Employer Branding in International Recruitment Communication. Case Opteam

International Business Communication

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Employer Branding in International Recruitment Communication.

Case Opteam

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Objective of the Study
The objective of this study was to investigate the external employer brand in the recruitment communication of a recruitment company recruiting internationally. The main focus was on exploring how a recruitment company manages its employer brand in the recruitment process of international employees and how the international applicants perceived the employer i.e. what the employer brand image of the company is. The case company of the study was Opteam, a Finnish recruitment company and the focus was on international recruitment in the Philippines.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework
For this study, a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods was used. Four semi-structured qualitative theme interviews were conducted to gather data from the representatives of the case company. A survey with quantitative and qualitative questions was conducted among the recruited employees, who were asked to consider the questions from the perspective of their previous role as applicants.

Findings and Conclusions
Four specific elements that have influenced the case company's employer branding in recruitment communication were clearly seen in the interview findings: *the importance of host country, the local partner and legislation, the labor market conditions and number of applicants* as well as *the double-role of a recruitment company*. The findings clearly indicated that location information dominated in employer branding and recruitment communication is balancing between extremely realistic information and selling the host country. The brand vision of Opteam is to be a reliable, safe and ethical recruiter and employer. The findings indicated that the features that have to do with tangible and directly employment related issues, such as employee benefits and investments to employees' well-being, were valued the highest when the applicants evaluated the case company as an employer. Based on the findings the employer brand vision and employer brand image correlate in general. Finally, based on the findings recommendations for further employer branding were drawn. These recommendations included further developing the message and symbolic benefits of the employer brand, intensifying internal marketing of the employer brand to the local partner and increasing the possibility of positive word-of-mouth endorsements.

Key words: employer branding, employer brand image, international recruitment, recruitment company, personnel service company

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Työnantajabrändi kansainvälisen rekrytointiviestinnässä – Case: Opteam

Tutkimuksen tavoitteet
Tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli selvittää, mitkä ovat kansainvälisesti rekrytoivan henkilöstöpalveluyrityksen työnantajabrändin erityispiirteet rekrytointiviestinnässä. Tutkimus keskittyi siihen, miten case-yritys brändää itseään rekrytointiprosessin aikana ja miten kansainväliset työnhakijat näkevät case-yrityksen työnantajana ja rekrytoijana. Tutkimuksen kohteena oli suomalainen henkilöstöpalvelualan yritys Opteam ja tutkimus keskittyi kansainväliseen rekrytointiin Filippiineillä.

Tutkimusmenetelmät ja teoreettinen viitekehys
Tutkimuksessa käytettiin sekä kvalitatiivisia että kvantitatiivisia tutkimusmenetelmiä. Kvalitatiivisen tutkimuksen aineisto kerättiin suorittamalla neljä teemahaastattelua case-yrityksen edustajien keskuudessa. Kvantitatiivisen tutkimuksen aineisto kerättiin sähköisen kyselyllä, jossa kysyttiin case-yrityksen Filippiineiltä rekrytoimien työntekijöiden näkemyksiä hyvästä työnantajasta yleisesti ja case-yrityksestä työnantajana ja rekrytoijana.

Tutkimuksen tulokset ja johtopäätökset
Haastatteluaineistosta nousivat esiin neljä case-yrityksen työnantajabrändiin ja rekrytointiviestintään vaikuttavaa erityispiirrettä: *kohdemaan tärkeys, paikallinen kumppani ja lainsäädäntö, työmarkkinat ja hakijamäärät* sekä *kaksoisrooli työnantajana ja rekrytoijana*. Tutkimustulokset osoittivat, että kohdemaa on vahvassa roolissa työnantajabrändäyksessä ja rekrytointiviestintä on tasapainoilua äärimmäisen realistisen viestinnän ja kohdemaan myymisen välillä. Opteamin työnantajabrändivisio on olla luotettava, turvallinen ja eettinen rekrytoija ja työnantaja. Tutkimustulosten mukaan työnhakijat arvostivat case-yrityksessä eniten konkreettisia ja suoraan työhön liittyviä ominaisuuksia, kuten edut ja panostus työntekijöiden hyvinvointiin. Tutkimustulosten mukaan työnantajabrändivisio ja työnantajakuva korreloivat yleisellä tasolla. Tutkimustulosten pohjalta koottiin suositukset Opteamin työnantajabrändäyksen kehittämiseksi rekrytointiviestinnässä. Näihin suosituksiin kuuluivat työnantajabrändin ydinviestin terävöittäminen, sisäisen markkinoinnin lisääminen paikalliselle kumppanille ja positiivisten vertaissuositusten mahdollisuuden lisääminen.

Avainsanat: työnantajabrändi, työnantajakuva, kansainvälinen rekrytointi, rekrytointiyritys, henkilöstöpalveluyritys

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research problem

In recent years, there has been constantly increasing public discussion about the upcoming labor shortage and its effects on the economy and labor market conditions both globally and in Finland. According to the predicted demographic trends of increasingly ageing population, companies will face an increasing level of competition for a decreasing pool of skilled workers (Bijak, Kupiszewska, Kupiszewski, Saczuk & Kicinger, 2007; Wilden, Gudergan & Lings, 2010; Myrskylä, 2012). It has become apparent that job applicants do not compete for the same position in a company but more and more companies compete for the same job applicant. Some industries have already experienced the consequences of the labor shortage and faced significant difficulties of finding employees with particular skills. In Finland, international recruitment has recently been widely discussed as one solution to the upcoming labor shortage. The role of international recruitment and employment-based immigration has been acknowledged in the programme of the current Finnish Government (Programme of Finnish Government, 2011, p. 46).

According to official statics, in 2020 there will be a shortage of 150 000 employees in Finland (Myrskylä, 2012). Particularly, the welfare and health care sector can be mentioned as an example of an industry facing a severe labor shortage in the future. It is already difficult to hire nurses in Finland (Heilmann, 2010). In October 2012 the Ministry of employment and the economy of Finland (TEM) released the results of its analysis of the labor shortage of welfare services (Koponen, Laiho & Tuomaala, 2012). According to TEM's analysis (Koponen et al., 2012), by 2025, in the best-case scenario, there will be a shortage of at least 20 000 new employees in the welfare services or in the worst case-scenario, even 60 000 new employees. TEM's analysis clearly states that

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regardless of what other measures are taken to solve the labor shortage, the international recruitment of employees to the welfare sector is inevitably needed (Koponen et al., 2012). Nevertheless, the welfare sector is not the only industry facing the problems of labor shortage and the challenges of international recruitment. There are already difficulties for instance in the metal industry to find skilled workforce, such as welders.

As the need for international recruitment has emerged and will continue to grow, recruitment companies that specialize in recruiting internationally have been established (Raunio, Pihlajamaa & Carroll, 2009). Competition for skilled work force in global labor markets will grow, not only among Finnish companies and recruitment companies but also against the recruiters from other countries, as Finland is not the only country facing a labor shortage (Bijak et al., 2007; Tuokko, Mäenpää & Nivala, 2013, p. 10). It can be assumed that not only will there be more demand for recruitment companies' services, as companies want to focus on their core businesses and do not have the resources or interest to take care of international recruitment, but also there will be more competition among the recruitment companies. Applying the resource-based view (e.g. Backhaus & Tikoo, 2005, p.503), it may be assumed those who are able to recruit the best employees for their clients will win the competition. The resource-based view suggests that the characteristics of a company's resources can contribute competitive advantage and the resources that are rare and valuable, in the context of recruitment human resources, allow the company to move ahead of its competitors (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, p. 503; Wilden et al., 2010, p. 57).

The changing labor market conditions affect companies' strategies of attracting and retaining not only top talent, but also other qualified employees. Due to the heavy competition in the labor market, companies have developed new ways to communicate and attract employees, and new tools are developed e.g. by using branding and marketing theory and research in the recruitment process (Franca & Pahor, 2012; Moroko & Uncles, 2008). Such concepts as employer brand, employer reputation, employer image and employment brand (discussed in more detail in Chapter 2), which

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are used almost synonymously, will play a significant role in recruitment. Also in international recruitment, they are used to attract the best job seekers, as initial job choice decisions are often related to the image or reputation of the employer (Gatewood, Gowan & Lautenshlager, 1993). The advantage of having a strong employer brand is both for attracting and retaining the best employees.

Employer brand has been studied from different viewpoints, mostly in the context of employee retention and how employees see their current employer, i.e. the internal employer brand (Franca & Pahor, 2012). Employer brand has been studied relatively less from the viewpoint of the external employer brand and to some extent in the context of recruitment communication (Franca & Pahor, 2012; Wilden et al., 2010), but has not received attention in the context of international recruitment (Lundby, Wayne & Macey, 2012) as the phenomenon is relatively new. In addition, there is only a limited amount of research that has focused on how recruitment activities and communication impact potential employees during the early stages of the recruitment process (Collins & Stevens, 2002, p. 1121). The job seeking populations studied in the context of the employer brand have mostly been students, but also other job seeking populations have been studied, for example in order to compare which aspects of the employer brand are valued by each job seeking group (Franca & Pahor 2012). However, international job seekers have not been widely studied yet and no research was found that would address the employer brand of the recruitment companies and their role in the international recruitment.

The recruitment company's role is not as straightforward as the employer's role. The recruitment companies may either take some of the responsibilities (e.g. relocation, housing) of their clients i.e. the employer of the recruited employees or only take care of the recruitment. Some of the recruitment companies are also staffing agencies, which means that the company is the actual employer, and the client company only leases the employee. Regardless of whether the recruitment company is the employer or the recruiter, the recruitment company is often the first contact of job seekers applying for a

job through a recruitment company and as international recruitment is a more complex and multi-dimensional process for the job applicant than finding employment in one's home country, the recruitment company has a more significant role than in "traditional" in-country recruitment. Therefore the employer brand of recruitment companies and their recruitment communication are worth studying in an international setting more closely.

This Thesis addresses the research gaps indicated above and focuses on developing better understanding of the role that employer branding has in attracting skilled employees particularly in the early stage of the recruitment process when employee expectations are set. The Thesis investigates the external employer brand in the recruitment communication of a recruitment company recruiting internationally. In other words, the study focuses on the attractiveness of the recruitment company as an employer-recruiter through the perceptions of the representatives of the case company and the external stakeholder group of international job applicants. The main focus is on exploring how a recruitment company manages its employer brand in the recruitment process of international employees and how the international applicants perceive the employer i.e. what the employer brand image of the company is.

According to Cornelissen (2011), corporate image management is an essential part of corporate communication. The Thesis focuses on employer branding and employer brand image that are linked to corporate brand and image, and therefore the Thesis is positioned within the field of corporate communication. The Thesis concentrates on studying employer brand and communication in the context of an international recruitment process. Hence, it can be said that the study also contributes to the discussion of international business communication. The Thesis discusses employer brand in general and in the context of international recruitment communication in particular.

1.2 Research questions

This subchapter introduces the research questions and objectives. The research problem of this Thesis focuses on employer branding in recruitment communication in the early stages of the recruitment process. The research problem is studied from the viewpoint of a case company as well as from the viewpoint of job applicants.

Firstly, the Thesis examines whether there are specific elements in a recruitment company's employer branding. Specific elements refer to elements that may differentiate a recruitment company's employer branding from employer branding of a company that is recruiting employees only for itself and also the specific elements that are related to international recruitment in the Philippines, where the case company recruits. Answering the first research question also helps to answer the rest of the research questions.

Secondly, the Thesis will examine employer branding from the viewpoint of the case company and employer brand image from the viewpoint of the external stakeholder group of potential employees. Research questions 2 and 3 are used to answer to the second objective. Finally, based on the results of research questions 2 and 3, the Thesis will examine whether brand vision i.e. how the case company would like it to be perceived and experienced correlates with the employer brand image of the case company i.e. how it is currently perceived and experienced. Based on the answers to the research questions, also recommendations to communicating the employer brand to the stakeholder group of job applicants are considered. The research questions aim at finding out how and why employer branding is used in international recruitment.

The research questions are as follows:

RQ1 **What are the specific elements of the employer branding in the case company (a recruitment company recruiting internationally)?**

- Is the recruitment company's employer branding different compared to employer branding of other companies?

RQ2 **How does the case company perceive the role of its external employer brand in recruitment communication in attracting international job applicants?**

- What is the employer brand vision of the company?
- What measures has the company taken to manage its external employer brand in the context of the international recruitment process?

RQ3 **How does the group of job applicants perceive the case company's external employer brand in recruitment communication?**

- How do the applicants perceive the company's employer brand image?
- What specific factors attracted them to apply employment through the case company?

Firstly, the research problem is considered by looking into the extant literature on employer brand and recruitment communication and their role in the recruitment process in general and in the context of international recruitment and recruitment companies in particular. The theoretical framework of the Thesis is then formed. Secondly, the empirical study focuses on assessing the case company's employer branding in recruitment communication from both the case company's and job applicants' perspective. Finally, the two perspectives on the employer brand are compared in order to find out potential similarities or differences and some recommendations are formed for future employer branding.

1.3 Case company – Opteam and international recruitment in the Philippines

This research is conducted as a case study and the research questions are studied in the context of a case company. The case company and its international recruitment operations in the Philippines are introduced in this subchapter.

Opteam was chosen as a case company for this study as it is the leading and one of the most experienced recruitment companies in international recruitment in Finland. Opteam is a Finnish recruitment and staffing company that was established in 1999. Today the company is the fifth largest company in the staffing and recruitment industry (HPL, 2013b) with a turnover of EUR 65 million in 2012. The company has over 30 offices in Finland and in addition offices in Poland and Slovakia as well as had a representative office in the Philippines until the end of 2013. The International Labor Organisation's (ILO) EU funded project "Decent Work Across Borders" chose Opteam's recruitment model in the Philippines as an example of ethical international recruitment in 2013 (Opteam, 2013).

The Thesis focuses on the employer brand and international recruitment of Opteam in the Philippines. The target country was chosen firstly because recruitment operations in the Philippines are stabilized and secondly, the recruitment of nurses and chefs from the Philippines will continue and therefore it is important to understand the influence of the external employer brand on attracting the best talent pool. From the practical point of view, it is possible to contact the recruited employees in order to collect data. Consequently, the Philippines case is both significant and possible to study.

In 2005, Opteam established a new business unit, Opteam Global to specialize in international recruitment and in 2006, Opteam started international recruitment among the first Finnish recruitment companies. Opteam started international recruitment by recruiting licensed practical nurses from the Philippines in 2007 and for instance welders from Poland and Slovakia. In 2011 Opteam set up a representative office in the

Philippines to recruit both practical nurses and chefs to Finland. In 2009, Opteam started a pilot project with HUS, Hospital district of Helsinki and Uusimaa, to recruit nurses from the Philippines to work as registered nurses within specialized health care (Tuokko et al., 2013). Until May 2013, Opteam had recruited more than 150 employees from the Philippines to Finland.

The recruitment company may either take some of the responsibilities (e.g. relocation, housing) of their clients i.e. the employer of the recruited employees or only take care of the recruitment. Some of the recruitment companies are also staffing agencies, which means that the agency is the actual employer, and the client company only leases the employee. In the Philippines, Opteam recruits nurses directly to its clients and hence Opteam is in a recruiter's role. Chefs, however, are recruited as Opteam's employees and leased to client companies.

Sorvali (2013) has studied Opteam's international recruitment service Opteam Global from the perspective of service design in her Master's Thesis. Sorvali (2013) visualized the recruitment process used in Opteam Global in the Philippines. Figure 1 is adapted from Sorvali's visualization (Sorvali 2013, pp. 66–67) and illustrates the early phases of Opteam's recruitment process. The later phases of the recruitment process are left out of the figure as the present Thesis focuses on the early phases. The recruitment process in general is discussed in more detail in Subchapter 2.2.

Applicant	Applies for employment	Partcipates in the 1st interview and info session	Participates in the 2nd interview and assesments/tests	Participates in 2 weeks' language Test training and first health check	Accepts the conditions and job offer

Services for applicants	Job ads in internet and print media www.opteam.ph	Contact by phone	The 1st interview	The 2nd interview	Language test training

Interaction

– –

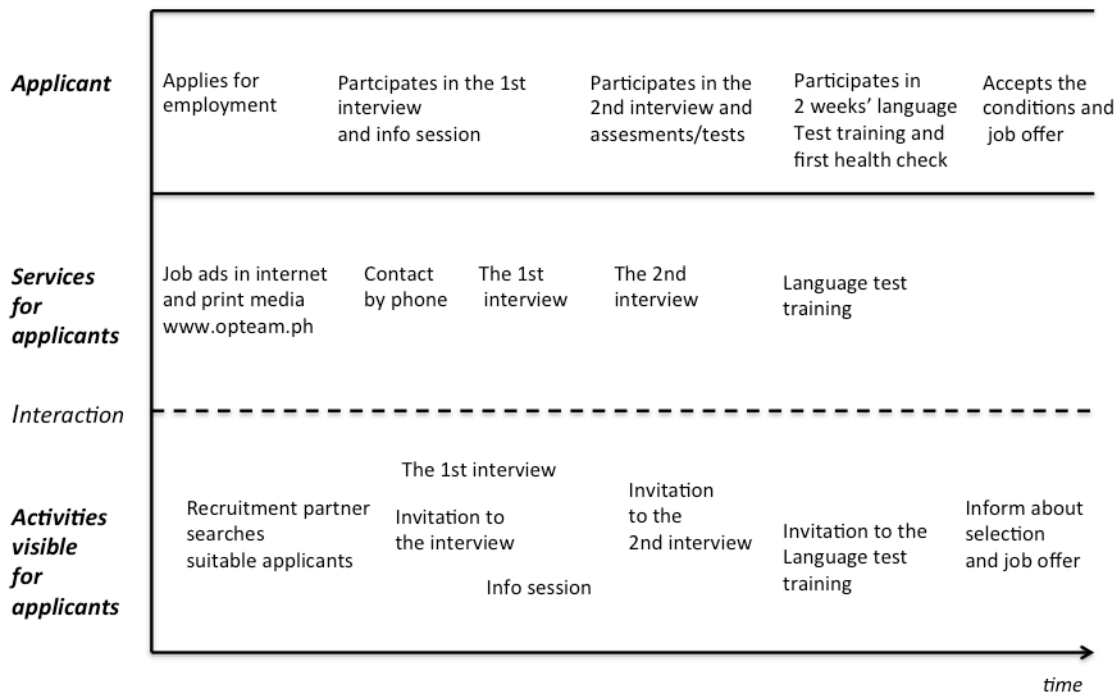|		The 1st interview			
Activities visible for applicants	Recruitment partner searches suitable applicants	Invitation to the interview	Invitation to the 2nd interview	Invitation to the Language test training	Inform about selection and job offer
		Info session			

time

Figure 1. Early phases of the recruitment process used by Opteam in the Philippines (Sorvali, 2013, pp. 66–67).

Due to the legislation of the Philippines, Opteam has to cooperate with a local, Philippine recruitment partner and Opteam cannot recruit without the recruitment partner. However, Opteam is actively involved in all phases of the recruitment process and for instance Opteam's representatives meet the applicants either in both interviews or at least in the second interviews (Vanhala-Harmanen, 2013). Opteam also organizes the language training and relocation of the selected employees, as it has not outsourced any parts of the recruitment process or recruitment services.

The Philippines is the one of the leading source countries for nurses internationally. The government of the Philippines supports nurses', as well as other professionals' emigration as overseas employment is a key source of economic growth (Aiken, Buchan, Sochalski, Nicols & Powel, 2004) and as the population of the Philippines is

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growing fast (Vanhala-Harmanen, 2013). The Philippines educates nurses for export and motivates them to emigrate since remittance income sent home by nurses abroad is a major source of hard currency for the Philippines (Aiken et al., 2004). Indeed, the Philippines is one of few countries that educate significantly more nurses than are needed in its own health care system at a level of education that meets the requirements of developed countries. Filipino nurses are recruited overseas as they are educated in college-degree programs, they communicate well in English and governments have reckoned the Philippines as an ethical source of nurses (Aiken et al., 2004). The same conditions apply to some other professions as well, as in the case Opteam that has also recruited highly competent chefs in the Philippines (Vanhala-Harmanen, 2013).

1.4 Structure of the Thesis

The Thesis is divided into six main chapters. Chapter 1 introduced the topic, research problem and research question as well as the case company. Chapter 2 presents existing literature on employer branding, the recruitment process and recruitment communication as well as international recruitment and the role of recruitment companies. Based on existing literature, the theoretical framework for the Thesis is formed.

