



Bachelor Thesis, 15 credits, for a Bachelor of Science in
Business Administration: International Business and Marketing
Spring 2019

The unknown brand of the Swedish Armed Forces

*A case study of how the SAF's brand image coheres to
its brand identity and how it might influence its employer
attractiveness*

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Title

The unknown brand of the Swedish Armed Forces:

A study of how the SAF's brand image coheres to its brand identity and how it might influence its employer attractiveness

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Abstract

This study is based on the case of the Swedish Armed Forces (SAF) since the organization has struggled with its recruitment and brand building. The purpose of the study is to approach the coherence between brand image and brand identity through an employer branding perspective. More specifically, it aims to explore how this interplay might influence the employer attractiveness of an organization. The research is based on a qualitative case study. Furthermore, previous research regarding brand identity, brand image and employer branding constitutes the basis of the developed conceptual model. The empirical material was gathered through semi-structured interviews with current SAF employees and semi-structured focus groups with potential employees. Findings indicate the brand image did not cohere with the brand identity and that the potential employees had a more negative perception of the employer. However, the potential employees' who had relatives who work for the SAF had a positive attitude towards the organization and perceived the workplace as more attractive. This study has contributed with an additional perspective on employer branding since there is little research within the field.

Key words:

Branding, corporate brand, brand image, brand identity, employer brand, employer attractiveness

Acknowledgements

We would like to express our gratitude to ...

Lisa Källström

For being the first person that believed in our idea and for always pushing us forward through sincere guidance. She has been a great motivation and inspiration through this journey.

Indira Kjellstrand

For always encouraging and motivating us during difficult and stressful times. Also, for always seeing potential in us when we did not see it.

Annika Fjelkner

For making the thesis readable through her continuous guidance with language, structure and core sentences.

Respondents

For making this thesis feasible through their engagement and honest opinions.

Our family & friends

For always supporting and believing in us in the most difficult times, but also for motivating us through this period. Most importantly, for surviving our breakdowns and constant talks about the SAF.

Kristianstad 29th of May 2019



Clara Henriksson



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Table of content

1	Introduction.....	1
1.1	Background.....	1
1.2	Problematization.....	3
1.3	Purpose	6
1.4	Research question	6
2	Theoretical methodology	7
2.1	Research philosophy.....	7
3	Theoretical framework.....	9
3.1	Branding	9
3.1.1	<i>Corporate brand</i>	<i>10</i>
3.2	Brand Image & Brand Identity	11
3.2.1	<i>Brand Image.....</i>	<i>12</i>
3.2.2	<i>Brand Identity</i>	<i>13</i>
3.2.3	<i>Brand Identity Prism.....</i>	<i>14</i>
3.2.4	<i>The Customer Brand Identity Model.....</i>	<i>15</i>
3.3	Employer branding	18
3.3.1	<i>Link between quality of employees and quality of product/service</i>	<i>20</i>
3.4	Conceptual Model.....	21
4	Empirical Method	23
4.1	Research design	23
4.2	Collection of empirical material	23
4.3	Participant selection.....	25
4.4	Interviews	26
4.5	Focus groups.....	28
4.6	Data analysis.....	29

4.7 Trustworthiness	30
4.8 Limitations	31
5 Case presentation	32
5.1 The SAF's history	32
5.2 About the SAF	33
5.3 The SAF's marketing campaigns	35
6 Empirical findings & Analysis	37
6.1 Current employees	37
6.1.1 Culture	37
6.1.2 Mission & Vision	40
6.1.3 Brand core	41
6.1.4 Personality	43
6.1.5 Personal relationships	45
6.2 Potential employees	46
6.2.1 Value proposition	46
6.2.2 Relationship	48
6.2.3 Position	50
6.2.4 Expression	52
6.2.5 Personality	53
6.3 Comparison of brand image & brand identity	54
6.4 Employer brand	57
7 Thesis conclusions	59
7.1 Summary of dissertation	59
7.2 Conclusion	60
7.3 Research implications	62
7.4 Critical review & future research	63
References	65

Appendix 1 – Interview Guide	72
---	-----------

Appendix 2 – Focus-group guide	74
---	-----------

List of figures

<i>Figure 1- Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism</i>	<i>14</i>
--	-----------

<i>Figure 2 - Customer Brand Identity Matrix</i>	<i>17</i>
--	-----------

<i>Figure 3- Link between quality of employees and quality of product/service</i>	<i>20</i>
---	-----------

