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An Experimental Analysis of Image Transfers: Exploring the Role of CEOs and Employees in Shaping Stakeholder Perception of the Organisation

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Introduction

In recent years, organisations, have moved increasingly into the eye of public interest, whereas in the past they operated largely outside the spotlight (Caspers, 2019; Hagelstein, 2023; Jarren & Röttger, 2008). Communication assumes a central role in this context, with effective strategic communication being crucial for developing the organisational brand, forming their images and shaping the perception of the stakeholders (Johann et al., 2025; Meng & Berger, 2013). In today's complex corporate environment, there seems to be a heightened demand for personalised communication as people tend to relate more easily to a human individual than to impersonal organisations (Caspers, 2019).

Consequently, it is essential to analyse how individuals, portrayed in organisational communication, are perceived. Individual actors, such as the CEO (Chief Executive Officer) and employees, are regarded as spokespersons and representatives of the respective organisation, thereby inheriting a prominent role in both external and internal public relations, as well as personifying the organisation and embodying their image (e.g., Greenwood & Anderson, 2009; Mast, 2020; Ninova-Solovykh & Einwiller, 2021; Park & Berger, 2004; Szyska, 2010). Given the important role of individual actors, the study will focus, on the one hand, on CEOs. These leaders "personify and represent their organizations through their visibility in media. In this way, their leadership influences perceptions of the organization among stakeholders, and thereby organizational reputation and performance" (Meng & Berger, 2013, p. 307). However, the representation and communication of organisations is not solely determined by members occupying higher hierarchical levels, such as the CEO (e.g., Ninova-Solovykh & Einwiller, 2021; Schneider & Zerfass, 2019). Therefore, this study, will analyse on the other hand, the influence of the perception of another stakeholder group, namely employees, who are frequently perceived as familiar and ordinary people and are consequently seen as highly authentic, as well as an essential intangible resource for the organisation (e.g.,

Greenwood & Anderson, 2009; Ninova-Solovykh & Einwiller, 2021; Zeitoun et al., 2020). Academic research in recent years has placed greater emphasis on the role of CEOs in terms of their positioning, strategies, and influence (e.g., Scheidt et al., 2018; Zerfass et al., 2016). For employees, this is a more recent development, as research regarding the role of employees in this context is still in its infancy (e.g., Pekkala & Erkkilä, 2024).

This underscores the increasing polyphony in organisational communication, highlighting the necessity to examine how various voices could influence the organisation's perception (Palmieri & Mazzali-Lurati, 2021; Schneider & Zerfass, 2019). Overall, there appears to be a close link between the employees' and CEO's perceptions and the organisation's overall perception (e.g., Hagelstein, 2023; Scheidt et al., 2018; Zeitoun et al., 2020). Therefore, understanding the influence of individual actors' perception and images is important because it can affect an organisation's reputation, perception, as well as its performance, with negative or unethical behaviour having a potentially negative and contradictory impact, incorporating potential downsides (e.g., Johann et al., 2025; Men, 2015; Shank & Burns, 2022; Yeu et al., 2021; Zeitoun et al., 2020; Zhu & Chang, 2013). The relevance of examining is further illustrated, for example, by the incident entitled as 'Coldplaygate', where the affair between a CEO and an employee (Chief People Officer) was accidentally exposed at a Coldplay concert and received widespread public attention, with experts highlighting the potential significant consequences for the company's reputation (Faguy, 2025; Hasan, 2025; Morse, 2025).

All of this underlines the importance of empirically analysing the role of CEOs and employees in the context of image transfers (Hagelstein, 2023). Replications are recommended in the literature because they transparently assess the robustness of prior results, are crucial for scientific progress, and foster open science (e.g., Dienlin et al., 2021; Erdfelder & Ulrich, 2018). This study builds on Hagelstein's (2023) explicit recommendation to reinforce and expand the findings from the empirical examination of the *Dual Process Model of Image Transfer* in a

conceptual replication. In this replication, based on the model mentioned, the pairing of two different actors with one organisation is examined (Dienlin et al., 2021; Hagelstein, 2023).

This study analyses the research question of whether the affective evaluation, as well as the judgment of the person (CEO or employee) in the functional and social dimensions, influences how the organisation is perceived in the respective dimensions. Thus, this research aims to empirically explore the roles of CEOs and employees in shaping stakeholder perceptions of organisations within the context of polyphonic communication, contributing scientifically substantiated findings to the ongoing discourse on organisational image. Theoretical implications for strategic communication will be drawn from the empirical findings, alongside with practical recommendations for organisational environments.

Theoretical Background and Literature Review

Organisational Communication

Given that organisations today are in the spotlight of general interest, it is essential to take a closer look on how organisations communicate with the public, as communication is a fundamental characteristic of organisations and plays a decisive role in forming their image, perception, and success (e.g., Caspers, 2019; Johann et al., 2025; Theis-Berglmair, 2008).

Public organisational communication can thus be understood as instances of communication in which the corporate entity, in this case the organisation, functions as the communicating unit, whereby all individuals holding system-specific audience positions may potentially serve as recipients (Hagelstein, 2023). There is a considerable diversity in the definition of the term (e.g., Szyszka, 2024; Zerfass, 2022). Organisational communication can be divided into two forms: advertising and public relations. The latter refers to communications whose messaging and understanding processes are shaped by the structural patterns of different systems that the organisation is involved in (Hagelstein, 2023; Szyszka, 2024; Theis-Berglmair,

2008). Empirical evidence underscores that (communicative) organisational actions can, among others, impact their own employees, positively influencing employee engagement (Jiang & Men, 2017) and job satisfaction (Mehra & Nickerson, 2019). While in times of crisis these actions could further influence the perception of trustworthiness and reputation (Thießen, 2011). Overall, the communicative actions play a crucial role in shaping relationships among and with stakeholders, as well as in determining the success and effectiveness of an organisation (Caspers, 2019; Usadolo et al., 2025).

In particular, the trend for personalisation plays a decisive role in the underlying significance of organisational communication (e.g., Caspers, 2019; Zerfass et al., 2016). It is utilised, among other things, in the management of impressions and reputation (e.g., Gaines-Ross, 2003; Zerfass et al., 2016; Zorn, 2001). The phenomenon describes the increasing centrality of individual personalities in communication and in the representation of organisations, whereby these can be used to interpret organisational issues, i.e. they become schemata of interpretation, interpreting these very issues (e.g., Caspers, 2019; Denner, 2025; Hagelstein, 2023). Following Hagelstein (2023), in this paper, personalised communication is limited to those periods of communication and offerings that emphasise a single actor (e.g., Hagelstein, 2023). A further distinction can be made if the media offering is addressing an individual who is not a member of the organisation or an individual who is. The latter is referred to as “inside-out personalised organisational communication” (Hagelstein, 2023, p. 30, translated and slightly amended). Inside-out organisational communication can be further distinguished in centralised personalisation, focusing on high-ranking members (top-level), i.e., people with broad powers (e.g., CEOs), whereas decentralised personalisation emphasises individuals without such influences, like employees (Hagelstein, 2023; Hoffjann, 2022; Kirchenbauer, 2020). Research on the impact of personalised organisational communication demonstrates that personalisation through an organisational figure can influence stakeholder

trust and enable the transfer of image between the individual and the organisation (e.g., Denner et al., 2019; Denner, 2025; Eisenegger, 2010).

Nowadays, the organisation's communication is often aimed at a variety of audiences, whereby it is essential to emphasise that the communication includes many senders, who can influence how the organisation is perceived through multiple voices (Palmieri & Mazzali-Lurati, 2021; Viertmann et al., 2021; Waller & Polonsky, 1998; Schneider & Zerfass, 2019). This phenomenon is referred to as 'polyphony' which “describes the integration of a multiplicity of internal and external voices into communication processes that are performed on behalf of the organization” (Schneider & Zerfass, 2019, p. 19). In today's corporate environment, there is an increasing transfer of organisational power from high-ranking members to the entire workforce, which can be seen as initiated by a fragmentation of recipients, the increasing influence of social media, and globalisation, to which organisations are responding by personalising their communication (Caspers, 2019; Schmeltz & Kjeldsen, 2022).

Image Transfers

The prominence of multiple actors in organisational communication, together with their obligation to present a coherent and persuasive public image, highlights the need to examine image transfers (Caspers, 2019; Johann et al., 2025). This work builds on a study that introduced this narrative to the academic community and conceptualised, as well as empirically tested, the *Dual Process Model of Image Transfer*, which explains the mechanisms behind the image transfer. The concept of image constitutes the foundation of image transfer and describes “the positive or negative affective evaluation as well as the functional, social, and aesthetic cognitive judgement” (Hagelstein, 2023, p. 37, translated and slightly amended). Brands, organisations, and people can be the object of an image (Caspers, 2019; Einwiller, 2024). The image formed by observers is always their perception of another actor at a given moment. This perception is continuously modified, and image transfer is a form of such a modification (Einwiller, 2024;

Hagelstein, 2023). This study sheds light on image transfers focusing on CEO's and employees, defining these transfers as occurrence of media perception and influence in which "the positive or negative affective evaluation and/or the functional, social, and aesthetic cognitive judgment of an actor influences the evaluation and/or judgment of another, communicatively linked actor" (Hagelstein, 2023, p. 38, translated and slightly amended).

The *Dual Process Model of Image Transfer* (Hagelstein, 2023) incorporates both "affective and cognitive effects" and "explicit and implicit effects" in "controlled and automatic processing" of media offerings (Hagelstein, 2023, p. 77, translated). The process can be divided into two phases: the image-building phase and the retrieval phase. In the first phase, the media offering is subjected to an understanding activity by the recipient, which is followed by a change in the recipient's cognitive structure. In the second phase, the recipient is confronted exclusively with the corporate actor following the media offering. As a result of the modifications described, an explicit assessment or evaluation of this corporate actor takes place (Hagelstein, 2023).

The mechanisms behind the image transfer, so human cognition, can be explained by means of the associative network model (Anderson, 1983; Collins & Loftus, 1975; Gotsi et al., 2011; Hagelstein, 2023; Lang, 2006). In relation to the image transfer in this study, this means that the concept that the recipient has about the individual actor is linked to that of the organisation, with the links described and through the repeated co-present observation (Hagelstein, 2023; Johann et al., 2025). As a result, the recipient's assessment and evaluation of the organisation corresponds to the image of the linked (individual) actor. When the recipient reflects on the organisation, it is possible that the image created of the individual actor is activated at the same time, whereby the perception of the individual actor is transferred to the organisation and can influence both dimensions of image transfer, i.e. the affective assessment of the organisation as well as the cognitive judgement (Hagelstein, 2023; Johann et al., 2025).

The described model is based on the associative-propositional evaluation model (Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006), which has been further developed, streamlined, and supplemented by insights from the attribute conditioning model (e.g., Arendt & Northup, 2015; Förderer & Unkelbach, 2014; Gawronski et al., 2024; Hagelstein, 2023).