In Chapter 3 the chosen methodology is explained and justified and data is described. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the Thesis. In Chapter 5 the findings are further discussed in the context of the theoretical framework and from a practical viewpoint. In Chapter 6 the Thesis is concluded by summarizing the main findings and implications, discussing the limitations of the study and providing suggestions for further research.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review chapter has been divided into four subchapters. The subchapters cover literature and theories of employer branding, communication in the recruitment process, international recruitment and recruitment companies. Derived from the literature review, Subchapter 2.4 introduces the theoretical framework for this Thesis.

Employer branding is a relatively new field, especially in the context of international recruitment, although there is long history of the study of organizational attractiveness. Therefore, in addition to communication literature, the literature review draws from other related fields of study, such as marketing, organizational psychology and human resource management.

2.1 Employer brand, employer brand image and employer branding

This subchapter discusses the concepts of *employer brand, employer brand image* and *employer branding*. As the present Thesis focuses on the company's communication to potential employees, the terms employer brand and employer branding refer to the external employer brand and the company's efforts to manage the awareness and perceptions of prospective employees.

As discussed in Chapter 1, due to changing demographic and economic conditions labor markets have become increasingly competitive. In the context of recruitment these developments mean more intensive competition for good and skilled employees and therefore companies need to develop strategies to ensure adequate amounts of skilled workforce. Adequate and skilled human capital is a source of competitive advantage and securing qualified workforce is a strategic necessity. Employer branding has been suggested as a strategic approach to attract more and better applicants (Wilden et al., 2010; Franca & Pahor, 2012). Sullivan (2004) defines employer branding as "a targeted,

long-term strategy to manage the awareness and perceptions of employees, potential employees, and related stakeholders with regards to a particular firm". Moroko and Uncles (2008) defined employer branding as the sum of a company's efforts to communicate to existing and prospective employees that the company is a good and desirable place to work.

The idea of branding originates from marketing literature and originally branding was used to differentiate products and services. The American Marketing Association defines a brand as "a name, term, sign, symbol, or design or a combination of them intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers to differentiate them from those of competitors" (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, p. 256). Importantly in the context of this Thesis, researchers (e.g. Franca & Pahor, 2011) generally agree that a brand can also be understood as a customer experience presented by images, i.e. brand images, that the customer has. The customer's believes and reactions to the brand are created by the accumulation of experiences with the product or service. Experiences are formed through the use of the product or service and through the influence of advertising, design and media. A brand is formed of all the information connected to company, product or service (Franca & Pahor, 2012, p. 84).

Several researches agree that benefits of brand also apply to employer brand (Gardner et al., 2011, p. 257; Collins & Stevens, 2002; Cable & Turban, 2001). Collins and Stevens (2002) state that according to research on customer brands, brand image refers to beliefs that a consumer has about a brand. Brand image plays a critical role in the consumer's decisions because it increases the chances that the branded product (or service) will be among those considered, it generates positive affect toward the branded product, it makes the product different and creates reasons to choose the brand, not competing products (Collins & Stevens, 2002, p. 1122). Garner et al. (2011) state that brands benefit both sellers and consumers as brands simplify decision making and allow sellers to communicate the utility of their offering and differentiate from competitors. They

continue that brands reduce search costs, reduce the perceived risks of the decision and increase consumers' confidence on their final decision.

The idea of employer branding refers to the differentiation of a company as an employer from its competitors and the process of building "an identifiable and unique employer identity" (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, p. 502). According to many researchers of employer brand (e.g. Franca and Pahor, 2012) the concept employer brand has linked the concepts of branding and image, originating from marketing, with human resources, which can be consider as a marketing approach to human resources. Employer branding means that an employer builds an image in the minds of potential job applicants that the company is a desirable workplace (Franca & Pahor, 2012). People seeking for an employment, and actually anyone on the labor market, form beliefs about the potential employer, about the attributes of the job and about the people who work for the employer. These beliefs are called employer brand image and they provide the basis for decisions about whether to pursue or accept employment offers (Cable & Turban, 2001).

Employer brand can be further divided into external and internal employer brand. Researchers of employer branding agree that the internal employer brand image refers to how employees see their employer and the external employer image refers to how other stakeholders, including potential applicants, outside the company see it as an employer. However, eventually internal and external employer brands are the two sides of the same coin as the external employer brand image reflects internal employer brand image (Korpi et al., 2012, p. 67).

Researchers of employer brand have used different concepts, for instance employer reputation, employer image and employer knowledge, that all convey the same finding that the employer brand image has important effects on recruitment (Franca & Pahor 2012; Ployhart, 2006, p. 871). In this Thesis, the term employer brand and employer brand image are used, as employer brand is the most often used term and the focus is on

the influence of the employer brand in attracting applicants in the recruitment process, which is what the present Thesis examines.

According to Franca and Pahor (2012), the term employer brand was first introduced in 1996 by Ambler and Barrow to describe the factors that attract job applicants to seek employment in a particular company. Ambler's and Barrow's (1996) commonly cited definition of employer brand is "the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment and identified with the employing company". Franca and Pahor (2012) suggest that employer brand covers the company's values, policies, and behavior in the context of attracting, motivating and retaining the current and prospective employees.

Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) have depicted employer branding as a three-step process that addresses both external and internal stakeholder groups. The first step is the value proposition, which means that the company develops the message they send to applicants and employees through the brand. The second step is the external marketing of the employer brand, which primarily addresses applicants. The last step is the internal marketing that is also called internal branding. The goal of internal marketing is to commit employees to the values and goals of the company. However, Backhaus' and Tikoo's model and the order of the steps could be criticized as employer branding research (e.g. Korpi et al., 2012) acknowledges that external employer branding is not possible without internally consistent employer brand.

Researchers (e.g. Cable & Turban, 2001; Gardner et al., 2012) argue that companies with strong employer brands are preferred by job seekers during the recruitment process. Gardner et al. (2012, p. 271) define a "strong brand" as a brand "with well-developed brand knowledge structures in the minds of potential and actual consumers; high brand familiarity and strong, positive, and unique associations with the brand". Consistent with consumer branding research, employer branding research suggests that employer brands with a strong brand image should result in increased attention to

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employment information received directly from the employer or from other indirect sources; better comprehension and remembering of employment information as well as more positive reactions to that information; and greater willingness among both passive and active job seekers to listen to employment information (Gardner, 2012, p. 272).

According to Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), the aim of employer branding is to increase awareness and make those statements communicated during the recruitment process distinctive and differentiate the company as an employer from other employers. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) argue that as employer brand awareness grows, potential employees develop positive associations with the employer. Generally, branding research seems to emphasize the importance of uniqueness. Besides of communicating distinctiveness and uniqueness, Cornelissen (2011) refers to recent research that has showed that in corporate branding companies in some industries may also need to communicate the similarity of a company to others in its industry in order for the stakeholders to consider the company legitimate. However, companies with strong corporate reputations have less pressure to communicate similarity and they can emphasize distinctiveness without losing legitimacy (Cornelissen, 2011, pp. 65–66). As the product and corporate branding framework is applied to employer branding, it can be assumed that these findings about the need to communicate both similarity and distinctiveness apply also to employer branding and recruitment communication.

Several researchers state that the theoretical base for employer branding has not been fully developed yet. Applying branding theory on the employer context is still a relatively recent development and it is unclear which product or corporate brand success factors apply or what other factors are relevant (Moroko & Uncles, 2008; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Moroko and Uncles (2008) have studied the characteristics of successful employer brands and they argue that it is inadequate to rely only on the success factors derived from consumer brand theory. They reason that it can be expected that employees experience employer brand in different ways from consumers experiencing product brands as employees are paid for their experience and, compared to consumers,

employees have a bigger stake in the company. Similarly, Franca and Pahor (2012) argue that it cannot be assumed that the job applicant behaves similarly when applying for a job as consumers purchasing a product or service. The choice of an employer has more significant and longer lasting impacts than everyday purchase decisions (Franca & Pahor, 2012, p. 85).

Gardner et al. (2011), on the other hand, strongly argue that the theoretical frameworks of product and service brand knowledge can be applied to employer brand (Gardner et al. use the term employment brand instead of employer brand), as employment should be recognized as an economic exchange between employees and employers. Gardner et al. (2011) propose that the role of the employer brand is even more important making employment decisions than making consumer product or service decision. They continue about the role of employer brand in decision making by proposing that the role of the employer brand is more important, the greater the role work plays in a person's identity, the more the "self" in the form of physical, mental of emotional labor is required in the employment, and the greater the uncertainty and variability of the employment offering are term (Gardner et al., 2011, p. 263).

Communicating employer brand

Employer brand research has identified different brand benefits. According to Barrow and Mosley (2008), employer brand consists of functional benefits, emotional benefits and brand values. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), instead, use terms tangible and symbolic benefits. Barrow and Mosley (2008) describe functional benefits as basic performance promises such as payment for employees and a safe working environment and they can be taken for granted or they can be an important part of an employer brand proposition. They continue that relevant and attractive emotional benefits of the employer brand position the functional benefits in the mind of prospective employees. Emotional benefits are about how the brand makes you feel and therefore they are more difficult to

copy than functional benefits that tell what the brand does (Barrow & Mosley, 2008, pp. 58–59). Similarly to Barrow and Mosley (2008), Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) argue that importance of symbolic benefits increases when functional differences between employers are limited and job related factors are similar. Symbolic benefits conveyed by employer branding can be used to create favorable and distinctive employer brand image (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, p. 506). Barrow and Mosley (2008) emphasize that employer brand should not only project the company's values but translate them to be relevant and meaningful for employees.

Barrow and Mosley (2008) introduce employer brand personality as a dimension of employer branding referring to the style, tone and range of references used to communicate the benefits and values. Barrow and Mosley (2008) continue that the benefits, values and personality need to be defined in the context of a target audience. Brand positioning refers to targeting the right target group with the right brand benefits and messages and brand proposition refers to the most relevant and differentiating brand message for a target group. (Barrow & Mosley, 2008, p. 61–63).

According to Birkigt's and Stadler's (Cornelissen, 2011, p. 61) model, companies communicate and project an image of themselves to their stakeholders through three attributes – symbolism (logos), communication (all planned forms of communication) and behavior (all behavior of employees that leaves impressions on stakeholders). According to the model, companies project their identity and the way in which their stakeholders perceive it is called corporate image (Cornelissen, 2011, p. 61). In this Thesis, the model is applied to employer brand identity and image as they are linked to corporate identity and image.

Barrow and Mosley (2008), claim that the real brand lives in people's experiences of the brand and in the perceptions and associations they have. They continue that this is important as if employer brand communication does not match with the perceived reality of the employer brand it can seem false and set up expectations that cannot be

met. As a model to facilitate communication of employer brand, Barrow and Mosley (2008) distinguish two forms of employer brand, firstly, the currently perceived and experienced employer brand i.e. brand reality and secondly, how the employer would like it to be perceived and experienced i.e. brand vision (Barrow and Mosley, 2008, p. 64). This approach is used in the research design of the Thesis, as one purpose of the study is to find out whether there is gap between the employer brand vision and the brand reality i.e. the employer brand image. As concepts brand reality and brand image convey the same meaning.

Dimensions of employer brand image

Employer branding research has identified several dimensions of employer brand image i.e. employment attributes related for instance to pay, advancement, location and organizational structure (Gardner et al., 2012, p. 274). However, research on employment attributes is based on research of employee satisfaction and perceptions of potential employees have been mostly ignored (Gardner et al., 2012, p. 274). There are several ways in recruitment research to categorize the attributes. Gardner et al. (2012, pp. 274–275) divide between directly and indirectly related employment attributes. In their framework directly related employment attributes refer to the actual work attributes (e.g. pay, advancement and job security), whereas indirectly related attributes refer to attributes that are part of the employment but not specific to the work itself (e.g. culture and structure of the organization and coworkers). In turn, for instance Cable and Turban (2001, p. 125) have categorized dimensions of employer brand image as employer information, job information and people information.

Employer branding and recruitment researchers seem to agree that both job seekers' attitudes and perceived job attributes are the key dimensions of employer brand image (Collins & Stevens, 2002; Barber 1998). However, there is vagueness in terms as similar concepts have been labeled by different names and different concepts by the

same name (e.g. Gardner et al. 2012; Cable & Turban 2001; Collins and Stevens 2002). As Cable and Turban (2001) point out, confusion in concepts has made progress in recruitment research difficult.

Integrated brand model

In addition to employer brand, companies have customer and corporate brands to manage. Several researchers have discussed the relationship between corporate brand and employer brand (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Wilden et al.; 2010; Cornelissen, 2011) as well as between customer brand and employer brands (Barrow and Mosley, 2008, p. 110–111). It may be a challenging task to manage the multiple brands that the company presents to its stakeholders, as all branding objectives need to be aligned. Several researchers have argued that an employer brand affects and is affected by all of the other brands and image of the company. Therefore it is crucial that the employer brand is consistent with other branding and communication efforts of the company (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Wilden et al., 2010).

Cornelissen (2011) discusses the consistency of corporate image and brand and notes that any individual belonging to a company's stakeholders has usually more than one stakeholder role. Prospective employees are also consumers and if the company fails to communicate a consistent image, it threatens the company's integrity (Cornelissen, 2011, p. 61). Barrow and Mosley (2008) introduce an integrated brand model that recognizes that some brand qualities need to be present in every stakeholder's experience of the brand, while other brand qualities need to be designed to meet the different needs of customers and employees. Although the customer brand and employer brand compete in two different markets, they are interrelated (Barrow & Mosley, 2008, p. 110). Figure 2 illustrates relationship of customer brand and employer brand.
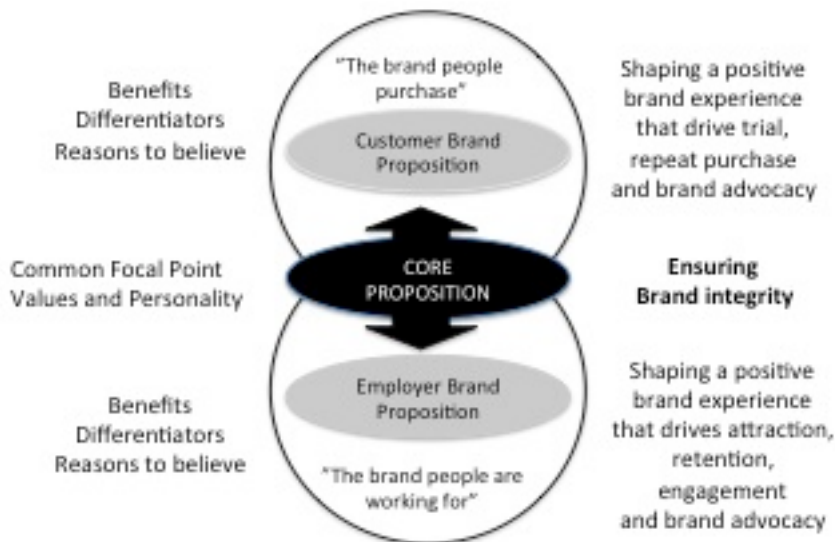
Figure 2. Integrated brand model
(Barrow&Mosley, 2008, pp.110–111).

Drawing together the literature on employer brand discussed in this Subchapter, it must be noted that employer branding and creating employer brand images are not straightforward processes, as a number of features and attributes are involved. As Franca and Pahor (2012) point out, there is not one theory of employer brand or employer branding strategy that could be applied to all organizations. There are differences in environments, goals, structures of organization and a number of other factors that affect employer branding. The next two subchapters discuss these factors first in the context of the recruitment process and recruitment communication and then in the context of international recruitment and recruitment companies.

This subchapter discussed the definitions and general models related to employer brand, employer brand image and employer branding, and introduced the extant literature to form the theoretical framework for this Thesis. These general models introduced have the communicative perspective useful for the subject of the Thesis.

2.2 Communication and employer brand in the recruitment process

This subchapter discusses communication and employer brand in the context of the recruitment process as the Thesis focuses on examining employer branding in recruitment communication in the early phases of the recruitment process. First, a recruitment process is defined and discussed and then, recruitment communication and employer branding are explored in the context of the recruitment process. In the present Thesis, recruitment communication refers to communication related to recruitment activities and practices.

2.2.1 Recruitment process

Barber (1998) defines recruitment as a multi-stage process that companies utilize to target potential applicants. According to Barber (1998, p. 5) "recruitment includes those practices, and activities carried on by the organization with the primary purpose of identifying and attracting potential employees". Barber (1998) continues that the purpose of recruitment activities is to find potential applicants and persuade them to pursue and accept employment in the company and states that recruitment, as an organizational function is dependent on its ability to communicate with potential applicants and influence them. According to Barber's (1998) definition there are two primary players in recruitment: the company that is engaged in recruitment and the applicant. Other parties involved in recruitment are organizational agents who are the individuals, either internal or external to the company, responsible for the recruitment

function, and outsiders who may have a role in recruitment as they may react to the process as well (Barber, 1998, pp. 7–8).

Beardwell and Claydon (2007) have defined recruitment similarly to Barber: "searching for and obtaining potential job candidates in sufficient number and quality so that the organization can select the most appropriate people to fill its job needs". Barber (1998) stresses that the attraction has both quantitative and qualitative dimensions as the company aims at attracting a certain number of applicants with specific attributes. He continues that considering quantity, recruitment is efficient when the quantity of applicants attracted is neither too small nor too large (Barber, 1998, p. 10).

The terms recruitment and selection are sometimes used interchangeably. Barber (1998, p. 3) as well as Beardwell and Claydon (2007, p. 190) agree that recruitment and selection are interrelated and take place simultaneously. Beardwell and Claydon (2007) summarize the difference of the two processes by describing the recruitment as a positive process that builds a group of potentially qualified applicants and the selection process as a negative one that narrows the group down according to the company's needs. In other words, recruitment aims at attracting applicants whereas selection aims at identifying the most qualified among them.

A recruitment process covers several phases of finding a new employee. According to Beardwell and Claydon (2007) the key phases are defining the vacancy, attracting applicants, assessing candidates and making the final decision. Barber (1998) defines the phases of recruitment slightly differently: outreach to an applicant population in order to persuade some of it to apply for positions (generating applicants), attempts to persuade applicants to remain interested in the company and job opportunity (maintaining applicant status) and finally attempt to persuade selectees to accept job offers (job choice). Nonetheless, both of the descriptions of the recruitment process are useful as they can be seen two perspectives to the same function. Beardwell and Claydon (2007) focus on the actual practices whereas Barber's (1998) definition is

based on the classification of employees as they move through the recruitment process and it concentrates more on attraction and persuasion related to the recruitment practices and communication. Because of its communicative perspective, Barber's (1998) definition and categorization of recruitment phases provide the main theoretical framework for the recruitment process applicable in this Thesis.

The two first phases of the recruitment process according to Barber (1998) i.e. generating applicants and maintaining applicant status are particularly interesting in the context of this Thesis and they are called the early stages of the recruitment process. According to Barber (1998), from the company's point of view the first phase is characterized by narrowing applicant population to an applicant pool, in the other words during the first phase, a larger population of potential applicants becomes a smaller group of actual applicants, and there is relative little information about each applicant. Similarly, applicants attempt to generate employment opportunities from which one will be chosen and in this phase applicants may know relatively little about the jobs for which they apply and there is little interpersonal contact between the company and applicants as interaction is mostly faceless and impersonal (Barber 1998, pp. 14, 18).

Barber (1998) suggests that the key outcomes of the first phase of the recruitment process are the identification and attraction of potential applicants. However, although individuals need to be persuaded to seek employment in the company, the number of applicants should not be too great as to overburden the company, as applications need to be processed efficiently (Barber, 1998, p. 18). In the other words, recruitment activities should attract the appropriate quantity of qualified applicants who meet the needs of the company. Barber (1998, pp. 18, 49) argues that in addition to the key outcomes, the extensive interpersonal mass communication used in this phase to identify potential applicants is likely to have so called spillover effects, which means that the communication also influences the attitudes and behavior of other stakeholder groups that were not primarily targeted.

Barber (1998) continues that in the second phase both companies and applicants search for more detailed information about each other, and interpersonal relationships between applicants and the representatives of the company are established. In the second phase, the company's goal is to maintain applicants' interest in order that they continue to pursue employment during the ongoing selection processes and similarly applicants are narrowing down their pool of potential employers. (Barber, 1998 p. 53).

According to Barber (1998) significant and time-consuming interpersonal contact characterizes the second phase as recruiters and other representatives of the company involved in the recruitment process interact with applicants. Although interactions take place in a variety of recruitment activities such as initial face-to-face interview and extended interview in company's premises, research has focused on initial interviews (Barber, 1998, p. 53). Barber (1998) suggests that initial face-to-face contacts between the company's representatives and applicants are important in the context of attraction as initial impressions of the representatives of the company may lead to opinions that are difficult to change later.

To conclude this Section, from the communicative perspective, recruitment communication in the second phase of the recruitment process is interpersonal and often face-to-face, whereas in the first phase of the recruitment process recruitment communication is mainly impersonal mass communication via various media.