<i>Figure 4 - The circle of employer attractiveness</i>	<i>21</i>
---	-----------

List of tables

<i>Table 1 - The interviewees from the SAF</i>	<i>26</i>
--	-----------

<i>Table 2 - The names of the respondents in each focus group</i>	<i>28</i>
---	-----------

<i>Table 3- The culture within the SAF</i>	<i>39</i>
--	-----------

<i>Table 4- Mission and vision of the SAF</i>	<i>41</i>
---	-----------

<i>Table 5- The brand core of the SAF</i>	<i>43</i>
---	-----------

<i>Table 6- The characteristics of the SAF if it would be a person</i>	<i>44</i>
--	-----------

<i>Table 7 - Personal relationships' influence on the employees</i>	<i>45</i>
---	-----------

<i>Table 8- The potential employee's perception of the value proposition</i>	<i>47</i>
--	-----------

<i>Table 9- The relationship between the SAF and the potential employees</i>	<i>50</i>
--	-----------

<i>Table 10- The SAF's position in the potential employees' minds</i>	<i>51</i>
---	-----------

<i>Table 11- The potential employees' perception of the SAF's marketing and communication .</i>	<i>53</i>
---	-----------

<i>Table 12- The perceived characteristics of the SAF</i>	<i>54</i>
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1 Introduction

In the following section the background, problematization, purpose and research question are presented. The first section gives an overview of the background and current situation of the Swedish Armed Force. Secondly, the problematization presents the research gap and explains why the research is relevant as well as how it is related to the Swedish Armed Forces. Finally, the section ends by explaining why the research is relevant and presents the question of the research.

1.1 Background

We defend Sweden and the country's interests, our freedom and the right to live the way of our choice. (Swedish Armed Forces, 2019)

The citation above presents The Swedish Armed Forces' (SAF) motto which highlights the importance of a strong defence in order to secure Swedish citizens' rights. During and after World War II, the SAF struggled with a powerless defence, a collapsing recruitment and a weakened brand. When the SAF realised its defence was weak it took measures which in 1964 allowed Sweden to experience the most well-equipped military force in its best condition (Försvarsmakten, 2019). However, it quietly deteriorated again at the same time as the political safety situation had improved. Other countries started to abolish the compulsory military service and Sweden was not an exception. In 2010, Sweden established a free military service after more than 100 years.

Even though the abolishment of other countries' compulsory military service influenced the decision of Sweden, there were additional influential factors. For example, the SAF wanted to increase the quality of its employees by targeting potential employees who would voluntarily work for the institution and share its values. More specifically, the SAF had the ambition to create a professional army with highly educated and motivated soldiers. Therefore, the organization had to increase its focus on its recruitment process and marketing which did not turn out as successfully as planned (Tidningarnas Telegrambyrå, 2011; Karlsson, 2016). Military issues were more discussed before and rooted in the society. Therefore, the SAF had not previously considered marketing (Ellsén, 2018).

Ellsén (2018) claims that the perception of what the SAF is and does will remain unknown for the most. That is why, when in 2011 the SAF aimed to strengthen its brand and gain increased trust from the entire Swedish society it proved to be a big challenge (Tidningarnas Telegrambyrå , 2011; Strand, 2018). As the SAF was no longer assigned with employees and had to compete with other employers, there was a need for an attractive brand (Maurya & Mishra, 2012). It has also become even more difficult to recruit new employees as fewer people now want to become officers (Ellsén, 2018). The organization had hoped to attract applicants with greater competence which also failed. The highly competent did not apply and the objective of recruiting 4000 men and women each year was not achieved (Benigh, 2018). At the same time, the political safety situation has become once again unstable which strengthens the argument that there is a need of greater recruitment (Jarteg, 2016). Consequently, in 2017 the compulsory military service was reinstated.

Even though the compulsory military service has been reinstated, the problems with recruitment and brand-building have not disappeared. For example, The U.S announced that Sweden cannot depend on the U.S defence in case of war (Hagberg, 2019). In its latest annual report, the Supreme Commander of the SAF claimed, *“the employees are and will always be our most important asset”* which once again highlights the need of greater recruitment (Försvarsmakten , 2018, p. 1). However, according to Anders Åkermark, head of recruitment the SAF did not manage to strengthen its brand, become competitive and attract competent employees (Benigh, 2018). Therefore, all-measures taken in 2018 were based on that the SAF wanted to be perceived as an attractive and open workplace for everyone (Försvarsmakten , 2018). For example, besides opening up the organization for female applicants, the SAF has also undertaken social activities such as the participation in the Pride Festival to highlight the importance of diversity (Försvarsmakten , 2018; Försvarsmakten, 2019). The minister of defence, Peter Hultqvist, hopes that the issue of manpower is temporary and can be solved through a sustainable recruitment system where compulsory military service will no longer be necessary (Jarteg, 2016).