A look at current research on image transfer generally reveals an increasing importance of the topic. Overall, the research suggests a tendency to confirm effective image transfer. However, a more nuanced view reveals a fragmented picture of image transfer and shows that, in some studies, image transfer could be proven only partially, moderately, or conditionally. Research in this field has predominantly centred on outside image transfers, particularly investigating image transfers in the area of celebrity endorsements and sponsorships, as well as brand extensions (e.g., Bergkvist & Zhou, 2021; Boisvert, 2011; Knoll & Matthes, 2017; Yang et al., 2024). Nevertheless, in recent years, there has been a significant increase in research on inside-out image transfers, particularly focusing on centralised organisational communication (e.g., Caspers, 2019; Denner et al., 2024; Hagelstein, 2023). Empirical findings on celebrity image transfer show the transfer of both evaluative as well as non-evaluative associations from the endorsers to the organisations and brands, which can be shaped by factors such as awareness, congruity and type of endorser (e.g., Scheidt et al., 2018; Schimmelpfennig & Hunt, 2020; Till et al., 2008). New technologies, as well as a wide range of stakeholders, including leaders, influencers, politicians and employees, are being examined in the latest research (e.g., Ingenhoff & Klein, 2018; Kim et al., 2017; Tang et al., 2025; von Sikorski & Herbst, 2020).

As this study is a conceptual replication of Hagelstein's (2023) work and is therefore linked to it, similar hypotheses are formulated. The model provides a comprehensive lens for investigating image transfers in organisational communication, characterised by multiple voices.

It is hypothesised that *H1/H2*, the affective evaluation of the person, has a positive and direct effect on the affective evaluation of the organisation, and *H3/H4*, the cognitive judgement of the person in the (a) functional and (b) social dimensions, has a positive and direct effect on the cognitive judgement of the organisation.

Role of CEOs in Image Transfers

Current research on image transfer underlines that individuals and spokespeople can have an influence on how the company is perceived. In the complex organisational environment, recipients tend to relate more easily to a human individual than to impersonal organisations, which means that CEOs and employees are increasingly becoming the public faces of their organisations (Caspers, 2019; Meng & Berger, 2013). This highlights the need to understand the interdependencies between organisations and their leading figures, especially those at the top of the hierarchy, such as the CEO (Caspers, 2019; Scheidt et al., 2018).

CEOs play a prominent and diverse role in both external but also internal public relations (Deekeling & Arndt, 2014; Men, 2015). Mintzberg (1973) acknowledged ten different roles, such as leader, monitor and disseminator. The CEO can foster relationships with different stakeholders, influence the reputation of an organisation, as well as impact the effectiveness and organisational performance, by defining and personifying the mission and values, guiding the culture and articulating a shared (organisational) vision (Caspers, 2019; Men, 2015; Yeu et al., 2021). They are seen as spokespersons, the so-called face of the respective organisation (e.g., Deekeling & Arndt, 2014; Men, 2015; Szyszka, 2010). Therefore, the issue of positioning CEOs in the sphere of mass, as well as social media, is becoming important. This positioning can be understood as a communication approach that distinguishes the leader from others in the public domain and aims to increase recognition of this leader among all different stakeholders (Bentele & Nothaft, 2010; Zerfass et al., 2016). The aim is to achieve a favourable positioning

of the CEO and corporation, which could then be mirrored in the reputation (Szyszka, 2010; Zerfass et al., 2016).

To understand the significance of CEOs in the context of image transfer, it is important to grasp the impact of CEOs as communicating actors when the corporation positions them. Communication by CEOs encompasses “all systematically planned, implemented and evaluated communication activities by the top management of an organisation with its internal and external stakeholders” (Zerfass & Sandhu, 2006, translated and slightly amended, p. 52). In line with the previously introduced definition, the image in this context is understood as the affective evaluation, as well as the cognitive judgement of the CEO through the recipient (Hagelstein, 2023). It shows that there is broad diversity in the literature regarding the definition of the leader’s image (e.g., Andreini et al., 2021; Fetscherin, 2015). For example, Caspers (2019) identifies different dimensions of the CEO image, and other researchers approach the concept from the perspective of the CEO brand, with Fetscherin (2015) arguing that CEO reputation, as well as the CEO image, form the two key dimensions of the CEO brand. A common feature of all definitions lies in the significance ascribed to the CEO's image, which is portrayed in the literature in regards to the CEO capital, and therefore is regarded as an important intangible resource of the company (Caspers, 2019).

A variety of studies have examined image transfers, focusing on different types of CEOs, such as celebrity or start-up CEOs, and on different contexts. Empirical findings suggest that the perception of the CEO has a positive effect on the perception and image of the organisation (e.g., Caspers, 2019; Denner et al., 2024; Hagelstein, 2023; Scheidt et al., 2018; Stäbler & Gala, 2024). Studies in related fields of research, including those examining the reputation of CEOs, have revealed corresponding findings (Loock & Phillips, 2020; Meng & Berger, 2013). The research in the start-up context has shown that the image can be transferred from the start-up founder to the organisation, whereby a positive perception and reputation can

enhance the organisation's overall perception, whereas unethical behaviour can have a negative impact on the perception (e.g., Johann et al., 2025; Zhu & Chang, 2013). It has been observed that CEOs are becoming increasingly well-known, and celebrity CEOs are therefore receiving more attention in research, particularly regarding the extent to which public prominence and perceptions can influence organisational outcomes (Huaman-Ramirez & Merunka, 2021; Scheidt et al., 2018). The importance of the CEO's role is also frequently examined in the context of crises, as executives are considered to be particularly important during such times and personalisation is expected to increase (e.g., Beldad & von Rosenstiel, 2024; Caspers, 2019). Research shows that the disclosure of personal information by the CEO can enhance an optimistic pre-crisis image, which can positively influence the perception of the organisation during the crisis (Denner et al., 2024; Koch et al., 2022).

Based on all of these discoveries, this study proposes the following two hypotheses to examine the role of CEOs in image transfers.

H1: The affective evaluation of the person (CEO) has a positive and direct effect on the affective evaluation of the organisation.

H3: The cognitive judgement of the person (CEO) in the (a) functional and (b) social dimensions has a positive and direct effect on the cognitive judgement of the organisation.

Role of Employees in Image Transfers

The representation and communication of corporations is increasingly determined not only by leaders at the top of the hierarchy, but rather by all individuals of an organisation (e.g., Schneider & Zerfass, 2019). There is a growing trend of employees playing an active role in organisational communication, underlining their importance in the organisation's reputation management, as well as highlighting the significance of examining them within the paradigm of image transfers (Einwiller et al., 2021; Hagelstein, 2023; Juholin et al., 2015; Ninova-

Solovykh & Einwiller, 2020). An employee is “a person who has a contract to carry out work for an employer and receives compensation ... ” (EFTHEIA & European Labour Authority, 2024, p. 10). As they are part of achieving corporate goals and creating value, they should be comprehended as a central stakeholder group, and they are seen as an important intangible resource for the company, a key element, representing their respective organisation by acting on its behalf and name (Greenwood & Anderson, 2009; Ninova-Solovykh & Einwiller, 2021; Welch, 2019). They are often referred to as the ambassador or the face of their organisation (e.g., Brockhaus & Zerfass, 2024; Korschun, 2015; Ninova-Solovykh & Einwiller, 2021).

An understanding of the impact of employees' communication is important to highlight the significance of their role in shaping stakeholders' perception of the organisation. Their function in communication can be attributed to the growth and emergence of so-called communication-oriented organisations and the growing development of a digital and increasingly social networked world (Mazzei, 2014; Men, 2021; Ninova-Solovykh & Einwiller, 2020; Zerfass & Franke, 2013). The research, which focuses on employee communication, mostly centres on the diverse roles employees play as communicators and distinguishes among various types of employee communication behaviour (Mazzei, 2014; Verhoeven & Thøis Madsen, 2022). The role of the employees as ambassadors of their organisation can be understood as their utility in mediating between the corporate environment and the organisation, whereby their behaviour can influence how outsiders perceive the company both positively and negatively (e.g., Ninova-Solovykh & Einwiller, 2021). More specifically, the role of employee advocates can be described as those who positively communicate about their organisation based on the assumption of a strong, positive connection with their organisation, whereby so-called corporate influencers are understood as a form of these advocates (Brockhaus & Zerfass, 2024; Christensen, 2024; Ninova-Solovykh & Einwiller, 2021). Employees are able to establish connections and close divides between the organisational environment and their organisation,

fostering enduring connections with stakeholders through communication (Korschun, 2015; Verhoeven & Thøis Madsen, 2022). The results underscore how important employees, especially those who are communicative, committed, as well as engaged, are to the performance and success of a corporation (e.g., Andersson, 2019; Mazzei, 2014). Similarly, the role of the employee, in the context of image transfer, is of significant importance, which has not been studied extensively to date. The image is understood here in accordance with the previously presented definition, whereby it includes the recipient's evaluation and judgement of the person, in this case, the employee (Hagelstein, 2023).

The preliminary findings suggest that the perception of employees and their evaluation by stakeholders can have a significant influence on the perception of the organisation (e.g., Hagelstein, 2023; Pekkala & Erkkilä, 2024; Shank & Burns, 2022; Zeitoun et al., 2020). Hagelstein's (2023) study demonstrates that the "affective evaluation" and "functional, social and aesthetic judgements" of employees can exert a significant positive influence on how the organisation is perceived (Hagelstein, 2023, p. 105, translated and slightly amended). In addition, subsequent studies have indicated that image transfers, or impression transfers in this case, vary depending on the type of impression and whether positive or negative impressions are transferred (Shank & Burns, 2022). The findings are further supported by research focusing on employees' perceptions, as well as their influence and impact in areas such as employee advocacy, corporate influencers, employee voice, crisis communication and reputation management (e.g., Gräve et al., 2021; Helm, 2011; Johnson et al., 2018; Kim & Rhee, 2011). Empirical evidence demonstrates that employees, for example, acting as so-called corporate influencers, can significantly influence an organisation's reputation by engaging with diverse audiences through different styles of communication (e.g., Brockhaus & Zerfass, 2024; Helm, 2011; Ivens, 2018; Nguyen & LeBlanc, 2018; Schaarschmidt & Walsh, 2020). Examining the influence of employees is particularly relevant in the service sector (Einwiller et al., 2021).

Research in this context shows that personnel and their behaviour can influence stakeholders' satisfaction, the perceived quality of the service provided, and loyalty (e.g., Brown & Lam, 2008; Liu et al., 2021).

On this basis, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H2: The affective evaluation of the person (Employee) has a positive and direct effect on the affective evaluation of the organisation.

H4: The cognitive judgement of the person (Employee) in the (a) functional and (b) social dimensions has a positive and direct effect on the cognitive judgement of the organisation.

Method

The subsequent section presents the methodological approach, covering the design, the selection of participants, and the measurement of the variables. The study employs an online experiment with two factors to analyse the hypotheses, examining how a person's evaluation can affect the organisation's evaluation and judgment, thereby offering insights into image transfers in centralised and decentralised personalised organisational communication.

Experiment

Survey experiments have emerged as a key methodological approach in the social sciences (Kovács & Veselý, 2025). Experiments are research designs that evaluate causal relationships by systematically manipulating the independent variables and analysing their influence on dependent variables under controlled conditions (e.g., Brosius et al., 2022; Mullinix et al., 2015). By employing random assignment and comparing treatment groups with control groups, researchers can isolate and attribute observed differences to the experimental manipulation, thereby ensuring high internal validity (Brosius et al., 2022; Eifler & Leitgöb,

2022; Mullinix et al., 2015). A benefit of the online survey experiment is that it allows many respondents to be reached and various types of stimuli, in this case, newspaper and blog articles, to be incorporated (Brosius et al., 2022; Goodfellow, 2023; Vehovar & Manfreda, 2017). Moreover, it enables the formulation of more differentiated statements (Brosius et al., 2022). This chosen method is deemed the most appropriate for this study, as it furthermore establishes a connection to existing research, with the studies on image transfer utilising experimental designs (Hagelstein, 2023; Caspers, 2022).

