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# An exploratory analysis of employer branding in healthcare

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to explore how large, public companies in the health industry communicatively engage in employer branding on career homepages.

**Design/methodology/approach** – An exploratory content analysis of the career homepages ( $N = 42$ ; 8,500) was conducted to analyze the communication of successful organizations in four realms of the public health-care industry to include Biotech ( $n = 10$ ), Managed Health Care ( $n = 8$ ), Medical and Equipment Supplies ( $n = 12$ ) and Pharmaceuticals ( $n = 12$ ).

**Findings** – The analysis revealed the following ten major themes of content: Worldview, Stakeholders, Environment, Excellence, Dedication, Aid, Unity, Advancement, Distinctiveness and Industry/Organization. Additionally, the results revealed that health-care employer branding often communicated about Stakeholders, Industry/Organization and Advancement.

**Research limitations/implications** – The results of this study aid researchers in understanding the foundational content of employee branding efforts in the health industry.

**Practical implications** – The results assist practitioners in understanding how different health-care industries and organizations engage in employer branding on career homepages.

**Originality/value** – The results of this study function to both confirm previous findings related to employer branding and extend research on employer branding into the career homepages of organizations in the health-care industry.

**Keywords** Healthcare, Communication, Employer branding, Career homepage, Employer image

**Paper type** Research paper

## An exploratory analysis of employer branding in health care

Employer branding is “a firm’s efforts to promote, both within and outside the firm, a clear view of what makes it different and desirable as an employer” (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004, p. 501). Employer branding occurs when, “the ‘product’ they are branding is the employment experience that the firm offers, and the ‘customers’ of this brand and product are prospective and current staff” (Moroko and Uncles, 2009, p. 183). Employer branding, or the creation of an employment brand, requires organizational communication that occurs both internally and externally to stakeholders about the characteristics of employment at an organization (Knox and Freeman, 2006). Employer branding has been identified for its influence on organizational behavior (Edwards, 2009), organizational culture (Lievens, 2007), perceived differentiation (Berthon *et al.*, 2005), attracting applicants (Biswas and Suar, 2014), and many other veins of research concerned with both human resources and brand management (Bratton and Gold, 2012).

Despite major advancements in knowledge concerning employer branding in the last twenty years, its research in health care is still relatively limited (Gapp and Merrilees, 2006; Heilmann, 2010; Kay, 2007; Perepelkin and Di Zhang, 2011; Van Hoyer, 2008). Indeed, “It has been 20 years since the employer brand concept was introduced, and we still have much to



learn about the purpose and practices of employer branding” (Backhaus, 2016, p. 198). Further, those in the health-care industry may face challenges in employer branding because the attractiveness of the brand, its differentiation and its relevance for potential employees may depend on unique variables in this sector (Backhaus, 2016; Moroko and Uncles, 2008). For example, the need for differentiation, as established as a primary goal of many employer brands, may be amplified in this field as:

Integrated healthcare networks (IHNs) – or integrated healthcare delivery systems – have been focusing heavily on their level of various partnership integration (i.e. service differentiation strategy) in order to offer a full continuum of care (Lin and Wan, 2001, p. 18).

Therefore, this study seeks to compare the content of health-care organizations’ career homepages with previous findings regarding employer branding and extend research on employer branding into the career homepages of health-care firms.

This study explores the following two research questions:

*RQ1:* What categories of information are presented by various health-care firms within recruitment/career homepages?

*RQ2:* How do various sub-sets of the health-care industry vary in the categories of information presented in recruitment/career homepages?

First, the answers to these research questions will expand research on employer branding to explore the content of career homepages in health care. Second, the results of an investigation into these research questions provide information about the way employers within unique subsets of the health-care industry potentially differentiate and describe employment at their firms. This research may provide valuable information to practitioners seeking to understand employer branding in health care, as well as researchers seeking to better understand the communicative processes of employer branding in specialized industries.

## Literature review

A major theoretical underpinning of current research on employer branding is the concept of differentiation (Martin *et al.*, 2011). Employer branding, therefore, “is the process of building an identifiable and unique employer identity that differentiates the company from its competitors” (Biswas and Suar, 2014, p. 58). The majority of research conducted on employer branding has revealed for various industries “a different hierarchy of preferred traits, likely because each study examines a slightly different sample” (Backhaus, 2016, p. 195). The purpose of this hierarchy-based research is to begin to explain the content of employer branding communications and to contribute new evidence that explains variation in how employer brands may be perceived (Backhaus, 2016).

