Winning the War for Talent

A study on employer branding from a corporate communication perspective

PhD dissertation

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION
1 – Introduction

Over the past decades, drastic changes in the business landscape have transformed the supply and demand of talent on a global scale because of technological advancements, the globalisation of markets, changing demographic trends, and changes in the needs and expectations of customers and other stakeholders (Oxford Economics, 2012). The changing demographic has created a profound challenge for companies that seek to replace a large pool of retiring employees with a young, significantly different (Napoli & Ewing, 2000; Krahn & Galambos, 2014) pool of applicants. To navigate the intensifying global talent shortage, companies are developing extensive strategies to retain and attract current and prospective employees (ManPower Group, 2014; 2016; Theurer et al., 2016). Recruitment agencies have underlined the urgency of this situation time and again in press releases and human resources reports, projecting that in 2016, as in previous years, approximately 40 per cent of employers reported having difficulty filling positions on a global level due to “lack of available talent” (ManPower Group, 2016). Understanding the differences in job-search-related attitudes and behaviours between succeeding generations is of key importance for organisations if they are to develop appropriate talent-attraction strategies.

One solution is to differentiate the company from its competitors and gain competitive advantage on the labour market by applying marketing techniques to human resources management, thus developing employer branding strategies (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). Employer branding is a multidisciplinary concept. It emerged first as an alignment between marketing and human resources management (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Edwards, 2010), but is now a subject of discussion in the academic literature of several different disciplines including marketing, human resources, and communication (Edlinger, 2015). The potential of employer branding to bring companies significant competitive advantage was suggested as early as 2001, in a report published by the Conference Board. Since then the topic has gained increasing attention, both in the practitioner (e.g. Stamler, 2001; Carr, 2006; Øksenbjerg, 2009; Yang, 2015) and academic literature (e.g. Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Edwards, 2010; Aggerholm et al, 2011; Xie et al. 2015).

The demands and expectations of current and prospective employees, especially the young generation, have also changed significantly. The new generation of employees attach more importance to work–life balance (Crumpacker & Crumpacker, 2007; Bissola & Imperatory, 2013) and are looking for instant gratification and a feeling of importance (Maxwell & Broadbridge, 2014), making them “high maintenance” (Shaw & Fairhurst, 2008) when it comes to recruitment
and retention. Businesses have also taken a step towards developing better relationships with their now more aware stakeholders (Johansen & Nielsen, 2011) by expanding their responsibility past the profit margin (Carol, 1999; Kakabadse et al., 2005). Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become a way for companies to meet the demands and expectations of their stakeholders, including current and prospective employees (Kakabadse, 2005), and to gain competitive advantage (Porter & Kramer, 2011) by establishing trust and creating shared value. Corporate sustainability activities strengthen a company’s reputation both internally and externally (Tkalac Verčič, 2017). When used to recruit, retain and motivate employees, CSR contributes to the development of employer branding strategies (Suliman & Al-Khatib, 2014). From a communication perspective too, CSR has become an integrating aspect of employer branding practices (Aggerholm et al. 2011; Andersen et al., 2013): the main purpose here is the establishment of sustainable relationships.

Looking at employer branding from a communication perspective, the inclusion of CSR discourse in the corporate context and the changes in work-related behaviours of the newest generation on the job market (Bissola & Imperatori, 2013) drove the concept of employer branding to develop from a linear view of communication as a transmission model (in e.g. Ambler & Barrow, 1996) to a complex concept focused on the sustainable relationship between the organisation and its stakeholders (Aggerholm et al., 2011).

Employer branding is thus a multidisciplinary phenomenon. Employer branding research has been conducted in a range of fields and disciplines including human resources management (e.g. Sullivan, 2002; App et al., 2012; Edlinger, 2015), marketing (e.g. Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Edwards, 2010; Foster et al., 2010), and communication (Aggerholm et al., 2011; Andersen et al., 2013), so that achieving an overview of the various contributions to the field is quite challenging (Theurer, 2016). There is a substantial supporting literature in the organisational behaviour field on attracting and recruiting talent (e.g. Cable & Yu, 2006; Cable et al., 2000; Cable & Graham, 2000; Cable & Turban, 2003) and in the marketing field on corporate image, identity and reputation (e.g. Foster et al., 2010; Martin et al., 2011; Abratt & Klein, 2012; Van Hoye et al., 2013). The multidisciplinarity of employer branding also brings challenges in its management in organisations. As each of the main component disciplines – marketing, human resources management and communication – is in practice managed by a separate function, employer brand managers struggle to define and defend their role in companies. Responsibility for employer brand management is usually assigned to the human resources department (Edlinger, 2015), but implementing this function entails working across different areas such as public relations, marketing (Martin et al.,
2005) and CSR (Aggerholm et al, 2011). Employer brand management therefore requires complex integration on several levels both within and across organisational boundaries.

In the light of the above, several general questions still remain unanswered. How is employer branding practised in organisations? How are the different disciplines integrated within employer branding, and how do managers integrate them in organisations? How is CSR influencing the evolution of the employer branding concept within organisations? Are different generations attracted to different features of organisations, and should employer branding strategies be tailored to different target groups? This dissertation will address these broad questions and will attempt to theoretically and empirically explore the employer branding concept through analysis of how employer branding is practised in organisations.

In an organisational context, employer brand managers, like organisational actors, have to manage an interdepartmental and cross-functional task (Edlinger, 2015) even though they are most commonly situated in an HR department. Little research of either theoretical or empirical nature has been undertaken on the perspective of employer brand managers as organisational actors and on their practices (ibid.).

1.1 Research purpose and research questions

The research purpose of this dissertation is to explore and enhance the understanding of the employer branding concept holistically, both theoretically and empirically from a communication perspective. The aim is to understand employer branding practices in greater depth by taking both organisation and stakeholders into account in order to provide a more holistic picture. Therefore, the research objective is addressed by raising two research questions and three affiliated sub-questions which provide a frame for the research process:

RQ1: How is employer branding practised in an organisational context from a communication perspective?

- Sub-question 1: What is the role of CSR in influencing the evolution of the employer branding concept in organisations?
- Sub-question 2: How are the component elements of the employer branding discipline integrated in an organisational context, and how do employer brand managers define their role in relation to the integrated communication?
RQ2: What is the role of generations in employer branding?

- Is employer branding perceived differently by different generations?

The two main research questions represent a comprehensive frame for the dissertation, which consists of three independent papers and an overall integrating frame text. The main purpose of the frame text is to present the theoretical (Chapter 3) and methodological (Chapter 4) assumptions on which the dissertation is based, and to provide a synthesising discussion (Chapter 8) of the two main research questions and the contribution of this research project (Chapter 9). The three independent research papers (Chapters 5, 6 and 7) each have their own research objective, presented in the form of the three sub-questions. Each paper contributes different perspectives and insights to the overall purpose of the dissertation. Two of the papers (Paper I and Paper III) were submitted to two international peer-reviewed journals before the dissertation deadline, and the third (Paper II) will be submitted together with my co-author, Jana Kollat. The three papers are presented in Figure 1 which presents the overall structure of the dissertation and the interconnection between the two overarching research questions, the three sub-questions, and the three papers.

The dissertation is composed of two studies, a dominant qualitative study and a secondary quantitative study. The qualitative study discusses research question 1 and has generated two papers (Paper I and Paper II) corresponding to the two sub-questions affiliated to RQ1. The quantitative study generated one paper (Paper III) corresponding to the sub-question affiliated to RQ2.

The qualitative study, comprising Paper I and Paper II, provides an overview of employer branding practices from the perspective of employer brand managers. Its focus is on a communication approach, which distinguishes it from studies of employer branding from a marketing perspective (e.g. Ambler & Barrows, 1996; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Edwards, 2010) or an organisational behaviour perspective (e.g. Sullivan, 2002; App, 2012; Edlinger, 2015). On the other hand, the second study focuses on a very different stakeholder group: jobseekers or prospective employees. This study generated one paper (Paper III), “Are There Generational Differences in the Job Search Process?” The study provides empirical evidence in the area of intergenerational differences in the job-search process, exploring whether or not Generation Y exhibits behavioural differences from older generations in the job-search process. This study provides empirical evidence that informs the development of employer branding strategies.

The discussions chapter (Chapter 8) synthesises both the theoretical and empirical aspects of the three papers in order to respond to the main research questions. The dissertation concludes by
summarising the contributions of the three independent papers as well as the overall contributions of the dissertation and discussing possibilities for future research (Chapter 9)

Figure 1.1. – The structure of the dissertation
1.2 A reading guide

As the beginning of this reading guide, I call the reader’s attention to the fact that this is an article-based dissertation, meaning that it consists of three interrelated but independent research papers. This format has certain implications for the dissertation. First, the articles were written before the frame text. Some of the most recent literature discussed in the frame text therefore may not be discussed in the individual papers. Secondly, there are certain overlaps between the three papers and the frame text. These were impossible to avoid and are in fact necessary. These overlaps are especially visible in relation to the theoretical framework, which is the basis of the entire dissertation, with each of the papers exploring a particular part of the overall theoretical framework. Another overlap is visible in the methodology: Paper I (Chapter 5) and Paper II (Chapter 6) are part of the same study and are based on the same empirical material, which was analysed employing the same methods.

The structure of the dissertation follows the natural structure of the research process and consists of a frame text and three individual research papers. The frame text has two main parts: the meta-theoretical frame of the dissertation, and the discussions and conclusion. The three research papers represent the empirical part of the dissertation.

The meta-theoretical part comprises two chapters. Chapter 2 discusses the research paradigm and methodology that guided the entire research process; and Chapter 3 presents the theoretical framework of the dissertation, discussing in depth the main concepts on which the dissertation is focused, namely employer branding and corporate communication.

The empirical part comprises four chapters. Chapter 4 discusses the research design of the dissertation and the construction and analysis of the empirical material. The three chapters that follow are the individual research papers. The first of these, “Integrated communication and employer branding” (Chapter 5), discusses the employer brand manager’s perspective on integrating the various component disciplines of employer branding in practice, and how they define their role in relation to the integrated communication. The second paper, “Employer branding as interface between business and society” (Chapter 6), explores how employer branding has evolved within in organisations from a functionalistic to an integrative approach by examining the integration of corporate social responsibility into employer branding practices. The last of the three papers, “Are there generational differences in the job-search process?” (Chapter 7) provides
empirical evidence of behavioural differences in the job-search process between Generation Y and earlier generations. It argues for the implementation of tailored employer branding strategies.

In the last part of the dissertation (Chapter 8), the contributions of the three individual papers are discussed. The dissertation concludes (Chapter 9) by answering the two main research questions and mapping the direction of further research.

The three individual papers follow the author guidelines of the peer-reviews journals they were submitted to or the journal considered when writing the articles (Paper II has not yet been submitted to a peer-reviewed journal. However, a journal has been considered and the paper was written based on the author guidelines of this particular journal).
CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH PARADIGM AND METHODOLOGY
2 – Research paradigm and methodology

In this chapter, I will present and debate the research paradigm and methodology that gave direction to the research process, following Guba’s (1990) definition of a research paradigm as “a basic set of rules that guides action” (ibid., p. 7).

Employer branding is a multidisciplinary concept (as will be discussed in Chapter 2). By tradition, it combines marketing and human resources disciplines; this dissertation takes a communication perspective. The disciplines of marketing and human resources are often positioned within a positivist research paradigm, whereas corporate communication is traditionally studied within the constructivist research paradigm. In order to understand the employer branding concept better, I therefore position myself in this dissertation within the pragmatist paradigm. In allowing me to adopt elements of both positivist and constructivist approaches, the pragmatic paradigm allows me to explore the concept of employer branding holistically, and thus to escape the limitations that would follow from choosing either the positivist or the constructivist approach.

As with social constructivism, which encompasses several different positions (Weneberg, 2000), there is no single pragmatic philosophy. The pragmatic philosophy of science consists of different interpretations, some of which are in conflict, and is “notoriously slippery to define” (Festenstein, 2002, p. 551). The philosophical movement of pragmatism appeared in the late nineteenth century and was developed primarily by Charles Sanders Pierce, William James, John Dewey, and John Herbert Mead. Pragmatic philosophy rejects certain traditional beliefs regarding the nature of truth and knowledge and how these can be attained. Constructivism and positivism are centred around differing conceptions of reality: for constructivism, reality is subjective, for positivism, objective. Pragmatism is construed as a paradigm, substitutes a new way of thinking about the differences between the traditional constructivist and post-positivist approaches to research. Rather than treating these differences as a conceptual philosophical system, pragmatism sees the differences between the traditional paradigms as “a social context for inquiry as a form of social action” (Morgan, 2014, p. 1049). In pragmatism, James (1907) defines truth as something that “happens to an idea. It becomes true. It is made true by events. Its verity is in fact an event, a process, the process, namely, of its verifying itself, its verification” (ibid., p. 142). The reality of an object is provided by our experience of that object, and different realities can be true at the same time, as different people experience the same object differently. Pragmatics “recognise that there are many different ways of interpreting the world and undertaking research, that no single point of
view can ever give the entire picture and that there may be multiple realities” (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 144).

Classic pragmatism is not a methodology per se. It is a doctrine of meaning, a theory of truth. It rests on the argument that the meaning of an event cannot be given in advance of experience. The focus is on the consequences and meanings of an action or event in a social situation. This concern goes beyond any given methodology or any problem-solving activity (Denzin, 2012, p. 82).

One of the main assumptions of pragmatism is the practicality of what is real. For a pragmatist, research starts with a problem, and the task of research is to provide practical solutions that will inform future practice. Even operating within pragmatism’s highly practical approach, however, questions such as “why” or “how to” demand more than merely technical decisions about the methods that are to be employed.

Dewey (2013) elaborates on pragmatism, steering the discussion away from abstract philosophical concepts to focusing instead on human experience. Dewey gives a general definition of what is “pragmatic” as “the action of consequences as necessary tests of the validity of propositions, provided these consequences are operationally instituted and are such as to resolve the specific problem evoking the operation” (Dewey, 1938, pp. iii–iv, in Maxcy, 2003). His philosophy revolves around two inextricable essential questions: What are the sources of our beliefs? And what are the meanings of our actions? (Morgan, 2012). The answers to these two questions can be explained by a model (see Figure 2.1) showing that “the origins of our beliefs arise from our prior actions and the outcomes of our actions found in our beliefs” (ibid., p. 1046). The processes of interpretation that brings together the beliefs and actions are our experience. Experiences represent the actions linking individuals with their environment, the connection between mind and matter. Dewey distinguishes between habits and inquiry. When our previously acquired beliefs are sufficiently abundant to manage our requirement to act in the present circumstances, the experience becomes a habit. On the contrary, inquiry is a process of deliberate, thoughtful decision-making. As a common characteristic of all experiences, these are both historically and culturally situated and an emotional aspect, where feelings represent a bond between beliefs and actions and experiences are social in nature (Dewey, 2013). The world, in Dewey’s perception, encompasses both physical and social realities. It is therefore an error to attempt to separate the two.
Inquiry, as a type of experience, is a process that takes problematic beliefs and examines them carefully in an effort to resolve them through action (Morgan, 2012). This is an iterative decision-making process of questioning and answering “the likely outcomes of applying current beliefs to future actions” (ibid., p. 1047). Dewey’s account of inquiry involves a five-step iterative process that seeks a sense of resolution. The five steps, as articulated by Morgan (2012, p. 1047), are:

1. Recognising a situation as problematic
2. Considering the difference it makes to define the problem one way rather than another
3. Developing a possible line of action as a response to the problem
4. Evaluating potential actions in terms of their likely consequences
5. Taking actions that are felt to be likely to address the problematic situation.

In the mid-twentieth century, pragmatism took yet another turn and developed into what is known as neopragmatism (Maxcy, 2003). There were three strands: epistemological, meta-methodological, and methodological. Pragmatists rejected the idea that “unless a proposition originated or came from either the sensation or reflective thought about the relationship among ideas, it was in error” (Maxcy, 2003, p. 75). Epistemological neopragmatists such as Bernstein (1983) consider that “knowledge was constructed through the exercise of thought on experience, catalysed by doubt and a desire to seek some kind of resolution or closure to a problem” (Maxcy, 2003, p. 76). The meta-methodological neopragmatist position rejects the idea of a system or a
philosophy, which, it is argued, would be a hindrance to pragmatic understanding. Propositions, if they are to go beyond a simple theoretical assumption, must be linked to actions. And as actions are the materialisation of beliefs, exploring practical propositions becomes the quintessence of inquiry. Maxcy (2003) sees the third type, methodological neopragmatism as an improvement on epistemological neopragmatism, because it allows philosophers of science to move towards method acceptability. “Competing methods of inquiry were to be tested by how well they achieved their purported goals” (Maxcy, 2003, p. 77). The best method or mix of methods is that which provides the best and most effective resolution (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998).

2.1 A pragmatic approach to employer branding

Taking into account the theoretical background of employer branding, the various research traditions of its component elements, and the research tradition of the lens applied to the concept by this dissertation – corporate communication – I position this dissertation within the pragmatic paradigm. More precisely, I adhere to Dewey’s theory of inquiry, in which academic research, like other forms of inquiry, is an iterative process where thoughtful examination and decision-making are required in order to resolve a problematic belief.

As an alternative paradigm, pragmatism aims to find resolutions to practical problems by accepting that there are multiple realities open to empirical inquiry (Dewey, 1938). Pragmatism allows researchers to free themselves from the restrictions imposed by choosing either a positivist or a constructivist approach (Feizer, 2010). At the point of articulating a research methodology on the basis of the epistemological beliefs and deciding on the research methods, a pragmatist ought to ask himself how the multiple realities of the studied phenomena are to be observed (Feizer, 2010). The solution comes in the use of multiple or mixed methods, which opened the way for problems to be addressed within the social sciences without the necessity of making strict choices about what is believed to be “true” or “valid”. This approach allows me, as a researcher, to undertake the traditional philosophy of marketing and organisational behaviour as component elements of the concept under study, as well as the tradition of the lens I am applying to it. Rather than committing to a set of philosophical assumptions prior to starting the study, pragmatists focus their attention on beliefs that are closely connected to action and ask themselves how researchers make choices regarding the way they do research, why they make those particular choices, and what consequences are of making those choices as opposed to others (Morgan, 2014). “Though many
have pronounced the war and even the debate over... not everyone has adopted the stance of the methodological enlightenment and tolerance, namely, that methodological orthodoxy, superiority and purity should yield to methodological appropriateness, pragmatism and mutual respect” (Patton, 2002, p. 68).

Studies of employer branding have been carried out within both the post-positivist and the constructivist paradigm. Scholars such as Knox and Freeman (2006) and Agrawal and Swaroop (2009) have measured employer brand image; Cable and Graham (2000), Turban and Cable (2003) and Cable and Yu (2008) have used quantitative methods and a post-positivist philosophy to measure organisational image perception and the characteristics of the applicants pool. By contrast, Aggerholm et al (2011), Andersen (2013) and Edlinger (2015) have used qualitative methods and a constructivist approach to explore employer branding. To integrate these two perspectives, I position myself as a researcher within the pragmatist paradigm, using mixed methods to study the concept of employer branding using both qualitative and quantitative methods.

2.2 Implications for research

The pragmatist paradigm has a number of consequences for research – both in terms of what we know (the concept of employer branding) and in terms of how we can know it (the methodology). These consequences are presented here.

From a pragmatist perspective, it is very important not to start with the supposition of a reality that can be observed and focus instead on what we can observe. But this principle highlights the importance of data-collection methods, as these shape what we observe. The choice of different data-collection methods will inevitably change what is observed.

The above implies that, as researchers, we ourselves influence our research. The choices we make when selecting the methods we use will impact the outcome of our observations. In addition, our interactions during the observation process – for example, my interactions as a researcher with the organisations I study and the people who work there – will also have an influence on our results.

Finally, the researcher observes through his/her senses, then interprets the data. The process of interpretation is influenced by the researcher’s own past experiences, theoretical or practical. In the pragmatist perspective, therefore, truth is not an objective reality, but is influenced by our beliefs and experiences. The results and explanations we provide, if not refuted by experience, are considered to be instrumentally true. As experiences change, what is true is what seems suitable at a
given point in time. Thus knowledge becomes fallible. We must then adjust our assumptions and find a new appropriate solution.

2.3 Methodology

According to Creswell et al. (2006), mixed-methods research is considered to be both method and methodology and consists of “collecting, analysing and mixing qualitative and quantitative approaches in a single study or a series of studies” (p. 1).

The history of mixed methods starts in the beginning of the twentieth century with what was then called mixed research. This included what we consider today to be qualitative and quantitative data (Johnson et al., 2007). In 1959 Campbell and Fiske introduced the concept of triangulation (ibid.), using multiple methods as part of a validation process. Between-method or across-method triangulation was introduced by Webb et al. in 1966 (ibid.), and in 1978 Denzin outlined the manner in which methods were to be triangulated, identifying four types of triangulation:

- data triangulation – where multiple sources are used in the same study
- investigator triangulation – where different researchers are used in the same study
- theory triangulation – where multiple theories and perspectives are used in the interpretation of the results
- methodological triangulation – where multiple methods are employed to study the same problem.

Greene et al. (1989), in an inductive study of the published research, identified five main rationales for using mixed methodological studies:

- triangulation – where the researcher studies the same phenomena and seeks confirmation of the results
- complementarity – where the researcher seeks to clarify or elaborate on the results obtained using one method with the results obtained using a different method
- development – where the researcher uses the results from one method to develop the other method
- initiation – where the researcher uncovers contradictions lead to the reformulation of the research question.
- expansion – where the researcher seeks to extend the breadth and range of inquiry by using different methods for different inquiry components.
There is consensus in the mixed-methods community that “methodology follows from inquiry purpose and questions” (Greene, 2008, p. 13). The design of mixed methods will vary according to the purpose of the inquiry and questions – whether this is to test a hypothesis, to develop an explanation or understanding, or democratisation. In the 1980s and 1990s, a polarisation of the qualitative and quantitative research took place (Creswell et al., 2006) and this led to the emergence of another intellectual movement, the mixed-methods paradigm. Creswell et al. (2006) assert that our current research is marked by three methodological paradigms – qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods.

One issue that is still under debate regarding mixed methods relates to the manner in which different paradigms are used. “Researchers have had at least six different positions on the issue of how paradigms are to be used in the development of mixed methods research” (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003, p. 17). The six stances are presented in Table 2.1..

Table 2.1. – Contemporary points of view regarding the use of paradigms (inspired by Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003, 2008)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The A-paradigmatic stance</th>
<th>Some researchers (e.g. Patton, 2002; Morgan, 2007) believe that methods and paradigms should be independent and the methods chosen should fit the research questions.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The incompatibility thesis and mixed-methods research</td>
<td>This thesis states that researchers cannot combine qualitative and quantitative methods because the paradigms that inform these methods are incompatible. The incompatibility thesis has been refuted: many scholars have managed to combine them successfully.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The complementary strengths thesis and mixed-methods research</td>
<td>It is possible to use mixed methods so long as the two methods are clearly separated, so that the strengths of the underlying paradigms can be fulfilled (e.g. Brewer and Hunter, 1989; Morse, 2003).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The single paradigm thesis</td>
<td>Lincoln and Guba (1985), with their...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
identification of a single association between post-positivism and quantitative methods and constructivism and qualitative methods, initiated the search for a single paradigm that would embrace the methodological preferences of mixed methods. Scholars such as Teddlie and Tashakkori (1998, 2003), Patton (2002), Maxcy (2003), Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004), and Morgan (2007) have identified pragmatism as the single paradigm that would fit their methodological requirements. By contrast, scholars such as Mertens (2003) have identified the transformative perspective as a desirable framework.

The multiple paradigm thesis

The multiple paradigm thesis argues that a single paradigm may not always suffice, and that multiple paradigms can be applied depending on the mixed-methods research design (Creswell et al., 2003). Creswell and his colleagues present six different research designs that employ one or multiple paradigms.

The dialectical paradigm thesis

Scholars such as Greene and Caracelli (1997, 2003) believe that each paradigm has strengths, and that the understanding of the studied phenomena can be enriched by using multiple, diverse paradigms.

This chapter has presented the philosophical principles that underlie this dissertation. We turn next to the detailed description of the research design and methods used to study the concept of employer branding (Chapter 3). Positioned within the pragmatist perspective, the dissertation draws on the Deweyan perspective of inquiry as an iterative decision-making process of questioning and answering. Pragmatism considers that any method can be employed in order to better fit the
requirements of the research question: therefore this dissertation uses a mixed-methods methodology. It is based on these assumptions that Chapter 4 presents a detailed description of the research design and methods used to answer the research questions presented earlier in Chapter 1. The following chapter discusses the theoretical framework of this dissertation.
CHAPTER 3
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
3 – Theoretical framework

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a theoretical background to the exploration of the employer branding concept. Employer branding is a multidisciplinary concept, located at the intersection between marketing, human resources and communication. Therefore in order to understand how it is practised in an organisational context from a communication perspective, I frame this dissertation in the corporate communication paradigm understood as a theoretical perspective (Craig, 2013). This paradigm has a strong focus on the integration of communication (Christensen et al., 2008). This chapter discusses corporate communication as a theoretical framework for the study not only of the concept of employer branding, but also the main concepts within the paradigm of corporate communication that form the basis of or are closely related to the employer branding concept. First, the chapter will discuss corporate communication, focusing on its main concepts and the main drivers for integration. Secondly, I will discuss corporate branding as an alignment between vision, culture and image (Hatch & Schultz, 2003). Corporate branding is a concept drawn on by employer branding as it aims to align the internal management vision of the organisation as an employer with the decisions made by the organisation members and the external stakeholders’ perception of the organisation as an employer. Thirdly, employer branding will be conceptualised in relation to corporate communication and corporate branding. The areas of employer branding in the focus of this dissertation will be further explored in Section 4.3.1 (employer branding in human resources and organisational behaviour) and Section 4.3.2 (employer branding and sustainability). Finally, in Section 4.4, I provide a definition for the concept of employer branding, based on the theoretical framework that will form the basis of the dissertation.

3.1 Corporate communication

“In contemporary writings, corporate communications is understood as a mind-set, a certain way of thinking about and approaching communication as a strategic management function” (Christensen, Morsing & Cheney, 2008, p. 2). In 2007, van Riel considered corporate communication to be a fully developed field of study both in practice and within academia (van Riel, 2007). Subsequently, however, the discipline has developed faster in the business than in the academic world (Argenti, 1996), as companies have begun to seek social legitimacy and to feel that they must justify their practices (Christensen, Morsing & Cheney, 2008). Corporate communication
first emerged in contrast to the field of public relations. Scholars including Steyn (2004) and Brønn (2003) identified themselves with corporate communication in order to move away from the negative connotations ascribed to public relations by management scholars.

In defining the discipline, there is no disagreement on the fact that corporate communication is “a management function” (Cornelissen, 2008, 2014) that effectively and efficiently balances all forms of internal and external communication (van Riel, 1995) with the purpose of creating a positive relationship (van Riel, 1995; van Riel & Fombrun, 2007) or reputation with stakeholder groups upon which the company depends. There is, however, disagreement over the component disciplines that together comprise corporate communication. While van Riel and Fombrun (2007) and Brønn and Berg (2011) present corporate communication as a composite of management communication, marketing communication, and organisational communication, Christensen et al 2008 view corporate communication as situated at the intersection between public relations, marketing, organisational communication, and human resource management. A consequence of the convoluted definitions and divergences in the component disciplines is to make corporate communication more complex in nature.

In the early 2000s, corporate communication “conceives itself as the integrated communication discipline par excellence” (Gambetti & Quigley, 2013; p. 13), supplying an all-encompassing framework that includes all possible communication disciplines (Argenti et al., 2005; Christensen et al., 2008; van Riel, 1995; Frandsen & Johansen, 2014). However, it is unrealistic to consider all corporate communication activities as completely integrated at all times. Frandsen and Johansen (2014) talk about differing degrees of coordination, ranging from none at all to complete coordination. The choice of degree of coordination is based on (a) the purpose of the coordination, (b) the situation, and (c) the particular understanding of the concepts of strategy, management and organisation (Frandsen & Johansen, 2014). In spite of the integrating approach of corporate communication, Christiansen et al. (2007) states that this:

- does not mean there is no longer a need for separate public relations and marketing functions. The expectation is that corporate communication as a field may include expertise and experience from many communication disciplines including public relations, marketing, organisational communication and human resources in order to manage and integrate different strategies under the same umbrella (Christiansen, et al., 2007; p. 655).
For Christensen and Cornelissen, a major disadvantage of the corporate communication paradigm is its dependence on the linear communication model (Christensen & Cornelissen, 2010). This means that stakeholders frequently construe corporate products and messages differently than the original purpose (Cova, 1996). However, in the introduction to his book on corporate communication, Cornelissen talks about the “current state” (Cornelissen, 2014, p. 12) in corporate communication “where the difference lies in the outright dismissal of the view that stakeholders can be managed and controlled in their views” and where “organisations need to ‘engage’ individual stakeholders through different platforms in addition to addressing broader audiences, or entire stakeholder groups” (ibid., pp. 10–11). Other corporate communication scholars discussing stakeholder engagement have identified the static and linear aspects of employer branding, leading them to re-conceptualise employer branding based on the “ontological turn in the overall understanding of the organisation and its members” (Aggerholme et al., 2011).

