10 students viewed and rated the manipulated incongruent ad, and 11 students viewed and rated the manipulated congruent ad. The preparatory study was distributed as a self completion questionnaire via anonymous link through Qualtrics XM.

The preparatory study utilized scales from Heckler and Childers (1992) and Goodstein (1993). To test Heckler and Childers' (1992) proposed dimensions of incongruence, expectancy and relevancy, respondents were asked to rate the overall ad compared to previously seen ads for the same job category on two 5-point scales anchored by “extremely

¹ See Appendix G for disclosure of use of AI in the creation of the two ads.

unexpected” and “extremely expected”, and “extremely irrelevant” and “extremely relevant”. In addition, Goodstein's (1993) measure of incongruency through the means of *typicality* was tested by asking respondents to rate how the adjectives “*typical*”, “*unique*”, and “*different*” described the viewed ad relative to other ads from the same job category on three 5-point scales (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). The mean scores for each adjective were added to form a *typicality score* for the two ads, reverse scoring where necessary, where scores ranged from 3, most typical, and 15, most atypical. The results from the pretest were satisfactory, and the incongruent- and congruent manipulations continued to the main survey.

3.2.2 Main Study

3.2.2.1 Population

This thesis samples students enrolled in Swedish universities pursuing either a bachelor's or master's degree. Both levels of university education are considered relevant to this thesis as they collectively represent the potential talent pool companies may use to recruit.

Furthermore, a content analysis showed that the professional services job advertisements posted on social media by the larger firms in Sweden are often distributed in English. Thus, it was decided to conduct the survey in English in order to capture non-Swedish speaking students who could also be of potential interest to employers seeking new hires (e.g. international- or foreign exchange students). Hence, the existing sample is not necessarily limited to Swedish-speaking students.

The survey featured 118 participants, of whom 95 completed the survey in full. After omitting a total of 13 participants who failed one or both of the included attention checks, the viable sample consisted of a total of 82 people. As shown by the descriptive statistics in Table 4, the majority of respondents (56%) were male, and the mean age was 22, with the largest proportion of respondents (85%) being between the ages of 19 and 24. A majority of the respondents were bachelor students (82%), and 95% of respondents currently study at the Stockholm School of Economics.

Table 4. An overview of the data sample, containing gender, age and level of education for complete respondents.

Variable	<i>N</i>	<i>n</i>	% of the total sample	<i>M</i>
	82			
Gender ^a				
Male		46	56%	
Female		35	43%	
Age (years)				
				22,21
19-24		70	85%	
25-29		8	10%	
30-34		2	2%	
> 35		2	2%	
Education				
Bachelor's		67	82%	
Master's		15	18%	

Note: Due to rounding of numbers, percentage errors may occur.

^a Response alternatives for gender were male, female, or prefer not to say.

3.2.2.2 Questionnaire

The self-completion questionnaire was constructed in English to account for the total pool of potential recruits. This allowed the survey to be distributed to international students, who also comprise the potential employee pool. The questionnaire consisted of 10 blocks, the first being a short introduction, providing the respondent with general information and an estimated completion time.

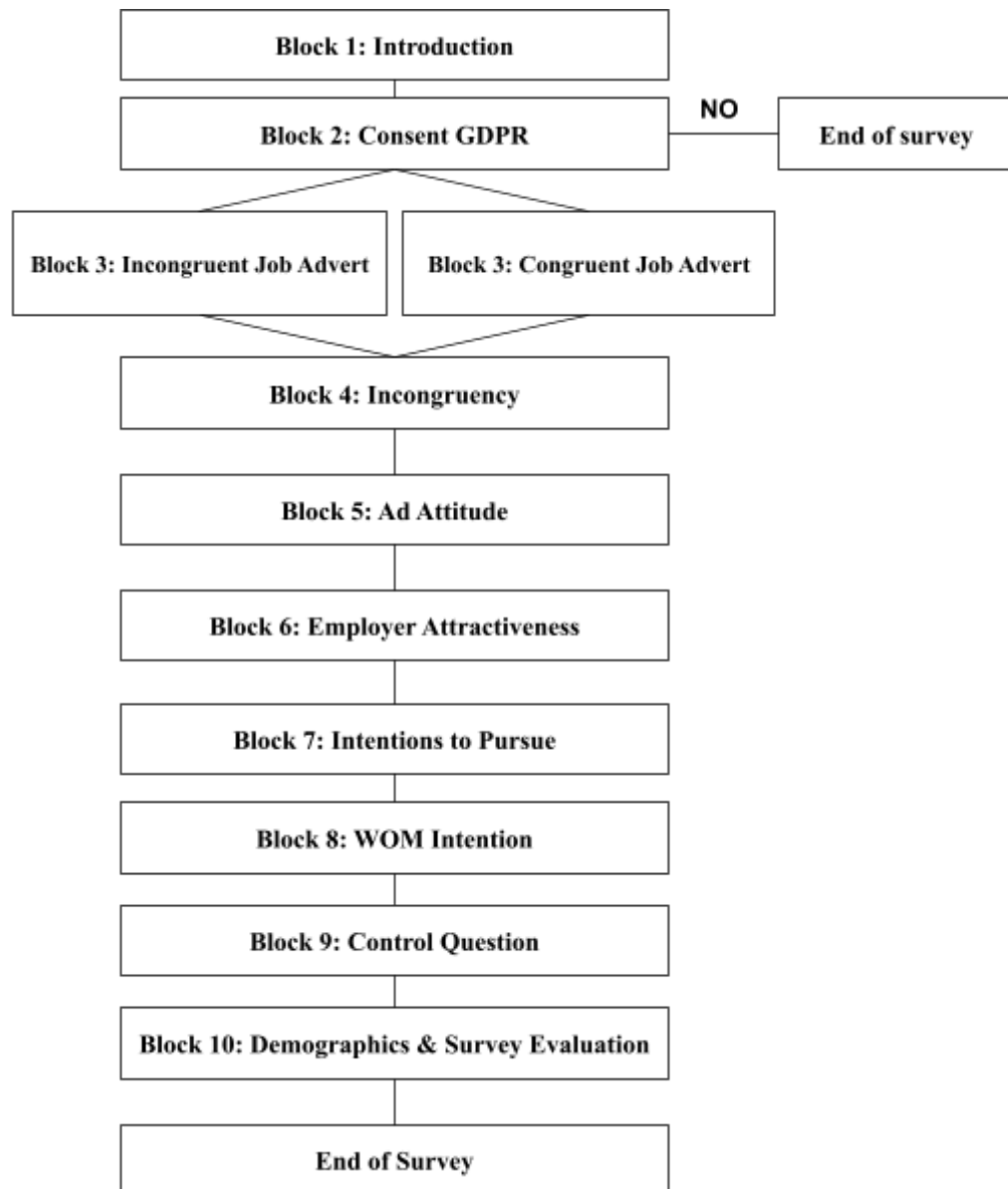
The second block contains GDPR information. Here, respondents were informed of their GDPR rights and how their data would be handled. The GDPR section concluded by asking the respondent for consent to participate through the statement, "I have read the information above and consent to participate in this study," followed by filling in the day's date and their initials. The other choice presented to respondents was, "No, I do not consent to participate in this study," which, if chosen, sent the respondent directly to the end of the survey.