1.2 Problematization

Branding has become important in business and for some organizations, brands are seen as the most valuable asset (Kapferer, 1997; Aaker, 1996; 2002). Brands allow an organization to differentiate itself from its competitors, but it is not enough to stay competitive (Kapferer, 1997). Therefore, brands need to create meaningful associations that engage stakeholders and catch their attention. In order to mediate a strong brand, it is necessary that the organization, together with its employees, engages in creating a shared vision and a powerful brand identity (Roy & Banerjee, 2014). The concept of brand identity was first mentioned in 1986 by Kapferer (Janonis et. al, 2007). According to Kapferer (1997), brand identity is defined as what the brand represents by an organisation, its values, what makes it recognizable and different. Furthermore, Kapferer (1997) as well as Aaker (1996), claim that brand identity is created internally together with the organization's values. The main purpose of brand identity is to provide directions, purpose and meaning that focuses on moral image and values (Janonis et. al, 2007). It is important to consider brand identity since few brands know who they are, what they stand for and what makes their brand unique (Kapferer, 1997). Therefore, in the case of the SAF, there might be inconsistency within the organization regarding the brand identity which in turn might influence the SAF's communicated message to its stakeholders. The issue of an incoherent brand identity might influence the brand image since its stakeholders might not perceive the message according with the organization's idyllic brand image. Kapferer (1997, p. 91) claims that *"having an identity means being true to yourself, driven by a personal goal that is both different from others and resistant to change"*. Hence, the brand identity is seen from the company's perspective and serves as a link between the organization and its stakeholders (Kapferer, 1997; Aaker, 2004).

On the other hand, brand image is what the receiver decodes from the communication of a brand's identity and its positioning. One of the most influential experts of brand management claims that the real value of a business lies in the minds of potential buyers and this perception is called brand image (Kapferer, 1997). Since brand image is decoded by receivers, it can create associations and emotions towards the brand that can affect the brand identity (Nandan, 2005). Therefore, Kapferer (1997) claims that the identity must be clearly defined before sending a message to be decoded since identity and image affect each other. Likewise, Park et. al (1986) argue that in order to establish a coherent brand, a clear choice of brand identity has to be made that appeals to the public and at the same time is consistent with the brand image.

The coherence between brand identity and brand image is not always easy to obtain for an organization due to extraneous factors such as noise and competitors (Kapferer, 1997). For example, after the abolishment of the compulsory military service, the SAF did not obtain assigned employees anymore. Instead it had to face the competition of other employers which might have aggravated the communication of the SAF's brand identity. The abolishment also resulted in that the SAF became more independent and had to reach out to potential employees as well as adopt greater marketing efforts. Moreover, along with the digitalization the flow of information has increased, hence it is more difficult to reach out to stakeholders with a certain message. Consequently, this might have contributed to the SAF's recruitment issues. The most efficient way to communicate with stakeholders is when the brand image and brand identity cohere, where the brand identity creates value for its stakeholders (Kapferer, 2003). If the brand image does not cohere to the brand identity, the brand can experience attenuation which in turn might affect its core values (De Chernatony & McEnally, 1999; Roy & Banerjee, 2014). Since the SAF's recruitment objective failed, we believe that one potential factor that caused the failure might derive from poor brand management. Furthermore, if there is inconsistency between brand identity and brand image, it creates a communication gap which further can cause brand identity crisis. Besides coherence between brand identity and brand image, it is necessary that the brand identity is perceived as attractive by the public (Nandan, 2005).