Corporate communication represents the theoretical foundation on which the qualitative study is built. Therefore it figures prominently in Papers I and II. The principles and main concepts of corporate communication help us to answer RQ1: How is employer branding practised in an organisational context from a communication perspective?

### 3.1.1 Main concepts in corporate communication

Corporate communication goes beyond individual communication practices, such as press communication, investor relations or employee communication. In employing a unified strategic interest of the whole organisation, it bridges these specialised functions. Numerous concepts and terms are used in connection with corporate communication, and the following section will discuss the main concepts that form the basis of the discipline: namely stakeholder theory and the concepts of identity, image, and reputation.

Stakeholder theory first received attention in 1984 with the publication of R. Edward Freeman’s seminal book *Strategic Management: a Stakeholder Approach*. Since then, the concept has undergone a series of changes, shifting from a static concept defined as “groups and individuals that can influence or are influenced by the achievement of an organisation’s mission” (Freeman, 2010) to a more dynamic concept. In 2006, Friedman and Milles defined stakeholders as dynamic groups who are in continuous interaction with the organisation (Friedman & Milles, 2006). This dissertation explores the concept of employer branding from the perspective of different stakeholder groups, in order to provide a holistic understanding of the concept.
Originating in the visual arts, the concept of identity, in relation to organizations, progressed from a company’s self-presentation to external audiences through logos and symbols (Balmer, 1995), to a complex concept representing the outside manifestation of an organization. Hatch and Schultz (2000) distinguish between two types of identity: corporate identity, which is the representation of the organisation defined by the top management to, especially, external stakeholders, and organisational identity, the perception and understanding of the organisation by its members. Van Riel (1995) attributes considerable importance to the concept of identity and considers this can help to raise employees’ motivation.

In a similar manner, the concept of image has developed since the 1950s to a contemporary understanding on which, according to Frandsen and Johansen, there is a level of consensus in academia (Frandsen & Johansen, 2014). Image is formed of both tangible and intangible elements: functional attributes, and emotions and attitudes that represent the perceptions of external stakeholders of an organisation (ibid).

Another important concept for corporate communication is reputation. Reputation, defined as “the collective representation of multiple constituencies’ images of a company, built up over time and based on a company’s identity programs” (Argenti & Druckenmiller, 2004), has two dimensions: time-based and value-based (Frandsen and Johansen, 2014). The time-based dimension refers to image as a snapshot at a single point in time, while reputation is a commutation of several images over a period of time (ibid.). The value-based dimension of reputation was defined by Fombrun (1996) as the “overall estimate in which a company is held by its constituents” (Fombrun, 1996; p. 3). In The Oxford Handbook of Corporate Reputation, Rindova and Martins (2012) discuss three perspectives on reputation based on three different conceptualisations: the game-theoretic view, the social constructivist view, and the institutional view.

Another key concept in the discipline of corporate communication is integration, or “the notion and the practice of aligning symbols, messages, procedures and behaviours in order for an organisation to communicate with clarity, consistency and continuity within and across formal organisational boundaries” (Christensen et al., 2008, p. 424).

3.1.2 Drivers for integration
Integration has been discussed as a topic in communication ever since academics and practitioners realised in the 1980s (e.g. Kotler & Mindak, 1978; Torp, 2009) that the disciplines of marketing and public relations, previously considered distinct, actually had many things in
common. Integrating all communication functions and striving for centralised control offers many advantages, ranging from being able to break through the ever-growing number of communication messages (e.g. Torp, 2009; Christensen, Firt & Torp, 2008; Christensen, Firt & Cornelissen, 2009), to creating a stronger reputation for the company, and even a more efficient spending of the communication budget (Christensen et al., 2009). The need to integrate communication activities appeared simultaneously with the change in the economic environment. Organisations had to develop new practices in order to respond to changes in society. Managing communication activities more holistically allowed organisations to reduce overlaps between tasks and stakeholder groups handled by the two departments. The concept of integrated communication is discussed more in detail in Paper I (Chapter 5). Christensen et al. (2009) discuss various drivers of integration. The promise that communication activities can be organised (van Real, 1995) in such a way as to provide order and structure in a hectic world (Christensen et al., 2009), together with the idea that communication functions can be centralised and controlled, makes the integration of communication very appealing from a managerial perspective. In addition, since the decline in the legitimacy and credibility of the business environment following the financial crisis of 2008, organisations are expected to share information with their stakeholders equally on financial and non-financial issues. Companies address this increased demand for information through measures of integration (ibid.). The integration of communication is not limited to marketing and design aspects, but involves every aspect of an organisation and its actions. “Organisations that manage their design or marketing parameters in tightly controlled ways may well find that their audiences are paying more attention to other, and less manageable, dimensions like, for example, the behaviour of their staff or the production methods of their suppliers” (ibid., p. 210).

Integration of communication is a key concept in Paper I, and helps to answer RQ1: How is employer branding practised in an organisational context from a communication perspective? To focus on sub-question 2: How are the multiple component elements of the employer branding discipline integrated in an organisational context and how do employer brand managers define their role in relation to the integrated communication?

### 3.2 Corporate branding

Corporate branding focuses on a cluster of organisational factors – organisational culture (the current and original practices in an organisation), strategic vision (how the organisation aims to be
in the future), image (the stakeholders’ perception of the organisation), and identity (all internal interpretations of who the organisation is – Hatch & Schultz, 2001; 2003). It thus represents an extension of product branding. In order to capture the essence of the organization, corporate branding aims to enhance the organisation’s distinctive aspects through managerial and organisational processes (Schultz, 2005). A sub-stream of research has been dedicated to corporate branding and employment since 1990 (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990; Heighhouse et al., 1999; Lemmink et al., 2003; Fetscherin & Usunier, 2010; Turban & Cable, 2003). The main focuses in this stream of research are on the one hand on the employment image and intention to pursue (Heighhouse et al., 1999; Lemmink et al., 2003), and on the other hand on job applications (Turban & Cable, 2003). Lemmink et al. (2003) study the “influence of the corporate image and company employment image on the application intention of graduate business students” (p. 1), showing that both the corporate image and the employment image have “independent but significant positive effects on the intention to apply and are thus valuable tools in the labour market” (ibid., p.1). Turban & Cable (2003) explore whether the number and quality of applicants is influenced by the organisational reputation, their study showing positive results.

The classic branding model has been restrictive (e.g. Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000; Kapferer, 2001; Hatch & Schultz, 2001; Schultz, 2005) in the sense that it is solely focused on the external perspective and is single-focused on customers, so as to “[neglect] the special conditions for creating brands based in the organisations itself” (Schultz, 2005; p. 24). Employees are an important aspect of corporate branding, as they are put under pressure and expected to carry out the brand promise (Christensen et al., 2008). They are trusted to translate the corporate brand promise into their daily activities. While managers see the employees as “walking-around embodiments of the company brand” (ibid., p. 67), managers are expected to “sell the brand” to the employees (Mitchell, 2002).

There is little agreement in the academic literature on what a corporate brand (the object of corporate branding) actually is (Abratt & Kleyn, 2012). The corporate brand defines the company that delivers and endorses the product or service the stakeholders are offered (Aaker, 2004). Schultz and Kitchen (2004) consider a successful corporate brand as an advantage based on the integrated communication attainments, as these bring positive associations to the company’s name.

According to Schultz, (2005) corporate branding focuses on building relationships with the company’s stakeholders and involving them in defining “who the organisation is – and aspires to be” (Schultz, 2005; p. 24). Corporate branding should not be confused with or mistaken for an
oversizing of the product branding, because corporate branding includes a cluster of values, symbols, and beliefs that are central to both internal and external stakeholders (Ind, 1997; Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000; Hatch & Schultz, 2001; Balmer & Greyser, 2003; Schultz & Hatch, 2003; Aaker, 2004; Schultz, 2005). Kitchen and Schultz (2001) consider corporate branding to be a symbolic corporate umbrella; Aaker (2004) sees it as a vehicle to deliver the unique value proposition. At the same time, it is also seen as a conceptual and managerial “fog” (Balmer, 2001). Corporate branding consists of constructs originating across multiple disciplines – marketing, organisational behaviour and strategy (Cornelissen et al., 2012), and organisational culture, corporate identity, mission and vision (Balmer & Greyser, 2003).

For Schultz and Antorini (2005), corporate branding is now moving to a second wave, moving on from what was initially “founded on a number of myths that locked the organisation into a marketing and campaign-driven approach” (Schultz & Antorini, 2005; p. 220). The focus in this second wave of corporate branding is integration and cross-disciplinary collaboration. They argue that what we now have is no longer a marketing and communication function, but a phenomenon that requires a cross-functional and strategic foundation across the entire organisation.

3.3 From internal marketing to employer branding

It is more than four decades since (1981) introduced internal marketing as a solution in the delivery of high-quality customer service. The concept is also discussed by George (1990), George and Gronroos (1989), Gronroos (1981), and Kotler (2003). Kotler defines it as “the task of successfully hiring and motivating able employees to serve the customer well” (p. 23). This assumes that its personnel are actually a company’s main market (Caruana & Ewing, 1999), and has as its main objective securing “customer-conscious personnel at every level” (ibid., p. 18). However, even four decades later there is still confusion in the academic literature over what internal marketing is and who is supposed to be in charge if it (Rafiq & Ahmed, 2000).

The main assumption in internal marketing is that internal customers (employees), like external stakeholders, want their requirements satisfied. Satisfied internal customers can then transfer their own contentment to the quality of services the company is providing. “[F]ulfilling employee needs enhances employee motivation and retention, and as a consequence the higher the degree of employee satisfaction, the higher the possibility of generating external satisfaction and loyalty” (Rafiq & Ahmed, 2003; pp. 1177–1178). George (1999) describes internal marketing as a
philosophy for managing human resources, using marketing principles and tools to build internal abilities that can then be used for achieving successful external marketing.

According to Kaurav et al. (2016; pp. 89–90), there are four major areas discussed in internal marketing:

- **Internal marketing as a synonym of HRM**, where internal marketing is seen as “the task of hiring, training, motivating able employees who want to serve customers well” (Kotler, 2003; p. 23)
- **Internal marketing as a use of marketing techniques in the internal marketplace**, where internal marketing “is the development of marketing programme aimed at the internal marketplace in the company, by using the same basic structures used for external marketing” (Rafiq & Ahmed, 1993; pp. 84)
- **Internal marketing for the purpose of satisfying external customers**, where internal marketing “must precede external marketing because it makes no sense to promise excellent service before the company’s staff is ready to provide it” (Kotler, 2003; pp. 23)

In other words, internal marketing was used as a source of competitive advantage to attract, retain and motivate “service-minded”, and “customer-conscious” employees so that they would support the service quality perception and effective external marketing of the company as a way to achieve competitive advantage (Ballantyne, 2000). By contrast, employer branding was initially used to attract prospective employees and was thus focused on external stakeholders, later coming to include employees as an important stakeholder group. In this respect it replaced internal marketing and brought with it a more holistic approach.

### 3.4 The employer brand and employer branding

First and foremost, it is important to make a clear distinction between the two terms used in employer branding research: the **employer brand** and the **employer branding process**. The employer brand is a “concept of the firm that differentiates it from its competitor” (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; p. 502). It is a “package of functional, economic and psychological benefits” (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; p. 187). The employer branding process, on the other hand, is the process of using marketing, communication, branding and HR concepts and techniques in order to build an “identifiable and
unique employer identity” (Theurer et al., 2016; p. 2) and to “raise awareness and strengthen associations between the brand and desirable attributes” (Edwards, 2010; p. 1122).

The concept of employer branding draws on the concepts of identity, image and reputation outline earlier in this dissertation. In a very simplistic and linear sense, an organisation has an employer identity that is projected to the external stakeholders (prospective employees). The “snapshot” perceptions of the external stakeholders represent the employer images. In a time-based view the long-term accumulated images represent the employer reputation, while in a value-based approach, employer reputation is the collective evaluation of the company as an employer.

Initially, employer branding emerged as an alignment between marketing and human resources management (HRM) (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Edwards, 2010). Berry (1981) appears to be the first author to have acknowledged the potential effect of advertising on current employees, but Gilly and Wolfinbarger (1998) noted that in the late 1990s employees were still neglected as an important target for company advertisements. The idea of applying marketing techniques to people management was first discussed in 1996 by Ambler and Barrow, who used the term “employer brand” to refer to “the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company” (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; p. 187). They emphasised the relevance of marketing in the context of employment, in a study that reported the results of in-depth interviews with respondents from 27 companies.

The employer branding concept is discussed in academic research across various disciplines (Edlinger, 2015) including human resources management, marketing, and corporate reputation. Empirical papers mostly focus on measuring the levels of attractiveness of the employer brand (Aiman-Smith et al., 2001), jobseekers’ knowledge of the company’s employer brand (Cable & Turban, 2001), and the organisational image beliefs (Cable & Yu, 2006) etc. Varying in scope and function, the concept of employer branding is, depending on the research stream, part of a management process (Barrow & Mosley, 2005; Foster et al., 2010), part of the corporate brand (Foster et al., 2010), an HRM activity (Sullivan, 2002; App et al. 2012), or part of the sustainability strategy (Aggerholm et al., 2011; Andersen et al., 2013). Likewise, in an organisation, the specialist or group of specialists in charge of the strategic planning and implementation of employer branding can be allocated to a range of departments – to marketing, human resources, or communication. Even though all these disciplines and sub-disciplines have different fundamental principles and visions of what an organisation is and the relationships between organisation and stakeholders, they
all consider employer branding as a competitive advantage, a “value creating process” (Aggerholm et al., 2011).

The relevance of employer branding was quickly acknowledged. In 2001 Dell and Ainspan published a report in the Conference Board concluding that many organisations had found conducting effective employer branding to bring them competitive advantage. In 2002, Ewing et al. discussed the usefulness of employer branding in relation to the knowledge-based economy, where skilled employees are increasingly difficult to find. In 2004 in their review of employer branding, Backhaus and Tikoo emphasised the interest in employer branding, finding more than 3,000 hits in internet searches using the term “employer branding” on Google and Yahoo. In 2017, internet searches using the same term yield 42,700 hits on Google Scholar and over six million hits on Google. It seems that there has been a dramatic spike in interest in this topic.

In its early stages, employer branding was conceptualised based on a more mechanistic view of communication, and this aspect is easily identifiable in all the definitions and characteristics. In 2004 Backhaus and Tikoo defined employer branding as “the process of building an identifiable and unique employer identity, and the employer brand as a concept of the firm that differentiates it from its competitors” (p. 502). Here they were underlining the idea of a built identity and brand, with which employees and prospective employees could identify and which accordingly would differentiate the company from its competitors. The human resources literature describes employer branding as a three-step process (Sullivan, 2002):

- A firm develops a value proposition based on elements of the company’s culture, management style the perceptions of the current employees and the image the company has as an employer, but also based on product branding
- The company markets the value proposition to the external target audiences. The employer brand should be consistent with the other branding efforts and is mainly designed to attract prospective employees, but also to support
- The organisation transfers the brand “promise” made to the prospective employees into the company and conveys it to the organisational culture (Frook, 2001), internal marketing.

Christensen and Cornelissen see the corporate communication paradigm’s dependence on the linear communication model as a major weakness (Christensen and Cornelissen, 2010). This means that stakeholders frequently construe corporate products and messages in a different manner than the original purpose (Cova, 1996). However, in the introduction to his book on corporate communication, Cornelissen talks about the “current state” (Cornelissen, 2014, p. 12) in corporate
communication “where the difference lies in the outright dismissal of the view that stakeholders can be managed and controlled in their views” and where “organisations need to ‘engage’ individual stakeholders through different platforms in addition to addressing broader audiences, or entire stakeholder groups” (ibid., pp. 10–11). Other corporate communication scholars have discussed stakeholder engagement. They have additionally identified the static and linear aspects of employer branding, re-conceptualising it based on the “ontological turn in the overall understanding of the organisation and its members” (Aggerholm et al., 2011).

Although it was originally discussed mainly by marketing scholars, since catching the attention and interest of human resources specialists (Martin et al, 2005), employer branding has become an important topic in the organisational behaviour field (Edwards, 2010). In the organisational behaviour literature, employer branding is meant to clarify and manage the employment offering of an organisation, including both tangible and intangible benefits, together with elements of the company’s image and identity (ibid.).

3.3.1 Employer branding in human resource management and organisational behaviour

Drawing on the human resource management literature, Martin et al. (2011) develop an employer branding model based on innovation, reputation and corporate governance. They define an employer brand as “generalised recognition for being known among key stakeholders for providing a high-quality employment experience, and a distinctive organisational identity which employees value, engage with and feel confident and happy to promote to others” (ibid., pp. 3618–3619). Here employer branding has become the process that uses communication, HR, and marketing and branding concepts and techniques in order to deliver an employer brand. But despite being defined as an HRM function, employer branding is seen (ibid.) as transcending HRM and including features of corporate reputation, marketing, and public relations. Employer brand managers have the responsibility of ensuring the company’s visibility and attractiveness for prospective employees (Edwards, 2010), performing cross-functional and interdepartmental tasks that cross formal organisational boundaries (Foster et al, 2010; Edlinger, 2015). Edlinger (2015) describes EBM’s specific task as to “create, implement and manage the employer brand” (p. 444), where the management process of the employer brand is seen either as a traditional marketing process (with the employer brand being considered as a sub-brand of the corporate brand: Foster et
al., 2010), or as an HRM recruiting activity (App et al., 2012). Edlinger (2015) identifies five main tasks that EBMs reported performing in their capacity as employer brand managers (p. 448):

- Creating the ideal employer brand
- Controlling the ideal and desirable employer brand’s transition into brand manifestations
- Promoting the ideal, desirable and pure employer brand
- Protecting the ideal, desirable and pure employer brand
- Policing the ideal, desirable and pure employer brand.

Precisely because the employer branding concept is multidisciplinary, EBMs feel they need to control and safeguard the employer brand’s content, meanings, and use (ibid.). They build boundaries around the ideal and desired employer brand, establishing who may and may not contribute to the employer brand, and they “restrict and control the co-creation of the employer brand’s contents and meanings” (ibid., p. 455).

A research area that is very relevant to employer branding is the research from personnel psychology exploring factors that affect organisational attractiveness. Organisational attractiveness is defined as “an attitude or expressed general positive affect towards an organisation and toward viewing the organisation as a desirable entity with which to initiate some relationship” (Aiman-Smith et al., 2001; p. 221), or alternatively the extent to which prospective employees perceive an organisation to be attractive as an employer (Elving et al, 2013). A central finding in this literature is that prospective employees are more likely to be attracted by a company and thus apply for jobs if the company has a positive reputation (Edwards, 2010). Cable & Graham (2000) conducted a study to investigate the factors predicting jobseekers’ perceptions of an organisation’s reputation. They found that a major factor for predicting organisational attractiveness is profitability, a finding that is in accordance with previous research (e.g. McGuire et al, 1988; Turban & Greening, 1996). In addition to profitability, another important aspect predicting positive perceptions of a company’s reputation is a range of social responsibility characteristics, including community and employee relations, environmental and human rights policies, and treatment of minority groups (Turban & Greening, 1996). Further studies confirm the importance of a good reputation in attracting talent. Collins & Han (2004) show that general corporate advertising rather than job-specific advertising is significant in increasing organisational attractiveness and improving the company’s reputation. The importance of long-term communication efforts is also underlined, as these influence jobseekers’
perceptions of the organisation’s image and reputation as well as their intention to apply (Cable & Turban, 2003).

Other important organisational behaviour areas for employer branding are organisational identity and organisational identification. From a social constructivist perspective, organisational identity is defined as a “socially constructed product of relationships between collectively held, and socially structured individual cognitions” (He & Brown, 2013; p. 7) concerning “who the organisation is” (Corley et al, 2006). Central to organisational identity is the notion that the organisation has a recognisable character that can be distinguished by its employees (Edwards, 2010). Organisational identity has been shown to be significant (see e.g. Hatch & Schultz, 2004; He & Brown, 2013; Dutton et al, 1994 etc.), and the research shows how important it is for a company to have a strong and distinguishable identity in order to encourage its employees to identify with the organisation.

According to Edwards (2005), one of the main purposes of employer branding practices is to motivate current employees to identify with the organisation. This company–employee bond is explained by the organisation identification body of research. The concept of organisational identification has a long tradition (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Dutton et al, 1994; Edwards, 2005; Edwards, 2010). It received particular attention in the management field, as it offers capability to explicate and predict various behaviours and attitudes in the workplace. In the presence of a strong and durable organisational identity, clearly communicated, employees can create not only a bond with the organisation, but organisational identification, “the person–organisation merger” (Ashforth & Mael, 1996). There is a substantial amount of research suggesting that organisations with an appealing external image and perceived organisational identity tend to have a higher degree of organisational identification (Edwards, 2010).

Although the body of literature on employer branding originating in human resources is relatively small (ibid.), there are supporting areas in the organisational behaviour literature that can help provide a framework and structure to the employer branding filed.

3.3.2 Employer branding and sustainability

It is many years now since businesses began to feel responsible for more than their profit margins (Carroll, 1999; Kakabadse et al., 2005) and have sought to build and strengthen their relationships with their more aware stakeholders (Johansen & Nielsen, 2011). Cable & Turban (2003) showed how positive perceptions of an organisation’s reputation has a positive effect on
jobseekers’ desire to apply for jobs with that company, thus attracting a larger and better qualified pool of applicants and allowing the organisation to select more highly-qualified employees.

Supporting literature on the topic of sustainability in employer branding can also be found in the fields of sustainable HRM (App et al., 2012), corporate social performance (CSP) (Turban & Greening, 1997; Albinger & Freeman, 2000; Greening & Turban, 2000), and CSR (Carroll, 1999; Kakabadse et al., 2005; Brammer et al., 2007; Ali et al., 2010; Pomering et al., 2013). “[T]he social dimension of sustainability is sometimes used synonymously with CSP, CSR or corporate ethics” (App et al, 2012; p. 266).

A positive association between CSP and employer attractiveness is found by Turban and Greening (1997), who find that organisations that publish their CSP ratings have better perceived corporate reputation and employer attractiveness. Organisations frequently promote their CSR activities to attract highly-qualified employees (Greening & Turban, 2000), and App et al. (2012) provide a conceptual framework linking sustainable HRM to employer branding in order to attract and retain highly-qualified employee.

Aggerholm et al. (2011) provide a conceptual framework for the study of employer branding in sustainable organisations. Their framework includes the theoretical fields of branding, HRM and CSR and focuses on the stakeholder relationship. They start by redefining employer branding, moving away from the mechanistic-like view to a co-creative approach. Employer branding is seen as a “strategic branding process which creates, negotiates and enacts sustainable relationships between an organisation and its potential and existing employees under the influence of the varying corporate contexts with the purpose of co-creating sustainable values for the individual, the organisation and the society as a whole.” (ibid., p. 113). The newly redefined employer branding concept highlights three main features (ibid., pp 114–115):

- It is a strategic branding discipline that is secured to the overall corporate strategy
- It is in a continuous co-creation-of-values process, with its stakeholders depending on their stakes and expectations
- The sustainable relationship between the organisation and employees revolves around a continuous consideration of their needs and expectations.
Continuing the idea of transitioning towards a sustainable employer branding concept, Andersen et al. (2013) identify three waves of literature in the employer branding field moving from “selling jobs and aligning values” (ibid., p. 26) towards sustainable employer branding. The framework of the three waves of employer branding is discussed in more detail later in this dissertation, in Paper II, “Employer branding as interface between business and society”. In this section, the frame only will be briefly presented and the main characteristics of each wave will be highlighted.

The first wave of employer branding revolves around the work of Ambler and Barrow (1996), Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), and Knox and Freeman (2006). These authors discuss the concept of employer branding in terms of the transmission of values to an audience that is meant to decode the messages in the same way as they were transmitted. Current and prospective employees are seen as “branding targets” (Edwards, 2005).

The second wave of employer branding is characterised by the corporate branding approach, where the discussion revolves around such concepts as integration and alignment. The rigid boundaries between internal and external stakeholders begin to blur, and the alignment occurs at the level of vision, image and culture of the organisation. Employees are accorded a higher priority (Mosley, 2007). Here a process of negotiation and alignment between expectations in the employer–employee relationship becomes visible (Andersen et al., 2013).

Finally, the third wave of employer branding includes authors such as Mark and Toelken (2009); App et al., (2012); Aggerholm et al. (2011) etc. It is in this third wave that the contextual perspective becomes important, the concept of sustainability is brought into the discussion, and the
focus is on integrating the organisation in society as a good corporate citizen. App et al. (2012) underline the necessity of long-term relationships, and the focus of creating value for the existing employees first, and only as a second priority making the company attractive externally.

3.4 Developing the employer branding definition

In order to provide a better understanding of the concept of employer branding studied from a communication perspective, in this dissertation I decided to develop further the concept of employer branding. I based my treatment on Aggerholm et al.’s (2011) definition of employer branding, but also incorporating elements of previous definitions of this concept (e.g. Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Edwards, 2010) as well as the definition of intermediaries developed by Frandsen and Johansen (2014). I propose a conceptual model representing employer branding as a co-created concept negotiated between a focal organisation and various stakeholders (see Figure 3.2.), inspired by the theory of intermediaries (Frandsen & Johansen, 2014). This theory argues that a number of influencing factors will, voluntarily or involuntarily, impact upon this relationship. The co-creative process is initiated by the organisation with the signals initiated by its employer branding value proposition and campaign (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Edwards, 2010), or lack of one. From this point on, the process undergoes constant change and negotiation between the stakeholders and organisation (Aggerhol, et al., 2011). Both the stakeholders and the organisation contribute to this co-creation process, and the influencing factors also contribute to this negotiation process. The main purpose of this development of the employer branding definition is to elaborate on Aggerholm et al.’s (2011) definition by expanding and clarifying what the “influence of the varying corporate contexts” (ibid., p. 113) stands for in my perception. Accordingly, the concept of employer branding is here defined as:

A strategic communication process initiated by the organisation which creates, negotiates and enacts sustainable relationships between the organisation and its current and prospective employees under the impact of influencing factors (ranging from the organisation’s side to the stakeholder’s side) with the purpose of co-creating sustainable values for the individual, the organisation and the society at large.
The influencing factors can be roughly divided into three categories. The first is represented by neutral influencers (e.g. media). The second category is represented by influencers from the organisation side that contribute to the continuous negotiation process, such as new product or corporate campaigns or CSR activities that can create a positive or negative image that, in turn, can improve or worsen the company’s employer brand perception. The last category is represented by influencers from the stakeholders’ side. These can vary from socio-demographic to cultural factors, and are socially constructed through social media and word-of-mouth. To simplify the model and portray these relations better, Figure 3.2. represents a view in one plane.
Considering that employer branding focuses on both internal and external stakeholders, it was only natural to look beyond the organisational boundaries and explore jobseekers as an important stakeholder group. Paper III (Chapter 7) focuses on jobseekers as a major stakeholder group, and explores the role of generations in the job-search process – a process in which employer branding plays an important role.

3.5 The job-search process

In this dissertation, job-search represents the other facet of the employer branding coin. While companies focus on creating an attractive employer brand and attracting talent, jobseekers play an important role in how they search for jobs, what company-related information they search for, and what resources they allocate to the job-search process. It is therefore only natural that this dissertation should also consider the job-search process and jobseekers as stakeholders for employer branding.

Individuals engage in job search after graduation, job loss, or when they pursue career opportunities, therefore job search is an important part of the career. It too has attracted the attention of researchers (Kanfer et al., 2001; Van Hoye et al., 2013), particularly within applied and business psychology (Kanfer & Hulin, 1985; Wanberg et al., 1999; Moynihan & Roehling, 2003; Brown et al., 2006). There are various definitions of the job-search process, as well as different operationalisations of the concept, and previous research has mostly focused on one or a few aspects of job search rather than the entire process (Wanberg 2012; Van Hoye et al., 2013). Schwab et al (1987) define the job-search process as the sum of sources used to gain information about open positions and the intensity with which the search is performed. Another definition and operationalisation comes from Solberg (1967), who distinguishes between two phases of the process – planning, and the actual job-search and choice phase. Sun et al. (2013) consider the job-search process as a dynamic process with natural fluctuations of variables, such as job-search self-efficacy and jobseekers’ effort and behaviour.