Research on employer branding is currently conducted from several theoretical perspectives (Botha *et al.*, 2011). For example, research on the content of employer branding may be conducted with a focus on:

- individualized market needs (Minchington, 2010; Moroko and Uncles, 2009; Sartain and Schumann, 2008); or
- employer value proposition (Foster *et al.*, 2010; Kochanski, 2004; Mandhanya and Shah, 2010).

Both of these theoretical perspectives allow for an investigation into the content of employer branding materials by assessing various categories of information presented and how those categories may fit together to create a cohesive employer brand.

### *Categories of content*

Research in the field of employer branding has revealed several categories of information typically presented as elements of employer brands. For example, [Berthon et al. \(2005\)](#) specify five factors related to employer branding including:

- (1) interest value;
- (2) social value;
- (3) economic value;
- (4) development value; and
- (5) application value.

Alternatively, [Maxwell and Knox \(2009\)](#) specify four different types of information that will likely be utilized in the creation of the employment brand to include:

- (1) Employment;
- (2) organizational success;
- (3) construed external image; and
- (4) product/service characteristics.

[Table I](#) presents an overview of current literature that describes the type of information typically presented in the employer branding process as found in previous research.

### *Media*

In addition to studies on the types of information communicated by employers, research on employer branding has also introduced information about the media used. Communication concerning employer branding may happen internally and/or externally depending on organizational need ([Wilden et al., 2010](#)). Although research on external communication in employer branding has often focused on recruitment advertisements and job postings ([Martin, 2008](#)), more recent research has explored organizational websites ([Lievens and Slaughter, 2016](#)) and social media ([Backhaus, 2016](#); [Martin et al., 2011](#); [Sivertzen et al., 2013](#)). For example, [Allen et al. \(2007\)](#) found that organizational websites may be prime for providing information about employer brands as attitudes toward the organization are influenced by the amount of job information presented. For this study, career homepages, or the organizational Web page which provides an overview of employment at the organization, will be investigated. As career homepages exist as part of the organizational website and introduce potential employees to employment at the organization, this particular media is ripe for investigation.

### *Previous industry-specific analyses*

By exploring the content of media concerning employer branding in a specific industry, researchers have been able to ascertain descriptive information about how companies engage in employer branding. Specifically, research has been conducted on employer branding in the banking industry ([Lievens and Highhouse, 2003](#); [Sokro, 2012](#)) and power

Author(s)	Dimensions
(Ambler and Barrow, 1996, (Donath, 2001), (Minchington, 2006), (Moroko and Uncles, 2009), (Sartain and Schumann, 2008)	Functional benefits, economic benefits, psychological benefits
(Berthon <i>et al.</i> , 2005)	Interest value, social value, economic value, development value, application value
(Martin, 2008)	Instrumental, symbolic, cultural
(Michaels <i>et al.</i> , 2001), (Munsamy and Venter, 2009)	Work environment, work content, benefits, indirect financial reward and direct financial reward
Elving <i>et al.</i> (2013)	Organizational climate, development, innovation, compensation
Maxwell and Knox (2009)	Employment, organizational success, construed external image, product/service characteristics

**Table I.**  
Dimensions of  
employer/  
employment  
branding as  
introduced in  
previous research

industry (Heilmann *et al.*, 2013) which identified how these organizations may engage in brand differentiation and potentially improve employer image. Industry-specific analyses are necessary.

As organizations in a particular industry tend to possess attributes that are distinctive to that industry, and since the employer brand attributes that employees consider most attractive are dependent on the perceived attributes of their organisation [...] [Therefore,] it may be useful to extend the study [of employer branding] to include organizations from a broader range of industries (Maxwell and Knox, 2009, p. 905).

Despite this call for more investigation on industry-specific employer branding, little research has been conducted on employer branding in health care. Heilmann (2010) conducted a study which identified career development as an important aspect of employer branding in health care. Van Hoye (2008) found that nurses perceived task diversity, helping people, prestige and competency to influence employer image in health care.

