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Outtweeting the competitors - how social media is used in employer branding in Finland

International Business

Master's thesis

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Objectives: This thesis studies social media usage in international companies based in Finland. The first objective is to find out how companies use social media to attract their employees. Second, an objective is to study how social media activities of a company affect the applicant's perceptions of the company and if it had any effect when choosing their employer.

Methods: The methodological approach of this thesis was qualitative. Five companies were interviewed. Additionally, employees from two of the respective companies were interviewed to find out how they experienced companies social media activities related to employee attraction.

Results: The study found that companies operating in Finland actively use various social media channels for employer branding and use it in variety of ways. The use combinations include traditional job ads and more general employer branding communications, which are both done in rather traditional ways, but also some new methods suited for social media are being used. The employees seemed to be very positively positioned towards social media and felt that it is an important contributor to a company's attractiveness as an employer, however they stated that they for them the social media had not affected their choice of employee. From this perspective for the employees there seems to be a discrepancy between the perceived effect of social media and the actual effect.

Keywords employee branding, social media, qualitative study

Tutkimuksen tavoitteet: Tutkimuksen tavoitteena on analysoida kansainvälisten Suomessa toimivien yritysten sosiaalisen median käyttöä työnantajakuvan luomisessa. Tutkimuksen ensimmäinen tavoite on saada selville millä tavalla yritykset käyttävät sosiaalista media työntekijöiden houkuttelussa. Toinen tavoite on saada selville millä tavalla yritysten toiminta sosiaalisessa mediassa vaikuttaa työntekijöiden mielikuvaan yrityksestä ja sen mahdollisista vaikutuksista työnantajan valitsemiseen.

Tutkimusmetodit: Tutkimus toteutettiin kvalitatiivisella metodilla käyttäen apuna semi-stukturoituja haastatteluja yritysten työnantajakuvan luomisesta vastaavien työntekijöiden kanssa. Työntekijöiden haastattelut tehtiin sähköisinä haastatteluina. Tutkimuksen haastateltiin viittä yritystä ja yhdeksää työntekijää kahdesta näistä yrityksistä. Työntekijöiden haastatteluissa keskityttiin saamaan selville millä tavalla yritysten sosiaalisen media käyttö vaikuttaa heidän työnantajan valintaansa ja mielipiteisiinsä yrityksistä työnantajana.

Tutkimustulokset: Tutkimus osoittaa että Suomessa toimivat yritykset käyttävät aktiivisesti useita sosiaalisen median kanavia työnantajakuvan luomiseen monilla eri tavoilla. Sosiaalista mediaa käytetään perinteisesti työpaikkailmoituksia varten ja yleisempään työnantajakuvan luomiseen. Molempia varten yritykset käyttävät niin perinteisiä keinoja kuin myös uudempia tapoja, jotka sopivat paremmin sosiaalista mediaa varten. Työntekijät vaikuttivat olevan hyvin positiivisia sosiaalista mediaa kohtaan ja olivat sitä mieltä että sosiaalisen median käyttö on erittäin tärkeä tekijä työnantajan houkuttelevuuden kannalta. Kuitenkaan työntekijät eivät olleet itse kokeneet sosiaalisen median toiminnan vaikuttaneen heidän päätöksiinsä työnantajan valinnassa. Tältä kannalta tulokset osoittavat että työntekijöiden mielikuva sosiaalisen median vaikuttavuudesta työnantajakuvaan ei käy käsi kädessä sen todellisen vaikutuksen kanssa.

Avainsanat Työnantajakuvan luominen, työnantajakuva, sosiaalinen media, kvalitatiivinen tutkimus

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study and the Research Problem

Social media is the blessing and the curse of our time and it has penetrated the daily lives of hundreds of millions of people in a decade, making many private, corporate and governmental actions public in a matter of minutes. Not only has social media saturated people's personal lives, but is also an extremely important field of play for companies as marketing has shifted more and more to social media because of the intense competition for clients and employees (Barwise & Meehan 2010). Because social media has become more important in corporate communications (Brawise & Meehan 2010, Huy & Shipilov 2012) it is becoming essential for companies to use it also in reinforcing their employer brands. However there is still ambiguity about the effectiveness of social media in marketing, for example the real reach of Facebook is often doubted in the recent researches (Sashittal & al 2012), however the topicality of this theme will surely spark new research and reveal some facts behind the hype.

Huy & Shipilov (2012) indicate, in their research about social media use in organizations, that even though only about half of companies had social media initiatives in 2010 the interest towards social media use was rapidly rising, not least for companies like Virgin Atlantic or Tupperware, who have been able to engage both employees and customers through social media. Since the rising interest on social media uses and its effects on business are evident, both in academia and in managers, this research is designed to clarify this issue by understanding how international companies use social media for employer branding purposes and how is it seen from the users perspective.

Through signing up to social media sites like Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Youtube and/or by creating a blog, the corporations can easily access millions and millions of users around the world, and through this engagement they are affecting their employer brand and company image in general. Social media is used to communicate with

stakeholders about their business operations, post jobs, search for potential candidates, promote trainee-programs and have a genuine dialogue with the social media users; all of these actions are essentially part of employer branding (Russel 2009).

Social media presence can be very beneficial for companies, when used correctly, however according to Taskinen's investigation (2011) the use of social media for corporate communications is still in a development stage in Finland and the companies are building up their social media presence gradually while learning the ropes of this new media. Because of the fast adaptation of the use of social media, I believe that in two years the social media use has increased even more, making the subject even more topical at this date.

There is also some recent research about employer branding and its incarnations in Finland. A recent Finnish study from Simonen (2011) about employer branding in large companies operating in Finland already paved the road for further research. The results indicated that although large companies realized the need for employer branding the funding and company engagement were perceived to be flimsy according to the respondents; companies with HQ's abroad however fared better employer branding methods wise (Simonen 2011). Simonen's findings show that employer branding is a relevant field of study as companies are actively engaging in it, but, as always, further research is needed. Furthermore if considering both Simonen's (2011) and Taskinen's (2011) research results simultaneously; they both provided topical evidence of the business decision makers' interest towards both social media use and employer branding in Finnish context, which highlights the need for further investigations in this field.

To further improve our understanding of social media use for employer branding, a topic which has not yet been extensively research, it is best to start from the basic concepts and concentrate on the common manifestations of employer branding in social media. There is substantial research about employer branding, and other related or more specific concepts like talent management and employer reputation. By combining this with the studies from the field of marketing and social media studies, the background should be well set for the aims of this research. In this way the stage can be set for later

research going to more specific topics. I decided to focus this research on describing what makes an effective employer brand in social media from the point of view of the users. This point of view is important since it is the opinion of the company actions through the eyes of the employee, who, in the case of employer branding, is the consumer of the product.

1.2 Research Objective and Research Questions

As already established above, there is only a few academic investigations about corporate operations in social media related to their employer branding. Because of this, this research is trying to shed light on how companies are using social media for employer branding; channels, methods, actions and on the other hand find out if these have had an effect on the employees' decision to apply to the specified company. As an outcome, it is possible that some implications can be derived on how companies can leverage their social media use in order to improve their employer brands or focus their efforts towards the most effective methods and channels. The objective is to understand how companies are using social media for employer branding, if they are using it all, and how these efforts are affecting people's outtake of the company in general and tendency to apply to this company.

In order to reach the research objective, the following two research questions need to be answered:

1. How do companies operating in Finland use social media for employer branding in terms of attraction of new employees?
2. Does the use of social media affect the job applicants' likeliness to apply to the company?

As stated before this research is in a way divided into two parts; the first examining employer branding in social media from the employers side, and the second focusing on the view of the employees. The first research question dives into the employer side and tries to establish how companies are using social media for employer branding, what social media websites they are using, what are the actions that they are doing in social media and how do they want to affect their attractiveness as an employer?

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The second research question is focused on how the employees see the company's employer branding actions in social media; did they notice them and did they have an effect on their decision to apply to this company. This is an important aspect in this study, because the aim is to understand if the company's use of social media at the current level has affected their employer brand. And since in the literature good employer branding is argued to increase potential employees' interest towards a selected company, this question should reveal if the actions in social media affected the employees' conscious decision making when applying to the company.

The topic of this study is significant not only because the use of social media is rising constantly and its uses are now more and more established as a normal part of business from sales, marketing and employer branding viewpoint, but also because talent management and thus employer branding are currently hot topics both among academia and corporations. As talent management becomes ever so important as companies want to ensure they have the best employees, also the interest towards how companies are trying to attract the talent, for example through employer branding is rising – and what would be a more topical subject than social media as the new rising channel. The studied issue could be argued to be interesting also because it involves closely the sustainability of employers, and how they communicate their employer promise to employee candidates, and on the other hand the responsibility of the employee as another side in the psychological contract.

1.3   Definitions

Talent Management

Synthesizing and adopting the definition of Scullion, Collings & Cagliari (2010) and Collings and Mellahi (2009) I define talent management as the company's actions to attract,

recruit, maintain and develop the strategically identified talent. So in a way I see it as an umbrella term for employer branding, that being a more specific term.

Employer Branding

The deliberate effort of a firm to market its corporate image both to internal and external stakeholders, especially employees, in order to develop its talent pool. Can also been seen as the process which differentiates the company's employer image from that of its competitors and possibly creates competitive advantage by hoarding strategically relevant talent. (Moroko & Uncles 2009; Branham 2011)

Key talent

The key talent can be identified as employees with strategic capabilities and skills that are defined to be in the utmost interest of the company and possible candidates to fill the key strategic roles in the corporate hierarchy (Mäkelä et al 2010)

Social media

Social media is an online platform which through interactivity enhances conversation, provides the users with the possibility to instantly create, acquire and share the content with other users, while ignoring geographic or demographic barriers (Andrews 2012, Hensel & Deis 2010; Madia 2011).

Social media strategy is the consistent corporate guidelines by which a company will engage its stakeholders through the use of modern Web 2.0 technologies, and the continuously evolving new platforms, in involving the customers, employees and other related groups in its network. (Andrews 2012, Kaplan & Haenlein 2010)

2   LITERATURE REVIEW

In the following section I will go through and analyse the existing literature which is related to employer branding and social media, in order to proof the academic validity of this research and to construct a cohesive academic base on which this research can be built upon. First I will review the theories about talent management from the HR perspective, as it is often seen as an umbrella term for employer branding, or at least according to academia the processes of these two are found to be more or less similar. This section will be followed by the outlook on employer branding research. Employer branding research is basically formed from research from both human resource and branding research, from the field of marketing, hence this theme is explained by addressing research from both of these disciplines respectively. The employer branding research is relatively new since the branch fundamentally started from Ambler and Barrow's (1996) research, and in the literature corporate branding, internal branding and employer branding have been discussed often somewhat equivocally, hence a definition of the employer branding, that is the subject of this research, is essential.

The third part of the literature review is constructed of the inspection and analysis of research focused on social media. The examination of research about social media for this research can be rather demanding because there are not many articles about social media and employer branding, resulting from the recent emergence of this media. Hence I will go through investigations and articles relating social media marketing, recruitment and the few works related to employer branding, since this will provide us the framework on assessing social media in relation to employer branding in a scale and point-of-view needed for this research. Largely because the social media studies are a young field of research there is an apparent void of academic articles, hence the best and relevant available writings from industry professionals are also included in the discussion. However, having the whole literature review in mind, the main emphasis of this literature analysis is put on the academic side of the publications.

Through this evaluation of the related literature a theoretical framework is weaved to serve as a graphical illustration of the main theoretical pillars on which this whole investigation is

based. The theoretical framework is constructed in order to use in the analysis of the empirical findings, so that the findings can be effectively linked to the appropriate academic literature.

2.1   Talent Management

A concept which has become a modern HR classic and much quoted term in the respective HR and management literature towards the 21th century, talent management became a hot topic since its inception in the academic field by Michael et al. (2001). This group of McKinsey and company consultants postulated in their report "War on Talent" that as the competition between companies is getting more intense and the fight for the best employees is intensifying, the importance of skilled labour and talent has become a key resource that can enable competitiveness for companies (Michael & al 2001). Going forward from the publication of this report, academics have discussed the novelty of this idea and the different approaches to conceptualize the term and solve this problem, for example Ambler and Barrows (1996) followed by Ewing et al. (2002), Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) and Moroko and Uncles (2008, 2009) proposed a solution using the traditional marketing approach of branding the company in order to differentiate the firm of its competitors. Talent management is not any more seen only as the responsibility of HR department, but it has also been discussed as being integral factor of company's key resources (Barney 1991; Collings & Mellahi, 2009).

2.1.1   Definitions of Talent Management

Because of the comprehensive nature of talent management as an business process and the interdisciplinary approach which follows, most of the definitions of talent management share the view of it being a concept for the organization as a whole.

"Global talent management includes all organizational activities for the purpose of attracting, selecting, developing and retaining the best employees in the most strategic roles (those roles necessary to achieve organizational strategic priorities) on a global scale. Global talent management takes into account the differences in both organizations global strategic priorities as well as the differences across national contexts for how talent should be managed in the countries where they operate"

(Scullion, Collings & Cagliari, 2010 p. 106)

Formulating their definition of talent management more from the view point of the key role identification Collings and Mellahi, in their definition, emphasize the importance of finding the best employees to these key positions.

"organisational talent management strategy as activities and processes that involve the systematic identification of key positions which differentially contribute to the organisation's sustainable competitive advantage, the development of a talent pool of high potential and high performing incumbents to fill these roles, and the development of a differentiated human resource architecture to facilitate filling these positions with competent incumbents and to ensure their continued commitment to the organisation."

(Collings & Mellahi 2009 p. 305)

In other words, in their approach strategic talent management focuses on those employees who are part of the company's strategic internal talent pool or are in one of the company´s strategic positions and identified as talent (ibid).

As for this research talent management can be seen as conceptual major for employer branding as the processes that it entails are in many ways the same as those of employer branding. At least the conceptual fit is perfect when observed from HR perspective.

There have been substantial amounts of academic dialogue about talent management and the views and definitions of this term have been varied. However widely quoted view, about the division of the field of study of talent management, by Lewis and Heckman (2006) identifies the field as threefold.

1. Substituting term HR with TM; strong focus on one area such as: recruitment, succession planning, employees' skill development
2. Identification of talent pools and their development related to the staffing needs of those pools and the progression planning in the pools.
3. Focus on management of talented people. Identification and division between "A performers and C players" and the organizational adjustments and actions linked to this division.

A fourth field was later defined and added to the discussion by Collings & Mellahi (2009):

4. Identification of key positions, which strongly impact the firm's competitive advantage, inside the firm and planning of the strategic skill needs of these key positions going forward (Boudreau & Huselid, 2005; Huselid & al., 2005).

2.1.2   What is talent and how is it identified?

Stemming from the definition of talent management, as a process aimed at identifying and acquiring the necessary talent to achieve strategic success, the problem of identifying the talent and defining "who are labelled as talent in firms" arises (Stahl et al 2012). This is of course an issue which is also linked to employer branding; companies want to maximize the beneficial effect of a positive employer brand in the employee segment, which they perceive as the most interesting. The interest often goes hand-in-hand with talent.

Even though, this study focuses on employer branding in social media more than in general talent management, the issue of identifying talent also affects the employer branding

process. The question of how individuals are labelled as talent in firms is addressed in the article of Mäkelä et al. (2010) and Lewis and Heckman (2006) offer one answer by defining talent as employees, who are difficult to replace and possess important skill-sets for achieving the strategic goals. Company "decision makers" are however found to have their own biases because of company's internal politics, lack of objective information of the candidates or preference on selecting similar people as themselves, which all affect how the talented individuals are identified (Mäkelä & al. 2010). There is also the careful choice of deciding between whether to promote internal or external hiring (Capelli 2008), however in this study this criteria and the selection is not included as it is not considered a key factor for the aims. These factors highlight the challenges and complexity of identifying the talented individuals inside and outside the company.