After this, blocks 4 to 10 included a total of six indexed questions and thirteen standalone questions, amounting to a total of 35 questions. Of these questions, two were control questions in the form of one attention check and one control question. Block 4 regarded the

independent variable, where respondents were shown a social media job advertisement and asked questions about how they perceived the ad regarding incongruity. Here, incongruity measures developed by Heckler and Childers (1992) and Goodstein (1993) were utilized. In the subsequent Block 5, respondents were asked about their attitudes towards the advertisement utilizing a scale from Dahlén (2005). Blocks 6 and 7 measured the organization's attractiveness as an employer through employer attractiveness and intentions to pursue it, utilizing scales from Highhouse et al. (2003). In Block 7, an attention check was included to ensure the respondents paid attention to the questions. Block 8 featured measures for word-of-mouth intention, using a scale from Bruner's (2021) book "Marketing Scales." Following this, another control question was asked to ensure the respondents had viewed the advertisement. The last block of the survey consisted of questions concerning demographics, where respondents were asked questions regarding, but not limited to, age, gender, and year of expected graduation. The last portion of the questionnaire also allowed respondents to evaluate the quality of the questionnaire.

3.2.2.3 Survey Flow & Blocks

Figure 2. An overview of the layout and division of blocks in the questionnaire



3.2.2.4 Independent Variables

Incongruency

In this thesis, the independent variable is incongruency. The questions used to measure the respondents' experienced level of incongruency with existing ad schema are the same ones used in the preparatory study: Heckler & Childers' (1992) *relevancy* and *expectancy* questions and Goodstein's (1993) three *typicality* questions. As concluded in Section 2.1.3.2, the effects of incongruency can be said to follow a U-shaped curve (Mandler, 1982). While Goodstein's (1993) three questions of typicality help identify if the manipulation is experienced as incongruent among respondents, including Heckler & Childers' (1992) questions of relevancy and expectancy help ensure that the manipulation is, in fact, the correct type of incongruency. This pairing of the two scales is not novel, it was also done in research performed by Loef (2002). Thus, this reasoning led to the inclusion of both scales.

Following the design of Heckler & Childers' (1992) study, this thesis manipulates the pictorial element of the advertisement to test the effect of incongruency on the dependent variables. This is done by replacing a typical (congruent) element of professional services job advertisements, three humans in suits, with something atypical (incongruent), three dogs in suits.

3.2.2.5 Dependent variables

Ad Attitude

In this thesis, ad attitude is included as a dependent variable. Students' attitude toward the shown advertisement was measured using Dahlén's (2005) 5-point semantic differential scale that contains three items: good/bad, pleasant/unpleasant, and favorable/unfavorable (1 = very bad/unpleasant/unfavorable; 5 = very good/pleasant/favorable). Dahlén (2005) initially used a 7-point scale. However, this study chose to limit the number of options to five due to reasons of questionnaire formatting with regards to mobile friendliness.

Employer Attractiveness

Highhouse et al.'s (2003) five *general attractiveness* items were utilized to measure the employer brand's perceived attractiveness. Respondents were asked to rate the five items on a 5-point Likert scale anchored by "Strongly disagree" and "Strongly agree" (see Appendix F). The items were indexed to form an *employer attractiveness score* for the two ads, reverse scoring where necessary. Scores ranged from 1, most unattractive, and 5, most attractive (Highhouse et al., 2003).

Intentions to pursue the organization

The second component of overall organizational attractiveness suggested by Highhouse et al. (2003) is intentions to pursue. It is the most proximal measure of actual behavior and was used as a dependent variable in this study to gauge intentions to pursue the organization based on the viewed advertisement. Highhouse et al.'s (2003) five *Intentions to pursue* items were utilized, and respondents were asked to rate the five items on a 5-point Likert scale anchored by “Strongly disagree” and “Strongly agree” (see Appendix F). The items were indexed to form an *intention to pursue score* for the two ads. Scores ranged from 1 (most minor intentions) to 5 (most intentions; Highhouse et al., 2003).

Word-of-mouth Intentions

Concerning viral marketing, the thesis included positive word-of-mouth intentions (WOMI) as a dependent variable. The degree to which the shown ad led to intentions to share information about the brand in a positive manner was measured on a 5-item, 5-point Likert scale (1= Very unlikely/5 = Very likely). The scale is included in Bruner’s (2021) book, “Marketing Scales Handbook” and used by researchers such as Fedorikhin et al. (2008) and Huang et al. (2018). This scale initially featured nine points. However, this study chose to limit the number of options to five due to reasons of questionnaire formatting with regards to mobile friendliness.

3.3 Data Collection & Analysis

3.3.1 Data Collection

The self-completion questionnaire was distributed in the form of an anonymous link as well as a QR code on the Stockholm School of Economics campus. The anonymous link was primarily sent out using social media. The respondents who answered through the QR code received a small incentive, such as a soda and a small candy bar, in exchange for completing the questionnaire. In order to reduce the risk of influencing respondents with the authors' physical presence, respondents were left in privacy while answering the questionnaire. Furthermore, no questions regarding the questionnaire or its contents were answered before the completion of the survey to avoid influencing the responses.

3.3.2 Data Quality

Initially, 118 participants began answering the survey. To qualify for inclusion in the study, participants were required to complete the entire questionnaire by answering all questions. Consequently, 23 responses were omitted due to partial completion. Additionally, respondents failing the control questions, as predetermined, were excluded from the study. Consequently, 95 complete responses were initially available, but 13 were subtracted due to these exclusions. Ultimately, the study relied upon 82 participants who completed the survey entirely and successfully passed both control questions. These 82 responses formed the basis for subsequent data analysis.

3.3.3 Data Analysis

The data analysis is based on responses collected through Qualtrics XM, and the software R, accompanied by R Studio, was used to analyze the responses. Low-quality responses were omitted, and the hypotheses were tested using independent t tests. Furthermore, Cronbach's alpha was used to evaluate the internal consistency and reliability of indexed, multi-item questions in the dataset.

3.4 Reliability & Validity

3.4.1 Reliability

Bell et al. (2019) define *reliability* as “the consistency of a measure of a concept” (p.172). The reliability of measures used in research is essential and entails that the measures are stable, consistent, and repeatable (Bell et al., 2019). A standard and common way to measure reliability is to use Cronbach's alpha. The test measures the internal consistency of multi-indicator measures by computing the mean value derived from all potential split-half reliability coefficients (Bell et al., 2019). Thus, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient ranges between 0 and 1, where 0 implies no internal reliability and 1 implies perfect internal reliability. The academic standard posits that an acceptable level of internal reliability lies around 0.7-0.8. However, Cho and Kim (2015) advise researchers to be cautious of strictly following the cut-off at a specific number as they argue that receiving an alpha of 0.7 is no better than a value of 0.69.