Taking into account the variation found in previous research, this dissertation bases its working definition and operationalisation of the job-search process on numerous studies within both psychology (e.g. Moynihan & Roehling, 2003; Brown et al., 2006) and organisational behaviour
In addition to behaviours, four constructs have been identified across the job-search process that represent prerequisites for the jobseeker. The four elements identified in this dissertation as composing the job-search process are as follows: (1) job-search self-efficacy, (2) job sources, (3) the ideal job and (4) the ideal employer. Job-search self-efficacy and the ideal job are intrinsic characteristics of the jobseeker, and preconditions for the job-search process. Job-search self-efficacy determines the behaviour and methods used in the actual job-search process. Job sources represents the measure of different sources used by an individual during the job-search process. It is dependent upon job-search self-efficacy, and is represented as the total number of formal and informal sources used by participants in their job-search process (Barber et al., 1994; Saks & Ashforth, 2000). The final element – the ideal employer – represents the characteristics that make a company a desirable place to work. This is related to the ideal job and forms the basis of the employer brand, as it is the basis of the organisations’ analysis and point of departure in employer brand communication. Figure 3.4. graphically represents the job-search process as operationalised in this dissertation. The four elements and their measurement are described in more detail in Paper III, “Are there generational differences in the job-search process?” which forms Chapter 7.

This chapter has presented the theoretical framework on which this dissertation builds. It has highlighted the various complementary concepts used in exploring the topic of employer branding in a critical and constructive manner. It is based on these premises that the purpose of this dissertation is to theoretically and empirically explore and enhance the understanding of the
employer branding concept holistically, from a communication perspective; That is, to understand employer branding practices in an organisational setting from two separate perspectives in order to provide a more holistic picture: from the organisational perspective (focusing on employer brand managers) and from the stakeholder perspective (focusing on jobseekers).
CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH DESIGN AND STRATEGIES
4 – Research design and strategies

This chapter aims to outline the research design used in the dissertation, together with the construction of empirical data and the strategies used to analyse the data. The objective of the dissertation is to explore and enhance the understanding of the employer branding concept holistically, both theoretically and empirically from a communication perspective. In order to understand employer branding practices in greater depth by taking both organisation and stakeholders into account in order to provide a more holistic picture. In accordance with the pragmatist paradigm (Chapter 2), I developed a mixed-research methodology that includes two studies, a dominant qualitative study and a secondary quantitative study, that enable me to gain a holistic understanding of the employer branding concept.

The chapter is structured as follows. In the first part, I will present the research design as a partially mixed sequential dominant research design. I will develop the implications of a dominant qualitative mixed-methods design (Section 3.1.). The second part of the chapter will present the construction of empirical material and discuss in detail each of the methods employed (Section 3.2.). In the third part I will discuss the strategy of analysis for each of the studies.

4.1 The research design: a mixed sequential dominant design

There are many different designs for mixed methods. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2003) alone present 35 types of mixed-methods research designs in their book. Other scholars such as Greene and Caracelli (1989), Greene (1990), Creswell et al. (2003), and Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) have also developed typologies of mixed-methods research design. Morse (2003) presents four main principles to be considered when deciding on a research design. First, the researcher should consider the theoretical drive of the study. If the purpose of the study is to explore, then the theoretical drive will be inductive, and qualitative data is most appropriate (though quantitative data in the form of questionnaires or exploratory factor analysis or surveys could also be used). If the aim of the study is to confirm or test a hypothesis, then the theoretical drive is deductive and quantitative methods will be used. The second principle states that the researcher should recognise the role of the imported component in the project, meaning that “the main project forms the theoretical foundation and information obtained from other strategies will be used to supplement or inform the main project” (Morse, 2003, p. 194). The third principle states that while the
Methodological assumptions of the base method should be followed and not violated, at the same time the assumptions of the secondary method should also be respected (for example, qualitative data should not be treated in the same way as quantitative data). Morse’s last principle (2003) advises working with as few data sets as possible.

In 2009, Leech and Onwuegbuzie developed a continuum design intended to solve the various problems of previous typologies. They defined mixed methods as “research that involves collecting, analysing and interpreting qualitative and quantitative data in a single study or in a series of studies that investigate the same underlying phenomena” (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009, p. 267). Conducting an analysis of the available research design and taking the above-mentioned definition into account, they developed a framework (Figure 4.1.) that presents mixed methods in terms of three dimensions: a mixing dimension (partially or fully mixed), a time dimension (concurrent or sequential), and an emphasis dimension (equal status or dominant status).

Based on this typology, the research design guiding this dissertation is a partially mixed sequential dominant status design featuring two phases occurring sequentially, of which one or the other – either the qualitative or the quantitative – is emphasised. This dissertation includes two phases, one quantitative (during which data was collected by questionnaire, see section 4.4.2), and one qualitative (where data was collected by in-depth interviews, see section 4.4.1.). Of the two, the qualitative phase is dominant. It has generated two research articles (see Chapters 5 and 6).

Figure 4.1. – Typology of mixed research (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009, p. 269)
4.2 A qualitative dominant mixed-methods research design

This dissertation consists of two studies, as shown in section 4.1. The main study is a qualitative study based on in-depth interviews (see Section 4.4.1.) and has generated two research articles (see Chapters 5 and 6). The second study is a quantitative study based on data constructed with the use of a survey, and has generated one article (see Chapter 7). The qualitative study presents the concept of employer branding from the organisation’s perspective, whereas the quantitative study provides a context for the employer branding concept from the jobseeker’s perspective. The two studies contribute to a holistic overview of the employer branding concept – focused, however, on the organisational perspective. Although the two studies are independent, I adhere to the dialectic paradigm thesis and consider that each study’s results help to a great extent to improve understanding of the employer branding concept. The two studies are described in detail in sections 4.4.1 and 4.4.2.

Qualitative research represents a significant contribution to mixed-methods research (Creswell et al., 2006). The use of what Mason (2006) calls a qualitative logic does not define the world in qualitative versus quantitative terms; rather by mixing methods we intensify the “logic of qualitative explanations about the social world” (Creswell et al., 2006, p. 2). Mason (2006) also states that qualitative research provides an explication for the context rather than trying to control for contextual variables.

A common type of mixed-methods design that starts with and emphasises the qualitative study is an exploratory sequential design (Creswell et al., 2007). The qualitative study is often based on qualitative in-depth case studies, exploratory interviews, or observations, and is followed by a quantitative study based on, for example, a survey. Creswell et al. (2006) and Morgan (2007) provide a series of reasons for emphasising the qualitative component of a mixed-methods research design. They cite, among other reasons, instrument development, the emphasis on different perspectives, and generation of a theory or modes.

The exploratory purpose of this dissertation enhances the qualitative component, which dominates the research project and is based on a grounded-theory approach. The supporting study is a quantitative study based on a survey. The following section (Section 4.3) will describe the grounded-theory approach in more detail, followed by a description of the data-collection methods (Section 4.4.1 and 4.4.2).
4.3 The grounded-theory approach

Taking as it does an exploratory purpose and an inductive approach, this dissertation is based on grounded theory, as Glaser and Strauss introduced this concept in 1967. As one of the main principles of grounded theory is to generate theories (Daymon & Holloway, 2011), while the main purpose of this study is to explore and understand a theoretical concept, in this dissertation I can only claim to have done research in the grounded-theory style or inspired by grounded theory. In the following paragraphs I will present the theory and the aspects of this approach that form the basis of the qualitative study.

The main idea Glaser and Strauss (1967) reinforce in grounded theory is that “theory evolves during actual research and it does this through continuous interplay between analysis and data collection” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 158). Grounded-theory methodology follows a set of well-defined rules that lead to the development of theory through the interchange between analysis and data collection, for which there is a rigorous procedure. The research process initially starts without a hypothesis or theory, and the research develops both deductively and inductively. The present study started with the sole purpose of exploring employer branding in two different contexts; the research process was a continuous iterative process between analysis and data collection. The researcher was immersed in the data and identified patterns that will lead to the development of theory.

The most common data-collection method in grounded theory is observation, but interviews are also acceptable, on the premise that grounded theory aims to apprehend tacit knowledge, which can be obtained from relevant interviewees (Partington, 2000). Data collection and data analysis occur simultaneously in grounded theory. The data analysed helps to develop the further data-collection process.

Grounded theory is based on “theoretical sampling” and “constant comparison” (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). This in turn implies that the selection of subjects is based on an initial set of decisions, and may change over the course of data collection as informed by the ongoing analysis.

The analysis in grounded theory consists of coding (Charmaz, 2006). The process consists of three steps (Daymon & Holloway, 2011):

- open coding: represents breaking down the data into ideas, which are labelled. The open codes tend to be numerous, but are then grouped in categories.
• Axial coding: this type of coding does not appear in Glaserian grounded theory. It implies reviewing and re-sorting the previously formed categories and reorganising them in major categories that are then labelled. At this point the labels might represent concepts from previous literature.

• Selective coding: at this point the major categories are linked together in what is called core categories, integrating them and providing a narrative. This step integrates all elements of the study and reveals the core essence of it.

The coding process is described later in section 4.5, where I also discuss the implications of using NVivo software to implement the analysis. The NVivo application follows closely the coding procedure in grounded theory.

The grounded-theory approach is still evolving, and the two directions identified by Glaser (2002) and Strauss and Corbin (1998) continue to be developed in different research areas. One of the main differences between the two approaches lies in the role of the researcher. While Glaser (2002) views the researcher as objective and detached from the analyses process, Strauss and Corbin (1998) consider the researcher to be subjective and an inextricable part of the analysis. This latter perspective on grounded theory sees the process of coding and analysing as initially based on feelings and intuition (Suddaby, 2006). The empirical material is perceived through the researcher’s experiences, and therefore there is not a single reality, but several. Another critique comes from Glaser (2002) himself, who condemns the technical direction that grounded theory is taking and the way in which it is becoming a series of steps to follow rather than a method of analysis.

Several approaches to grounded theory are in use today, many of which can barely be called by that name. These methods adopt parts of the grounded-theory methodology, mainly the organisation and classification of the data, but exclude the theory generation completely. In a similar manner, I used elements of grounded theory in my methodological approach. Therefore I am not claiming to use grounded theory: rather, I base my research on a grounded-theory approach.

4.4. Methods for constructing the empirical material

The research underpinning this dissertation was conducted using a mixed-methods design (section 4.1.), and is based on the philosophical assumptions that I have previously articulated as underlying the dissertation (Chapter 2). The research has been conducted in two studies, a main qualitative study and a supporting quantitative one (Section 4.1.). The construction of the empirical
material has thus been carried out using two different methods. The qualitative data was constructed using semi-structured interviews (Section 4.4.1), while the quantitative data was collected using a survey (Section 4.4.2.). Both methods are described further in this chapter.

4.4.1 Semi-structured interviews

Traditionally, qualitative research uses an array of different methods, which allows for comparisons across different empirical materials to determine what can be construed as true (Alvesson & Skölberg, 2009). However, this dissertation does not focus on verification, but rather explores how individuals describe the same event or concept in different ways (ibid.). Therefore I chose to conduct a series of semi-structured interviews to investigate the regularities and irregularities that appeared. The purpose of qualitative interviews is to collect interpretations rather than information (Warren, 2001), and the interviewees are more appropriately seen as meaning-makers (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995).

The research purpose of the qualitative study is to explore employer branding practices, and one way of achieving this purpose was through semi-structured interviews with employer brand managers. This allowed me to adapt the questions from one interviewee to another, based on the analysis following the grounded-theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), but still maintain a basic structure of the conversations.

In a pragmatist perspective, reality is not single and unique. In the current study, therefore, there are various realities (Dewey, 1938) of the same phenomena or concept. Therefore, in order to explore the concept of employer branding and its practices, 14 employer brand managers in 14 different organisations were interviewed. Even though the interviewees’ official job titles may have varied, they were selected to be the persons in charge or assuming all the responsibilities of the employer branding strategy – the decision-makers.

For Kvale (1996), the interview is a “conversation” – which parallels the original meaning of the Latin word conversatio, “wandering together with” (p. 4). For Kvale, the design of the interview is open-ended, focusing more on the participant in the conversation than on the strict path to be followed. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed me to focus on the interviewee, allowing the conversation to flow unrestricted by a rigorous set of questions as in a survey interview (Warren, 2001). The interview guide (see Appendix 2) gave me the frame or guidance that ensured I could achieve my research purpose. An interview, in Kvale’s perspective (Kvale, 1996; Warren, 2001), follows seven steps. The first two of these, thematising and designing, are
present in developing the interview guide. The following five steps are interviewing, transcribing, analysing, verifying, and reporting (Kvale, 1996, p. 88). The employer brand managers were asked to speak freely on the topic, while the researcher could intervene with follow-up questions to ask for specific detail or to ask for clarifications or examples in the “how” or “in what way” type of questions. The interview guide was developed based on grounded theory in the sense that it did not contain any predefined themes and was not inspired by the theory. The main purpose of the interview process was to explore the different “perspectives” (Campbell, 1998) of the respondents regarding the employer branding concept and employer branding practices.

Although theoretical sampling is one of grounded theory’s main assumption, participants were selected based on convenience sampling (Daymon & Holloway, 2011). As the official title of employer brand managers varies greatly from one company to another, it was difficult to identify the right person and approach them directly. Additionally, it is not always visible whether a company has an employer branding strategy or not. Therefore I decided to approach the Aarhus University Careers Centre, which has a large number of business partners. The AU Careers Centre sent out an email asking all their partners if they were interested in participating in a study, providing a short description of the research project and my contact information. I was then contacted by 17 employer brand managers. The main criteria for selecting the participants, as described also in the two articles generated by the qualitative study (see Chapter 5 and Chapter 6), were the size of the company and their desire to attract, recruit and retain high-quality talent. Size was considered an important factor because large companies have the resources necessary to invest in an employer branding team and activities. Based on these criteria, 14 companies were selected, and the interviews were conducted between January and March 2015. After conducting the interviews, one company was eliminated from the study, as it was significantly smaller than the others and employer branding was a secondary function assigned to the chief commercial officer. The empirical material thus consists of 13 semi-structured interviews with employer brand managers in large companies in five business sectors (see Table 4.1.). Sample size in qualitative studies can vary greatly as it depends on various factors, including the type of research question or qualitative approach, the number of researchers conducting the study, time resources, and so on. But according to Mitchell (1983), “the validity of qualitative analysis depends more on the quality of the analysis than on the size of the sample” (p. 54).

The interviews were conducted face-to-face, excepting one interview which was conducted by telephone (Appendix 4I). Some of the companies asked to remain anonymous and so company
names are not revealed in the study. The interviews lasted between 21 and 74 minutes, the shortest one being the telephone interview. Telephone interviews are usually used for survey interviews in preference to semi-structured or in-depth interviews (Shuy, 2001), as they provide better standardisation and uniformity. This particular interview was conducted by telephone due to difficulties in scheduling. The researcher tried to create a friendly and pleasant atmosphere in order to gain the interviewee’s confidence, and to treat this as a conversation rather than a formal interview.

Table 4.1. – List of interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Interviewee’s official title</th>
<th>Interview duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>Consulting</td>
<td>HR Consultant</td>
<td>46 min 51 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>Global Employer Branding Manager</td>
<td>42 min 09 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03</td>
<td>Banking</td>
<td>Head of Employer Branding and Recruitment</td>
<td>1 h 13 min 47 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04</td>
<td>Consulting</td>
<td>HR Consultant and Employer Branding</td>
<td>41 min 40 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05</td>
<td>Energy</td>
<td>Senior Manager, Performance &amp; Internationalization</td>
<td>28 min 36 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06</td>
<td>Energy</td>
<td>HR Director and P &amp; S Recruiter</td>
<td>37 min 12 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07</td>
<td>IT</td>
<td>Senior Communication Consultant</td>
<td>49 min 25 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08</td>
<td>Banking</td>
<td>Employer Branding Manager</td>
<td>32 min 48 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09</td>
<td>Consulting</td>
<td>Senior Consultant</td>
<td>20 min 31 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Energy</td>
<td>HR Communications &amp; Employer Branding</td>
<td>30 min 04 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Energy</td>
<td>HR Manager</td>
<td>47 min 33 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>IT</td>
<td>HR Consultant</td>
<td>no audio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Energy</td>
<td>HR Specialist Talent Management, Learning &amp; Development</td>
<td>39 min 08 sec</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regardless of the possibility of “creating a particular context” (Warren, 2001, p. 91), the interviews were audio recorded with the permission of the participants, with the exception of one interview where the interviewee clearly confessed to feeling uncomfortable with the audio recording, so that the interviewer only took notes (Appendix 4L). All the interviews were taken in English and transcribed (see transcriptions in Appendix 4). Transcription means transforming the spoken language into written language (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009), and the level of detail transcribed depends upon the purpose of the study. This study uses thematic analysis (see section 4.5.1) to analyse the empirical material; therefore the transcription does not include all pauses and emotions transmitted by the interviewee.

The entire research process is based on decisions and choices that the researcher must make. Many of these decisions are related to the empirical material production and analysis – from choosing the appropriate method, to developing the interview guide, to taking decisions during the interview, as well as during the transcription and analysis process. All the decisions taken along the
way were informed and guided by the research questions (see section 1.1) as well as the philosophical assumptions of the study (see Chapter 2).

4.4.2 Survey

The supporting quantitative study is based on an online survey (Vehovar & Manfreda, 2008). The survey research method has always been open to new technologies – the telephone in the 1960s, or computer-assisted surveys in the 1980s (ibid.). Online surveys have both advantages and disadvantages compared with other survey types. Advantages include that they conserve resources by not requiring one or several interviewers who would call the respondents or administer the survey face-to-face, thus saving on postage and printing costs. Disadvantages include a 6 to 15 per cent lower response rate than other types of surveys (Manfreda et al., 2008). A large number of software applications can be used to develop and submit the surveys, as well as collect the data and perform limited analysis. For this study the SurveyXact online application was used to create and submit the survey. This was due to the fact that Arhus University provides access to this application.

The main purpose of this study was to explore the role of generation in the job-search process. Therefore cluster sampling combined with judgement sampling were applied, with the interest groups initially sampled based on decisions made by the researcher. The population of this survey was defined as Danish and international individuals living and working or intending to work in Denmark (both men and women) of or above 18 years of age who were involved in a job-search process (as defined in section 3.5). In order to have respondents of different ages as well as professions, the survey was distributed on social media through a link posted in groups dedicated to job-seeking on Facebook and LinkedIn, and also through the monthly newsletter of Aarhus University’s Careers Centre and Alumni Office, as well as the monthly newsletter sent to the members of two unemployment funds. The unemployment funds were chosen because they provided access to a large pool of jobseekers of different ages and backgrounds, while the Careers Centre and Alumni Office provided access to a large number of jobseekers younger than 30 years old. The survey was conducted in both English and Danish (see questionnaire in Appendix 7A and

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1 An unemployment insurance fund where people become members, pay a membership contribution and are guaranteed an amount of regular income if they become unemployed.
The questionnaire was accessed 520 times, of which 334 were valid, complete responses, resulting in a 64.2 per cent response rate. As a reward for participation, the respondents could choose to take part in a competition for twenty gift certificates for 200 DKK (ca. 26 Euro or 36 USD) that could be used in a Danish design shop.

The survey consists of 16 questions (see questionnaire in Appendix 7A and 7B), leading to 30 variables (see Appendix 9). The first set of questions asked for socio-demographic details, followed by questions related to self-efficacy in the job-search process. The job-search process was defined in Section 3.5 and Paper III (Chapter 7).

Bias can easily occur in survey results, in different ways. One type of bias easily found in online surveys is frame coverage bias, which occurs when the selected sampling frame misses some key part of the population. In this study, this type of bias could arise from the selection of groups to which the survey was submitted, possibly leaving out groups that might represent an important part of the population.

4.5 Strategies of analysis

The following section discusses the strategies used to analyse the data in the qualitative study. Although I use a grounded-theory methodological approach (section 4.3), I am not claiming to use grounded theory as a method of analysing the data. In order to find a balance between choice of an analytical strategy and steering clear of the rigidity of grounded theory as a method (Glaser, 2002), I employed a template analysis (King, 2012) strategy. This was done with the use of the computer-assisted analysis software, NVivo (Section XXX). This section is thus structured in two parts. Part one discusses template analysis as a strategy for analysing the qualitative data (section 4.5.1) and part two considers the implications of using computer-assisted analysis of qualitative data (section 4.5.2). The test used to analyse the quantitative data are described in Paper III (Chapter 7).

4.5.1 Template analysis

Template analysis is, according to King (2012), a type of thematic analysis “that balances a relatively high degree of structure in the process of analysing textual data with the flexibility to adapt it to the needs of a particular study” (p. 426). This type of analysis is situated between grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and content analysis (Weber, 1985). Codes are
predefined and the data is most often quantified, and the approach is placed between bottom-up and top-down (King, 2012). Template analysis is not a methodology, but rather a technique that can be used within various epistemologies. Although it can be used with several types of data, it is most commonly used with qualitative interviews. It implies developing a coding template on a subset of the data, which is then applied to a larger part of the data set, revised, and applied to the entire data set.

Template analysis allows the researcher to be flexible in the coding process without imposing a strict number of levels of coding or distinguishing between descriptive and interpretative themes. The use of a priori themes is also permitted to a limited extent, placing this type of analysis between the other more restrictive types of analysis which do not permit theoretically inspired themes (e.g. grounded theory) or where themes must be informed by theory (e.g. content analysis).

The coding process in the qualitative study in this dissertation was conducted in multiple steps. Initially, the transcribed interviews were coded using an open coding system (Figure 4.2.). This initial coding process was also informed by the interview guide; therefore it could be argued that there were a priori codes to a certain extent. After an initial coding process, a second round was carried out focusing on the research questions. The codes were selected based on the research question; each paper generated in this study focuses on a different set of initial codes. For example, Paper I (Chapter 5) focuses on the main themes – ownership, activities, future plans, and boundaries – while for Paper II (Chapter 6) my co-author and I developed a new set of codes based on the initial coding. It can be argued that one article (Chapter 5, Paper I) took a more bottom-up approach, whereas the other (Chapter 6, Paper II) was more top-down in approach. The two redefined sets of codes were initially applied to a small number of interview transcriptions and re-evaluated. Once the code-books were considered to be definite, they were applied to the entire empirical material. Paper II (Chapter 6) was co-authored, and the collaboration was initiated as a shared interest in the topic after I met my co-author at a conference. From the second step, where the codes were redefined based on the research proposition, the coding process was therefore conducted in collaboration between the two researchers.

King’s (2012) key features of template analysis were taken into consideration during the entire coding process, so the codes were used as labels for text fragments. Parallel coding permitted the researcher to label the same text fragment with different codes, and hierarchical coding was used in order to group similar codes into clusters with more general meanings.
The coding process was discussed with my supervisors along the way, and it was additionally presented to conferences. The feedback was used along the way in redefining the codes and reaching the form used in the two articles. For the co-authored article, the codes were developed with my co-author in an iterative process. Each of us initially developed an individual set of codes which were then discussed, and we agreed upon a common code book which was applied to the entire empirical material (see Table 4.2.).

Figure 4.2. – Initial coding

In a pragmatist approach, there are differing interpretations of reality (Chapter 2). Therefore the researcher’s reflexivity is a greater concern than coding reliability (Haynes, 2012). Haynes defines reflexivity as the understanding of the role the researcher has in the actual practice of research, acknowledging the way in which the researcher influences both research process and outcome (ibid.). Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009) consider that there are two main elements comprised in reflexivity: interpretation and reflection. Interpretation acknowledges that analysis is not simply of facts but is influenced by the underlying assumptions, or pre-assumptions, of the
Reflexivity is conceptualised differently according to the researcher’s philosophical assumptions. From a pragmatist perspective, reflexivity is situated between the objectivist view (in which reflexivity is merely the eradication of possible bias in research design and in the analysis) and the subjectivist view (in which reflexivity concentrates mainly in the interpretation of the text in the various forms in which it is constructed) (ibid.). In this dissertation, reflexivity is conceptualised closer to a subjective view, in the sense that it acknowledges the multiple understandings of the same reality and is aware of the pre-understandings the researcher brings into this research process and its outcome.

**4.5.2 Computer-assisted analysis of the qualitative data: NVivo**

In quantitative research software applications have been used for many years making statistical calculations much easier for researchers (Seale, 2002). It is in the 1980s that qualitative
data could be also analysed using personal computers in the recent years the software was significantly improved.

Since consistency and systematic data management (Gibbs, 2007) are the main criteria for an effective qualitative data analysis, computer software is very useful in reaching this efficiency. In qualitative data research, the computer software does not perform the analysis on its own. The researcher has to take all the decisions and takes charge of the coding process (Gibbs, 2007). The software does not provide any type of solutions for the analysis. It is merely a tool that provides support in organising and keeping track of the data.

In the present dissertation, NVivo 2011 was used to store, organise, and manage the qualitative data. The transcribed interviews were stored and coded in NVivo, making it much easier to find specific codes or to see all the material coded with the same label. In this way I could make sure that the content assigned to each code was consistent with the appropriate definition. NVivo has a number of different options for visualising data which are especially useful in content analysis, for example when data is quantified. In this study none of the more advanced features of NVivo were used. The software was merely a tool for organising and managing the data.
CHAPTER 5

PAPER I
5. Introduction to Paper I

The first of the three papers in this dissertation is part of the main qualitative study and is based on semi structured interviews with employer brand managers in 13 large organizations. This paper looks at the organization of integrated communication in the employer branding role and how do EBMs define their role in relation to the integration of communication. The paper is based on literature on the organization of integrated communication and authors such as e.g. Christensen, Firat and Cornelissen (2008); Christensen et al. (2008); Schultz and Schultz (2003); Torp (2009) and takes its point of departure in the multidisciplinarity of the employer branding concept. As it is part of the qualitative study, this paper uses the same data set as the following paper (Paper II), focusing on different themes that were identified during the analysis.

The initial idea for this paper appeared while I was conducting the interviews and I notices the struggle of the employer brand managers in defining their role in the organization as a recurring theme. This paper was however, written the last of the three papers in this dissertation.

The paper was submitted to Corporate Communication An International Journal on the 22nd of September 2017.
1. Introduction

Employer branding is situated at the intersection of corporate reputation, public relations, marketing and human resources and is crossing between internal and external communication (Martin et al., 2011; Foster et al., 2010). Such a complex concept is difficult to manage in an organization where each of the intersecting disciplines is managed separately in an organization. In their attempt to define and control the employer brand and their authority in the organization, employer brand managers (EBMs) have been found to start creating boundaries around it (Edlinger, 2015). This is a continuous process of defending the relevance of the employer brand and shielding it from undesirable influences. This defining and defending process leads to a disconnection between the employer brand and the corporate brand as well as the separation of the EBM function from other elements of the organization. Whereas employer branding, on the one hand, requires boundaries, it also, on the other hand, requires integration across boundaries. Employer branding requires several types of integration, e.g. horizontal integration, vertical integration etc., including internal-external integration. Here, prospective employees (external stakeholders) have access to current employees (internal stakeholders) through, for example, ambassador programs, the recruiting process and even informally through their personal networks. Therefore, the alignment of messages, symbols, procedures and behaviours is important in order to have “consistency, coherence, clarity and continuity within and across formal organizational boundaries” (Christensen et al., 2008, p. 424).

The topic of integration has been discussed in communication since the 1980s (e.g. Cornelissen, 2014; Torp, 2009) when academics and practitioners realized that the two previously distinct disciplines of marketing and public relations actually had many things in common. There are different opinions about what is to be integrated, while van Riel (1995) considers important the integration of the various communication functions, van Riel and Fombrun (2007) refer to integration as the coordination of all the internal and external communication activities. There are many advantages of integrating all communication functions and striving for a centralized control of these functions: from being able to break through the ever-growing number of communication messages (e.g. Torp, 2009: Christensen, Firat & Torp, 2008; Christensen, Firat and Cornelissen, 2009), to creating a stronger reputation for the company and even a more efficient spending of the communication budget (Christensen et al., 2009). Without any doubt, integrated communication is
very attractive from a managerial perspective. However, the question of how integrated communication can be implemented in practice in organizations remains an important topic of debate even after two decades of research within the field (Christensen et al., 2009). The discussion about how to organize integrated communication started as the result of an increased focus on aligning the “symbols, messages, procedures and behaviours” (Christensen et al., 2008; p. 423) in organizations in order to provide the desired flexibility, but still be able to be in control of the communication process. The question of flexibility vs. control is also one of the main challenges of integrated communication (Christensen et al., 2008), which leads to the question of how to organize what has become an organization-wide project of integrated communication. Cornelissen (2001) questions whether the actual organization of integrated communication is even possible in practice, or if the phenomenon provides solely a theoretical frame with serious difficulties of implementation.