To continue, the incoherence does not urge to change an organisation's brand identity, but rather change the perceived brand image that is decoded in peoples' minds (Roy & Banerjee, 2014). The SAF has aimed to change its brand identity from raising boys into men with a masculine approach to take part in Pride Festivals in order to attract various personalities and gender with appreciation for differences (Försvarsmakten , 2018). Furthermore, on the SAF's website it is stated *"We practice for what we know is necessary today, plan for what we know will be required tomorrow, and adapt to the developments we cannot predict"* (Försvarsmakten , 2018). Therefore, since the SAF adapts to the modern society as the society changes, it might influence the organization's brand identity. It is argued that brands that fail to adapt to changes can fail to sustain a competitive advantage where the SAF, besides its adaptation to the society also changed its vision in 2015 (Försvarsmakten, 2015; Gotsi & Andriopoulos, 2007). However, by changing the core elements of a brand identity it can also harm the brand image which creates a war between "old" and "new" (Gotsi & Andriopoulos, 2007). Therefore, in the case of the SAF, it is relevant to consider whether the brand image coheres to the brand identity and whether the brand identity appeals to potential employees.

As Graham and Cascio (2017) argue, it is necessary that an organization is aware of its brand identity and the influence employees might have on the brand image in order to deliver a clear message of its employer brand. Therefore, the concept of employer branding is also relevant since the SAF's marketing efforts were mainly directed to potential employees (Tidningarnas Telegrambyrå, 2011; Karlsson, 2016). As the supreme commander argues, the SAF's employees are its most important asset (Försvarsmakten, 2018). Employer branding has gained increased attention, although there is still a lack of research regarding this concept (Edwards & Edwards, 2013). Firstly, according to Rampl and Kenning (2014), the definition of employer branding is the perception of an organization's brand identity by current and potential employees as well as the public. Secondly, an employer brand is defined as "*the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company*" (Ambler & Barrow, 1996, p. 187). Employer branding is a powerful tool that can affect the organizational identity, increase employer brand loyalty and by that, employer productivity (Graham & Cascio, 2017). An organization's branding can target several stakeholders, but in the SAF's case, we mainly aim to focus on its current and potential employees. The current and potential employees are especially relevant in the situation of the SAF since its recruitment process is failing and its marketing efforts are mainly directed to potential employees. Therefore, it is relevant to understand how the potential employees perceive the SAF's brand identity and whether it is seen as an attractive employer.

The perception of the brand is more important than financial performance as companies compete for employees in the intense war of talent (Rampl & Kenning, 2014). According to Ewing *et al.* (2002), employees are the most important stakeholders to an organization and therefore, employer branding is used to attract and retain employees (Graham & Cascio, 2017). If employer branding is performed successfully, it generates value and distinguishes the employer brand from other employers which increases its attractiveness (Bourdreau & Cascio, 2012). Consequently, employees are becoming central in brand building since their behaviour can either reinforce a brand's values or undermine the credibility of an advertised message (Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005). Hence, since SAF has difficulties to attract potential employees and to strengthen its brand, it is necessary to explore how the coherence between its brand image and brand identity might influence its employer attractiveness (Körlof, 2019).

Since the political safety situation has deteriorated, the need for greater preparedness and safety has increased. In consequence, this calls for greater recruitment of competent labour and by that, a stronger employer brand (Körlof, 2019). If the brand image is incoherent with the brand identity or seen as less appealing, it might affect the attractiveness of a workplace and also result in brand failure. Therefore, we also want to investigate the reason to why the SAF's attempt to build a stronger brand and improve the recruitment process failed. Previous research has not investigated the coherence between employer branding, brand image, brand identity and employer attractiveness which is the aim of this study. Since the gap between brand identity and brand image has been an important aspect within branding, it has generated a lot of research on the topic. However, no previous research, to the best of our knowledge, has approached the perspective of how the coherence between brand identity and brand image can affect employer attractiveness (Xie et. al, 2015; Roy & Banerjee, 2014; Kissel & Büttgen, 2015; Sivertzen et. al, 2013; Balmer & Greyser, 2006). The SAF as a case is relevant for this study since it is a corporate brand with a current recruitment issue, but also a government body which makes it unique compared to other organizations. Furthermore, the SAF's recruitment issue is a highly discussed topic in the Swedish society today, which makes it especially relevant to investigate.

1.3 Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore the coherence between brand image and brand identity and its influence on employer attractiveness where the case of the Swedish Armed Forces is analysed. Since the Swedish Armed Forces has struggled both with its recruitment process and the building of a strong employer brand, it is a relevant case for this thesis.

1.4 Research question

How does the Swedish Armed Forces' brand image cohere to its brand identity and how might this interplay influence its employer attractiveness?

2 Theoretical methodology

The following section presents the research philosophy of the study and research approach which aims to explain the main underlying philosophical assumptions that influence the method of this research.