One possible solution to the issue of identifying the right talent is combining marketing tools with the company strategy in order to segment the employee market and then focus on the employees in these targeted segments (Moroko & Uncles 2009). The segmentation strategy conjoined with the pivotal talent pool thinking, in my opinion, indicates the two sides of the talent management process; first is the internal screening of the needs of the company and the second is the breakdown of the possible employees in the market and the targeting of the most interesting groups in that moment.

The process of analyzing the potential employees and finding the talent is very much based on the company's ability to identify the kind of talent it needs. The process according to Collings and Mellahi (2009) is based on identifying the "pivotal talent pools" and "pivotal strategic positions" to which the talent is recruited in predictive style. Such forecasting of future employee needs and the overall development of the company necessitates strategic vision and naturally resources to plot the possible future scenarios. Other very important note by Collings and Mellahi (ibid) is that companies should acknowledge that there should be a balance between the "best" talent (or A-players) and "good-enough" talent (C-players), so that company does not waste precious resources on having over qualified employees for basic jobs. An issue arising from the talent pool thinking and internal hiring is the

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correlation between being an important asset in one strategic position and having the same level of potential when a higher strategic position with different responsibilities is considered (Lewis & Heckman , 2006).

This study will approach talent management from the view point identified by Collings and Mellahi (2009), talent management as being a process of critically selecting the key strategic positions in the company and acquiring the most talented and appropriate people to hold them. This view very well addresses the two sides of talent management; getting the best people to the company and putting them to work with the critical tasks in which they will be most valuable.

2.2   Employer branding

Employer branding, which can be seen as a term to describe certain kind of HR actions and which is much used in the HR literature, originally emerged to academic literature from the marketing discipline and gradually changed to also include HR researchers in the discussion (Edwards 2010). Edwards, in his comprehensive review of the employer branding field, explains that as offshoot from the product branding field, in which brand embodies the attributes and images associated to a product, the employer branding applies the "science of branding" to firm's HR activities, in a way that it represents the "unique and particular employer experience" (Edwards 2010 p. 6). This is based on the ground work about the employer branding from Ambler and Barrow (1996), they were the firsts to describe employer branding as a concept in HR as the factors which influence the employee's willingness to apply to and to continue working in a certain firm. In other words they introduced the traditional marketing tool of branding to HR terms and explained how it could be seen as an inclusive term for actions which differentiated the company as an employer. According to Ambler and Barrow (1996) it was this offering of distinctive financial and economic rewards that might differentiate a firm from the other. Backhaus

and Tikoo (2004) used the "employer experience" as a similar term when describing how the company specific offerings to the employees were to make a clear distinction between them and the competitors and create a unique employer image in the eyes of the prospective and current employees. Edwards (2010) further deepens the view of employer branding from just the tangible and intangible offering of the firm to also include the image and values, which gives it a more substance and creates a stronger identity of the company. Knox et al. (2000) dubbed such employer identity as "unique organisational value proposition" which essentially means the distinctive bundle of features that are part of being employed in a certain company.

So this mix of intangible and tangible attributes, from monetary gains to the psychological fulfilment and the sense of belonging, which stem from the communicated core values and mentality of the company, are the mix which can be accounted as employer branding as it is seen through the employees eyes (Edwards 2010). And according to Martin et al. (2000) the aim, is that employer branding tries *"to deal with the complex task of harmonizing internal belief with the external brand message" (p. 79)*, so in other words it is the surface what prospective employees see, and is based on what is the essence of the company. Something which I perceive to be important in this view is the employees' perspective, since similarly as product brand is targeted at an end consumer, the employer brand is targeted at the potential or existing employee and their perception of the brand is the important aspect.

The big need and the scarcity of talent needed in the business world has not changed from the times of Ambler and Barrows, or perhaps only grown more solemn, as companies become more and more knowledge based, this is also why employer branding and its applications to businesses have remained in the discussion, both in the HR and marketing literature (App et al 2012; Backhaus & Tikoo 2004). The same authors continue that the challenges to businesses don't only come from the scarcity of the skilled employees but also from the diversity in the workforce, deriving from different cultural backgrounds, new types of career expectations and the lengthening of careers. For example, currently companies are not supposed to be employers for life, but workforce is more fluid and

project based work is seen as viable career option; this means that also HR has to adapt its expectations and modify its offering to suit the varied needs of the employees (App et al 2012).

Franca and Pahor (2012) made an important division of the existing literature and noted that usually employer branding has referred to either the internal branding with existing employees (Graeme et al 2004; Mangold & Miles 2007) or to attracting potential recruits (Wilden et al 2010; Berthon et al 2005; Moroko & Uncles 2008) or to both (Foster et al 2010). The argumentation of Foster, Punjaisri and Cheng is understandable as employer branding cannot only be seen as a one or the other, but moreover it is a concept which has to affect both the current employees and the potential employees to be successful.

There also has been more recent studies from Franca and Pahor (2012), Moroko and Uncles (2008) and Shen (2011) in which the emphasis has shifted from just defining employer branding and the description of it to more analytical approach, where quantifiable metrics and real-life results are portrayed. In addition, in their investigation about the key attributes of an attractive employer brand, Berthon, Ewing and Hah (2005) came up with key dimensions of employer branding that are necessary in marketing the employer brand to the employees. The above investigations are of benefit for this research as these studies prove that there is a real business case in employer branding and that it can be used effectively and measured with at least some criteria. Others, mainly from the managerial side, like Ashton and Morton (2005) have put together step-by-step processes, which explicitly explain the stages that include in a successful employer branding. The realization of the process obviously follows the pattern of any strategic implementation of a HR or organizational change process; hence the contribution to the academic side has remained slim to say the least.

2.2.1 Definition of employer branding

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The definition of employer branding that underlines this research is based on Edwards' definition, which is in its turn well derived from the academia.

> *employer branding campaigns will tend to involve the clarification and management of an organisation's tangible and intangible employment offering, it will also tend to involve managing aspects of the organisation's image and identity and these will be presented through sophisticated communication campaigns*

Edwards 2010 p. 7

For this research I will use a modified version of Edwards (2010 p. 7) definition of employer branding because it incorporates and sums the knowledge from the academia and represent also my idea of employer branding as it includes the important aspect of various communication channels. So the definition of employer branding for this research is as follows:

Employer branding consists of *clarification and management of an organisation's tangible and intangible employment offering ...managing aspects of the organisation's image and identity*, which are communicated effectively through modern and diverse communications channels and is aimed to establish the company as the employer of choice.

Why to choose employer branding as the used term instead of other similar terms like internal or corporate branding, which are sometimes used almost synonymously?

Corporate branding refers more to the cohesive internal and external image of the company to all its stakeholders and extends from corporate communications to CRS and internal branding is discussed as a vessel of internal marketing; meaning that the focus on the acquisition of the right employees and maintaining them has been less discussed in the corporate branding or internal branding literature (Aaker 2004; Balmer 2001; Foster et al 2010; King 1991: in Foster et al 2010, p402). In addition to the above definition derived from Edwards, Knox and Freeman (2006, p697) underline that employer brand image "is

the image associated with an organisation uniquely in its role as an employer", which clearly differentiates the term from the other two.

2.2.2 Creation of an employer brand

Creating consistent employer experience for the employees through employer branding is the key in creating a strong employer brand, this holistic approach (Foster et al 2010) should be carefully aligned with the company's values and should be clear on all levels of the company; therefore it should be visible through all the actions taken by the company. The consistency between the outside image and the internal culture create and fulfil the psychological contracts of the employees (Rousseau & Wade-Benzoni 1994) hence they feel at home in the company and the trust also develops. Whether it is towards the outside or the inside, the employer branding and all the branding and PR efforts should go hand in hand (Sullivan 1999), and they should be developed and adapted according to the changes in the surrounding environment (Foster et al 2010). Now this change of environment has quickly changed the way how firms are communicating with the public, mainly through the application of internet based social media. Besides the companies should also be tracking the employer branding actions of their competitors and their presence in social media, as the competitive advantage derived from employer brand (Moroko & Uncles 2008) can be also lost if the consistency is neglected. So it could be argued that at the moment social media presence of firm's is at critical point; the transformation from novelty, to a required communications channel, is causing companies to start researching and adapting social media strategies with a fast pace.

In addition to communication efforts intended to enforce the employer brand, the perception about the employee is also affected by information from other sources. An important note about the employer brand attractiveness is the relationship between the product brands of the company and the employer brand; companies with weak product

brands might find it difficult to attract skilled employees to the company (Wilden et al 2010). Mangold & Miles (2007) also remind that the employees often gather their information about the employer brand and the company through product advertising and public relations campaigns; because of which also the impact of these campaigns on the employer branding should be assessed before the execution.

There is also additional proof about the effect of general positive image of a firm on its employer brand. For example, in their study Collins and Stevens (2002) found proof that the general image of the company and the perceived positive employer brand attributes were increased when prospective employees had been subjected to general publicity, in addition to just recruitment related coverage. Edwards (2010) also supports this argumentation, relying on academic synthesis of similar studies, and confirms that often "high-profile" companies, with major visibility in society, are able to leverage the publicity in creation of employer brand with positive brand attributes, and thus likewise increase the chances of employing talented new recruits (Collins & Han 2004, Collins & Stevens 2002).

In general the creation of employer brand and its communication is very delicate process, which needs to take into account all company communications, also the part which is not directly targeted at the prospective employees. This naturally makes the assessment of employer brand communication more difficult from research perspective, as identifying a specific message aimed to support the employer brand is impossible. Hence the communications which affect company's employer brand should be seen as all the internal and external company communications. For example in social media the product advertising campaigns and branding efforts are also partly formulating the employer brand of the firm. This concept could be also widened to include discussion in social media; people are proofed to hold the opinions of their friends and reference groups in high regard when it comes to employer, but do employees perceive social media and their "connections" as a trusted source of information about employees?

2.2.3 Psychological contracts.

The core of employer brand stems from the balance between what the firm is offering to and demanding from its employees and what the employees offer to give and what they want in return, which signifies that this brand promise is essentially psychological contract between the two sides. This aspect of employer branding has been discussed by Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), Edwards (2010) and Miles and Mangold (2004) who all base their argumentation on the theory about psychological contracts of Rousseau, the investigation of Rousseau and Wade-Benzoni (1994) talks about the same issues from HRM perspective. Rousseau and Wade-Benzoni (1994, p. 466) define psychological contract as:

...the beliefs people hold regarding the terms of their employment relationship. These contracts affect employees' behavior toward customers and fellow employees, and also affect their commitment to the organization.

So the psychological contract is something that underlies every employment agreement even though it entails much more than just the printed words on the contract itself. Because the contracts are always one side's interpretations of the promises and mutual expectations, if albeit both sides always assume that they are on common ground (Robinson & Rousseau 1994), there can be different understanding of these terms inside the same relationship (Rousseau & Wade-Benzoni 1994). However these misunderstandings can be curtailed by open and accurate communication about the company and its expectations and offering and from the employee side by having enough knowledge about the organization. (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004, Rousseau 2001).

The clear and accurate information, meaning that the descriptions are realistic, including both negative and positive aspects, is essential, because if the employee feels that the company has breached the made psychological contract the results are increase in "turnover and intentions to quit, reduced job satisfaction, reduced organizational trust, and decreased job performance" (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004, p. 507); these consequences are problematic

to the company not just for financial reasons but also because they affect negatively the employer brand. However, I presume that even though the realistic information naturally facilitates the creation of a psychological contract which is as close to both parties' understanding, the misunderstandings are inevitable. In those situations the employees trust for the company becomes even more important.

Has social media and the more open interaction between the two parties of work life reduced the amount misjudgements about the psychological contracts? Various researchers (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004, Rousseau 2001) state that open communication can positively mediate the formation of balanced psychological contracts and social media is seen as the modern forum for such an explicit information sharing, hence it is fair to presume that the social media might help in the creation of more neutral psychological contracts. This would in turn lead to the reduction of the perceived breaches of the psychological contracts.

2.2.4   Segmentation of the employer value proposition

Employer branding has its profound roots in HR and especially marketing, so it is understandable that also the academic research uses lot of terms from both disciplines. The employee market segmentation as a model of adjusting the offering of the employer brand to the employees, potential and existing, is borrowed from marketing, but serves well its purpose in employer branding literature.

In the talent management literature the importance of talent pools and the accurate targeting of the potential employees is paramount, similarly in the employer branding literature the correct targeting of the employees is a significant notion. Moroko and Uncles are most prevalent in this discussion and in their article about the segmentation of the workforce they explain the importance of targeting the certain employee groups with certain products of the employer experience (2009); with employer experience they mean the embodiment of the work and its correlation to the psychological contract of the job. Their concept of

segmenting the market of employees is fundamentally a strategy of cutting costs and lining the company offering with the needs of the most important groups of employees. E.g. it is not economical, if not also totally ineffective, to offer day care services as a benefit for employees, if wanted employee group is 18-24 year old student who seek part-time work; this would waste money on the service, and it could even make the firm seem distant for the target group.

There is, however some sceptical opinions on the traditional approach to communication of the employer brand. Aggerholm and al (2011) argue that the concept of employer branding is outdated and that the traditional view considers employer branding communication as only one sided process where the employer functions as the sender and the employees are the passive receivers and the theories do not take into account the broad field of stakeholders who have to be addressed in all company communication (Aggerholm & al 2011). However I feel that when, for example, the psychological contract side of employer branding (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004; Rousseau 2001; Rousseau & Wade-Benzoni 1994; Zagenzcyk et al 2011) is considered, the reciprocal nature of employer branding process is better understood. All of the fore mentioned authors emphasize the importance of the employer's responsibility to honour the psychological contract and to communicate the firm's offering and wants in such a way that both sides minimize the chance of misunderstandings and the following disappointments. In other words, I feel that in their work Aggerholm et al (2011) emphasize importantly the "sustainability" in the employer branding process, as this highlights the significance of integrating employer branding to the company vision and aligning it with the array of corporate communications.

App et al (2012) also discuss how the offering of the employer brand should be adjusted depending on the target employee segment. Also their investigation discusses the sustainable HR in employer branding, but whereas Aggerholm et al (2011) used the term "sustainable employer branding" for emphasising the firm's responsibility towards all the stakeholders in a CSR sense, App et al (2012) see it as a concept of firm integrity towards the employees and their responsibility to adjust their employer value proposition (EVP)

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according to the life stages. Their approach emphasizes, similarly to Moroko and Uncles (2009), that corporations should be consistent in their employer branding, so that they offer their employees/potential employees the services which they actually need. App, Merk and Büttgen (2012) state, that through the well-defined employee segments the company has the possibility to offer employees exactly what they need in their specific situation; also taking care of the existing employee needs as their career life cycle is closing in on the retirement. According to them, this further consolidates the relationship between the two sides and additionally, in the diverse business world of today, firms are able to adjust their employer experience offering to suit the prevailing situations and needs of the employees. So according to the two sources, the segmenting approach and the offering of right benefits to correct employee groups, creates cost savings and also more consistent and appealing employer brand to these various groups.

According to the assumption of Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), which is also strongly supported by others in the literature, a distinctive employer brand attracts distinctively talented human capital, which in turn are creating and "living" their assumption of the firm's brand, thus furthermore supporting and developing it. Going forward, the employer branding involves the "identification of elements of the character of the organisation itself; features such as the organisation's key values and the guiding principles" (Edwards 2010, p. 7), so it might be that the success of the companies with employer brand does not only come from the acquisition of talent, but from the company hiring individuals, who share their values and desires. Said differently, the segments would not only help in focusing the offering, but also in helping the company to more accurately select which segments to target. Could this also be one of the reasons behind the success stories like Google, who want to hire talented people who perfectly fit their corporate culture?

When the concept of segmenting is applied to employer branding in social media, new questions arise, because of the various uses of social media. Social media is already used to target the student segment, which is beneficial with corporate trainee programs, but can it also be used to solidify the employee relation with a middle age manager through different

kind of engagement? Social media of course offers ways to investigate the potential employees and from them find patterns, groups and most interesting individuals for the segmenting purposes, but it might be also easily used to launch specific campaigns targeted at the certain segments. The possible applications of social media for employer branding purposes have not been yet discussed widely in academic literature, so this investigation should be able to provide so extra information about these issues.