As employer brand managers struggle to define and situate their position in the organization and define their role in relation to the other organizational roles (Edlinger, 2015), a better understanding of the organization of integrated communication in relation to employer branding could help EBMs define their role and improve communication and collaboration across departments and disciplines. The purpose of this paper is to look at the organization of integrated communication in relation to the employer branding role and how do EBMs define their role in relation to the integration of communication.

This paper is structured as follows. To begin with, the theoretical framework is presented, where the organization of integrated communication and the concept of employer branding are discussed more in detail. Based on an interview study, we discuss the role of EBMs in relation to the organization of communication, and the organization of integrated communication. Lastly, by collapsing Johansen and Andersen’s (2013) and Andersen’s et al. (2013) models of integration within communication and specifically employer branding, we tentatively discuss a model of application of integrated communication for the concept of employer branding.

2. Theoretical framework

This research paper is organized around two main theoretical concepts: integrated communication and employer branding. In the following section the two concepts will be discussed...
in more detail, first discussing integrated communication in section 2.1, followed by employer branding in section 2.2.

2.1 The organization of integrated communication

Integration is a recurring topic in the study of corporate communication, marketing and branding, in the challenging mission to “align symbols, messages, procedures and behaviors in order for an organization to communicate with clarity, consistency and continuity within and across formal organizational boundaries” (Christensen et al., 2008; p. 424). Integration in communication is seen to have several advantages such as, for example, increased credibility and trust shown by the stakeholders (Christensen et al., 2008) or strengthened branding efforts (Christensen, Firat and Cornelissen, 2009). Considering that organizational communication is no longer seen as limited to PR or marketing, but rather as an action of an organization (Gronstedt, 1996), integrated communication has grown from a confined activity to a function that concerns the entire organization (Christensen et al., 2008).

Some scholars (e.g. Schultz, 1993, Duncan & Moriarty, 1998) discuss the implementation of integration in practice in terms of horizontal or cross-departmental coordination. However, according to Christensen et al. (2008), one of the main hindrances to integration is the poor horizontal communication in organizations. The interdepartmental communication and collaboration is difficult to achieve due to, for example, differences of opinion regarding the stakeholder groups in focus (Christensen et al., 2008), but also a lack of commitment to integrated communication (Smith, 1996) and a strong fragmentation of the communication in what Gronstedt and Thorson (1996) calls “functional silos”. Also, different levels of integration are discussed (Cornelissen, 2001; Duncan & Caywood, 1996; Schultz and Schultz, 2003), from awareness, where the organization is conscious and gains knowledge of the changes in the environment, which increases the likelihood of developing a system of integrated communication, to a level where the different disciplines and functions are structurally integrated. A more recent model of integration strives for an alternative to the controlled integration, more precisely for a flexible approach, where the organization is responsive to the environment (Christensen et al., 2008).

The concept of integrated communication is very flexible and this is clearly visible from the development its definitions have been through over time (see IMC for example, as a model of integrated communication). Scholars such as Bruhn (1997) and Schultz (2004) criticize the IMC
existing definitions, and advance new definitions of the concept. One of the main concerns regarding the integration of communication is, as suggested by Schultz (1999), the inflexible organizational boundaries, among the most commonly mentioned ones being the lack of horizontal communication (Christensen et al., 2008). An other major critiques brought up in discussion was its exclusive focus on external communication (Torp, 2009). Therefore, more definitions include communication programs that involve “relevant external and internal audiences” (Schultz, 2004, p. 9), including employees and associates that were neglected previously. “IMC is doomed to fail if the external community is better informed than the internal community” (Bruhn in Torp, 2009, p. 197).

Employees, as a stakeholder group, are often disregarded when discussing integrated communication (Torp, 2009). However, even integrated marketing communication, which holds marketing to be central, “includes all internal and external communication functions employed by a company” (Bruhn, 1997-1998; p. 2). In addition, Schultz (2004) sets focus on internal communication and employees as an audience in her understanding of IMC:

“Integrated marketing communication is a strategic business process used to plan, develop, execute and evaluate coordinated, measurable, persuasive brand communications programs over time with consumers, customers, prospects, employees, associates and other targeted, relevant, external and internal audiences” (Schultz, 2004; p. 9).

In a review of integrated communication, Johansen and Andersen (2013) present a “classical view” (p. 289) of integration across the disciplines of integrated marketing communication (IMC), corporate marketing, corporate branding and corporate communication. The organization of integrated communication changes from one discipline to an other, from being focused on the marketing mix and wanting to ensure a consistency of the brand across points of contact in IMC to including all forms of internal and external communication having the purpose of presenting the organization as one entity in corporate communication (ibid.).

Despite having a framework for integrating all internal and external forms of communication in corporate communication, Johansen and Andersen (2013) argue that within these forms and structures of integrated communication, the brands should listen even more to their stakeholders. In addition, they state that “the integration of communication seems to focus exclusively on intra-organizational aspects” (ibid.; p. 298). The alternative comes as the re-conceptualization of integration in a co-creation perspective where “organizations need to listen to
market voices and engage in open stakeholder dialogue as part of an integrated mind-set” (ibid.; p. 302).

2.2 Employer branding – cross-disciplinary work

Employer branding requires integration in the overall communication strategy of the company and is itself a very complex function. This calls for a high level of integration, both vertical and horizontal, as well as internal-external integration.

Ambler and Barrow (1996) initially introduced the concept of employer branding by exploring the relevance of applying marketing techniques and terminologies to HRM. The initial definition of the concept inspired by Asker’s (1991) classic definition of brand and brand equity, became a central definition of employer branding (Aggerholm et al., 2011). Ambler and Barrow’s (1996) definition describes employer branding as a static concept based on the traditional branding paradigm that Csaba and Bengtsson (2006) recount as static, focused on sender and independent of relational influences.

Employer branding is discussed in academic research in different disciplines (Edlinger, 2015) (e.g. human resources management, marketing, corporate reputation). Empirical papers mostly focus on measuring the levels of attractiveness of the employer brand (Smith et al., 2001), job seeker’s knowledge about the companies’ employer brand (Cable & Turban, 2001), the organizational image beliefs (Cable & Yu, 2006) etc. Varying in scope and function, employer branding is, depending on the research stream, a part of a management process (Barrow & Mosley, 2005; Foster et al., 2010), a part of the corporate brand (Foster et al., 2010), an HRM activity (Sullivan, 2002; App et al. 2012) or a part of the sustainability strategy (Aggerholm et al., 2011; Andersen et al., 2013).

Andersen et al. (2013) argue that employer brand concept went through various changes that they describe as three waves. The first wave is marked by Ambler and Barrow’s (1996) and Backhaus and Tikoo’s (2004) definitions, based on Aaker’s (1992) brand equity concept. The employer brand is characterized as static concept, that considers employees as “predefined templates of corporate behaviour” (Andersen et al. (2013) and that is intended to serve the external audiences. The second wave moves away from the product branding perspective into a corporate branding perspective. Here, the employee experience is aligned with the recruitment messages sent to the external audiences (Mosley, 2007). In addition, employees participate in the
construction of a common understanding of the employer brand values. In the recent years, employer branding has entered, at least from a normative perspective, what Andersen et al. (2013) describe as the third wave and revolves around the reconceptualization of Aggerholm et al. (2011) where employer branding leaves the product branding and corporate branding perspectives behind and becomes a “strategic branding process” (Aggerholm et al., 2011). The organization develops sustainable relationships with its current and prospective employees and has changed its main purpose to “co-creating sustainable values for the individual, the organization and the society as a whole” (ibid.; p. 113).

When looking at employer branding in companies, it is most commonly seen as associated with an HR role and consequently situated within the department of human resources (Edlinger, 2015). Moreover, it cuts across various traditional HR functions (Edwards, 2009). However, employer branding also requires working across areas such as corporate reputation, public relations and marketing (Martin et al., 2005) and it should be equal and consistent with all the other branding activities (Sullivan, 1999). Due to its main scope of attracting, motivating and retaining the firm’s current and prospective employees (Conference Board, 2001), employer branding cuts across both internal and external communication (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

The management of such a complex function that cuts across various disciplines and organizational structures requires tools and tactics that make it possible to navigate it. Employer brand managers are, in addition, faced with the challenge of having to define and defend their position (Edlinger, 2015) within the organization, which puts even more pressure on them to organize the communication between the different functions that take part in the development and implementation of the employer brand and the corresponding activities.

3. Methodology

Since this paper strives to look at the organization of integrated communication in relation to the employer branding role as well as how do EBMs define their role in relation to the integration of communication, 13 semi-structured interviews were conducted between January and March 2015, with professionals that were responsible for the employer brand strategy and practices in their companies. Regardless of their official job title, I refer to them as employer brand managers (EBMs), as they oversaw and owned all the activities related to employer branding. The companies represented in this study are large companies in Denmark from five different sectors (banking,
consulting, energy, engineering and IT). They have operations in several countries and have a high necessity for recruiting specialized talent. Therefore, they decided that employer branding is a priority for them. The two main selection criteria were the size of the company and their need to attract, recruit, and retain highly qualified talent. The size was considered an important factor, because large companies also have the resources necessary to invest in an employer-branding team and activities. The companies’ experience in working with employer branding varied from the planning phase (one company), two to five years of experience (four companies), over five years of experience (seven companies) where two of them had over eight years of experience. The interviews ranged in length from 21 to 74 minutes and were conducted face to face, with the exception of one interview that was conducted by phone. All interviews were conducted in English.

The interviews were based on a set of guiding questions that allowed the interviewees to describe their employer brand practices in detail. The first part of the interview focused on the employer brand function, the EBM’s role, organizational structure and the importance EB is attributed at top management level. The second part of the interview focused on the EB practices and the evaluation of the EB. In order to reduce the enhancement bias (Krueger, 1998), i.e. the tendency to describe oneself or one’s role in a more positive tone than normative criteria would anticipate, I made sure I asked for examples in all situations described by the interviewees.

The analysis of the data was conducted with the help of NVivo (QSR International Pty Ltd, Melbourne, Australia). The analysis was conducted in a stage-by-stage process (Burnard, 1991) inspired by grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and included thematic coding (King, 2012). In relation to the scope of the present paper, the thematic coding produced four themes of relevance (see table 1). These themes form the point of departure for the analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>main theme</th>
<th>sub-themes</th>
<th>description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>intra-organizational</td>
<td>EB boundaries</td>
<td>the formal boundaries identified by the interviewees, the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>boundaries</td>
<td>human resources</td>
<td>separation between departments and responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CSR</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ownership</td>
<td>EB ownership</td>
<td>the struggle to define the ownership of the employer brand,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EB function</td>
<td>creating a distinction from other contributors to the EB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>activities</td>
<td>campus partnerships</td>
<td>the description of activities used as tactics in their employer branding process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>internal</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
4. Analysis

In order to fulfil the aim of looking at the organization of integrated communication in the employer branding role and how EBMs define their role in relation to the integration of communication, the analysis is structured in two parts. The first part of the analysis section will describe the situation of the EBMs in the organizational structure and their role in relationship to other organizational functions. The second part of the analysis will focus on the integrated communication in employer branding and will look at the cross-functional collaboration and communication in employer branding.

4.1 The Employer Brand Manager’s role - a description

In order to establish where in the organizational structure the ownership of EB is placed, I asked the interviewees what their job titles are and where in the organization they are situated. In most companies, the employer brand function is found under human resources and the typical job title is human resources consultant or coordinator (nine out of thirteen companies). In three companies, the interviewees said their job title is Employer Brand Manager (02; 03; 08). However, they directly report to the Human Resources Manager. A single interviewee (07) is a Senior Communication Consultant and reports to the HR and Communication Manager.

The simple description of where in the organizational structure the role of EBMs takes place sometimes became overwhelming and difficult to follow:

“Technically I am called Global Employer Branding Manager and I sit within our organizational development section, which sits under HR, but HR is part of Communications as well, so we are called People and Communications, and so under People and Communications, we are under People, Organizational Development and then there is my role.” (02)

“I am a Senior Communications Consultant and I am sitting in the Communications department, which is part of our HR Communications
and Quality Division. So the Head of Communications refers directly to our HR and Quality and Communications Director and she is actually part of the top management, so we are very close to our CEO.” (05)

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The two most recurring themes in their description of their role as responsible for the employer brand are the collaboration with other functions and, at the same time, their ownership of the EB compared to just the support other functions provide. The two themes go hand in hand and most often they follow each other even in the same sentence. For example:

“EB is an activity carried out between us, the HR department and the Communications department. We have a marketing coordinator ... she does most of the practical work, the layouts, contacting media and such, and she is the one updating the Facebook page and all that. So, she is doing most of the practical work.” (01)

“There is a person representative from each of the sections under People and Communications who meet in advance (before joint meetings of the two sections) and talk about what is most relevant, what is interesting for the other sections to hear as well. In terms of just cooperation, that varies greatly, I think Communications, at least when I look at my role, what they've done, is ... they help a lot when there’s a need.” (02)

Collaboration between the human resources department, or section, and the communication department is present in all the companies, to a smaller or greater extent, and all interviewees stress the fact that there is collaboration between these two. This collaboration takes different forms, from weekly status meetings (02), to asking for ideas and slogans (04), and social media updates and activities (01; 04; 10). In other cases, the collaboration is based on need, which may vary substantially (02). Other EBMs have decided to “staff the team with people with communication skills” (04) or the EBMs themselves have a communication background and their “need for basic communication feedback is not really pressing” (10).
In the interviews, the appreciation of the close collaboration between the EBMs, who sometimes associate themselves with the HR department, and the communication team is followed by a delimitation of ownership and power. For example:

“EB is sitting under HR and Communications together in that sense, under the same leader and we, of course, have joint monthly department meetings where we learn about what each other is doing, but we also have a weekly meeting (...). In terms of just cooperation, that varies greatly, I think Communications, at least when I look at my role, what they've done, is ... they help a lot when there’s a need” (02)

A discussion about us and them is recurrent in most interviews. However, it should be easily seen and understood “first of all that is anchored in HR, but also that it requires close cross-organizational collaboration” (03). The same principle is applied also in the company where the EBM is a communication professional and talks about the close cooperation with HR. Here, the HR team performs the support function: “They used the template, some of the parts would be fixed and they would be written by me and they would write the job characteristics and some specific description” (07). When talking about the collaboration with the communication department, the EBMs adjoin phrases such as “these practical things” (01); “they help when there is a need” (02); “they are more on operations” (03) indicating the “we” (HR department), their decision making power compared to the tactical, operational tasks that “they” (communication department) perform. This leadership role in employer branding is diminished later on in the interview when they talk about future plans and improvements, here the focus is put on collaboration.

The employer branding role is a challenging one that requires not only a good collaboration with other functions in the company, but also the struggle in defining and defending what it implies and who should be responsible for each task. With activities that start from HR and having to be communicated on social media (which is the communication department), EBMs strive for collaboration and delimitation at the same time. EMBs belittle the role the communication department is has in employer branding and entrust the role of decision making strategy development to the HR department, to which they belong.
5. Organizing communication in employer branding

Employer brand activities are varied and cover a wide range of stakeholders. Most EBMs decided to establish agreements with different universities or university career centres (01; 02; 03; 04; 05; 07; 08; 10; 13) where they meet prospective candidates early on in their careers and establish relationships with them. These external stakeholders might have internships or student jobs in the companies and thus become internal stakeholders. While the human resources department carries out the campus activities (01; 02; 03; 04; 05; 07; 08; 10; 13), other activities, e.g. sponsorships (01; 02; 04; 07; 10), may be conducted by the communication department, where EB is an integrated element. Ambassador programs (03; 04; 05; 06; 08; 10) are usually internal programs where employees are “appointed” (05) ambassadors and they carry the responsibility of presenting the company’s values outside its formal boundaries. In one case (04), ambassadors are not employees, but students that are trained by the company and represent its values on campus.

Media communication is one of the tasks that requires cross-functional collaboration, as it is mostly owned by the communication department (01; 02; 03; 04; 05; 06; 07; 08; 09; 10; 11; 12; 13), including most social media channels.

“The approach on Facebook is a bit different, so on Facebook, EB is a content provider, we don’t run our Facebook own initiatives, but we try to provide content about us as an employer then e use on those customer facing communities” (03)

LinkedIn, however, is primarily used as a recruitment channel and it is, in most of the represented companies, “owned” by HR (01; 02; 06; 08; 09; 10; 11; 12; 13). In some of the companies (03; 04; 05; 07), LinkedIn is considered a communication channel and, as such, is managed by the communication department with EB or HR feeding them content.

“My colleague is social media responsible, but we are collaborating and together we’ve been doing a lot for the past two years and primarily on LinkedIn. That is because of the focus on specialists, people with longer career track. We use it communications wise both in collaboration with marketing and recruitment, so we do a lot, both on the corporate page which K is responsible for and also, we invested in career pages in Europe and Czech and China and US.” (07) (EBM in communication department)
Integration of communication is a topic that comes up in some of the interviews (03; 03; 04; 06; 07) as something they would like to improve in the future: “that will be one of the big things in the future: to coordinate all these activities and be sure that they all have the same purpose” (04). The integration of employer branding activities in the corporate brand is one of the main concerns of the EBMs (02), but also the integration among the different communication platforms (05). Horizontal integration is also on the list of future improvements (06; 07) where the EBMs consider cross-departmental integration a necessity and priority for the future of EB as well as the horizontal integration of all geographical affiliates (07).

“I don’t think the employer branding has been directly related to the recruitment process yet, but as I said that’s where we want to go, of course it wouldn’t be just that we want to hire somebody here in the next two months so we’d better start some EB, we want to get it where there’s always this level of EB that’s going on, that countries are focusing on.” (02)

“I want our employer story to be even more integrated with our overall branding than it has been in the past, both in terms of visual identity but also in terms of positioning. (…) we also need to work on multiple digital platforms. Basically this is about making the transition from having a very dominant focus on the career websites to having a focus on multiple online hubs.” (05)

In some companies, the silo effect (Gronstedt and Thorson, 1996) prevents the communication flow across different departments and hinders the sharing of information among individuals working with very similar or overlapping tasks. The EBMs do acknowledge the existence of these communication barriers (03; 04; 07) and are already changing the communication processes (07) or plan to do so (04) in the near future as part of new communication strategies.

Some of the interviewees (03; 04; 05; 10; 11) talked about an integration of the communication of the employer brand after changing the strategy to focus on a corporate brand instead of focusing on the brand at country level or on different business units. The more recent strategies revolve around the corporate brand and act as an umbrella concept where the core values are at the centre of attention.

There is a wide variety of activities carried out under employer branding, some of the activities having a short term oriented goal (e.g. job postings on social media), others (e.g. ambassador programs) will only have results in a few years time. There nature of activities is also
diverse, some are meant to communicate the employer brand of the organization, others are meant to attract prospective candidates. In order for the EBMs to manage all these activities, they strive for a certain level of integration of all communication activities in employer branding. Some of the EBMs that did not manage to achieve integrated communication, acknowledge the need for integration and develop plans for better integration in the future.

6. Discussion - Applying an integrated communication perspective to employer branding

The aim of this paper is to look at the organization of integrated communication in relation to the employer branding role and how EBMs define their role in relation to the integration of communication. In the theoretical framework the concepts of integrated communication and employer branding were discussed in more detail. In order to study the integrated communication in employer branding, thirteen interviews were conducted in large organizations and the analysis shows the challenges the employer branding poses in relation to the EBMs role. The analytic findings suggest that the EBMs described their collaboration with other functions while at the same time creating boundaries to help them assume ownership of the employer branding activities. EBMs acknowledge this delimitation of the employer branding activities from, for example, communication activities, hinders the integration of employer branding activities and plan for a better cross-functional collaboration in the future.

The integration of communication in employer branding is acknowledged to have great importance among practitioners (Lindzon, 2015; Yang, 2015), as EB itself is a discipline and function that crosses departmental and organizational boundaries between communication, marketing and HR departments and involves both internal and external stakeholders (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Edwards, 2009).

The struggle over the ownership of the EB and detachment from the communication department is also seen in the EBMs’ strategic recruitment and staffing of their team with professionals with a communication background or communication skills. As such, the EBMs acknowledge the need for communication skills and for the collaboration with the communication department. However, by recruiting communication professionals themselves, they strengthen this boundary between the two teams and reaffirm their ownership of the EB.
The organizational structure and the organization of the integrated communication employed in each company also have an impact on employer branding. Each of the integrated communication disciplines has its own view of the ideal of coherence and consistency across all levels of the organization and its deliberate communication. Based on each discipline’s understanding and vision of the integration of communication, employer branding receives a different conceptual organization (due to the multidisciplinary nature of EB) and a different outcome. I argue that applying an integrated communication framework to employer branding would help organize the communication process. Moreover, it would aid employer branding managers to find a structured way of both defining their role in the organization in relation to other functions, as well as achieve coherence and consistency between the employer brand and the corporate brand. By consolidating Andersen et al. (2013) and Johansen and Andersen’s (2013) approaches to employer branding and the organization of integration, it is possible advance our understanding of the integration of communication in employer branding. Johansen and Andersen (2013) discuss the characteristics and ideals of integrated communication in four disciplines (integrated marketing communication, corporate marketing, corporate branding and corporate communication) and add a fifth perspective: Co-creation. Andersen et al. (2013) discuss different approaches to employer branding and determine three EB waves based on the sustainability discourse in the corporate context. By bringing together the two perspectives we identified the characteristics and ideals of employer branding based on each of the disciplines/frames of reference for integrated communication and we determined on which of the three waves is situated based on the corporate discourse (see Figure 1).

The discipline of integrated marketing communication employs the marketing promotion mix in order to achieve the greatest communication effect and strives for coherence of the communication activities across all contact points. IMC is a market-oriented (Reid, Luxton & Mavondo, 2005) or customer driven (Schultz & Patti, 2009) approach and it has a more tactical rather than strategic level of integration. In this sense, EB is a set of employer value propositions (EVPs) that are communicated to the external stakeholders using a transition-like model of communication. The EBM develop “standard phrases that are sent further (…) and the employees are expected to be proactive and share on their LinkedIn profile (…)” (10). These characteristics are aligned to a great extent with the first wave of employer branding (Andersen et al., 2013) where the EVPs are marketed to the external stakeholders, who are also the focus of EB.
In transitioning from the focus on product to the entire organization (Balmer, 2009) in corporate marketing, an interest in building stakeholder relationships comes into sight (Balmer and Greyser, 2006) and the corporate marketing mix (ibid.) includes organizational identity, corporate identity and corporate reputation, among others, in main sight. At this point, employer branding is still concerned with the marketing of EVPs nonetheless, it also includes elements of identity and reputation. The employer brand is still in the first wave, where employees are required to adopt the organizational values imposed to them by the EBMs and are expected to do “their small part to sell the company” (02).

It is in corporate branding, and with it moving to the second wave of employer branding, that we talk about an integrated relationship between the internal and external stakeholders (Balmer & Grey, 2003; Hatch & Schultz, 2003), and where companies develop ambassador programs (03; 04; 05; 06; 08; 10) to encourage the initiation of relationships between

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1st wave</th>
<th>2nd wave</th>
<th>3rd wave</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>integrated marketing</strong></td>
<td>• market oriented</td>
<td>• market oriented</td>
<td>• market oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>communication</strong></td>
<td>• customer driven</td>
<td>• focus on the entire organization</td>
<td>• focus on the entire organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• tactical</td>
<td>• EVPs marketed to external stakeholders</td>
<td>• EVPs marketed to external stakeholders</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• EVPs marketed to the external stakeholders</td>
<td>• includes elements of identity and reputation</td>
<td>• includes elements of identity and reputation</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• employees are expected to adopt the organizational values</td>
<td>• employees are expected to adopt the organizational values</td>
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<td><strong>corporate marketing</strong></td>
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<td>• integrated relationship between internal and external stakeholders</td>
<td>• integrated relationship between internal and external stakeholders</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• better horizontal communication</td>
<td>• better horizontal communication</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>corporate branding</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>• encompasses the organization as a whole</td>
<td>• encompasses the organization as a whole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• focus on coherence, consistency and clarity</td>
<td>• focus on coherence, consistency and clarity</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• shared responsibility of EB between departments</td>
<td>• shared responsibility of EB between departments</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• EB is an integrative part of the operations</td>
<td>• EB is an integrative part of the operations</td>
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<td><strong>corporate communication</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>• company and stakeholders work together in a value creation process</td>
<td>• company and stakeholders work together in a value creation process</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• focus on transparency and dialogue</td>
<td>• focus on transparency and dialogue</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• sustainable human resources management</td>
<td>• sustainable human resources management</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• sustainable relationships between organization, stakeholders and society at large</td>
<td>• sustainable relationships between organization, stakeholders and society at large</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
the internal and external stakeholders. Within the organization, the silo structure is broken down and better cross-departmental collaboration emerges, where employer branding “is both under Communication and HR” (02), and where “there is a very close and evident collaboration between Marketing and Communications” (03).

The communication in corporate communication encompasses the organization as a whole (Johansen & Andersen, 2013) or a single entity (Christensen et al., 2008). By integrating all internal and external stakeholders, corporate communication sets a central focus on the coherence, consistency and clarity of the communication (Johansen & Andersen, 2013). This coherence and consistency is achieved in employer branding within the second and third waves, where the silo structure of the organization is no longer rigid and the responsibility of the employer branding is shared between different departments (01; 05; 06). Striving for the holistic communication approach, EBMs work towards a strong cross-departmental collaboration where there is no longer necessary to define the need for employer branding, but rather that EB is an integrative part of their operations (01).

Johansen and Andersen (2013) add a fifth concept, namely co-creation. Here, the company and stakeholders work together in a process of value creation that is based on transparency and driven by dialogue (ibid.). In this context society is claiming and regaining its control over corporations (Hatch & Schultz, 2010) that was lost in previous configurations. Employing this form of integrated communication, employer branding has been suggested to “create, negotiate and enact sustainable relationships between organization and its potential and existing employees” Aggerholm et al., 2011, p. 115). Moreover, it becomes more aware and considers the contextual perspectives on how to do business (ibid.). In the third wave of employer branding, organizations are argued to draw on sustainable human resources management and work together with their stakeholders in order to address their responsibility towards their stakeholders and society at large (ibid.).

7. Conclusions and further research

Employer branding is a multi-disciplinary concept that challenges both the theoretical approach and practical application. Research on employer branding is rooted in different disciplines, such as organizational behaviour, marketing, human resources and corporate communication, which makes it difficult to have a coherent and consistent research stream within
employer branding. The application in practice of employer branding is challenged by the difficulty
the EBMs face in defining and defending their role in organizations where there is a great overlap
between different functions. The integration of communication aspires to provide a solution for
these challenges. However, the organization of integrated communication is a topic widely debated
on its own, and its application on employer branding has never been approached before.

The aim of this paper was to take a closer look at the organization of integrated
communication in employer branding and understand how employer brand managers define their
role in relation to integrated communication. In order to achieve this goal, I organized the paper
around two theoretical concepts, namely the organization of integrated communication and
employer branding. I used an interview study to understand the EB role and the organization of
integrated communication within this function. I then proceeded to collapsing Andersen’s et al.
(2013) employer branding model and Johansen and Andersen’s (2013) framework on the
organization of integrated communication in order to develop a framework that takes a closer look
at the organization of integrated communication in employer branding based on different integrated
communication disciplines and employer branding configurations.

Cornelissen (2001) questions whether the organization of integrated communication is
even possible in practice, or if the phenomenon provides solely a theoretical frame with difficulties
of implementation. Employer branding and the challenges employer brand managers are faced with
in organizations in their daily work certainly needs a framework that would help navigate and
organize integrated communication within employer branding. In this paper I developed a
theoretical framework that applies integrated communication characteristics to the concept of
employer branding. In order to further develop the research in employer branding from a
communicative perspective, we propose future research should focus on, for example, exploring the
process of employer branding co-creation and the different possibilities of engaging employees in
the employer branding co-creation processes. Further exploration, also empirical, of Andersen’s et
al. (2013) employer branding framework is also needed in order to further develop the framework.

Also, exploring the role of employees as key stakeholders in different organizational
context is required in order to get a broader understanding of different facets of employer branding.

Despite offering new perspectives on employer branding and the EBMs’ role, this
study faces a few limitations. As the study involved interviewing employer brand managers, it is
unlikely that in the interviews the EBMs would reveal conflicts in the workplace. An other
limitation consists of the enhancement bias (Krueger, 1998), meaning that there is a tendency that
the interviewees would describe themselves or their role in a more positive tone than normative criteria would suggest. In order to reduce this bias, the interviewer asked for examples in all situations described.
8. References


CHAPTER 6

PAPER II
6. Introduction to Paper II

This is the second out of the three papers included in this dissertation. This explores employer branding practices in light of the growing emphasis on CSR. More precisely, it seeks to understand if and how employer brand managers (EBMs) embrace the societal requirements of being socially responsible, thereby moving from a functionalistic view of employer branding towards a more integrative approach, a relationship-building process. This paper is based on both employer branding and corporate social responsibility literature aiming to show how CSR can build a bridge between the organization and society at large. The empirical material for this paper is formed of the same semi structured interviews that form the empirical material for the qualitative study.