Research Design and Stimuli

This study employs an experiment with a 2*2 design, i.e. a two-factor survey experiment utilising a between-subjects approach, consisting of a total of six factor levels, differentiated into four experimental groups and two control groups with the factor's person (CEO or employee) and the dimension (functional or social), as well as the control groups (neutral). It should be noted again that this study is a conceptual replication of Hagelstein's (2023) study and is therefore linked to it in its design.

The experiment was presented to participants using a cover story that obscured its actual aims, thereby allowing to avoid hypothesis-driven responses. The participants in the study were informed that it examines how they evaluate the quality of online newsprint articles, as well as blog posts created using various editorial processes, including the integration of new technologies. Participants were informed about data protection and had to confirm their consent to continue participating. Demographic information was collected, and filters were integrated with the objective of excluding participants in the event of a lack of target-group suitability, a filled quota, or a failed attention check.

The participants were randomly allocated to one of the experimental conditions presented. In accordance with their assigned allocation, participants were shown one of four

portrait stimuli, each designed to emphasise either the social or functional dimension, thus the qualities of a CEO or an employee. Additionally, participants were allocated to the control groups, which comprised neutral portraits of the actors. The subjects' affective evaluation, as well as cognitive assessment, were evaluated based on their reading, thus they were questioned to assess how they perceived the actor and to evaluate them using pairs of opposites. A filler article was included afterwards to facilitate the process of clearing the short-term recall. Subsequently, a pairing stimulus was shown, which linked the individual from the portrait stimulus to the organisation, thus presenting them as a new member. Following this, the same questions posed previously were asked to evaluate the organisation. The procedure was approved by the Institutional Review Board, and several steps were implemented to ensure ethical conduct and promote transparency throughout the research process (Eynon et al., 2017).

For this experiment, different variants of portrait and pairing stimuli were designed. A newspaper article from the Handelsblatt was adapted into six different forms for all groups. In developing the stimulus, the original article was edited using the JavaScript console, enabling the adaptation of the various elements while retaining its appearance and feel. For the six groups, two general versions of the stimulus were created, with the individual actor presented as either an employee or a CEO, using the same stock photos of a male person for both actors. In all four versions of the stimuli, the CEO/employee was described in detail in terms of their characteristics, depending on the image dimension the design aimed to measure, either the functional or social characteristics of the individual actor were highlighted. For the pairing stimulus, the created juice company, 'Fruchtquell', was endowed with a corporate identity, including a logo, as well as a claim, matching photos, colours and writing. A blog article on the fictitious organisation's website was the pairing stimulus, in which the organisation was presented and linked to the individual actor already introduced in the portrait stimulus. The blog post informed participants that the individual actor is transferring to this organisation.

Employing a fictional company and individual actors enables the exclusion of behaviours in the response due to preconceptions, thereby supporting the attribution of effects to the experiment's influence (Hagelstein, 2023; Scheidt et al., 2018).

Data Collection and Sample

The online survey experiment was conducted via the SoSci Survey platform (Leiner, 2024), targeting 18 to 65-year-old female, as well as male, inhabitants of Germany who have a school-leaving qualification. This study is based on a representative quota sample, for which a corresponding representation was drawn from the population of the cases described above, which allows the findings to be transferred to the population represented, whereby quotas can ensure that the characteristics are distributed within the sample in correspondence with their distribution in actual populations (Brosius et al., 2022). A quotation with regard to the demographic characteristics of age, gender, and educational level was applied (Statistisches Bundesamt (Destatis), 2025). Participants were recruited through an online panel provided by Bilendi.

Before the commencement of the study, the desired sample size was identified using rules of thumb in accordance with the study to be replicated (Hagelstein, 2023). The rules recommended, 200 participants as the lower limit (Barrett, 2007), six observations per variable (Cattell, 1978) and 50 participants per group (here six experimental groups) (Chou, 2018). Thus, a sample size of 300 was aimed for in this study. During the experiment, various data cleaning steps were carried out, and participants were excluded, among others, when they completed the survey in a very short, unrealistic time, as recommended by Leiner (2019). Prior to the launch of the actual data collection, a qualitative pretest was conducted, during which minor adjustments were made. During the survey period, 330 participants completed the study. After applying the exclusion criteria, 313 participants were included in the analysis. The distribution of the 313 participants reveals that 50.2% were female ($n = 157$) and 49.8% were

male ($n = 156$). A detailed overview of the descriptive data is presented in Table 1 (Appendix). The sample is deemed to be representative of the target population relevant to the study, with an absolute maximum deviation of 3.2% from the true distribution.

Measures

After each stimulus, the affective evaluation of the actor or associated organisation is recorded. For this measurement, the study used the Affective Slider (also called AS), a self-assessment instrument shown in scientific literature to be effective for measuring the image of individuals, as well as organisations (e.g., Denner et al., 2024; Hagelstein, 2023; Johann et al., 2025). The AS measures human emotions and self-assessment of affective ratings, specifically pleasure (Betella & Verschure, 2016). This digital configuration uses a slider which comprises two poles, with an unhappy emoticon positioned on the left end and a happy emoticon therefore on the right end, utilising a monochromatic palette (Betella & Verschure, 2016). This study assumes that image should be understood as a construct which consists of two different components, whereby the cognitive component is divided into three dimensions: functional, social, as well as aesthetic (Hagelstein, 2023). According to Hagelstein (2023), this division is made in accordance with the three-dimensional reputation construct by Eisenegger and Imhof (2009). The functional dimension is reflected in elements for example as competence and specific qualifications, whereas the social dimension is formed on the basis of reliability and honesty (Hagelstein, 2023).

The participants' cognitive judgement of the CEO, employee and/or organisation in functional as well as social terms will be measured using semantic differentials, following Ohanian (1990). She created a scale to measure the perceived characteristics of a celebrity endorser: “expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness” (Ohanian, 1990, p. 39). Therefore, ten items from the scale are included in this research as indicators of recipients' judgment of the functional (5 semantic differentials) and social (5 semantic differentials) dimensions. Both

scales were adjusted to a 7-point scale. The internal consistency was assessed, revealing excellent values across both groups and dimensions.

Statistical Analysis

The study used structural equation modelling (SEM) to examine the hypotheses, and the data analysis was performed using R (R Core Team, 2025), with various packages for the individual steps of the analysis.

The expression SEM can be defined as a collection of techniques aimed at quantifying both the strength, as well as the direction, of assumed causal relations (Kline, 2023; Rosenthal, 2017). It can be understood as a synthesis of factor analyses with path analysis or regression methods (Rosenthal, 2017; Kline, 2023). Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) identifies latent factors, or constructs which can't be measured directly and are defined by several measurable, observable indicators (Rosenthal, 2017). The structural model encompasses theoretically postulated connections between variables, allowing for presuming probabilistic causality between the underlying constructs, while considering possible measurement inaccuracies (e.g., Gäde & Schermelleh-Engel, 2023; Kline, 2023). The present study uses a MIMIC approach, which represents a mixture of reflexive, as well as causal-formative models and is based on the assumption that the latent variables are both cause and effect, depending on the indicator (Kline, 2023; Weiber & Sarstedt, 2021).

The inclusion of latent variables in SEM enables the analysis of images, as this latent construct can only be comprehensively examined and captured in this way (Kline, 2023; Hagelstein, 2023). The SEM aims to reproduce the observable covariance matrices with as little deviation as possible, i.e. to define a parsimonious model. Complex links between different variables can be taken into account, and multiple endogenous variables can be placed in the model, enabling the testing of all hypotheses in one model (Gäde & Schermelleh-Engel, 2023;

Kline, 2023; Rosenthal, 2017). Therefore, a set of structural equation models was estimated to investigate the hypotheses.

Randomisation

The following analysis will be reported separately for the two groups. Half of the participants were assigned to the stimulus/control group with the CEO (1–3), and the other half to the stimulus/control group showing the employee (4–6). Since none of the participants saw both actors, the analysis was carried out separately. Henceforth, the terms 'CEO group' and 'employee group' will be used to describe the respective sets of experimental conditions. When referring to the CEO group, the CEO functional, the CEO social, and the CEO control group were included in the analysis. Accordingly, when referring to the employee group, the employee functional, employee social, and the employee control group formed the basis of the analysis.

A randomisation check indicated successful randomisation, i.e. an equal composition of the groups. There were no significant deviations across the CEO groups in terms of gender ($\chi^2(2) = 1.28, p = 0.527$), age ($\chi^2(4) = 3.93, p = 0.415$) and education ($\chi^2(4) = 8.94, p = 0.063$). In addition, the participants who observed the employee stimuli demonstrated no substantial group variations in terms of gender ($\chi^2(2) = 0.21, p = 0.902$), education ($\chi^2(4) = 1.81, p = 0.770$), and age ($\chi^2(4) = 4.84, p = 0.305$).

Mardia Test

Prior to analysing the measurement model, the Mardia test was applied to evaluate whether the assumption of (multivariate) normal distribution was met, revealing a non-normal distribution. In accordance with recommendations in the literature, the robust variation of maximum likelihood was used, and the data were modelled using the robust maximum-likelihood estimation (MLR) (Kleinke et al., 2017; Kline, 2016).

Measurement Models

For each group (CEO and employee stimuli), two CFAs were conducted. In the analysis, the cognitive judgment of the individual and the organisation in both dimensions was estimated as latent variables. These latent dimensions were captured by the items of the Source Credibility Scale.

For the CEO group, the measurement model on the judgments of the person showed an acceptable fit to the CEO data ($\chi^2(34) = 52.243$, $p = .019$, $CFI = .981$, $TLI = .975$, $RMSEA = .079$, 90% CI [.000; .132], $SRMR = .036$). The model for cognitive judgements of the organisation also showed an acceptable fit to the data ($\chi^2(34) = 50.903$, $p = .031$, $CFI = .985$, $TLI = .980$, $RMSEA = .077$, 90% CI [.005; .123], $SRMR = .024$). A strong association between functional and social evaluation was observed (0.83).

Similarly, the model on the judgments of the person showed an acceptable fit to the data of the employee group ($\chi^2(34) = 51.827$, $p = .026$, $CFI = .986$, $TLI = .982$, $RMSEA = .071$, 90% CI [.000; .114], $SRMR = .027$). The model on cognitive judgements of the organisation fit the data well ($\chi^2(34) = 41.969$, $p = .164$, $CFI = .995$, $TLI = .993$, $RMSEA = .044$, 90% CI [.000; .094], $SRMR = .019$). Across all CFAs for both the person and the organisation, the standardised factor loadings for the indicator variables were satisfactory, with all loadings $>.82$. More information can be found in Tables 2 and 3 (Appendix). As well as for the CEO condition, the check for multicollinearity of the two predictors showed a strong correlation between the respective factors (0.87), indicating values close to 1, which implies multicollinearity. The literature recommends that values exceeding .8 warrant careful consideration and caution, i.e., that these should be understood as problematic and potentially having an influence on the accuracy of the values (Grewal et al., 2004; Urban & Mayerl, 2014). As this study is a replication, the model was first retained in line with the theoretical assumptions and preregistration, ensuring comparability and replicability of Hagelstein's (2023) study. The

following section, as well as the whole statistical analysis, can therefore show parallels to this study.