2.2.2 Employer brand in recruitment communication

As discussed in Chapter 2.1, the goal of employer branding is to create and maintain an identity that differentiates the company as an employer from other employers. The company offers potential employees a value proposition and communicates it in recruitment messages.

Communication and employer branding are related to the recruitment process in each phase, but particularly in the attraction phase i.e. the initial phase as one of the main outcomes of the attraction phase of a recruitment process is an applicant's intention to apply for the job. Attraction of the employer refers to the way the employer communicates its strengths in order to attract applicants to apply for an employment (Gomes & Neves, 2011; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). However, it can also be assumed that consistent employer branding is equally important in every phase of a recruitment process as attraction occurs throughout the recruitment process (Barber, 1998, p. 11).

Nevertheless, the Thesis focuses on the recruitment activities in the early phases of the recruitment process i.e. early recruitment-related activities because it is important to understand how the early recruitment activities affect job applicants, as if they do not apply at the initial stage, they cannot be reached by later recruitment activities. Barber (1998) argues that applicants seek and gather information about potential employers from different sources and there is nearly no interpersonal contact between the applicant and the company in the first phase of the recruitment process. Therefore it is important to know how the applicant perceives the company when deciding whether to apply for the employment or not.

Communication activities are needed in all phases of the recruitment process and related to recruitment activities for the purposes of recruitment (Barber 1998, p. 9), all the way from advertising a job vacancy to the final messages to applicants who were not selected. During the recruitment process, the company generates and spreads information about itself as an employer and employment in the company (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, p. 507; Barber, 1998, pp. 8, 32). Some information is available to the general public and is spread broadly, for instance through advertisements, and some information is gathered by individuals who may share it with other people. This may impact the company by changing the perceptions of potential applicants as well as other stakeholders (Barber, 1998, p. 8).

Barber (1998) states that after the company has identified and decided whom to target as potential applicants and which recruitment sources it uses, it begins to persuade individuals to apply for the employment. As stated above, typically the company first communicate information about itself as an employer and the specific employment through specific media and later also more and more in interpersonal contacts. However, applicants are not "tabula rasa" as they usually have at least some impressions or even knowledge of the company before they are exposed to recruitment communication (Barber, 1998, p. 32) and these impressions are a part what is called employer brand image.

Employer brand research (e.g. Gardner et al., 2011; Cable & Turban, 2001, p. 132) suggests that any source of information may affect an individual's employer brand image. According to Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) potential employees form an employer brand image from the brand association that are result of employer branding. Potential employees form employer brand image based on both employer-controlled and not employer-controlled sources (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, pp. 505–506). In other words, recruitment communication is not the only source of potential employees' employer brand image as other employer-controlled sources such as company's websites and brochures and not employer-controlled sources such as word-of-mouth and media exposure are also sources for employer associations and brand image (Cable and Turban, 2001, p. 132). Consequently, employer brand image may be formed with or without exposure to a company's recruitment communication (Lemmink, Schuijf & Streukens, 2002).

Franca and Pahor (2012) state that companies with strong employer brands have the advantage of not needing to rely on recruitment advertising to improve their attractiveness. Marketing research as well as recruitment research suggests that people are usually skeptical about claims made by the companies and value information received from organizational sources differently than from other sources of information (Cable & Turban, 2001, p. 136). Several researchers have argued that the recruitment

source through which the company makes an initial contact with potential applicants affects applicant attraction (Barber, 1998; Allen, Mahto & Otondo, 2007; Van Hoye & Lievens 2009). Advertising is only one form of recruitment communication and recruitment source although it is often emphasized in recruitment research as the recruitment source in the attraction phase (e.g. Heilmann, 2010; Gardner, 2011). Barrow and Mosley (2008) state that employer branding is too often concerned only to recruitment advertising.

Recruitment activities and sources

Collins and Stevens (2002) identified four sets of early recruitment-related activities – publicity, sponsorship, word-of-mouth and advertising – as they studied the relationship between early recruitment activities and application decisions. They identified these marketing activities worth of focusing on as they have the counterparts in early recruitment-related activities (Collins & Stevens, 2002). They base their identification on brand equity research and Barber's (1998) definition of recruitment that suggests that recruitment-related activities impact the decision making of potential applicants. The four sets of early recruitment-related activities are discussed below.

First, according to marketing research publicity affects brand images as consumers see it more trustworthy and memorable than paid advertisements (Collins and Stevens, 2002, p. 1123). However, as Collins and Stevens (2002, p. 1123) note publicity as well as sponsorship are likely to affect attitudes but perceptions of specific job attributes as publicity may only convey general messages about the company and therefore influence generalized perceptions of the company. Also Barber (1998, p. 8) suggests that media publicity may have significant spillover effects on recruitment.

Second, similar to publicity, sponsorship promotes generalized affective association and therefore it does not influence specific brand attributes (Collins & Stevens, 2002, p.

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1123). In the context of recruitment, sponsorship may be used for instance to sponsor campus activities, scholarships and equipment (Collins & Stevens, 2002, p. 1123). Collins' and Stevens, (2002, p. 1131) research findings suggest that companies need to communicate about their sponsorship actions and make them visible through publicity in order to get benefits of these activities.

Third, marketing research has shown that consumers seek information from sources that they think are credible, such as friends, family, acquaintances or even strangers with relevant expertise, in order to reduce risks associated with purchases (Collins & Stevens, 2002, p. 1123; Van Hoye & Lievens, 2009). Opposite to commercial sources like advertising, people who have no self-interest in promoting the product provide word-of-mouth endorsements and therefore word-of-moth is typically more influential than information received from commercial sources (Van Hoye & Lievens, 2009, p. 343). Such word-of-mouth sources may provide information about specific attributes as well as more general attitudes about the brand (Collins & Stevens, 2002, p. 1123). Similarly to the findings of marketing research, recruitment research suggests that word-of-mouth endorsements may influence employer brand image as information provided by people outside the company is perceived more credible than the same information provided by the company's representatives (Collins & Stevens, 2002, p. 1123). Also Wilden et al. (2010, p. 70) argue that word-of-mouth through referrals seems to be very credible source of information about the employer and companies could benefit of this by establishing employee referral programs.

Recruitment research also suggests that applicants will have more positive general attitudes and perceptions of job attributes after being exposed to positive word-of-mouth endorsements (Van Hoye & Lievens, 2009, p. 341; Collins & Sevens, 2002, p. 1124). Van Hoye and Lievens (2009) note that similarly to publicity, the company is not able to directly control word-of-mouth endorsements and therefore word-of-mouth sources can provide both positive and negative information. Nonetheless, the company can increase the possibility of positive word-of-mouth endorsements with recruitment

activities such as developing closer relationships with key individuals and opinion leaders, employee referral programs and campus recruitment (Collins & Stevens, 2002, p. 1123; Van Hoye & Lievens, 2009, p. 349). As Gardner et al. (2012, p. 274) note, willingness to recommend an employer to others seems to be an essential consequence of positive employer brand image.

Marketing research has showed that brand image may act as a buffer against negative word-of-mouth so that negative word-of-mouth is more influential when consumers evaluate unfamiliar or unfavorable brands (Van Hoye and Lievens, 2009, p. 349). Based on the finding of marketing research and their research of word-of-mouth, Van Hoye and Lievens (2009) suggest that companies with a strong employer brand are less impacted by negative word-of-mouth than companies with a weak employer brand.

Fourth, recruitment advertising is widely used to provide information about employment opportunities and several recruitment studies suggest that recruitment advertising impacts perceptions of specific job attributes as well as general attitudes (Collins & Stevens, 2002, p. 1124).

Collins and Stevens (2002) focused on four early recruitment-related activities (publicity, sponsorship, word-of-mouth and advertising) and found that the relationships between word-of-mouth endorsements and the general attitudes towards the company and perceived job attributes are particularly strong. In addition, they found that early recruitment-related activities are related to one another in a way that employer brand image was stronger when firms used publicity in together with other early recruitment-related activities (Collins & Stevens, 2002). Their research results suggest that companies that can create publicity may receive the return on investment in other recruitment activities (Collins and Stevens, 2002, p. 1130). Collins and Stevens (2002, p. 1130) find that applicants may be more inclined to believe the information from other sources when they have also received information through news reports or articles.

Beardwell's and Claydon's (2007) list of the recruitment methods is parallel with Collins' and Stevens' identification of early recruitment-related activities and in addition they also mention some other recruitment sources. Beardwell and Claydon (2007, p. 202) list the following recruitment methods: informal personal contacts (e.g. word-of-mouth, speculative applications), formal personal contacts (employee referral schemes, career fairs, open days), notice boards accessible by current staff and/or the general public, advertising (press, radio, TV), the internet and external assistance (job centres, career service, employment agencies and headhunters).

Due to relatively recent and fast development of the Internet, only a limited amount of research has focused on applicant attraction in the context of the Internet and company Web pages (Allen et al., 2007, p. 1696). However, the Internet is nowadays important for creating employer brand image as companies use their Web pages and social media to communicate with potential applicants. New platforms and technologies such as multimedia, pod castings, RSS feeds, blogs and chats can be used in recruitment communication (Heilmann, 2010). Allen et al. (2007) suggest that the web-based recruitment shares many characteristics with more traditional recruitment sources, but there are also significant differences, e.g. information has a potentially greater reach and there are many levels of interactivity. However, the Internet technologies also allow other actors than the company to create and share content about the company faster and more widely than ever before. This influences the company's employer brand image in addition to the content created by the company and often it is difficult to distinguish content created by the company itself and content created by others.

Social media as a recruitment channel is a recent phenomenon that has not yet been widely studied. Korpi, Laine & Soljasalo (2012) argue that due to the development of social media, interaction and two-way communication will be expected from all services in the Internet. Korpi et al. (2012) also importantly note that the content in social media can be owned, paid or earned, similarly as in traditional media. Social media platforms such as Facebook, blogs and discussion forums have also created new

channels for word-of-mouth about employers and employment possibilities (Gardner et al., 2012, p. 267).

Cable and Turban (2001) have classified recruitment sources as from the job seeker's perspective with two continuums: internal versus external information sources and experiential versus information continuum. They argue that the source by which information is provided impact the credibility of recruitment messages and how job seekers react to these messages (Cable & Turban, 2001, p. 135). The internal versus external continuum refers to the degree to which the source of information is internally created for job seekers i.e. are recruitment activities such as recruitment advertising and recruiters versus information, which is available to the general public such as brand advertising and media publicity (Cable & Turban 2001, p. 136). Little research has focused on information sources that are not the company's recruitment activities (Cable & Turban, 2001, p. 136). Cable and Turban (2001) claim that whereas internal sources may not be seen as trustworthy they may have greater expertise than external sources. Consequently, researchers suggest that job seekers see potential co-workers as important source of information (Cable & Turban, 2001, p. 136).

The experiential versus information continuum, on the other hand, refers to the degree to which the job seeker receives information by personally experiencing, e.g. interviews, information sessions versus by reading information from media presentations and materials such as brochures and newspaper articles (Cable & Turban, 2001, p. 137). Cable and Turban (2001) claim that job seekers that are exposed to experiential sources use their own experiences to make interpretations about the employer whereas job seekers that learn about the employer by reading materials use pre-processed information. Therefore, aligned with prior research they suggest that information received though experiential source is perceived more credible than information received through media presentations (Cable & Turban, 2001, p. 138). In addition, Cable and Turban (2001) importantly note that job seekers' motivation for information processing is greater with information from experiential sources than with

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information from informational sources. Figure 3 illustrates the job seekers' sources of employer related information and employer brand image.
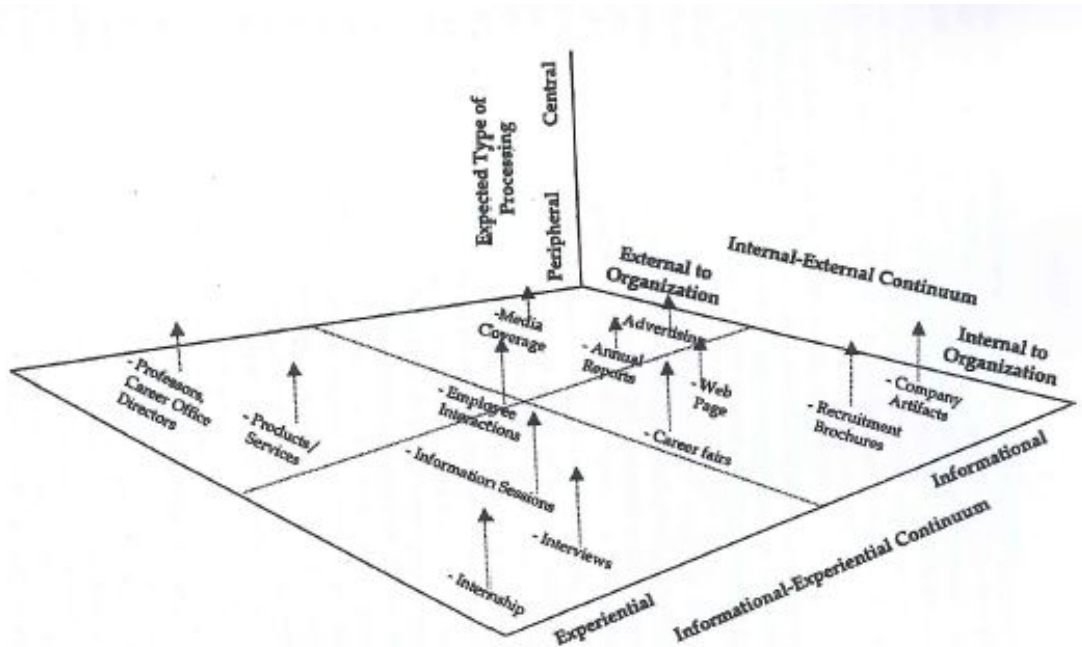

Figure 3. Sources of job applicants' employer brand image
(Cable & Turban 2001, p. 139).

Realistic recruitment communication

Recruitment communication researchers have studied different approaches to information provided during the recruitment process. Barber (1998) introduces two approaches. The first approach, "selling the job" refers to giving the most favorable image of the employing company and the job. In other words, this means emphasizing the positive features and overlooking negative features. The second approach, "realistic job review" is to provide complete and well-balanced information about the employer and the job. This means that both positive and negative features are revealed (Barber 1998, p. 84–85).

Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) argue that when recruitment communication includes adequate and accurate information, it may enhance the accuracy of an applicant's perceptions of the company. They continue that recruitment communication can be interpreted as promises and therefore information needs to be realistic. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004, pp. 507–508) suggest that realistic recruitment communication increases trust and perceptions of honesty as both positive and negative information about the employment is provided.

Barber (1998) says that realistic recruitment communication has been recommended by researchers of the recruitment communication since it is suggested to lead positive outcomes such as higher job satisfaction, commitment, and performance and lower turnover. However, realistic recruitment communication may also have a more immediate impact on recruitment outcome as negative information may decrease the applicant's interest in applying for and accepting the job (Barber, 1998). Nevertheless, researchers of realistic job reviews agree that primary objective of the realistic recruitment communication is to reduce turnover (Barber, 1998, p.85). Barber (1998) states that one important mechanism by which realistic job reviews impact recruitment and turnover is self-selection. It refers to refusing an employment opportunity because it is inconsistent with the applicant's preferences and needs (Barber, 1998, p. 89). Based on previous research Barber (1998, p. 92) argues that it is not sure whether a company using realistic recruitment communication is less attractive and looses applicants and notes that if those applicants that withdrew from the recruitment process were likely to have quit soon after being hired, the company is likely better off without them. Richardson et al. (2008, p. 491) seem to be more assured that high quality employees are not deterred from applying to organizations using realistic recruitment. Barber (1998, pp. 23–24) also refers to previous research findings that suggest informal recruitment sources as providing more accurate information, which leads to more realistic expectations and thus better attitudes and performance.

Realistic job review research in the context of international recruitment is further discussed in chapter 2.3.

This subchapter introduced different sources of employer brand image and channels of recruitment communication as well as realistic recruitment as a communicative approach to recruitment. To conclude this subchapter, for the purpose of the Thesis, the most relevant theoretical concepts and models consider recruitment related activities and sources of employer brand image and realistic recruitment communication.

2.3 International recruitment and recruitment companies

This subchapter introduces international recruitment and the role of the recruitment companies in international recruitment in a degree that is necessary to understand the phenomenon for completing the theoretical framework for the Thesis.

2.3.1 Employer branding in international recruitment

Host country and country of origin in employer branding

International recruitment is a relatively recent phenomenon and due to that it has not yet been studied extensively. Most recruitment studies have concentrated on in-country recruitment and much of the international recruitment study has focused on a particular country (Gowan, 2004, p. 687). Therefore, academic research has not yet extensively covered employer branding in recruitment communication in the context of international recruitment.

International recruitment has developed in the age of globalization as a way to find talented and skilled employees to fill labor shortages. Companies that are unable to find needed personnel in local national labor markets may conduct international recruitment

outside their geographic boundaries. In this Thesis international recruitment refers to recruitment of employees from one country (country of origin) to another (host country). In other words, in this Thesis international recruitment means that the recruited employee relocates to another country.

Preferences of workers who choose to go overseas independently rather than as part of an overseas assignment have not yet been studied extensively. According to Gardner et al. (2012), international assignments as an employment attribute to generate external applicants' response have not yet been studied, although internal applicants responses and preferences in the context of expatriate assignments have been studied. However, the international recruitment of nurses has been studied extensively from the viewpoint of ethical recruitment (e.g Aiken, Buchan, Sochaiski, Nichols & Powel, 2004).

It can be assumed that in international recruitment the location plays important role. International recruitment means relocation for the hired employee and therefore the location of employment may be assumed to be one of the critical employment attributes. It may also be assumed that going overseas for employment is a more complex decision and process for the employees, as their relocation to overseas have personal, logistical and professional implications and they are required to learn and adjust to a new professional as well as social environment (Richardson, McBey & McKenna (2008).

From the employer's perspective the essential decision is where it may find the suitable employees and thus where to focus its recruitment activities (Sorvali, 2013). International recruitment in the context of the case company has been discussed in chapter 1.3.

A number of studies (e.g. Barber, 1998, p. 20) suggest that applicants do not consider employment that is located outside their preferred geographical area. Barber (1998) argues that it may assumed that recruitment is more effective when it focuses on applicants that are likely to consider the employer's location attractive. Barber (1998)

does not explicitly discuss international recruitment but makes general suggestion that in order to maximize employee attraction one approach is to identify geographical areas that are similar to the employer's location. It is probably too simplified to assume that people would only want to relocate to similar locations as their original domiciles.

Gardner et al. (2012, p. 279) argue that knowledge about the specific country to where the employer is recruiting may create positive responses among potential applicants. For instance, for some applicants, an employer in the USA may be more appealing than an employer in Finland or vice versa. Gardner et al. (2012) suggest that an applicant has images of what it would be like to work in a specific geographical location. These images are part of what Gardner et al. (2012) call employment imagery i.e. feelings and experiences associated with the visualization of working in a specific location or with other directly and indirectly related employment attributes. Gardner et al. (2012) suggest that employment imagery may extend outside the workplace and include location attributes. They continue that employment imagery including the images of a specific country can significantly influence employer brand image (Gardner et al, 2012, p. 281). Therefore, it may be assumed that in an international recruitment process the country of the employer has a significant impact on recruitment communication and the employer may need to communicate the location attributes in addition to employment attributes.

Richardson et al. (2008) have researched the use of realistic job previews (Richardson et al. use the word preview instead of reviews; realistic job reviews were discussed in Subchapter 2.2) and realistic living conditions previews in the context of the recruitment of internationally mobile knowledge workers. Realistic living conditions previews refer to "provision of accurate favorable and unfavorable information on the general living environment in the host country" (Richardson et al., 2008). Although researchers have traditionally treated realistic job previews and realistic living conditions as separate dimensions in the recruitment process, Richardson et al. (2008) suggest that realistic recruitment is a holistic process in which individual applicants have different weighting

of the relative importance of different factors. Richarson et al. (2008) argue that realistic recruitment is particularly useful when employees are recruited internationally and they relocate to another country as those employees' knowledge of their new employer and host country may be limited to what they are told during the recruitment process and what they have been able to find out from their sources. Researchers of realistic recruitment seem to agree that realistic recruitment ensures that hired employees expectations are met which eases the post-entry adjustment as unmet expectations cause for instance low job satisfaction and early turnover (Richardson et al., 2004, 492). Logically it could be assumed that realistic job previews should ease work adjustment and realistic living conditions previews may help adjustment to the day-to-day routines in the host country (Richardson et al., 2004, 493). However, Richardson et al. (2008) suggest that information about living conditions may also impact work adjustment and performance.