The idea for this paper started in June 2015 when I participated at the Corporate Communication International conference in New York together with my co-author Jana Kollat. Her research is focused on CSR and we decided to work on a paper together. Due to my maternity leave (March 2016 – March 2017) we postponed submitting this paper to a journal. By the deadline of the dissertation the paper is not yet submitted, we plan on framing it and submitting it to a journal as soon as Jana comes back from her maternity leave.
Employer branding as interface between business and society

1. Introduction

As employees provide a great competitive advantage and a vital and essential resource for business success, it is crucial for organizations to create relationships with their current and prospective employees. Reflecting the demands and expectations of employees in the highly competitive business environment, the recruitment and selection processes in organizations have changed (Edlinger, 2015; Theurer et al., 2016). Consequently, both the practitioner (e.g. Lindzon, 2015; Yang, 2015) and the academic literature (e.g. Jain & Bhatt, 2015; Schlechter et al., 2015) have been focusing on employer branding and its increased importance in attracting top talent (Xie et al, 2015) in recent years. New recruitment strategies have been developed as a result of alterations in employees’ and prospective employees’ expectations (Broadbridge et al, 2009). Employer branding is one of the activities that constitutes a bridge between the internal and external stakeholders of an organization. It has become more popular among companies, especially large ones, where human resources (HR) practitioners use it as an “umbrella program” (Edwards, 2010) for their activities in an increasingly challenging labor market (Edlinger, 2015). While the responsibility for employer branding is usually assigned to the HR department (Edlinger, 2015), the function implies working across areas such as corporate reputation, public relations and marketing (Martin et al., 2005). The main task of employer brand managers is to create awareness and make the company appealing to both current and prospective employees (Backhaus & Tikko, 2004; Edwards, 2010; Edlinger, 2015).

Employer branding research started to move from a linear, functionalistic model, where companies could follow a number of steps in order to create an employer value proposition and market it internally and externally (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004), to a relationship-building process (Aggerholm et al., 2011). In this latter conceptualization of employer branding, the attraction of prospective employees and the retention of current ones becomes a “trustworthy value-creating process” (Aggerholm et al., 2011; p.107) in which social responsibility plays an increasingly important role (Turban & Cable, 2003).

Businesses have expanded their responsibility beyond profit margins long ago (Carroll, 1999; Kakabadse et al., 2005) and are seeking to strengthen the relationship with their stakeholders who have become increasingly aware of the role businesses play in society (Johansen
Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has been presented as the manner in which the companies should fulfill the expectations and demands of their most relevant stakeholders, and not only the ones that are pertinent for achieving their economic goals (Kakabadse et al., 2005). In addition, CSR has moved on to a perspective where it is perceived as a means of gaining competitive advantage (Porter & Kramer, 2011) and earning the trust and acceptance of the society by creating shared value. The concept of CSR expresses how organizations must learn to respond to the dynamics of modern societies and economies in order to stay competitive. Furthermore, CSR implies that organizations take responsibility for their operations and try to implement ethical considerations in their daily business decisions.

This paper seeks to explore employer branding practices in light of the growing emphasis on CSR. More precisely, it seeks to understand if and how employer brand managers (EBMs) embrace the societal requirements of being socially responsible, thereby moving from a functionalistic view of employer branding towards a more integrative approach, a relationship-building process. While the theoretical framework of employer branding has been increasingly researched in the past decade (e.g. Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Edwards, 2010; Jiang & Iles, 2011; Aggerholm et al., 2011; App et al., 2012 etc.), there is still a need for qualitative empirical evidence on employer branding (Edlinger, 2015). Furthermore, despite numerous scholars researching the influence of CSR on organizational attractiveness (e.g. Brammer, 2007; Duygu, 2009; Kim, 2011) or the impact corporate social performance has on organizational attractiveness (Turban & Greening, 1997), little is known about the use of CSR has in employer branding initiatives.

The study contributes to the employer branding as well as to the CSR literature by aiming to focusing on the employer branding practices in large organizations in Denmark and their attempt to attract and retain the highly qualified human resources by using CSR related topics in their communication strategies.

The structure of the paper is as follows: we provide the theoretical framework on employer branding and CSR in the context of talent attraction and retention, then, we describe our data, which consists of semi-structured interviews with Employer Brand Managers in large companies in Denmark, and report our findings. Finally, we discuss our findings and draw theoretical and practical implications from them.
2. Theoretical Framework

The paper is organized around two theoretical concepts, namely CSR and employer branding: we argue that by introducing CSR elements in employer branding the perspective of EMBs on the communication with current and prospective employees changes and this, in turn, changes the formal organizational boundaries of an organization.

Changes in the formal organizational boundaries are especially visible in communication activities, such as employer branding and corporate social responsibility, where employees are the main link between the organization and the external stakeholders. The clear distinction between internal and external communication and the rigid formal boundaries of an organization have been challenged by academic scholars for more than three decades (e.g. Cheney & Christensen, 2001; Weick, 1979). Despite the general acceptance of the blurred boundaries, the field is still substantially molded by the “container” metaphor (Axley, 1984) that was for a long time supported by the “regulations of activities and associated media” (Cheney et al., 2014). This metaphor assumes that communication in an organization is confined within the constricted boundaries of a predetermined organization. From that perspective it is argued that communication can extend the boundaries of an organization (Schoeneborn 2011). As Schoeneborn and Trittin (2013, p. 194) state, “the organizational boundary is not given but needs to be continuously (re-)established through communication”. By integrating internal and external dimensions of their activities (Cheney & Christensen, 2001), companies can transcend the formal boundaries and have employees communicate directly with external stakeholders, as well as including the latter in the creation of the company’s culture and identity.

2.1 Attracting and retaining talent – the evolution of the employer branding concept

Theoretically, the employer branding concept is comprised of different disciplines (Edlinger, 2015) (viz. human resource management, marketing, corporate reputation). Empirical papers have focused, for example, on measuring the attractiveness levels of the employer brand (Aiman-Smith et al., 2001), job seeker’s knowledge about the employer brand (Cable & Turban, 2001), and the organizational image beliefs (Cable & Yu, 2006). Varying in scope and function, the concept of employer branding is, depending on the research stream, a part of a management process (Barrow & Mosley, 2005; Foster et al., 2010), a part of the corporate brand (Foster et al., 2010), an
HRM activity (Sullivan, 2002; App et al. 2012), or even a part of the sustainability strategy (Aggerholm et al., 2011; Andersen et al., 2013).

Andersen et al. (2013) suggest that there are three waves of employer branding, starting from “selling jobs” (ibid., p. 26) to sustainable employer branding. This is however, a theoretically based model that requires empirical confirmation. The evolution from the first to the third wave reflects the new relationship between the company and its current and prospective employees.

The first wave is seen merely as the transmission of a set of values to the current and prospective employees, where they are seen as “raw material” (ibid., p. 26) that receive and interpret the message as it has been intended. In its early stage, employer branding has been conceptualized grounded in a mechanistic view of communication, based on the Shannon and Weaver (1949) transmission model of communication. This transmission aspect is easily identifiable in many of the definitions (e.g. Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Sullivan, 2004; Edwards, 2010). In 2004, Backhaus and Tikoo defined employer branding as “the process of building an identifiable and unique employer identity, and the employer brand as a concept of the firm that differentiates it from its competitors” (p.502), underlining the idea of a built identity and brand that the company (sender) transmits to the employees and prospective employees (receiver) for them to identify. Based on this identification, the current and prospective employees differentiate the company from its competitors. Taking a similar approach, Edwards (2010), in a review of employer branding and the organizational behavior theory, describes employer branding as a representation of an organization, where prospective employees are considered “the branding targets” (ibid., p. 6). The employer brand is compared to a product brand as it is designed for, and meets the needs of, only external stakeholders. Internal stakeholders (employees), if involved in the process, incur the chance of being nothing more than what Mosley (2007) calls a “channel to market” (p. 128).

The second wave moves away from the product branding perspective. Instead it is framed in a corporate branding approach, where integration and alignment of the employer brand communication play an important role. This integration is sensed at the company boundary level, as there is no longer a strict distinction between internal and external stakeholders. Rather, the focus is on the alignment between the vision, culture and image of the organization with a clear purpose of creating lasting relationships with all its stakeholders. In that sense, organizational culture involves all organizational members and can, from a theoretical viewpoint, be defined as “a symbolic context
within which interpretations of organizational identity are formed and intentions to influence organizational image are formulated” (Hatch & Schultz 1997, p. 360).

The third, and final, wave leaves the product and corporate branding approaches behind and “reinterprets the role of business in society as transcendental to economic responsibilities” (Andersen et al. 2013, p. 29). Due to the dramatic change of perspective in the third wave, employer branding is redefined as a “strategic branding process which creates, negotiates and enacts sustainable relationships between organization and its potential and existing employees under the influence of the varying corporate contexts with the purpose of co-creating sustainable values for the individual, the organization and the society as a whole” (Aggerholm et al., 2011: 115). At this level, the employer brand focuses on the integration of the company in the society as a good citizen acting as a starting point for talent attraction. These changes in the understanding of the tasks of employer branding seem to have an impact on both the processes of employer branding by moving away from the transmission model to the co-creation and negotiation of values between the organization and its stakeholders, as well as on the content of the employer branding, by focusing on the CSR values to attract talent and to motivate and retain the current employees.

2.2 CSR applied to employer branding acts as a link between business and society

Corporate responsibility and sustainability have gained an increased significance in organizations; not as a “question of sugar coating” (Andersen et al. 2013), but rather as an important element of the communication strategy. A prevailing underpinning of theoretical approaches of CSR is based on the notion of stakeholders’ expectations (Carroll 1999; Dahlsrud 2008; Neville & Menguc 2006). By engaging in CSR activities and communicating about these, organizations can obtain a wider range of business benefits, such as positive associations or greater identification of employees (Peloza & Shang 2010; Sen et al. 2006). Golob et al. (2013) have identified three clusters of themes in the existing literature on CSR communication: (1) disclosure/accountability, (2) process, and (3) outcomes/consequences. As Golob et al.’s (2013) review shows, recent research perspectives have mainly concentrated on external communication and left the importance of internal communication processes aside. Still, CSR communication can not only enhance an organization’s external image, but also impact the way employees behave towards an organization. Consequently, some organizations have started to promote their CSR
engagements to attract quality employees (Greening & Turban 2000). As previous research has shown (Rupp et al. 2006; Cropanzano et al. 2001; Greening & Turban 2000), employees tend to judge organizations according to their CSR efforts, which can in turn affect employees’ attitudes and behaviors. Therefore, organizations must communicate and explain what they do in terms of CSR and why they do it (cf. Parguel et al. 2011; Schultz et al. 2013; Pomering et al. 2013), especially as stakeholders tend to be skeptical about organizations’ CSR claims after a great deal of reported incidents of corporate misconduct (Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013; Elving, 2013).

CSR, as an underlying statement of all business activities, has the potential, according to Andersen et al.’s (2013) conceptual model of the three employer branding waves, to integrate both the internal and external perspectives when creating an organization’s image and legitimizing its behavior. CSR can build and ensure a long-term relationship with an organization’s stakeholders and shape their public image (Kim et al. 2010). Furthermore, taking into account psychological dimensions, the public image seems to be a significant predictor related to the perception of CSR communication (Mueller 2014). In line with this, research has shown that CSR activities influence corporate reputation (Chi-Shiun et al., 2010; Siltaoja, 2014; Aksak et al., 2016). Recent studies not only show that organizations can generate favorable stakeholder attitudes and better support behavior, but also that there is a positive link between employees’ perceptions of their organization’s CSR and their affective organizational commitment (e.g. Brammer et al. 2007; Stites and Michael 2011). On this basis, organizations that establish a long-term commitment to CSR may give rise to a questioning of prior negative beliefs and an affirmation of positive beliefs among employees (Pomerger and Johnson 2009).

Committed employees reflect well on the organization’s overall image. Farooq et al. (2014) have shown that CSR has a direct effect on employees’ affective organizational commitment, mediated by organizational trust and organizational identification. Going a step further, Kim et al. (2010) propose two identification-cuing factors to understand how CSR relates to organizational identification. Their results reveal a positive relationship between an organization’s communicated CSR activities and employee-company identification. Similarly, another study by Ali et al. (2010) found a significant, positive relationship between CSR actions and employee organizational commitment, CSR and organizational performance and employee organizational commitment and organizational performance. Greening and Turban (2000) examined how organizations with higher corporate social performance are more attractive employers and that
prospective applicants’ job pursuit is also positively associated with an organization’s social performance (Greening & Turban 2000).

As employees are seen as important stakeholders with regard to CSR, scholars also recognize that there is an urgent practical need for effective employer branding strategies that integrate CSR issues (Ellemers et al. 2011). Moreover, we need a more nuanced understanding of how organizations – as part of their employer branding activities – create, reinforce or expand their networks with current and prospective employees as well as with society at large through CSR communication. We argue that by communicatively bridging CSR and employer branding activities, organizations create an interface to societal demands and simultaneously attract prospective employees as well as ensure long-term relationships with their current employees. By doing so, an organization extends formal organizational boundaries within these steps and opens itself towards society at large. As a result, by developing each wave of employer branding strategies, an organization will recognize new stakeholders and integrate them in their communication activities. It is important to note that the evolution of the theoretically developed three waves of employer branding strategies do not necessarily happen in a specific sequence but can also occur simultaneously. Our analysis will show how employer branding managers present their employer branding activities. We will thus identify their understanding of employer branding strategies within the three waves and examine their change of perception of the formal organizational boundaries.

3. Methodology

The study was shaped by the ambition to understand employer branding practices in organizations. Fourteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with professionals responsible for the employer branding strategy and activities within their respective companies. We will refer to them as Employer Brand Managers (EBMs) regardless of their actual job title, because the interviewees are the ones taking decisions regarding the employer brand in the organization and assuming all responsibilities for the employer branding process. The companies represented in the study, were selected using the snowballing method (Bryman, 2012), and are large companies in Denmark that operate in several countries and are from five different industries (banking, consulting, energy, engineering, and IT). The two main selection criteria were size and their need for recruiting highly qualified talent, which is in great demand on the job market. The size of the
company was considered an important selection criterion, as large companies have both the human and financial resources for sustaining an employer branding strategy with designated activities and a large hiring necessity. Smaller-sized companies do not have the same amount of vacancies and may not see branding themselves as employers as a necessity, and therefore will not allocate resources to such activities. Based on these criteria, one company was eliminated from the study because, despite it being an international company and having the necessity to recruit highly skilled talent, the size was significantly smaller than that of the other companies and the employer branding activities were assigned as a secondary role to the Chief Commercial Officer. The companies varied in terms of their experience in working with employer branding. One company was in the initial planning phase, four companies had between two and five years of experience and seven companies had more than five years of experience, with two of them exceeding eight years. The duration of the interviews ranged between 21 and 74 minutes. All interviews were conducted face-to-face, except for one, which was conducted by telephone. All interviews were conducted in English.

The interviews were conducted by one author and consisted of guiding questions that allowed the interviewees to describe in detail the employer branding practices in their companies. The first set of questions addressed the job title, role and organizational structure, the experience that the company had in working with employer branding, the distinctiveness of the employer brand, the level of importance attributed to employer branding by top management, and the attributes the EBMs considered most attractive in their company. The last few questions required the EBMs to elaborate on their employer branding activities, their target audiences, and their evaluation of the employer branding strategy and activities. Considering the tendency to describe oneself or one’s role in a more positive tone than normative criteria would suggest, the interviewer tried to reduce the enhancement bias (Krueger, 1998) by asking for examples in all situations described.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim by one author and the analysis of the data was conducted in NVivo (QSR International Pty Ltd, Melbourne, Australia). The coding was theoretically driven (Bryman, 2013; Symon & Cassell, 2012), based on a codebook developed by the two authors (see Table 1) derived from the work of Andersen et al. (2013) in an iterative process. We started from selecting keywords describing each of the three waves in the conceptual model (e.g. channel to market; long-term relationships etc.) and alternated between the conceptual model and the data until we identified characteristics of each wave of employer branding in the interview transcripts. The codebook was created jointly by the two authors. The two authors coded
50% of the interviews each and the coded sections were then discussed by the two authors in order to ensure that the coding was consistent.

Table 1.- List of codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1st wave: functionalistic (product) brand approach</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Using predefined set of corporate values</td>
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<tr>
<td>Differentiating from competitors</td>
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<tr>
<td>Channel to market communication</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enhancing customer experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Selling jobs</td>
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<tr>
<th>2nd wave: contextually attentive approach at corporate level</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aligning internal experiences and external communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating long-term relationships</td>
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<tr>
<td>Creating corporate culture</td>
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<tr>
<td>Creating meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating values</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>3rd wave: integrative approach incl. societal level</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being good for society</td>
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<tr>
<td>Being transparent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being responsible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting social</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acting environmentally sustainable</td>
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</table>

4. Analysis

The analysis of the interviews had the main purpose of exploring employer branding practices by addressing if and how EBMs embrace the societal requirements of being a socially responsible employer. In order to do so, we used Andersen et al. (2013) as the supporting theoretical framework and developed a coding book that allowed us to identify elements of the three waves of employer branding. Our aim was not to divide the EBMs interviewed based on the three waves, where each belongs to one particular wave of employer branding. The three waves do not represent a continuum or three chronologically consecutive elements, nor are they mutually exclusive. Rather, the three waves represent different approaches that can be used simultaneously or in different combinations in organizations. In our analysis, we intend to understand how the interviewees adopt each of the three waves and look at characteristics of the communication practices and the changes in relation to their perceptions of formal organizational boundaries.
In our data, the strict boundaries of the company and the rigid distinction between internal and external stakeholders, as well as a clear transmission model-like communication, are clearly visible, as was argued for the first wave of employer branding. The distribution of the employer brand messages from the sender (the EBM) to the receiver (the market or prospective employees) is distinctly present in the interviewees’ focus, for example on social media as a channel that “works better for distribution than for dialogue” (03). These EMBs do not anticipate any dialogue with their target audiences and when this happens “people ask who should be answering these questions” (04). “There is no dialogue on social media” (01), these platforms, which are used by all the EMBs interviewed, are treated as distribution channels with a “significant reach” (03) that can easily be redirected towards the company’s website (01, 12). The main focus is “to get that message out” (08) and communicate their priorities to external stakeholders.

At this stage of employer branding, the communication across the company’s hard boundaries is often done via employees, who are seen as a resourceful channel to the market. The employees “represent” the company (02) and employer branding is seen as “their small part to sell the company” (02). The EMBs talk about their efforts of “getting all our employees to share the news” (10) on their private social media profiles and “maximizing their LinkedIn profiles” (02), expecting them to sell the company on social media. The hiring managers are “told to make sure to do that because they have the candidates in their network” (11), while other EMBs assign the task of being in charge of Facebook postings (04) and “updating [the social media page] with some small things from their everyday life” (04).

Talking about a product branding-like communication, the emphasis is on selling (jobs) and differentiating the brand from the competitors. The notion of having a “distinguishable brand” (01; 02; 03; 05; 06; 07; 08; 11) is crucial for many EMBs. They consult “external benchmarks” (01; 02; 03; 04; 05; 07; 08) and look at “what do people want in an employer” (02). Keeping track of the company’s position in certain top-employer rankings and evaluating the previous position, “in 2014 for example, we had the highest ranking ever” (03), validates the employer branding strategy or is used as the basis for a new strategy in order to “improve because we want to be in the top employers” (08).

Previous top-employer rankings are also used to give the EMBs an idea of what is most attractive at that specific point in time for prospective employees in each country. An EBM
stresses “the flexible work-life balance that we can especially sell in Denmark” (02), whereas recruiting in other countries requires other “factors we should promote to get the right people in” (07). They consider it is important to “sell the company for is that we have so many functions and for our clients we are so relevant” (04).

This focus on selling the company and the open positions requires “aligning the employer branding activities with the sourcing and pipeline” (06) that companies need and develop activities targeted to a specific segment. Some of the EBMs talk about the advantage of being ahead of other competitors by “predicting each year how many people we need in each of these critical areas” (05). Identifying the most attractive factors for prospective employees is closely connected with the process of selling jobs and EBMs feel more confident when their “value proposition is very easy to sell” (02) and they choose the values they want to focus on i.e.: “For us it’s almost a matter of what do we want to focus on because we can actually say that these ten items are very important for the type of people we are looking for in the markets that we are looking for, we actually have all those” (02).

It is only in this first wave of employer branding that EBMs shape their entire employer branding concept that can be “suited for all the markets” (13). Each value is meticulously presented to the employees and embedded into the culture: “we had one week for each of the values across the group” (11) that can then be sold to the external markets.

2nd wave – Integrating corporate culture

The second wave of employer branding emphasizes that organizations become aware that employees cannot be simplified as market objects (Andersen et al., 2013). Stakeholders perceive and understand an organization through employees: employer branding “is not only about employer attractiveness, it is about more” (03). Therefore, the EBMs applying the second wave are regarding their employees as an important resource in creating and living corporate values and transforming them into corporate culture. The employer branding waves are not mutually exclusive, but different perspectives that are being applied simultaneously. From a theoretical viewpoint, organizations applying the second wave – in contrast to the first wave – open up their constitutive boundaries to integrate their current and prospective employees into a mutual, participative communication process through which the employer brand evolves. As one of the EBMs pointed
out: “We have been very inside-out in the past, but now we are trying a more outside-in approach” (03).

Consequently, communication is no longer just a one-way-process, but it is about creating communication networks with (prospective) employees. Networking events and activities become an important part of the EMBs' work: “participating at different events (...) that works very well – both externally, but also internally” (04). Especially bridging the internal and external perspectives and extending the organizational activity boundaries plays an especially critical role in this second wave of employer branding strategies. EBMs do not understand their employees just as a target group of communication activities but as communicators for employer branding activities themselves, as is evidenced by statements such as “our employees being willing to stand up and represent the company” (07) and “we need help from inside as well” (08). Consequently, employees are understood as ambassadors of the organization. For example: They “are certainly our ambassadors” (01), “people are appointed ambassadors” (03), and “we have what we call an ambassador network or ambassador core” (05). Employer branding by means of involving an organization’s employees can create a more authentic and trustworthy relationship with prospective employees. As one EBM puts it: “it creates a vibe about the employer branding activities” (04). This new understanding and appreciation of employees can also result in internal programs with external focus: “We are of course having events for these ambassadors to train them to know what it is they can say” (04) and “we train the employees to (...) actually share what they are doing, because it is a lot more authenticity” (06). All in all, the second wave of employer branding is characterized by a particularly involved role of current as well as prospective employees in organizational communication processes.

Furthermore, not only the communication processes differ from the first wave but also the content of employer branding communication. The goal of EBMs is not just to sell their vacant job positions but also to make their corporate culture visible. Hard facts like salary or market position and power are still important, but also soft facts are gaining attention, such as the values that define the corporate culture. For example: “this doing the little extra thing, we want to emphasize on that” (11). Therefore, EBMs position their organizations according to these requirements: “we started to work on what is our value proposition” (02) and “we also want to nourish what is good about our culture” (07). Again, communication plays a critical role, as is evidence by statements such as “we need to communicate so that people are aware of the values” (13).
In addition, it seems to be crucial for EBMs to align internal and external activities and the communication about the employer brand, so that the “employer branding is credible also internally” (11) and that “we have proof points to support our message” (01). In that sense, employer branding communication within the second wave is not about telling “the fairytale story (...) but (...) the everyday story” (06).

3rd wave – Being good for society

In the third wave of EB, organizations incorporate the societal level into their (daily) employer branding activities. This results in CSR becoming an important topic when communicating the employer brand to stakeholders. Clearly, employer branding cannot be equated with CSR, “but it has a touch of CSR as well” (07), as one EBM argues. In the third wave, the organization really lifts its boundaries and involves not only current and prospective employees on the corporate level but also society on a larger scale. For example: “we really want to act in a responsible way” (05). Their aspiration is to interact with society at large, addressing issues present in the society, and to be regarded as a good citizen – at least as an employer. From a performance-driven perspective, the focus switches from the corporate to the societal level: “our goal is to become a great European company” (08). Therefore, organizations implement activities that involve employees as well as society, “where the regular employee is so engaged and passionate about what they do that it is not because it is part of their job” (02).

When trying to integrate this approach, the EBMs mention, for example, that they sponsor and collaborate with the local community (01, 04): “employer branding also means that our employees get involved in the community” (06). By showing responsibility organizations are facing the challenge to not randomly respond to societal demands but to always keep authentically the link with their core business: “The employer branding activities we do have we also always try to keep them professional-academic, we won’t sponsor a party or something like that” (01). Still, it is important to show intrinsic motivation without always considering the outcome. As one EBM mentions: “that would be more employer branding towards experienced hires, but I do not think they [the communication department] had that in mind when they created the sponsorship”. Employer branding activities are not focused on the organization’s benefits but on helping others. It is about “creating awareness among younger people about engineering” (07), “the young
generations, public schools” (10), “access to water” (06), or “health and a healthier working environment” (04).

Current and prospective employees are not targeted specifically in the third wave, but rather involved in employer branding activities. For example, “we allow our employees to donate blood, there is a big truck outside here in the parking lot” (06), “some of the employees are teaching” (12), or “help out a university” (02). Consequently, these CSR-related activities enhance the identification of employees with their organization and trigger the feeling of being part of something good: “these are some of the stories that would be great for employee advocacy, I mean that would be an example of things that I would be talking about and be proud of” (06).

5. Discussion - The collapsing of the formal organizational boundaries

Not only the relationships between the organization and stakeholders change from the first employer branding wave to the next, but also the formal boundaries of the organization. As such, the above analysis suggests that the company changes in three stages. In the rigid and constricted “container” metaphor in the first employer branding wave (see Fig. 1), the internal and external stakeholders are clearly differentiated and stakeholders are the passive receivers (Hübner, 2007) of the communicated messages. The communication is unidirectional (01) and the messages have the scope of a call to action, for example redirecting the readers from a social media platform to the company’s website (01) or simply distributing the desired messages (03). Underlying this unidirectional communication flow is the companies’ focus on selling jobs (03; 04; 05; 06; 10; 12) rather than the creation of a long-term relationship.

In the second wave of employer branding, our findings suggest that the organization becomes more inclusive, seeking to enter a dialogue with current and prospective employees. The focus here is on aligning the internal and external perspectives and involving both current and prospective employees in the creation of corporate values, identity and culture. Companies are not just interested in selling jobs and filling vacant positions, i.e. they do not want to be chosen just for their compensation packages (01), but rather for their identity and work culture (01). Relationships become more important at this stage. Companies choose to focus their employer branding activities on students by offering them the possibility and resources to work on projects or theses (10) as they know that students would only be viable candidates in a few years’ time. Ambassador programs (03; 04; 05; 08; 10; 13) and alumni programs (12) become part of the employer branding strategy in
order to create a bridge and form stronger relationships between internal and external stakeholders, i.e. current and prospective or former employees.

Figure 1. – Employer brand communication in the employer branding waves

Finally, our findings suggest that the third wave of employer branding opens the formal organizational boundaries even more and includes society at large as a significant stakeholder in the employer-brand communication. CSR plays an important role at this stage of employer branding and helps strengthen the bridge between the clearly demarcated internal and external stakeholders. Society participates in the creation of identity and values involving the organization in its development. Companies focus on employer branding activities, such as educational programs (01; 06; 10; 13) where they teach children at all ages how to be responsible (06; 10), how to choose a career (06). They also focus on teaching them how to become better professionals (01). Responsibility towards their own employees is also very important, as companies try to make sure that employees feel valued and trust the organization, so that they will be loyal also in difficult times such as during layoffs (06).
6. Conclusion: implications and further research

This paper has set out to explore employer branding practices by understanding if and how EBMs embrace the societal requirements of being socially responsible into their activities. By incorporating CSR elements in the employer brand communication, the EBMs’ practices shape their way of understanding formal organizational boundaries, which in turn guide the stakeholder communication. Given that employer branding as a construct is evolving and becoming more complex, becoming more aware of the interdisciplinarity of the concept is increasingly important for companies to understand the relationships with their current and prospective and thus the degree of rigidity of the formal boundaries of the organizations. Andersen et al.'s (2013) model of the three waves of employer branding has never been examined empirically. Applying the three-waves model to our data allowed us to identify elements that characterize the relationship between a company and its stakeholders and understand the EMBs’ perception of the formal organizational boundaries in different stages of employer branding.