Going forward, there is a own section dedicated to the relationship between corporate culture and employer branding, but it should be said, that in my opinion, which is based on the postulation of Backhaus and Tikoo, the segmenting and focused targeting of certain employee groups also creates the benefit of gathering people with same values and shared mind-set.

2.2.5   Communicating the employer brand

As I already briefly mentioned in the last part, the communication is obviously the corner stones of employer branding, and the right execution can make a difference in the creation of appealing employer brand. The effect of different kinds of campaigns and communications styles on employer branding have been researched before and there are some methods proven by these investigations, even though the right formulation of the correct mix of actions always depends on the company and the situation at hand.

To start with, it can be said that, a holistic communications is very important when it comes to employer branding, according to Edwards (2010) it often is not enough to achieve an employer brand by putting effort solely into wanted ads in order to communicate the employer brand to the employees, as this is not perceived as enough to evoke interest. Moreover it seems that visibility campaigns combined with vacancy ads are better in building the employer brand presence among the potential employees (Edwards 2010).

The company characteristics which are seen to push employee towards regarding a company as an employer of choice are profitability and financial success but also "softer" attributes, like CSR and general reputation are something which influenced the employees' opinions significantly. This highlights how difficult it is to present the company to prospective employees in a way that it is perceived to have an appealing employer brand. Importantly enough, there has been proof (Collins & Stevens 2002) that, the positive image of the company has positive correlation to more people applying to a company. It was stated that among students the companies who engage in collaboration with universities are often portrayed in more positive light (Collins & Stevens 2002).

A one example of the fore mentioned of recruitment campaign could be a trainee program directed at students, during which "an organization invested in sponsorship that was visible to potential recruit" (Edwards 2010, p 9), such recruitment activities were found to have a positive effect on the perception about the company (Collins & Stevens 2002). Furthermore these positive perceptions were found to influence the employment decisions and improve the company image in the long run (ibid), so bundling company advertising with job vacancy advertising will also yield longer lasting results, not only better candidates for the job in question (Edwards 2010).

Actually, the positive image or favourable general opinion that company, a "high-profile company", has among the public is generally seen to positively affect employees' job application tendency (Collins & Haan 2004; Collins & Stevens 2002). The higher profile can be however achieved also through other means than just employer branding communications. Wilden et al (2010) postulate that company employer image is also affected by the firm's other brands, like consumer product brands; if the product brands are appealing and seen in positive light the affect is reflected positively to the employer brand and vice versa if the consumer brands are unknown. Ergo it is important for companies to

realise the brand assets that they already possess on the consumer side and use those also when communicating the employer brand.

According to Wilden, Gudergan and Lings (2010) employees did not only use firm's consumer brands as a reflector on the overall profile of the company but also their consistency in relation to each other was an important determinant. The relation between product brands and employer brands were seen as an important determinant for the employees about the company. If there were inconsistencies between the product brands and employer brands and the images did not correspond to the fore-communicated image, the firm's credibility as an employer decreased (ibid). This is another point which emphasizes the importance of the consistency in the corporate communications and the harmonisation of the firm's brand images.

Moroko and Uncles (2009), in their article about market segmentation as a tool for employer branding, argue about the importance of reference group opinions in the case of employment when considering a potential employer brand. The reference group might be colleagues, family or friend, and their opinions about a brand have a big influence on employment decisions (Moroko and Uncles 2009; Wilden et al 2010). People see employee referrals as a credible source of company information and especially the currently employed have particular weight behind their referrals (Collins & Stevens 2002, Wilden et al 2010). Similar behavior, about the importance of referrals on behaviour, has been identified earlier about consumer brands (Henderson & Bowley 2010). When this is reflected on the corporate image and the employer brand, it is not enough that the positive aura is spread to the potential employees, but also their possible references should have a positive outlook on the firm. Hence there has to be balance between an overall positive perception about the company and a more specific employer branding which is targeted at specifically on the employee prospects.

Truthfulness in the communications is a key. In order for the employer branding to be successful, not only is it beneficial to combine to company info into a coherent package with a job posting, but it is also essential to give the potential employees a realistic picture of the company and its offering, no to skew to company image into a more "appealing" direction. This often leads to the disappointment of the new employees as their preconceived expectations were not met, which is caused by the breach of the employer-employee social contract, based on the original image of the company (Edwards 2010). According to Martin et al (2004) and Edwards (2010) the communication should however include the real characteristics of a company, the same ones that are also dominant in the internal communications. For example company can be youthful, fast-paced or conservative, and through the manifestation of these attributes in the employer branding the expectations of the potential employees are likely to be closer to the real characteristics and atmosphere of the company.

The brand identity should be well defined because in that way the employees are more likely to "live the corporate values" and also the values of the company seem more constitutionalized, which strengthens the outside employer brand image as usually firms with clear values and higher status are seen to have stronger employer brand (Edwards 2010, Martin et al 2004). Similarly to Martin et al. (2004) and Edwards (2010) explanation of the realistic company characteristics, Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) argue that the company culture and values have to be explained in accurate way, not too positively or negatively, for if the employment decision was based on this imprecise info the employee is likelier to leave the company.

2.2.5.1 Young employees as an target group

When considering the prospective employees market in the light of the aforementioned discussion about communicating the employer brand there is one easily definable group

which interprets the brand messages differently because of the lack of experience, the young employees.

As also mentioned above (Wilden et al 2010), employees evaluate their employers and possible employers according to their past experience and their opinion of the employer brand is formulated in the same way. Because young employees lack this apparent first-hand experience of certain firms or specific sectors or industries, the decision making process and the factors affecting it are somewhat different than with more experienced employees (ibid). The lack of experience tends to direct inexperienced employees to use more consumer brands as indicators of the whole corporation's employer brand. This has implications on how should the company approach the employer branding communications directed to young employees like students. Is it safe to assume that advertising hinting about company's successful and highly regarded consumer brands also further promotes also the employer brand?

Both Edwards (2010) and Wilden et al (2010) furthermore note that employees with little work experience more easily tend to direct their attention to monetary and other short-term benefits, disregarding other contributions to their careers like career advancement or training, which are valued by more experienced employees. In addition, more experienced employees were said to evaluate brand promises and communicated company characteristics more critically and in more reflective manner (Edwards 2010, Wilden et al 2010). Consequently communicating the company offering and the employer experience to inexperienced employees can be seen as even more critical process in employer branding because the message has to be clearer and closer to reality, for the decisions are based on more inadequate experience.

Many companies have acknowledged the importance of providing young inexperienced employees with additional info and first-hand accounts of their programs aimed at young people and the work place in general. For example videos of testimonials of employees in graduate programs and stories about different career paths inside the company are providing employees with additional info and also functioning as current employee

recommendations of sort. Social media could be seen as a perfect tool for this kind of engagement for the reason that such video content is easily added to company channels in social media and it is also easily accessed by potential employees. But do the testimonials or introduction videos really provide more accurate information to employees or can is it also a way to communicate one sided or unrealistic information.

2.2.6 Employer brand as a manifestation of corporate culture

Corporate culture might be seen as the soul of the firm, which affects all the actions done in the company and, in addition, is shaped by the same actions in return. Just like the Italians might be considered to have the culture of wine drinking and the concept of "la vita bella", people in Google might be considered to be innovative tech-savvies. An important aspect of employer branding is its ability to be a mirror of this organizational culture to the outsider, it is a manifestation of the company values and methods of doing business and hence it directly gives an outsider an understanding of the firm. Because of this interconnection between these terms, employer branding should be also explained from the perspective of corporate culture.

The company can enforce the employer brand and the employee's sense of belonging in the organization through its actions which please the employees. Zagenczyk et al (2011) state that companies which offer support to their employees and treat them well, e.g. flexibility, job conditions, equality and good relations to superiors, are also more likely to do more sacrifices for the company and experience organizational commitment towards the company. In other words, the organizations support to its employees pays off when the employees are also putting more effort to support company, which leads to a positive loop (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004). Edwards (2010) and Zagenczyk et al (2011) agree that when the positive identification to the company is perceived, an employee feels strong sense of

belonging and commitment to the company and they also perceive the company success as directly being success for themselves as well. In my opinion, this kind of mutual exchange of "favours" and a certain feeling of obligation is related to company culture and brand resonance, which is more discussed by Backhaus and Tikoo.

Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) explain that employer brand loyalty is similar to the common brand loyalty because it is based on the relationship between the company and the employee and is held together with the company culture. Employer branding is a way of affecting company culture and organizational identity and it can also be used to improve the employer brand loyalty. The brand loyalty works like a magnet and encourage customers to repurchase products even in not ideal situations and similarly the employer brand loyalty makes the employees less likely to bail-out even when the situation at work becomes momentarily unappealing (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004).

The employer brand loyalty is also partly due to the assimilation of the organizational identity with the employees self. When company employer brand is seen to portray a positive organizational identity in the employee's mind it creates strong self-identification, which is natural to humans, and the commitment to the company increases hand in hand with this organizational identification (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004; Wilden et al 2010). When employees feel to be part of a social group in work setting "they are more likely to identify with the brand, and will more likely choose to seek membership with the organization for the sense of heightened self-image that membership promises" (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004, p. 506), so in other words the employer brand increases the employees identification with the firm.

As stated before the loyalty creation and the employee solidarity towards a company can be achieved by using the brand as a symbol of the company values, and as a source of social identity which is also seen as one of the benefits of the different groups in social media (Van Zyl 2009) The kind interactive communication, elementary to social media, can engage prospective employees to identify themselves with companies and recognise the shared values, which in turn, according to research, would increase their brand resonance

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and brand loyalty towards a company. But is it also possible that the communications in social media more easily reveal differences and negative aspects of the company culture to the public, since the flow of information is twofold and the discourse is harder to control by the company?

2.3 Social media

This part in question will be used to review the existing literature about social media; what it is, how is it used in marketing and what are the current applications for recruitment. In order to be able to build a comprehensive picture of social media use in marketing and how the same principals and researched methods can also be used for employer branding, this section incorporates more contemporary articles from business magazines to support the academic theories. Furthermore, an aspect to be acknowledged is that since there has not been extensive research about employer branding in social media, this section builds up on research conducted about marketing, branding and recruitment methods in social media and in turn indicates the similarities and linkages with employer branding.

2.3.1 What is Social media?

Two different definitions for social media and social media strategy derived from classifications of other academics and used in defining social media in the context of this study are as follows:

> Social media is an online platform which through interactivity enhances conversation, provides the users with the possibility to instantly create, acquire and share the content with other users, while ignoring geographic or demographic barriers.

(Andrews 2012, Hensel & Deis 2010; Madia 2011)

Social media strategy is the consistent corporate guidelines by which a company will engage its stakeholders through the use of modern Web 2.0 technologies, and the continuously evolving new platforms, in involving the customers, employees and other related groups in its network.

(Andrews 2012, Kaplan & Haenlein 2010)

In other words both of these definitions highlight interaction and involvement of individuals, who are part of the social media, hence creating the whole media itself. Social media is an online platform which constantly develops and changes, which of course creates a pressure for companies and marketers to evolve with it and always find new innovative uses to engage the masses. This is something I see as very paramount in social media; if one wants to be part of social media platforms they have to embrace the constant change, not fight against, but adapt and evolve in similar fashion.

Kluemper and Rosen (2009), while defining social network websites, include one important aspect to social media definitions; being able to share and explore the shared interests and activities and the ability to visually display the network or individual connections. Van Zyl (p. 909, 2009) on the other hand emphasizes the relationship building factor by defining social media (or "social networking 2.0", as she calls it, a term derived from the term "web 2.0") as "applications or web sites that support the maintenance of personal relationships, the discovery of potential relationships and should aid in the conversion of potential ties into weak and strong ties…" However important the relationships are in social media, for this research and reflecting the definitions of other academia, it could be argued that in social media such as Youtube.com, Pinterest and blogs the simplification of the interactions to only portray relationship building hinders the multifaceted surface of the services.

2.3.2 Social media use expands rapidly

According to a recent report from an independent research company Forrester Research (2013) the European annual spending on marketing in social media was 1.4 billion euros in 2012 and they estimate that it will grow approximately 17.6% annually, reaching 3.2 billion euros in 2017. They also postulate that the current amount of social media users in online population, 63% in 2013, will reach and surpass 70% in 2017 (Forrester Research 2013). These numbers indicate, in spite of how speculative they might be that even only in Europe the usage and marketing expenditure in social media will continue to grow steadily. In addition these numbers shed light why so many executives and companies are joining the fuzz about social media and what they can achieve by using it.

In their investigation Kozinets et al (2010) postulate that company spending on word of mouth -marketing initiatives will increase from $1.54 billion in 2008 to $3 billion in 2013, which also reflects the potential in social media. Although it has to be noted that not all word of mouth marketing campaigns are for social media.

The virtual presence in social media sites like Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Youtube and blogs is becoming a must for companies in engaging their customers and potential employees, this has been proved through many corporate success stories (Andrews 2012; Hensel & Deis 2010; Jones et al 2009). According to Kristin Hunt (2010) it is essential that companies engage their potential employees through social media, not only because it is a great extension to the traditional ways of recruiting, but also because now the majority of employers are prospecting in social media and not being there can leave a company excluded. In addition to prospecting and social recruiting purposes, corporations should establish interactive communications with wider groups, including all their most important stakeholders, as this leads to more comprehensive social media presence, supports corporate image and hence formulates the employer brand in more holistic way (Jones et al 2009; Russel 2009). The concept of extensive social media coverage makes perfect sense on a corporate level in a way of showing "the best side" to everyone, but when employer branding is concerned the segmentation approach possible provides more success, since this

way the resources can be targeted at the most important groups (Madia 2011), this is the base for the market segmentation of Moroko and Uncles (2009).

The social media has huge potential in improving the companies' employer brands and facilitating recruitment by giving them access to millions and millions of users around the world, only by signing up to few websites. This is something already proven in branding CSR literature, the change in the dynamics of the communication caused by social media has forced companies to rethink their CSR and branding practices online and how these relate to their communication strategies (Jones et al 2009). Most of these websites also directly offer companies the possibilities to post their job vacancies and search for potential employees (Andrews 2012; Joos 2008).

Through social media companies can promote their attractive subjective attributes (Laick & Dean 2011) in order to engage the potential employees and become the employer of choice. Furthermore, the use of social media does not only stop in marketing of the company or its products, but the social networking sites are currently also used by the HR specialists to screen the applicants and help them in the recruitment decisions, and at least preliminary studies, like the one from Kluemper and Rosen (2009) showed that this application of social media is also effective, at least to some extent.

Many authors state that the key aspect in social media is the interactivity of the communications; it should be used to inform people and to answers peoples inquiries. It was said that nothing is as frustrating for interested parties than not to get a reply on their inquiry in social media. This point is emphasized by Hunt (2010) as she explains that the company has to be committed to their social media strategy and also put enough sources to achieve the selected goals. Companies operating in social media also have huge pressure to live up to the expectations as everything has become extremely transparent; past employees or failed applicants can open up about their experiences, furthermore also customers opinions are much more easily communicated to the public through social media (Laick & Dean 2011). The reciprocal nature and the openness of the communication also force a company to constantly communicate with all their stakeholder groups in social media as

only the consistency ensures the achievement of an affective employer brand (Jones, Temperley & Lima 2009). And this of course influences also the employer brand, since in the real world both the employer brand and the consumer brand are often intertwined in the minds of the people (Wilden et al 2010).

There has been more studies about the corporate-to-consumer type interaction through social media, many investigations emphasizing on the CSR themes (Jones et al 2009; Geerts & Scoubeau 2009), yet there has not been that much studies about the effect of social media on employer branding. Although the branding discussion which stems from the field of marketing is applicable to this investigation, since employer branding follows the same conformities as conventional branding.

 "Management of corporate reputation is a two-way, top down and bottom up process." (Jones et al 2009, p 928). This is another way to say that the time for only feeding public corporate information exclusively from the company stand-point is past and with the use of social media companies can engage, listen and even influence their customers by offering people the possibility to talk about brand related topics (Bruhn et al 2012) Because of the possible of negative backlash from the public the importance of good behaviour online has become an imperative (Jones et al 2009) and this is why social media presence should be integral part of firms marketing communications and handled with the same kind of care (Bruhn et al 2012).