Hypothesised Structural Models

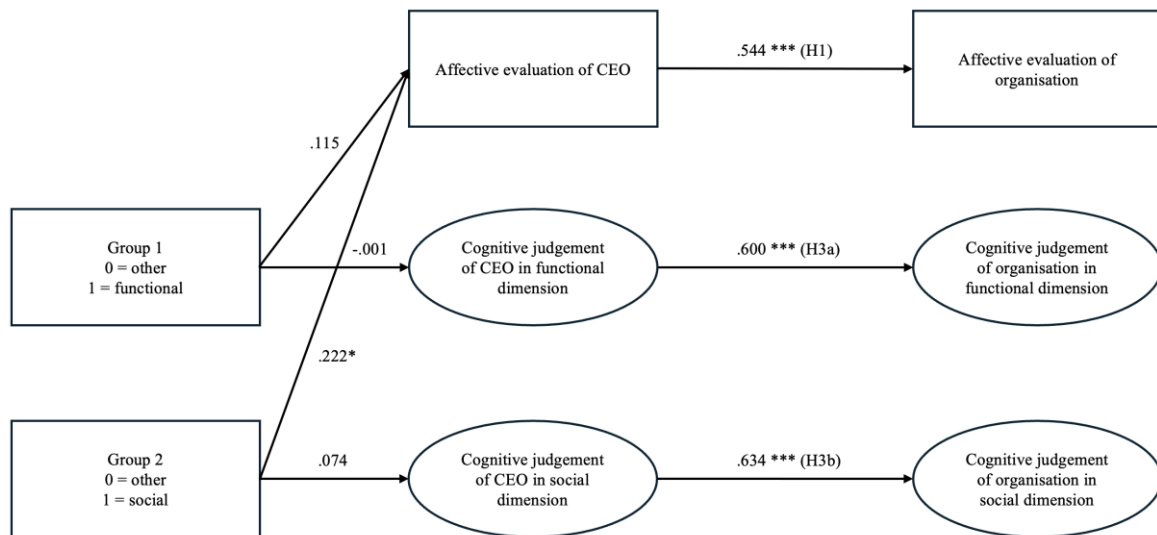
To test hypotheses 1-4, two hypothesised structural equation models were estimated: one for the CEO group (testing H1, H3a, and H3b) and the other for the employee group (testing H2, H4a, and H4b). The models were estimated to evaluate the impact of the person's affective evaluation on the organisation, with this analysis conducted separately for the CEO and the employee (H1 and H2). Subsequently, the effect of the evaluation of the person in functional and social dimensions on the evaluation of the organisation in the respective dimensions was estimated separately for CEOs and employees (H3a,b; H4a,b).

In general, for the CEO group, the operationalisation in relation to the experimental variables was not always significantly successful. The variable used to assign participants to the first experimental group (first grouping variable) of the CEO group ('functional characterised CEO') had only a marginal and negative effect on the corresponding judgment of the CEO in the functional dimension ($\beta = -.001, p = .987$). The grouping variable of the second experimental group showed a positive but weak effect on the social judgment of the CEO ($\beta = .074, p = .403$). The results showed that the grouping variables of experimental group 1 ($\beta = .115, p = .200$) and 2 ($\beta = .222, p = .015$) had a significant positive influence on the affective evaluation of the CEO, with the latter case achieving statistical significance.

In contrast, the manipulation check among participants who received a stimulus with the employee revealed only positive, direct effects of the grouping variables on the evaluation and judgment of the employee. The variable describing the third experimental group (first of employee group) showed a positive and significant effect on the functional assessment of the employee ($\beta = .217, p = .007$). The social grouping variation had a positive but not significant

effect on the judgment of the employee in the social dimension ($\beta = .106, p = .186$). The two grouping variables of the experimental groups of the employee group had a significant positive influence on the corresponding evaluation of the employee ($\beta = .212, p = .014$), ($\beta = .255, p = .003$). The manipulation check for the grouping variables had limited functionality and indicated that the stimulus individuals received and their evaluation of the person were largely independent of each other, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

The SEM analysis for the CEO group had an acceptable model fit ($\chi^2(245) = 542.902, p < 0.001, CFI = .903, TLI = .891, RMSEA = .104, 90\% CI [.092; .117], SRMR = .326$). The affective evaluation of the CEO had a strong, positive, and significant direct effect on the corresponding affective evaluation of the organisation ($\beta = .544, p < .001$), thereby confirming the first hypothesis (H1). In line with the assumptions, the cognitive evaluation of the CEO in the functional dimension had a strong and significantly positive direct effect on the corresponding cognitive evaluation of the organisation ($\beta = .600, p < .001$), which supports H3a. Regarding the social characterisation of the CEO, it can be observed that the social judgement of the CEO had a significant and strongly positive direct effect on the judgement of the corporate actor in the respective dimension ($\beta = .634, p < .001$); thus, H3b can be accepted.

Figure 1*Structural Equation Model (CEO)*

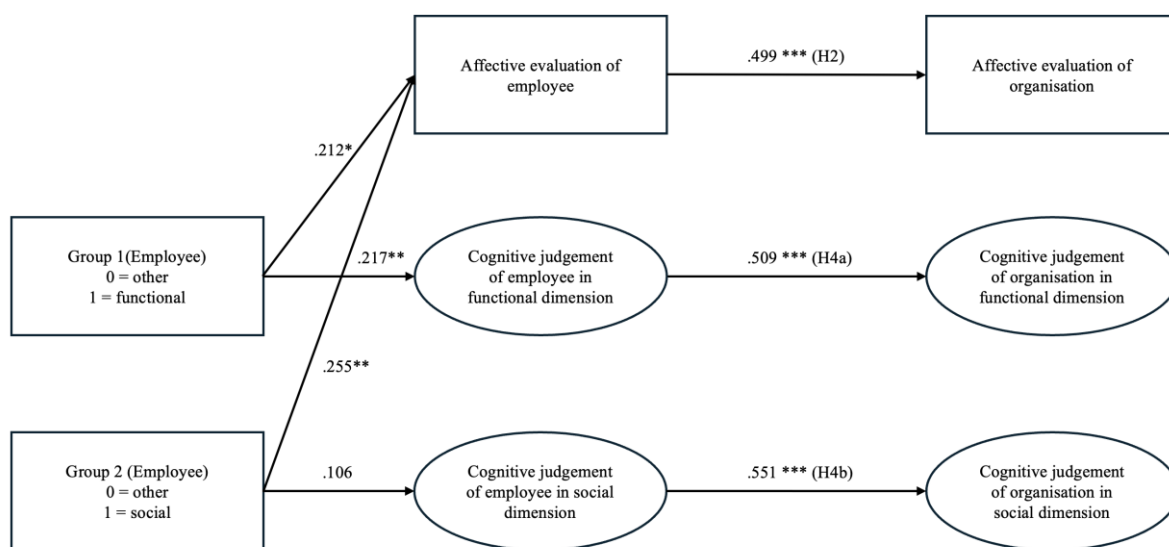
Note. Standardised regression coefficients are presented. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

In line with the assumptions, similar findings were obtained from the SEM of the employee group, which also showed an acceptable model fit ($\chi^2 (245) = 553.512$, $p < .001$, $CFI = .909$, $TLI = .898$, $RMSEA = .102$, 90% CI [.090; .113], $SRMR = .340$). Regarding the affective evaluation, the model showed that the evaluation of the employee had a strong, positive, and significant direct effect on the corresponding affective evaluation of the organisation ($\beta = .499$, $p < .001$), thereby confirming H2. Furthermore, the cognitive evaluation of the employee in the functional dimension had a strong positive and direct significant effect on the corresponding cognitive evaluation of the organisational actor ($\beta = .509$, $p < .001$), as a result of which H4a can be accepted. With regard to the social characterisation of the employee it can be observed that the social judgement of the employee had a significantly and strong positive direct effect

on the evaluation of the corporate actor in the respective dimension ($\beta = .551, p < .001$), confirming the last hypothesis, H4b.

Figure 2

Structural Equation Model (Employee)



Note. Standardised regression coefficients are presented. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

Alternative Model

In the following exploratory factor analysis, the aim was to determine whether the model components and factor structure derived from theoretical considerations should be retained or whether a model optimisation based on this analysis would be preferable. The necessity of this analysis was grounded in the elevated multicollinearity among the predictors and the deficiencies in the model fits documented earlier. The analysis is suitable for this purpose, as it enables the identification of latent variables post hoc and aims to optimise the hypothesised model (Rosenthal, 2017). In this model, the items used to measure the cognitive evaluation of the respective person (i.e., the CEO or employee) and the organisation were the centre of

analysis, with the aim to identify and model the underlying latent dimensions based on these results. The exploration was performed using a so-called oblique rotation, as the chosen rotation technique (Oblimin), following the recommendations in the literature (Field, 2024). The analysis of the scree plot, as well as the parallel analysis, suggested a two-factor structure in all four cases, as previously modelled.

For both the CEO and the employee, the CFAs demonstrated superior CFI, TLI, RMSEA, and SRMR values for the two-factor structure in the evaluation of the individual and the organisation. This should be exemplified by the CFI values, which range from .981 to .995 for the two-factor structures, whereas the CFI values for the one-factor structures range from .852 to .918. This analysis indicated that the data structure is more realistically represented by a model with two latent factors for the evaluation of the person/organisation in functional and social dimensions, than by a single-factor model. In order to establish a decision regarding the factor structure, the variables with the new structure were implemented into the structural equation model. In each of the cases, the new structure did not improve the fit of the model in terms of the CFI, TLI and RMSEA parameters (Two-factor: $CFI > .9$; $TLI > .89$, $RMSEA < .11$; One-factor: $CFI > .81$; $TLI > .80$, $RMSEA < .16$). A marginally superior SRMR value was evident in the single-factor solution, although it remained above the recommended threshold. Furthermore, a comparison of the models was performed according to the Akaike Information Criterion (Kline, 2023; Burnham & Anderson, 2004). The findings of the two-factor structure of the CEO model indicate lower AIC values than those of the one-factor structure. Based on the literature's recommendation, the model with the lower AIC should be considered superior (AIC model with one factor = 7875.018 > AIC Model with two factors = 7488.208). The same results are also evident for the employee condition (AIC model with one factor = 8079.005 > AIC model with two factors = 7867.769) (Burnham & Anderson, 2004; Kline, 2023). Overall,

the comparison of the model structures shows that the two-factor model, is superior in both cases and can't be improved by a new structure with only one factor.

All hypotheses, were confirmed, supporting the assumed image transfer between the CEO and the employee and their respective organisations. A consistent trend was observed across the two groups of conditions: the assessment of the person enhanced the evaluation of the organisation in all respective dimensions, with this effect being strongest for social evaluation compared to affective and functional evaluation. The findings provide an empirical basis for the interpretation and the considerations outlined in the next part.