Intercultural communication and employer branding

International recruitment, as any other business function in international business, involves intercultural communication. It has been argued that in the context of international recruitment, recruitment may succeed when the company understands the role of both the person-employment fit and cultural differences in the recruitment process (Valentine 2002).

Globalization and international recruitment adds a new dimension to the employer's need to understand the applicants' values and what they look for in ideal employment. However, due to the scope of the Thesis, intercultural communication does, although it is relevant, not contribute largely to theoretical framework. Intercultural communication is discussed to an extent that is needed to understand its role in the theoretical framework. The Thesis focuses on studying the phenomenon in the context of the recruitment process and employer branding. It may be assumed that cultural differences

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will influence the interpretation of the employer's recruitment messages just as cultural differences will influence how marketing, communication and other business activities are experienced (Gowan, 2004).

Jameson (2007) suggests an expanded concept of cultural identity as a framework for international business communication research. The expanded concept of cultural identity is not focused on nationality, but instead highlights components directly related to business such as economic class or professional experience. According to Jameson (2007), this expanded concept of cultural identity as such enriches intercultural business communication studies and shows how culture not only connects people but also defines them as unique individuals. Hence, Jameson's (2007) concept suggests that intercultural business communication should shift the viewpoint from audience analysis to more self-analysis. Jameson (2007) argues that, firstly, generalizations about other cultures are problematic as there is a significant amount of variation within cultures and secondly, people have less access to knowledge about others' cultural makeup than about their own. Jameson (2007) continues "knowledge about a culture, though valuable, does not ensure that one can communicate successfully with persons from that culture". Therefore the emphasis should, according to Jameson (2007), be on how individuals communicate. However, Jameson (2007) reminds that adding focus on understanding one's own cultural background does not diminish the need to understand others' cultural backgrounds. Jameson's (2007) concept of cultural identity serves as a framework addition to the intercultural business communication research and therefore is offers applicable framework for this Thesis as well.

Jameson (2007) argue that the reason for nationality being often the primary factor in intercultural business communication research is that it may be easier to get information about participants' nationality than about their socioeconomic class, ethnicity, religion, and other elements of cultural identity. Jameson (2007) continues that when such information is available, each added variable complicates the methodology and interpretation of results. However, it is important to remember that for many people,

nationality is not the most important factor in a certain situation or an overall sense of identity (Jameson, 2007). Therefore, Jameson (2007) notes that it should not be assumed that nationality was more central in cultural identity than class, vocation, religion, gender, or other components.

Jameson (2007, p. 210) introduces an expanded concept of cultural identity that includes components related to a person's membership in groups based on at least six commonalities: vocation, class, geography, philosophy, language, and biology. The salience and relevance of the component may vary depending on the situation, some components may remain central even when day-to-day conditions change and cultural identity evolves in the course of the lifetime (Jameson, 2007, p. 219). Jameson's (2007) expanded concept of cultural identity serves as an useful framework for this Thesis as the expanded cultural identity of the interviewees and respondents is the background against which the data is analyzed instead of only considering the nationality of the interviewees and respondents. However, due to the scope of the Thesis it is not possible or even necessary to conduct a deep analysis of their cultural identity. Table 1 introduces the components of the expanded of cultural identity by Jameson (2007).

Table 1. The components of the expanded cultural identity
(Jameson, 2007, p. 211).

Vocation	**Philosophy**
Occupational field	Religious identity
Profession or job category	Political identity
Employing organization	Identity based on other philosophies
Subunit of organization	
Class	**Language**
Economic class	First language
Social class	Dialect
Educational class	Other languages
Geography	**Biological traits with cultural aspects**
Nationality	Race
Region, state, province, or city identification	Ethnicity
	Gender
Density identification (urban, suburban, small town, rural)	Sexual orientation
	Health
Residence (if different from nationality)	Age

Gowan (2004) argues that employer branding is even more challenging when an international applicant pool is considered than just dealing with employer branding domestically since cultural differences influence preferences for employment characteristics. When applicants' values match with the employer's values, it can be assumed that the employer is more attractive to applicants (Lundby et al, 2012). Lundby et al. (2012) argue that the understanding of employees' preferences helps the employer to determine who it wants to attract and then create messages and branding that attract likeminded applicants. However, applicants' preferences are likely to vary across geographic and cultural boundaries and it is critical for the employer recruiting internationally to understand these differences and similarities when considering recruitment communication to attract applicants (Lundby et al, 2012).

Lunby et al. (2012) introduce the results of a global employee survey (Valtera's Annual Global Employee Survey) on employee value propositions in country level to illustrate some differences in what employees in different countries look for in the ideal work

environment and relate the findings to recruitment. The survey measured employees' opinions (most important and least important attributes of an ideal company to work for) on employment attributes such as job security, challenging work and advancement opportunities (Lundby et al. 2012). However, similarly to Jameson's (2007) expanded concept of cultural identity, Lundby et al. (2012) note that the nationality of the employees is not the only variable as also other demographics such as job level, gender and age significantly impact to the employees' preferences (Lundby et al 2012)

Barber (1998) emphasizes that factors in the company's external and internal environment influence recruitment activities and recruitment communication as well as applicants' responses and reactions to those activities and communication. For instance the state of labor market and legislation are important external factors (Barber 1998, pp. 11–12). According to Kulkarni and Osicki (2010) different cultural and societal contexts influence employees' preferences and an employer recruiting internationally should be aware of the remarkable impact that institutions such as family, religion, education, trade unions and the state as well as labor market conditions have on employees attitudes.

Gowan (2004) has studied how cultural differences affect perceptions of employment characteristics. She suggests that the international experience that the applicant may have is a moderator between cultural differences and the perceptions (Gowan, 2004). In other words, Gowan (2004) proposes that perception of the elements of employment for global assignments is affected directly by cultural differences and indirectly by previous international experience. Previous international experience provides a source of information to prepare employees for new international assignments and therefore greater international experience may impact how the company's recruitment message is interpreted (Gowan, 2004). Consequently, Gowan (2004) argues that potential employees with greater international experience may be attracted with a different set of employment features than potential employees with less experience or experience at all, partly as international experience may reduce the impact of one's own cultural

orientation. Consequently, when crafting the recruitment message the employer may consider the previous international experience of the targeted applicants and craft recruitment communication accordingly.

2.3.2 Role of recruitment companies in international recruitment

Recruitment and employer branding research mentions recruitment companies usually as recruitment sources without discussing the role of the recruitment companies in creating the employer brand or whether recruitment companies may or may not have an employer brand image to begin with (e.g. Barber, 1998; Beardwell & Claydon, 2007). This Section discusses the role of recruitment companies (also known as private employment agencies) in international recruitment. The focus is on Finnish recruitment companies as the case company is a Finnish company. Section 2.3.2 is mainly based on Raunio et al.'s (2009) research on Finnish recruitment companies, as there is only limited research on recruitment companies.

A recruitment company may recruit employees to its client company or recruit employees and lease them to its client company. In the latter case, the recruitment company is the employer of the recruited employees. According to Raunio et al. (2009, p. 45) companies buy recruitment companies' services relatively more when they are recruiting internationally than domestically. Raunio et al.'s (2009) research indicates that international companies and companies with knowledge and resources take care of international recruitment by themselves and small and medium sized companies use recruitment companies' services in international recruitment. Raunio et al. (2009) continue that although extant research does not give a comprehensive picture, it gives an indication that recruitment companies' services will be used more and more in international recruitment. The role of international, non-Finnish recruitment companies has been significant in international recruitment of labor to Finland partly because of the limited supply of the international recruitment services in Finland but also because of

the cost of the services (Raunio et al., 2009, p. 46). Raunio et al. (2009) suggest that recruitment companies' role in international recruitment will get stronger as the industry grows in Finland.

To illustrate the size of international recruitment business in Finland, Raunio et al. (2009) present the following figures. In 2012 18% of the member companies of Private Employment Agencies' Association (HPL) i.e. 19 recruitment companies had recruited by themselves foreign labor to Finland (HPL, 2013b). In 2007 the corresponding number of the member companies was 30. The biggest domestic recruitment companies are members of HPL. However, there are number of small, non-member, one-person consulting companies involved in international recruitment as well (Raunio et al., 2009, p. 46).

Recruitment companies offer their services particularly for those companies that do not have necessary resources or networks to recruit internationally by themselves or for some other reasons do not want to get involved in the international recruitment process by themselves (Raunio et al, 2009). Recruitment companies often aim to recruit larger groups of foreign employees at a time and they may offer comprehensive recruitment packages including also testing in the selection and other ancillary services (Raunio, et al., 2009, p. 49). Recruitment companies' international recruitment service may include search of employees, interviews, testing of professional skills and aptitude and relocation services. In addition, recruitment companies may offer variety of language training and induction services (Raunio et al., 2009, p. 49). Raunio et al. (2009) note that there are some recruitment companies that offer very limited services, basically only arrange the travels of the recruited employees. Recruitment companies may take care of the whole service package of international recruitment, but according to Rautio et al. (2009, p. 48) some parts of the service are often outsourced to partners that may be specialized in testing, training or relocation services.

2.4 Theoretical framework

In this subchapter the theoretical framework of this study is introduced and discussed. The previous subchapters have presented and discussed the key theoretical concepts and models that contribute to the theoretical framework of this study. Since very little previous academic research exists on employer branding in recruitment communication in the context international recruitment and recruitment companies, this study draws from various domains of research to build a theoretical framework. Employer branding as a concept is drawn from HR, marketing and corporate communications as well as organizational psychology.

This study is conducted from the perspective of *external communications* and in the context of *international recruitment*. The main focus is on exploring how a recruitment company manages its employer brand in the recruitment process of international employees and how the international employees perceive the employer i.e. what the *employer brand image* of the company is. Figure 4, the theoretical framework illustrates how both the company as an employer and job applicant "view" the employer brand from their own perspectives and how the employer brand involves moving from *external communication* in the corporate level through *employer branding* and *recruitment communication* until the level of a single *employment offer*. All branding – corporate brand, customer brand and employer brand – of the company has to be integrated.
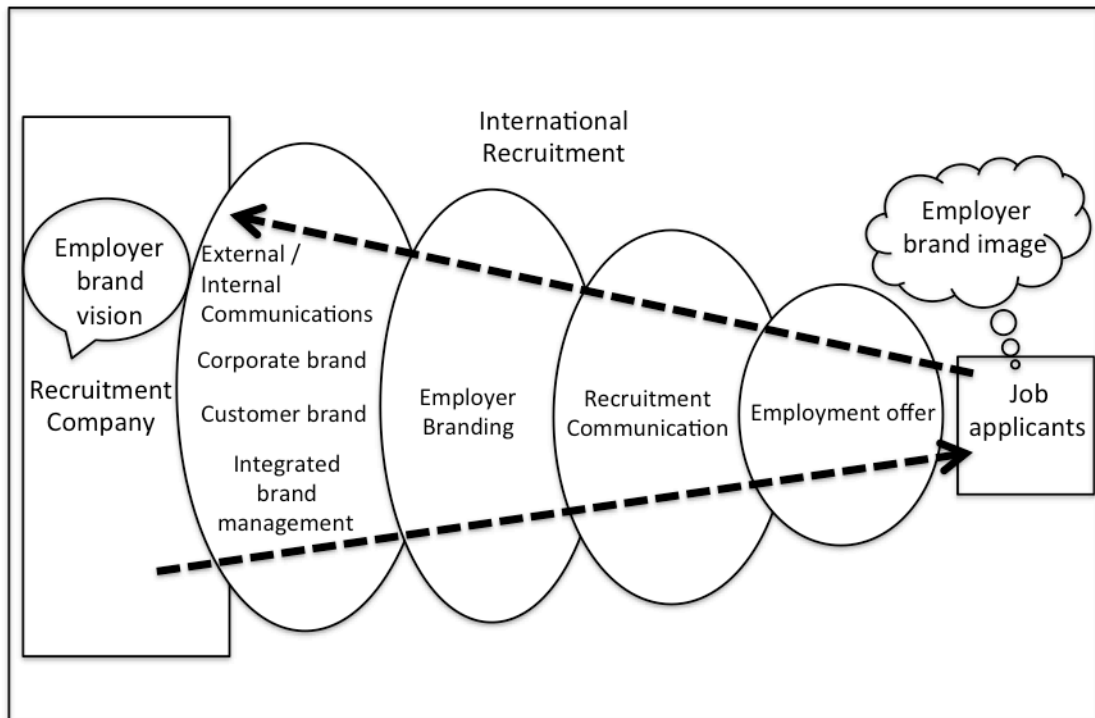
International
Recruitment

Employer
brand image

Employer
brand
vision

External /
Internal
Communications

Corporate brand

Customer brand

Integrated
brand
management

Recruitment
Company

Employer
Branding

Recruitment
Communication

Employment offer

Job
applicants

Figure 4. The theoretical framework.

From the employer's perspective employer branding is a strategic approach to attract more and better applicants by managing the awareness and perceptions of potential employees as well as employees and other related stakeholders. The company has a *employer brand vision* i.e. how it wants to be perceived that it aims at communicating to job applicants in the recruitment process. Employer branding is integrated with the employer's corporate brand and customer brand. Job applicants view the employer from their perspective in which an *employment offer* is what they primarily look at. The employment offer consists of different direct and indirect attributes that are related to the job, employer and people as well as the location of employment (Gardner et al., 2012, pp. 274–275, 281; Cable & Turban, 2001, p. 125).

Job applicants have an *employer brand image* i.e. beliefs about the employer. The employer brand image is the *brand reality* i.e. how the employer brand is perceived. The employer brand image could be described as spectacles through which they evaluate the employment offer and all information related to the employer, and simultaneously the same employer brand image spectacles are affected by employer branding of the employer. How strong the employer brand image is depends on how well-developed brand knowledge structures are in job applicants minds i.e. high brand familiarity and strong, positive and unique association with the employer brand (Gardner et al., 2012, p. 272).

Recruitment communication refers to communicating *functional benefits, emotional benefits* and *brand values* in the recruitment process. According to Birkigt's and Stadler's (Cornelissen, 2011, p. 61) model, employers communicate and project an image of themselves to relevant stakeholders, in this Thesis potential job applicants, through *symbolism, communication and behavior*. In the different phases of the recruitment process, the company uses different channels to communicate the benefits with the job applicants and the job applicants use different sources of employer brand image. The employer brand image that the job applicant have of the company impacts how they perceive the recruitment communication and for instance which sources they consider more credible than others (Cable & Turban, 2001).

It has been argued that employer branding is even more challenging in *international recruitment* than just dealing with employer branding domestically since cultural differences influence preferences for employment characteristics. However, nationality is not necessarily the most important factor in this situation. Jameson's (2007) expanded concept of cultural identity serves as an useful framework for this Thesis as the expanded cultural identity of the interviewees and respondents is the background against which the data is analyzed. In addition, in international recruitment, it is noteworthy that international experience may reduce the impact of one's own cultural orientation. Consequently, when crafting the recruitment message the employer may

consider the previous international experience of the targeted applicants and craft recruitment communication accordingly.

Previous research has indicated that the location is central in international recruitment and influences on employer branding decisions, as the location of employment is one of the critical employment attributes. Globalization and international recruitment adds a new dimension to the employer's need to understand the applicants' values. In this Thesis the expanded concept of cultural identity is used as a framework in analyzing the job applicants values.

Researchers argue that realistic recruitment communication is particularly useful when employees are recruited internationally and they relocate to another country. Researchers of realistic recruitment seem to agree that realistic recruitment ensures that hired employees expectations are met which eases the post-entry adjustment as unmet expectations cause for instance low job satisfaction and early turnover (Richardson et al., 2004). Realistic job previews and realistic living conditions previews impact work adjustment and performance and may help adjustment to the day-to-day routines in the host country (Richardson et al., 2004)

The theoretical framework for this Thesis, as presented in Figure 4, is formed on the basis of all subchapters of the literature review. The theoretical framework is used in the empirical part of this Thesis to examine the research questions. In the next chapter, the methodologies chosen for the empirical study as well as the data are introduced.

3 METHODS AND DATA

This chapter firstly introduces, discusses and justifies the chosen methods. The chosen methods are used in the empirical part of the study, which aims to verify whether the theoretical framework is applicable to employer branding and recruitment communication in a recruitment company recruiting internationally. The study is conducted by using both quantitative and qualitative research methods i.e. it is mixed methods research. As the two methods are used in this Thesis side by side to collect and analyze data, both methods are explained and justified in their own subchapters. Secondly, this chapter introduces and describes the collected data. Finally, the trustworthiness of the study is discussed.

3.1 Single case study

The study is conducted in a single-case format for various reasons. According to Yin (2003), case studies are for exploring new areas of interest and a single case study may be used when a new phenomenon is studied. The external employer brand image of recruitment companies and recruitment communication in the context of international recruitment have not been previously studied. Therefore this study can be considered exploratory and in this case a single case study is justified. Opteam was chosen as a case company for the reasons that are explained in Subchapter 1.2. The company is a typical example of the recruitment industry and Finnish recruitment companies involved in international recruitment.

Case-study research enables a more in-depth study of a phenomenon. The case study format is also beneficial as it outlines the research area that otherwise could be quite vast. Only one case company examined is looked at from multiple angles in the context of the topic of the Thesis and therefore selection of mixed research methods matched well with a single case study format.

The time and scope limitations of a Master's Thesis project do not allow a multiple case design as the phenomenon in the context of the case company is studied extensively and the research problem does not involve comparison.

In addition, a case study was a natural choice as the methodology of the study since the case company currently employs the author of the Thesis and this particular topic is a current issue in the case company.

3.2 Mixed-methods research

The empirical part of the study is conducted as mixed-method research that combines qualitative and quantitative research methods:

- Semi-structured qualitative interviews of the case company's representatives
- A survey including both quantitative and qualitative questions to recruited employees

The choice of research methods is related to how the researcher sees and understands the world (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Quantitative research lies on the logic of positivism, which is typical to natural sciences. Qualitative research, on the other hand, has its origins in anthropology and is based on the interpretivist paradigm. It has been acknowledged that a variety of approaches has benefits. According to Glesne and Peshkin (1992) "different approaches allow us to know and understand different things about the world".

For this research, the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods is used as both methods have different types of advantages. Cornelissen (2011) states that both qualitative and quantitative methods may be used in research of corporate image. The qualitative methods allow more detailed and anecdotal data (Cornelissen, 2011, p. 132). According to Patton (1980) qualitative data provide depth and detail that emerge

through direct quotations and careful description. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) describe qualitative research as contextual and it aims at interpreting and understanding the perspectives of the target of research.

Cornelissen (2011) argues that quantitative methods are also suitable for corporate image research. Quantitative data is more discrete and it is easier to interpret but on the other hand it is less rich and less insightful (Cornelissen, 2011, p. 132–133). However, the quantitative survey allows the data to be collected from a larger group of people, which is needed for the credibility of the study results. According to Glesne and Peshkin (1992) quantitative research aims at generalizability, predictability and causal explanations.

In the following subchapters the methodology, data collection and collected data are discussed in more detail.

3.3 Qualitative interviews

Firstly, this subchapter introduces and discusses qualitative research methods and semi-structured interviews. Secondly, this subchapter explains the data collected in the semi-structured interviews.

The aim of the qualitative interviews is to provide information on the perceptions of the case company's employer branding in recruitment communication and employer brand vision of the case company. The qualitative interviews aim at providing an answer to research questions 1 "What are the specific elements of the employer branding in the case company?" and 2 "How does the case company perceive the role of its external employer brand in recruitment communication in attracting international job applicants?"

Qualitative methods are used in the form of semi-structured interviews with the case company's representatives. According to Hirsijärvi and Hurme (2009) a semi-structured interview is suitable for instance when there is limited awareness of the issue that is studied. Theme interview is a variation of a semi-structured interview and it is introduced by Hirsijärvi and Hurme (2009). A theme interview typically focuses on specific themes that are then discussed and questions are planned in order to get a clarification of the chosen themes. The order and the number of the questions may vary depending on how much information the interviewee gives on a single question (Hirsijärvi & Hurme, 2009).

The semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from the case company's representatives, who were selected based on their position and knowledge concerning international recruitment – the CEO, the country director of the Philippines, the director of Global operations and the HR consultant.

The interviewees participated on a voluntary basis. The purpose of the interviews was reviewed in the beginning of the each interview. As the author of the Thesis works in the case company, the interviewer personally knows the representatives of the case company, the representatives of the case company were asked to think that the interviewer did not know the case company in order that they would not exclude information from their answers.

The interviews of the representatives of the case company were conducted by the author in the premises of the case company during July-September 2013. One interview was conducted at the home of the interviewee. Each interview of the case company's representatives lasted approximately an hour and the interviews were conducted in Finnish as it is the native language of each interviewee and all possible distractions, such as expressing oneself in a foreign language, wanted to be diminished. More precise background information on the interview sessions and interviewees can be seen from Table 2.