2.3.3   Marketing in social media

Marketers have rather quickly adopted the use of social media for marketing purposes. In fact the two-way flow of information in social media has ensured that the use of social media is much broader than that of traditional marketing channels. Social media also provides companies with "rich, unmediated customer insights, faster than ever before" (Barwise & Meehan 2010 p.83). With the use of social media the marketers are now able to

mine rich ethnographic data from social media, which provides them with information how their products fit in their customers daily lives and hear their opinions and preferences (Barwise & Meehan 2010), most importantly, according to Yan (2011), this data can provide them with competitive advantage if used correctly.

In addition to being a source of market information, social media brings the benefit of speed. Twitter, a service which is well known for its reach and quickness in distributing breaking news around the globe in mere minutes, much before they reach the traditional media outlets (Hensel & Deis 2010), has huge potential also for marketing purposes. Can companies replicate the convention of instantly reposting company news or job ads and thus expediting the circulation speed of company news? This acute timeliness of communications is something which draws many people to social media, hence the ability leverage it is a great asset for a company (Hensel & Deis 2010).

A very important article in the field of marketing in social media and social networks from Kozinets et al (2010), which specifically investigated blogging communities, introduced many interesting remarks about the word-of-mouth marketing (WOMM) in social medias. They (Kozinets et al 2010) postulate that in online communities (social media) consumers have become active creators of content and that marketers have shifted from emphasizing transactions to emphasizing the relationship between the consumers. Similarly Barwise and Meehan (2010) explain that in the active social media communities marketers have transferred some control over the brands to the consumers, thus empowering the consumers. This big change for marketers has given the consumers a stronger sense of ownership over the products and brands and created trust (Barwise & Meehan 2010).

Relating to the earlier remarks on the interaction between the consumers and the companies and content creation Hensel and Deis (2010) add that an extremely important aspect of social media usage, now also grasped by many companies, is the aspect of having fun. Social media is used because it is fun; sharing ideas, photos, videos and opinions is made

easy and serves not only a source of information but also as entertainment (Hensel & Deis 2010). One widely spread example of fun marketing videos is Blendtec's "Will it blend" – videos, where the company CEO uses their trademark blender in order to blend things, ranging from an Apple iPad and golf balls to silly putty and jewels, according to the online communities requests. Such videos are a source of amusement but in tandem it spreads company and product knowledge and emphasizes the superior blending attributes of the blenders.

On the other hand the social communities build around brands or products do not only benefit marketing but very importantly they are also a source of customer information and market knowledge. And as the information in social media sources is easily accessible and rather permanent, companies can use them constantly to probe their brand success and adjust their practices accordingly. (Kozinets et al 2010; Wilson & al 2011; Yan 2011).

Barwise and Meehan (2010 p. 83) offer us four concise principals which are essential when striving for marketing success through social media:

- Offer and communicate a clear, relevant customer promise.
- Build trust by delivering on that promise.
- Drive the market by continually improving the promise.
- Seek further advantage by innovating beyond the familiar.

Although these four points are rather universal and could come from any marketing course book, the importance of Barwise and Meehan's words for this research lie in the similarities with the fundamentals of successful employer branding. Similarly to employer branding literature clear communication, delivering on the initial promise, developing the promise and finding distinct innovative advantages are cornerstone in social media marketing success. Hence it could be argued that if social media marketing drive and skills are targeted at employer branding excellence in social media the same practices should yield great results.

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If thinking about the employer experience -promise the same principles apply. The corporate values that have been selected have to be communicated throughout the communications matrix consistently. And only by realizing the promises trust can be build and the company is perceived as a trusted and well-behaving employer. Furthermore, as noted also earlier, the information that can be found from social media, should be used to adjust the promised employer experience and develop the company further as a number one employer.

2.3.4   Branding in social media

The subject of this thesis being employer branding in social media it is justifiable to investigate how social media is used for branding purposes in addition to only marketing in general. Because of the similarities with product branding and employer branding it could be postulated that both forms of branding conform to the same principles in social media.

As also stated before, internet and social media are changing the way people, communities and companies interact. A rather recent study from Bruhn, Shöenmueller and Shäfer (2012) investigates this change and they postulate that emergence of social media has caused that companies are not anymore the only source of information about brands as people can engage with millions of other users and use social media directly to search for information. This manifesto is a base for most members of academia in this field (Barwise & Meehan 2010; Hensel & Deis 2010; Kozinets et al 2011; Yan 2011). In addition, the speed and spread of social media has caused that news and opinions, both positive and negative, are instantaneously distributed throughout the world, hence making the importance of these internet based networks essential for branding (Jones et al 2009).

Brand communication in social media by other users is seen as more credible

In employer branding the credibility of the message is of utmost important, this is also the issue with branding communication in social media. In social media firm-generated and user-generated communications have difference of credibility as the first one is seen as being controlled by the brand manager and the latter as an independently communicated message (Bruhn et al 2012). According to Bruhn et al (2012), user-generated messages are perceived to be objective testimonials of products or services, hence credible external sources of the brands performance.

Oscar Wilde's legendary quote 'The only thing worse than being talked about is not being talked about.' is still relevant in the social media age as the 'buzz' and visibility of a brand in social media play an important role in defining the attractiveness of the brand. Bruhn et al (2012) point out that for consumers the discussion itself around a brand serves as a proof of the brand appeal, despite being positive or negative. The open communications and free access to all of it furthermore attracts people to participate and blurs the boundaries of 'us' and 'them' (Yan 2012).

Branding is a communal effort in social media

As it was stated above (Bruhn et al 2012; Yan 2012) the open branding communications in social media is essential part of creating the brand appeal, but it also provides companies with other kinds of inputs that affect the brand strategy and also how the brand is perceived.

The discussion around a brand is not only used to draw attention towards the brand and create hype, but the social media community is also a source of new ideas as the two-way dialogue develops. Yan (2011) describes two important ways how the social community can be used to company's benefit; it provides them with a genuine feedback on the brand strategy and ideas on how to develop it to best resonate with the audience, secondly the dialog brings fresh out-of-the-box views for the company.

Since the discussion in social media is so important for the brands, it should also be nurtured in a constructive way. Bruhn et al (2012) and Jones et al (2009) quite rightly postulate that the stimulation of participation to the social media community is essential

and should be done by constantly encouraging the customers and stakeholders to engage in online conversation. The updates and discussion should be regular and integrated into the company's other web presence in aim of creating unforgettable experiences (Bruhnet al 2012).

As explained before the communications and the substance in a social media sight can be individualized, thus making a company page and the interaction with the company seem personal. There is however the problem of visual branding in the most popular social media sites Facebook and Twitter, a problem identified by Yan (2011). On these pages companies cannot use the strong semiotic signs to engage with customers, even though some brand imagery can be added to the pages, which means that the important aspect of brand visuals is much less developed than in common branding imagery or branding on company owned websites (Yan 2011). Because of the lack of strong brand imagery firms are inclined to connect with the customers by engaging them to interact (Yan 2011), this theorem is supported also by some other researchers (Jones et al 2009).

2.3.5   Recruitment in social media

As already mentioned in the above sections the uses of social media have constantly expanded as it has become more popular and enticed more users; also recruiters in companies have started to use it. The use of social media relating to recruitment literature is threefold; employers use it as a marketing platform for jobs (Henderson & Bowley 2010), recruiters use it in assisting the selection process by screening applicants (Kluemper & Rosen 2009; Henderson & Bowley 2010; Hensel & Deis 2010; Ollington et al 2013), and also employees use it as a way of getting information about companies (Vicknair et al 2010). According to Jobvite survey (2010, 2012, 2013) on social media usage in recruitment, in 2013 94% of recruiters are using or planning to start using social media in their recruitment efforts, a rise from 2010 (82%) and 2012 (94%). According to Jobvite

(2010, 2012, 2013) the majority of the professional recruiters use LinkedIn as their main focal point to social media, Facebook being the second most popular platform. These numbers shed light on how popularly social media is used for recruiting purposes.

The opinions and research on the effectiveness of social media as a tool for recruiting divides the opinion as some sources postulate that social media is a great platform for cost-effective recruiting (Madia 2011) and that it grants recruiters access to important complimentary information about applicants, that could not otherwise be found (Kluemper & Rosen 2009). On the other hand, according to investigation by Ollington, Gibb and Harcourt (2013 p. 18) many recruiters though that "costs of effectively attracting and then screening suitable candidates, in terms of time and effort, usually exceeded the returns. ". They continue that because of this perceived inefficiency in recruiting via social media makes many recruiters view social media as more of a place of building and maintaining networks (Ollington et al 2013). The uncertainty about the effectiveness of social media as a recruitment platform will persist to be an issue until there will be some researched on how effective it is in reality.

The uncertainty about the effectiveness of social media might be one reason why some studies have pointed out that social media is virtually always only one part of the recruitment strategy of companies, and most recruiters use it side-by-side with the traditional ways of recruiting like job boards (Jobvite 2013; Madia 2011; Ollington et al 2013). The recruitment field is not only fragmented because of many used medias, but as explained by Ollington et al (2013), also social media sites themselves are very fragmented as lot of professional discussion is going on in sub-forums and sub-groups, which means that both recruiters and employees, have to be up to constantly update themselves on the situations of the forums and groups. This might be one reason why social media is seen inefficient; it is very time consuming when surfing through various social media sites and their sub-categories.

The assessment of individual employees through social media channels, even though proven to be rather accurate by Kluemper and Rosen (2009), is very dependent on the

individual use of the selected social media site, or sometimes use of various medias. This is to say that a person inactive in social media networking, can in reality be extremely social and well networked in real-life, this critique was also acknowledged by Kluemper and Rosen (2009). On other hand, in the opposite situation, in which a potential employee is browsing through different social media pages of a firm, they usually get much broader understanding of the company, for most companies are present in various social medias (Jobvite 2013; Madia 2011; Ollington et al 2013).

2.4   Theoretical framework

Based on the literature review the theoretical framework for this research is formulated in order to provide us with a concrete reference point from the academic literature to which to refer back to when analysing the empirical findings. The relevant theories for this thesis come from the employer branding literature and social media literature, and based on these two main streams the theoretical framework is formulated. As mentioned in the research questions of this thesis, the aim is to shed light on how companies are using social media for employer branding, this naturally directs us to look at this phenomenon in a way that the company is in the centre and acts as the focal point of this investigation. In the centre of the onion diagram is the company itself and the subsequent layers going outward stem from either employer branding literature or marketing literature about social media.

The company entity includes the company's situation and the industry in which it functions, its values and especially its corporate culture. Especially the corporate culture and how this is connected to the employees is very important in the creation of employer brand as it binds the employees to corporation as the understanding of shared values and culture deepens. (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004; Wilden et al 2010)

The target of this research is not only to look at the company, but also to some extent investigate the entity mentioned in the second research question –employee. The employees, according to most academics (App et al 2012; Backhaus & Tikoo 2004; Berthon et al 2005; Edwards 2010; Knox & Freeman 2006; Foster et al 2010; Moroko & Uncles 2008; Wilden et al 2010) cited in the above chapters, are the receiver and the target of employer branding, which is why this is also included in the theoretical framework on the most outer section. The employees are called target audience in the framework, since they can basically be, as also mentioned in the definition of employer branding section, potential or existing employees.

The second layer of the theoretical framework is the message that the company wants to communicate to the people. This message is the image about the company as an employer, the positive attributes that employees relate to its brand, and the profile that it wants to communicate to its target audience in order to make it an attractive employer (Berthonet al 2005; Collins & Stevens 2002; Collins & Han 2004; Edwards 2010). The four principals of successful social media marketing are very relevant to this theoretical framework (Barwise & Meehan 2010 p. 83) :

• Offer and communicate a clear, relevant customer promise.

• Build trust by delivering on that promise.

• Drive the market by continually improving the promise.

• Seek further advantage by innovating beyond the familiar.

This, combined with the next three parts of the framework, is the one that is studied the most in the empirical part, and even though the message itself is not the main point of discussion in this research, it is however something without which one cannot discuss employer branding and how is it done.

The channel is derived to this framework from the marketing literature and of course consists of the specific social media channels, when looked at from the empirical

perspective. Social media channels like blogs, social networking sites and other social communities, where users share information to each other and which enhance conversations and offer users the possibility to instantly create and share content, are the ones that are investigated in this research (Andrews 2012; Barwise & Meehan 2010; Hensel & Deis 2010; Kozinets et al 2011; Madia 2011; Yan 2011). For employer branding or recruitment the social media is often used integrated with other media outlets (Jobvite 2013; Madia 2011; Ollington et al 2013), but in this research the focus is on the social media channels that fall in line with the aforementioned theories and thus can be analyzed using this framework.

Subsequently a logical step forwards in the theoretical framework is the actions that companies engage in in social media. In the case of social media, the possible actions a company can make are very dependent and linked with the social media channel in question like Hensel & Deis (2010) describe about the distinct use of Twitter as quick and timely communication method. Actions in social media are also described by stimulation to participate in the community, encouraging customers to engage in online conversations, share their opinions and new ideas and very importantly all this should be done on regular intervals and integrated with the company's other web presence and other communications (Bruhn et al 2012; Jones et al 2009). All of these actions on their part aim to convey the company's message, which in this case is the employer branding message underlining that the company is a very good employer (Collins & Stevens 2002; Edwards 2010). In addition, these actions, through open communications about the company and its values (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004, Rousseau 2001) aim to build a base or strengthen psychological contract between the employer and the employee or potential employee (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004; Edwards 2010; Miles & Mangold 2004).

The last but nonetheless very important part of the theoretical framework based on the literature is the segmentation of the employer value proposition. The company should aim to build a sustainable employer brand, which realistically pictures the company as an employer, but at the same be able to target the distinct employee groups with distinct

messages, so that their needs and interests are met with the company's offering (Aggerholm et al 2011; App et al 2012; Backaus & Tikoo 2004; Moroko & Uncles 2009). In other words through segmenting their employer offering, the company can use its resources more efficiently as it aligns their employee benefits with the interests of their target employee group and then communicates it to them specifically (Moroko & Uncles 2009) .
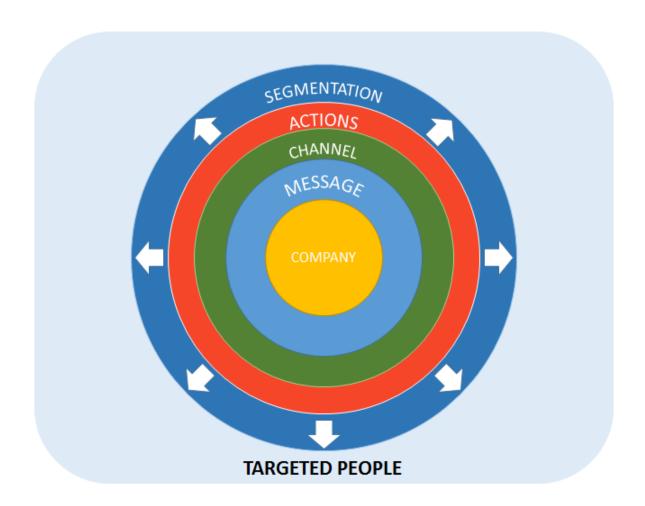

Figure 1: Theoretical framework

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To sum up the theoretical framework combines the building blocks from both employer branding and social media marketing literature into a structured and sequential diagram.

This diagram will in the analysis stage serve as the base of analysis and the four main sections; message, channel, actions and segmenting are analysed from the empirical data, which should provide us with a understanding how companies have built these entities to serve them in employer branding.

3   METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the methodology of the thesis and also justifies the choices for the research design and research approach. The aim is to explain why this methodology was chosen and why it is relevant and suitable for this investigation. In addition by considering the validity and limitations of this research the quality of the study is evaluated in academic terms.