Discussion

This thesis analysed how the thematisation of different organisational members influences perceptions of the organisation. It provides insights into the roles of CEOs and employees in image transfer in today's personalised organisational communication, featuring a multitude of voices (e.g., Hagelstein, 2023; Caspers, 2019). The study uncovers that the evaluation of the actors can have a positive effect on the affective and cognitive evaluation of the connected organisation, highlighting the importance of aligning the communication with all the different voices along the values of the organisation. The findings confirm the assumptions of the *Dual Process Model of Image Transfer* and replicate Hagelstein's (2023) results. The investigation of the two initial hypotheses substantiates the assumption that personalised communication of the organisation, in which the individual actor is thematised, results in strong affective image transfers. The analysis of H3a,b and H4a,b confirmed that the cognitive judgement of the person, both of the CEO and the employee, in the functional and social dimensions, had a direct, strong influence on the judgement of the organisation in those dimensions.

The image transfer was observed in both models, nonetheless with higher beta weights for the effects in the CEO model. The effect sizes are not directly comparable, so only a descriptive comparison follows to evaluate possible explanations for this result. There has been a noticeable increase in the visibility of executive leaders, such as CEOs, serving as a projection surface for the actions of the organisation (Caspers, 2019), and many people already develop a certain idea and image of leaders from early childhood (Junker & van Dick, 2014; Lord et al., 2020). It could be concluded that the participants in the experiment might have had clear expectations of the role, due to the increasing CEO presence, which was congruent with the stimulus and could have been reflected in the results.

Furthermore, the assumptions of the Role Congruity Theory should be considered for the explanation. This theory states that evaluations are determined by the extent to which the characteristics of the persona correspond to the expectations of the role, whereby unfavourable judgements can arise if there is a mismatch between anticipated behaviours for two roles occupied by one individual (Eagly & Karau, 2002; del Carmen Triana et al., 2024). The CEO appears to have met the expectations of the corresponding social position, i.e. role, really well. The individual actors could also have been recognised, beyond the role ascribed to them through their profession, in an additional role in this scenario of an ‘organisational representative’, understood as a social role with shared expectations. Future research should examine the extent to which shared expectations about such an ‘organisational representative’ role exist. Based on the results, it could be hypothesised that the roles of the CEO and the organisation’s representative seemed more aligned for the participant, leading to better evaluations.

Moreover, it should be noted that the different ways in which the two individuals were portrayed in the stimulus had only a minor influence on the evaluations of these actors. It could be a possible explanation that in this online survey experiment, participants may have paid little attention to the portrait stimulus, despite the instructions to read carefully and a minimum dwell

time, as their focus could not be supervised. An additional reason can be found in the literature, which assumes that attributing positive characteristics, is more difficult to achieve than attributing negative characteristics (Rothbart & Park, 1986). As the participants were only shown a single newspaper article, stronger effects would likely need more repetition to be taken into account in the judgment.

In addition, it became apparent that a negative effect on the functional evaluation of the CEO emerged when the functional qualities of the CEO were emphasised. A possible explanation for this finding involves attribution theory, particularly the discounting principle, which states that "the role of a given cause in producing a given effect is discounted if other plausible causes are also present" (Kelley, 1973, p. 113), i.e. if there are several causes or motives for a particular behaviour, the significance of one cause for the behaviour is weakened. Research suggests that participants may interpret their actions as externally driven when they feel that the person or organisation is aiming to improve their image or is only doing so for self-promotional purposes (Del Mar Garcia de los Salmones et al., 2013). If these motivations are assumed, potentially adverse reactions can occur, as the person is perceived as less credible and participants feel potentially manipulated (Del Mar Garcia de los Salmones et al., 2013; Sparkman, 1982). Thus, participants may have included another explanation for their evaluation of the CEO, beyond his functional qualities, which decreased the evaluation of the CEO in the functional dimension.

Implicit leadership theories (ILTs) could thereby explain why satisfactory results were achieved for the CEO, even when the manipulation was weak and showed some adverse effects. Through socialisation and previous interactions with leaders, people (e.g. members of an organisation) form "cognitive structures or prototypes of leadership categories (i.e. ILTs)" (Lord et al., 2020, p. 51; Junker & van Dick, 2014). Participants seem to have attributed functional characteristics to the CEO not only through his portrayal, but also through the role

he holds. The ILTs can influence how people assess a leader's actual actions, rather than evaluating what they actually observe, whereby people like the CEO can gain advantages when their behaviour aligns strongly with these notions and therefore, good results could be traced back to the ILTs rather than to the perceived stimulus (Junker & van Dick, 2014).

At this point, the empirically described multicollinearity of the predictors should be revisited, which contrasted with the theoretical assumption that the functional and social dimensions of the evaluation of the CEO and employee are two separate constructs. The analytic steps undertaken to evaluate the factor structure suggested a two-factor structure. This result aligned with the literature, suggesting separate measurement of the constructs (e.g., Hagelstein, 2023). Research on the formation of impressions suggests that these constructs, or related constructs, should be considered separately. As examples, the constructs 'warmth' and 'competence' (Fiske et al., 2007) should be used to illustrate this. Hagelstein (2023) further hypothesised the presence of a hierarchical construct. Additionally, in the literature, these dimensions are often considered to be reasons or facets of the overarching construct of trust (e.g., Kohring, 2004). Generally, the study results support the two-factor solution and imply that the explanatory approaches of the hierarchical model should be considered in further image transfer research.

In total, it can be concluded that the findings align with prior research, with the particularly interesting observation that one of the greatest assets to the organisation's image lies within the organisation itself. This analysis therefore provides a comprehensive and precise answer to the question of how the evaluation of the actors, the CEO and the employees, in the affective and cognitive components, influences the evaluation of the organisation.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study makes a significant contribution to the theoretical understanding of image transfers in personalised organisational communication. In the course of the experiment, participants evaluate the actors and the organisation linked to them. This study constitutes one of the early applications of the *Dual Process Model of Image Transfer* (Hagelstein, 2023) across different actor groups, confirming the model's assumptions regarding the functional and social dimensions. Consistent with previous research, the study offers empirical evidence of the significant role of the CEO in shaping organisational perceptions and broadens the initial findings, providing insights into the role of employees in image transfers (e.g., Scheidt et al., 2018, Hagelstein, 2023; Caspers, 2019). This offers implications for the literature on polyphonic communication by underlining the importance of individual actors, by taking a diverse stakeholder view of inside-out image transfer, thereby responding to calls for integrating more individual actors in the analysis of image transfers (Johann et al., 2025; Hagelstein, 2023; Schneider & Zerfass, 2019).

A number of practical implications and recommendations for organisations and communication practices relating to image creation and enhancement can be derived from this study. This research demonstrates that, within the contemporary complex corporate environment, recipients demonstrate a stronger affinity towards human individuals than towards impersonal organisations, underscoring the significance of incorporating organisation members into the image-building process as they are an invaluable intangible resource and cost-efficient option, acting as credible advocates for the organisation from within (Greenwood & Anderson, 2009; Caspers, 2019, Hagelstein, 2023). The findings suggest that the evaluation and/or the judgment of the individual actor has an influence on the evaluation and/or the judgment of the linked organisation. The perception and evaluation of the member's values are transferred to the organisation. Therefore, the individual actors can be seen as a source of image

with the internal values the organisation wishes to convey being embodied externally through the individual actor thematised in the organisational communication. From this, it can be concluded that personalised organisational communication offers the opportunity to raise and improve the organisation's profile. As Hagelstein (2023) already highlighted, organisations should be aware that this communication could influence consumer behaviour, both spontaneous and deliberate reactions can be influenced, such as a spontaneous purchase. Especially in times of crisis, this can play an essential role as the implementation of organisational actors in communication can strengthen an organisation's image (Koch et al., 2022), whereby it should not be forgotten that inappropriate behaviour on the part of these actors can also harm the organisation's image (e.g., Johnson et al., 2018).

This underlines the need for organisations to align the individual actor's image and its representation with the organisation's mission, and to bear in mind that building and improving an image ultimately depends on how the recipient perceives it. This study thus contributes to expanding the state of research and theoretical considerations.

Limitations and Future Research

The study provides comprehensive insights into the roles of different actors in shaping the perception of the organisation. Different limitations should be acknowledged, from which various avenues for future research can be derived.

The experimental study design allows for the investigation of causal relationships and the structure of the study, with newspaper articles as stimuli, bolsters internal validity. However, external validity is limited since the recipients are aware of the experimental situation. In future research, a more natural setting or an in-situ design with genuine interactions with the participants would allow for uncovering how such transfers manifest themselves in real-life settings (Brosius et al., 2016; Hagelstein, 2023; Karnowski, 2013).

In addressing the limitations of the study, it is crucial to recognise that the Chi² test statistics in the models were mostly significant. Nevertheless, extant literature indicates that this test is sensitive to sample size and that this sensitivity increases when the sample size increases. Consequently, even well-fitting models are more likely to be rejected because the assumption is not met; however, this should not automatically lead to rejecting this model (Hartmann & Reinecke, 2013). In accordance with the assumptions in the literature, the model values in this study were reported, along with the reference provided here. Given the available resources, the present study has narrowed the analysis of image transfers to the investigation of two dimensions (functional and social) and two actors. Based on the findings and the purely descriptive comparison of the models, it can be assumed that there is minimal difference in the influence of each of the individual actors' evaluation on the evaluation of the respective organisation. In future research, a comparative analysis of both actors within one model (experiment) with a common control group would allow for capturing precisely the potential differences of hierarchical low and high organisational members in image transfer.

It is further recommended that future research attempt to replicate the current design, with consideration given to the inclusion of a wider range of organisational members from diverse hierarchical levels, representing different genders, various types of organisations across different industries, and a range of development levels. A fruitful avenue for future research could be to expand the present investigation in accordance with the underlying image transfer model to examine the role of the actors in terms of negative valence, furthermore, taking into account the third dimension of the model. A supplementary step that could be taken is to perform a comparative analysis between inside-out transfer and outside-in transfer within one experiment for all dimensions and different valences. This could provide a significant extension of the theoretical state of knowledge. All these avenues underscore the relevance of furthering

the study of image transfer in personalised organisational communication by comparing how different actors shape different stakeholders' perceptions of the organisation.

Conclusion

The central objective of this thesis was to analyse the role of the CEO and employees in organisational image transfers. Drawing upon the *Dual Process Model of Image Transfer* and prior research on personalised communication, the study confirmed that personalised and polyphonic organisational communication, and more precisely these roles, influenced stakeholder perception of the organisation (e.g., Hagelstein, 2023; Caspers, 2019). The study addressed the demands articulated in preceding research, which called for considering high-ranking members, such as the CEO, in a positive context and integrating all members, including low-ranking ones, in the analysis of image transfer. The study makes a significant contribution to image transfer research regarding employees, an area that is currently limited in both scope and depth (Scheidt et al., 2018; Hagelstein, 2023; Johann et al., 2025). At the heart of the analysis lies the insight that the image of the organisation is inextricably linked to the perceptions of its members, both high- and low-ranking.

These image transfer effects highlight the importance for organisations and academia to acknowledge the influence and strength of this phenomenon, as well as the potential threat posed by the critical role of the CEO and employees in shaping stakeholders' perceptions of the organisation. Overall, this thesis provides an understanding of the important role of CEOs and employees in shaping stakeholder perception of the organisation, highlighting the significance of strategic organisational communication. The insights gained into these role dynamics and the increasing development of polyphony in the context of organisations suggest that the importance of individual roles in image transfer could continue to increase in the future. In this sense, the present work provides a valuable starting point for further research and should also be considered outside of academia in the practice of organisational communication.