Additionally, Perepelkin and Di Zhang (2011) found that “significant brand personality differences exist among various types of pharmacies” (p. 175). Finally, trust, quality, and sincerity were found as important marketing characteristics in health-care branding (Kay, 2007; Perepelkin and Di Zhang, 2014). However, information about how the health-care industry may engage in employer branding on organizational websites and how this branding may fit into broader theoretical perspectives on employer branding is still relatively unknown.

## Method

To investigate the research questions, an exploratory content analysis was conducted to produce conclusions about online, written communication. As [Krippendorff \(2012\)](#) posited, content analysis is “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use” (p. 24). The six steps of content analysis include:

- (1) defining units;
- (2) sampling;
- (3) coding using a category system;
- (4) reducing to generalizations;
- (5) providing context; and
- (6) producing concluding interpretations ([Krippendorff, 2012](#)).

**Table II** presents each of these conceptual components in reference to their basic step and application. Each of these steps was employed within this study and is reviewed within the following sections.

### *Defining units*

For this study, a unit was defined as an individual word utilized within the career homepages. As the questions for this study concern a description of information presented on the Web pages, using words as units allowed for an investigation into the language engaged to convey concepts. Grouping words into categories of similar meaning allowed for the answering of research questions about the types of information presented.

The word as a unit is identical with what [Lasswell \*et al.\* \(1952\)](#) calls a symbol [ . . . ] In this type of research, one might study the relative occurrence of key symbols or value-laden terms [ . . . ] until the content has been systematically examined relevant to the hypotheses of the study ([Kassarjian, 1977](#), p. 11-12).

Therefore, by examining the communication at this level of language and then comparing and contrasting these selections, valid generalizations could then be made about organizational communication choices.

	Content analysis step	Basic conceptual foundation	Application
1	Define Units	Define artifacts worthy of analysis	Define the type of unit Define the size of the unit
2	Gather Sample	Produce question(s) answered through examination of the artifact	Identify units Identify population
3	Code	Create an approach allowing the analyst to answer the question(s)	Create codebook Analyze each unit
4	Reduce to Generalizations	Ensure proper operationalization	Review coding results Review categories of analysis
5	Provide Context	Create inferences about the artifact	
6	Produce Conclusions	Summarize evidences to original question(s)	

**Table II.**  
Content analysis  
methodology

**Source:** Compiled information from [Krippendorff, 2012](#)

*Sample*

The career homepages identified for analysis within this study were compiled from [Forbes' \(2016\)](#) list of the *World's Biggest Public Companies* as delineated by industry subset including:

- (1) Biotech ( $n = 10$ );
- (2) Managed Health Care ( $n = 8$ );
- (3) Medical and Equipment Supplies ( $n = 12$ ); and
- (4) Pharmaceuticals ( $n = 12$ ).

The career homepages of large, public companies were selected for analysis as these companies represent a successful, labor-intensive sector with a substantial online presence. The full text of the career homepages for the analyzed firms ( $N = 42$ ) was obtained and recorded from 12/15/2016 to 1/05/2017. In sum, this was approximately 17 pages of single-spaced text ( $N = 8,500$  words). Because the research questions analyzed pertain to content of the text of the webpages, any images, links or other extraneous webpage content was omitted from the analysis. This resulted in data gathered from career homepage materials from each of the firms which ranged in length from 77 words (approximately four sentences) to 518 words (approximately one page of single-spaced text). As the information on the websites is publically available and the reporting of the information within this study is aggregated as not identify any one company, there were no deterring ethical considerations in this analysis.

Although each message presented on the career homepages varied in length, the homepages were analyzed for the frequency of unique words ( $n = 1,493$ ). From the list of unique words, only words which occurred at least 9 times (or over 0.20 per cent per cent of all analyzed words) were used as part of the aggregate analysis which resulted in a list of commonly occurring words ( $n = 114$ ). From this list, pronouns and prepositions, as they were inconsequential to answering the research questions, were eliminated and a list of unique words ( $n = 60$ ) remained to be coded. [Table III](#) provides the list of these unique words.