Our analysis has indicated that the third wave of employer branding is not as prevalent among companies, as the first and second waves are. Nevertheless, there is a noteworthy tendency to integrate this third wave approach. Even if it is not yet set in practice, corporate responsibility within employer branding is a plan for the future for some of the companies in our study. Employer brand managers consider CSR to be a common set of values that can be co-created in the communication processes that go beyond the formal organizational boundaries in order to create a desirable workplace. Further research is needed to better understand the employer branding practices in the third wave of employer branding. Our results also show that the three waves of employer branding are not mutually exclusive. In order to get to a different wave, the companies are likely to have elements of the prior waves integrated into their strategy. The difference between companies featuring different stages of employer branding in their strategies is that the focus lies on different elements. Companies employing the second and third waves have as their main focus activities that are better in building relationships with their stakeholders, even though still having messages that are simply distributed to the market using social media because it is a better distribution channel.

The metaphor of the three waves of employer branding implies a development from one wave to the other and creates the idea that the third wave has a more positive connotation that the previous two. Based on the idea that the three waves are not mutually exclusive and an
organization can employ any wave or a combination of them at different points in time based on their needs, we propose to amend the conceptual model. Instead of using the word wave, and steer clear of any evolution implication, we propose using the term employer branding clusters.

The analysis suggests that by understanding how EBMs’ perceptions of the formal organizational boundaries change with the progress from one employer branding cluster to an other, we become aware of their perception of control over the employer brand messages. In the first cluster of employer branding, the EBMs assume the absolute control over the message by creating it internally and distributing externally with the clear intention of being decoded in the same way it was initially coded. Meanwhile, in the third cluster of employer branding, the communication is much more organically created, leaving completely behind the idea of control over the communication process and focusing on relationship building and creating the employer brand together with the various stakeholders that are involved.

In the third cluster of employer branding, the awareness of the interdisciplinarity of the concept becomes evident. From Aggerholm et al. (2011) and also from our analysis, we can see that CSR is one of the disciplines that are introduced in the employer brand strategy at this stage. As more disciplines are involved in the communication of the employer brand, the EBM’s role is no longer to define the employer brand and portray it to the external market, but it becomes more of a coordinating role, where the EBM has to oversee all the activities and needs to manage them in order for them to be coherent and serve the same purpose. Therefore, we argue that the more advanced the employer brand strategy is, the more it is necessary for the EBM to assume the role of a coordinator in the communication department, where s/he has an overview of the other disciplines involved (e.g. branding, CSR, internal communication, stakeholder communication etc.) rather than merely knowing the human resources strategy and activities and engaging in a sporadic collaboration with the communication department.

The findings also have practical implications. Organizations are required to understand their boundaries as dynamic and totally dependent on their communication activities. It is important to recognize that different communication strategies include or exclude certain stakeholders. Consequently, an organization has to be aware of its communication targets in terms of employer branding and its target groups. When acting according to the first cluster, an organization reaches only prospective employees. This implies that an organization cannot expect to create a corporate image and an identification base for its other stakeholders with this strategy. Similarly, in the second cluster, an organization will not be perceived by its external stakeholders
representing the society at large. As long as organizations do not open themselves towards society, CSR initiatives might not produce the desired effects, as they do not reach the target audience in a meaningful way or might get lost in the plethora of messages they receive daily.

Despite offering new insights about employer branding initiatives based on interview data, our study faces a few limitations. As we only investigated the management perspectives of EBMs, we clearly miss the perspective of the targeted stakeholder groups. Thus, the present study does not provide insights into the outcomes on the market of the presented employer branding clusters. Future research might include this perspective and examine whether and how the perceptions of the different stakeholder groups correspond to the communication strategies adopted by the organization. Furthermore, quantitative studies, including different variables such as for example industry, size, or financial performance, need to be done to explore if our results also hold on a large scale.
7. References


CHAPTER 7

PAPER III
7. Introduction to Paper III

This paper was generated by the quantitative study in this dissertation. The paper represents the stakeholder perspective of employer branding and it aims to provide more empirical evidence in the area of intergenerational differences in the job search process. More precisely, it explores whether or not Generation Y displays different behaviours in the job search process than the older generations. The purpose of including this study in my dissertation is to provide evidence of the importance different job seeker groups attribute to different employer branding attributes therefore the importance companies should attribute to tailoring the employer branding strategies based on their audience.

This paper was actually written the first of the three papers. The paper was developed as part of my participation on the PhD course called “Publish or Perish: Preparing, Writing and Reviewing Business Research” at University of Southern Denmark in February-September 2014. As the paper was written so soon after starting the PhD, it went through several revisions based on my supervisors’ feedback until reaching this current form. This paper was submitted to Career Development International journal on the 21st of September 2017.
Are there generational differences in the job search process?

1. Introduction

One of the challenges organizations are facing is replacing a large pool of employees that are retiring, namely Baby Boomers, with a young pool of applicants, namely Generation Y, born between 1979 and 1998 (Guillot-Soulez & Soulez, 2014). In the past few years, the topic of Generation Y’s distinct behaviour in the workplace and job search process has been widely discussed both in the practitioner literature (Armour, 2005; McCrindle, 2010), as well as in academic journals (e.g. Josiam et al., 2009; Smith, 2010; Treuren & Anderson, 2010; Lichy, 2012; Choi et al., 2013; Krahn & Galambos, 2014). Generation Y has been portrayed as being different from Generations X and Baby Boomers in terms of job search behaviour, attitudes, and media use (Krahn & Galambos, 2014; Napoli & Ewing, 2000). Understanding these differences in work attitudes and behaviour between Generation Y, Generations X and Baby Boomers is important for organizations in order for them to tailor their strategies better to attracting and retaining Generation Y as employees.

Numerous studies have focused on characterizing one particular generation in relation to recruitment behaviour or job choice (e.g. Hurst & Good, 2009; Kwok, 2012; Ng, Schweitzer, & Lyons, 2010), even though there is still an ongoing debate around the concept of a generation (Twenge, 2010) Treuren and Anderson (2010) even argue that there are no sudden shifts between generations, but rather continuous changes along the years affecting all generations. Since the studies focusing on intergenerational differences in the job search process have been contradictory, more empirical evidence is needed to advance our understanding of intergenerational differences in the job search process. In their literature review on generational differences in work values, Parry and Urwin (2011) concluded that “the evidence is mixed” (p. 92). Some studies provided evidence of generational differences in work values, while others provided evidence of no differences or even similarities. Guillot-Soulez and Soulez, (2014) provided evidence of heterogeneity in job preferences within Generation Y. In spite of the relevance of the topic, both for academics and practitioners, there is a scarcity of empirical evidence on intergenerational differences in the job search process. Thus empirical evidence on generational differences in terms of job search behaviour and motivation is needed in order to provide a better understanding of the recruitment process and the existence or absence of potential differences in this process in distinct generational
cohorts. Being aware of these potential differences would help companies develop more targeted talent attraction strategies. This study aims to provide more empirical evidence in the area of intergenerational differences in the job search process. Its purpose is to explore whether or not Generation Y displays different behaviours in the job search process than the older generations.

2. Theory of generations

The theory of generations (Mannheim, 1970) considers fundamental to the creation of a generation all political, economic and technological events and changes that occur in the early life of its members and a generation’s identity becomes evident when its members enter adulthood, between 17 and 25 years old (Lyons & Kuron, 2013). One of the key scholars within generation research is Karl Mannheim, who argued that the concept’s “practical importance becomes clear as soon as one tries to obtain a more exact understanding of the accelerated pace of social change characteristic of our times” (Mannheim, 1970; p. 287). Mannheim defined a generational cohort as a group of people who are not only born in the same period of time, but also have experienced the same historical events. Each generation is tied to a specific range of experiences and opportunities that provide a set of “collective memories” (Schuman & Scott, 1989) that serve as a fundament for their attitudes and behaviours later in life (Lyons & Kyron, 2013. Thus, it can be assumed that generational characteristics differ also based on national contexts (Guillot-Soulez & Soulez, 2014).

There are two perspectives to the theory of generations. The social forces perspective (Mannheim, 1970) looks at generations as mechanisms of change as they make fresh contact with cultural norms (Lyons & Kuron, 2013), whereas the cohort perspective (Ryder, 1965) sees generations as clearly defined by birth year boundaries, that have an adequate homogeneity and shared attitudes and behaviours that can be measured by mean scores (Ryder, 1965).

In order to research generational characteristics and generational differences, it is important to understand the difference between a generation and a cohort. Parry and Erwin (2011) explain the difference between the two by clarifying the approach used to consider one of the two concepts. In order to study a cohort, one needs to determine cutting points (e.g. birth years), so that one can determine whether their values or other characteristics differ from those of another cohort. An age cohort is thus a group of people created solely on the basis of their birth years. In order to determine a generation, one first begins by identifying the political, social, economic and technological characteristics and only then can one determine the appropriate cutting points (Parry & Urwin,
A cohort can be considered as a generational group, if it shows distinct values and attitudes caused by the sharing of social, economic and political events, in comparison with other cohorts. Cohorts are thus considered to be an “atheoretical construct” serving as a “proxy” or “sample” (Guillot-Soulez & Soulez, 2014; Parry & Urwin, 2011) of generational categories.

Most research on generational differences in work-related variables is based on the cohort perspective (Lyons & Kuron, 2013). This study will consider generational cohorts as proxies for the generation construct and identify the birth year boundaries for each construct.

2.1. Generational differences

The theory on generation and cohorts has been extensively used in marketing research in segmenting the consumer population, based on the argument that different generations have different preferences (e.g. McDonald & Dunbar, 2004). Human resources management then used the concepts to create targeted policies and communication strategies to attract prospective employees (Parry & Urwin, 2011). In their literature review on generational differences in work values, Parry and Urwin (2011) concluded that the evidence is mixed, with many studies both finding and failing to find differences between generations. Since their review other studies have been conducted, both time-lag studies and cross-sectional ones, and more evidence of differences have been established, for example, there are studies showing that successive generations have an increased interest in work-life balance (Lyons & Kuron, 2013). Lyons & Kuron’s (2013) review of generational differences in the workplace describes trends pointing towards increased extroversion, conscientiousness and self esteem, increased interest in material rewards and leisure, but lower importance attributed to team work and work ethic.

A reason for inconclusive findings is offered by Twenge (2010), who argues that “there are not sudden shifts in generations, but linear trends” (p. 208). For example, a trait like increased interest in flexible working hours, or work-life balance, which many authors discuss (Bissola & Imperatori, 2013; Crumpacker & Crumpacker, 2007; Shaw & Fairhurst, 2008), would be an ascending trend that has continued from previous generations. If we adopted Twenge’s (2010) approach, there could no longer be a discussion about characteristics of one specific generation, as such a generational cohort would not be a homogeneous class with similar characteristics throughout the group. However, Twenge argues that the term of generational cohort is not obsolete, even though there might be a linear trend along a wide range of ages. According to her, the term
could be used at least to avoid calling a certain group of people “the young generation” and be more specific to which group we refer to (Twenge, 2010).

2.2. Generation Y – a new generation on the job market

The term Generation Y has been attributed to the population that most recently entered the job market. Napoli and Ewing (2000) suggest that the historical event that this generational cohort revolves around is the digital revolution, which made them rapidly and easily adaptable to innovation and change. Other shared events that contributed to the creation of this generational cohort are the fall of the Berlin Wall, Nine Eleven, or other terrorist attacks. As part of this digital revolution, social media have changed the way people communicate by shifting the focus to connectivity (McCorkindale, 2010). In the academic literature, the start and end dates that define the boundaries of the Generation Y cohort vary from beginning dates of 1977-1982 to end dates of 1994-2003 (Cogin, 2012; Krahn & Galambos, 2014; Luscombe, Lewis & Biggs, 2013; Shaw & Fairhurst, 2008; Treuren & Anderson, 2010).

Despite Shaw and Fairhurst (2008) discussing the lack of consensus in identifying this generational cohort’s characteristics and preferences, the literature presents a “stereotypical view of Generation Y as valuing autonomy and work–life balance” (Parry & Urwin, 2011). The differences in characterizing Generation Y could be attributed to the use of data sets from different continents or even nationalities, as national contexts can account for different characteristics of the same generational cohort (Guillot-Soulez & Soulez, 2014). Regarding their work values and behaviour at work, Generation Y has been found to be both individualistic, confident and self-reliant, and also collaborative, socially active and team oriented (Bissola & Imperatori, 2013; Shaw & Fairhurst, 2008). More importance seems to be attributed to Generation Y’s high interest in work-life balance and their choice of family and friends over work, if forced to choose (Crumpacker & Crumpacker, 2007). These characteristics make employers perceive this generational cohort to be "high maintenance" when it comes to retention (Shaw & Fairhurst, 2008).

The Generation Y have also been found eager to be intellectually stimulated and to find employers who will help further their professional development, because setting and achieving goals is important for this generational cohort (Hurst & Good, 2009). Other prominent features attributed to the Generation Y are high demand of instant gratification and feeling of importance (Maxwell & Broadbridge, 2014), besides the need to belong (Shaw & Fairhurst, 2008) and to take
decisions based on reaching consensus among peers (Bissola & Imperatori, 2013) rather than based on facts. Despite the many differences between Generation Y and other generational cohorts documented by scholars, Treuren & Anderson (2010) found Generation Y not to be distinct in their employment expectations compared to Generations X and Baby Boomers. In terms of media usage, it is well accepted across both practitioner and academic literature that social media use is one of the most conspicuous attributes of Generation Y (e.g. Bissola & Imperatori, 2013; De La Llama, Trueba, Voges, Barreto, & Park, 2012; Lichy, 2012; Shaw & Fairhurst, 2008).

Due to the inconsistencies found both in generational differences (Parry & Urwin, 2011; Lyons & Kuron, 2013) and in Generation Y characteristics (Bissola & Imperatori, 2013; Shaw & Fairhurst, 2008), the hypothesis developed further in this study are merely explorative and thus will not be given a direction.

3. The job search process

A failure to understand the behaviour and motivation of this age cohort in the workplace and recruitment process could give rise to issues, such as a mismatch of expectations between employers and employees, high turnover and conflicts in the workplace, as well as being unsuccessful in reaching the desired target audience in the initial phase of talent attraction, among others.

The job search process has been widely researched, especially within applied and business psychology (Brown, Cober, Kane, Levy, & Shalhoop, 2006; Kanfer & Hulin, 1985; Moynihan & Roehling, 2003; Wanberg, Kanfer, & Rotundo, 1999). Sun, Song and Lim (2013) concluded that the “job search is a dynamic process with natural fluctuations” of variables, such as job search self-efficacy, the effort and behaviour of job seekers. However, based on numerous studies within both psychology (e.g. Moynihan & Roehling, 2003; Brown et al., 2006) and organizational behavior (Aiman-Smith et al. 2001; Cable & Yu, 2006; Cable et al, 2000; Cable & Turban, 2003; Cable & Graham, 2000), four constructs have been identified across the job search process that will be tested for differences between Generation Y and older age cohorts: (1) job search self-efficacy, (2) job sources, (3) ideal job and (4) ideal employer. Job search self-efficacy and ideal job are prerequisites for the job search process. The job search self-efficacy determines the behavior and the methods used for searching available positions as well as company-related information. Job sources represents the measure of sources used during the job search process and is dependent upon job
search self-efficacy and is represented as the total number of formal and informal sources participants use in their job search process (Barber et al., 1994; Saks & Ashforth, 2000). The final element, ideal employer, represents the characteristics that make a company attractive. It is related to the ideal job and forms the basis of the employer brand as it is the basis of the organizations’ analysis and point of departure in the employer brand communication (Figure 1). The elements of the job search process will be discussed in turn below.

Figure 1 - The job search process

![Diagram of the job search process]

### 3.1. Job search self-efficacy

The concept of self-efficacy was first defined as one’s ability to perform a determined behaviour (Bandura, 1977), and is considered a main determinant of whether an individual will attempt a specific behaviour or not (Hackett & Betz, 1981). Wanberg et al. (1999) have researched self-efficacy in terms of performance of job search activities, and defined job search self-efficacy (JSSE) as an individual’s confidence in his or her ability to successfully perform a variety of job search activities. Empirical research on the job search has revealed that low levels of self-efficacy lead to reduced job search intensity and the use of less job sources, which in the end lead to less positive outcomes of the job search activities (Kanfer & Hulin, 1985; Wanberg et al., 1999). In a study from 2003, self-efficacy has been proven to be most consistently related to preparatory search behaviors, in finding information on available positions and potential employers (Moynihan & Roehling, 2003). Self-efficacy has been found to influence job search behavior and the search methods used (Kanfer & Hulin, 1985; Wanberg et al., 1999). A significant part of the recruitment
process in most companies, as well as the job search process, are conducted online today (Bissola & Imperatori, 2013; Manroop & Richardson, 2013; Verhoeven et al., 2009). Based on the JSSE theory and the assumption that Generation Y is more familiar and more confident with the use of the Internet (Tapscott, 1997) and social networking sites, it was hypothesized the following:

Hypothesis 1: Generation Y differs from Generation X and Baby Boomers in terms of JSSE.

3.2. Job sources

Employment outcomes are a result of the job search behaviour, which has been defined as the specific activities an individual engages in to gain information about the job market (Blau, 1993; Brown et al., 2006). Schwab et al. (1987) define job search behaviour as both the sources used to gather information about job vacancies as well as the intensity of the search process. Barber et al. (1994) suggest that job search behaviour implies identifying job opportunities and gathering more detailed information about the existing options. Most studies measure job search behaviour in terms of intensity (Cahuc & Fontaine, 2002; Moynihan & Roehling, 2003; Wanberg et al., 1999). As Van Hoye (2013) & Kanfer et al. (2001) suggest, it is important to consider as well the content and the target group of the job search activities. JSSE has previously been found to be a determinant factor of the methods used in the job search process (e.g. Wanberg et al., 1999). Because media use has been found to be different across generations (Carrier, et al., 2009), this study defines job search behaviour as the channels, strategies or sources an individual uses in his or her job search process, for both open positions and information on potential employers. Thus, the following hypothesis is offered:

Hypothesis 2: Generation Y differs from Generation X and Baby Boomers in terms of job sources used.

3.3. Ideal Job

The ideal job is the concept that is intrinsic to the job seeker (Schein, 1996), “the self-concept” of what an individual’s career should be. Similarly, the job search self-efficacy lies within the job seeker and affect the job sources (that mirrors the effort and behaviour) the individual will use. The ideal job - or expectations and goals (Luscombe et al., 2013) - is a predictor for the attitudes and actions of job seekers as well as for their work motivation (Smith & Krüger, 2005). This study defines the ideal job based on Schein’s career anchors, the self-concept that holds one's
ideal career together even when the actual career suffers dramatic changes (Schein, 1996). According to Schein (1996), one’s self concept can change over time with experience, but once formed this serves as an anchor to stabilize one’s career choices. Even though the ideal career is an individual characteristic, considering the theory of generations one could argue that, due to the common social, technological, political and economic events that a generation has experienced (Mannheim, 1970), certain patterns could be visible at the generational level in the self-concepts of what one’s career should look like (Twenge & Hoffman, 2010). Based on the above-mentioned theory, the author hypothesizes the following:

**Hypothesis 3a:** Generation Y differs from Generation X and Baby Boomers in terms of ideal jobs – work-life balance.

**Hypothesis 3b:** Generation Y differs from Generation X and Baby Boomers in terms of ideal jobs - intellectually challenged

**Hypothesis 3c:** Generation Y differs from Generation X and Baby Boomers in terms of ideal jobs - leadership.

**Hypothesis 3d:** Generation Y differs from Generation X and Baby Boomers in terms of ideal jobs - greater cause.

**Hypothesis 3e:** Generation Y differs from Generation X and Baby Boomers in terms of ideal jobs - job security.

**Hypothesis 3f:** Generation Y differs from Generation X and Baby Boomers in terms of ideal jobs - international career.

**Hypothesis 3g:** Generation Y differs from Generation X and Baby Boomers in terms of ideal jobs - expert.

**Hypothesis 3h:** Generation Y differs from Generation X and Baby Boomers in terms of ideal jobs - autonomy.

**Hypothesis 3i:** Generation Y differs from Generation X and Baby Boomers in terms of ideal jobs - innovative.

### 3.4. Ideal employer

The concept of ideal employer is based upon the notion of employer attractiveness, defined by Berthon et al. (2005) as “the envisioned benefits that a potential employee sees in working for a specific organization” (p. 151). Employer attractiveness forms the basis for employer branding efforts and is portrayed on social media platforms both directly, on company’s page or profile, as
well as indirectly, through referrals and communication about a company as an employer, but also in all the traditional sources of information. Closely related terms are organizational attractiveness (Elving et al., 2013) and the employer brand (Aggerholm et al., 2011; Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Berthon et al., 2005). The tangible characteristics are not the sole component of employer attractiveness. Person-organization fit (Morley, 2007) is also important, denoting the compatibility between the organization’s image and the image that the job seeker has of him–or herself, consistent with Schein’s (1996) self-concept theory. The concept of ideal employer is extrinsic to the job seeker. However, it influences the choice of an organization based on the person-organization fit (Cable & Judge, 1994), the fit between the ideal job and ideal employer. Person-organization fit is an important factor in the job choice decision (Backhaus, 2004; Morley, 2007; Turban & Cable, 2003), thus the concept of ideal employer is significant in the job search process as the job seeker will be more attracted by characteristics of an organization that are a fit to his/her career goals (Bissola & Imperatori, 2013; Shaw & Fairhurst, 2008). Based on the above arguments It was hypothesized the following:

Hypothesis 4a: Generation Y differs from Generations X and Baby Boomers in terms of ideal employer characteristics - employer reputation.

Hypothesis 4b: Generation Y differs from Generations X and Baby Boomers in terms of ideal employer characteristics - job characteristics.

Hypothesis 4c: Generation Y differs from Generations X and Baby Boomers in terms of ideal employer characteristics - international job.

Hypothesis 4d: Generation Y differs from Generations X and Baby Boomers in terms of ideal employer characteristics - people and culture.

Hypothesis 4e: Generation Y differs from Generations X and Baby Boomers in terms of ideal employer characteristics - pay and advancement.
4. Methodology

4.1 Sample

A web-based survey was carried out in Denmark. The link to the survey was distributed in the monthly email newsletters of two unemployment funds\(^2\) and a University Career Center and Alumni Office, as well as via social networking sites, on LinkedIn and Facebook groups dedicated to job seekers. The unemployment funds were chosen because they provided access to a large pool of job seekers of different ages and backgrounds, while the Career Center and Alumni Office provided access to a large number of job seekers younger than 30 years old. The questionnaire was accessed 520 times, of which 334 were valid, complete responses, resulting in a 64.2% response rate. As a reward for their participation, the respondents could choose to participate in a competition for 20 gift certificates for 200 DKK (ca. 26 euro or 36 USD) that could be used in a Danish design shop.

In order to address the problem of delimitating Generation Y in terms of birth years, this study uses the means of the start and end birth years from the previous studies cited above, and therefore defines Generation Y as the population born between 1979 and 1998; Generation X was defined as being born between 1965 and 1978 and Baby Boomers before 1965. The respondents were aged between 19 and 63 years (\(M = 35.7, SD = 11.41\)). The majority was female (67.4%) and 81.4% were not students. The respondents were divided into three groups based on their age: Generation Y\(^3\) includes 192 respondents aged between 19 and 35, Generation X\(^2\) includes 86 respondents aged between 36 and 49 years old, and Baby Boomers\(^2\) and include 55 respondents aged over 50 years old (see Table 1).

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\(^2\) An unemployment insurance fund where people become members, pay a membership contribution and are guaranteed an amount of regular income if they become unemployed

\(^3\) For simplicity purposes the three groups were named Generation Y, Generation X and Baby Boomers, similar to the generational cohorts they represent
4.2. Measures

The measures for the four constructs identified above are presented in the following subsections.

**Job search self-efficacy**

JSSE was measured using a five-item scale (writing a good application or resume; contact and persuade employers to consider them for the job; make a good and creative list of the skills they can use to find a job; creating a personal brand and developing and adapting their personal brand), based on van Ryn and Vinokur (1992) and Soberg et al. (1993) and adapted to the online job search requirements. The five units were measured on a five-point scale from *Not at all confident* to *Very confident*. The scale was found to have adequate internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha 0.766) and was merged into one score.

**Job sources**

This variable has been rarely used so far (e.g. Urwin & Shackleton, 1999), and it measures the diversity of tools a respondent use in the job search process. The construct was developed for this study and represents the average of four items shown in Appendix 1. The participants were asked to
indicate with “Yes” or “No” the sources they used in their job search process from a list containing 47 items divided in four clusters (Appendix 1). Each item was marked “1” if the participant responded “Yes” and “0” if the participant responded “No”. Based on previous literature (Barber et al., 1994; Saks & Ashforth, 2000), scores were calculated for the total number of sources for each of the four clusters. The scale includes both traditional channels, such as newspapers, recruiting agency and personal network, as well as channels expected to be used predominantly by Generation Y, such as Facebook and LinkedIn features that were originally developed for other than job search activities e.g. status updates, contacts etc. Van Hoye (in press) distinguishes between formal and informal sources used in the preparatory phase of the job search process, when job seekers are acquiring information on vacant positions and potential employers. The efficiency of individual recruitment sources has been previously discussed, such as job ads (e.g. Walker, Feild, Giles, & Bernerth, 2008), job boards e.g. Dineen & Noe, 2009) and word-of-mouth or personal networks (e.g. Van Hoye & Lievens, 2009). However, there is little research focusing on job seekers’ use of specific search behaviours and sources. Van Hoye, in press, p. 15) In the present study job sources construct is formed of the combination of four scores: a) the total number of tools a respondent uses to search for open positions; b) the total number of tools a respondent uses to search for information about a potential employer; c) the total number of Facebook functions one respondent uses in the job search process; and d) the total number of LinkedIn functions one respondent uses in the job search process. The aim of this construct is to understand if there is a significant difference between the varieties of tools one generational cohort uses in comparison with another (see Appendix 1).

**Ideal job**

The items in the construct ‘ideal job’ were created based on Schein’s (1996) career anchors and intended to identify the level of importance of eight career goals. To these eight items, a ninth was added, namely international career, as many global companies promote international experience to attract young applicants (e.g. international rotations, especially in Graduate Programs). The concept will be used to test whether Generation Y differs from Generations X and Baby Boomers based on their career goals. The level of importance of each item was measured on a five-point Likert-type scale (from 1-5) from *Not at all important* to *Very.*

**Ideal employer**

In order to better operationalize the employer attractiveness concept in the data collection, the structure developed by Universum (global employer branding consultancy) was used to measure employer attractiveness globally. as this structure follows the five factors developed by Berthon et
al., 2005. This construct consists of one question with 39 variables, which were initially grouped into four clusters based on Universum’s Ideal Employer Survey: a) employer reputation (Cronbach’s alpha 0.738); b) job characteristics (Cronbach’s alpha 0.665); c) people and culture (Cronbach’s alpha 0.732); and d) pay and advancement (Cronbach’s alpha 0.809). After testing for internal consistency, the second cluster was divided into: international job (Cronbach’s alpha 0.839) and job characteristics (Cronbach’s alpha 0.706), forming thus five clusters in the ideal employer concept. The five clusters were therefore computed into five scores.

5. Results

The variables that were measured were job search self-efficacy, job sources as well as ideal job and ideal employer. H1 and H2 show whether there are any differences in the range of tools the three groups use in the job search process and the mean confidence the three groups self-reported. H3a-I and H4a-e measure differences in terms of career goals and information the three groups are more interested in, in relation to a potential employer.

In order to determine whether or not Generation Y, Generation X and Baby Boomers (see Table 2) were different in the job-search process, a non parametric K-Wallis fallowed by Tamhane non-parametric test were used for pairwise comparisons (Table 2). Because the constructs were measured on an ordinal scale and because the data are not normally distributed, the non-parametric K-Wallis test of mean ranks was performed to compare the three groups, followed by a Tamhane post-hoc test to see which pairs among the three groups differ significantly.

The results for job-search self-efficacy show no statistically significant differences between Generation Y, Generation X and Baby Boomers (p=.137). Based on these results, the hypothesis that Generation Y is different from the Generations X and Baby Boomers in terms of job-search self-efficacy (H1) has to be rejected. Job sources show no statistically significant differences (p=.185) for the two groups. On the basis of these results, H 2 must also be rejected.