3.1   Research approach and methodology

This research is focused on revealing the ways how Finnish companies use social media for employer branding both from the perspective of the companies doing it and from the viewpoint the employees who have experienced it, the sample is ten Finnish companies who have social media presence. The study was conducted by using qualitative research approach focusing on 10 different companies operating in Finland and additionally to interview 7 recently hired employees of these companies.

Qualitative research is an interpretive method for research and through interaction it is focused on how things happen by revealing new concepts not only categorising old definitions (Gerson & Horowitz 2002). The discovery of new meanings is important aspect of qualitative research and something that can also be considered when researching a rather

unresearched field as employer branding in social media (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). And as Tim May (2002) explains, qualitative research provides us with a reconstruction of social phenomena, something which also is sought out in this investigation, the understanding how a phenomena of employer branding is occurring in social media. One characteristic and benefit in qualitative research is the tendency to use varied qualitative methodologies simultaneously which provides flexibility in the data collection phase as in the analysis (Gerson & Horowitz 2002). The final decision of choosing qualitative research and detailed interviewing was done because it provides us with a focused insight on a certain phenomenon and allows us to understand peoples responses and experiences of phenomena, it also gives us the possibility to uncover the unexpected through in-depth discourse (Gerson & Horowitz 2002; Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008).

For the sake of identifying what are the ways how social media is currently used for employer branding in companies operating in Finland, how employees experience those methods and finally derive ways to develop the methods according to current best practices, the intimate engagement of interviewees was important. Deeply understanding both the company methods and needs and the experiences and preferences of the employees is in the epicentre of mapping out the researched phenomena for this thesis, which means that the research method should allow us to discuss the interviewees' opinions in-depth. Qualitative in-depth interviewing was chosen as the method of choice since it rich descriptions from both the company representatives and the employees were needed in the following analysis of the studied phenomena. The decision of including various companies for data collection instead of one case company resulted from the desire of understanding the research phenomena on a wider scope, for example not only based on a company or a few companies from one industry. This does not imply that the results would be more generalizable than in case method, but at least the inclusion of firms from different industries provides a broader view of things.

The research approach of this thesis is based on both deductive and inductive inquiry. First the definition of the research subject, research questions, selection of interviewees and

interview themes was based on former academic knowledge of the fields of marketing in social media and employer branding, which, according to the definition of Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) is deductive. The latter part of the investigation where generalizations and common trends are sought out from the empirical findings, on the other hand falls under the inductive field of inquiry (ibid). The description of these two approaches does not mean that the logic used in the research is as clearly divided in to two segments as mentioned above, but tries to illustrate the two distinct phases of the research process.

3.2   Research Design

The research design of this thesis was in line with the structured approach, so that the first steps were identification of research problems and research questions, which provided a point of reference and a general direction to which the investigation could be further developed (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008). However the process of outlining and planning the design was not as linear and systematic as Yin (2002) proposes, but the form took shape through contemplation and reading. The definition of the research basics was followed by defining the precise unit of analysis, method of data collection and analysis and measures for interpretation of the findings. However, as a point of remark the thesis has been, as Eriksson & Kovalainen (2008) would describe it, a circulatory and reflective process, where all the concepts from research questions to the end remarks have been modified during the whole process because of continuous learning and reflection.

3.2.1   Unit of analysis

The unit of analysis is a key feature in any research as it could be argued to be the start point for the analysis of the collected data (Quinton & Smallbone 2006). The same authors (ibid) also argue that that unit of analysis can be deducted either from applicable theoretical frameworks, from notable patterns identified during critical literature review or from the

initial research questions. In this research the unit of analysis stems from the initial research questions as well as from literature concepts, for the research questions already were influenced by the academic consensus about the employer branding and social media fields.

The selected unit of analysis in this investigation is two-fold, this is due to the distinction between the corporate and the employee perspectives investigated in this research. However the primary unit of these two is the methods how social media is used for employer banding purposes. The secondary unit of analysis, used for the analysis of the results from the employee interviews, is what employees feel as appealing employer branding aspects in social media, which could be defined in other words as the employer branding appeal in the context of social media. Both of these units of analysis have rather broad scope as they tend to both focus on groups, both people and companies (Guest, Namey & Mitchell 2013).

So this research is built around two distinct units of analysis the first one is more general in nature as it looks at how social media is used for employer branding in the Finnish context as a whole. However it is important to note that the unit of analysis and unit of observation are not a same concept; the unit of observation differs from the unit of analysis as the latter means the level on which the data is collected, regardless of the data collection (Guest, Namey & Mitchell 2013). The unit of observation is the interviewed individuals responsible of the employer branding functions in the subject companies. Similarly in the second part the unit of observation is the individual, albeit the view point is changed to the employee side and the individuals in question are the employees, who were supposed to talk from their own experience and not represent the company. (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008)

3.2.2 Selection of subject companies

When approaching the companies to be interviewed the selection criteria was aimed at providing a balanced view of companies with international operations, both bigger and smaller as well as native and foreign companies to the Finnish market. As a rule of thumb

all the interviewed companies were well known in the Finnish employment market for business people. This somewhat ambiguous construction was based on the authors experience about the Finnish job market and the analysis of both web and print job advertising directed at business professionals, which provided important cues of the most prevalent employers.

The companies were contacted first with emails containing the specifications concerning the research which in some cases were followed with phone calls in order to clarify the content and scale of the research. The interview questions were made available to some of the interviewees because of their specific want to prepare themselves. This is understandable since many of the interviewees were not solely responsible for employer branding and thus they might have had the need to clarify some issues or aspects from their colleagues beforehand.

One noteworthy empirical finding, which stems from the thesis process and not from the interviews themselves, is that three companies from the ones that were contacted in order to organize the interviews declined. Two stated that they do not do anything in social media as a corporate policy and one replied that their social media activities for employer branding are of very high security level and cannot be discussed in a research project. Others however used different channels in a variety of ways and were open to share their methods.

3.2.3   Selection of interviewees

The company representatives for the interviews were not all working under the HR organization, but one of them was actually working under marketing. This highlights the fact that employer branding naturally falls in between both marketing and HR, which is also something which is evident from the literature. The selection of the employer branding interviewees was of course in the hands of the companies after the initial contact with them and after they had indicated their interest in participating in the research. But in general, as also visible in Table 1, the interviewed representatives were easy to find for the interviews as their titles indicate connection to HR or marketing.

Because one of the objectives of this thesis is also to research the juxtaposition between the company view and the view of the employees familiar with the firm's social media actions, there was also need to interview employees from the subject companies. Initially the concept was to interview recently hired employees since such people would still hold fresh memories of the company image in social media and the image would not be largely influenced with the internal branding of the company. As it would be hard to find and contact such recently hired employees without also contact with their respective employers, the decision was made that the interviewed HR representatives were asked about suitable candidates for the second stage of the interviews.

The recently hired employees were described as individuals who had been hired during the last 0 to 6 months. In the end the nine interviewed employees has been working in the companies between 2 months and 8 months, fit the original plan of the seniority in the company very well. There were only nine employees how were able to answer the questions about employer branding and social media, and furthermore the 9 employees were only from two companies. On the other hand the two companies, Company 4 and Company 5, had very different current situation in social media use, which of course might affect how the employees saw their employer branding efforts.

3.2.4   Data collection

For this research the data collection was qualitative and based on semi-structured interviews done to two distinctive groups of people, and this material served as the raw data. As in qualitative research in general, semi-structured interview was selected as the method for data collection because it provides us with a reflection of the reality with peoples experiences, beliefs and concerns included (Guest, Namey, Mitchell 2013, Patton 1980).

The advantage to of semi-structured interview in comparison to a structured one is the existing structure combined with a relaxed tone and the possibility to direct inquiry towards areas which seem to spark interest in the interviewee (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008; Guest,

Namey, Mitchell 2013). The same authors (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008; Guest, Namey, Mitchell 2013) however note that the downside of the structural freedom is the difficulty in comparing results from different interviews, resulting from the different experiences, opinions and feelings of the interviewed individuals. This study is not aiming to do any comparative analysis between the data, which entitles the use of the semi-structured interviews in the hopes of richer data and deeper understanding of the research topic.

The data was collected from both employer branding managers and new employees with interviews, which lasted approximately one hour and 15 minutes with the company representatives. In the interviews with the company representatives the aim was to focus on the on-going methods how social media is employed in the promotion of the firm's employer brand. Also a subject of interest was how the company perceives the possibilities and future uses of social media in employer branding as well as the fact how long had they engaged public in social media. This approach offered the needed outlook on the current uses of social media for employer branding.

In the second part of the interviews, which were organized with recently employed associates of the companies who partook in the first part of the interviews, the emphasize was to reveal their experience about the social media presence and employer branding before the time that they had been employed and during the recruitment process. The original intention was to organize these interviews as face-to-face interviews, but because of time limitations of the researcher and the employees it was decided that the interviews would be conducted in electronic format. This data offered a critical point of comparison between the perceived actions and effects of the company's employer branding efforts. By hearing the opinions of new employees it could be possible to comprehend, albeit on surface level, if the firms efforts in employer branding were realising in actually better employer image.

The interviews were organized during half a year, spanning from Spring 2014 to summer 2014. They started with the interviews with the company employer branding representatives and were later expanded to include the employees. This was due to the fact

that the contact with the recently hired employees was established through the company representatives during the first interviews.

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Company	Company representative	Employees interviewed	Interview date company representative	Interview date employees
Company 1	Team leader, Global recruitment	0	17/4/2014	
Company 2	HR Specialist	0	27/4/2014	
Company 3	HR Manager, Employer Branding	0	7/5/2014	
Company 4	HR Manager, Employer Branding	6	20/5/2014	26/6/2014- 30/6/2014
Company 5	Marketing Manager	3	26/6/2014	30/6/2014

Table 1: Summary of interviews

3.2.5 Analysis and interpretation

Like mentioned by Quinton and Smallbone (2006) the first step in starting the analysis is to start structuring the vast amount of empirical data and continue by sorting and summarizing the data. In this research the manuscripts of the interviews were read through and content relating to different subjects was identified color coded and then later summarized before the construction of the findings section. The identification and summarization of the

relevant findings was done by going constantly back to the original research questions and research objective.

The structure for the analysis of the data can be achieved through a theoretical framework (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008) which was also the basis for data analysis in this research. Since research is an iterative process (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008; Quinton and Smallbone 2006) also during the analysis stage the theoretical framework was still modified and re-structured in order to construct in a way that represented the base of the academic literature in a best possible way relating to the subject. After the revised analysis was constructed and written out, also the main conclusions of the whole investigation can be outlined. The end results of the analysis can be always a subject of more rigorous analysis by going repeatedly back to the literature and reviewing the theoretical framework, but most importantly the end result and the whole research should be evaluated with the academic standards. This is done in the following section.

3.3   Evaluation of the study

When evaluating a study there are generally three measures through which reliability, validity and generalizability.

The method chosen is the most appropriate one for the nature of this study and research questions. The aim is to find how companies use social media for employer branding and how consumers see this. This can best be studied by finding the underlying reasons and mechanics for their strategies and the actual execution and also the details on how applicants evaluated this. Also the qualitative research method with interviews supports the aim of the research in finding out the depth of social media use and the methodology, combined with the electronic interviews with the employees. The whole research was conducted in a very structured and logical manner with all steps documented, which should enhance the dependability of the study. What comes to conformability, the analysis is based directly on the findings and the theoretical framework which stems from the literature,

which means that the logic of the thesis and the interpretations made from the data should be easily understood.

As already mentioned before, some of the contacted companies were not willing to participate in the research some did not want to reveal their methods of employer branding and some did not do anything in social media. This means that this study is not generalizable for Finland nor for any other country, but it offers only a peek to the current situation through the companies that participated. The same challenge with generalizability also persists with the employee interviews, the employee sample was very small and did not even represent all of the participating companies. This means that a comparison between these companies from the employee perspective is not appropriate and neither should comparisons or generalizations be made about the situation in Finland in general. As a consideration of the reliability of the study it could be argued that even though the results of a similar investigation would not be the same if done again in a year, it would just emphasize the nature of the study as an investigation about the transient situation.

When it comes to ethical considerations of this thesis, it has to be noted that as it was rather difficult to find companies to participate in this, there could be a slight risk of seeing the participating companies in a more positive light than what the reality actually is, and also the participating companies can be the ones who do social media advertising much more. On the other hand, this enables me to collect and analyse rich data. The ethical considerations were the main driver in designing the research, since the participating companies wanted to maintain absolute anonymity and which was the case also with the employees. The ethical aims towards the companies was achieved by refraining from writing or mentioning the company names or interviewee names in notes or in any stages of the analysis. This methodology minimized the possibility of the company or interviewee names becoming public.

4 FINDINGS

The empirical findings section describes the empirical data that was acquired in the interviews with the company representatives in charge of employer branding in social media and in the online survey for company employees. The theoretical framework, described in the section 3.4, is used to dissect the empirical findings and is used in the division of the findings into themes which are then analysed according to the theoretical framework. The first section discusses the findings from the company representatives' interviews and the latter the findings from the employee surveys. The theoretical framework derived from the literature review is used to analyse the data for prevalent themes not forgetting openness in order to find out new themes not existing in the literature.

4.1 Employer insight on employer branding in social media

4.1.1 Used social media channels

In the interviews it became evident that social media is used in many companies for employer branding, but the extent of use and channels used depends on the company.

Four of the interviewed companies (Company 1, Company 2, Company 3 and Company 5) were active in the same base social medias (Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter), and actually all had chosen these three since they are the "most popular ones" and had most active users. Company 4 was only active in Facebook and LinkedIn, but had just recently started using Youtube. The emergence of Youtube as a channel for employer branding was backed up by the fact that also company 4 was starting to use it for career stories and they explained that they want to make the company more visual for people through it. All companies had more general corporate Youtube channels, where they provided info about the company and its products/services, this way supporting the employer brand. When the interviewees talked about Youtube, most of them saw it as a very interesting channel and somewhat more

engaging than the for example Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. Company 2 being a listed company, and communication of companies in the Finnish stock exchange are rather closely regulated by Finnish laws, they felt that it was better to have only few channels in social media, in order to better manage them- for example they had had career videos in Youtube, but had taken them away as they were only part of specific campaigns.

Company 1 representative explained that they are Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter for recruiting and employer branding purposes and in addition Youtube is used for more general branding purposes, not directly aimed at employer branding from recruitment or talent acquisition perspective. In addition to the general company branding communications in social media, they also have lot of specific product/service branding material in social media, which supports the company branding. He mentioned that all channels have slight differences in their use and aim, but on the other hand he mentioned that "as employer brand communications cannot ever be differentiated from other corporate communications, basically all social media communications influence the employer brand in some way." This take about the nature of employer branding was supported by all of the interviewees. Additionally to the "managed" social media communications all employees who are in social media are also using it to promote the company in their own structured way in the medias they are present –this was also the case to large extent in the other interviewed companies.

Companies had very differing outtakes on social medias involving pictures (Pinterest, Instagram). In Company 2 after considering the start of use of such social media, they saw that they would not relate to their industry that well, thus not being worth the invested time. Whereas in Company 1 they were not present in these channels systematically at the moment, but stated that they might do it in the future, given that they see them useful and catching more attention. However both Company 1 and Company 4 used Instagram for their consumer products, so even though this is not employer branding activity as such, it however affects the overall visibility of these companies in the social media. Company 5 is using Pinterest, they have a Finnish Pinterest group under the global profile. They have

been very happy with Pinterest and believe that even though they are in B2B service industry photos tell more than thousand words

> *When a good photo is chosen well it conveys feelings very well and tells how great people we have, in a much better way that anything else.* –Company 5 rep.

Because of these positive feelings they are now considering of starting the use of Instagram in the near future. A point that the Company 5 rep. emphasized was that the photos have to be of good quality, but at the same time they should not be taken by ad agencies, but taken in with cellphone cams, thus portraying the situations truthfully.