*Coding and reducing to generalizations*

Content analysis for this study was operationalized by first gathering all of the text from the career homepages into a single document and uploading the text into *Textalyser.net*, a free, Web-based textual analysis software. The software provided an output detailing the total number of words, unique words, unique phrases and their frequencies. The word frequency outputs were then analyzed to make inferences about similar groups of words. This was conducted by grouping/clustering, as defined by [Deese \(1969\)](#), or placing content in groups based on similar attributes.

First, various forms of the same word (different, differentiate, differences, etc.) were grouped to reduce redundancies. Second, various words were grouped based on meaning (different, unique, special, etc.). Words with similar meanings were grouped together until each unique word ( $n = 60$ ) was categorized under a unique code ( $n = 10$ ). This allowed the researchers to identify various codes from the data which was the primary goal of content analysis. After the codebook was designed, the frequency analysis was repeated to analyze frequencies as they appear on career homepages based on industry subset.

*Providing context and producing conclusions*

The fifth step of the content analysis required the researchers to make inferences about the artifacts (i.e. the career homepages) ([Krippendorff, 2012](#)). Once the codes and their frequency were

		Employer branding
<i>Worldview</i>		
World/world's	46	
Global	12	
Community/communities	25	
Part	16	
<i>Total</i>	99	
<i>Stakeholders</i>		
Customers	20	
Employment/employees	60	
Individuals	12	
Life/lives	54	
Members	22	
Patients	41	
People	62	
Career(s)	67	
Job(s)	24	
Benefits	13	
<i>Total</i>	375	
<i>Environment</i>		
Culture	18	
Environment	17	
<i>Total</i>	35	
Excellence		
Best/better	26	
Leading	30	
Quality	19	
Talented	14	
Success	15	
Meaningful	10	
<i>Total</i>	114	
<i>Dedication</i>		
Passion	19	
Commitment	20	
Focus	18	
<i>Total</i>	57	
<i>Aid</i>		
Care	30	
Help/helping	28	
Offer	18	
Provide	29	
<i>Unity</i>		
United	18	
Together	16	
Team	18	
Mission	16	
<i>Total</i>	68	
<i>Advancement</i>		
Learn	10	
Technology	26	
Improve/improving	27	
	(continued)	

**Table III.**  
Unique words and  
codes generated from  
the content analysis



IJPHM	Innovation/innovative	34
	Opportunities/opportunity	39
	Research	11
	Impact	12
	Difference	25
	Plans	12
	Solutions	15
	<i>Total</i>	<i>211</i>
	<i>Distinctiveness</i>	
	Rare	9
	Unique	14
	New	17
	<i>Total</i>	<i>40</i>
	<i>The Industry/Organization</i>	
	Business	18
	Company/companies	43
	Industry	10
	Health/ health care	88
	Pharmaceutical(s)	33
	Services	25
	Products	25
	Wellcare	12
	Medical/medicine	31
	Diseases	28
	Information	19
	Organization	13
	<i>Total</i>	<i>345</i>
<b>Table III.</b>	<i>Collective total</i>	<i>1,493</i>

determined, generalizations and inferences could be produced about the sample. The generalizations produced by the content analysis included an evaluation of which codes occurred within the aggregated sample and the frequency of the codes as they differed by industry.

The frequency analysis allowed the researchers to make conclusions about the sample regarding the regularity of specific content in the employer branding of the career homepages. Additionally, the development of the codes and the subsequent frequency analysis allowed the researchers to answer the original research questions, which satisfies the sixth step of the content analysis (Krippendorff, 2012). These conclusions are presented within the *Results* of this study.

### *Validity*

There are several considerations of validity within content analysis including face, construct, hypothesis, predictive, and semantic validity (Weber, 1990). Although each type of validity has a relationship to content analysis, face and semantic validity are of the most concern within content analysis research. Face validity concerns the correspondence between the definition of concepts and the category in which the concept or element is placed (Krippendorff, 2012). Semantic validity is the degree to which the words, phrases, or units correspond to one another (Weber, 1990).