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Abstract

This study analyses the role of chief executive officers (CEOs) and employees in shaping stakeholder perceptions of organisations. Drawing upon the Dual Process Model of Image Transfer, the study constitutes a conceptual replication of Hagelstein's (2023) work and aims to examine image transfers in organisational communication, characterised by multiple voices. At the core of this lies the notion that there is a close link between stakeholders' perceptions of individual actors and the organisation's overall perception. An online experiment was conducted in which participants ($N = 313$) were exposed to stimuli (articles/posts) thematising a CEO or an employee, examining differences in the affective evaluations, as well as the cognitive judgments. The structural equation models demonstrate that the affective evaluation of the individual (CEO/employee) has a positive and direct effect on the affective evaluation of the organisation. The results further illuminate that the judgement of the individual (i.e. the CEO/employee) in social and functional dimensions has a similar effect on the judgement of the organisation in the respective dimensions. This study offers a nuanced perspective on the phenomenon of image transfers in organisational communication, underscoring the pivotal role of individual actors in shaping the organisation's perception, highlighting that one of the most significant assets influencing the organisation's image is embedded within the organisation itself.

Abstract (German)

Diese Studie analysiert die Rolle von CEOs und Mitarbeitenden in der Gestaltung der Wahrnehmung von Organisationen durch Stakeholder. Basierend auf dem dualen Imagetransfermodell zielt die Studie, als eine konzeptionelle Replikation der Arbeit von Hagelstein (2023) darauf ab, Imagetransfers in der mehrstimmigen Organisationskommunikation zu untersuchen. Ausgangspunkt ist dabei die Annahme eines starken Zusammenhangs zwischen der Wahrnehmung einzelner Akteure durch die Stakeholder und deren Gesamtwahrnehmung der Organisation. Im Rahmen eines Online-Experiments wurden den Teilnehmer*innen (N = 313) Stimuli (Artikel/Beiträge) präsentiert, die einen CEO oder einen Mitarbeiter thematisierten, wodurch Unterschiede in den affektiven Bewertungen sowie den kognitiven Beurteilungen untersucht wurden. Die Strukturgleichungsmodelle zeigen, dass die affektive Bewertung des individuellen Akteurs (CEO/Mitarbeiter) einen positiven und direkten Einfluss auf die affektive Bewertung der Organisation hat. Die Ergebnisse verdeutlichen darüber hinaus, dass die Beurteilung des individuellen Akteurs (CEO/Mitarbeiter) in sozialer und fachlicher Dimension einen ähnlichen Einfluss auf die Beurteilung der Organisation in den jeweiligen Dimensionen hat. Diese Studie bietet eine differenzierte Perspektive auf das Phänomen des Imagetransfers in der Organisationskommunikation und unterstreicht die zentrale Rolle einzelner Akteure bei der Gestaltung der Wahrnehmung der Organisation, wobei hervorgehoben wird, dass einer der wichtigsten Faktoren, die das Image der Organisation beeinflussen, in der Organisation selbst verankert ist.

Appendix

AI-Disclosure

Tool	Purpose	Applied in Chapters
GPT-4.1 (AI)	Wording check and structure of sentences	Full study
Grammarly	Wording Check	Full study
Research Rabbit	Paper Collection	Full study
DeepL Translate DeepL Write	Translation of study materials and wording check	Full study

Tables

Table 1

Sociodemographic Characteristics

Variable	Category	n	Percent
Gender	Female	157	50.2
Gender	Male	156	49.8
Age	18–30 years	61	19.5
Age	31–49 years	128	40.9
Age	50–65 years	124	39.6
Educational background	Lower secondary education	65	20.8
Educational background	Intermediate secondary education	106	33.9
Educational background	Higher education entrance qualification	142	45.4

Note. n = Number of respondents per category. Percentages are based on valid cases. Total

N = 313

Table 2*Statistical information on the measurement model (CEO)*

Construct/Indicators	<i>SL</i>	<i>α</i>
Cognitive judgement of CEO in functional dimension (expertise)		.95
not an expert—expert	.84	
inexperienced—experienced	.93	
unknowledgeable—knowledgeable	.87	
unqualified—qualified	.93	
unskilled—skilled	.91	
Cognitive judgement of CEO in social dimension (trustworthiness)		.95
undependable—dependable	.84	
dishonest—honest	.89	
unreliable—reliable	.89	
insincere—sincere	.91	
untrustworthy—trustworthy	.92	
Cognitive judgement of organisation in functional dimension (expertise)		.97
not an expert—expert	.91	
inexperienced—experienced	.93	
unknowledgeable—knowledgeable	.91	
unqualified—qualified	.92	
unskilled—skilled	.96	
Cognitive judgement of organisation in social dimension (trustworthiness)		.96

Construct/Indicators	<i>SL</i>	<i>α</i>
undependable—dependable	.91	
dishonest—honest	.89	
unreliable—reliable	.87	
insincere—sincere	.94	
untrustworthy—trustworthy	.94	

Note. *SL* = standardised loadings, *α* = Cronbach's Alpha; all standardised loadings are significant at $p < .001$.

Table 3

Statistical information on the measurement model (Employee)

Construct/Indicators	<i>SL</i>	<i>α</i>
Cognitive judgement of employee in functional dimension (expertise)		.96
not an expert—expert	.89	
inexperienced—experienced	.91	
unknowledgeable—knowledgeable	.93	
unqualified—qualified	.94	
unskilled—skilled	.92	
Cognitive judgement of employee in social dimension (trustworthiness)		.96
undependable—dependable	.86	
dishonest—honest	.90	
unreliable—reliable	.93	
insincere—sincere	.90	
untrustworthy—trustworthy	.90	

Construct/Indicators	<i>SL</i>	<i>α</i>
Cognitive judgement of organisation in functional dimension (expertise)		.95
not an expert—expert	.91	
inexperienced—experienced	.88	
unknowledgeable—knowledgeable	.83	
unqualified—qualified	.92	
unskilled—skilled	.94	
Cognitive judgement of organisation in social dimension (trustworthiness)		.96
undependable—dependable	.94	
dishonest—honest	.89	
unreliable—reliable	.94	
insincere—sincere	.86	
untrustworthy—trustworthy	.93	

Note. *SL* = standardised loadings, α = Cronbach's Alpha; all standardised loadings are significant at $p < .001$.

Study Materials

Porträt-Stimuli

Stimulus (CEO x Fachliche Kompetenzen)

Gesichter der Wirtschaft: Andreas Schneider – renommierter Fachmann der Getränkeindustrie

In unserer heutigen Ausgabe stellen wir Andreas Schneider (50) vor, CEO der Eckes-Granini Group in Nieder-Olm. Mit einem Studienabschluss als Jahrgangsbester, einer Promotion summa cum laude und über 25 Jahren Berufserfahrung in der Lebensmittelindustrie gilt Andreas Schneider als einer der führenden Experten der Branche. Das Rezept für seinen Erfolg fasst Andreas Schneider so zusammen: „Ich arbeite präzise und tauche gerne tief in komplexe Themenfelder ein.“ Dabei betont er, wie wichtig ein tiefes Branchenverständnis und eine klare Vision für die Zukunft der Getränkeindustrie sind. Durch seine Arbeit konnte sich das Unternehmen im vergangenen Jahr den renommierten 'World Beverage Innovation Award' sichern. Mehr dazu im Portrait.

(Bild: Model vor Laptop an einem Tisch sitzend)

(Bildunterschrift:)

Andreas Schneider bei der Arbeit. Seine Mitarbeitenden beschreiben ihn als „sehr erfahren und kompetent“. Sie schätzen seine fachliche Expertise und loben seine Fähigkeit, „komplexe Probleme durch innovative Ansätze zu lösen“.

Stimulus (CEO x Soziale Kompetenzen)

Gesichter der Wirtschaft: Andreas Schneider – prinzipienstarke Kraft der Getränkeindustrie

In unserer heutigen Ausgabe stellen wir Andreas Schneider (50) vor, CEO der Eckes-Granini Group in Nieder-Olm. Er prägt die Unternehmenskultur und hat sich durch seine zuverlässige und ehrliche Art einen ausgezeichneten Namen gemacht. „Für mich steht der Mensch im

Mittelpunkt – ein offenes Ohr für jeden, auch bei sensiblen Angelegenheiten, und eine ehrliche Kommunikation sind das Erfolgsrezept für gute, vertrauensvolle Personalführung“, sagt Andreas Schneider. Kürzlich wurde er mit dem renommierten „German Leadership Award“ ausgezeichnet – eine Ehrung, die sein Engagement für ein *wertschätzendes Arbeitsumfeld und Miteinander* würdigt. Mehr dazu im Portrait.

(Bild: Model mit anderen Personen an einem Tisch sitzend)

(Bildunterschrift:)

Andreas Schneider im Gespräch mit Mitarbeitenden aus verschiedenen Abteilungen. Seine Mitarbeitenden beschreiben ihn als „den Inbegriff von Verlässlichkeit und Integrität - jemand, der stets für die Unternehmenswerte einsteht und verbindlich danach handelt“.

Stimulus (*Mitarbeiter x Fachliche Kompetenzen*)

Gesichter der Wirtschaft: Matthias Wagner – renommierter Fachmann der Getränkeindustrie

In unserer heutigen Ausgabe stellen wir Matthias Wagner (50) vor, Mitarbeiter der Forschungs- und Entwicklungsabteilung der Eckes-Granini Group in Nieder-Olm. Mit einem Studienabschluss als Jahrgangsbester, einer Promotion summa cum laude und über 25 Jahren Berufserfahrung in der Lebensmittelindustrie gilt Matthias Wagner als einer der führenden Experten der Branche. Das Rezept für seinen Erfolg fasst Matthias Wagner so zusammen: „Ich arbeite präzise und tauche gerne tief in komplexe Themenfelder ein“. Dabei betont er, wie wichtig ein tiefes Branchenverständnis und eine klare Vision für die Zukunft der Getränkeindustrie sind. Durch seine Arbeit konnte sich das Unternehmen im vergangenen Jahr den renommierten „World Beverage Innovation Award“ sicher. Mehr dazu im Portrait.

(Bild: Model vor Laptop an einem Tisch sitzend)

(Bildunterschrift:)

Matthias Wagner bei der Arbeit. Seine Kollegen beschreiben ihn als „sehr erfahren und kompetent“. Sie schätzen seine fachliche Expertise und loben seine Fähigkeit, „komplexe Probleme durch innovative Ansätze zu lösen“.

Stimulus (Mitarbeiter x Soziale Kompetenzen)

Gesichter der Wirtschaft: Matthias Wagner – prinzipienstarke Kraft der Getränkeindustrie

In unserer heutigen Ausgabe stellen wir Matthias Wagner (50) vor, Mitarbeiter des Bereichs Diversity in der Personalabteilung der Eckes-Granini Group in Nieder-Olm. Er prägt die Unternehmenskultur und hat sich durch seine zuverlässige und aufrichtige Art einen ausgezeichneten Namen gemacht. „Für mich steht der Mensch im Mittelpunkt – ein offenes Ohr für jeden auch bei sensiblen Angelegenheiten und eine ehrliche Kommunikation sind das Erfolgsrezept für gute, vertrauensvolle Personalführung“ sagt Matthias Wagner. Kürzlich wurde er mit dem renommierten „HR Excellence Award“ im Bereich „Diversity und Inclusion“ ausgezeichnet – eine Ehrung, die sein Engagement für ein wertschätzendes Miteinander und Vielfalt würdigt. Mehr dazu im Portrait.