For the ideal job construct, multiple non parametric K-Wallis tests, followed by Tamhane non-parametric test for pairwise comparisons were conducted in order to test for significant differences between the three groups for H3a-i. Except for H3f and H3g, international career and expert, none of the variables differed significantly among the thee groups. The results for H3f showed significantly higher mean ranks for Generation Y compared to Generation X and Baby
| Table 2: Non parametric K-Wallis fallowed by Tamhane non-parametric test for pairwise comparisons for generational differences |
|---------------------------------|-------------|-------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
|                                | Chi-square | df. | Asymp. Sig | Mean ranks | Average± Standard Deviation |
|                                |            |     |            | under 35 (N= 192) | 36 to 49 (N= 87) | over 50 (N= 55) |
| Job search self efficacy       | 3.970      | 2   | .137       | 162.87      | 162.79          | 191.13          | 3.14±0.71 | 3.13±0.72 | 3.30±0.77 |
| Job sources                    | 3.371      | 2   | .185       | 166.77      | 156.82          | 186.93          | 3.98±1.05 | 3.87±1.02 | 4.19±0.98 |
| Ideal job                      |            |     |            |             |                 |                 |             |          |           |
| work-life balance              | 2.930      | 2   | .231       | 166.15      | 179.09          | 153.88          | 4.32±0.86 | 4.44±0.82 | 4.15±1.03 |
| intellectually challenged      | .856       | 2   | .652       | 164.77      | 167.37          | 177.25          | 4.22±0.76 | 4.26±0.67 | 4.33±0.72 |
| leadership                     | 3.904      | 2   | .142       | 174.17      | 150.57          | 171.01          | 2.79±1.13 | 2.52±1.23 | 2.75±1.25 |
| greater cause                  | 3.099      | 2   | .212       | 170.85      | 172.70          | 147.60          | 3.83±0.97 | 3.86±0.88 | 3.58±0.99 |
| job security                   | 5.350      | 2   | .069       | 175.17      | 148.23          | 171.19          | 4.06±0.84 | 3.74±1.05 | 4.02±0.85 |
| international career           | 21.571     | 2   | .000*      | 187.99      | 136.36          | 145.21          | 3.37±1.26 | 2.63±1.36 | 2.76±1.29 |
| expert                         | 6.983      | 2   | .030*      | 174.18      | 145.03          | 179.74          | 2.58±1.09 | 2.23±1.05 | 2.69±1.29 |
| autonomy                       | 3.375      | 2   | .185       | 161.39      | 183.06          | 164.22          | 3.27±1.03 | 3.49±1.05 | 3.29±0.96 |
| innovative                     | .311       | 2   | .856       | 168.17      | 163.25          | 171.89          | 3.16±1.22 | 3.08±1.12 | 3.22±1.13 |
| Ideal employer                 |            |     |            |             |                 |                 |             |          |           |
| employer reputation            | 1.130      | 2   | .568       | 167.51      | 161.41          | 177.11          | 3.64±0.63 | 3.60±0.69 | 3.69±0.72 |
| job characteristics            | 37.648     | 2   | .000*      | 194.62      | 131.51          | 129.75          | 3.69±1.14 | 2.85±1.29 | 2.87±1.04 |
| international job              | 3.843      | 2   | .146       | 160.09      | 175.76          | 180.30          | 3.81±0.58 | 3.93±0.61 | 3.94±0.59 |
| people and culture             | 4.278      | 2   | .118       | 160.64      | 178.85          | 173.48          | 3.91±0.51 | 4.03±0.46 | 3.98±0.4 |
| pay and advancement            | 22.245     | 2   | .000*      | 186.72      | 148.59          | 130.32          | 3.70±0.73 | 3.36±0.79 | 3.18±0.77 |

* p<0.05
Boomers, while H3g showed significantly higher mean ranks for Generation Y compared to Generation X, but lower than Baby Boomers (as indicated by the Tamhane post hoc test). Based on these results H3a, H3b, H3c, H3d, H3e, H3h and H3l were rejected, as the three groups show no significant differences, while H3f and H3g failed to be rejected.

Ideal employer was the last construct and, similar to the previous construct, multiple non parametric K-Wallis followed by Tamhane non-parametric test for pairwise comparisons were conducted in order to determine the existence of significant differences between the three groups. The results show that H4b and H4e show significant differences between Generation Y, Generation X and Baby Boomers, (H4b p=.000 and H4e p=.000). As indicated by the Tamhane post hoc text, for both H4b and H4e, Generation Y has significantly higher mean ranks than the other two groups. H4a, H4c and H4d showed no significant differences among the three groups. Based on these results H4b and H4e fail to be rejected, as the results are significantly different within the three groups, whereas H4a, H4c and H4d are rejected as there are no significant differences between Generation Y, Generation X and Baby Boomers.

Thus, the results indicate that, Generation Y can be considered to be different from Generations X and Baby Boomers in relation to their idea of an ideal job, more precisely international career and expert. Generation Y shows also differences in terms of their interests in the characteristics of an employer, more specific in terms of job characteristics and pay and advancement. Considering the career development theory (Super, 1990; Sullivan, 1999; Hackett, the next question that arises is if there is a difference between students and non students in each of the groups. Therefore, the groups were divided in students and non students with the exception of Baby Boomers, where there was a single student that was eliminated for being an outlier.

The group Generation Y was divided in students (N=58) and non-students (N=134) and the group Generation X was divided in students (N=3) and non-students (N=84).

In order to determine whether the five groups differ, non parametric K-Wallis tests, followed by a Tamhane non-parametric test for pairwise comparisons were conducted (Table 3). The tests show significant differences for international career and leadership (in the ideal job construct) and job characteristics, people and culture and pay and advancement (in the ideal employer construct). There were no significant differences between the two groups regarding job-search self-efficacy and job sources. Thus, the results of the non parametric K-Wallis followed by Tamhane non-parametric test provide evidence that support the existence of differences between students and non students.
<table>
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<th>Factors</th>
<th>Chi-square</th>
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<th>under 35 not students (N=134)</th>
<th>36 to 49 students (N=3)</th>
<th>36 to 49 not students (N=84)</th>
<th>over 50 not students (N=54)</th>
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* p<0.05
Job search self efficacy and job sources show no significant differences between the five groups. In the ideal job construct there is a significant difference shown in leadership (p= .002) where students in both Generation Y and Generation X show higher mean ranks than the non student groups. In the same construct, international career (p=.000) shows that student in Generation Y have a higher mean rank than any other group.

The ideal employer construct shows significant differences in three variables: job characteristics (p=.000), people and culture (p=.011) and pay and advancement (p=.000). Job characteristics shows a higher rank for students in Generation Y than any other group, similar to people and culture. Pay and advancement shows a higher mean rank for students in Generation X followed by students in Generation Y and the lowest mean rank for Baby Boomers.

6. Discussion and conclusions

The purpose of this study was to determine whether or not there appears to be significant differences Generation Y and the other generations present on the job market, namely Generations X and Baby Boomers, in their job search process in terms of JSSE, job sources, ideal job and ideal employer. The study provided evidence that supports the existence of generational differences in two of the elements of the job search process, namely the ideal job and the type of information different generational cohorts find more relevant about a potential employer. The initial element of the entire job search process – the ideal job construct – represents the career goals an individual has before even starting to search for open positions. The results showed significant differences between the mean ranks of two out of nine career goals. The items with a significant difference were international career and expert, international career variable was ranked higher in importance by Generation Y. This generational cohort’s interest in having international opportunities in their career could be attributed to many reasons among which also their age and life stage, supporting Twenge’s (2010) theory. The same difference is also found between students and non students, where students in Generation Y show a much higher mean rank in international career than any other group, suggesting that the younger the subjects, the more importance they attribute to an international career. Expert, showed significant differences between the three groups, with Baby Boomers showing the highest mean rank followed by Generation Y.

Although many scholars (e.g. Bissola & Imperatori, 2013; Crumpacker & Crumpacker, 2007; Shaw & Fairhurst, 2008) discuss the strong interest of Generation Y in work-life balance and
Parry and Urwin (2011) describe this as being a stereotype of this generation, the results showed no difference in importance accredited to work-life balance between any of the three groups, nor between students and non students. The p value is .231 for the three groups and p=.364 when introducing the study status as covariate, contradicting Twenge’s (2010) ascending trend theory, as well as the stronger interest in work-life balance discussed by other authors (e.g. Crumpacker & Crumpacker, 2007; Parry & Urwin, 2011 etc.).

Despite finding two significant differences between the two groups in their career goals, the overwhelming majority of expectations are similar. Thus, the overall career goals construct was found to be similar for the three groups thus confirming Treuren and Anderson’s (2010) findings that there are no distinct employment expectations between Generation Y, Generations X and Baby Boomers. Also, the study showed no difference in the level of self-efficacy, meaning that both Generation Y and other generational cohorts have similar levels of confidence in performing job search activities.

When analyzing the job sources, the non parametric K-Wallis followed by Tamhane non-parametric test for pairwise comparisons showed no significant differences between the three groups. This construct was formed of four sub-constructs, two of them being dedicated solely to search using different features of social media sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn. Considering the popularity of social media technologies among the young generation, it is easily assumed among employers that a new set of expectations has developed regarding the ability of the Generation Y to utilize this technology in job search-related activities. The results showed that there is still no significant difference between job sources, even with the inclusion of social media in the job sources, which is considered a distinctive feature of Generation Y (Napoli & Ewing, 2000; Ryberg & Larsen, 2012).

The last construct, ideal employer, showed significant differences between the interests of the three groups in two out of the five items that compose the construct. The analysis provided evidence to support that employer reputation had a similar level of importance for the three groups, and the same goes for international opportunities and people and culture. Job characteristics and pay and advancement differ significantly in the levels of importance the groups attribute to them. The mean ranks for these variables show that Generation Y attributed more importance to characteristics such as job characteristics and pay and advancement. These results differ however, from the findings in the ideal job construct, where Generation Y was expected to pursue an international career.
The results of the comparison between students and non-students show no significant differences between the level of confidence the respondents reported in performing job search related tasks. The same goes for the job search sources they use. In the ideal job construct, the difference remains significant in the respondents’ wish to have an international career, where students in Generation Y attribute the highest importance to this, followed by non-students in Generation Y. While in the comparison of the three groups, Generation Y, Generation X and Baby Boomers, the expert variable showed a significant difference, there is no significant difference in the respondents’ ideal job as an expert when introducing the study status as a covariate. Students show however, more interest in leadership as aspect in their ideal job, with older students (in Generation X) show the highest mean rank followed by students in Generation Y. The other seven variables in the ideal job construct show no significant differences when introducing the study status as a covariate. In the last construct, the ideal employer, besides showing a significantly higher interest in job characteristics and pay and advancement, students also show a high interest in information about people and culture in an ideal employer. Similar to the ideal job construct, an explanation for this difference could be attributed to the life stage of this group.

Previous research in the area of generational differences discusses strong contrasts in attitudes, motivations and use of resources between generations (Krahn & Galambos, 2014; Napoli & Ewing, 2000). This study provides empirical evidence to support significant differences between Generation Y, Generations X and Baby Boomers in terms of ideal job and employer attractiveness. Generation Y attributed significantly higher importance to job characteristics and pay and advancement. The present research thus supports the theory of generations (Mannheim, 1970) regarding the organizational attractiveness factors and career goals. However, the study provides empirical evidence that does not support generational differences in other elements of the job search process, such as the job search behaviour, where behaviour is measured in the variety of job sources used in the job search process, as well as in job search self-efficacy.

When looking at the job search process comprised of the four elements measured in this study, JSSE and ideal job are prerequisites to the process. According to Kanfer and Hulin (1985) and Wanberg et al. (1999), JSSE influences the job search behaviour, which in this study is measured as the variety of sources used in the job search process. Ideal job and ideal employer are also related when considering Morley’s (2007) idea of person-organization fit. The results of this study show that despite the lack of significant differences between Generation Y and other generational cohorts in terms of mean ranks of confidence, job sources employed, there are
significant differences in career goals and in what constitutes an attractive organization for the three groups.

7. Implications

Many organizations are faced at the moment with the challenge of recruiting young talent to replace the retiring Baby Boomers or cope with new requirements in their industry. In attempting to attract the best-qualified applicant pool, companies have begun to use marketing techniques in recruitment, namely brand themselves as great places to work. This study provides empirical evidence that can be used in employer branding by understanding that branding efforts must be targeted depending on who the organization is interested in attracting. Despite having similar levels of confidence in their job seeking abilities and using the same array of methods to search for available jobs and information about potential employers, different generational cohorts attribute importance to different organizational characteristics when considering an employer. By being aware of what different generations consider important, companies can better tailor their employer brand communication for specific audiences and attract the desired applicant pool, reducing the resources spent on triaging, selecting and interviewing a larger, unfocused applicant pool.

This study shows that Generation Y’s interest in an employer lies in different characteristics than that of the older generational cohorts, despite having the same level of confidence, using similar methods to search for open positions. The three groups also have different career aspirations. The younger generational cohort attributes more importance to the specific tasks they will have to perform, as well as opportunities for advancement and higher remuneration. A company interested in attracting more experienced applicants who are part of other generational cohorts than Generation Y, should focus their employer branding efforts on advertising the reputation of the company and the organizational culture, as these rank higher in their priorities.

8. Limitations and future research

This study has a number of limitations. First, the data used in this study were collected with the use of an online survey, where a URL was sent via email newsletter and posted on social networking sites. This could lead to a sample selection bias. In order to reduce the bias, two unemployment benefit funds were used to send the URL via their email newsletter, which was
received only by members of the unemployment funds that were unemployed at the moment of data collection. In what concerns the social networking sites, the URL was posted only in closed groups dedicated to job search.

Second, the present study is a cross-sectional study, where data on job seekers of different ages were collected at the same point in time. This type of study implies that the results could be attributed to the age/career stage. In order to avoid this type of bias, two other types of studies are recommended for future research, namely a time-lag study (where different participants of similar ages are studied at different points in time) or a longitudinal study (where the same participants are studied over the passing years) (Twenge in Salkind, 2010). Previous time-lag studies have provided empirical evidence to support generational differences (see, e.g., Twenge, 2010). Similarly, the present study brings evidence supporting generational differences

With regard to future research, there is an opportunity for more in-depth studies on how the job search process is changing with the new generation on the job market, and the advanced use of technology, especially social media. It is also a possibility for future projects to study the relationship between the use of different media, in particular social networking sites, and job search self-efficacy. This could help us better understand if and how the use of social media is influencing the job search process.
9. References


CHAPTER 8

DISCUSSIONS
8 – Discussions

The purpose of this chapter is to readdress the central elements of this dissertation, focusing on the research objective presented in the introduction. Namely to theoretically and empirically explore and enhance the understanding of the employer branding concept holistically, from a communication perspective, in order to understand employer branding practices taking both the organisation and stakeholders into account (Section 1.1). In addition, as this is an article-based dissertation, the discussion seeks to bridge the three papers presented and synthesise their contribution to the dissertation.

The content of this chapter is as follows. First, the chapter will reflect on the theoretical framework used in developing an understanding of employer branding practices in an organisational context from a communication perspective. Secondly, I will reflect on and make a synthesis of the contributions of the two papers within the qualitative study, more specifically Paper I, “Integrated communication and employer branding”, and Paper II, “Employer branding as interface between business and society”. The discussion will seek to bridge the two papers by integrating the different perspectives at work. Thirdly, the contributions of both qualitative and quantitative studies will be brought together and an overall contribution of the thesis will be presented. Finally, I will offer reflections on the theoretical and practical implications of this research as I transition to the final chapter, expressing my concluding remarks.

8.1 The theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of the dissertation has several components, as each of the three papers provides a different perspective. The qualitative study aims to answer RQ1: How is employer branding practised in an organisational context from a communication perspective? It focuses on three concepts used by corporate communication scholars: the employer branding concept, integrated communication, and corporate social responsibility. The supporting quantitative study, on the other hand, aims to answer RQ2: What is the role of generations in employer branding? This study focuses on literature from the field of sociology (the theory of generations) and on organisational behaviour (the job-search process).

In the introduction (Chapter 1) and the theoretical framework (Chapter 3), the concept of employer branding was discussed as a multidisciplinary concept, with its roots in different
disciplines including marketing (e.g. Ambler & Barrows, 1996; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Edwards, 2010), organisational behaviour (e.g. Sullivan, 2002; App, 2012; Edlinger, 2015), and communication (E.g. Aggerholm et al. 2011; Andersen et al, 2013). In exploring the concept of employer branding from a communication perspective, the two papers in this qualitative study employ concepts such as integrated communication (Section 3.1. and Paper I) and corporate social responsibility (Section 3.3.2. and Paper II).

The integration of communication – despite being a multidisciplinary concept and occupying a position in the organisational setting that traverses departments and functions – is not a topic that has been discussed in the employer branding literature. From a corporate communication perspective, integration is a key concept in corporate communication (van Riel, 1997). Van Riel (1997), Christensen et al. (2008) and others stress the importance of integrating all internal and external communication activities as a crucial factor in order to “establish and maintain favourable reputations with the stakeholder groups upon which the organisation depends” (p. 5). Christensen et al. (2008) go one step further and discuss the integration of communication as a practice that unfolds within and across organisational boundaries. The integration of communication can occur in different frameworks – integrated marketing communication (IMC), corporate marketing, corporate branding, corporate communication, or co-creation (Johansen & Andersen, 2012). On the one hand, the integration of communication in employer branding can take place in each of these above-mentioned frameworks; on the other hand, different frameworks correspond to different employer branding waves (Andersen et al., 2013).

As organisations focus increasingly on establishing and maintaining sustainable stakeholder relationships, with stakeholders who are more aware of their environment and of company impact upon society, they have expanded their responsibility beyond mere interest for profit (Carroll, 1999; Kakabadse et al., 2005). They have embraced corporate social responsibility (CSR) as a way of fulfilling the expectations and demands of the most relevant stakeholders. Aggerholm et al. (2011) have redefined employer branding to include CSR in order to “create, negotiate and enact sustainable relationships between organisation and its potential and existing employees” (p. 115). Based on the employer branding waves model (Andersen et al., 2013) the employer branding concept is moving from a functionalistic perspective (which does not consider sustainability to be a component element) towards an integrative one (where sustainable relationships are the foundation of employer branding practices).
By integrating the theoretical concepts discussed in the two papers, the theoretical framework of this dissertation argues for a stakeholder-centric employer branding concept that focuses on building sustainable relationships by integrating all communication activities within and across the organisational boundaries. It is on this conceptualisation of employer branding that I base the discussion of the empirical study that follows in the next section.

8.2 The qualitative study

Based on the theoretical framework discussed in the above section, I will now discuss the combined findings of the qualitative study. I start my reflection by reviewing the study (Section 3.2., Paper I and Paper II) that focused on understanding the employer branding concept from a communication perspective. The qualitative study contributes to and enhances understanding of the employer branding concept by generating a framework integrating different perspectives. However, this study has a number of limitations that will be discussed in relation to future research possibilities.

The aim of the study was to explore employer branding practices in an organisational setting. Therefore I conducted semi-structured interviews with employer brand managers in large companies in Denmark. The data was analysed (Section 4.5.), and two papers were written, each focusing on a different aspect. Paper I focused on the integration of communication in employer branding practices, and Paper II focused on the inclusion of CSR in employer branding practices and the development of the employer branding concept from a functionalistic to an integrative concept.

The qualitative study is based on the corporate communication approach to employer branding (Section 3.4) and on the three-waves-of-employer-branding model (Andersen et al., 2013). According to both Andersen et al. (2013) and the empirical analysis used in the study, the three waves are not mutually exclusive, and it is not mandatory for a company to use all or to follow them in sequence. A company can use a different employer branding wave, or a combination of different waves depending on which elements they focus on. The metaphor of the three waves of employer branding implies a development from one wave to another, and suggests that the third wave has a more positive connotation than the previous two. I propose, however, to amend the conceptual model, based on the idea that the three waves are not mutually exclusive and that an organisation can employ any wave, or a combination of them at different points in time based on
their needs. Rather than use the word “wave”, so as to steer clear of any evolutionary implication, I propose to use the term “employer branding clusters”.

Employer branding has undergone changes in recent years both theoretically and in practice. While the empirical material was being constructed between January and March 2015, employer branding practices and indeed employer branding managers’ perceptions may have changed since the data was collected. However, the theoretical developments of employer branding are included in this dissertation and I have taken them into account in analysing the data. As for the difference in practices, a longitudinal study could potentially provide a more in-depth insight into the development of employer branding practices over time.

The selection of employer brand managers was undertaken using the Aarhus University Careers Centre, which contacted its partners and asked whether they had an employer brand manager and if they wished to take part in the study. On the one hand, the study includes some of the largest companies on the Danish market, all operating also in other countries; on the other hand, this selection process left out many companies that have not partnered the AU Careers Centre. A quantitative study of organisations in and outside Denmark could better identify the organisations with a designated employer brand manager, and could thus set the scene for a qualitative study.

The challenges implicit in a multidisciplinary concept such as employer branding are many. They are especially visible in practice when employer brand managers struggle to define and defend their role in an organisation. On the one hand they are restricted by organisational structure, and situated most often in the HR department; on the other hand, their function as employer brand managers requires them to work with tasks that would normally be managed in departments such as marketing or communication. It is for this reason that a framework is needed to manage and integrate employer branding communication activities both within and across organisational boundaries.

Paper I (Chapter 5) presents a consolidated model on the basis of the three employer branding clusters (Andersen et al., 2013) and the integrated communication approaches (Johansen & Andersen, 2012). Based on the empirical material, each of the three employer branding clusters is cross-referenced with the integrated communication frameworks and a set of features is identified (Figure 8.1.). On the one hand, this model provides empirical evidence for Andersen et al.’s (2013) conceptual model of the three employer branding waves, and depicts the evolution of the CSR discourse in the employer branding practices. On the other hand, it illustrates how different
Figure 8.1. Integrated communication in relation to employer branding based on the CSR discourse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CSR</th>
<th>Integration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employer branding cluster 1</strong>&lt;br&gt;• Identifiable and unique employer identity&lt;br&gt;• EB differentiates the firm from competitors&lt;br&gt;• considers only external stakeholders</td>
<td><strong>IMC as integrated communication platform</strong>&lt;br&gt;• market oriented&lt;br&gt;• customer driven&lt;br&gt;• tactical&lt;br&gt;• EVPs marketed externally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employer branding cluster 2</strong>&lt;br&gt;• no longer a strict distinction between internal and external stakeholders&lt;br&gt;• focus on alignment between vision, culture and image&lt;br&gt;• communication is a two-way process</td>
<td><strong>Corporate marketing</strong>&lt;br&gt;• focus on entire organization&lt;br&gt;• EVPs marketed externally&lt;br&gt;• employees are expected to adopt the organizational values&lt;br&gt;• includes elements of identity and reputation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employer branding cluster 3</strong>&lt;br&gt;• EB focuses on the integration of business in society as a starting point for talent attraction&lt;br&gt;• motivation and retention of employees becomes a focal point</td>
<td><strong>Corporate branding</strong>&lt;br&gt;• strengthened relationship between internal and external stakeholders&lt;br&gt;• better horizontal communication&lt;br&gt;• alignment between internal and external activities&lt;br&gt;<strong>Corporate communication</strong>&lt;br&gt;• encompasses the organization as a whole&lt;br&gt;• focus on coherence, consistency and clarity&lt;br&gt;• shared responsibility of EB between departments&lt;br&gt;• EB is an integrative part of the routine operations&lt;br&gt;<strong>Co-creating</strong>&lt;br&gt;• company and stakeholders work together in a value creating process&lt;br&gt;• focus on transparency and dialogue&lt;br&gt;• sustainable human resources management</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **CSR** includes the social level, which is incorporated in the daily activities, and the CSR becomes an important topic in communicating the EB to stakeholders. The organization lifts its boundaries to include the society at large and the organizations implement activities that include the society at large.

- **Integration** focuses on market orientation, customer-driven tactics, and external marketing of EVPs. In the corporate context, the focus is on the entire organization, including EVP marketing externally, with employees expected to adopt organizational values and include elements of identity and reputation.

- The employer branding clusters differ in terms of the focus on internal vs. external stakeholders, the emphasis on communication processes, and the overall strategy for employer branding and integration.
integrated communication frameworks can be applied to employer branding practices so as to provide structure to employer brand communication.

Based on this model, it can be argued that communication activities in the first cluster can best be integrated using the integrated marketing communication (IMC) or corporate marketing communication frameworks. IMC is a market-oriented approach (Reid et al., 2005) that is customer-driven (Schultz & Patti, 2009) and allows for a more tactical level of integration. In this framework, employer branding activities are focused on developing employer value propositions, communicated in a functionalistic approach to external stakeholders, who are also the main focus of employer branding in the first cluster. An alternative to the IMC framework for integrating communication activities in the first cluster of employer branding is the corporate marketing structure. Using this approach, the focus shifts from product marketing to corporate marketing (Balmer, 2009) and together with this, an interest in building stakeholder relationships (Balmer & Grayser, 2006). In addition to marketing the employer value proposition (EVP), this approach includes elements of identity and reputation.

In the second cluster, employer branding activities can also be integrated by using two frameworks: corporate branding and corporate communication. Corporate branding includes the concern that integration should transcend organisational boundaries and therefore includes internal–external communication (Balmer & Grey, 2003; Hatch & Schultz, 2003), including employees as an important stakeholder for employer branding. The intra-organisational boundaries are also broken down, and we notice better collaboration between departments. Corporate communication is an integrated communication framework that represents the transition towards the third cluster of employer branding. The integration of communication activities is a concern for the entire organisation (Johansen & Andersen, 2012). By integrating all internal and external stakeholders, it sets a central focus on coherence, consistency and clarity (ibid.). This coherence and consistency is visible in employer branding by a shared responsibility of the employer branding activities, and a close collaboration between different departments in their attempt to integrate employer branding in their routine operations.

The third cluster of employer branding brings a new framework of integration into consideration. This is co-creation, where company and stakeholders work together in a process of value creation that is based on transparency and driven by dialogue (ibid.) Here the employer brand is negotiated in a sustainable relationship between the organisation and its stakeholders (Aggerholm et al., 2011). This integrated communication structure provides a framework for companies and
stakeholders to work together in addressing their responsibility to stakeholders and society at large (ibid.).

The conceptual model of the three clusters of employer branding (Andersen et al., 2013) is based on the sustainability discourse in the corporate context. Therefore Paper II (Chapter 6) brings into discussion the concept of CSR, and employer branding becomes a bridge between business and society. By bridging the contributions of the two papers (Paper I and Paper II) and adding the concept of CSR and its potential to change the formal organisational boundaries of the previous model and thus provide an integrated contribution to the qualitative study, I present and discuss a framework that enables both theoretical and practical management of employer branding (Figure 8.2.).

Together, the employer branding cluster, the sustainability discourse within the organisation, and the integrated communication framework allow the organisation to soften the rigidity of its formal boundaries. In this process, all boundaries are affected – both the internal ones between departments and the external boundary facing the outside world.

Considering the communication process and the level of rigidity of the organisational boundaries, in the first cluster of employer branding the communication is unidirectional, directed from the organisation to its external stakeholders, who are considered passive receivers (Hübner, 2007) of the employer branding communication. The organisational boundaries are rigid, both inside the organisation (where each department is clearly demarcated and there is very little communication and collaboration between them) and outside at the external organisational boundary. Internal and external stakeholders are obviously differentiated, and the internal stakeholders are not considered a priority for employer branding in this cluster.

In the second cluster of employer branding, the organisational boundaries start to fade and the organisation becomes more inclusive. Communication becomes two-directional, and dialogue is encouraged. The focus is set on aligning internal and external communication, and both current and prospective employees are considered important stakeholders in employer branding. Once they consider employees to be an important stakeholder group in employer branding, organisations start to value employees and address their needs, developing the initial steps towards integrating CSR elements into employer branding.

It is in the third cluster of employer branding that CSR is fully integrated. Here the organisational boundaries fade, incorporating not only the most important internal and external stakeholders for the organisation, but also society at large. CSR plays an important role in this
Figure 8.2 - Employer branding in a communication perspective

Employer branding cluster 1
- identifiable and unique employer identity
- EB differentiates the firm from competitors
- considers only external stakeholders

Employer branding cluster 2
- no longer a strict distinction between internal and external stakeholders
- focus on alignment between vision, culture and image
- communication is a two-way process

Employer branding cluster 3
- EB focuses on the integration of business in society as a starting point for talent attraction
- motivation and retention of employees becomes a focal 

CSR
- the social level is incorporated in the daily activities
- CSR becomes an important topic in communicating the EB to the stakeholders
- organization lifts its boundaries to include the society at large
- organizations implement activities that include the society at large

Integration
- IMC as integrated communication platform
- market oriented
- customer driven
- tactical
- EVPs marketed externally

Corporate marketing
- focus on entire organization
- EVPs marketed externally
- employees are expected to adopt the organizational values
- includes elements of identity and reputation

Corporate branding
- strengthened relationship between internal and external stakeholders
- better horizontal communication
- alignment between internal and external activities

Corporate communication
- encompasses the organization as a whole
- focus on coherence, consistency and clarity
- shared responsibility of EB between departments
- EB is an integrative part of the routine operations

Co-creating
- company and stakeholders work together in a value creating process
- focus on transparency and dialogue
- sustainable human resources management

Organizational boundaries
- (Prospective) employees
- Organization
- Society
Cluster, and forms a connection between internal and external stakeholders. The wider society contributes to the co-creation of identity and values of the organisation. Here companies take on responsibility for their own employees, building trust and valuing their loyalty in times of crisis. Organisational responsibility extends also to the environment in which the organisation’s activities take place: the wider society. Companies set a price on teaching the young generations how to become better professionals, how to choose their career paths and contribute to the development of the local community. Co-creation is the main framework for the development of employer branding. Here companies engage in a sustainable relationship with their stakeholders in order to create, negotiate, and implement the organisation’s identity and values.