Table 2. Background information for the qualitative interviews of the representatives of the case company

	Position in the company	Gender	Work experience in the company	Interview duration	Interview date
1	CEO	F	6 years	45 minutes	8.7.2013
2	HR Consultant	F	6 years	75 minutes	28.6.2013
3	Director	M	4,5 years	45 minutes	19.8.2013
4	Country Director, Philippines (ex)	F	4 years	66 minutes	13.9.2013

All interviews were recorded and transcribed. The quotes from transcribed interviews were translated into English by the author according to her best abilities. The transcriptions of the interviews were used to analyze the internal perceptions about the case company's employer branding and the role of communication in the recruitment process as well as to gather background information. Data was categorized to different themes and the themes were interpreted by comparing them to the theoretical framework of the Thesis.

The questions were designed according to three broad themes: 1) International recruitment, 2) Recruitment process and 3) Applicants and Opteam. The interviewees were asked to consider all the questions mainly from the perspective of applicant attraction and in the context of the recruitment in the Philippines. The purpose of the two first themes was to get a general picture of the case company's international recruitment and the case company's recruitment process and recruitment communication. The purpose of the third theme was to understand the internal perceptions of recruitment communication as well as employer brand vision of the case company.

3.4 Quantitative survey

Firstly, this subchapter introduces and discusses the quantitative research methods. Secondly, this Subchapter presents the data collected in the quantitative survey.

The aim of the quantitative survey is to provide data to answer research question 3, "How does the group of job applicants perceive the case company's external employer brand in recruitment communication?".

The survey was used to collect data from the employees recruited by the case company from the Philippines. The recruited employees were studied even though the external employer brand image i.e. the job applicants' perceptions, was to be studied, not the internal employer image. The questions in the survey were set and formulated in a way that the recruited employees needed to consider employer brand image related issues and the early stages of the recruitment process from the perspective of their previous role as applicants. However, the researcher had to make an assumption that the recruited employees were able to consider the questions from the perspective of their previous role as job applicants and the data acquired was reliable.

Due to the legislation and restriction in the Philippines, it was not possible in the scope of this Thesis to contact individuals who are not yet applicants or employees. Therefore job seekers and potential applicants in the Philippines cannot be interviewed or survey cannot be sent to them.

The case company has recruited both nurses and chefs from the Philippines since 2007. The two groups of recruited employees i.e. nurses and chefs are different as nurses are recruited straight to the clients of the case company i.e. the clients are the employers whereas the chefs were first employees of the case company and usually after a year of employment the client company becomes the employer. However, Opteam takes care of many responsibilities of the employer for both groups of recruited employees.

The survey was sent to most of the nurses and chefs recruited from the Philippines, whose email address was available. The survey was sent out and answers were collected electronically with Surveypal. The survey was conducted in November 2013. The questionnaire language was English. The total number of the recruited employees who received the survey was 104, of which 38 answered to the survey, resulting in a 37 % response rate. 12 respondents were female and 26 male. 23 respondents were chefs and 15 were nurses. Also previous international employment experience was surveyed as a background question: 19 respondents had previous international employment experience. The survey demographics are gathered in Table 3.

Table 3. Quantitative survey demographics

Characteristics	Nurses: number of respondents	Chefs: number of respondents	Total number of respondents
Total amount of respondents	15	23	38
Gender: • Female • Male	8 7	4 19	12 26
Age: • 20-29 • 30-39 • 40-49 • 50-59	8 2 4 1	7 15 1 0	15 17 5 1
Previous international employment experience	6	13	19

The survey included both quantitative and qualitative sections. The open-ended question was included in the survey as open-ended responses allow the researcher to understand the world as seen by the respondents (Patton, 1980, p. 28)

The survey questions were designed based on the existing research of employer brand image and recruitment communication introduced in Chapter 2. The survey consisted of

three background questions (gender, age and previous international employment experience) and five main questions. Altogether there were eight questions in the survey. The survey was sent to nurses and chefs separately and therefore the occupation was not asked in the survey.

In each question section the respondents were asked to assess several factors, which were all multiple choice on a five level Likert scale completed with one open-ended question i.e. the qualitative section. The Likert scale values were: 1) Not at all important, 2) Quite little important, 3) Somewhat important 4) Quite important and 5) Very important / 1) Not at all, 2) Quite little, 3) Somewhat, 4) Quite well and 5) Very well. For the survey questionnaire form, see Appendix 1.

The quantitative and qualitative data acquired through the survey was analyzed and categorized to different themes and the themes were interpreted by comparing them to the theoretical framework of the Thesis. The quantitative parts of the survey were first analyzed statistically after which they were interpreted.

3.5 Trustworthiness of the study

This subchapter discusses the trustworthiness of the study, which includes the concepts of reliability and validity. Yin (2003) discusses four widely used tests for case studies. These four tests are used to assess this study.

Firstly, construct validity refers to whether the researcher has sufficient operational measurements for the studied phenomenon. The sufficient, correct operational measurements were ensured by conducting a thorough literature review of existing research and by getting to know the case company on the operational level. The author is currently employed in the case company and therefore is familiar with the culture of the case company as well as its business operations. However, the author has not been

involved with international recruitment and recruitment communication in the international recruitment process. Several representatives of the case company were consulted during the research to ensure that relevant issues were included in the study.

Secondly, internal validity refers to whether causal relations between the variables are correctly constructed. The use of multiple data collection methods contributes to trustworthiness and validity (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Hirsijärvi & Hurme, 2009). Therefore, in order to maximize internal validity, the study uses multiple research methods and data analysis. During the analysis existing literature was referred to in order to minimize the threat of misunderstanding of causal relationships.

Thirdly, external validity refers to the ability to generalize the results beyond the case study. In this case study the author is aware that the studied case company and target group is quite narrow, but the key concepts of the study are widely applicable in other companies as well. The existing literature introduced in the literature review consist of more generalized research on employer branding in recruitment communication. Consequently, it is technically possible to apply the theoretical framework of this study to other areas of study as well. This case study may suggest trends that apply to other settings and research as well. Nevertheless, the study is designed in the context of the case company, which hinders generalizing the finding to wider settings.

Finally, reliability refers to whether the findings are the same if the study was repeated. In this study, the number of the interviewees and respondents was maximized in order to add reliability and trustworthiness of the data. The interview sessions were organized one-on-one in order to avoid that the interviewees modify their answers and to encourage them speak freely. As the author is employed by the case company, there was a possibility of subjectivity. The author did her best to minimize its effects by following the research design during the interviews, transcribing the interviews carefully and linking the analysis of the data to the existing literature as well as reporting the results carefully in detail.

4 FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings of the empirical part of the Thesis. The empirical part of the Thesis consists of two studies with different methodologies and data collection methods. Firstly, the representatives of the case company were interviewed by using qualitative, semi-structured interviews. Secondly, a survey including both quantitative and qualitative questions was used to gather answers from the Filipino employees who were recruited by the case company. In this chapter the findings of both studies are introduced comprehensively in two subchapters, in order to answer the research questions.

4.1 Interview findings

This subchapter presents the findings of the qualitative theme interviews of the representatives of the case company. The interviews were conducted among four representatives of the case company – CEO, Director of Opteam Global (international recruitment), HR consultant and former Country director (the Philippines) – who have been involved with international recruitment in the Philippines.

The interviews were conducted within three themes: 1) International recruitment, 2) Recruitment process, and 3) Applicants and Opteam. The first and second themes were discussed so that the general picture of the case company's operations in the Philippines could be formed, out of which all practices, communication and behavior stem from. The last theme dealt with employer brand from the viewpoints of employer branding and employer brand vision.

The findings of the interviews of the representatives of the case company are divided into three distinct but interrelated areas that are related to research questions 1 and 2.

4.1.1 Specific elements of employer branding

This section introduces the main findings from the interviews concerning the specific elements of the case company's employer branding in the Philippines. The specific elements are related to recruitment business and particular conditions in the Philippines.

All the interviewees had a similar view of the specific elements of the international recruitment company's employer branding. Firstly, they all emphasized the importance of the host country i.e. Finland in employer branding. Secondly, all interviewees also mentioned to some extent the different roles the case company has depending on whether it is recruiting the employees directly to its clients or recruiting the employees as its own employees that are leased to clients. The third element that all interviewees mentioned was the local recruitment partner in the Philippines, which is required by the law of the Philippines. Finally, the interviewees mentioned the labor market conditions in the Philippines and the immense amount of applications in the Philippines, which impact recruitment communication and employer branding decision.

Firstly, all the interviewees agreed that as both the case company and Finland are not well known in the Philippines, the case company has to strongly communicate the benefits of Finland as the location of employment. The interviewees reported that often the order in which job applicants get information is employment, Finland and Opteam. Recruitment business is very extensive in the Philippines, where there are thousands of recruitment companies operating. Countries such as the USA, the Great Britain and Canada are popular among locals who wish to emigrate, partly because of the language but also because of the long traditions of emigration to those countries. Finland, on other hand, is a small country, where only few people have so far emigrated from the Philippines. Therefore, the recruitment communication often focuses on giving information about Finland and how it is to work and live in Finland, as can be seen in the following quotes:

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"Yes, Opteam's name is there, but it is perhaps more Finland and recruiting to Finland. It is like Opteam equals to Finland. (...) It is still in so small scale (Opteam's recruitment in the Philippines) that it is more Finland than a corporate brand that matters" (Interviewee 1)

"There is a big difference in domestic and international recruitment. When we are recruiting internationally, we have to sell first of all Finland. We have to sell them (job applicants) Finland as a good place to work." (Interviewee 3)

The interviewees compared the international recruitment from the Philippines and from Europe. The knowledge of Finland varies, but job applicants also have different motives to emigrate. The interviewees mentioned that if the job applicant is planning to emigrate for years or even permanently, they are interested in different issues than those that are looking for temporary employment abroad. The Filipinos are usually looking for long-term employment abroad.

Secondly, the interviewees mentioned the different roles that the case company has depending on whether it is recruiting nurses directly to its clients or chefs to its own employees impact the recruitment communication. However, all interviewees saw that regardless of being the recruiter or employer, the case company's role is significant for job applicants in the recruitment process. The case company is with job applicants from the first contact until they are finally settling down in Finland, as e.g. Interviewee 1 pointed out:

"We (Opteam) are in a certain way escorting and holding hand, taking care of the process, when we are recruiting directly to a client. In that way it isn't traditional employer branding in that sense." (Interviewee 1)

Thirdly, all the interviewees also discussed how the cooperation with a local recruitment partner, required by the law in the Philippines, influences the employer branding in recruitment communication. The law requires foreign recruitment companies to have a local recruitment partner. One reason for this is the importance of the recruitment business for the Philippine's economy. According to the law, foreign recruitment companies cannot be in direct contact with the job applicants without a local recruitment partner. Therefore, it is for instance impossible for a foreign recruitment company to advertise without a local partner being involved in an advertisement or communicate with job applicants directly before the contact of employment is signed.

Although the legislation set restrictions to foreign recruitment companies (e.g. communication with job applicants) the interviewees do not see the requirement of a local partner as a problem, but on the contrary a local partner is seen as beneficial as it has necessary local connections and obviously it is locally better known than the case company. The following quotes reflect these issues:

> *"Recruitment is a big business there (in the Philippines). That is why we (Opteam) chose this kind of (good reputation) partner. The partner doesn't have to market itself as reliable and so forth. That they are cooperating with us makes us also reliable. The immediate image that the applicant gets when he/she applies through the partner to Opteam is that he/she will be in good hands and he/she will be taken good care of."* (Interviewee 3)

> *"Opteam is strongly present (in recruitment process) and roles are made clear. And specifically in that way that the local partner is a partner that implements that specific part (of the process) there and we are responsible for a lot of things both in the Philippines and Finland and always for communication with a client company."* (Interviewee 2)

Besides of the requirement of cooperating with a local recruitment partner, international recruitment is also subjected to license. This means that the Philippine Overseas Employment Agency (POEA) licenses and supervises all international recruitment in the Philippines.

Fourthly, the interviewees also mentioned the immense amount of applications received in the Philippines. Due to the fast growing population the unemployment rate is high in the Philippines and there are for example hundreds of thousands of unemployed nurses in the Philippines. The Philippine government encourages Philippines to emigrate and international recruitment is huge business in the Philippines. The case company has faced challenges in recruiting in the Philippines as it receives too many applications which all do not meet the requirements. In other words the quality and quantity of the applicants is not optimal, as can be seen here:

> *"We (Opteam) have had to restrict for example the visibility of our logo on the partner's website as we have received far too much applications directly and we are not allowed by the law to answer these inquiries."* (Interviewee 2)

> *"The amount of applications is really huge, we are talking different figures than in Finland. That is a big thing for both applicants and the company. The partner takes care of the initial elimination, but it requires an awful lot of time and resources to separate the wheat from the chaff, to find the right applicants."* (Interviewee 4)

In conclusion, as the specific elements of the case company's employer branding the interviewees brought up issues that can be categorized to four elements: the importance of the host country i.e. Finland in employer branding, the different roles the case company has depending on whether it is recruiting the employees directly to its clients or recruiting the employees as its own employees, the local recruitment partner in the

Philippines, which is required by the law of the Philippines and the immense amount of applications in the Philippines, which impact recruitment communication and also employer branding.

4.1.2 Employer branding in recruitment communication

This section presents the main findings of the interviews concerning the case company's employer branding in recruitment communication in the Philippines. The findings are divided into themes.

The key messages

All the interviewees emphasized reliability, which refers to the essentiality of international recruiter to be a reliable actor in the Philippines. Among thousands of recruitment companies there are a lot of unreliable and unethical actors. The interviewees referred the Philippines as a country of distrust and all people looking for international employment do not have for instance Internet access to be able to compare recruitment companies. Plenty of people have had or heard about bad experiences of international recruitment. The following quote reflects these issues:

> *"They have had or heard about bad recruitment cases and that has deteriorated the trust to foreigners. But it is also part of the culture as only family is trusted. (…) A real trust comes from fair and equal treatment of job applicants. And that is what we communicate from the beginning."* (Interviewee 4)

Therefore, the interviewees raised reliability as the most important message to job applicants. For interviewees reliability meant that the case company is a safe option to

job applicants as it takes care of all issues in recruitment as it promises and operates always in an ethical way. According to the interviewees, reliability is a crucial part of the recruitment process and it can be quarantined as all the representatives of Opteam always tell the same things to applicants, they do not promise anything else than what is definitely true, as e.g. Interviewee 4 pointed out:

> *"You can't ever use any conditionals such as "maybe" in the Philippines. You have to tell only absolute facts, shortly and a little amount. (...) If you say "sometimes", it means "yes, always" and then it is a big fight. You just tell the things that are facts and it increases reliability. Reliability also means that we do not take any recruitment fees from job applicants".*
> (Interviewee 4)

> *"As it (the Philippines) is a country of distrust, where nobody is trusted, it is reliability that comes up in every issue and in employer brand image it comes from that we take care of things as we have promised, schedules are kept and contracts are taken care of properly. (...) That is from where it all begins, the reliability, and that's how the good word spreads out."*
> (Interviewee 4)

The interviewees reported that internal coherence of communication and openness have created trust among stakeholders, as can be seen in the following quote:

> *"One issue where we have succeeded is openness. We have been open to every direction, to employees, to job applicants and to clients. And what has been really good is how it is internally, as anyone of us interviews job applicants, they always get the same answers. There aren't any secrets."*
> (Interviewee 3)

The interviewees described on several occasions an ethical recruiter, which they defined for instance as reliable and safe recruiter and employer. The ethical recruiter does not charge any fee from recruited employees. The Finnish law forbids charging a recruitment fee, but in the Philippines it is legal and local recruitment companies do usually charge the fee. Therefore the ethical recruiter has to make sure job applicants are not charged fees at any stage of the process. The following quotes reflect the issues of ethical recruitment:

> *"We (Opteam) are a recruitment company that is strict about it ethicality. So we cannot recruit from countries where we cannot be sure that the recruitment is conducted ethically."* (Interviewee 1)

> *"The first (Finnish) competitor has now showed up there (in the Philippines) and there is already a big difference as the competitor charges the applicants for a Finnish language course. This has not been perceived as that ethical here in Finland. That differentiates us (Opteam). Ethicality and responsibility, and also that we offer the whole service as a turnkey package. Those are the elements that will differentiate us."* (Interviewee 1)

Being an ethical recruiter also means that job applicants are given realistic information about working and living conditions in Finland (this will be discussed in more detail below). People striving out of poverty may look at the world through rosy spectacles and the ethical recruiter provides job applicants realistic information not only about salaries but also living costs, as the following quote shows:

> *"In my opinion it is also a really important element of ethicality (that job applicants are told realistically about all living costs). We could tell that in Finland you earn this much and then leave it there. And then in Finland, the employee has to pay taxes, rent and everything (that he/she*

wasn't aware of). We have to be reliable and ethical in this" (Interviewee 2)

Realistic information

All of the interviewees stressed the importance of providing very realistic information to job applicants during the whole recruitment process. Realistic information about both working and living conditions in Finland is needed, firstly, as job applicants do not have much or at all knowledge about Finland and secondly, as proving realistic information is hoped to encourage on one hand the right and suitable applicants to continue in the recruitment process and on the other hand the unsuitable applicants to withdraw from the recruitment process in the early stages of the process, as can be seen in the following quotes:

> *"We have also had so called Finland info sessions in that point when we have a group of interesting applicants selected to the first interview. They will be given more detailed information and the country director holds the session. The purpose of the session is also to discourage those applicants who feel in that point that they are not suitable and also give applicants more information about Finland, conditions here and working in Finland."* (Interviewee 2)

> *"Informing those that continue in the process. (…) When they get right information they can process where they are going. You have to tell them facts about Finland. Then they will be committed to the process."* (Interviewee 4)

All of the interviewees brought up the role of salary in relation to applicants' attraction and employer brand image. Money was seen as the most important motivator for the

Filipino applicants. As it is not possible to compete in salaries due to the wage level in Finland, it was recognized that giving realistic information about living and working conditions might attract right applicants, as e.g. Interviewee 3 pointed out:

> *"We have to think every day what ethical recruitment really means. When Finland cannot compete in salaries, the competitive advantage can be the working conditions."* (Interviewee 3)

> *"Filipinos are only interested in money and work. However, Finland is so far a way that they are also interested in other things such as where they live."* (Interviewee 3)

Realistic information is also needed to communicate about work assignment and working environments in Finland. There are significant differences in work assignment and working cultures between Finland and the Philippines, as can be seen in the following quotes:

> *"There are cultural differences also in work assignment. For example, they (Filipinos) come here to work as a practical nurse, but in the Philippines elderly people are taken care of at home. They don't have such a profession as practical nurse taking care of elderly people. They don't understand why elderly people are in nursing homes. First they have slight ethical issues with that."* (Interviewee 3)

> *"You can see in that communication that it is a completely different thing to work as a nurse or a chef in Finland than in any other country. (...) Chefs are so surprised that here a restaurant manager can do the dishes if there is a rush in dishes."* (Interviewee 1)

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The employer/recruiter in recruitment communication

The interviewees agreed on that the host country is in a crucial position in recruitment communication. The interviewees did not seem to see employer /recruiter information as that important or that it would matter for job applicants. The huge amounts of applicants have had an impact on employer branding decisions, as the following quotes show:

> *"It goes now in this order: the partner, Finland and Opteam."* (Interviewee 3)

> *"We (Opteam) don't maybe know how to sell us. Now we don't have to really sell our recruitment services there because immediately we get one hundred of million applications. But for those applicants that we really want to recruit, the communication has to be well structured during the whole process."* (Interviewee 2)

Although job applicants get information about the case company in the early phases of the recruitment process, much of it does not come directly from the case company. Due to the legislation, the foreign recruitment company is not allowed to do marketing or be in direct contact with the job applicant without a local recruitment partner. In some extent, the case company discusses with the local partner what the partner should tell about the case company in each phase of the recruitment process. Some of the interviewees raised this as a point of development as it should be better structured what and how the local partner communicates about the case company, as can be seen in the following quote:

> *"We (Opteam) have a really good process, but a cherry on the top of the cake would be communication issues and defining it (how to communicate) with the partner. (…) Everybody creates employer brand. It*

is self-evident that every contact matters and therefore messages should be in harmony and the "voice" should always be the same." (Interviewee 2)

The interviewees recognized that all communication and behavior creates employer brand. The interviewees agreed that internally it is coherent what and how the representatives of Opteam communicate about the company as an employer and recruiter, as e.g. Interviewee 3 pointed out:

"All communication to outside has to support our operations and it has to be coherent and consistent with the previous message. (…) It does not matter which one of us (Opteam's representatives) goes there (in the Philippines), we all speak the "same language"." (Interviewee 3)

For all of the interviewees the key message about the case company is reliability and ethicality. When the representatives of Opteam meet job applicants in the info sessions they use the official company presentations to introduce the company and its operations.