An alternative method to assess the reliability of a measure involves employing the test retest approach, wherein identical questions are posed to participants at two distinct time intervals to compare their responses. A strong correlation between the responses indicates high

stability, while a weaker correlation suggests lower stability. However, this method requires collecting data from the same sample at two separate time points, a challenge in this study due to its use of an anonymous digital self-response survey and the existing time constraint. Moreover, this method is susceptible to limitations; for instance, the passage of time between data collection instances can influence how respondents answer, potentially affecting the results. Considering the study's nature, research design, and the existing time constraints, the decision was made to measure reliability by calculating Cronbach's alpha.

Cronbach's alpha was computed for all multi-item measures (e.g., Highhouse et al., 2003; Dahlén, 2005; Fedorikhin et al., 2008). Individual experiment scores ranged between 0.78 (intentions to pursue, humans) and 0.94 (employer attractiveness, dogs), while aggregate scores fell within the range of 0.85 to 0.91. Notably, none of the individual or aggregate items exhibited an alpha below 0.7, with nearly all surpassing 0.8. Furthermore, despite some scale adjustments, Cronbach's alpha results closely aligned with those reported in the original studies, affirming the study's internal reliability as acceptable. For a comprehensive overview of calculated Cronbach's alphas for multi-item dependable variables, please refer to Table 5.

Table 5. Summary of Cronbach's alphas.

	Dogs	Humans	Aggregate	Result in Original Study	Original Study
Ad attitude	0.88	0.82	0.86	0.89	Dahlén (2005)
Employer attractiveness	0.94	0.87	0.91	0.88	Highhouse et al. (2003)
Intention to pursue	0.87	0.78	0.85	0.82	Highhouse et al. (2003)
WOMI ^a	0.83	0.87	0.85	0.94	Fedorikhin et al. (2008)

Note: Rounded to two decimal points.

^a WOMI is used as an abbreviation of *word of mouth intention*.

3.4.2 Validity

An additional critical aspect of research is ensuring the validity of measures. Bell et al. (2019) state that validity concerns “the integrity of conclusions generated from a piece of research” (p. 46). Low validity suggests uncertainty in how well the study's measurements align with reality; thus, high validity is necessary. Validity can be assessed through various methods, including testing for face, content, concurrent, predictive, convergent, or

discriminant validity (Bell et al., 2019). Furthermore, Bell et al. (2019) suggest that reliability precedes validity in quantitative research, which Section 3.4.1 has established that the measures of this study have.

Face Validity

Face validity tests the extent to which a measurement accurately represents “the content of the concept in question” (Bell et al., 2019, p. 174). Essentially, it assesses whether the measurement truly measures the desired concept. To establish face validity in this study, published and validated measurements and scales from established theory and research were adopted (e.g., Highhouse et al., 2003 & Dahlén, 2005). Utilizing measurement methods and questions derived from prior research, as detailed in the methodology section, ensures alignment of the study's measurement techniques with established practices from similar studies.

3.4.3 Survey Evaluation

The final segment of the questionnaire invited respondents to assess its quality. This section comprised three questions presented on a 5-point Likert scale (see Table 6). These inquiries aimed to ascertain if the questions were appropriately formulated, if the response options were clearly presented, and if respondents felt the way questions were posed attempted to influence their responses. Notably, 92% and 94% of participants agreed that questions and answers were well formulated, respectively. A mere 4% of respondents felt that the questions attempted to influence their responses. A summary of the evaluation results is provided in Table 6.

Table 6. Summary of Questionnaire Evaluations.

	<i>n</i>	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
The questions were clearly formulated	82	1%	1%	5%	52%	40%
The answer options were clearly formulated	82	0%	1%	5%	43%	51%
The questions tried to influence my answer in any way	82	41%	41%	12%	2%	2%

Note: Rounded to whole percentages.

4. Results

As outlined in the methodology chapter, this study seeks to assess the impact of employer marketing communication efforts incongruent with ad schemas through a 2x1 experiment (see Section 3.2). Specifically, it explores its effects on the dependent variables: ad attitude, employer attractiveness, intentions to pursue the organization, and word-of-mouth intention. Hypotheses were examined using t tests with a significance level set at 5% to discern potential disparities between the means of the two subject groups. The results presented in this section concern a significance level of 5% ($p < 0.05$).

4.1 Incongruency Manipulation

As lifted in the literature review, to gain positive marketing communication effects of incongruent advertising, the incongruency perceived must be moderate (Mandler, 1982). Thus, as posited by Heckler & Childers (1992), it is essential that the ad is not only perceived as unexpected, but also as relevant. The picture manipulation used in the main study was the same manipulation yielding satisfactory results from the pre-study, meaning it was deemed unexpected-relevant, not unexpected-irrelevant. The same questions regarding expectancy and relevancy were asked in the main study as well, and gave differing mean scores to the pre-study. On a 5-point scale, the incongruent ad was subject to $M = 2.08$ for expected and $M = 3.17$ for relevant in the pre-study, and $M = 2.29$ for expected and $M = 2.71$ for relevant in the main study. Thus, the main study sample viewed the incongruent manipulation as less unexpected, and less relevant than the pre-study sample did, even bordering below the 3-point cut off making it cautiously close to being irrelevant.

As mentioned, the congruent ad-version was based off of a content analysis and replicated to be as similar as possible to existing job advertisements for professional services. These generated results of $M = 4.00$ (preparatory study) versus $M = 4.05$ (main study) for expected, and $M = 4.08$ (preparatory study) versus $M = 3.63$ (main study) for relevant. Here, there is an observable dip in experienced relevance of even the congruent ad, modeled after a content analysis of some of the largest employers within this field. Thus, it could be speculated that even the existing advertisement layout is not perceived as relevant. Nonetheless, regarding the reduction of relevance for the incongruent group in relation to that of the congruent group, coupled with its proximity to the cutoff point, the authors deem the manipulation to still be of relevance in the context of how job advertisements look on social media.

Table 7. Overview of the means of the independent variable in the prestudy and main study.

Independent Variable	Prestudy			Main study		
	Expectancy	Relevance	Atypicality	Expectancy	Relevance	Atypicality
Dogs	2.08	3.17	12.88	2.29	2.71	11.98
Humans	4.00	4.08	6.25	4.05	3.63	5.41

Note: Rounded to two decimal points.

4.2 Hypotheses Testing

Prior to conducting independent t tests, an initial descriptive analysis was conducted to provide an overview of the data. As presented in Table 8, the 41 participants exposed to the incongruent job advertisement (dogs) reported lower scores for ad attitude, employer attractiveness, and intention to pursue than those exposed to the congruent job advertisement (humans). However, the incongruent group displayed a higher WOMI score than the congruent group, as highlighted in Table 8².

Table 8. Overview of the initial descriptive statistics, showing mean and standard deviation for each dependent variable for the two groups.