(Bild: Model mit anderen Personen an einem Tisch sitzend)

(Bildunterschrift:)

Matthias Wagner mit Kollegen aus verschiedenen Abteilungen. Seine Kollegen beschreiben ihn als „den Inbegriff von Verlässlichkeit und Integrität - jemand, der stets für die Unternehmenswerte einsteht und verbindlich danach handelt“.

Kontrollgruppe (*CEO*)

Business Faces Monitor 2025

Im Handelsblatt Business Faces Monitor stellen wir Ihnen regelmäßig Fach- und Führungskräfte aus verschiedenen Branchen und Tätigkeitsfeldern vor. Wir schauen uns an:

Wo kommen sie her, welche Rolle haben sie im Unternehmen und was sind ihre Ziele und Ambitionen? In dieser Ausgabe: Andreas Schneider (50), CEO der Eckes-Granini Group.

(Bild: Model vor unscharfem Hintergrund mit neutralem Gesichtsausdruck)

(Bildunterschrift:)

Andreas Schneider stammt aus dem Rhein-Main-Gebiet, ist 50 Jahre alt und arbeitet in der Konzernzentrale der Eckes-Granini Group in Nieder-Olm. Zuvor war er in verschiedenen Unternehmen der Lebensmittelindustrie tätig. Mehr zu Andreas Schneider und seinem beruflichen Alltag lesen Sie in der aktuellen Ausgabe.

Kontrollgruppe (*Mitarbeiter*)

Business Faces Monitor 2025

Im Handelsblatt Business Faces Monitor stellen wir Ihnen regelmäßig Fach- und Führungskräfte aus verschiedenen Branchen und Tätigkeitsfeldern vor. Wir schauen uns an: Wo kommen sie her, welche Rolle haben sie im Unternehmen und was sind ihre Ziele und Ambitionen? In dieser Ausgabe: Matthias Wagner (50), Mitarbeiter der Eckes-Granini Group.

(Bild: Model vor unscharfem Hintergrund mit neutralem Gesichtsausdruck)

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Matthias Wagner stammt aus dem Rhein-Main-Gebiet, ist 50 Jahre alt und arbeitet in der Konzernzentrale der Eckes-Granini Group in Nieder-Olm. Zuvor war er in verschiedenen Unternehmen der Lebensmittelindustrie tätig. Mehr zu Matthias Wagner und seinem beruflichen Alltag lesen Sie in der aktuellen Ausgabe.

Fillerstimulus:

Es wurde außerdem ein Fillerstimulus verwendet: Ein Artikel aus dem Handelsblatt (zu Fürstenberg, 2024) über einen bekannten CEO wurde unverändert belassen, lediglich die Werbung, sowie der Autor wurden entfernt und das Datum wie zuvor beschrieben angepasst.

Paarungs-Stimuli

Stimulus (*CEO x Organisation*)

Herzlich Willkommen bei Fruchtquell!

Wir freuen uns überaus, Andreas Schneider am 1. Juli als neuen Fruchtquell CEO in Ravensburg begrüßen zu dürfen. Zuvor war er bei der Eckes-Granini Group in Nieder-Olm tätig. Das Handelsblatt hat bereits mehrfach über ihn berichtet. Eleonore Stoll, Leiterin der Personalabteilung, sagt: „Mit Andreas Schneider gewinnen wir eine erfahrene Führungskraft, die unser Unternehmen bereichern wird.“ Mehr über Andreas Schneider und seine Rolle hier bei Fruchtquell erfahrt ihr in unserem Interview. Willkommen an Bord!

(Bild: Model vor unscharfem Hintergrund mit lächelndem Gesichtsausdruck)

Stimulus (*Mitarbeiter x Organisation*)

Herzlich Willkommen bei Fruchtquell!

Wir freuen uns überaus, Matthias Wagner am 1. Juli als neues Mitglied in der Fruchtquell-Familie in Ravensburg begrüßen zu dürfen. Zuvor war er bei der Eckes-Granini Group in Nieder-Olm tätig. Das Handelsblatt hat bereits mehrfach über ihn berichtet. Eleonore Stoll, Leiterin der Personalabteilung, sagt: „Mit Matthias Wagner gewinnen wir einen erfahrenen Kollegen, der unser Team bereichern wird.“ Mehr über Matthias Wagner und seine Rolle hier bei Fruchtquell erfahrt ihr in unserem Interview. Willkommen an Bord!

(Bild: Model vor unscharfem Hintergrund mit lächelndem Gesichtsausdruck)

Demografische Informationen:

- Geben Sie bitte Ihr Geschlecht an: *Männlich, Weiblich, Divers*
- Was ist Ihr höchster erreichter Bildungsabschluss? *Kein Schulabschluss, Haupt- oder Volksschulabschluss, Mittlerer Abschluss, Fachhochschulreife- oder Hochschulreife*

- Wie alt sind Sie? *17 Jahre alt oder jünger, 18 bis 30 Jahre alt, 31 bis 49 Jahre alt, 50 bis 65 Jahre alt, 66 Jahre alt oder älter*

Messung nach jedem Stimulus:

Affektive Bewertung des Akteurs:

Bitte bewerten Sie den Akteur aus dem Ausschnitt des Artikels mithilfe des Schiebereglers. Denken Sie nicht zu viel darüber nach und bewegen Sie den Schieberegler, um auszudrücken, wie Sie den Akteur tatsächlich empfunden haben. Es gibt keine richtigen oder falschen Antworten.

Affektive Bewertung der Organisation:

Bitte bewerten Sie die Organisation aus dem Ausschnitt des Blogbeitrages mithilfe des Schiebereglers. Denken Sie nicht zu viel darüber nach und bewegen Sie den Schieberegler, um auszudrücken, wie Sie die Organisation tatsächlich empfunden haben. Es gibt keine richtigen oder falschen Antworten.

Beantwortet mit Affective Slider, leicht angepasst (Betella & Verschure, 2016). Das Instrument bedient sich eines Schiebereglers, an dessen Enden sich stilisierte Gesichtsausdrücke (glücklich und unglücklich) befinden, wobei die Anzahl der verfügbaren Platzierungsmöglichkeiten des Reglers in dieser Studie auf sieben begrenzt wurde. Weitere Details befinden sich im Kapitel Methodik.

Kognitive Beurteilung des Akteurs:

Herzlichen Dank für Ihre Einschätzung zu Künstlicher Intelligenz. Im Folgenden werden Sie gebeten, verschiedene Beiträge zu lesen und zu bewerten. Bitte lesen Sie den folgenden Ausschnitt des Artikels einschließlich aller Überschriften und der Bildunterschrift sorgfältig

durch. Versuchen Sie, sich anhand der bereitgestellten Informationen einen genauen Eindruck von der beschriebenen Person zu bilden. Versuchen Sie nicht, die Entstehungsweise des Textes zu identifizieren, da dies hier keine Rolle spielt. Beantworten Sie anschließend die Fragen.

Im Folgenden sehen Sie 5 Gegensatzpaare. Sie werden nun gebeten, den Akteur aus dem Artikel mithilfe dieser Gegensatzpaare zu beurteilen. Es gibt keine richtigen oder falschen Antworten. Wir interessieren uns für Ihren persönlichen Eindruck.

laienhaft–fachmännisch

unerfahren–erfahren

unkundig–bewandert

unqualifiziert–qualifiziert

ungelernt–sachkundig

Im Folgenden sehen Sie 5 Gegensatzpaare. Sie werden nun gebeten, den Akteur aus dem Artikel mithilfe dieser Gegensatzpaare zu beurteilen. Es gibt keine richtigen oder falschen Antworten. Wir interessieren uns für Ihren persönlichen Eindruck.

unzuverlässig–zuverlässig

unehrlich–ehrlich

unsicher–verlässlich

unaufrichtig–aufrichtig

unseriös–vertrauenswürdig

Kognitive Beurteilung der Organisation:

Bitte lesen Sie den folgenden Ausschnitt des Blogbeitrages einschließlich aller Überschriften und der Bildunterschrift sorgfältig durch. Versuchen Sie, sich anhand der bereitgestellten Informationen einen genauen Eindruck von der beschriebenen Organisation zu bilden. Versuchen Sie nicht, die Entstehungsweise des Textes zu identifizieren, da dies hier keine Rolle spielt. Beantworten Sie anschließend die Fragen.

Im Folgenden sehen Sie 5 Gegensatzpaare. Sie werden nun gebeten, die Organisation aus dem Blogbeitrag mithilfe dieser Gegensatzpaare zu beurteilen. Es gibt keine richtigen oder falschen Antworten. Wir interessieren uns für Ihren persönlichen Eindruck.

laienhaft–fachmännisch

unerfahren–erfahren

unkundig–bewandert

unqualifiziert–qualifiziert

ungelernt–sachkundig

Im Folgenden sehen Sie 5 Gegensatzpaare. Sie werden nun gebeten, die Organisation aus dem Blogbeitrag mithilfe dieser Gegensatzpaare zu beurteilen. Es gibt keine richtigen oder falschen Antworten. Wir interessieren uns für Ihren persönlichen Eindruck.

unzuverlässig–zuverlässig

unehrlich–ehrlich

unsicher–verlässlich

unaufrichtig–aufrichtig

unseriös–vertrauenswürdig

Die Beurteilung der Akteure/Organisationen in fachlicher und sozialer Dimension basiert nach Hagelstein (2023) auf zehn Items aus Ohanian's (1990, p.47) Source Credibility Scale. Weitere Details finden sich im Kapitel Methodik.

Cover Story:

Haltung der Teilnehmer gegenüber KI (Gnambs et al., 2025):

Wir möchten gerne Ihre Meinung zu Künstlicher Intelligenz erfahren. Künstliche Intelligenz bezeichnet Technologien, die Aufgaben ausführen können, die normalerweise menschliche Intelligenz erfordern. Sie ermöglicht es Maschinen, die Umwelt selbstständig wahrzunehmen, zu handeln und sich anzupassen. Künstliche Intelligenz kann Teil eines Computerprogramms oder einer Online-Anwendung sein, aber auch in verschiedenen Maschinen wie Robotern vorkommen. Eingesetzt werden kann sie u. a. am Arbeitsplatz, in der Medizin und Krankenpflege sowie im Studium als auch in der Aus- und Weiterbildung.

Bitte geben Sie für jede Aussage an, inwieweit Sie dieser zustimmen. Es gibt dabei keine richtigen oder falschen Antworten.

- Künstliche Intelligenz ist eine wertvolle Hilfe für viele berufliche Tätigkeiten
- Ich habe ein gutes Gefühl, wenn ich darüber nachdenke, wie Künstliche Intelligenz im Arbeitsleben eingesetzt wird.
- Wenn ich eine wichtige Aufgabe bei der Arbeit erledigen müsste, würde ich eher eine Technologie mit Künstlicher Intelligenz wählen als eine ohne.

Um die Glaubwürdigkeit der Cover Story zu gewährleisten, wurden die Haltungen der Teilnehmer in Bezug auf KI mithilfe der leicht angepassten ATTARI-WHE Scale (Gnambs et al., 2025, p.8) gemessen.