To address two major issues regarding validity (i.e. face validity and semantic validity), this study used two research coders as suggested by Krippendorff (2012) to avoid biases. For the frequency analysis, computerized analytics produced the statistics and, thus, no

reliability calculations were necessary. However, the construct into which the words were grouped based on meaning needed verification. Therefore, the first researcher developed codes ( $n = 10$ ) based on meanings from the unique words derived from the career homepages ( $n = 60$ ). From this construct, including an extraneous category as to not force the construct onto the text, the second researcher independently assigned the words into these codes. A comparison of how the researcher and coder assigned the unique words ( $n = 60$ ) to each category ( $n = 10$ ) was conducted which resulted in an inter-rater reliability statistics of approximately 92 per cent.

All disagreements were discussed and resolved by the researchers until 100 per cent agreement was achieved. This was accomplished by:

- identifying a word that was assigned to codes differently by the researchers;
- contextualizing the word by analyzing how it was utilized in the context of the career homepage;
- reviewing how the codes were defined for this study (as presented in Table 4); and
- discussing the word's denotative and connotative meaning in context until agreement was achieved as to which code the word best satisfied, if any.

To detail the operationalization of this process, the code of "Stakeholders" was identified as including the following words:

- customers;
- employment/employers;
- individuals;
- life/lives;
- members;
- patients;
- people;
- career(s);
- job(s); and
- benefits.

To develop this code, several groups of words were established (e.g. employer/employment, life/lives, etc.). After grouping these words based on similar meaning, words and word

	Category	Definition
1	Advancement	Innovations, opportunities or technological change
2	Aid	Offering help while delivering support and care
3	Dedication	A combination of passion, commitment and focus
4	Distinctiveness	Combining rare, new, and unique for new advancement
5	Environment	The culture and environment of the organization
6	Excellence	Leading in quality and success with the best talent
7	Industry/Organization	The overarching industry of health care as well as its services and products
8	Stakeholders	Individuals directly affected by the organization
9	Unity	A team working together for one direct mission and goal
11	Worldview	An outlook from a community to world perspective

**Table IV.**  
Categories of  
information  
presented on career  
homepages

groups were assigned to the “Stakeholder” code when their denotative meaning was encapsulated by the meaning of the code, “individuals directly affected by the organization.” However, while the words of life/lives, career, job and benefits do not have a denotative meaning that indicates a clear stakeholder, these words were often contextualized in a way that represented a stakeholder.

For example, the use of the word career was contextualized in one instance as, “Your manager will encourage you to take charge of your own career.” Career, once the researchers evaluated how the word was contextualized, indicated the employee stakeholder. Once words with code disagreement were contextualized, each word could then be resolved to be assigned to a single code.

The final words and categories are presented in [Table III](#).

The design of research questions, the quality of methods, a detailed codebook, and the ethical conduct of analysts will also address concerns about validity ([Krippendorff, 2012](#)). The research questions in this study were designed to ensure that the methodology would address their primary consideration which was the type information presented within homepages. A codebook was designed in which the ten code/categories of information, as developed through meaning-connection grouping within the content analysis, were defined as presented in [Table IV](#). The researchers worked independently in their coding processes and the anonymity of the companies was maintained to ensure ethical conduct and preserve the validity of the results.

## Results

The research questions for this study asked:

*RQ1:* What categories of information are presented by various health-care firms within recruitment/career homepages?

*RQ2:* How do various sub-sets of the health-care industry vary in the categories of information presented in recruitment/career homepages?

The results of the content analysis revealed several key findings about the employer branding within content of career homepages of top health-care firms to answer these questions.

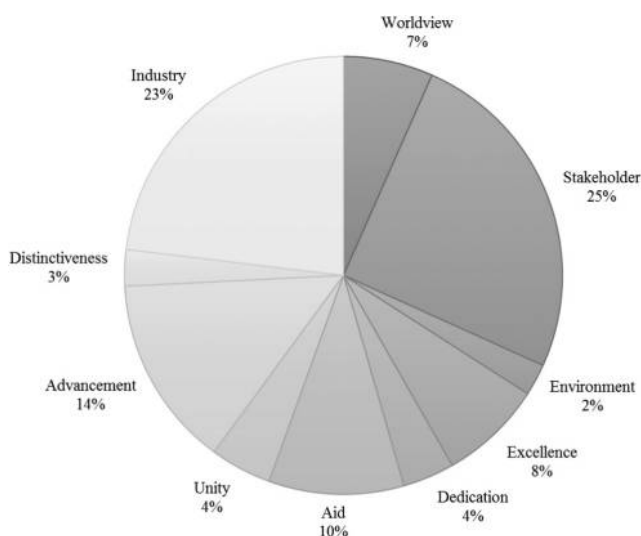
[Figure 1](#) provides an aggregated overview of the results from all sub-sets of the health-care industry.