Some of the interviewed companies (Company 1 and Company 2) had specific talent pages which were meant recruitment and employer branding purposes. Company 1 used LinkedIn as their number one recruitment channel, posting virtually all jobs there, mostly because it is the "number one platform for recruitment" and that makes it a "self-evident choice" and that the other main channels (Twitter, Facebook) are used because "they have the biggest global reach and user base". Company 2 however saw that the LinkedIn career page might serve the purpose for posting jobs, but the high price is too much at the moment and they preferred to use Twitter as their number one career page. There they post different kind of info about working at their company and sometimes also specific jobs.

Blogs didn't come up in all of the interviews, maybe they are not considered as social media by all of the interviewees, but Company 1, Company 3 and Company 5 mentioned that they had blogs of some sort. Company 1 and Company 3 had trainee blogs or summer employee blogs where the employees wrote about their work and day-to-day life in the company, whereas in Company 5 the blogs are more fact based posts about specific business related topics written by their specialists.

4.1.2 Actions and employer branding content in social media

From the empirical data it became evident that companies see their EB actions to mostly serve two distinct purposes –general posts supporting company's employer brand overall, discussions, pictures and the sort, and recruitment related posts about specific open jobs or trainee programs etc. For example Company 2 had the company career page in Twitter and tweets about what was happening at the office, achievements of some of their employees or how they were presented in a fair. It was said that in Company 2's social media channels aimed at employer branding they bring lot of soft values to the front; work-life balance, well-being of the employees and all other aspects of the company that differentiates it from its huge international competitors as an employer. So in this way also in social media they emphasize the values and choices that emerge from their corporate strategy. On the careers page the way of talking was also different (talking about the careers side vs. the corporate page);

> *...on this side we want to talk using WE, since the corporation doesn't actually do these things, but the people inside the company are the actual doers. It is something we want to emphasize.* –Company 2 representative

From using we as the subject in social media posts to carefully selecting what to post, one similarity in the way of thinking in all companies arose when the discussions turned into the posts itself –employee advocacy is the best way to reach people.

> *Communication is much more credible when people, from within the company tell how is it to work in the company.* –Company 4 representative

For Company 4 most of the posting is done by few active users but regardless of the number of active social media users inside the company the company representatives mentioned that the most credible message comes from the employee itself and most importantly it should well from their enjoyment in their jobs, that is something that people can sense and see.

This distinction is a good presentation of the fact that the company does not only select its message depending on the social media channel, but also the tone is often different than in

the normal corporate communication, which uses only the company name as the doer. In Company 4 the way and tone of communication in social media is still very similar to traditional media, which was also identified as a big downside in their social media employer branding –they want to change it to more informal, to match the general tone of social media. However, all company representatives agreed that the even though the tone of messages should be more informal they still argued that there has to be certain fixed way of communication or "company style" which is recognisable, or as the Company 3 rep put it:

> *We always try to use the same company template and be cohesive in the way how the jobs are posted, so that people recognize that the add is for from our company and this is our job.* –Company 3 representative

The recruitment related posts are very case dependent when the delivery and method are concerned. For example both Company 1 and Company 2 mostly post their jobs in English, but sometimes the job posts are done in local languages.

> *The choice of language when posting a job depends on what the job is… we want to maximize the reach of job posts by also using local languages if need be.*

> –Company 1 representative

In Company 1 the posts in local language were done in the local market by employees responsible of social media in the local market. The language however also caused some problems –in Company 2 not all jobs were posted to their LinkedIn careers page, because there the visibility was too big, that they usually received too much applications, which overloads the managers responsible for the recruitment. In addition they mentioned that through LinkedIn the amount of non-suitable candidates applying for a job, for example because the of lack of language skills, is problematic and creates unnecessary burden for the employees. As an example they mentioned that:

...even though we specifically mention in the job application that, for example Finnish is needed for a role, many people without the required language skills apply, mostly because the posts are done in English.   -Company 2

On the other hand, in Company 2 they want to get the "best talent" to work for the company, regardless of the country of origin, and LinkedIn is a great tool for that because of the huge reach. However they mentioned that the expensiveness of the LinkedIn Careers Page is one issue, and they might start posting jobs directly to LinkedIn in the future, without a company Careers Page and this way cut costs but still be present in this channel. Interestingly Company 4 had already done this when they quit paying for the LinkedIn Careers page and reverted to posting individual jobs directly to LinkedIn and supporting that by posting certain jobs also to Facebook. As a comparison Company 1 posts all their jobs to LinkedIn and in addition uses other channels (Facebook, Twitter) for enhancing the reach by posting selected jobs in these, when needed –a similar fashion that also Company 4 described it used a combination of outlets for employer branding.

Very interesting was that in Company 1 they see that one of their greatest assets in Twitter was their employees who have many followers; they re-tweet the Company 1's tweets when possible and in this way get much more publicity for them in their own networks. They emphasized that because of the personification of social media, strong figures who give publicity for the company are a key to success, in addition messages in social media have much more weight behind them if they come from individuals and not companies, a point which was agreed by all the interviewees in all companies. Also Company 5 used their employees specialist status in their own networks as one method for employer branding –as mentioned before their employees write to business blogs about current issues in their own field of expertise. This of course is very beneficial for their careers and status as an specialist, but it also improves the Company 5's standing as a home of best professionals, in this way it is a win-win situation for all. To furthermore improve the sp

Both Company 1 and Company 2 have been thinking of creating career stories as they are great way to present the actual people and the roles of the company to the public and they

give "a face to the company" –said by the Company 2 representative. In Company 1 it is still in the making, they want to create career videos, but they said that "we don't want to make the normal career videos, we want them to stand out and look like US" –they want their career videos to represent the company and its brands as they are in real-life, young, dynamic and fun, something which differentiates them from many competitors. Company 2 has decided to put career videos only to their own site instead of posting them on social media like Youtube, because of the better control over the content and the ability to delete if the employee changes employment. One challenge concerning career videos, that both Company 2 and Company 1 identified, is the difficulty to make appealing career videos in a company, where there are tens of different kind of positions and careers.

> *When the diversity of wanted employees is so broad –how much insight can the career story give to the viewer, when she can't actually identify herself with the employee or position in question because of the difference in the job?*

> -Company 2 rep

So for certain jobs and recruitment campaigns career videos offer good insight of the company but there are still many positions and people that do not benefit from them, and this is why in these two companies they are not used that often as of yet. When talking about further about the targeting of people recruitment wise, Company 1 said that a great way of targeting certain specialized groups of potential employees is to post jobs in LinkedIn's specialized sub-groups where professionals interact with each others. The actual act of finding the right sub-groups for certain jobs was outsourced to an agency and said to have been working great. Also Company 3 used the same strategy and their representative said that:

> *That is how you do recruitment in social media now, you need to target the people, because it is a buyers market right now.* –Company 3 representative

She also mentioned that also in Company 3 they put lot of emphasis on using their own employees networks to reach the potential future employees, because "great people know

great people" and if they search for the best talent, this is what it takes. This was also the general message from all the interviewees -the people that you have working for you are the best employer brand ambassadors.

A big influencer on the chosen activities and the amount of social media use depends on the audience the companies want to engage with –Company 1 targets people who are "digi-natives", meaning people who have grown up using computers and internet, whereas Company 2 admitted that they see that their target group does not consist of the very active social media users. One "innovation" from Company 1 is to start using a "check-in service" linked to LinkedIn on fairs and events, where people can like Company 1's page by few simple clicks. Then the company can track in which occasion people started following them and send them updates and personalized messages about the possible interests going forward.

This has been very popular and liked practise and has already yielded good response from the public. –Company 1 representative

Same kind of innovative ways of combining traditional career and job fairs or corporate presentation in universities (which were mentioned to be the traditional and still highly effective way of doing employer branding for young employees) with social media did not emerge in the interviews. Maybe this was because it is still something that is not really done in larger scale.

4.1.3 Activating employees in social media

Activating employees to use social media to post and spread posts about the company, in order to promote it and bolster its employer brand is a very important aspect of social media according to the academia, however this appeared to be somewhat challenging for all the companies. In all six interviews the company representatives were asked about their employees activity in posting about the company and how they are, if they are, trying to promote this behaviour inside the company. Based on the interviews it seemed that in all of

the companies they place lot of value on the employees' activity to take stance about the company when it comes to the social media posts, commenting and sharing them further. However, the interviewees did not mention the employees posting things about the company as an important aspect because it increased the amount of posts about the company, but they emphasized that the posts made by employees are more effective and resonate better with their networks and "the public". Company 3 representative expressed that they don't have any "social media liking scheme" but they believe that people who like the company will share the posts. "quality before quantity" in social media posts. Company 2 representative explained that according to their research most people who applied to their company did it because of a good reference about the company was made by their acquaintance.

> *"Our employees were very active in sharing our summer jobs in social media, and even if only dozen people share our summer job ads in social media, it makes a really really big difference."* -Company 2 representative

All the interviewees said that the passion to post and be active in social media has to come from within –if employees are happy and really enjoy their jobs, they will also naturally tell it to their friends and everyone else. That being said it is evident that the companies are also putting lot of resources to supporting their employees adaptation of social media, since the interviewees from Company 4, Company 5 and Company 2 said that they are training their employees in social media use and supporting in starting its use. It was said about Company 4 that the support for social media use, for employer branding and for other reasons, has to come from the company's high executives in order for it to be effective. Relating to this it seemed that in Company 5 they were few steps ahead in social media use, since they were already getting support for social media use on all company levels:

> *We are supporting employees from entry-level to partners and senior managers to start an active use of social media, for example by providing help in creating a good LinkedIn profile."* -Company 5 representative

For the employer side, the importance of employee engagement in social media is obviously great, at least when it comes to employer branding –this was the impression from the interviews, since all the interviewees emphasized it to some extent. Company 2 representative explained the reason for this through their eyes, and I believe that it is applicable to most companies that are part of this research.

> *"People who have been in the company for a long time are a statement of their own about how good we are as an employer and their reasons to stay with us are very important in creating the employer brand. Everyone has their own* (reasons) *and in the communication these subjective reasons have to be ever-so-present."* –Company 2 representative

Activating employees by creating games out of social media use or using software like SMARP share is an issue that divides the companies in two –others think that this will distort the message, motivate people use social media for wrong reasons and increase the posts in a non-beneficial way, the others think that it is potential way of development or even an essential step forward in social media use for companies. Company 2 and 3 were against the of using some kind of "artificial system" to increase the social media use of employees. Rather they believed that the employees will and want to promote the company is a enough big driver for social media use, and that this way the usage is not distort with the use of a promotion system.

Companies 4 and Company 5 on the other hand saw that the gamification would benefit the company and increase the social media use, thus serving its purpose for employer branding. Both companies had tested a new software called SMARP Share. Company 5 had tested it for a longer time with great results driving the amount of social media shares and posts up and Company 4 had started to test it, but also they had initially good results and high hope for the use of the software. Smarp Share program makes it possible for employees to choose which content they post from a ready made list of "digest" topics, employees can also earn points according to their social media activity, which in turn can of course be linked to compensation. In all the interviews the doubts about these kinds of software were

discussed – would it cause people to post too much posts, exhausting people in their own network? Would they post relevant stuff relating to them and their network? Would it annoy the employees' followers in their network, if they realized that the posts were all the time pro-employer and obviously aimed at promoting the company? According to the results from Company 4 and Company 5 this is not the case, but rather people were very selective on what they posted and also kept the amounts of posts in control, not over reaction in hopes of rewards.

Company 1 was in-between these two distinct groups, since they had been discussing the idea of gamefying social media use and rewarding it, but without starting to test it or even consider testing it. They saw that the possible negative consequences mentioned above were so big that they wanted to wait and not start it now considering it for a longer time and weighing their options. Main reason for not trying the gamification was that they saw that in most situations the use of software takes the personal touch out from social media use when people post what the software suggests or even what the software automatically posts.

4.1.4 Length of social media use

If the time that companies have used social media at all, for example for marketing has been quite short, the time they have used social media for employer branding has been ever shorter, and in all companies it has been rather recent development. However different companies were in slightly different situations in their social media adaptation for employer branding purposes.

The length of social media use seemed to correlate with the amount of used social media channels. For example Company 2 and Company 4 had the fewest social media channels in use and they had also been most using social media for employer branding for the shortest time. Both of the companies are were described by the interviewees as rather conservative, when it comes to social media use and its adaptation. So it is apparent that at least in these two cases being a conservative company in their own opinion meant that they were not

adopting social media that quickly but moreover expanded its use with slower pace. In both cases they had been using social media for employer branding for mere one year or slightly longer. On the other hand the time that social media has been used for employer branding is not apparently the best criteria to evaluate the its adaptation in companies as almost all companies had been using it systematically only for a year. For example this was also the case with Company 5 and Company 1 which had been using social media for about 1 year, but on the other hand used many different channels with variety of different ways in comparison to other companies with more narrow set actions.

4.1.5 Development of the social media use in time

Because the adaptation of social media for employer branding, and for company marketing purposes in general, has been very recent development for the studied companies its development this far and going forward seems to be rather unstructured and lot of question marks seem to remain. One reason for this is of course the quick development of social media in general, which, according to the interviewees makes it very hard to predict which are the social medias where it is most beneficial to be. Example of this is a comment from Company 4 representative from which it is evident that the quick change of social media causes companies to weight their options carefully.

> *We have been thinking about going to Twitter at some point of time. It is said that young people are leaving Facebook, so we are thinking about future alternatives on reaching them via social media.* –Company 4 representative

One big issue, which the interviewed companies faced when weighing the options about adding new social media channels, was the lack of resources. If the company has only one person responsible for social media for employer branding use, the time is very limited in all of the companies the interviewed person was not only responsible of social media use,

but had also other responsibilities. For example Company 2 and Company 3mentioned that one big reason for not starting to use new channels was the lack of resources

> *Starting a career twitter isn't now possible because the lack of resources, since now I am the only one responsible of going the posting.* –Company 3 representative

The interviewee from Company 2 similarly mentioned that if they wanted to start using new social media channels, it would also meant that more resources should be allocated their administration. It would not necessarily mean increasing the head count, but at least a more efficient organization for the work would be needed, since already now it is taking lot of time from many different employees.

With scarce resources the amount of social media channels has to be limited as also mentioned above –Company 5 representative mentioned that their approach to this going forward is to limit the amount of social media channels to the ones that are already in use, but try to make the use more effective in a way that more and more people are reached through them and the engagement is stronger. The same kind of direction for future was outlined by the Company 2 interviewee, although she added that:

> *Even though we now say that we don't need any new channels, if a new "mega channel" pops up, it might be that we would go there. The development has been quick, 5 years ago we were not using any of these channels –so it is very hard to say to what directions and how the social media and employer branding will develop.*
> -Company 2 representative

The above quote feels to summarize well the opinions linked to the development of social media and its use for employer branding. None of the interviewees had a clear idea to what directions the use of social media was developing and how they are planning to develop the use systematically –the one common opinion was that the change of social media is constant and that because of that they have to ready to adapt to the changing environment.

4.1.6   Reaching the target group

Targeting and reaching the target group was an important issue that arose from the literature review as a topic which should play a big role in employer branding in social media, which at least to some extent proved to be according to the interviews.

In Company 1 they do not adapt the tone or way of writing in their job ads or posts in social media, but try to maintain a tone that is cohesive with the company's way of communicating in order to maintain the integrity across platforms. However, for example for job ads posted in social media they used very specified channels in order to reach their target group. They used a third-party agency to do the plan where, for example to which LinkedIn sub-group, they would post the job ad in order for it to have the most effect and reach the specialists they were looking for. They have decided for this approach since it has proved to be very effective although very labour intensive, which is why they had opted to use an agency to do the research about the right forums. Their data showed that targeted job ads in social media resulted in much more clicks, which was also the case the more the job ad was posted to different places increasing its spread. The Company 1 representative also mentioned that of course they also adopt their message a bit depending on the target group, for example if it is a student or a seasoned veteran they are looking for –"the message has to resonate with the target group". Also Company 3 uses sub-groups in LinkedIn to target the desired potential employees, yet they do the time consuming research about the right groups themselves. The HR representative was also positive that the specific targeting of potential employees through carefully chosen channels yields the best results, even though they do not change the way how they "speak" in social media depending on the target group, but try to maintain it uniform throughout the company.