2.1 Research philosophy

There are three main philosophical positions within social science, namely interpretivism, positivism and realism. (Lind, 2014; Bell *et al.*, 2019). Interpretivism aims to assume other people's perspectives rather than investigating the behaviours with own assumptions. This research aims to investigate and understand the social behaviours, opinions and perceptions of both current and potential employees of the SAF which makes the interpretivist philosophy preferable. The interpretivist philosophical position is often related to qualitative studies and concerns social behaviour. It also analyses the reason to how and why things happen. Since this thesis does not aim to test hypotheses but rather explore, a quantitative approach does not fit within the context of this study. Therefore, a qualitative research approach is more suitable in order to explore the coherence between brand image and brand identity and how it might influence employer attractiveness. Additionally, the philosophy wants to develop knowledge about people's conviction (Bell *et al.*, 2019). Similarly, we want to investigate the reason to why the SAF's attempt to a stronger brand and recruitment failed.

2.3 Research approach

There are three possible research approaches namely, *induction*, *deduction* and *abduction*. *Induction* refers to that the researcher makes conclusions of empirical experiences and moves from data collection to theory. Inductive research is therefore often related to qualitative data where the outcomes of the observations result in theory. On the contrary, *deduction* refers to that the researcher moves from theory to data collection where theory is compiled, and hypotheses are later derived which is further empirically tested. Finally, the last method of reasoning is *abduction* which is a composition of the inductive and deductive. *Abduction* refers to that the research moves between theory and data collection in order to build theories about the world (Lind, 2014; Bell *et al.*, 2019).

To continue, abductive research has its starting point in identifying facts that existing theory cannot explain by testing it empirically while relating back to the theory. This creates an interrelated relationship between theory and empiricism (Lind, 2014; Bell *et al.*, 2019). Abduction is usually related to interpretive research where understandings of own experiences together with data are an ongoing process in order to create the best knowledge (Bell *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, the abductive reasoning is more appropriate since we base our study on previous research and theories which is empirically explored in order to provide theoretical implications and knowledge.

3 Theoretical framework

The aim of this study is to explore how a brand image coheres to the communicated brand identity and how this interplay might influence employer attractiveness. Therefore, the following sections include concepts such as branding, brand image, brand identity, how brand image and brand identity are dependent of each other and finally, employer branding. The last section presents a conceptual model that explains how the different concepts are associated.

3.1 Branding

A product is something that is made in a factory; a brand is something that is bought by a customer. A product can be copied by a competitor; a brand is unique. A product can be quickly outdated; a successful brand is timeless. - Stephen King

(Aaker, 1991, p. 1)

A brand is traditionally defined as a name or symbol aimed to differentiate and facilitate recognition of a product or a service (Aaker, 1991). According to The World Organization for Industrial Property, the legal definition of a brand is that a brand is used as a differentiator of products or services from its competitors (Kapferer, 1997). In contrast to the traditional definition, Kapferer (1997) states that a brand has become more than a visual symbol and is rather a set of mental associations that add additional value to a product or a service. Brands are even defined as a cluster of values (Urde, 2009). A brand needs to lead to trust, respect, passion and engagement due to increased consumer bargaining power (Kapferer, 1997). If a brand is unsuccessfully positioned increased advertising is often an insufficient measure to improve the brand's position (Kay, 2006). The creation of meaningful associations becomes more important since brands proliferate. Therefore, differentiation of a brand is an insufficient measure to stay competitive (Kay, 2006). According to Keller and Lehmann (2006), branding has become a priority within management since brands are seen as one of an organization's most valuable assets. Competition in the business environment constantly increases which calls for greater brand management in order to stay competitive. Brand management is a field studied by many researchers and refers to managing different underlying elements that together constitute a brand (Roy & Banerjee, 2014).

One aim with brand management is to engage both the management and all employees in order to ensure shared vision and strong brand identity where the organization has a common view of the brand (Roy & Banerjee, 2014). More specifically, brand management can be defined as managing the meaning of signs where the signs later, in a similar manner, are created in a person's mind (Urde, 2013). The response of stakeholders is highly important for brand managers in order to perform effective brand management (Kay, 2006).