Wahrnehmung computergenerierter Nachrichten durch die Teilnehmer (Gräfe et al., 2018)

Bitte bewerten Sie den gerade gelesenen Artikel/Blogbeitrag anhand der unten angegebenen Begriffe. Entscheiden Sie für jedes Adjektiv, wie sehr Sie diesem in Bezug auf den Text zustimmen. Mit der Skala können Sie ihre Antwort abstufen.

unterhaltsam

interessant

gut geschrieben

schlüssig

prägnant

verständlich

Die Wahrnehmung der Inhalte wird zusätzlich anhand der von Gräfe und Kollegen (2018, p. 601) in ihrer Studie verwendeten Messgrößen zur Bewertung der Wahrnehmung computergenerierter Nachrichten durch die Teilnehmer gemessen, welche leicht angepasst wurden. Für die Cover Story wurde in beiden Fällen eine 7-stufige Skala verwendet.

Study Materials (English)

Portrait Stimuli

Stimulus (CEO x Functional competence)

Faces of the Economy: Andreas Schneider – renowned expert in the beverage industry

In today's edition, we introduce Andreas Schneider (50), CEO of the Eckes-Granini Group in Nieder-Olm. With a degree as the best in his class, a doctorate summa cum laude and over 25 years of professional experience in the beverage industry, Andreas Schneider is considered one of the leading experts in the sector. Andreas Schneider summarises the recipe for his success as follows: 'I work precisely and enjoy delving deeply into complex topics.' He emphasises the importance of a deep understanding of the industry and a clear vision for the future of the beverage industry. Thanks to his work, the company won the prestigious "World Beverage Innovation Award" last year. Read more in the portrait.

(Image: Model sitting at a table in front of a laptop)

(Caption:)

Andreas Schneider at work. His colleagues describe him as 'very experienced and competent'. They value his functional expertise and praise his ability to 'solve complex problems through innovative approaches'.

Stimulus (CEO x Social Competence)

Faces of the Economy: Andreas Schneider – a principled force in the beverage industry

In today's edition, we introduce Andreas Schneider (50), CEO of the Eckes-Granini Group in Nieder-Olm. He shapes the corporate culture and has made an excellent name for himself

through his dependable and honest manner. ‘For me, people are the focus – listening to everyone, even when it comes to sensitive issues, and communicating honestly are the recipe for success for good, trustworthy personnel management,’ says Andreas Schneider. He was recently awarded the prestigious German Leadership Award – an honour that recognises his commitment to an *appreciative working environment and cooperation*. Read more in the portrait.

(Image: Model sitting at a table with other people)

(Caption:)

Andreas Schneider in conversation with employees from various departments. His employees describe him as ‘the epitome of reliability and integrity – someone who always stands up for the company's values and acts in accordance with them’.

Stimulus (*Employees x Functional Competence*)

Faces of the economy: Matthias Wagner – renowned expert in the beverage industry

In today's edition, we introduce Matthias Wagner (50), an employee in the research and development department of the Eckes-Granini Group in Nieder-Olm. With a degree as the best in his class, a doctorate summa cum laude and over 25 years of professional experience in the beverage industry, Matthias Wagner is considered one of the leading experts in the sector. Matthias Wagner summarises the recipe for his success as follows: ‘I work precisely and enjoy delving deeply into complex topics.’ He emphasises the importance of a deep understanding of the industry and a clear vision for the future of the beverage industry. Thanks to his work, the company won the prestigious ‘World Beverage Innovation Award’ last year. Read more in the portrait.

(Image: Model sitting at a table in front of a laptop)

(Caption:)

Matthias Wagner at work. His colleagues describe him as ‘very experienced and competent’. They value his functional expertise and praise his ability to ‘solve complex problems through innovative approaches’.

Stimulus (*Employee x Social Competence*)

Faces of the economy: Matthias Wagner – a principled force in the beverage industry

In today's edition, we introduce Matthias Wagner (50), an employee in the Diversity department of the Eckes-Granini Group's Human Resources division in Nieder-Olm. He shapes the corporate culture and has made an excellent name for himself through his dependable and honest manner. ‘For me, people are the focus – listening to everyone, even when it comes to sensitive issues, and communicating honestly are the recipe for success for good, trustworthy personnel management,’ says Matthias Wagner. He was recently awarded the prestigious ‘HR Excellence Award’ in the field of ‘Diversity and Inclusion’ – an honour that recognises his commitment to mutual respect and diversity. Read more in the portrait.

(Image: Model sitting at a table with other people)

(Caption:)

Matthias Wagner with colleagues from various departments. His colleagues describe him as ‘the epitome of reliability and integrity – someone who always stands up for the company's values and acts in accordance with them’.

Control group (*CEO*)

Business Faces Monitor 2025

In the Handelsblatt Business Faces Monitor, we regularly introduce you to specialists and executives from various industries and fields of activity. We take a look at where they come from, what role they play in the company and what their goals and ambitions are. In this issue: Andreas Schneider (50), CEO of the Eckes-Granini Group.

(Image: Model in front of a blurred background with a neutral expression)

(Caption:)

Andreas Schneider comes from the Rhine-Main area, is 50 years old and works at the Eckes-Granini Group headquarters in Nieder-Olm. He previously worked for various companies in the beverage industry. You can read more about Andreas Schneider and his everyday working life in the current issue.

Control group (*employees*)

Business Faces Monitor 2025

In the Handelsblatt Business Faces Monitor, we regularly introduce you to specialists and managers from various industries and fields of activity. We take a look at where they come from, what role they play in the company and what their goals and ambitions are. In this issue: Matthias Wagner (50), employee of the Eckes-Granini Group.

(Image: Model in front of a blurred background with a neutral facial expression)

(Caption:)

Matthias Wagner comes from the Rhine-Main area, is 50 years old and works at the Eckes-Granini Group headquarters in Nieder-Olm. He previously worked for various companies in

the beverage industry. Read more about Matthias Wagner and his everyday working life in the current issue.

Filler stimulus:

A filler stimulus was also used: an article from the Handelsblatt (on Fürstenberg, 2024) about a well-known CEO was left unchanged, with only the advertising and the author removed and the date adjusted as described above.

Pairing stimuli

Stimulus (*CEO x Organisation*)

Welcome to Fruchtquell!

We are delighted to welcome Andreas Schneider as the new CEO of Fruchtquell in Ravensburg on 1 July. He previously worked for the Eckes-Granini Group in Nieder-Olm. The Handelsblatt has already reported on him several times. Eleonore Stoll, Head of Human Resources, says: ‘With Andreas Schneider, we are gaining an experienced leader who will enrich our company.’ You can find out more about Andreas Schneider and his role here at Fruchtquell in our interview. Welcome aboard!

(Image: Model in front of a blurred background with a smiling facial expression)

Stimulus (*Employee x Organisation*)

Welcome to Fruchtquell!

We are delighted to welcome Matthias Wagner as a new member of the Fruchtquell family in Ravensburg on 1 July. He previously worked for the Eckes-Granini Group in Nieder-Olm. The Handelsblatt has reported on him several times. Eleonore Stoll, Head of Human Resources,

says: ‘With Matthias Wagner, we are gaining an experienced colleague who will enrich our team.’ You can find out more about Matthias Wagner and his role here at Fruchtkuell in our interview. Welcome aboard!

(Image: Model in front of a blurred background with a smiling facial expression)

Demographic information:

- What gender do you identify with? *Male, Female, Diverse*
- What is your highest level of education? *Lower secondary education, Intermediate secondary education, Higher education entrance qualification*
- How old are you? *17 years old or younger, 18 to 30 years old, 31 to 49 years old, 50 to 65 years old, 66 years old or older*

Measurement following each stimulus:

Affective evaluation of the actor:

Please evaluate the actor from the excerpt of the article using the slider. Don't think too much about it and move the slider to express how you actually felt about the actor. There are no right or wrong answers.

Affective evaluation of the organisation:

Please evaluate the organisation from the excerpt of the blog post using the slider. Don't think too much about it and move the slider to express how you actually felt about the organisation. There are no right or wrong answers.

Answered with Affective Slider, slightly adapted (Betella & Verschure, 2016). Further details can be found in the Methodology section.

Cognitive judgement of the actor (Ohanian, 1990, p. 47)

Thank you very much for your assessment of artificial intelligence. In the following, you will be asked to read and evaluate various articles. Please read the following excerpt from the article carefully, including all headings and captions. Try to form an accurate impression of the person described based on the information provided. Do not try to identify how the text was created, as this is irrelevant here. Then answer the questions.

Below you will see 5 pairs of opposites. You are now asked to evaluate the protagonist from the article using these pairs of opposites. There are no right or wrong answers. We are interested in your personal impression.

not an expert–expert

experienced–experienced

unknowledgeable–knowledgeable

unqualified–qualified

unskilled–skilled

Below you will see 5 pairs of opposites. You are now asked to assess the actor from the article using these pairs of opposites. There are no right or wrong answers. We are interested in your personal impression.

undependable–dependable

dishonest–honest

unreliable–reliable

insincere–sincere

untrustworthy–trustworthy

Cognitive judgment of the organisation:

Please read the following excerpt from the blog post carefully, including all headings and captions. Try to form an accurate impression of the organisation described based on the information provided. Do not try to identify how the text was created, as this is irrelevant here. Then answer the questions.

Below you will see 5 pairs of opposites. You are now asked to assess the organisation from the blog post using these pairs of opposites. There are no right or wrong answers. We are interested in your personal impression.

not an expert–expert

experienced–experienced

unknowledgeable–knowledgeable

unqualified–qualified

unskilled–skilled

Below you will see 5 pairs of opposites. You are now asked to evaluate the organisation from the blog post using these pairs of opposites. There are no right or wrong answers. We are interested in your personal impression.

undependable–dependable

dishonest–honest

unreliable–reliable

insincere–sincere

untrustworthy–trustworthy

The judgement of the actors/organisation in terms of functional and social dimensions is, following Hagelstein (2023), based on ten items from Ohanian's (1990, p.47) Source Credibility Scale. Further details can be found in the method section.

Cover story:

Attitudes of participants towards AI (Gnambs et al., 2025, p. 8):

We would like to hear your opinion on artificial intelligence. Artificial intelligence refers to technologies that can perform tasks that normally require human intelligence. It enables machines to perceive their environment independently, act and adapt. Artificial intelligence can be part of a computer programme or an online application, but it can also be found in various machines such as robots. It can be used in the workplace, in medicine and nursing, in higher education, and in training and further education, among other areas.

For each statement, please indicate the extent to which you agree with it. There are no right or wrong answers.

- Artificial intelligence offers good solutions for many job tasks.
- I have a good feeling when I think about the use of artificial intelligence in daily working life.

- If I had to complete an important task at work, I would rather choose a technology with artificial intelligence than one without.

In order to maintain the credibility of the cover story, the attitudes of the participants in regards to AI were measured using the ATTARI-WHE scale (Gnambs et al., 2025), which was slightly adapted.

Participants' perceptions of computer-generated news (Gräfe et al., 2018)

Please rate the article/blog post you have just read using the terms below. For each adjective, decide how much you agree with it in relation to the text. You can use the scale to grade your answer.

Entertaining

Interesting

Well written

Coherent

Concise

Comprehensive

The perception of the content is additionally measured according to the measures used by Gräfe and colleagues in their study to assess participants' perceptions of computer-generated news, which was slightly adjusted (Gräfe et al., 2018, p.601). For the cover story, a 7-point scale was used in both cases.