Company 2 approaches its target groups of employer branding bit more straight forward and in a more simplistic way, maybe because they employ people from doctors to blue-collar workers to specialists with PhD which means that their target groups are in general also much broader that in many other companies. The interviewee shed light that they actually only target the white-collar office workers through social media, focusing

employer branding efforts towards blue-collar through traditional means. However for summer work they use the same Facebook page to target both white- and blue-collar summer employees. The interviewee mentioned that "this division is rather odd in some way since people who are vocationally trained might be very active social media users."

Company 4 has similar kind of situation with Company 2 with huge variety of different roles offered by the company, meaning that they also need different kind of employees, however they do not actually target any of the groups specifically with particular actions. This differs a lot from Company 5, where they have made a distinction between the young prospects and more experienced professionals and the channel of choice for these groups. The young prospects are targeted more through Facebook and the experienced, a bit older, professionals are targeted more through Twitter, where the subjects and discussion are more professional with an edge for the seasoned specialists.

> *The open positions and information targeted for potential young employees is transmitted more through social media, for young people are more active there, whereas experienced professionals are searched and targeted more using print ads.*
>
> -Company 5 interviewee

Interestingly only in the interview with Company 5 representative it came up that they see that a combination effect with print media and social media is very good when discussing trainee recruitment campaigns or normal job ads. She said that when there is more announcements, posts or job ads simultaneously in various media the combined effect is the best as people are exposed to the company in many different medias, thus enhancing the retention of the company and its positions.

4.2   Employee perception of employer branding in social media

In the section that follows the most relevant findings from the employee interviews are presented in order to showcase the most relevant empirical data from that direction.

Only one of the 9employees had found the job using social media, even in this case the job ad was found from an online job board from which she was directed into the company's Facebook page, where more information was got. This was interesting since most companies put lot of effort on posting their jobs to social media, which was also noted by some of the employees. All others had found their current jobs using internet job boards without any touch to social media in that stage.

One of the workers from Company 4 mentioned that once before his opinion about the company was affected by their social media pages, which then had stimulated him to apply to that company. In addition, only two of the employees had used social media as a source of knowledge when looking for an employer and researching for possible employers. The one has tried but unfortunately there is not that much information available about employer at the moment. If in the future he becomes a job-seeker social media would be one of the main channels in the search of interesting employers. The other mentioned that she goes even beyond just researching for info about the employer but also looks details about the values, reviews and even looks for employees working in the possible employer company

The 3 employees from Company 5 said that the company is apparently very active towards the young prospects in social media since the Facebook pages are modern and well designed and the updates are more or less active. Also presence and activity in LinkedIn was noted. The 6 respondents from the Company 4 all mentioned that their employer virtually does nothing in social media, except of having a Facebook page for summer interns. This was seen as a negative thing by others, who wanted more social media presence. But almost all of them mentioned that social media did not have an effect on their choice of employer, on the other hand how could it have effected them, if the employer is near non-existent in social media. This was well summarized by one respondent "Social

media did not affect me. It is unlikely that that it would have decreased my interest if there had been more activities."

On the other hand according to the personnel from Company 5 all were aware of their employees presence both in LinkedIn and Facebook and mentioned that following the current and former employers offers them another way to stay in tune on what is happening currently. One of them also added that she follows many big companies in Twitter in order to get the news quickly and also see what are the current topics around the company.

Employees from Company 4 did not see the social media presence from their employers side as very important attribute and something that would affect their choice or image of the employer itself. On the contrary the workers from Company 5 did see it as an important factor when choosing the employer.

> *"For me it would be weird to work for a company which didn't have anything in social media. If I were a job seeker I would see it as the baseline and not an added value."* –Employee Comp. 5

> *"I do think that it is great to work for a company which is well-known in social media. Visibility in social media is held in high regard among job seekers."* – Employee Comp. 5

The employees from Company 5 mentioned that the way that the company communicates in social media goes hand in hand with the other corporate communications. However one employee mentioned that the Facebook posts have very relaxed and youthful tone than the general corporate communications, on the other hand it was added that the youthfulness is one of the driving value in the company. Youthfulness and flexibility were also identified as attributes which are communicated in social media and also represent the reality in the company well – which according all the employees gives a feeling that the social media posts are in tune and represent well the whole company. As the Company 4 is not very

active in social media, the image that is transmitted to the employees is also very partial and the consistency between the social media communications and employer branding activities was hard for the employees to evaluate. However one of them, who was more aware of what the company was doing in social media said, that in general Company 4 in social media is very close to the reality. On the other hand it was said that the great team spirit and feeling of mutual trust and fairness inside the company is not well communicated through social media.

When asked about the benefits that social media can bring to companies employer branding wise the answers were quite varied. Almost all respondents answered that social media is a channel which should be used more, except for two employees from Company 5. Subject highlighted by three employees was the fact that social media is good tool to profile employer as long as it is done in combination with other channels, not as the sole medium. Companies using social media for employer branding were seen to be more easily approachable by one respondent and channel towards the youth was also pinpointed as one big benefit. In contrast, the two employees, from Company 5, who thought that social media use does not benefit company's employer brand stated that in addition to corporate website social media does not offer the potential employees more information.

> *"Of course company can convey a certain kind of image as an employer there, but most probably people have already quite a strong image of the company if they already follow the company in social media"* –Employee

In general, the answers from the employees were very interesting and even as a base point some aspects presented by them may question how social media can, or should, be used by companies. Overall, however, it is very interesting to note that most of the 9 employees valued social media in a way or the other, and basing on their answers social media has at least some role to play in the future.

5   ANALYSIS

The true mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible.

-Oscar Wilde

Being directed by the words of Oscar Wilde to proceed into analysing the empirical findings, the theoretical framework outlined in the corresponding section is used to structure the analysis and hence tie the findings together with the academic literature.

5.1   Company

As described in before all of the companies included in this study were international companies –some were Finnish by origin with operations in many countries around the world and some were global companies with operations in the Finnish market. It seems that most of the companies were at least on some level in the avant-garde of the social media use, at least when employer branding is concerned, since all of them were very willing to talk about their operations and experiences and discuss their activities in rather confident manner. It could be said that all of the companies actually are among the leaders of their industry at least in the Finnish markets, meaning that their employer brand is already strong, this in turn according to Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), Edwards (2010) and Zagenczyk et al. (2011) is even as it is a strong driver for people to apply there as the company is already held in high-belief. This was also emphasized by one of the interviewed employees who mentioned that employer branding actions in social media might not have actually that big of an effect, at least to him, since usually the companies which are the most active, like his employer Company 5, are already very well known, even without social media presence. On the other hand, one could argue that for example for Company 5, social media activities are not only employer branding issue, but they built credibility among customers and most importantly for this thesis it furthermore enhance the company

culture of open communications and active social media use representing interactions with the surrounding society (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004). In addition, companies which rely on social media marketing also towards their customers, like Company 5, Company 2 and Company 3, need people who are active or at least somehow knowledgeable about social media in order to drive this marketing method. This can be at least partly achieved by showing people that a company is active in social media, which then in turn resonates with people who have interest in social media and this according to research in turn leads to stronger connection with the employer brand and the company itself (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004, Wilden & al. 2010).

To sum up, the companies that described that they encourage their employees to be active in social media and share content were actually at the same time creating a company culture which favours social media use, which in turn drives people who are in active in social media to work there. In this respect employer branding literature about company culture's (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004) and psychological contract's (Rousseau and Wade-Benzoni 1994) effect on the employees who are motivated to apply to the company could be seen to connect to reality, since at least in the case of the interviewed companies both the companies and the interviewed employees saw the importance of social media at least to some extent.

Most companies had very limited resources for managing social media activities when it comes to employer branding and this was also identified in as a big challenge in all of the companies. The limited resources of course affect how much money can be spend to services which are subject to a charge, like Career pages in LinkedIn and Facebook ads or sponsored posts, but this was not highlighted as the biggest problem. Company 3 and Company 5 being global companies, offer the employees taking care of social media lot of support on in the form of best practice forums and ready-made content which can be localized for sharing. Such surely would have been appreciated in all five companies, since the persons in charge of employer branding explained that they have to be very critical

about how much time they can use on various tasks when they are the sole contributors and the only one responsible more or less.

5.2   Message

When companies want to express that they are great places to work and thus enhance their employer brand they communicate their values, culture and try to express how the actual workday is like in order to create a consistent image in-between the employer brand and the reality (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004, Edwards 2010, Martin & al. 2004). Based on the findings from the interviews this is to large extent what the companies wanted to communicate, at least in the case of the companies which took part. As a number one attribute which was communicated was that the companies were a great place to work –nice co-workers, good atmosphere with many professional opportunities, this of course go together with the afore mentioned academic theories. The issue of presenting too rosy picture of the company was acknowledged by the companies and it was said that they try to do posts about the reality in the company, however for example Company 2 and Company 5 representatives mentioned that many pictures and situations are of course a bit special because they are somehow worthy of posting. From theoretical perspective this might be the vulnerable part of the social media use since if even the interviewees, who are part of the company, feel that the pictures are out of ordinary, how does the reality and the pictures go together for example for a new recruit? Social media literate. From the employees it was not possible to get an absolutely clear idea how they saw the cohesion between the communicated employer brand and the reality, but basing on their answers in the case of the two companies, there were not any big discrepancies. Actually quite the opposite, since all of them mentioned that the image in social media and the reality went hand in hand. So it would seem that at least to some extent the social media communications has been

cohesive and is similar to what Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), Edwards (2010) and Martin et al (2004) describe as the critical balance for successful employer branding.

When comparing the findings with Barwise and Meehan's (2010) four marketing success drivers in social media at least some tendencies do meet the expectations from their theory. The customer promise is of course the employer brand, the employee experience, including the benefits etc. that the employees get, and as mentioned before the delivery on that promise could be seen successful. Continually improving the promise and innovating beyond familiar are however dimensions that at least in the scope of this research were not discussed enough so that any conclusions could be made. However career stories in Youtube or the LinkedIn linked check-in service that Company 1 had in use, might be considered as new drivers on how to communicate the employer brand promise in a better way. This obviously does not mean that the employer brand promise would change through this, but still it could be postulated that the new innovative methods to use social media for employer branding also affects the employer brand in a positive way.

All of the companies mentioned that in addition to the career pages they also wanted to communicate about the company in general, for example in their corporate Facebook or Twitter page, and they all mentioned that the company brands either for consumers or businesses also supports their employer brand and makes their company better known. As mentioned before the interviewed companies are all very well known in Finland, which in turn indicates that from this viewpoint their employer brand is strongly supported by their other affiliated brand fame. Also from theoretical point-of-view (Wilden & al. 2010) company's employer brand is strongly affected by their other brands –both in positive and negative. Furthermore because of the openness of social media people are able to see and share remarkable amount of information about firms, which in turn makes the evaluation of firm's employer brand very easy for the public (Hunt 2010; Laick & Dean 2011). Going forward this leads to the fact that companies have to be very careful with their communications, since mistakes, bad feedback or PR problems do not only tarnish the company brand or their product brand, but directly also affect their employer brand.

In relation to the fore mentioned risk of "losing control" in social media none of the companies stated that they are afraid of losing control of their employer branding message when their employees are active in social media and communicating about issues important to the company or when the public engages the brand. However it was mentioned that also the companies feel that the corporations have to be very careful when planning what to post in social media and how to communicate, but overall it is apparent that in the interviewed companies they have lot of trust on social media.

Another embodiment of trust and the open interaction that is so paramount for social media is the two-way communication between companies and the public (Bruhn, Schoenmueller & Schäfer 2012; Jones, Temperley & Lima 2009). Unfortunately when it comes to the interviewed companies the two-way communications did not happen, not at least at the level that is described in the literature to be optimal to engage people with the brands and, tie them closer to them (Bruhn, Schoenmueller & Schäfer 2012; Jones, Temperley & Lima 2009). The companies that where part of the study were very aware that the starting a dialogue with potential employees and the public is the best way to engage them, but all of the interviewees mentioned that it is very hard to get reactions from people about their posts, not to mention that they would start actually commenting or discussing issues. The outtake of the employer branding professionals was that most companies are not interesting enough and they do not evoke strong emotions to the extent that people would start commenting them. This is maybe one of the aspects which needs more development going forward so that companies can communicate their employer branding message in a way that people start caring and engaging the brands more. On the other Bruhn et al. (2012) point out that for consumers the discussion itself around a brand serves as a proof of the brand appeal, despite being positive or negative. This is something that might not be 100% applicable to employer branding, but I think it worth noting that if companies would be willing to be more daring in their social media use employer branding wise, it would create more discussion. This would naturally mean that companies should also the same time tolerate negative discussion, at least to some extent.

5.3 Channel

This section of the analysis to large extent intertwined with the message and the actual actions that the companies do in social media, but as social media is a fast developing channel, which actually includes many channels underneath it, like the various different social media sites, it needs its section for the analysis.

Companies in the study used many social media channels, but in many ways they were the same ones that probably most of their competitors use - posting to Facebook, Twitter and Linkedin is not anymore that "new" and even some of the interviewees said that they use the "normal channels". Some companies had blogs, but they do not seem to be that popular yet. However the rise of professional bloggers for the consumers and also many professional blogs is of course an indicator to most industries to start putting their effort to blogs, which of course means that the adaptation for employer branding purposes in larger scale has to happening in the near future.

If blogging was one channel that could be used more by companies in social media leveraging the user created input or insights is something that could also be developed, since, according to the findings, the companies do not use the social media as an input channel. For branding purposes companies use social media in order to get data, insights, opinions from the consumer discussions and opinions, which provides them with information how their employer brand could be customized to fit and offer their target segments preferences perfectly (Barwise & Meehan 2010; Yan 2011). Yan (2011) furthermore stated that if this data could be used effectively then companies could use it to get an competitive advantage over their competitors, which I believe could also be the case in employer branding wise. Employer branding wise this was not however the case; none of the companies told that they sourced new strategies, ideas from employees from social media. This of course is closely linked to the fact that the companies were not able to

engage the public so well as consumer brands, which means that there is not much discussion to source the ideas from. This is however currently a thing that needs development in some companies.

Youtube was identified as a rising channel and seen as a good way to bring news value for people in the form of videos and more visual material. Pinterest and Instagram were also seen as one possibility, but the visuality seemed to be also the biggest doubt for the companies. The visual approach was seen e.g. in Company 2 as a risk, since they did not feel that people would not want to see pictures from to them, or it would be at least unexpected. But the unexpectedness and flexibility that social media offers, is, at least according to research (Bruhn, Shöenmueller & Shäfer 2012; Jones, Temperley & Lima 2009) , one of the biggest assets in this channel. And furthermore it is also what people are expecting as they are so used to consuming and using social media. So the problem might actually be in their daringness to actually jump into using this new channel, or as by Bruhn, Schoenmueller & Schäfer (2012, p.784) "companies should view social media as an essential component of their marketing communication mix, and integrate them in their marketing communications in order to increase brand equity." In the light of this study, this big step has not been taken yet, but is something that might determine the long term use and success of social media for employer branding going forward.

One aspect that was somewhat covered in the interviews with the HR professionals, was the timeliness of the social media use and how the employer branding communication was quickly posted and as "fresh" as possible. Twitter is known as a service which has a reach and quickness in distributing breaking news very quickly before they reach the traditional media outlets (Hensel & Deis 2010), and this was also something that at least the companies with Twitter accounts were leveraging – quick and recent developments which can be quickly briefed and people are then provided a link or a photo. This is the way how companies were also using Facebook, to some extent, they posted pictures of events with quick explanations. This quickness of communications is something which draws many people to social media, and is also the way how people want to use social media, hence the

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ability to leverage this is a great asset for a company (Hensel & Deis 2010). Some of the employees also mentioned that they follow many companies just because of this very reason –both company news and new job opportunities were mentioned as an object of interest in social media.