The interviewees were asked to tell how Opteam differentiates itself from the competitors. The interviewees did not see Opteam's employer brand as particularly strong or unique. However, all of the interviewees agreed that employer brand is important as Opteam is already competing with other countries that are more attractive in the eyes of job applicants and competition is getting tougher as the population of Europe is ageing and international recruitment to Europe increases. The following quote reflects these issues:

"In that way it isn't traditional employer branding in that sense. Certainly when there will be more competition and someone else will also recruit to Finland, there will be bigger importance on how Opteam is different compared to the others." (Interviewee 1)

In competition with other countries, the crucial issue is selling Finland as a good place to work and life, but in future competition with other Finnish recruitment companies in the Philippines the employer strong brand and ethicality were seen important.

Sources of the employer brand image

All of the interviewees talked a lot about word-of-mouth as an important source of employment information based on which job applicants form employer brand image. One of the interviewees acknowledged friends' recommendations as an especially good way to recruit in the Philippines as the job applicants get information from their existing social networks and earlier recruited employees could act as mentors for job applicants, as can be seen in the following quotes:

> *"We could offer recruited employees already existing social networks in Finland through which they get easily reliable information. (…) Then there would be kind of mentors here for applicants as what is considered reliable is different in different cultures. I also believe that attractiveness of Finland would then increase as they have a friend here who would recommend. It (the message) has a different weight."* (Interviewee 1)

> *"If we recruit from certain schools, we would get this kind of a jungle drum as a recruitment channel that is anyway extremely efficient among Philippines. Oh boy, they communicate among themselves. If something happens somewhere, elsewhere they know it immediately."* (Interviewee 1)

The interviewees also brought up social media as an important channel for word-of-mouth, as can bee seen in the following quote:

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"Facebook and other social media is so effective channel to any country. There goes good and bad news. The recruited employees spread the word. Information has been received so much faster than we are even able to react." (Interviewee 3)

The interviewees recognized the importance of relocation services in creating word-of-month, as e.g. Interviewee 3 pointed out:

"If we think of any image, the best image is given by the employees that are already here. They give it. We couldn't ever to the same, not in any media or anywhere." (Interviewee 3)

"We have Philippines working here and it really matters how we take care of them here. There might be some problems, but what matters is how we take care of the problems. Do we leave them alone with the problems or do we take care of them." (Interviewee 3)

The interviewees mentioned employment advertisement in newspapers and on the partner's webpage as the most important channels to advertise Opteam's employment opportunities in the Philippines. The newspaper was seen important, as people do not necessarily have access to Internet. When the case company and the local recruitment partner advertise open positions in newspapers, usually the both companies are mentioned in the advertisement and the logos of the both companies are printed in the advertisement. In addition to Opteam's logo, there is a short text about Opteam in the advertisement.

The job applicants may also find Opteam's open positions in the local partner's webpage. Opteam's name is mentioned or alternatively it is stated that the local partner is recruiting with its partner and applicants will be told later that the partner is Opteam.

Opteam's open positions can also be found on the POEA's (the Philippine Overseas Employment Agency) webpage where Opteam is not however mentioned at all. Opteam has its own webpage for the Philippines, but due to the legislation it is not allowed to have job openings or contact information on that webpage.

As interviewees were asked how they would develop recruitment communication, two of the interviewees stated that recruitment communication could be better structured. They suggested that Opteam could for instance provide written material to the support of the local partner in how it communicates about Opteam and video material could be used in the info session to assure that in each session the information and message is the same. However, they said that the interpersonal connection with applicants is important and letters or emails cannot ever replace that. These two interviewees also mentioned that it is important to make sure that the local partner communicates consistently to the job applicants.

To conclude what the interviewees saw as central elements of employer branding in recruitment communication and currently supporting the creation of strong employer brand, they emphasized reliability and ethicality as the key messages, importance of realistic but also attractive information about the host country and word-of-mouth as a significant source of the employer brand image.

4.1.3 Points of development and employer brand vision

This section presents the interviewees' views on how they would want Opteam to be seen as an employer and recruiter i.e. employer brand vision in the Philippines and how they would develop recruitment communication.

All of the interviewees emphasized that Opteam has to make sure that it is also in the future seen as reliable and ethical recruiter and employer. The central issue in the

interviewees' views on employer brand vision was how Opteam is able to communicate that is particularly reliable. Reliability and ethicality were themes that were brought up in all of the interviews several times. The interviewees recognized reliability and ethicality as the key ingredients of what Opteam is now as an employer and recruiter and also how it wants to be seen in the future and thus what it needs to continuously communicate.

As mentioned in the previous sections, the interviewees agreed that employer brand would be more important once the company has to differentiate itself from its competitors recruiting to Finland. The factors that would differentiate Opteam were, according to the interviewees, the experience and good references from the job applicants and employees who have been satisfied with the services. Based on the previous recruitment of the nurses in the Philippines, Opteam has been able to create a profile of the "optimal employee". One of the interviewees mentioned that if Opteam recruits only these "optimal employees", then the applicants would eventually know that if they pass the recruitment process and the objectives criteria of the "optimal employees", they do not have to worry about whether they will be successful in their profession also in Finland. This would enhance the credibility and reliability of the recruiter.

All of the interviewees talked about how essential open and consistent communication has been in creating employer and recruiter brand in the Philippines. They emphasized that Opteam has to keep the same policy also in the future if it wants to enhance the image as reliable actor.

The interviewees acknowledged the importance of all communication and behavior in employer branding. However, the role of interpersonal contact with applicants was seen slightly differently as the interviewees were asked how they would develop the recruitment process and communication. One interviewee suggested that the recruitment process and communication should be developed so that more digital systems such as

video interviews should be used in the process when Opteam will recruit more in the Philippines. This would allow interviews to be conducted without Opteam's representatives travelling to the Philippines. Another interviewee stated very clearly that face-to-face contact is important and also that recruitment process should not be changed, as it would deteriorate reliability and the reputation Opteam has already achieved in the Philippines.

Two of the interviewees recognized the importance of the representatives of Opteam in international recruitment process. Who the representatives are and how they are selected was seen important for the recruitment process and communication. The interviewees brought up the values and expertise as well as language skills that Opteam's representatives have as all behavior and communication creates the employer brand. As the interviewees were asked to think of the strengths and weaknesses of Opteam in international recruitment from the viewpoint of applicants in the Philippines, two of the interviewees brought up also their personal strengths and weaknesses as Opteam's representatives. The interviewees also brought up both implicitly and explicitly that employer brand image has been personified to certain representatives Opteam.

One of the interviewees also brought up the employer and recruiter image in larger context than just in the Philippines and noted:

> *"We (Opteam) really have to think about how we make us the number one recruiter in Europe and how it is build with the same long-term view as in the Philippines."* (Interviewee 2)

However, the interviewees did not think that there was much that they would develop in the recruitment process and communication although they acknowledged that Opteam's employer brand needs to be further developed. Two of the interviewees mentioned that they would want to structure better the recruitment communication in order that the local partner would communicate consistently about the case company. One of the

interviewees would narrow down the recruitment sources. This was seen necessary, as the recruitment process requires a lot of effort due to the immense amount of applications, as can be seen in the following quote:

> *"It is a big issue that we (Opteam) have to think about how we start to narrow down where and how we recruit. It is really crucial. First of all, if we think about the amount of applications, the more we have application the more difficult it is to find those that are good and suitable applicants."* (Interviewee 1)

To conclude this section, first of all, the interviewees saw the reliability and credibility as most important attributes of the employer brand and those attributes Opteam has to continue to communicate in the recruitment process. Secondly, making sure that communication with applicants is consistent and recruitment sources were seen as the points of development.

4.2 Survey findings

This section presents the main findings of the survey. The survey to the employees that the case company has recruited from the Philippines was conducted in November 2013. The survey was sent to 104 recruited employees of whom 38 responded the survey. The aim of the survey was to explore the recruited employees perceptions on Opteam as an employer i.e. their employer brand image and recruitment communication in the early stages of the recruitment process.

The first topic in the survey questionnaire was the perception of a good employer. The respondents were asked to rate 18 features on a Likert scale on how important they

perceived the features of a good employer to be. In addition, there was possibility to an open answer. The answers of all respondents can be seen in Figure 5.
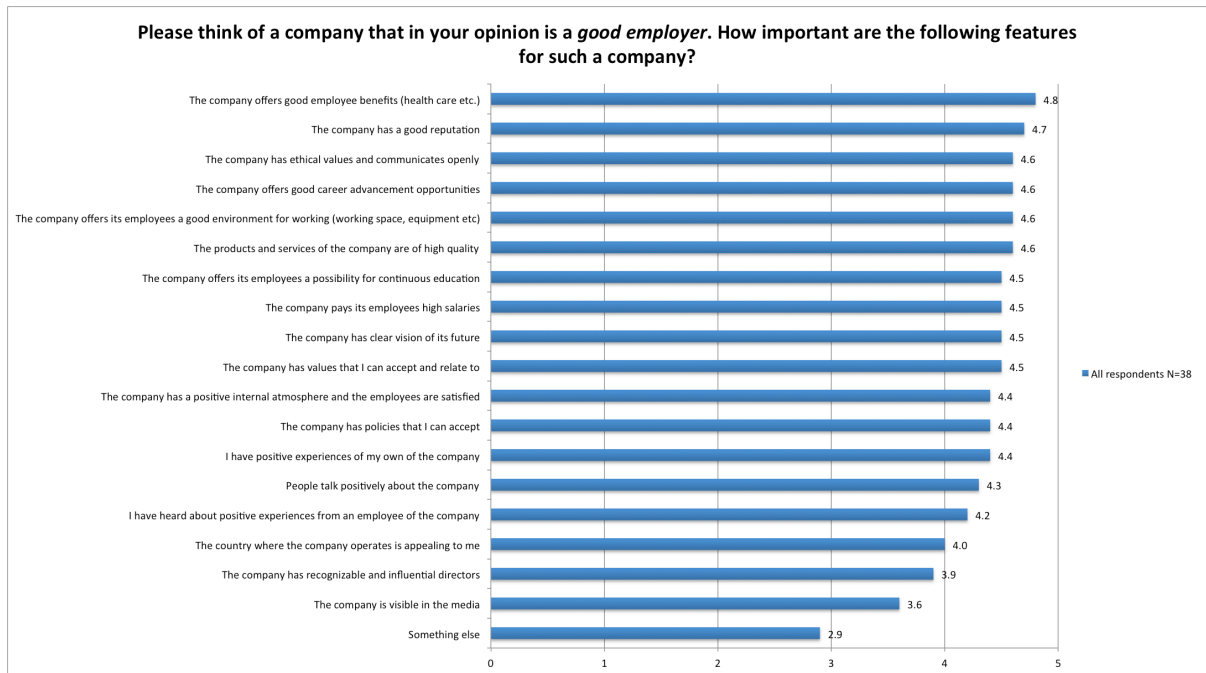

Figure 5. Perceptions of a good employer by all respondents.

When looking at all respondents the most important features were the company's good reputation and good employee benefits as well as high quality products and services, good working environment, career advancement opportunities, and ethical values and open communication, which were all rated as almost five on the Likert scale. The least important features were a company's visibility on media and recognizable and influential directors, which rate less than four on the Likert scale. Other features were valued high with averages around four on the Likert scale. The respondents that chose "Something else" specified their answers with open answers. The features raised in the open answers were related to how an employer helps and supports employees, equality, colleagues, working schedules and vacations.

When answers are divided according to profession (nurses and chefs), in general they were quite parallel with each other. However, there are a few features with more visible differences. This can be seen from the answers by profession in Figure 6.
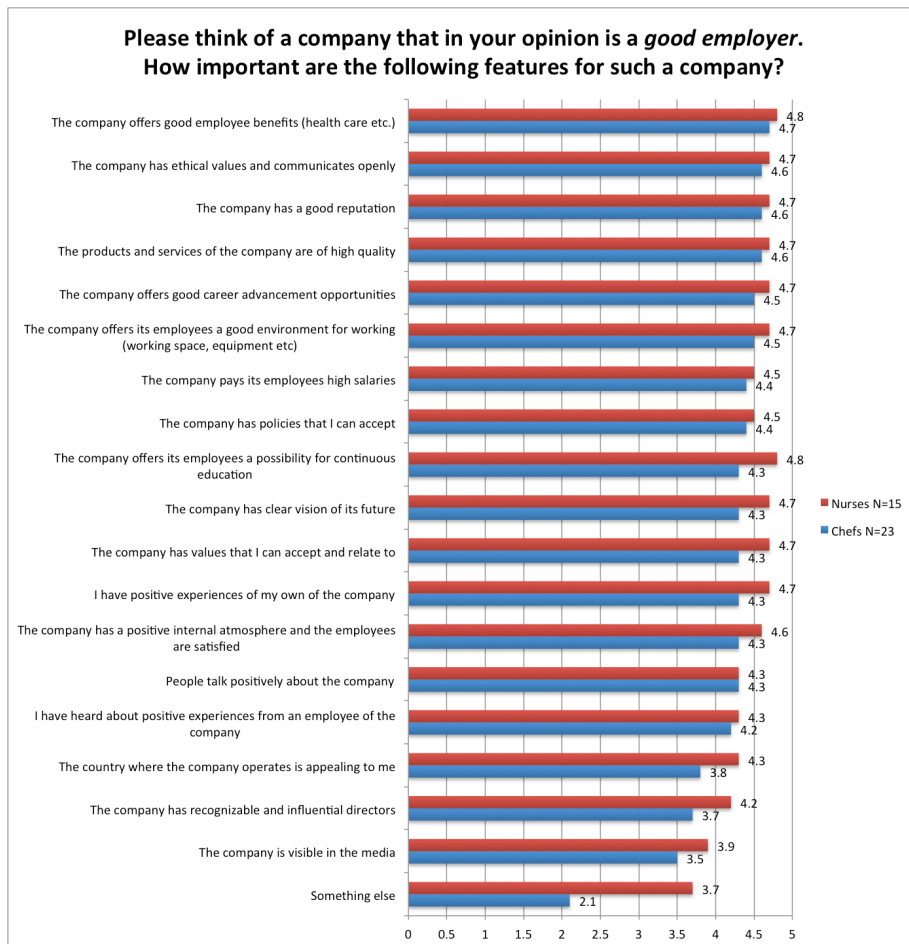
Figure 6. Perceptions of a good employer by profession.

The differences are related to importance of own positive experiences, a company's values that can be related to, a company's clear vision of future and possibilities for continuous education, which the nurses rated almost five and 0.4 or more higher on the scale than the chefs. The nurses also rated the company's operating country higher than the chefs although the nurses rated it closer to four on the scale. All in all, the nurses rated almost all features higher on the scale than chefs.

The respondents were also asked to choose three features that they perceived as the most important for a good employer. Some differences can be seen in the chefs' and nurses' answers, although in both groups good employee benefits were rated most often as the most important feature. The three most important features according to the chefs were good employee benefits, good career advancement opportunities and high quality products and services. According to the nurses the most important features were good employee benefits, positive internal atmosphere and the employees are satisfied, high salaries and ethical values and open communication.

The second topic of the survey was related to the respondent's perceptions of Opteam as an employer and recruiter. The respondents were asked to rate 16 statements on a Likert scale on how well the statements match the image they had had on Opteam when they had decided to apply employment through Opteam with a possibility to an open answer. The averages of the answers of all respondents can be seen in Figure 7.
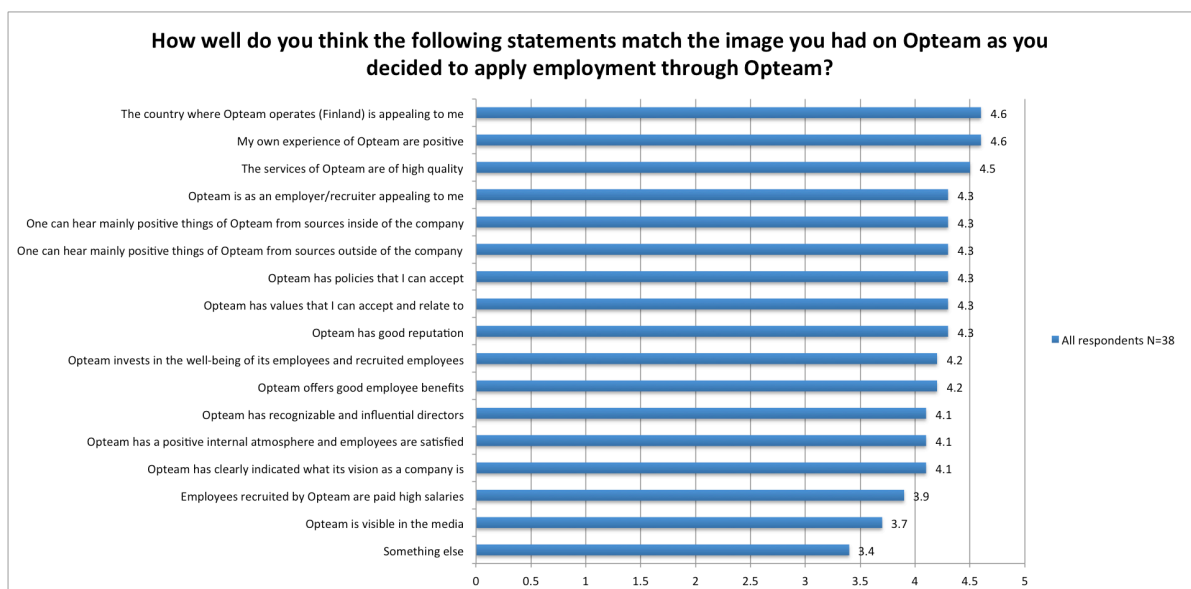
Figure 7. Perceptions of Opteam as an employer and recruiter by all respondents.

When looking at the average responses of all respondents, it can be seen that almost all of the statements have been rated four and five on the Likert scale i.e. to match with the image respondents had had on Opteam "quite well" or "very well" except two statement, Opteam pays high salaries and Opteam is visible in media, which rated less than four i.e. only to "somewhat" match. The top end, which was rated to almost five i.e. to match very well with the image that respondents had had on Opteam, included statements of own positive experiences of Opteam and the country where Opteam operates is appealing.

Similarly to the responses to the first survey question, when answers are divided according to profession (nurses and chefs), in general they were quite parallel with each other with some exceptions. This can be seen from the answers by profession in Figure 8.

How well do you think the following statements match the image you had on Opteam as you decided to apply employment through Opteam?

Statement	Nurses N=15	Chefs N=23
The country where Opteam operates (Finland) is appealing to me	4.5	4.7
My own experience of Opteam are positive	4.5	4.6
The services of Opteam are of high quality	4.5	4.5
Opteam has good reputation	4.3	4.4
Opteam has policies that I can accept	4.2	4.4
Opteam has values that I can accept and relate to	4.1	4.4
One can hear mainly positive things of Opteam from sources inside of the company	4.3	4.3
Opteam is as an employer/recruiter appealing to me	4.2	4.3
One can hear mainly positive things of Opteam from sources outside of the company	4.2	4.3
Opteam invests in the well-being of its employees and recruited employees	4.1	4.3
Opteam offers good employee benefits	4.1	4.2
Opteam has a positive internal atmosphere and employees are satisfied	4.1	4.1
Employees recruited by Opteam are paid high salaries	3.7	4.1
Opteam has clearly indicated what its vision as a company is	4.2	4.0
Opteam has recognizable and influential directors	4.1	4.0
Opteam is visible in the media	3.9	3.6
Something else	4.6	2.2

Figure 8. Perceptions of Opteam as an employer and recruiter by profession.

The respondents were also asked to choose three statements that they perceived to match the best with the image they had had on Opteam. Clear differences can be seen in the chefs' and nurses' answers, although both groups rated high the statement that Opteam invests in the well-being of its employees and recruited employees. The most well-matching statements according to the chefs were "Opteam offers good employee benefits", "Opteam invests in the well-being of its employees and recruited employees", "The services of Opteam are of high quality" and "Opteam is as an employer/recruiter appealing to me". According to the nurses the three most well-matching features were "My own experience of Opteam are positive", "Opteam invests in the well-being of its employees and recruited employees" and "Opteam has policies that I can accept".

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When the most well-matching statements are compered with the most important features of a good employer it can be seen that the chefs rated most often both as the most important feature and the most well-matching statement good employee benefits. This may imply that offering of good employee benefits is an important attribute in Opteam's employer brand image.