3.1.1 Corporate brand

Today a brand is not necessarily associated with a product but comprises countries, cities, persons or institutions (Kapferer, 2012). A corporate brand is defined "*primarily by organizational associations, but the number, power, and credibility of organizational associations will be greater for a brand that visibly represents a corporate organization*" (Aaker, 2004, p. 7). The corporate brand is a valuable resource and creates customer expectations on an entire organization rather than on a product. Consequently, the entire organization is viewed as a brand (Druckenmiller & Argenti, 2004; Balmer & Gray, 2003). For example, a product brand it is often referred to as "it". On the other hand, a corporate brand is often internally referred to as "we" and externally as "they" (Urde, 2013). Since the core values constitute the base of the corporate brand, it cannot be stronger externally than it is internally in order to be successful. The core of a corporate brand can be seen as an agreement between the organization and its stakeholders. Moreover, a corporate brand focuses on different stakeholders rather than only the customers. One difference between a corporate brand and a product brand is that the core values of a corporate brand are usually based on the founders and the organization as a whole. Hence, a product brand's values are created whereas corporate values are innate (Urde, 2013).

A service brand, just as a corporate brand, considers employees as crucial within its process. Therefore, the corporate brand is more closely related to a service brand rather than a product brand in its characteristics. (Balmer & Gray, 2003). Corporate brands can be seen as guidelines and influencing factors on employment, investment and consumer buying behaviour. Some important elements within corporate brand are the mission, vision, core values, culture and competences (Urde, 2013). The core values present what the corporate brand stands for and are communicated through the corporate brand in terms of the promise (Balmer & Gray, 2003).

The core values are further transmitted through the employees. They have an important role and are crucial in the branding process (Balmer & Gray, 2003).

3.2 Brand Image & Brand Identity

The brand identity and brand image are two interrelated concepts that represent the sender's and the receiver's side. The brand identity refers to how employees' and managers' build a unique brand based on shared mental associations that are further communicated (Tarnovskaya & Bertilsson, 2017). Regarding the brand image, it is the perception stakeholders have of an organization's communicated brand identity. It is important that these two concepts cohere with each other. However, the brand image should not only cohere to the brand identity but also be positive in order to be successful (Nandan, 2005; Roy & Banerjee, 2014). Regarding the coherence between brand image and brand identity, the management of a possible gap between these two concepts has gained increased focus within the academia. The management of a gap is also one of the greatest challenges for managers (Tarnovskaya & Bertilsson, 2017; Roy & Banerjee, 2014). Accordingly, the linkage between brand image and brand identity is a crucial element of shaping a branding strategy (Roy & Banerjee, 2014).

A consistent brand image is crucial in order for a brand to be successful since the firm's identity should be perceived in a similar manner among its stakeholders (Roy & Banerjee, 2014; Nandan, 2005). Inconsistencies between brand image and brand identity might harm a brand's competitiveness and risk of brand failure will be high. If the brand image is positive and corresponds to the communicated message that is based on the brand identity, a successful positioning is made. Consequently, it is not enough with a match between brand image and brand identity, but the two concepts must have a positive impact especially on the organization's target segment's perception of the brand (Roy & Banerjee, 2014). Besides consistency between brand image and brand identity, Park et. al (1986), explain that brand identity itself and how it is used to communicate its brand image are decisive aspects for a brand's success (Roy & Banerjee, 2014). Therefore, it is highly important that what a brand identity stands for corresponds to the communicated message in order to enable a coherence between brand image and brand identity (Roy & Banerjee, 2014).

If the brand identity is perceived to be consistent with the organization's core values and provides a credible message to its stakeholders, it might create incentives for a positive brand image. This in turn can enhance brand loyalty. Nandan (2005) claims that the brand identity is included in the sender's message and unwrapped by the receiver which results in the brand image. The true outcome of a communicated brand identity is the set of beliefs that the brand image contains. More specifically, the brand image is the result of a decoded brand identity by internal and external stakeholders (Roy & Banerjee, 2014).

Stakeholders need to understand the message of a brand identity and find it relevant in order for value to be created (Nandan, 2005). Since there is an overload of information with a constant flow, together with increased competition in the market, a message can be disrupted by such noise which is a challenge for brand managers. Therefore, it is important that brand managers are aware of the changes and trends to possibly avoid the noise disrupting the message (Roy & Banerjee, 2014). As Nandan (2005, pp. 276-277) claims, "*identity and image are separate constructs and their congruence cannot be taken for granted*". The gap between the "company reality" and the "consumer perception" has to be minimised or removed in order for the brand to be successful (Nandan, 2005).