Overall, the results of the content analysis revealed that the categories of Stakeholders ( $n = 375$ , 25 per cent), Industry/Organization ( $n = 345$ , 23 per cent), and Advancement ( $n = 211$ , 14 per cent) were the most frequently occurring categories from the analysis when compared to all category occurrences. Additionally, Aid ( $n = 149$ , 10 per cent) was also relatively frequently occurring. While Excellence ( $n = 114$ , 8 per cent), Worldview ( $n = 99$ , 7 per cent), Unity ( $n = 68$ , 5 per cent), Dedication ( $n = 57$ , 4 per cent), Distinctiveness ( $n = 40$ , 3 per cent) and Environment ( $n = 35$ , 2 per cent) occurred within the career homepages, these categories were only represented in 29 per cent of the frequency counts combined.

From the aggregated analysis, the frequencies were delineated by industry to include Biotech, Managed health care, Medical and Equipment Supplies and Pharmaceuticals.

Within each industry, the categories of Stakeholders, Advancement and Industry/Organization remained as frequently occurring codes.

The codes and their ranks by frequency within each industry are presented in [Table V](#).



**Figure 1.**  
Aggregated overview  
of the results from all  
sub-sets of the health-  
care industry

The following sections present an analysis of the codes by industry. The results from each industry subset are presented in [Table VI](#).

#### *BioTech industry*

[Forbes'](#) (2016) list of the *World's Biggest Public Companies* was delineated by industry subset to include Biotech ( $n = 10$ ). The results of the frequency analysis revealed that the codes of Stakeholders ( $n = 91$ , 27 per cent), Industry/Organization ( $n = 68$ , 20 per cent), and Advancement ( $n = 52$ , 16 per cent) were the most frequently occurring codes which aligns with the aggregated analysis for all health-care industries. The least frequently occurring codes were Environment ( $n = 5$ , 2 per cent), Dedication ( $n = 16$ , 5 per cent), Unity ( $n = 17$ , 5 per cent) and Distinctiveness ( $n = 18$ , 5 per cent), which is similar to the aggregated analysis for all health-care industries. The results from the Biotech industry sub-set are summarized in [Table VI](#).

Rank	Aggregated	Biotech	Managed health care	Medical supplies	Pharmacy
1	Stakeholders	Stakeholders	Industry	Stakeholders	Stakeholders
2	Industry	Industry	Stakeholders	Advancement	Industry
3	Advancement	Advancement	Aid	Industry	Aid
4	Aid	Excellence	Advancement	Excellence	Advancement
5	Excellence	Aid	Excellence	Worldview	Excellence
6	Worldview	Worldview	Worldview	Aid	Worldview
7	Unity	Distinctiveness	Unity	Dedication	Unity
8	Dedication	Unity	Environment	Unity	Dedication
9	Distinctiveness	Dedication	Dedication	Environment	Distinctiveness
10	Environment	Environment	Distinctiveness	Distinctiveness	Environment

**Table V.**  
Code rank by  
industry

**Table VI.**  
Results divided by  
industry Sub-set

Theme	Biotech		Managed care		Supplies		Pharmaceuticals		Overall	
	<i>n</i>	(%)	<i>n</i>	(%)	<i>n</i>	(%)	<i>n</i>	(%)	<i>n</i>	(%)
Worldview	18	5%	16	4%	32	8%	33	8%	99	7%
Stakeholders	91	27%	84	24%	98	25%	102	25%	375	25%
Environment	5	2%	8	2%	14	4%	8	2%	35	2%
Excellence	26	8%	17	5%	35	9%	36	9%	114	8%
Dedication	16	5%	6	2%	20	5%	15	4%	57	4%
Aid	22	7%	49	14%	27	7%	51	12%	149	10%
Unity	17	5%	13	4%	20	5%	18	4%	68	5%
Advancement	52	16%	45	13%	69	18%	45	11%	211	14%
Distinctiveness	18	5%	6	2%	7	2%	9	2%	40	3%
Industry	68	20%	112	31%	67	17%	98	24%	345	23%
Totals	333	100%	356	100%	389	100%	415	100%	1493	100%