Dependent Variable	Scenario	<i>n</i>	Ad Attitude		Intention to Pursue		Employer Attractiveness		WOMI	
			<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Dogs		41	3.18	0.88	3.05	0.81	2.99	1.03	3.10	0.88
Humans		41	3.37	0.58	3.31	0.60	3.15	0.75	2.87	0.79
Total		82	3.27	0.75	3.18	0.72	3.07	0.90	2.98	0.84

Note: Rounded to two decimal points.

Then, the four hypotheses formulated in Section 2.3 were tested using two-tailed independent t tests with a significance level set at 5% to discern potential disparities between the means of the two subject groups. As shown in Table 9, this study did not find empirical support for any of the four hypotheses. Consequently, the null hypotheses could not be rejected, signifying a lack of significant differences in means between respondents exposed to congruent or incongruent job advertisements within this sample.

² See Appendix E for the variable correlations.

Table 9. An overview of results from the two-tailed t tests performed on each dependent variable.

	Dogs (<i>n</i> = 41)		Humans (<i>n</i> = 41)		<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>t</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
H1: Ad attitude	3.18	0.88	3.37	0.58	69	0.261	-1.13
H2: Intention to pursue	3.05	0.81	3.31	0.60	74	0.106	-1.64
H3: Employer attractiveness	2.99	1.03	3.15	0.75	73	0.435	-0.78
H4: WOM intention	3.10	0.88	2.87	0.79	79	0.223	1.23

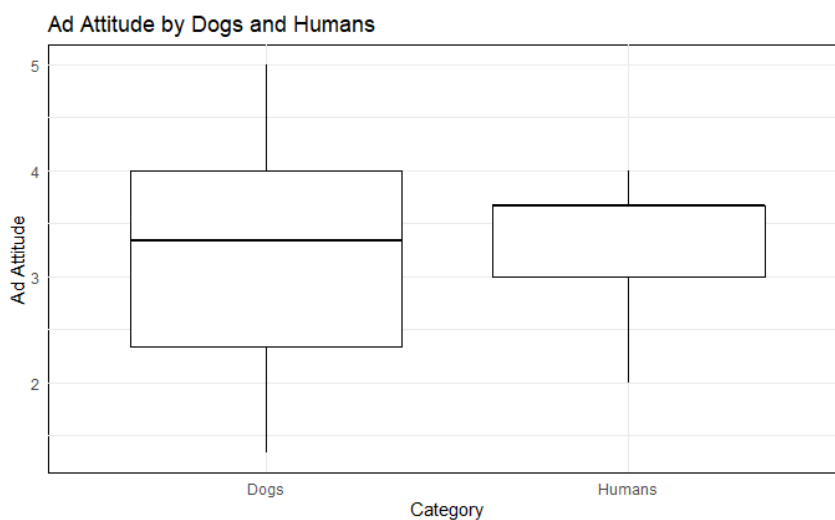
Note: Means, standard deviations and t-values rounded to two decimal points and p-value to three.

4.2.1 Hypothesis 1 - Ad Attitude

Participants evaluated the displayed advertisement using a 5-point semantic differential scale, ranging from good/bad, favorable/unfavorable, to pleasant/unpleasant (refer to Section 3.2.2.5). Subsequently, the three variables were indexed.

The group exposed to the congruent advertisement featuring humans indicated a slightly higher ad attitude level than the incongruent test group. However, upon conducting a t test, no statistically significant difference in means between the group viewing the incongruent ad ($M = 3.18$, $SD = 0.88$) and the group viewing the congruent ad ($M = 3.37$, $SD = 0.58$) were found, $t(69) = -1.13$, $p = 0.261$, $\alpha = 0.05$. Consequently, Hypothesis 1, which suggests that “Incongruent job advertisements compared to congruent job advertisements will generate higher ad attitudes among students,” was not empirically supported.

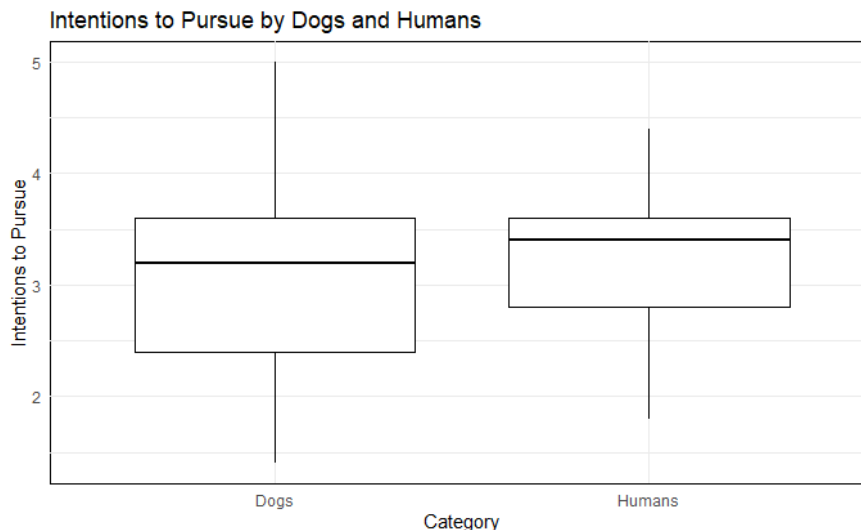
Figure 3. Boxplot depicting ad attitudes for the two subject groups.



4.2.2 Hypothesis 2 - Intention to Pursue

Participants were surveyed regarding their intentions to pursue the organization as an employer, utilizing a 5-point Likert scale with five items. These items were subsequently consolidated into a single measure of intentions to pursue (see Section 3.2.2.5). While intentions to pursue were marginally higher in the congruent group ($M = 3.31$, $SD = 0.60$) compared to the incongruent group ($M = 3.05$, $SD = 0.81$), the resulting t test revealed no statistically significant difference between the means, $t(74) = -1.64$, $p = 0.106$, $\alpha = 0.05$. Consequently, H2, proposing that “Incongruent job advertisements compared to congruent job advertisements will generate higher intention to pursue among students,” lacked empirical support.

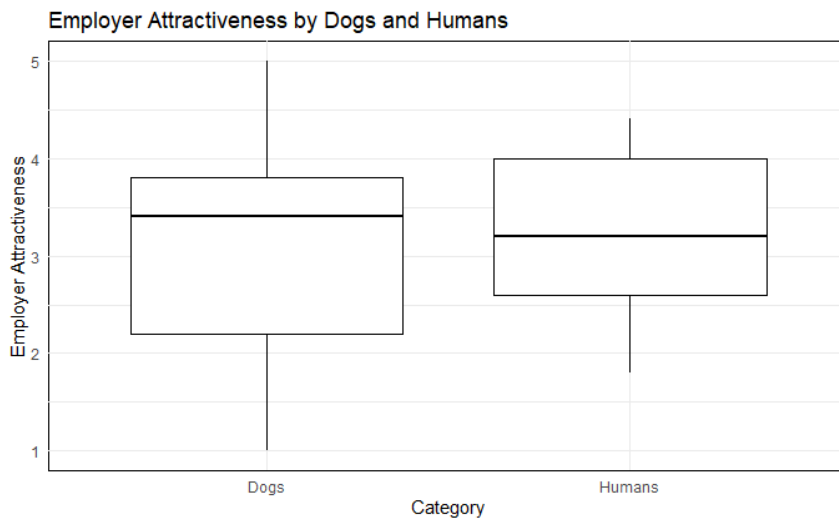
Figure 4. Boxplot depicting intentions to pursue for the two subject groups.