The employer branding framework developed based on the qualitative study (Figure 8.2.) provides a setting for the study of the concept from a communication perspective, focusing on integrating communication not only between the main component disciplines (marketing, human relations management, communication), but also between different stakeholder groups (internal, external stakeholders). The framework shows how CSR and integrated communication contribute to the concept of employer branding. It also shows how, depending on the CSR discourse used in the organisation and the integrated communication framework, employer branding managers’ perspective on the organisational boundaries changes.

Over and above the qualitative study, the contribution of this thesis is extended by the contribution of the quantitative study (Chapter 4), which generated one paper (Paper III).

8.3 The big picture – bringing the qualitative and quantitative studies together

This section aims to bring together the contributions of the qualitative and quantitative study and provide a synthesis of the dissertation. This section will begin by discussing the challenges that arise when trying to integrate the qualitative and quantitative study, and a short summary will follow of the contribution made by the quantitative study. Finally, I will discuss the overall contribution of the two studies, transitioning towards my concluding remarks, which elaborate on the theoretical and practical implications of the dissertation.

There is much debate over the mixed-methods approach, and arguments both in favour and against it. On the one hand, Guba and Lincoln (1994) discuss the Paradigm Wars, in which the methods are tied to specific paradigms – the quantitative and the qualitative – diverging in various respects from the data, using specific methods, and taking different approaches in the research
process (deductive or inductive). On the other hand, the main reason for using mixed methods is that each method can complement the other and compensate for the other’s weaknesses. While the qualitative approach allows for a deeper understanding but uses a small sample, the quantitative approach allows for generalisations but there is a limit to the richness of the analysis and the results.

The concept of employer branding as a multidisciplinary concept has been studied employing either a quantitative approach (in human resources management, organisational behaviour and marketing) or a qualitative approach (in communication). By combining the qualitative and quantitative approach, this dissertation attempts to provide a holistic view of employer branding, taking both organisation and stakeholders into account. However, there are challenges in integrating the contributions of the qualitative and quantitative studies.

On the one hand, the two studies are independent and were conducted at different points in time. They are based on different data sets and different theoretical concepts. The qualitative study focuses on the organisation, whereas the quantitative study focuses on the stakeholders. On the other hand, they represent the two sides of the employer branding coin, and are strongly connected to one another.

Another challenge is represented by the data used in the two studies. The qualitative study is based on a small sample and the data was collected using interviews, whereas the quantitative study is based on a survey with a much larger sample. The results of the quantitative study can be generalised, are statistically representative, and provide an overview of the role of generations in job-search behaviour in Denmark; but the results of the qualitative data offer a deeper understanding of the practices of employer branding, the challenges that employer branding managers face, and how the sustainability discourse in the corporate setting is influencing employer branding managers’ perception of organisational boundaries.

Despite the challenges that arise in the integration of qualitative and quantitative studies, there are advantages to integrating the contributions of the two studies. The main benefit lies in achieving a holistic understanding of the employer branding concept.

Besides the talent shortage discussed in both practitioner (ManPower Group, 2014; 2016) and academic literature (Theurer et al., 2016), the talent pool entering the job market is presenting distinctly different behaviours in the job-search process compared to previous generations (Choi et al., 2013; Josiam et al., 2009; Smith, 2010; Treuren & Anderson, 2010; Lichy, 2012; Krahn & Galambos, 2014). The main purpose of the quantitative study was to provide more empirical evidence in the area of intergenerational differences in the job-search process; and more precisely,
whether or not Generation Y displays different behaviours in the job-search process than older generations. Understanding whether or not this young talent pool is behaving any differently in the job market provides a background to better understanding employer branding practices, and aids in the development of better-informed decisions in practice.

The results show that the three groups – Generation Y, Generation X, and the Baby Boomers – seem to have similar levels of confidence when performing job-search activities and use a similar amount of sources to look for jobs and information on prospective employers. There are, however, differences concerning the ideal-job and ideal-employer constructs. The ideal job, or expectations and goals (Luscombe et al., 2013), is the concept that is intrinsic to the jobseeker (Schein, 1996). The “self-concept” of what an individual’s career should be is a predictor for the attitudes and actions of jobseekers as well as their work motivation (Smith & Krüger, 2005). It is based on their ideal job that applicants choose the positions they will search for, in which companies, and what makes those companies attractive. The ideal job combined with the ideal employer – the second construct that presented significant differences between the three groups – represents the characteristics that employer brand managers need to identify in order to manage employer branding. The compatibility between the organisation’s image and jobseeker’s image of him– or herself, consistent with Schane’s (1996) self-concept theory, represents what Mosely (2007) describes as person–organisation fit.

This is a step preceding (see Figure 8.3.) the employer branding model discussed earlier in section 8.2, and it provides the basis for taking decisions regarding employer branding strategies and practices. It also therefore provides the basis for the employer branding cluster, and whether and how much sustainability should be included in employer branding, the integrated communication framework etc. By understanding that there are differences between the three groups and where these differences are, employer brand managers can better tailor the employer branding efforts based not only on their immediate necessities in terms of recruitment, but also on their long-term talent-acquisition strategies. In the context of this dissertation, this study did not aim to provide a list of characteristics on which employer branding managers should focus when developing their strategies, but to provide background information for employer branding research and practice. A better understanding of the target population and of the company’s identity and image are needed to develop more appropriate employer branding strategies.
8.4 Theoretical implications

Employer branding is a multidisciplinary concept at the intersection of marketing and human resources management. It has been studied from different perspectives including marketing (e.g. Ambler & Barrows, 1996; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Edwards, 2010), organisational behaviour (e.g. Sullivan, 2002; App, 2012; Edlinger, 2015), and communication (E.g. Aggerholm et al. 2011; Andersen et al, 2013). Within communication, it has been only recently explored and mostly conceptually. This dissertation studies employer branding from a communication perspective, providing both conceptual and empirical contributions.

Because employer branding is a multidisciplinary concept, one of the main concerns is integration of its various elements, which originate in different disciplines. The application of a corporate communication framework to research on employer branding renders integration an inherent element of the process. This perspective therefore provides a better framework for further exploring the concept and its component elements.

The present study provides a framework for researching employer branding from a communication perspective. It takes into account various approaches of integrated communication based on the sustainability discourse in the corporate context and the consequences of introducing a sustainability discourse in employer branding. These consequences consist of perceived changes in the rigidity of formal organisational boundaries.

Previous studies exploring employer branding from a communication perspective have primarily contributed conceptually (e.g. Aggerholm et al., 2011; Andersen et al., 2013). This study
provides empirical evidence to support the conceptual developments of Aggerholm et al. (2011) and Andersen et al. (2013). Based on the empirical material, it provides an integrated employer branding framework.

Based on some of the limitations of this dissertation, I invite future research to participate in consolidating and furthering the understanding of employer branding and employer branding practices in organisations.

A first limitation was that the data was collected in Denmark, so the findings may be determined by the local business context. In order to evaluate its relevance in other contexts, the employer branding framework developed should be deployed in additional studies involving data collected from other countries in different business contexts. A second and similar limitation was that the quantitative study on jobseekers was conducted among Danish and international participants living in Denmark. Again, the findings may have been by local context. A larger study including participants from other countries could appraise the difference between generations in different contexts.

A third limitation was that the main study in this dissertation contributes a managerial perspective on employer branding. The managerial perspective is portrayed through self-reporting by employer brand managers. In self-reporting, managers tend to present themselves and their activities in a better light. Therefore future studies could include other perspectives, such as those of other team members or employees in other departments whose activities intersect with employer branding or stakeholders.

This dissertation has used a mixed-methods approach, more precisely a mixed sequential dominant status design in which a dominant qualitative study was followed by a supporting quantitative study. A more integrated mixed-methods approach could provide future studies with a broader and more in-depth understanding of the concept of employer branding and its practices in organisations. In addition, different data-collection and analysis strategies, for example adding observations and other employer branding relevant materials, and the use of discourse analysis could also considerably enrich the understanding of the concept, further the development of the theory, and better inform practice.
8.5 Practical implications

Organisations have only recently begun to focus on employer branding (e.g. Øksenbjerg, 2009; Yang, 2015), and the employer branding function is generally situated in human resources departments (Edlinger, 2015). For this reason it is often perceived as a concept additional to recruitment. The human resources perspective on employer branding causes various important aspects to be left out of consideration. For example, a human-resources-focused employer branding strategy does not develop a branding overview, or the understanding of image and reputation that other perspectives might contribute. An employer branding strategy rooted in and limited to human resources faces the risk of being disconnected from the overall corporate communication strategy. In the following paragraphs I will present the practical implications focusing on the results of the quantitative study and then the qualitative study.

Many organizations are currently facing the challenge of recruiting young talent to replace the retiring Baby Boomers or cope with new requirements in their industry. Companies have begun to use marketing techniques in recruitment and brand themselves as great places to work in their attempt to attract the best-qualified applicant pool. Employer branding (the use of marketing techniques in human resources management) strategies ought to be developed differentiated based on the different targeting groups. By looking at the generations as an influencing factor in the job search process, I could identify that different generational cohorts attribute importance to different organizational characteristics when considering an employer. However, the three generational cohorts included in the study present similar levels of confidence in their job seeking abilities and using the same array of methods to search for open positions. By being aware of what different generations consider important, companies can better tailor their employer brand communication for specific audiences and attract the desired applicant pool, reducing the resources spent on triaging, selecting and interviewing a larger, unfocused applicant pool.

This study shows that Generation Y’s interest in an employer lies in different characteristics than that of the older generational cohorts, despite having the same level of confidence, using similar methods to search for open positions. The three groups also have different career aspirations. The younger generational cohort attributes more importance to the specific tasks they will have to perform, as well as opportunities for advancement and higher remuneration. A company interested in attracting more experienced applicants who are part of other generational
cohorts than Generation Y, should focus their employer branding efforts on advertising the reputation of the company and the organizational culture, as these rank higher in their priorities. Understanding the audience is an important step preceding the development of the employer branding strategy.

When turning the attention towards the organizational side, the empirical insight drawn from the study suggests that employer brand managers face challenges in relation to defining and defending their role (Chapter 6). As employer branding overlaps with the activities of other departments, employer brand managers need both an overview of all activities that intersect with employer branding and a close collaboration with other functions in order to develop coherent and consistent communication.

By developing strategies that are rooted in corporate communication and in close cooperation with the marketing and human resources departments, employer branding strategy secures the amplitude of an organisation-wide function that is capable of both vertical and horizontal integration and includes both internal and external stakeholders.

In order to better manage employer branding, companies ought to apply an integrated communication framework, based on their communicative needs and the objectives they set. In doing so, employer branding becomes better integrated in the corporate communication strategy and, at the same time, integrated communication provides a framework for a better collaboration between the different functions intersecting with employer branding.

The intersection of employer branding and CSR in particular brings many advantages to the organization. By introducing a sustainability discourse in employer branding, companies can open their formal organizational boundaries and invite external stakeholders to take part in co-creating the employer brand. By co-creating the employer brand, the organization becomes more transparent and attractive to prospective employees on the one hand, and empowers current employees making the company a desirable workplace for current employees on the other hand.

In addition to adopting a communication perspective on employer branding strategies, employer brand managers should also consider acquiring a thorough understanding of the target audience as employer branding strategies are developed. Understanding both the identity and the image of the company, as well as the audience for employer branding, allows managers to make more informed decisions and develop more effective strategies.
CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSIONS, CONTRIBUTION AND FUTURE RESEARCH
This dissertation focuses on the concept of employer branding, a concept with a recent history (Ambler & Barrow, 1996) that has gained increasing importance in organisations in recent years. This is due both to the global talent shortage (ManPower Group, 2014; 2016; Theurer et al., 2016) and to changes in work-related behaviours of the young generation entering the job market (Josiam et al., 2009; Smith, 2010; Treuren & Anderson, 2010; Choi et al., 2013; Krahn & Galambos, 2014).

The dissertation aims to develop understanding of the concept of employer branding and enhance its understanding from a communication perspective by exploring employer branding practices taking both organisation and stakeholders into account. Two main research questions are raised, one concerning employer branding practices in an organisational setting, the other addressing the role of generations in the job-search process. RQ1 is: How is employer branding practised in an organisational context from a communication perspective? RQ2 is: What is the role of generations in the job-search process?

These research questions represent the guiding frame for the dissertation, which is composed of three independent but interconnected papers and a frame text. The three papers are the result of two studies, a qualitative and a quantitative study. The qualitative study represents the main research of the dissertation and generated two papers (Paper I and Paper II) which answer the first research question. The supporting quantitative study generated one paper (Paper III), which answers the second research question. Each of the three independent research papers (Chapters 5, 6 and 7) has its own research objective, presented in the form of the three sub-questions. Each paper contributes different perspectives and insights to the overall purpose of the dissertation. The main purpose of the frame text is to present the theoretical (Chapter 3) and methodological (Chapter 4) assumptions on which the dissertation is based, and to provide a synthesising discussion (Chapter 8) of the two main research questions and the contribution of the research project as a whole (Chapter 9). The structure of the dissertation is presented in Figure 9.1. below.

In this concluding chapter, I will briefly discuss the main contributions in relation to the objective of the dissertation and present the answers to the overall research question and sub-questions.
9.1 Outlining the main contributions and answering the research questions

With the purpose of exploring the concept of employer branding and enhancing its understanding from a communication perspective by exploring employer branding practices, taking both organisation and stakeholders into account, the dissertation was scientifically positioned within a pragmatic approach, one which aims to find resolutions to practical problems by accepting that there are multiple realities open to empirical inquiry (Dewey, 1938). This approach allows the researcher to liberate herself or himself of the restrictions imposed by choosing either a positivist or a constructivist approach (Feizer, 2010). The dissertation therefore consists of two studies answering the two main research questions: a main qualitative study, which draws on corporate communication and two of its elements, namely integrated communication and corporate social responsibility; and a supporting quantitative study, drawing on the theory of generations and the job-search process.
The main qualitative study is based on semi-structured interviews conducted with employer brand managers in large organisations in five business sectors. This study aims to answer RQ1: How is employer branding practised in organisational context from a communication perspective?

The study generated two papers (Papers I and II), each focusing on a different aspect of employer branding practices, and each with its own sub-research question. Paper I set out to explore the organisation of communication in the employer branding function and how employer brand managers define their role in relation to the integration of communication. The paper discusses different types of integrated communication based on Johansen and Andersen (2012), in addition to the concept of employer branding as a multidisciplinary endeavour. In this paper I propose a framework for managing and integrating employer branding communication activities both within and across the organisational boundaries, based on different types of integrated communication (ibid.) and on the three waves of employer branding (Andersen et al., 2013).

Paper II addresses a different aspect of employer branding, namely the role of corporate social responsibility in employer branding. It addresses this question by exploring how employer branding practices are advanced in organisations from a functionalistic view to a more integrative approach by embracing social responsibility. This paper contributes an understanding of changes that occur in perceived organisational borders when the sustainability discourse is introduced in the corporate context in employer branding.

The answer to RQ1 – How is employer branding practised in organisational context from a communication perspective? – comes from the combined contribution of the two papers written on the basis of the qualitative study (Papers I and II). By integrating the contributions of the two papers, I developed a framework that enables both a theoretical and practical management of employer branding (Figure 8.2. in section 8.2). This framework is based on employer branding clusters (Andersen et al., 2013). It shows how, by changing the sustainability discourse and the integrated communication framework of the organisation, the organisation can also change levels of rigidity in its formal boundaries. The framework focuses on the integration of communication not only between the main component disciplines (marketing, human relations management, communication), but also between different stakeholder groups (internal, external stakeholders) and shows how not only the intra-organisational boundaries between departments, but also the boundary facing the outside world can be affected by integration of the sustainability discourse in the corporate context and by choice of integrated type of communication.
The second research question, RQ2 – What is the role of generations in the job-search process? – is addressed and answered in the second study, the supporting quantitative study. This generated one paper (Paper III). This paper set out to explore the role of generations in the job-search process. More precisely, it aimed to understand whether Generation Y, the youngest generation entering the job market, displays different behaviours in the job-search process to its predecessors. The results of the study suggest that Generation Y, Generation X and Baby Boomers have similar levels of confidence when performing job-search activities and use a similar amount of sources to look for jobs and information on the prospective employers. There are, however, differences in what concerns the ideal-job and ideal-employer constructs, in the sense that younger generations are more interested in an international career. This is even more visible when students are compared to non-students in the ideal-job construct. In the ideal-employer construct, younger generations attribute greater importance to actual job characteristics, the tasks they have to perform, and pay and advancement characteristics than did older generations, which attributed more importance to employer reputation or people and culture attributes. These differences in turn have implications for the development of employer branding strategies. Misalignment between the expectations of the desired target group and employer brand communication can lead to the wrong pool of applicants being attracted, or to the necessity to allocate extra resources (time, human resources, financial resources) to find the right candidates. Employer brand managers can tailor employer branding efforts better based on their immediate necessities in terms of recruitment, but also based on their long-term talent-acquisition strategies.

In summary, this dissertation provides theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions. On a theoretical level, the dissertation further develops the understanding of the employer branding concept from a communication perspective, both in a corporate and a stakeholder context. It develops a framework that deepens understanding of the impact of corporate social responsibility and integrated communication on employer branding and employer branding practices in a corporate context. Furthermore, it provides an understanding of the importance of identifying and analysing the behaviours of the employer branding target audience, as well as the attributes that those audiences consider most relevant to them. On a methodological level, the dissertation contributes a mixed-methods study of the employer branding concept based on both qualitative and quantitative data sets. This allows for both an in-depth understanding of organisational practices and a wider understanding of the stakeholder perspective. Finally, on a practical level, the dissertation contributes a framework that allows managers to develop more
informed management practices. Such a framework will allow managers to understand the implications of introducing a sustainability discourse into employer branding strategies. It will also help them to better manage the integration of communication activities into a function that transcends organisational boundaries and involves both internal and external stakeholders.

To conclude, this dissertation has explored the concept of employer branding and its practices in organisations, a relatively young and multidisciplinary concept that stands in need of exploration and better understanding. It is hoped that the findings of this dissertation provide a framework that can provide for future research a new perspective on the study of the concept of employer branding from a communication perspective.
CHAPTER 10

SUMMARIES
10. Summaries

10.1 English summary

This dissertation takes its departure in the multidisciplinarity of the employer branding phenomenon. Employer branding research has been conducted in a range of fields and disciplines including human resources management (e.g. Sullivan, 2002; App et al., 2012; Edlinger, 2015), marketing (e.g. Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Edwards, 2010; Foster et al., 2010), and communication (Aggerholm et al., 2011; Andersen et al., 2013). On the one hand, achieving an overview of the various contributions to the academic field is quite challenging while on the other hand, in practice employer brand managers struggle to define and defend their role in companies as each of the main component disciplines – marketing, human resources management and communication – is in practice managed by a separate function.

The research purpose of this dissertation is to explore and enhance the understanding of the employer branding concept holistically, both theoretically and empirically from a communication perspective. The aim is to understand employer branding practices in greater depth by taking both organisation and stakeholders into account in order to provide a more holistic picture. Therefore, the research objective is addressed by raising two research questions and three affiliated sub-questions which provide a frame for the research process: RQ1: How is employer branding practised in an organisational context from a communication perspective? and RQ2: What is the role of generations in employer branding? The two main research questions represent a comprehensive frame for the dissertation, which consists of three independent papers and an overall integrating frame text.

Paper I set out to explore the organisation of communication in the employer branding function and how employer brand managers define their role in relation to the integration of communication. The paper discusses different types of integrated communication based on Johansen and Andersen (2012), in addition to the concept of employer branding as a multidisciplinary endeavour. In this paper I propose a framework for managing and integrating employer branding communication activities both within and across the organisational boundaries, based on different types of integrated communication (ibid.) and on the three waves of employer branding (Andersen et al., 2013).

Paper II addresses a different aspect of employer branding, namely the role of corporate social responsibility in employer branding. It addresses this question by exploring how employer
branding practices are advanced in organisations from a functionalistic view to a more integrative approach by embracing social responsibility. This paper contributes an understanding of changes that occur in perceived organisational borders when the sustainability discourse is introduced in the corporate context in employer branding.

Paper III set out to explore the role of generations in the job-search process. More precisely, it aimed to understand whether Generation Y, the youngest generation entering the job market, displays different behaviours in the job-search process to its predecessors. The results of the study suggest that Generation Y, Generation X and Baby Boomers have similar levels of confidence when performing job-search activities and use a similar amount of sources to look for jobs and information on the prospective employers. There are, however, differences in what concerns the ideal-job and ideal-employer constructs, in the sense that younger generations are more interested in an international career. This is even more visible when students are compared to non-students in the ideal-job construct. In the ideal-employer construct, younger generations attribute greater importance to actual job characteristics, the tasks they have to perform, and pay and advancement characteristics than did older generations, which attributed more importance to employer reputation or people and culture attributes. These differences in turn have implications for the development of employer branding strategies. Misalignment between the expectations of the desired target group and employer brand communication can lead to the wrong pool of applicants being attracted, or to the necessity to allocate extra resources (time, human resources, financial resources) to find the right candidates. Employer brand managers can tailor employer branding efforts better based on their immediate necessities in terms of recruitment, but also based on their long-term talent-acquisition strategies.

The answer to RQ1 – How is employer branding practised in organisational context from a communication perspective? – comes from the combined contribution of the two papers written on the basis of the qualitative study (Papers I and II). By integrating the contributions of the two papers, I developed a framework that enables both a theoretical and practical management of employer branding (Figure 8.2. in section 8.2). This framework is based on employer branding clusters (Andersen et al., 2013). It shows how, by changing the sustainability discourse and the integrated communication framework of the organisation, the organisation can also change levels of rigidity in its formal boundaries. The framework focuses on the integration of communication not only between the main component disciplines (marketing, human relations management, communication), but also between different stakeholder groups (internal, external stakeholders) and
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On a theoretical level, the dissertation further develops the understanding of the employer branding concept from a communication perspective, both in a corporate and a stakeholder context. It develops a framework that deepens understanding of the impact of corporate social responsibility and integrated communication on employer branding and employer branding practices in a corporate context. Furthermore, it provides an understanding of the importance of identifying and analysing the behaviours of the employer branding target audience, as well as the attributes that those audiences consider most relevant to them.

On a practical level this dissertation contributes with a framework for developing employer branding strategies rooted in corporate communication and in close cooperation with the marketing and human resources departments, employer branding strategy secures the amplitude of an organisation-wide function that is capable of both vertical and horizontal integration and includes both internal and external stakeholders. By introducing a sustainability discourse in employer branding, companies can open their formal organizational boundaries and invite external stakeholders to take part in co-creating the employer brand. By co-creating the employer brand, the organization becomes more transparent and attractive to prospective employees and empowers current employees making the company a desirable work place.
To conclude, this dissertation has explored the concept of employer branding and its practices in organisations, a relatively young and multidisciplinary concept that stands in need of exploration and better understanding. It is hoped that the findings of this dissertation provide a framework that can provide for future research a new perspective on the study of the concept of employer branding from a communication perspective.
10.2 Dansk resumé

Denne afhandling tager udgangspunkt i den multidisciplinaritet, som kendtegner employer branding. Forskning i employer branding er blevet udført indenfor en række felter og discipliner, bl.a. HR-ledelse (fx Sullivan, 2002; App et al., 2012; Edliner, 2015), marketing (fx Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Edwardzs, 2010; Foster et al., 2010) og kommunikation (Aggerholm et al., 2011; Andersen et al., 2013). På den ene side er det en større udfordring at skabe et overblik over de forskellige bidrag til det akademiske felt, og på den anden side kæmper employer brand-ledere i praksis med at definere og forsvarer deres rolle i virksomhederne eftersom hvert eneste hovedområde inden for feltet – marketing, HR-ledelse og kommunikation – i praksis styres af hver sin funktion.

Forskningsformålet med denne afhandling er at undersøge og udvide forståelsen af employer branding-konceptet som holistisk både teoretisk og empirisk fra et kommunikationsperspektiv. Målet er at få en dybere forståelse af employer branding-praksis ved at inddrage både organisation og stakeholdere med henblik på at tegne et mere holistisk billede. Forskningsformålet behandles derfor ved at opstille to forskningsspørgsmål og tre tilknyttede underspørgsmål til at rammesætte forskningsprocessen: FS1: Hvordan praktiseres employer branding i en organisatorisk kontekst fra et kommunikationsperspektiv? Og FS2: Hvilken rolle spiller generationer for employer branding? De to primære forskningsspørgsmål udgør en omfattende ramme for afhandlingen, som består af tre uafhængige artikler og en overordnet, integrerende rammetekst.


I artikel II behandles en anden side af employer branding, nemlig den rolle som virksomheders sociale ansvar spiller for konceptet. Dette spørgsmål behandles ved at undersøge, hvordan employer branding-praksis udvikler sig i organisationer fra en funktionalistisk opfattelse til en mere integrerende tilgang som omfatter socialt ansvar. Denne artikel bidrager med en forståelse af de
ændringer, der sker i opfattede organisatoriske grænseområder, når bæredygtighedsdiskursen bliver introduceret ind i virksomhedskonteksten i employer branding.


Svaret på FS1 – Hvordan praktiseres employer branding i en organisatorisk kontekst fra et kommunikationsperspektiv? – findes i det fælles bidrag fra de to artikler, som er skrevet på basis af den kvalitative undersøgelse (artikler I og II). Ved at integrere det, som de to artikler bidrager med, har jeg udviklet en ramme, som muliggør både en teoretisk og praktisk ledelse af employer branding (figur 8.2. i afsnit 8.2.). Denne ramme er baseret på employer branding-klynger (Andersen et al., 2013). Den viser, hvordan organisationen ved at ændre bæredygtighedsdiskursen og den integrerede kommunikationsramme i organisationen også kan ændre graden af rigiditet i sine formelle grænser. Rammen fokuserer på integrationen af kommunikation ikke blot mellem hoveddisciplinerne (marketing, HR-ledelse, kommunikation), men også mellem forskellige stakeholdergrupper (interne, eksterne stakeholdere), og den viser, hvordan ikke kun interne organisatoriske grænser mellem afdelingerne i organisationen, men også grænser mod den ydre
verden kan blive berørt, når bæredygtighedskursen bliver integreret i virksomhedskonteksten og gennem tilgangen til integrationen af kommunikation.


På et praktisk plan bidrager denne afhandling med en ramme for udviklingen af employer branding-strategier, der er rodfæstet i virksomhedskommunikation og som er i tæt samarbejde med marketing- og HR-afdelingerne. Employer branding-strategi sikrer rummeligheden i en organisationsfunktion, som er i stand til at rumme både vertikal og horisontal integration og omfatter både interne og eksterne stakeholdere. Ved at introducere en bæredygtighedsdiskurs i employer branding kan virksomheder åbne deres formelle organisationsgrænser og invitere eksterne stakeholdere til at deltage i medskabelsen af employer brandet. Ved at medskabe employer brandet bliver organisationen mere transparent og attraktiv for potentielle medarbejdere og styrker de nuværende medarbejdere, hvilket gør virksomheden til et attraktivt arbejdssted.

Som konklusion kan jeg anføre, at denne afhandling har undersøgt konceptet employer branding og dets praksis i organisationer, et relativt ungt og multidisciplinært koncept, som har brug
for nærmere undersøgelse og en bedre forståelse. Jeg håber, at resultaterne i denne afhandling kan levere en ramme, som i kommende forskning kan give et nyt perspektiv på studiet af employer branding-konceptet fra et kommunikationsperspektiv.
CHAPTER 11

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**Declaration of co-authorship**

Full name of the PhD student: Julia Kolesnicov

This declaration concerns the following article/manuscript:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Employer branding as interface between business and society</th>
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<td>Authors</td>
<td>Julia Kolesnicov and Jana Kollat</td>
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The article/manuscript is: Published [ ] Accepted [ ] Submitted [ ] In preparation [X]

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B. Major contribution  
C. Equal contribution  
D. Minor contribution  
E. Not relevant

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Signature of the PhD student

Date: 07.08.2017

*As per policy the co-author statement will be published with the dissertation.*