*Managed health care*

The results of the frequency analysis revealed that the codes of Industry/Organization (*n* = 112, 31 per cent), Stakeholders (*n* = 84, 24 per cent) and Aid (*n* = 49, 14 per cent) were the most frequently occurring within the career homepages of Managed health care (*n* = 8) organizations. This differs from the aggregated analysis for all health-care industries in that Aid (*n* = 49, 14 per cent) occurred more frequently than Advancement (*n* = 45, 13 per cent). The least frequently occurring codes were Distinctiveness (*n* = 6, 2 per cent), Dedication (*n* = 6, 2 per cent), Environment (*n* = 8, 2 per cent) and Unity (*n* = 13, 4 per cent) which is similar to the aggregated analysis all health-care industries. The results from the Managed health-care industry sub-set are summarized in [Table VI](#).

*Medical and equipment supplies*

The results of the frequency analysis revealed that the codes of Stakeholders (*n* = 98, 25 per cent), Advancement (*n* = 69, 18 per cent) and Industry/Organization (*n* = 67, 17 per cent) were the most frequently occurring within the career homepages of Medical and Equipment Supplies (*n* = 12) organizations, as was the case in the aggregated analysis of all health-care industries. The least frequently occurring codes were Distinctiveness (*n* = 7, 2 per cent), Environment (*n* = 14, 4 per cent), Unity (*n* = 20, 5 per cent) and Dedication (*n* = 20, 5 per cent) which is similar to the aggregated results. The results from the Medical and Equipment Supplies industry sub-set are summarized in [Table VI](#).

*Pharmaceuticals*

The results of the frequency analysis revealed that Stakeholders (*n* = 102, 25 per cent), Industry/Organization (*n* = 98, 24 per cent) and Aid (*n* = 51, 12 per cent) were the most frequently occurring codes in the career homepages of Pharmaceutical (*n* = 12) organizations which differs from the aggregated analysis in that Aid (*n* = 51, 12 per cent) occurred more often than Advancement (*n* = 45, 11 per cent). The least frequently occurring codes were Environment (*n* = 8, 2 per cent), Distinctiveness (*n* = 9, 2 per cent), Dedication (*n* = 15, 4 per cent) and Unity (*n* = 18, 4 per cent) which mirrors the aggregated results. The results from the Pharmaceutical industry sub-set are summarized in [Table VI](#).

## Discussion

The purpose of this research is to explore how large, public companies in the health industry communicatively engage in employer branding on career homepages. A content analysis of the career homepages ( $N = 42$ ) was conducted to analyze the communication of successful organizations in four realms of the public health-care industry to include Biotech ( $n = 10$ ), Managed health care ( $n = 8$ ), Medical and Equipment Supplies ( $n = 12$ ) and Pharmaceuticals ( $n = 12$ ).

The analysis revealed 10 major themes of content to include:

- (1) Worldview;
- (2) Stakeholders;
- (3) Environment;
- (4) Excellence;
- (5) Dedication;
- (6) Aid;
- (7) Unity;
- (8) Advancement;
- (9) Distinctiveness; and
- (10) Industry/Organization.

Additionally, the results revealed that health-care employers often communicated about Stakeholders and the Industry/Organization and Advancement in all four realms of industry.

The results of this study function to both confirm previous findings related to employer branding as well as extend research on employer branding into career homepages.

### *Comparison of employer branding categories*

Previous studies on employer branding indicate several themes/dimensions of information that employers may communicate during the branding process. [Table I](#) provides an overview of many dimensions of employer branding confirmed by previous study. The categories identified within this study best align with several of the employer attractiveness dimensions defined by [Elving et al. \(2013\)](#). [Table VII](#) provides an overview of how the content analysis results of this study may reinforce these previous findings as important elements of the employer branding message in the health-care industry.