4.2.3 Hypothesis 3 - Employer Attractiveness

Participants responded to questions intended to assess the perceived attractiveness of the employer based on the viewed advertisement. Using a 5-point Likert scale across five items, responses were consolidated into one variable for employer attractiveness (see Section 3.2.2.5). A t test revealed no statistically significant difference between the means of the incongruent group ($M = 2.99$, $SD = 1.03$) and the congruent group ($M = 3.15$, $SD = 0.75$), $t(73) = -0.78$, $p = 0.435$, $\alpha = 0.05$. Although there appears to be a slight discrepancy in the means when viewing Table 9, the absence of statistical significance indicates that H3, asserting that “Incongruent job advertisements compared to congruent job advertisements will generate higher employer attractiveness,” was not supported empirically.

Figure 5. Boxplot depicting employer attractiveness for the two subject groups.

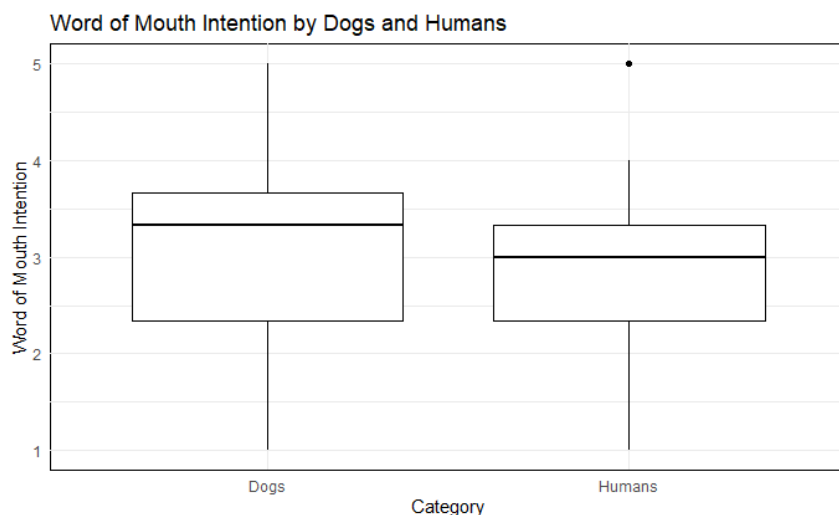


4.2.4 Hypothesis 4 - Word-of-mouth Intentions

Participants responded to questions about their WOMI using a 3-item scale, subsequently consolidated into an indexed measure (refer to Section 3.2.2.5). Notably, there was a discernible difference between the means of the two groups: Incongruent ($M = 3.10$, $SD = 0.88$) and congruent ($M = 2.87$, $SD = 0.79$). However, upon conducting a t test, the obtained difference did not reach statistical significance, $t(79) = 1.23$, $p = 0.222$, $\alpha = 0.05$.

Consequently, hypothesis H4, proposing that “Incongruent job advertisements compared to congruent job advertisements will generate higher word-of-mouth intentions among students,” did not find empirical support.

Figure 6. Boxplot depicting word of mouth intentions for the two subject groups.



4.3 Summary of Hypotheses

Despite the slight differences in means among subject groups, the data did not empirically support the four formulated hypotheses (see Table 10)³.

Table 10. Summary of Hypotheses.

H1	Incongruent job advertisements compared to congruent job advertisements will generate higher ad attitudes among students.	Not supported
H2	Incongruent job advertisements compared to congruent job advertisements will generate higher intentions to pursue among students.	Not supported
H3	Incongruent job advertisements compared to congruent job advertisements will generate higher employer attractiveness among students.	Not supported
H4	Incongruent job advertisements compared to congruent job advertisements will generate higher word-of-mouth intentions among students.	Not supported

5. Discussion

The objective of this thesis was to investigate the effect of virally constructed social media job advertisements on employer branding measures and recruitment efforts. The study was guided by the research questions regarding whether virally constructed job advertisements on social media influence employer attractiveness, intention to pursue, ad attitude and intention to share information about the organization, leading to the formulation of four hypotheses based on existing theory and previous research (see Section 2.3). However, as revealed in the results section, none of the hypotheses found empirical support. Consequently, the primary conclusion drawn from this study is that incongruency in advertisement schemas for job advertisements within professional business services does not significantly influence ad attitude, employer attractiveness, intentions to pursue the organization, or word-of-mouth intentions towards the organization.

³ See Appendix D for results of t-tests performed to gauge difference from the middle point of scale.

5.1 Conclusions and Implications

5.1.1 Ad Attitude

Mason and Lee's (1999) research highlighted increased brand and ad attitudes in incongruent (unexpected-relevant) compared to congruent (expected-relevant) ads, albeit within the context of B2C advertising rather than employer branding and recruitment efforts. Collins and Stevens (2002) argued that while distinct, brand image and employer brand image share similarities in their constructs, suggesting potential comparable effects (see Section 2.2). Given the scarcity of research on viral marketing in job advertising, this thesis aimed to explore whether the positive marketing communication effects of incongruency applied not just to product ads but also to recruitment advertising. Building on the premise of Collins and Stevens (2002), this thesis hypothesized that incongruent job advertisements compared to congruent job advertisements would generate higher ad attitudes among students. However, the empirical analysis of collected data did not support this hypothesis.

Comparing the findings of this study and that of Mason and Lee revealed opposite effects on ad attitude of utilizing incongruent ads. Accounting for the disparity in measurement scales between studies, Mason and Lee (1999) reported ad attitude means of 3.16 for incongruent and 2.78 for congruent ads, while this thesis found average means of 3.18 for incongruent and 3.37 for congruent ads. Mason and Lee's (1999) sample showed higher ad attitudes toward the incongruent ads while this study showed lower ad attitude toward the incongruent ad. The failure to reject the null hypothesis might imply that the heightened cognitive processing associated with incongruent job advertisements does not necessarily elevate ad attitude within the sample.

However, while empirical support was not found for the formulated hypothesis, neither was empirical support found for the opposite direction, meaning that this study cannot confirm that incongruent job advertisements for professional services employment opportunities *increases* nor *decreases* ad attitude. Therefore, given incongruent content's greater potential for virality (Petrescu, 2014), the inability to reject the null, in either direction, might suggest leveraging more viral content not solely to boost ad attitude but to broaden the reach of the potential talent pool.