The third topic of the survey was the respondents' perception of recruitment communication in the recruitment process. The respondents were asked to consider how well six statements matched the experience they had had of Opteam's recruitment process. The averages of all answers can be seen in Figure 9.
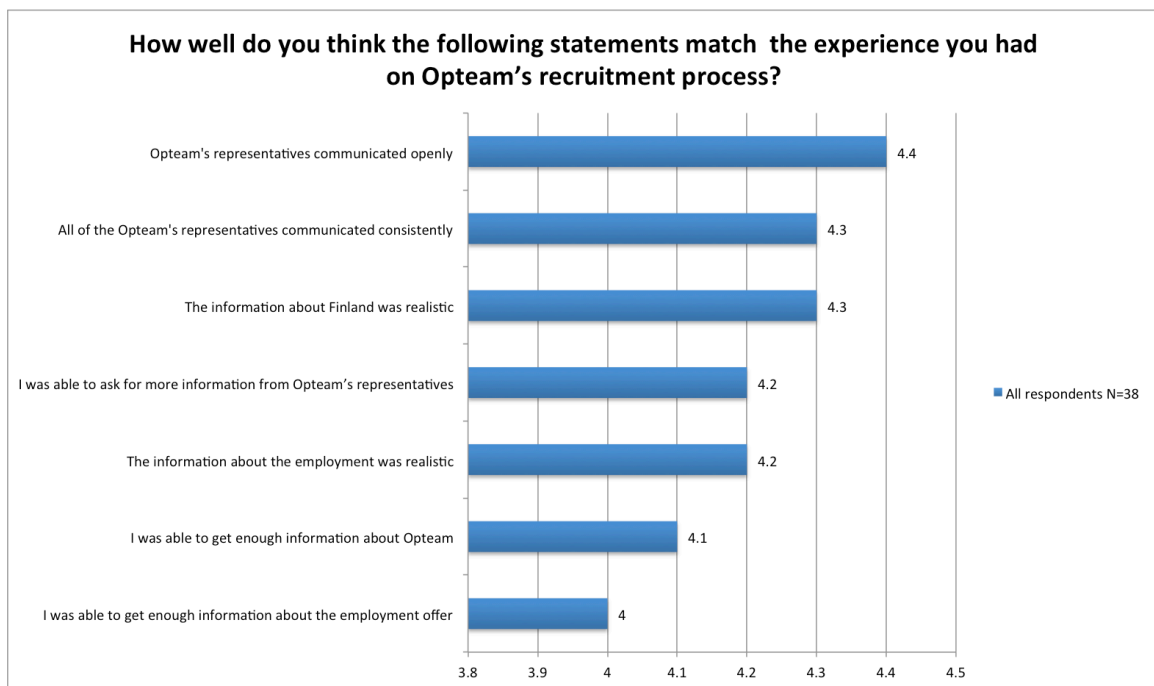
Figure 9. Perceptions of recruitment communication in the recruitment process by all respondents.

When looking at the average answers of all respondents, it can be seen that all statements related to recruitment communication were rated between 4 and 4.5 on the Likert scale i.e. to match quite well with the experience that the respondents had with

Opteam's recruitment process. When the answers are divided by professions, the average answers are quite parallel with each other with no differences bigger than 0.3 on the Likert scale.

The fourth topic of the survey was related to channels that the respondents had used to get information about Opteam and employment in Finland during the recruitment process in the Philippines. Figure 10 represents the channels that the respondent had used.

Please select the channels you used to get information about Opteam and employment in Finland during the recruitment process in the Philippines.

Channel	Count
Internet (for example Google search)	20
xx's (local partner) representatives	17
Opteam's representatives in the Philippines	15
Opteam's language teacher	12
xx's (the local partner) internet page	10
Information from friends and relatives	9
Opteam's info material about Finland	8
Employment ad in a newspaper	7
Opteam's information sessions	5
POEA's internet page	4
Opteam's internet page	4
Social media	3
POEA's representatives	1
Something else, what.	1

All respondents N=38

Figure 10. The channels used to get information about Opteam and employment in Finland by all respondents.

It can be seen from Figure 10 that besides of the Internet (e.g. Google search), the representatives of the local partner and Opteam were the most frequently used channels when the respondents had looked for information about Opteam and Finland. Also the local partner's webpage was frequently used channel. Friends and relatives i.e. word-of-mouth was mentioned by nine respondents.

The final topic of the survey and the open-ended question in the survey was related to attraction as the respondents were asked to describe in a few sentences what attracted them to apply employment through Opteam and when and where they heard about Opteam for the first time. The most frequently raised reasons why the respondents were attracted to apply employment through Opteam were related to salary and benefits, the location of employment in Europe and Opteam's recruitment process during which it takes care of the applicants from the beginning until they have settled own in Finland. The fair and equal treatment of applicants was also mentioned in the open answers and one of the respondents put it in this way:

> *"Opteam generally as a company gave me an impression of a certain sense of security for a foreign worker. I felt then that Opteam was a company strongly founded on laws that dealt with their employees in a just, equal and fair manner."*

The respondents heard about Opteam for the first time typically either from the local partner in the initial interview or from the representatives of Opteam in the second interview or in the info session. The nurses also mentioned newspapers and the chefs mentioned friends who had been already recruited to Finland as first sources of information about Opteam.

This chapter introduced the findings of the empirical part of the Thesis. In Chapter 5 the findings will be discussed.

5 DISCUSSION

This chapter will further discuss the main findings of this study in the context of the literature presented in Chapter 2. The findings will be discussed in the order of the research questions presented in the introduction of this Thesis.

The data providing answers to research questions 1 and 2 are derived from the responses of the qualitative theme interviews of the representatives of the case company and to research question 3 from the quantitative survey to the recruited employees from the Philippines. The data is then used to examine whether there is a gap between how the employer brand of the case company is currently perceived and experienced i.e. employer brand image and how the case company would like it to be perceived and experienced i.e. employer brand vision.

5.1 Specific elements of employer branding

Introduced in Section 2.3.1, Barber (1998) emphasized the state of the labor market and legislation as important factors in the company's external environment influencing recruitment activities and communication as well as applicants' responses and reaction. These external factors were clearly seen also in the interviewees' perceptions.

It was concluded in the findings chapter that in the interviews it could be identified four elements that would differentiate the employer branding and recruitment communication of the recruitment company from the traditional employer branding and elements that were specific to the recruitment in the Philippines. These specific elements are the importance of host country, the local partner and legislation, the labor market conditions and amount of applicants as well as the roles of employer and recruiter.

Host country – the employment imagery and location attributes

The host country i.e. Finland seems to be a crucial element in the employer branding and recruitment communication of the case company in the Philippines. As discussed in Section 2.3.1, Gardner et al. (2012) suggested an applicant employment imagery i.e. feelings and experiences associated with working in a specific location and they may extend outside the workplace and include location attributes. Gardner et al. (2012) identified that the employment imagery including images of a specific country may influence employer brand image. Therefore, in international recruitment the host country plays an important part in recruitment communication.

All of the interviewees brought up several times the importance of Finland as a host country in the employer branding in recruitment communication. This is in line with Gardner et al.'s (2012) research results. However, the attributes of the host country were emphasized so much that the other employment attributes seemed to be left on the second place. This is due to the applicant's low familiarity with the host country. As Finland is not known among the applicants, the host country attributes have to be stressed in the early phases of the recruitment process. Obviously, the applicants know much better other countries such as the USA, Canada and the Great Britain where lots of Filipinos have been recruited. According to brand theories familiar is more appealing as brand familiarity increases the chances to be considered (Collins and Stevens, 2002). As a country that is not known among the applicants is hardly an appealing option, the recruitment communication has to emphasize the positive attributes of the host country. However, as the interviewees emphasized, only selling the host country as a good place to work is not enough, as a responsible and ethical recruiter also tells about the negative attributes i.e. provides realistic information about the host country. This is in line with the Richardson et al. (2008) study on the realistic living conditions previews i.e. "provision of accurate favorable and unfavorable information on the general living environment in the host country". The role of the realistic recruitment is discussed further in Subchapter 5.2.

Local partner and legislation – sources of employer brand image

The Philippine law requires the foreign recruiter to have a local partner. The local partner takes care of some parts of the recruitment process and the foreign recruiter is not allowed to take care of certain recruitment activities. The interviewed representatives of the case company saw the legislation and local partner as a positive matter although they acknowledged the challenges related to this arrangement and the employer branding in recruitment communication. Coordination with the local partner was seen import in order for the recruitment activities and communication to be consistent.

The reputation and networks of the local partner were seen as positive and beneficial to the case company. It was acknowledged that the case company benefits from the local partner's good reputation as the case company is seen reliable, as its partner is seen reliable. The legislation restricts how the case company can communicate with applicants, especially during the early stages of the recruitment process, as direct contact with the applicants is not allowed. For instance marketing or recruitment fairs without the local partner's involvement are not allowed. Therefore, the case company firstly, do not have the full potential of sources of employer brand image in its use and secondly, it has to leave substantial part of its employer branding in recruitment communication to the hands of the local partner. The case company has fewer options to manage its employer brand among potential employees as well as other possible stakeholders in the Philippines and it does not have the whole employer branding in its own hands. As the brand image framework suggests that any source of information may affect the employer brand image, it is based on both company-controlled and not company-controlled sources (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). As the case company cannot use the full potential of the company-controlled sources, not company-controlled sources may be emphasized in the formation of the employer brand image of the

applicants. However, not company-controlled sources may be seen more credible than company-controlled sources.

As these conditions are given and cannot be changed, the coordination with and internal marketing to the local partner are ways to make sure that the local partner communicates consistently about the case company and messages to applicants are consistent. However, the representatives of the case company were not too much concerned about the restrictions, as the local partner has been proved beneficial and so far the cooperation has worked as they have wished.

Large number of applications – quantity and quality of the applicants

The state of labor market of the Philippines can clearly be seen in the immense amount of applications that the case company receives. As discussed in Section 2.2.1, recruitment research stresses that attraction in recruitment has both quantitative and qualitative dimensions, as the aim is to attract certain number of applicants with specific attributes (Barber, 1998). The aim of employer branding is to attract the best applicant. Simultaneously, recruitment is not efficient if the quantity of applicants attracted is too small or too large. In the case of the case company, the recruitment process clearly suffers from too large quantity of applicants and the selection process requires resources, as the most qualified applicants have to be identified from too large pool of applicants.

In the first phase of the recruitment process, the case company has had to limit its outreach to the applicant population, as quantity of the applicants would be too large to handle efficiently. The downside of limited outreach is that the quality of the applicants may suffer, as recruitment activities and communication is limited. In other words, the case company does not necessarily reach most suitable candidates and they will not be aware of the employment opportunities offered by the case company. As too small

number of applicants has not been a problem although applicants' awareness and beliefs of the case company as an employer i.e. employer brand image has not been as strong as it could be, the case company has not had to consider how a strong employer brand could generate attraction of the suitable candidates. In other words, the case company has received too many applications even though it is not widely known. This is possible in the situation of the Philippines where people are eager to emigrate and population seeking international job opportunities is large. As one of the interviewees stated, the company has to start to think about the recruitment activities and sources that would allow them to reach the suitable candidates, as there is no need to create general awareness among job seekers.

Roles of employer and recruiter – employment attributes and integrated brands

Employer branding and recruitment research mentions recruitment companies usually as recruitment sources without discussing the role of the recruitment companies in creating employer brand of their clients or whether a recruitment company has an employer brand of its own.

The case company has clearly employer branding of its own and it is not only a recruitment source as it employs part of the employees it recruits in the Philippines and also takes care of employees recruited to its client also after they have arrived and settled down in the host country. This is in line with Franca and Pahor's (2011) definition that employer brand covers the company's values, policies and behavior in the context of attracting, motivating and retaining the current and prospective employees. However, the case company's double role as an employer and recruiter add clearly a specific element to the employer branding and recruitment communication.

As discussed in Subchapter 2.1, Cable and Turban (2001) categorized the dimensions of employer brand image as employer information, job information and people

information. The importance of the host country was discussed above and it adds the location information to the dimensions. The double role of the recruitment company also adds a dimension, as in the role of the recruiter the recruitment company includes the attributes of its client company to the recruitment communication. In other words, employer information includes information about the recruitment company and its role in the recruitment process as well as information about the client company, the actual employer company. In addition that the recruitment company is managing the employer brand of its own, it is also creating the employer brand of its client company. As a conclusion it can be said that a recruitment company recruiting internationally has more dimensions in its employer brand image than an employer that recruits employees domestically.

As discussed in Chapter 2.1, employer brand research has its roots in research of product and service i.e. consumer (customer) brand. If the service of the recruitment company is considered, the service itself is employment. In other words, the service that the recruitment provides for free to job applicants i.e. b-to-c clients is employment and the service sold to companies i.e. b-to-b clients is an employee that does the work (among the other human resources related services). Therefore, in the case of the recruitment company, there is not a service to the consumers that they could purchase and thus they cannot have separate consumer brand image of the recruitment company. Logically this would imply that consumer brand and employer brand might overlap in the minds of the job seekers. The integrated brand model by Barrow and Mosley (2008) discussed in Subchapter 2.1 recognizes that although customer brand and employer brand compete in two different markets, they are interrelated. In the recruitment company's case, it may be concluded that they are even more interrelated, as the service itself is employment. Also branding and communication efforts of b-to-b branding need to be consistent with employer branding as recruited employees will work for the client companies and if the company fails to communicate a consistent image to all of its stakeholders, it threatens the company's integrity.

5.2 Employer branding in recruitment communication

The balance of extremely realistic communication and selling the host country

The representatives of the case company acknowledged the role of the employer brand in recruitment communication in attracting job applicants in the Philippines. All of the interviewees recognized the host country as an important element of the employer brand and recruitment communication.

A central feature of recruitment communication seemed to be balancing between selling Finland as an attractive option and giving extremely realistic view of work and living conditions in Finland. On one hand the case company has to attract suitable job applicants to apply to a country that they barely know and on the other hand the information has to be very realistic, even underlining things that might be seen as negative, so that not suitable applicant will not apply or they will withdraw from the process.

The realistic work and living condition reviews had three functions in recruitment communication of the case company. Firstly, the role of the recruitment was seen to provide realistic information as it hoped to encourage on one hand the right and suitable applicants to continue in the recruitment process and on the other hand not suitable applicants to withdraw from the recruitment process in the early stages of the process. This is in line with findings (Barber, 1998; Richardson et al., 2008) that realistic job reviews impact recruitment through self-selection, although high quality applicants are not deterred from applying. Realistic recruitment communication, including both positive and negative features, is hoped to attract those job applicants that would be satisfied and settle down in Finland. Secondly, recruitment communication was seen in role of increasing trust and perceptions of honesty as building trust among applicants was seen essentially important in the Philippines. Realistic recruitment was seen as an

important part of being an ethical recruiter. Thirdly, realistic communication was seen to have also long term consequences as it was hoped to increase commitment and job performance. Previous research has suggested all these functions as benefits of realistic job reviews and realistic recruitment (e.g. Barber, 1998). The finding of using realistic recruitment are in line with previous research on realistic job reviews discussed in Subchapter 2.2.

All of the interviewees recognized that in addition to all communication and behavior as well as the visibility of the case company's logo also informal, not company-controlled sources such as word-of-mouth were building the employer brand image in the minds of job applicants. They also recognized the need to manage the employer brand. However, the need was not seen urgent, as the company is now competing with recruiters from other countries and therefore the role of the host country in the attraction was seen as central. It was acknowledged that the situation changes when there will be other Finnish companies recruiting in the Philippines.

As a conclusion, it can be said that the importance of the host country and providing realistic information in recruitment communication seemed to have influenced on the case company's representatives' perceptions on the role of the employer brand and which employment attributes are emphasized in employer branding. Location information was seen as extremely important and all of the interviewees acknowledged that location information dominated in employer branding. Interestingly, people information was hardly mentioned. Job information was also seen important, as there are significant differences in work assignment and working cultures between Finland and the Philippines. It was seen crucial that these differences are communicated clearly and realistically. The double-role of the case company as an employer and recruiter could be seen in what attributes were emphasized. The interviewees passed the employer information of the case company although the employer information of the client company mentioned as important. All of the interviewees emphasized that the case company has to build its employer brand as reliable and ethical employer and

recruiter and they acknowledged the importance of consistent communication and behavior in creating this kind of employer brand image. However, the interviewees did not bring up specific employer attributes that are related to the brand vision they had.

Employer branding theory emphasizes the uniqueness and distinctiveness of brand. Interestingly the uniqueness of the case company as an employer and recruiter did not come up explicitly in the interviews, as the interviewees discussed very briefly about how the case company could differentiate as an employer and recruiter. The representatives of the case company did talk about reliability and ethicality as Opteam's strength and experience as a competitive advantage. However, reliability and ethicality can be also interpreted as features of similarity.

As discussed in Subchapter 2.1, Cornelissen (2011) refers to recent research that has shown that in corporate branding companies in some industries may also need to communicate the similarity of a company to others in its industry in order for the stakeholders to consider the company legitimate. In the case of the case company, the need to communicate reliability and ethicality serves purposes of being both distinctive and similar as an actor in international recruitment business. The case company needs to differentiate itself from recruitment companies that are not trustworthy and ethical. Simultaneously the same features make it a legitimate actor in the recruitment business and similar to other recruitment companies acting ethically. However, these features may not clearly differentiate the case company from other reliable and ethical recruitment companies. As the case company is a relatively small company in the international recruitment business and competing mainly with recruiters from other countries, the need to communicate similarity is important for keeping legitimacy. As Cornelissen (2011) states, companies with strong corporate reputations have less pressure to communicate similarity and they can emphasize distinctiveness without losing legitimacy. In the case of the case company, it may be more beneficial to communicate similarity than emphasize distinctiveness.

Employer branding in recruitment communication in early stages of the recruitment process

As discussed in Subchapter 2.2, Barber (1998) described the first phase of the recruitment process as an outreach to an applicant population in order to persuade some of it to apply for position. Recruitment communication in this phase is mainly impersonal mass communication via various media. In the second phase of the recruitment process, the focus is on attempting to persuade applicants to remain interested in the company and job opportunity. Recruitment communication in the second phase is interpersonal communication.

It was obviously seen from the interviews of the representatives of the case company, that recruitment communication in the first phase of the recruitment process was not seen as central as in the second phase. This seems to be due to the immense amount of applicants but also the role of the local partner in the recruitment process and legal restrictions. Recruitment communication and employer branding in the first phase of the recruitment process seemed to not have been systematic and to not have been clearly targeted to applicants that are wished to be attracted. However, as discussed in Section 2.2.2 brand awareness generates basis for brand attitudes and association between the brand and desirable attributes. Thus, employer branding is tightly related to recruitment communication in the first phase of the recruitment process. Employer branding research has suggested that impressions created in the first phase may influence the applicants' reactions in interviews in the second phase (Stevens, 1997).

The representatives of the case company recognized the role of consistent communication and behavior in employer branding in recruitment activities related to the second phase of the recruitment process. Internally the communication and behavior were perceived to be consistent, but it was acknowledged that recruitment communication should be better structured in order that it could be assured that also the

local partner communicates consistently and delivers the same messages as the case company's representatives. As discussed in Chapter 2.1, Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) depicted employer branding as a three-step process that addresses both external and internal stakeholder groups. The first step is to develop the message that is sent to applicants and employees through the brand. The second step is the external marketing of the employer brand, which primarily addresses applicants. The last step is the internal marketing that is also called internal branding. The goal of internal marketing is to commit employees to the values and goals of the company.

Backhaus' and Tikoo's (2004) model was used to analyze the case company's employer branding. The representatives had observed the need to structure communication and message, which would benefit the external and internal marketing of the employer brand. The internal marketing step seems to have been successful when the representatives of the case company are considered. However, internal marketing should be extended to the local partner as it takes care of significant part of the recruitment process and communication with applicants. Also the message development step would need to be considered further as it was pointed out in the interviews that the message could be clearer and better defined. Based on employer branding research, the order of the steps in Backhaus' and Tikoo's (2004) model could be questioned as internal marketing should come before external marketing in order that message is delivered consistently by the employees of the company and to avoid discrepancies. As Cornelissen (2011) notes if the company fails to communicate a consistent image, it threatens the company's integrity.

Sources of employer brand image – word-of-mouth as credible source

The representatives of the case company emphasized the importance of word-of-mouth as a source of employer brand image and recruitment source. According to their experience, word-of-mouth has increased awareness of the case company among job

applicants as recruited employees tell about their experiences to their relatives and friends in the Philippines. In the case company's representatives' opinion, the word-of-mouth has been mainly positive. Interestingly, nine of the survey respondents mention friends and relatives as a source of information about Opteam and employment in Finland. The earlier recruited friends were also mentioned in the open answers as reasons for attraction to apply.