Using the employer attractiveness dimensions defined by [Elving et al. \(2013\)](#) to frame the results of this study suggests that communication about the organizational climate was the focus of the analyzed career homepages. Organizational climate is described by [Elving et al. \(2013\)](#) as employers' attempts to make employees or future employees feel good about themselves as a result of working for an organization through communication about acceptance, belonging and overall humanitarianism. Frequently communicating about the organizational climate is likely to increase positive perceptions of person-organization fit ([Elving et al., 2013](#)). Thus, the studied career homepages engaged in communication expected to have an overall positive influence on organizational attractiveness.

### *Contrast to previous studies*

Current research on employer branding indicates that differentiation is a primary consideration in employer branding ([Backhaus, 2016](#); Biswas and Suar, 2014;

**Table VII.**  
Links from the  
current study results  
to [Elving \*et al.\* \(2013\)](#)

Dimension	Definition	Associated health-care branding theme
Organizational climate	Feeling good about yourself as a result of working for an organization; supportive encouraging colleagues, humanitarian, acceptance, belonging	Environment Industry/Organization Stakeholders Unity Worldview Dedication Aid
Development	Apply what is learned at the organization and gain career-enhancing experience	
Innovation	High-quality, innovative products/services; creativity encouraged; customer-oriented	Advancement distinctiveness excellence
Compensation	Salary, compensation, in-direct financial benefits	N/A

[Martin \*et al.\*, 2011](#)). [Lievens and Slaughter \(2016\)](#) call for more research to answer the question, “Which employer image attributes serve as points of differentiation among employers in different industries and applicant groups?” (p. 432). However, within the context of the current study, little differentiation existed between each analyzed industry subset as the top three to four categories of communicative content were almost identical. A lack of substantive differentiation between industry sub-sets in the analyzed content of the career homepages may “reflect the embryonic nature of employer branding strategy development and the fact that most employer brands are not meaningfully differentiated in practice” ([Moroko and Uncles, 2008](#), p.165). Overall, this study did not identify any large noteworthy points of difference between health-care industry subsets in that all industries only varied slightly in the frequency with which content themes were represented.

Nonetheless, [Lievens and Slaughter \(2016\)](#) also call for more research in employer image and branding that answers the question, “What is the consistency among organizational images (financial, service/product, employer, etc.)?” (p. 432). The results of this study begin identify consistency in employer branding between health-care industries. Specifically, this study revealed that Stakeholders, Industry/Organization and Advancement were continuously highly represented in employer brand communication within the career homepages of the analyzed health-care organizations regardless of industry.

This study also revealed that the theme of Environment was consistently represented but with far less frequently communicated within every analyzed subset of the health-care industry. This demonstrates a level of consistency in the employer branding communication of the health-care industry that provides a point of interest for future potential research.

It is also important to note that none of the major themes identified within this study relate to financial compensation or the direct/indirect economic benefit of the potential employee. Previous research indicates compensation as a potentially important element to employer branding ([Berthon \*et al.\*, 2005](#); [Leekha Chhabra and Sharma, 2014](#)). The absence of a theme related to compensation may be due a number of factors including that the sample related to large, well-known companies or that the compensation was addressed elsewhere within the organizational website but not within the career homepage.

### *Implications*

The results of this study aid researchers in exploring the foundations of content in employee branding efforts in the relatively understudied arena of the health industry. This study also



expands research on the employer branding by confirming the results of previous studies while providing new categories of commonly utilized employer branding communicative content in this context. Additionally, the results assist practitioners in exploring how different health-care industry sub-sets engage in employer branding, the kinds of employer branding in which potential health-care competitors and successful companies are engaging, and how employer branding efforts may be interpreted.

### *Limitations and future research*

Future research on employer branding in the health-care industry should examine the antecedents and consequences of this enacted communication. By establishing outcomes related to the remarkable similarities in employer branding content between industry sub-sets in health-care, practitioners could better understand how to improve communications. While the findings of this research contribute to a broader understanding of employer branding in the health-care industry, there are limitations to this study which must be considered. First, the researchers only retrieved the sample of text from large, well-known organizations in the health-care industry. While this allowed the researchers to readily access employer branding materials and create a manageable, defined sample, a study of smaller health-care organizations is likely warranted. Further, this study analyzed employer branding communications which occurred during a single point in time. A study of how employer branding changes over time could seek to answer a question posed by [Lievens and Slaughter \(2016\)](#) about how economic and/or social events change employer branding strategies.

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### Further reading

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