5.1.2 Employer Attractiveness

The 5-item measure by Highhouse et al. (2003) for general attractiveness, or *company* attractiveness, aligns with the concept of employer attractiveness (see Section 2.2). Collins and Stevens' (2002) statement of transferability between product and employer brands suggests that marketing efforts that lead to higher product brand attitudes may also lead to higher employer brand attitudes. A positive attitude naturally follows when something is attractive, hinting at a potential link between brand attitude and employer attractiveness. Building on Lee and Mason's suggestion of higher brand attitudes toward incongruent versus congruent job ads, this thesis hypothesized that incongruent job advertisements, compared to congruent job advertisements, would generate higher employer attractiveness among students. However, this hypothesis lacked empirical support in this study, suggesting an absence of this pattern in the results.

The study revealed a slight difference in perceived employer attractiveness among respondents, with mean values of 2.99 for incongruent ads and 3.15 for congruent ads. Standard deviations of 1.03 for incongruent and 0.75 for congruent ads suggest considerable variability within the sample, undermining the existence of a consistent pattern. As highlighted by Giannantonio et al. (2019), employers desire to gain attraction and increase the intention to pursue their job opportunities. Consequently, the failure to reject the null in both directions suggests that, within the sample, respondents' attraction to an employer may not hinge on whether the ad is incongruent or congruent. Hence, employing the same logic applied to ad attitude above, creating incongruent job advertisements for virality potential might still offer advantages. Doing so would not compromise viewers' attraction to the employer while potentially broadening the advertisement's reach to a larger audience.

5.1.3 Intentions to Pursue

The theory of reasoned action posits that intention is a function of attitude (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Highhouse et al., 2003). For employers, cultivating the intention to pursue among potential employees is a crucial objective in their marketing communication efforts (Giannantonio et al., 2019). Thus, combining Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) theory with the insights from Lee and Mason (1999) regarding ad and brand attitude, it was hypothesized that incongruent job advertisements, compared to congruent job advertisements, will generate higher intentions to pursue among students. However, this hypothesis lacked empirical support. Comparing average means of the intention to pursue among the two evaluated study groups revealed that, within the randomized sample, respondents who had viewed the

incongruent ad were 7.9% less likely to pursue the advertised job opportunity than respondents who viewed the congruent ad.

5.1.4 Word-of-Mouth Intention

Viral marketing is not a recent phenomenon; marketers have long leveraged incongruent content, known to spread more readily across social networks. A fundamental aspect of viral marketing involves the spread of content akin to the transmission of a biological virus (Petrescu, 2014). While this paper cannot measure actual behavior, it can measure intention, which is often predictive of future actions (Highhouse et al., 2003). Therefore, measuring WOMI was of particular interest to this thesis in relation to the research question.

Given the likelihood of incongruent product ads being shared in social networks (Petrescu, 2014), it was hypothesized that this may transfer to job advertisements, in accordance with Collins and Stevens' (2002) assertions. Consequently, this thesis hypothesized that incongruent job advertisements, compared to congruent job advertisements, will generate higher WOMI among students. However, as delineated in Section 4.2.4, the results did not support this hypothesis empirically. In this specific sample, however, WOM intention, on average, was 8% higher among viewers of the incongruent ad compared to the congruent ad.

5.2 Limitations

This study acknowledges several limitations that warrant discussion. Firstly, the data collection method used was constrained by time limitations, resulting in a sample that leaned more towards a convenience sample rather than a probability or quota sample. Consequently, concerns arise about the generalizability of the study's findings and the contexts in which they may hold relevance (Bell et al., 2019). Additionally, the industry scope examined in this study may be influenced by cultural differences, potentially impacting how subjects interpret and respond to incongruent stimuli. This leads to diverse outcomes in similar research conducted within different industries.

Furthermore, this study primarily focuses on the viral content aspect of viral marketing, yet virality is a result of both content and contagion (Petrescu, 2014). While intending to explore the relationship between incongruent content and social influence, the study's secondary objective was omitted due to time constraints. The decision was made to prioritize

investigating the impact of incongruent content design on the employer brand, as this ultimately precedes the contagion aspect of viral marketing.

5.2.1 Replication Crisis

The rise of the *replication crisis* warrants its own section under limitations. Research by Dreber and Johannes (2019) suggests a large share of published work in top journals does not replicate. Multiple indicators concerning the replicability of results exist, and the main and most common indicator is whether the replication study can find a statistically significant effect using the same statistical tests (Dreber & Johannes, 2019).

The ongoing replication crisis within the field of social sciences is an important aspect to consider when conducting research based on previous findings. As mentioned, time was a limiting factor in many respects in this study. This led to the inability to test the results from studies used to form this thesis' hypotheses and method, which ultimately puts the results of this study at risk of being incorrect and causes authors to claim higher levels of generalizability than what is true. While we have been cautious not to claim our findings as generalizable due to factors such as sample size and selection, if the replication crisis affects the studies in our literature review, our conclusion would be even less reliable than we already suggest (Dreber & Johannes, 2019). In addition, this thesis builds upon relatively old findings. While they are well established, it would have been beneficial to see if the results of said studies translate over time, which could be done by executing replication studies.

Hence, it may be of interest for future research to replicate the studies in this thesis to evaluate if their findings hold in today's digital climate. Furthermore, future research could look at the effect of incongruency with other levels of schemas to assert whether, for example, more influence resides within brand schemas in addition to advertisement schemes, as was the object of this study.

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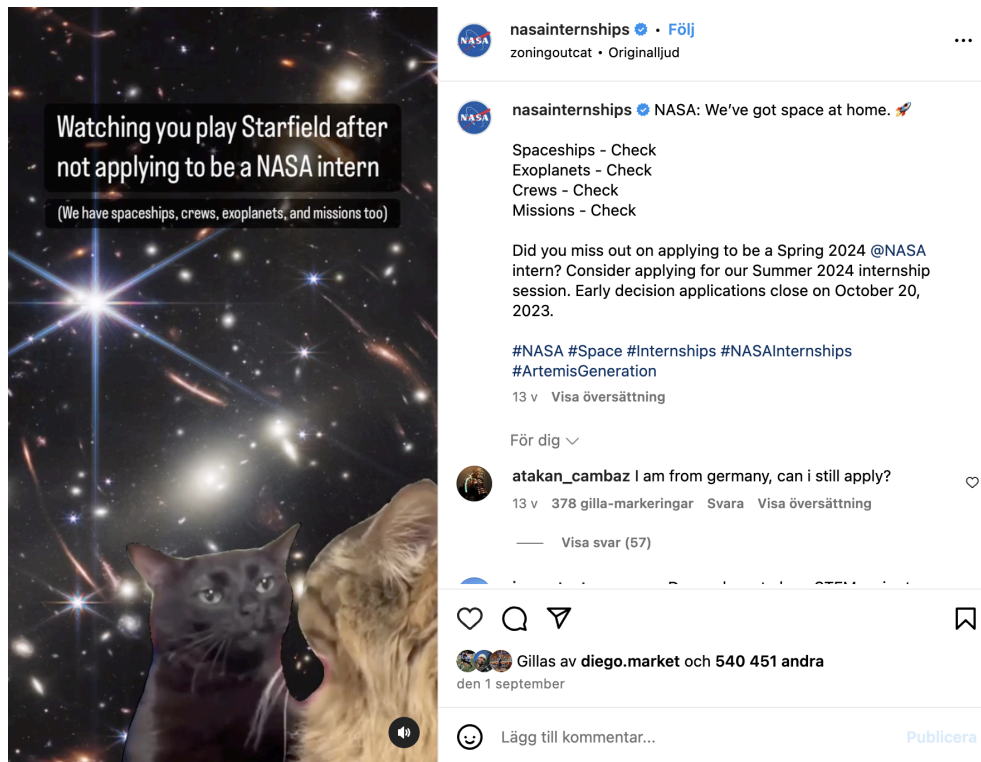
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7. Appendices

Appendix A

Viral NASA instagram post

Figure A1. NASA’s viral marketing post, posted 1 Sep. 2023 [Screenshot from 5 Dec. 2023].