The representatives of the case company acknowledged word-of-mouth as a powerful source of employer brand image because it is perceived credible. Credibility was seen especially important in the Philippines, as people tend to trust only family and friends. Recruitment research suggests that word-of-mouth may influence employer brand image, as information provided by people outside the company is perceived as more credible than the same information provided by the company's representatives (Collins & Stevens, 2002). The results of recruitment research have implied that relationship between word-of-mouth endorsements and the general attitudes towards a company and perceived job attributes are particularly strong (Collins & Stevens, 2002).

Previous research has also proposed that the company can increase the possibility of positive word-of-mouth endorsements with recruitment activities such as developing closer relationships with key individuals (Collins & Stevens, 2002). The representatives of the case company recognized the potential of word-of-mouth and suggested that word-of-mouth could be encouraged in the future if recruitment activities are for instance focused to certain nursing schools in the Philippines.

The representatives of the case company mentioned social media in relation to word-of-mouth. In their opinion, social media was an important channel for word-of-mouth. As the law of the Philippines restricts recruitment activities of foreign recruitment companies and this applies also to social media, the case company could encourage and take advantage of earned content in social media. However, as well as word-of-mouth in general and earned content in social media are not in direct control of the company, they

may be perceived more credible than company-controlled official sources of employer brand image (e.g. Wilden et al., 2010; Collins & Stevens, 2002).

Brand vision – reliable, safe and ethical employer and recruiter

The brand vision of Opteam was clearly seen in the interview answers of the representatives of Opteam. All of the representatives emphasized that Opteam has to make sure that it is also in the future seen as reliable, safe and ethical recruiter and employer. The interviewees recognized reliability and ethicality as the key elements of what Opteam's present employer brand and also how it wants to be seen in the future.

The representatives of Opteam agreed that employer brand would be more important once the company has to differentiate itself from its competitors recruiting to Finland. The crucial issue in the interviewees' views on employer brand vision was how Opteam is able to communicate that is particularly reliable. Also the consistency of communication was brought up as a point of development in order to improve the communication of the employer brand vision.

If the employer brand vision of Opteam in the Philippines is analyzed with the framework of different brand benefits (Barrow & Mosley, 2008; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004), the present employer brand seems to have quite well defined functional (tangible) benefits, but emotional (symbolic) benefits and brand values on other hand still need to be further defined and incorporated to the key messages in order to create employer brand that differentiates Opteam from domestic and also international competitors. Generally, the functional benefits are limited and the job related attributes are similar among competitors, but emotional benefits and employer brand values may be used to create favorable and distinctive employer brand image. Therefore, it is inevitable to further consider emotional benefits and employer brand values and then

create and communicate consistent and well-structured employer brand messages both internally (including the local partner in the Philippines) and externally.

5.3 Job applicants perceptions and employer brand image

When the survey respondents average answers to the first topic i.e. the perceptions of a good employer are analyzed, the focus seems to not be clearly either on internal or external features. The internal features that were rated as very important i.e. higher than 4.6 on the Likert scale were good employee benefits, good career advancement opportunities and good environment for working. These are clearly quite tangible and visible features and according to Gardner et al.'s (2012) categorization they are all directly related employment attributes. Both of the respondent groups rated most often good employee benefits among the three most important features of a good employer. These results implies that directly employment related attributes were perceived as the most important when considering a good employer.

From indirectly related employment attributes ethical values and open communication and good reputation were rated as very important. Interestingly good salary and appealing country came only after these features in rating. However, the chefs rated high salaries among the three most important features of a good employer. The representatives of the case company emphasized that the job applicants are almost only interested in salary and location, which was also seen to have great importance in attraction. The less valued features were superficial, external image features of recognizable and influential directors and media visibility. However, all features were rated with average 3.5 or higher on the Likert scale, also when the responses were divided according to the profession.

The respondents' average answers concerning the features matching with the image of Opteam rated appealing country, positive own experiences and high quality services to

match very well i.e. 4.5 or higher on the Likert scale. On the contrary, good salary as a feature was rated considerably lower i.e. 3.9 on the Likert scale. It was the second lowest ranked feature. The chefs, however, ranked the high salaries among the three most important features of a good employer This seems to indicate that although the case company cannot compete in salaries, the location is appealing to the job applicants and also other features besides good salary may be considered when making decisions to apply. Good employee benefits and investments to the well-being of the employees and recruited employees were rated among the most important features when respondents evaluated a good employer generally and Opteam as an employer and recruiter. This implies that the case company's competitive advantage among the job applicants may be the total package of an attractive employment package. However, all features rated with 3.7 or higher on the Likert scale, also when the responses were divided according to the profession.

As well as good reputation and positive word-of-mouth from both internal and external sources were rated on average to match well i.e. 4.3 on the Likert scale with the image of Opteam. This may indicate that the job applicants had been able to hear positive things about the case company in the early stage of the recruitment process and may have had influence also in the second phase of the recruitment process. The previous recruitment research supports this assumption as it has been argued that if employer brand awareness and positive associations grow in the first phase of the recruitment process, it creates positive attitudes toward recruitment communication and employer branding also in the later phases of the recruitment process (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004; Stevens, 1997).

Drawing together the responses to the first and second topic of the survey, it can be seen that certain features that generally were seen as very important i.e. 4.6 or higher on the Likert scale for a good employer, were not rated to match very well, but well with the image of Opteam. The feature of good employee benefits, which was rated highest as a feature of a good employer, was rated to match well i.e. 4.2 on the Likert scale with the

image of Opteam. The same applies to the feature of good reputation, which was rated as very important features of a good employer and to match well with Opteam. However, the chefs rated most often good employee benefits among the three most important features of a good employer and the three most well-matching statements with the image on Opteam. However, as almost all features of the first and second topic were rated between 4 and 5 on the Likert scale, it is difficult to make further conclusions about how important and well matching the features are seen in forming the employer brand image. Nevertheless, the general conclusion is that what a company does may be slightly more important for the respondents than what a company seem to be. The respondents valued higher the features that have to do with tangible and directly employment related issues such as employee benefits and investments to employees well-being. Least attention was given to external image features such as media visibility.

The respondents of the survey rated all statements related to Opteam's recruitment communication to match with they experience "quite well" i.e. 4.0–4.5 on the Likert scale. The purpose of this question and statements was to find out whether the recruitment communication was perceived as realistic and sufficient. Based on the averages of the answers it seems that recruitment communication has been perceived sufficient and both job reviews and living conditions reviews realistic. However, the responses only give a general indication about the perceptions and the topic should be further studied using for example interviews or focus groups in order to get better insight to the job applicant's perceptions.

The sources of employment information used by the survey respondents were analyzed with Cable's and Turban's (2001) internal versus external information sources and experiential versus information continuum. The most frequently used sources of employment information such as the representatives of Opteam and the local partner were both internal and experiential ends of the continuums with the exception of the Internet search, which can be categorized as external and experiential. Friends and

relatives were also chosen by nine respondents and as a source word-of-mouth can be also categorized as external and experiential. Experiential sources are generally perceived more credible than informational and internal sources to have greater expertise than external sources that on other hand are usually perceived more trustworthy (Cable & Turban, 2001). Hence, it may be concluded that respondents received employment information from sources that potentially have both credibility and expertise.

5.4 Correlation of employer brand vision and employer brand image

Based on the results of research questions 2 and 3, the Thesis examines whether brand vision i.e. how the case company would like it to be perceived and experienced correlates with the employer brand image of the case company i.e. how it is currently perceived and experienced.

According to the case company's definition a responsible and ethical recruiter and employer e.g. takes care of the recruited employees during and after the recruitment, provides extremely realistic employment information and communicates openly. The respondents perceived the case company e.g. to invest to the well-being of its employees and recruited employees and employment information was perceived as realistic and communication open. Based on the findings it seems that employer brand vision and employer brand image correlate in general. However, the representatives of the case company and the recruited employees seemed to perceive the importance of employment attributes such as salary and sources of employment information such as word-of-mouth somewhat differently.

The representatives of the case company emphasized the importance of salary as a employment attribute, although they acknowledged that when recruiting employees from the Philippines, the case company has to find other competitive advantages as it is

impossible to compete with salaries. Interestingly, the recruited employees rated high salary as the second lowest ranked feature of a good employer. The nurses, however, chose high salaries among the three most important features of a good employer. Nevertheless, high salary as an important employment attribute was not emphasized in the recruited employees 'answers. The findings may imply that the recruited employees had been attracted to apply as other competitive advantages such as good employee benefits and investments to the well-being of the recruited employees.

6 CONCLUSION

This chapter concludes the Master's Thesis by briefly summarizing the research in Subchapter 6.1 and practical recommendations in Subchapter 6.2, discussing limitations of the study in Subchapter 6.3 and making suggestions for future research in Subchapter 6.4.

6.1 Research summary

The study is motivated by the recent changes in the labor markets. Companies are increasingly competing to attract the best employees as Finland's and other European countries' population is ageing and the several industries are already facing labor shortages. It will be increasingly difficult to find enough competent employees in the domestic labor markets and employers may need to consider new approaches to human resources and recruitment such as employer branding and international recruitment as ways to find and attract employees.

The purpose of the Thesis was to investigate employer branding in the context of international recruitment and attracting employees. The area of study is both timely and

relatively marginally researched. In addition, the study provides benefits for the case company Opteam, as there is no previous study of the company's employer image.

The research questions for this study were as follows:

RQ1 **What are the specific elements of the employer branding in the case company (a recruitment company recruiting internationally)?**

RQ2 **How does the case company perceive the role of its external employer brand in recruitment communication in attracting international job applicants?**

RQ3 **How does the group of job applicants perceive the case company's external employer brand in recruitment communication?**

The literature review focused on presenting extant literature on key areas around the topic – employer branding, recruitment process, recruitment communication, international recruitment and recruitment companies. The theoretical framework for the Thesis was constructed from several different theories related to branding, communications and recruitment. The main contributors from extant research to the theoretical framework were Cable and Turban (2001), Franca and Pahor (2011), Gardner et al. (2012), Backhaus & Tikoo (2004) and Barber (1998).

In the empirical part of the study, the phenomenon was investigated from the viewpoint of the case company and the external stakeholder group of potential employees. Both qualitative (interviews) and quantitative (survey) methods were used to gather and analyze the data. The empirical part of the study was conducted through online survey for recruited employees and interviews with four representatives of the case company Opteam. The main findings of the Thesis are presented below.

In relation to research question 1, the findings of this study indicated that the specific elements of the case company's employer branding in international recruitment were related to both the specific conditions in the Philippines and recruitment business. The specific elements identified were the importance of the host country, the local recruitment partner, the labor markets conditions in the Philippines and the double-role of the recruitment company. All these identified specific elements impacted employer branding in recruitment communication in different ways such as simultaneous selling of the host country as a good place to work and live and providing extremely realistic information, the limited use of the company-controlled sources of employment information and legal restrictions to communication and marketing.

In relation to research question 2, the findings implied that the importance of the host country and providing realistic information in recruitment communication seemed to have influence on the case company's representatives' perceptions on the role of the employer brand in recruitment communication and which employment attributes are emphasized in employer branding. The findings clearly indicated that location information dominated in employer branding and recruitment communication is balancing between extremely realistic information and selling the host country. The brand vision of Opteam was clearly stated by the representatives of the case company, who emphasized that Opteam has to make sure that it is also in the future seen as reliable, safe and ethical recruiter and employer. The interviewees recognized reliability and ethicality as the key elements of Opteam's present employer branding. The representatives perceived word-of-mouth as important recruitment source, as credible and actively used source of employment information and social media as an important channel for word-of-mouth.

In relation to research question 3, the findings indicate the features that have to do with tangible and directly employment related issues such as employee benefits and investments to employees well-being were valued higher when the respondents evaluated the case company as an employer. Least attention was given to external image

features such as media visibility. The findings seem to indicate that although the case company cannot compete with salaries, the location is appealing to the job applicants and other features besides good salary may be important when making decisions to apply. Respondents perceived recruitment communication sufficient and both job reviews and living conditions reviews realistic. The most frequently used sources of employment information such as the representatives of Opteam and the local partner were both internal and experiential ends of the continuums with the exception of the Internet search, which can be categorized as external and experiential. Respondents mentioned, but not especially emphasize word-of-mouth from friends and relatives as an important source of employment information.

Finally, based on the results of research questions 2 and 3, the Thesis examined whether the case company's brand vision correlates with the respondents' employer brand image of the case company. According to the case company's definition a responsible and ethical recruiter and employer e.g. takes care of the recruited employees during and after the recruitment, provides extremely realistic employment information and communicates openly. The respondents perceived the case company e.g. to invest to the well-being of its employees and recruited employees and employment information was perceived realistic and communication open. Based on the finding it seems that employer brand vision and employer brand image correlate in general. However, the representatives of the case company and the recruited employees seemed to perceive the importance of employment attributes such as salary and word-of-mouth as a source of employment information somewhat differently.

6.2 Practical recommendations

Based on the findings, this study has derived practical recommendations for Opteam in communicating its employer brand in the Philippines. In light of this study, it is recommended that firstly, in order to develop further a strong and unique employer

brand, the case company may need to consider the message development and symbolic benefits that would create favorable and distinctive employer brand image. The company values may need to translate to be relevant and meaningful for job applicants. As the competition will get tougher, communication functional benefits will not be enough, as symbolic benefits are more difficult to copy than functional benefits.

Secondly, it is recommended that internal marketing of the employer brand to the local partner is intensified as the local partner has considerably role in communicating with the job applicants. As the employer brand message is further developed, it needs to be first marketed internally also to the local partner, in order that all communication and behavior is consistent and delivering the same employer brand message.

Finally, it is recommended that the possibility of positive word-of-mouth endorsements is increased among the recruited employees with recruitment activities such as developing closer relationships with key individuals, who are the recruited employees working in Finland. The key individuals could be encouraged to act as employer brand ambassadors and mentors to potential job applicants in the Philippines as not company-controlled sources may be perceived more credible among the applicants.

The representatives of the case company mentioned social media in relation to word-of-mouth. In their opinion, social media was an important channel for word-of-mouth. As the law of the Philippines restricts recruitment activities of foreign recruitment companies and this applies also to social media, the case company could encourage and take advantage of earned content in social media.

6.3 Limitations

There are some limitations related to this research. Firstly, the Thesis provides an in-depth analysis of external employer brand of the case company. As a single-case study the findings of the study cannot be straightforwardly generalized and expanded outside the case company. However, as a single-case study the Thesis provides valuable information on a relatively new phenomenon of the employer image in the context of international recruitment and insights as well as suggestions for improvements and development for the case company.

Secondly, sample of respondents sets some limitations to this research. The quantity of the respondents could have been larger in order to improve the reliability of the empirical part of the study. The author had to make the assumption that the recruited employees are able to consider the questions from the their previous role as job applicants. However, the author has to consider the possibility that the respondents may have not been able or willing to consider the questions from the intended viewpoint.

Thirdly, limitation for the study is subjectivity on the part of the author, as she is currently employed by the case company. This may be present in the author taking some things for granted, as the case company is very familiar to her. However, the author's position in the case company is not directly related to the international recruitment process and recruitment communication in the Philippines.

6.4 Recommendations for further research

The present study suggests at least two directions for further study. As a single case study the Thesis provides an in-depth analysis of external employer brand of the case company. In order get more general understanding of recruitment companies' employer

branding and employer brand image it would be useful to conduct also a multiple case study that compares employer branding and employer brand images of recruitment companies.

The employer brand image of the case company could also be studied further. This study focused on the employer brand image in the context of international recruitment and the Philippines as the country of origin of the recruitment. The perceptions of the job applicants could be further studied using for instance theme interviews or focus groups. The employer brand image of the case company could also be studied among Finnish job applicants.

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APPENDICES

Survey questionnaire

The survey for the employees recruited by Opteam from the Philippines.

Please answer the following background questions.

1. Your gender

O Female
O Male

2. Your age

O less than 20
O 20-29
O 30-39
O 40-49
O 50-59
O 60 or more

3. Have you ever worked abroad before Opteam recruited you?

O Yes
O No

4. Please think of a company that in your opinion is a good employer. How important are the following features for such a company?
Please use the scale: 1=Not at all important 2=Quite little important 3=Somewhat important 4=Quite important 5=Very important

Which of the features are the three most important? Please choose the three most important features in the last column.

	Not at all important			Very important		
	1	2	3	4	5	Choose the three most important
The products and services of the company are of high quality	O	O	O	O	O	O
The company is visible in the media	O	O	O	O	O	O
The company has a good reputation	O	O	O	O	O	O
People talk positively about the company	O	O	O	O	O	O
I have heard about positive experiences from an employee of the company	O	O	O	O	O	O
I have positive experiences of my own of the company	O	O	O	O	O	O
The company has values that I can accept and relate to	O	O	O	O	O	O
The company has policies that I can accept	O	O	O	O	O	O
The company has clear vision of its future	O	O	O	O	O	O
The company pays its employees high salaries	O	O	O	O	O	O
The company offers good employee benefits (health care etc.)	O	O	O	O	O	O
The company offers its employees a good environment for working (working space, equipment etc)	O	O	O	O	O	O
The company offers its employees a possibility for continuous education	O	O	O	O	O	O
The company offers good career advancement opportunities	O	O	O	O	O	O
The company has a positive internal atmosphere and the employees are satisfied	O	O	O	O	O	O
The company has recognizable and influential directors	O	O	O	O	O	O
The company has ethical values and communicates openly	O	O	O	O	O	O
The country where the company operates is appealing to me	O	O	O	O	O	O
Something else	O	O	O	O	O	O

If you chose "something else", please specify:

_____

_____

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5. Please think about the situation a few years back when you lived in the Philippines and you had decided to apply employment through Opteam. How well do you think the following statements match the image you had on Opteam then?
Please use the scale: 1=Not at all 2=Quite little 3=Somewhat 4=Quite well 5=Very well

Which of the statements fit the best with the image you had on Opteam? Please choose the three statements in the last column.

	Not at all				Very well	Choose the three statements that fit the best on the image you had on Opteam
	1	2	3	4	5	
The services of Opteam are of high quality	○	○	○	○	○	○
Opteam is visible in the media	○	○	○	○	○	○
Opteam has good reputation	○	○	○	○	○	○
Opteam has values that I can accept and relate to	○	○	○	○	○	○
Opteam has policies that I can accept	○	○	○	○	○	○
Opteam has clearly indicated what its vision as a company is	○	○	○	○	○	○
One can hear mainly positive things of Opteam from sources outside of the company	○	○	○	○	○	○
One can hear mainly positive things of Opteam from sources inside of the company	○	○	○	○	○	○
My own experience of Opteam are positive	○	○	○	○	○	○
Employees recruited by Opteam are paid high salaries	○	○	○	○	○	○
Opteam offers good employee benefits	○	○	○	○	○	○
Opteam invests in the well-being of its employees and recruited employees	○	○	○	○	○	○
Opteam has a positive internal atmosphere and employees are satisfied	○	○	○	○	○	○
Opteam has recognizable and influential directors	○	○	○	○	○	○
Opteam is as an employer/recruiter appealing to me	○	○	○	○	○	○
The country where Opteam operates (Finland) is appealing to me	○	○	○	○	○	○
Something else	○	○	○	○	○	○

If you chose "something else", please specify:
_____

_____

6. Please think of the Opteam's recruitment process in the Philippines. How well do you think the following statements match the experience you had on Opteam's recruitment process.
Please use the scale: 1=Not at all 2=Quite little 3=Somewhat 4=Quite well 5=Very well

	Not at all				Vey well
	1	2	3	4	5
I was able to get enough information about the employment offer	○	○	○	○	○
I was able to get enough information about Opteam	○	○	○	○	○
The information about the employment was realistic	○	○	○	○	○
The information about Finland was realistic	○	○	○	○	○
I was able to ask for more information from Opteam's representatives	○	○	○	○	○
Opteam's representatives communicated openly	○	○	○	○	○
All of the Opteam's representatives communicated consistently	○	○	○	○	○

7. Please select the channels you used to get information about Opteam and employment in Finland during the recruitment process in the Philippines.

☐ Internet (for example Google search)
☐ POEA's internet page
☐ POEA's representatives
☐ Edi StaffBuilders' internet page
☐ Edi StaffBuilders' representatives
☐ Opteam's internet page
☐ Opteam's representatives in the Philippines
☐ Opteam's information sessions
☐ Opteam's language teacher
☐ Opteam's info material about Finland
☐ Information from friends and relatives
☐ Social media
☐ Employment ad in a newspaper
☐ Something else, what:

8. Please describe in a few sentences what attracted you to apply employment through Opteam? When and where did you hear about Opteam for the first time?