The possible problem of visual branding in the most popular social media sites Facebook and Twitter, a problem identified by Yan (2011), did not come up in the interviews as a problem for the companies. On these pages companies cannot use the strong semiotic signs to engage with customers, even though some brand imagery like photos or logos can be put to the pages, which means that the important aspect of brand visuals is much less developed than in common branding imagery or branding on company owned websites (Yan 2011). It is very hard to take a stand if this is also a problem for employer branding, but as in employer branding the whole brand communications is also very important, including the colours and fonts, this might be an issue that has to be studied more in order to now the actual effect.

5.4   Actions

The actions that the interviewed companies are doing in social media is in many ways in the centre of this study since through these actions they are actually communicate their employer brand to the employees and advertise their jobs and career opportunities. Just like the theoretical framework indicates the actions can be seen through two different lenses, what the companies are doing employer branding wise and then how does it go together with the three former sections.

All five of the interviewed companies described that they use their social media channels to post jobs in similar ways that they do in traditional job boards, with similar kind of language and style which they have been using before. The content and methods are

however a mix traditional employer branding and social media usage. Companies post jobs, post photos from their daily work or more special occasions, publish news in social media and for example link new publications or good publicity in other media. In addition, according to the findings most companies did combine the employer branding and recruitment efforts between social media and traditional medias like print ads as well, Company 5 was the most prevalent in this from the interviewed firms. Combining job posting and other employer branding activity in social media with traditional channels is very important according to Edwards (2010) as it often is not enough to achieve an employer brand by putting effort solely into wanted ads in order to communicate the employer brand to the employees, as this is not perceived as enough to evoke interest. Also in the former sections the interest of the public was discussed and it could be argued based on the interviews that also the companies acknowledge that the job posts or trainee programs are the biggest drivers for interest for the public, over shadowing the other social media actions. On the other hand according to research (Collins & Haan 2004, Collins & Stevens 2002) a positive image or favourable general opinion about a company among the public is generally seen to positively affect employees' job application tendency. Combining this with the findings, the problem might be that the job ads are creating the interest for potential employees, even though it should be the other employer branding activities in social media, which drive the interest for the job ads even higher. This in turn indicates that there is much potential in building better employer branding activities going forward.

Very interestingly from the interviews it became evident that engaging the public in social media is a big problem for all of the participating companies. All of the interviewed companies stated that they had difficulties in getting people to comment their posts, post questions and sometimes even share or like the posts. This of course indicates that one of the biggest opportunities in social media, which is the discussions and engagement from the members of the social networks (Bruhn & al 2012; Jones & al 2009), is actually apparently also one of the hardest things to achieve. The difficulty to engage the public to online conversations points out that companies have lot to learn about how people use social

media and how they can be better engaged going forward. One important aspect mentioned by few of the company representatives was that companies do not evoke strong emotions in people, which is why they do not see the need to engage with the companies. Hensel and Deis (2010) accentuate that people use social media to have fun and when this is projected to the findings from the companies, it might be one of the big reasons which is still lacking in employer branding in social media, at least for these companies. If the conversations and the stimulation for engagement is the big challenge for the interviewed firms, what are then the actions that can drive the interaction and two-way communications forward? A key to this might be, according to Bruhn, Shöenmueller and Shäfer (2012) and Jones, Temperley and Lima (2009), an ongoing stimulation to engage and start discussions in social media and encourage the customers genuinely engage in online conversation while the conversation should be integrated into the company's other web presence in aim of creating unforgettable experiences.

The use of companies own employees referral and activity towards enhancing the company's employer brand was one key finding and also supported by academia. According to the literature both in employer branding and in marketing in social media, the opinion of individuals reference groups and networks has a big impact on the opinion of the individual –especially in employment decisions especially the currently employed have particular weight behind their referrals (Collins and Stevens 2002; Moroko and Uncles 2009; Wilden & al. 2010). All companies saw that the best possible way of spreading their employer brand ins social media was through their own employees. They argued that when an employee communicates positive, or sometimes even negative, things about the company, it is better understood and believed by people –if you trust and know the person who is posting, you also are more inclined to believe what she is saying. This is partly why companies want their employees to communicate about their work in social media, and like the Company 2 representative explained, if an employee really likes her job and the company, it is the best kind of promotion since it is genuine -"nobody believes when companies are telling how good they are". The findings and the theoretical framework substantiate that when companies want to communicate their employer brand to their target

group, they should not only focus on their own actions, but moreover be sure that their employees are active in social media in their own networks, as this is closer to the genuine interaction that social media is known for. Unfortunately the findings from the employees did not offer any insight about the possible effect that the social media actions of their friends or acquaintances had on their choice of employer or company employer brands in general.

As mentioned before, the findings indicate that in the light of this study companies use social media in two distinct ways they use it for general employer branding communications and for posting jobs. The job posts are done in variety of ways in the different companies, mainly focusing company career page in LinkedIn, if they have one, or then other pages like Facebook or Twitter. Interestingly enough most interviewed employer branding responsible said that the companies use professional sub-groups in LinkedIn, in order to target their career opportunities and especially open job posting just the right potential employees. The research needed to find the right groups for every posted job takes lot of time and resources and was sometimes done by outsourced agencies. This fragmentation of social media as a recruitment platform has been a topic of discussion also in the academic literature, which indicates that the challenge that the interviewed companies face is commonplace. This could be a great example of how companies should use all the possible methods that are available when using social media and combine it effectively and use it side-by-side with the more traditional ways of recruiting like the theoretical framework also indicates (Jobvite 2013; Madia 2011; Ollington, Gibb & Harcourt 2013).

5.5   Segmentation and target group

Segmentation of the employer branding offering for specified employee groups and targeting them accordingly is one of the key concepts in efficient and effective employer

branding and it plays a major role in cutting costs by aligning the company offering with the needs of the most important groups of employees (Moroko and Uncles 2009). This is not only the aim of the employer brand itself but plays an important role in social media since by effective segmentation and targeting companies can save their resources, which was identified as one issue in the findings.

In the section about specific actions in social media the use of sub-groups in LinkedIn was mentioned and in this case the effective segmentation is one of the main drivers, since the companies mentioned that in this way they can easily connect with just the right talented specialists. Similarly few companies had dedicated Facebook pages for the summer interns, which is just another incarnation of the segmentation –when young employees know that the summer job positions and all relevant info and stories are posted on the specific page, the following of the jobs and company is easier. These actions are a good example how through segmentation the communications and the communicated employer brand and the promised employee experience are perfectly aligned with the needs of the specific employee group. This strategy goes hand in hand with the employer branding segmentation theories from App, Merk and Büttgen (2012) and Moroko and Uncles (2009). Company 2 had made a decision that they targeted mostly white collar employees in social media while using traditional channels to promote their employer brand for blue collar workers. The company representative also acknowledged that this strategy might be problematic since in general employees general career path or job function does not, at least according to studies correlate with the use of social media. As an example it represents well that the segmentation decisions should be deliberate and serve a purpose in a way that it affects the employer branding positively.

Another way of segmenting the offering in the studied companies was to clearly divide the workforce in half, the young prospects who get employed with virtually no work experience straight from university and then the experienced professionals who are already specialists in their own fields; this strategy was used by Company 5 and by Company 1 to some extent. One benefit of this strategy is the fore mentioned precise targeting of

meaningful parts of the employer brand to the certain group, which is supported by theories (App & al 2012; Moroko & Uncles 2009). In addition according to studies the two groups of employees do not only have specific requirements of their employer, but the more experienced employees were argued to evaluate brand promises and communicated company characteristics more critically and in more relective manner (Edwards 2010; Wilden & al 2010).

The findings show that in the case of the companies involved in the study the consistent work of developing the employer brand was emphasized and the aim in all companies was to develop the employer brand in long term in a way that the target groups finds the communicated employer brand and the employment experience similar. This kind of alignment, of the employer brand with the company values and the target group, in the long run (Aggerholm and al. 2011) should create a distinctive employer brand which in turn attracts distinctively talented human capital, thus driving the company's competitive advantage (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004). Findings suggest that the companies believed that their employer brand was consistent and hence made the employer experience offering clear to the employees. The employees also indicated that in the two companies, in which they worked, the employer brand that was communicated in social media and in other channels matched the reality. In this sense the findings suggest that both Company 4 and Company 5 were successful in matching the employer brand and the reality, which according to the literature (Knox & Freeman 2006), is a key driver in creating attractive and distinct employer brands which guarantee differentiation from the competitors. For example Company 5 is seen as an attractive employer both for young and more experienced employees, so it could be argued that the segmentation works at least to some extent. In this case where employees were interviewed only from two companies, it is not suitable to make conclusions on how segmented employer branding works in larger scope, but it is something to study further in the future. For example a comparative study between two different employee segments of the same company about how they see the employer brand from their perspective might shed light on the fact if the company can actually successfully maintain an attractive employer brand towards two distinct segments.

6   CONCLUSION

In this final section of this investigation I will summarize the findings of the study and present my conclusions going through the answers to the two research questions. In addition the theoretical contribution and the managerial implications of the research are discussed and finally, the last part is my suggestions for further research.

6.1   The main findings

The research was set up in order to find out what is the current situation of social media use for employer branding in Finland. The research was not designed to go specifically deep into any theory or support any pre-set hypothesis , but more over to be a preliminary study to this field in Finland in order to find out the overall situation, which could then be examined further by other studies going forward. The results of the thesis are not in any way representative of the overall situation in Finland for the amount of studied companies was so small, and the depth of the research for the second research question was not sufficient because of the difficulties to find employees for the interviews. Nevertheless the findings of this investigation are interesting and serve as a good base for further studies.

1. How do companies operating in Finland use social media for employer branding in terms of attraction of new employees*?*

The use of social media for employer branding purposes in the studied companies at the current stage seems to be in a kind of a transitional period. All of the companies used a variety of channels in different ways to bolster their employer brand and attract new employees, but generally the used social media sites were usually the most traditional ones,

Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. Some companies however were widening the channel base by using Youtube, Pinterest, blogs and Instagram, while at the meantime other companies had deemed some of the channels unfit for their company or for the activities. One characterizing factor for the social media use was the coherence of the activities and the communicated employer brand with the company's overall image and the work reality, which was seen as a corner stone in employer branding, in general and especially in social media. The companies were really careful that their employer branding message was inline with both the reality and with the employer branding communications day did in other channels and with different methodology. The combination of employer branding in social media with the traditional methods and channels, like print ads, job boards, job fares was the reality in the interviewed companies, which should, according to literature, be the best way to enhance the employer brand.

The studied companies used a number of different ways while trying to bolster their employer brand and attract new employees to join their ranks. Most of the companies used segmentation as a method to divide the employees to smaller categories in order to efficiently communicating essentials of the employer brand for that specific group. Posting jobs in various social media pages, having career pages and pages for trainee programs and adding career stories to Youtube were all part of the actions in social media, whereas not any of the companies had very special or distinct actions which would have differentiated them from the five companies. Maybe the most important action, not only by the company representatives but also academia, was the use of company employees to promote the company employer brands in social media. The employee endorsement will most probably be a bigger part of the social media actions in the future as that has been also focus of various new commercial endeavors.

All in all the companies were active in their social media use for employer branding, but however the companies were obviously still in the first stages of social media invocation,

which is of course understandable since the companies had been using social media for employer branding for a maximum of couple of years.

2. *Does the use of social media affect the job applicants' likeliness to apply to the company?*

The sample of the employees was small and unfortunately they were employer only by two of the interviewed companies, which means that the companies could not be compared to each others from this viewpoint. The findings however indicate that these companies have lot of improvements that they have to do in order to make an actual effect on their employer brand with social media activities. The employees opinions were rather varied, since the majority of them thought that social media is a great way to find info about companies and possible employers, whereas some explained that social media plays no significant role for them in the choice of employer nor does it make their employer stand out in their opinions. Controversially only one employee mentioned that social media had actually affected her choice of employer, which indicates that there is a big difference in between the believed effect of social media and the actual effect it has on the employees. If some conclusions were to be made based on the findings, then it could be said that, even though currently employer branding had not affected the employment choice of the included employees, they all still had opinions and preferences about social media use, which would not be the case if they were completely ignorant towards it.

Some employees mentioned that they follow social media pages of companies, both their own employer and other companies, since they want to be in tune what is happening at the moment and see what they are posting, adding that social media would also be their main job search channels if it came to that and that social media presence more of a must for an employer than an added benefit. From this point of view there must be potential also for further research in probing the employee opinions and preferences even further.

6.2   Limitations

There are a number of limitations to this research, including but not being limited to ones highlighted in this section. Firstly, the scope of the thesis is small, only focusing on five international companies operating in Finland. A small sample as this, is not representing picture of businesses operating in Finland, meaning that the results are no indication of the bigger picture of social media for employer branding.

Secondly, the employee interviewees are already hired to the companies, of which use of social media for employer branding they are interviewed about, which denotes that neither in this perspective broad generalizations can be made. This said, I believe that a good possibility for further research would be to target a bigger pool of job seekers and ask them what actions in social media catch their attention and possibly affect their employment process. A more ample list of the limitations to this study can be found from the methodology section of this research.

6.3   Managerial implications

For managers and business decision makers the implications of this study are two-fold. Firstly it is obvious from the findings and the related literature that more and more companies are using social media for employer branding. They are not using only one channel, but they are combining it with the other outlets for employer branding, which amplifies the effect even further, and when combined with the drive to develop new methods and activities, the development will be quick going forward. Because of this all managers have to be willing to start using social media for employer branding and particularly put resources to the administration, since most companies do not, which means that that can be the driver to make social media competitive advantage.

The findings from the employees might not offer a totally new and ground-breaking insight on how they see the subject, but more importantly it was shown that companies do many things right in social media and there are employees who prefer it as a communications channel. And the interest and usage most probably grows as going further. This demonstrates that managers should also critically think what they are doing in social media employer branding wise and why, since as more and more companies start using it, and as presence there becomes the new minimum companies have to have something other to differentiate themselves from the competitors.

So in the end, based on this research there is not that many other alternatives for the managers than to develop their employer brand also through social media, since just like Company 3 representative said "It is not anymore a choice of if you want to be in social media, but it should be a baseline."

6.4   Suggestions for future research

As this research was in a way only a light ground research what is the situation at the moment in the Finnish market, there are lot of opportunities for future research. First of all, a great possibility would be to make a quantitative study with a much bigger sample about how many companies operating in Finland use social media for employer branding and how. This would offer us a better understanding of how widespread the use is and how companies use social media for employer branding in general. Another interesting study path would be to focus more on the employer side of the research equation and find out how employees respond to the increasing social media activity. This kind of deeper study about the employee side would also be especially beneficial for the managers since it should provide them with actual best practices and show the importance or irrelevance of social media use going forward. In general as social media is now more grounded to everyday business life there will be more conceptual studies about it, which in turn means

that the theoretical base for further studies will be even better and sturdier than it currently is.

7 APPENDIX

7.1 Interview Questions for HR

The following questions were formulated for the first sections of the interviews, with the company HR representatives, and concentrates on employer branding. There are two main questions and then sub-questions to deepen the conversation about relevant dimensions.

1. How do you currently use social media for employer branding?
   - In what social medias are you active currently and why?
   - How would you describe your company's actions in social media?
     o Have they changed/developed through time?
     o Do you coordinate social media activities with other communications linked to your employer brand?
   - Do you target specific groups through social media?
     o If so, do you customize the message depending on the target audience?
   - How does your employer branding activities in social media fare to those of your competitors?

7.2 Interview questions for employees

1. What was the process of selecting your employer?
   - Do you know/remember if your employer is active in social media as an employer?

- If you remember, could describe something they did/are doing in social media?
- Do you feel that the companies' social media presence had an effect on your decision of your employer?
    - o What actions affected your decision? And what kind effect did they have and why?
- Can you think any examples of companies or company actions which you remember from social media?
    - o Why do you think that they are something you remember?
- Do you follow companies in social media? In which websites?

2. (Do you feel that the image of the company is consistent with the one you got from their social media before you applied to the company?)
    - Can you describe how it was different? (if it was different)
    - What are the most different aspects of the image and reality

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