Appendix B

Content analysis of professional services accounts on Instagram

Table B1. Overview of analyzed companies and their instagram username handles.

Company	Instagram Handle
KPMG Sweden	@kmpgsweden
EY Sweden	@eysecareers
BCG Sweden	@bcginsweden
SEB	@sebcareer
Mckinsey Sweden & Company	@mckinseysweden
AFRY Sverige	@afry_sverige
Sweco Sweden	@swecosweden

Appendix C

Manipulations created for, and used in both preparatory and main study

Figure C1. Congruent version of the job advertisement shown in preparatory- and main study.



Figure C2. Incongruent version of the job advertisement shown in preparatory and main study.



Appendix D

Testing whether multi-item questions differ from the middle point of the scale

Table D1. Overview of results from t tests performed to gauge difference from the middle point of the scale (Incongruent group).

Dogs (<i>n</i> = 41)					
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>t</i>
H1: Ad attitude	3.18	0.88	40	.202	1.30
H2: Intention to pursue	3.05	0.81	40	.703	0.38
H3: Employer attractiveness	2.99	1.03	40	.952	-0.06
H4: WOMI	3.10	0.88	40	.483	0.71

Table D2. Overview of results from t tests performed to gauge difference from the middle point of the scale (congruent group).

Humans (<i>n</i> = 41)					
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>t</i>
H1: Ad attitude	3.37	0.58	40	< .001	4.03
H2: Intention to pursue	3.31	0.60	40	.002	3.27
H3: Employer attractiveness	3.15	0.75	40	.219	1.25
H4: WOMI	2.87	0.79	40	.300	-1.05

Table D3. Summary of results of the two t tests.

	Dogs (<i>n</i> = 41)	Humans (<i>n</i> = 41)
	Difference from middle	Difference from middle
H1: Ad attitude	NO	YES
H2: Intention to pursue	NO	YES
H3: Employer attractiveness	NO	NO
H4: WOMI	NO	NO

Appendix E

Correlation matrices

Table E1. Correlations for dependent study variables on an aggregate level.

Aggregate						
Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1. Ad Attitude	3.27	0.75	-			
2. Intentions to Pursue	3.18	0.72	0.54***	-		
3. Employer Attractiveness	3.07	0.90	0.78***	0.76***	-	
4. WOMI	2.98	0.84	0.62***	0.62***	0.68***	-

Note: A p value that is <0.05 indicates that a variable is significant. The significant p values are marked with: *p <0.05, **p <0.01, ***p <0.001.

Table E2. Correlations for dependent study variables segregated for humans.

Humans						
Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1. Ad Attitude	3.37	0.58	-			
2. Intentions to Pursue	3.31	0.60	0.56**	-		
3. Employer Attractiveness	3.15	0.75	0.83***	0.81***	-	
4. WOMI	2.87	0.79	0.64***	0.67***	0.71***	-

Note: p value that is <0.05 indicates that a variable is significant. The significant p values are marked with: *p <0.05, **p <0.01, ***p <0.001.

Table E3. Correlations for dependent study variables segregated for dogs.

Dogs						
Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1. Ad Attitude	3.18	0.88	-			
2. Intentions to Pursue	3.05	0.81	0.48***	-		
3. Employer Attractiveness	2.99	1.03	0.66***	0.67***	-	
4. WOMI	3.10	0.88	0.67***	0.65***	0.69***	-

Note: p value that is <0.05 indicates that a variable is significant. The significant p values are marked with: *p <0.05, **p <0.01, ***p <0.001.

Appendix F

Complete questionnaire

Start of Block: Block 1 - Welcome Text

Q7 Hi!

You are going to be shown a social media job advertisement for the job-category **Professional Services** (think, consulting jobs, banking jobs, etc). You will be asked a few short questions in six segments regarding your perceptions of the shown ad compared to other ads you may have previously seen from this job category.

Completion of the survey will take an estimated **5-7 minutes**. Thank you for your participation!

End of Block: Block 1 - Welcome Text

Start of Block: Block 2 - GDPR

Q8 GDPR

THE STUDENT 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 connected to the subject. Participation is naturally **entirely voluntary**, and this text is intended to provide you with

necessary information that may concern your participation in the study. **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 will be held **strictly confidential** and will only be made available to supervisors, tutors and the course management team.

STORAGE OF DATA

All data will be stored and processed **safely** by the SSE and will be **permanently deleted when the projected is completed.**

PERSONAL DATA

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.

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.

Q15 Do you want to participate in the study?

Yes. I have read the information above and give my consent to participate in this study. (Write your initials and today's date in the box below) (1)

No thanks. I do not consent to participate in this study. (2)

End of Block: Block 2 - GDPR

Start of Block: : Block 4 Congruency - CONGRUENT VERSION

QA JOB ADVERTISEMENT



internationalconsultingsweden · Follow

internationalconsultingsweden Are you a student interested in trying out consulting?

We are now open for applications to our Summer Program that will be taking place in Stockholm during June 12 – 30. Over the course of this three-week program, you will gain first-hand insights into a career in consulting, get introduced to consulting tools through training, and sharpen your problem-solving abilities. After the program, we also offer a mentorship opportunity.

Apply through the link in our bio.
We welcome applicants of any discipline or academic background.

Q1.1a This ad is *different* compared to other ads from the same job category

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly agree (5)

Q1.2a Compared to other ads for this job category, the way in which the ad communicates its message is...

- Extremely unexpected (1)
- Unexpected (2)
- Neither expected nor unexpected (3)
- Expected (4)

Extremely expected (5)

Q1.3a This ad is *typical* compared to other ads from the same job category

Strongly disagree (5)

Disagree (4)

Neither agree nor disagree (3)

Agree (2)

Strongly agree (1)

Q1.4a Compared to other ads for this job category, the way in which the ad communicates its message is...

Extremely irrelevant (1)

Irrelevant (2)

Neither relevant nor irrelevant (3)

Relevant (4)

Extremely relevant (5)

Q1.5a This ad is *unique* compared to other ads from the same job category

Strongly disagree (1)

Disagree (2)

Neither agree nor disagree (3)

Agree (4)

Strongly agree (5)

End of Block: : Block 4 Congruency - CONGRUENT VERSION

Start of Block: : Block 4 Congruency - INCONGRUENT VERSION

QB JOB ADVERTISEMENT



internationalconsultingsweden · Follow

internationalconsultingsweden Are you a student interested in trying out consulting?

We are now open for applications to our Summer Program that will be taking place in Stockholm during June 12 – 30. Over the course of this three-week program, you will gain first-hand insights into a career in consulting, get introduced to consulting tools through training, and sharpen your problem-solving abilities. After the program, we also offer a mentorship opportunity.

Apply through the link in our bio.
We welcome applicants of any discipline or academic background.

Q1.1b This ad is *different* compared to other ads from the same job category

Strongly disagree (1)

Disagree (2)

Neither agree nor disagree (3)

Agree (4)

Strongly agree (5)

Q1.2b Compared to other ads for this job category, the way in which the ad communicates its message is...

- Extremely unexpected (1)
- Unexpected (2)
- Neither expected nor unexpected (3)
- Expected (4)
- Extremely expected (5)

Q1.3b This ad is *typical* compared to other ads from the same job category

- Strongly disagree (5)
- Disagree (4)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Agree (2)
- Strongly agree (1)

Q1.4b Compared to other ads for this job category, the way in which the ad communicates its message is...

- Extremely irrelevant (1)
- Irrelevant (2)
- Neither relevant nor irrelevant (3)
- Relevant (4)
- Extremely relevant (5)

Q1.5b This ad is *unique* compared to other ads from the same job category

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly agree (5)

End of Block: : Block 4 Congruency - INCONGRUENT VERSION

Start of Block: : Block 5 Ad Attitude

Q2.1 Segment 2

Please answer the following questions with regards to your overall opinion of the advertisement. Feel free to go back and re-view the advertisement at any point in the survey.

Q2.2 I found the advertisement...

- Very good (5)
- Good (4)
- Neither good nor bad (3)
- Bad (2)
- Very Bad (1)

Q2.3 I found the advertisement...

- Very favourable (5)
- Favourable (4)
- Neither favourable nor unfavourable (3)

Unfavourable (2)

Very unfavourable (1)

Q2.4 I found the advertisement

Very pleasant (5)

Pleasant (4)

Neither pleseant nor unpleasant (3)

Unpleasant (2)

Very unpleasant (1)

End of Block: Block 5 Ad Attitude

Start of Block: Block 6 Employer Attractiveness

Q3 Segment 3

Please state to what extent the following statements match your perception of the company in the advertisement you just viewed.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither disagree nor agree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
For me, this company would be a good place to work (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would not be interested in this company	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

except as a last resort (2)					
A job at this company is very appealing to me (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am interested in learning more about this company (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This company is attractive to me as a place for employment (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: Block 6 Employer Attractiveness

Start of Block: Block 7 Intentions to Pursue the Job

Q4 Segment 4

You are more than half way through! Please state to what extent the following statements match your perception of the company in the advertisement you just viewed.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither disagree nor agree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
I would accept a job offer from this company (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

I would make this company one of my first choices as an employer (2)

If this company invited me for a job interview, I would go (3)

I would exert a great deal of effort to work for this company (4)

I would recommend this company to a friend looking for a job (5)

It is important to pay attention when answering survey questions, right!? Please answer "Strongly agree" to this statement (6)

End of Block: Block 7 Intentions to Pursue the Job

Start of Block: Block 8 WOM

Q5 Segment 5

Almost done! Please state to what extent the following statements match your perception of the company in the advertisement you just viewed.

	Very unlikely (1)	Unlikely (2)	Neither unlikely nor likely (3)	Likely (4)	Very likely (5)
How likely is it for you to tell others good things about this brand? (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How likely is it for you to recommend this brand to someone you know? (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How likely is it for you to share information about this brand with someone you know? (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: Block 8 WOM

Start of Block: Block 9

QC Now... let's see if you're awake!

What was featured in the job advertisement you just saw?

Dogs (1)

Turtles (3)

Humans (2)

Birds (4)

End of Block: Block 9

Start of Block: Block 10 - Demographic

Q6 Segment 6

DEMOGRAPHICS

This is the last segment.. & the easy stuff!

Q6.1 How old are you? (Insert age in *numbers*)

Q6.2 What is your preferred gender?

Male (1)

Female (2)

Prefer not say (4)

Q6.3 What university are you studying at?

Stockholm School of Economics (SSE) (1)

Stockholm University (SU) (2)

Kungliga Tekniska Högskolan (KTH) (3)

Other. Please specify: (4) _____

Q6.4 At what level do you study?

Bachelor's, or equivalent (1)

Master's (2)

Other. Please specify: (3) _____

Q6.5 What year do you expect to graduate?

▼ 2024 (2024) ... Other (1)

Q6.6 What do you study? Choose the broad-area that best matches your studies.

▼ Architecture (23) ... Social & behavioral sciences (32)

Q6.7 Are you currently working in addition to your studies?

Yes, full-time (1)

Yes, part-time (2)

No (3)

Prefer not to answer (4)

Q6.8 Are you currently searching for a job?

Yes (1)

No (2)

Prefer not to answer (3)

Q6.9 Have you previously seen job advertisements for professional services jobs? (Think consultancy, banking services, etc.)

Yes (1)

No (2)

Prefer not to answer (3)

Q6.10 Lastly, what did you think of the survey? Please answer the questions below.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
The questions were clearly formulated (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The answer options were clearly formulated (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The questions tried to influence my answer in any way (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: Block 10 - Demographic

Appendix G

Disclosure of AI-tools used

The AI tool *Adobe Firefly* was utilized to produce the incongruent media stimuli. With respect to time- and resource constraints, the ability to utilize generative AI to create the stimuli made the study possible in its entirety. The authors recognize that the effort involved in manually creating the stimuli to mirror that of congruent media found through content analysis would have been too cumbersome. It would have involved finding dogs, acquiring business clothes for the dogs, and contracting a photographer to take professional pictures. Moreover, the authors recognize that it might be hard to coordinate the kind of picture needed for the study with living animals.

Potential risks in utilizing AI for generating a picture include quality issues. Many generated images had issues that made them look unrealistic. One way to mitigate this is to generate many pictures and not settle as to ensure the output is as good as possible. Another way to mitigate the risk that an image is not fit for purpose is to ask external parties what they think or to conduct a pre-study as this thesis did. The authors find that the main insight in utilizing AI tools is its power and viability. As mentioned, it made this study possible within the confines and scope of the bachelor thesis and was thus a vital part of contributing to the findings of this paper. Of course, it could be argued that the aforementioned resources could have been invested in creating the image manually, however, as resources are finite, it would have negatively affected the overall quality of the thesis, which already operated under strict time constraints. In conclusion, the time savings offered by generative AI helped improve the overall quality of the paper.