3.2.1 Brand Image

Brand image is argued to constitute the real value of a business which lies in the minds of current and potential stakeholders (Kapferer, 1997). According to Nandan (2005), brand image is a concept constructed by stakeholders through their subjective perceptions and associations of a brand. Similarly, Roy and Banerjee (2014) define brand image as stakeholders' attitude towards a brand which is stored in the stakeholders' minds. The associations of a brand are based on and related to previous experiences. It is stated that a key marketing activity is to mediate a brand image to the market. A brand identity can be communicated through positioning which helps to differentiate it from its competitors but lacks guidance for organizations on how to maintain and manage a brand image in long term since the brand image might change (Park *et al.*, 1986). The brand image is a subjective perception of a brand by each individual which results in multiple brand images of the same brand. Therefore, the brand image becomes a volatile concept since it is influenced by stakeholder characteristics which becomes challenging for brand managers (Tarnovskaya & Bertilsson, 2017).

The volatility in brand image creates an additional obstacle to close the gap between brand identity and brand image (Tarnovskaya & Bertilsson, 2017). A successful communication of the brand image facilitates to form the positioning which in turn can create differentiation and make the brand competitive in the market (Roy & Banerjee, 2014). Aaker (1991) argues that brand image is a way to process information that differentiates it from competitors with positive feelings towards the brand which also might generate incentives to buy. Therefore, when brand image corresponds to the target segments' self-image, additional positive feelings are created. The perception stakeholders create of the brand is influenced by the total set of brand-related activities performed by an organization (Roy & Banerjee, 2014).

3.2.2 Brand Identity

As mentioned before, the concept brand identity was first mentioned by Kapferer in 1986 (Janonis *et al.*, 2007). Brand identity can be defined as the manner in which employees and managers build a unique brand based on shared mental associations that are further communicated (Tarnovskaya & Bertilsson, 2017). In contrast to brand image, which is on the receiver's side, brand identity concerns the organizational perspective which covers the sender's side (Kapferer, 1997). According to some researchers, a sustainable long-term brand is fully dependent on its organizational identity instead of changing and following a short-term trend (Kapferer, 2012; Urde, 2003; Aaker, 2004; Balmer & Greyser, 2006; Burmann *et al.*, 2009). It is argued that understanding and defining the identity is crucial before knowing how the brand is perceived which refers to the brand image (Kapferer, 1997).

The concept brand identity is important due to the fact that many organizations do not put enough focus on understanding who they are, what they stand for and what makes them unique. In order for the sender to communicate the brand identity clearly, it is necessary to know what to send and how it should be done. However, it is not always easy to communicate the aimed message since brands compete with others in the market and can be affected by extraneous factors (Kapferer, 1997). Therefore, the strategy regarding the brand identity is to position it in a way that captures the space in stakeholders' minds and makes it memorable. Brand identity can provide factors such as directions, purpose and meaning focusing on moral image and values (Janonis *et al.*, 2007). A strong brand identity reflects the strength, values and vision of a brand which are important in order to communicate a clear and powerful message (Roy & Banerjee, 2014).

When the core identity is mediated, a more consistent memory of the brand might be created in the receiver's mind. A relevant factor within the field of brand identity is knowing if internal and external stakeholders will perceive the brand in accordance with the identity within the organization (Urde, 2013).

3.2.3 Brand Identity Prism

The brand identity prism was developed by Kapferer (1997) in 1986 and is based on six characteristics, namely *physique*, *relation*, *reflection*, *personality*, *culture* and *self-image*. Furthermore, the outer part of the model consists of four elements, namely *externalisation*, *internalisation*, *picture of sender* and *picture of recipient* (See figure 1). The picture of sender and recipient refers to how the brand is perceived by the sender and the receiver. Internalisation explains how the brand is mediated within the organization whereas externalisation focuses on how the brand is conveyed outside the organization. Regarding the first characteristic, the physical qualities, Kapferer (1997, p. 99) explains, “*If the brand is a flower, its physique is the stem. Without the stem, the flower dies: it is the flower's objective and tangible basis*”. The citation refers to that the physique of the brand constitutes the base and is crucial for an organization. Therefore, problems can occur in this characteristic since brands sometimes have difficulties determining who they really are or that the functional added value alone is not strong enough to keep it going. The second characteristic, personality, refers to what characteristics a brand would be associated with if it would be a person. The personality reflects how an organization wants the brand to be perceived by others (Kapferer, 1997).

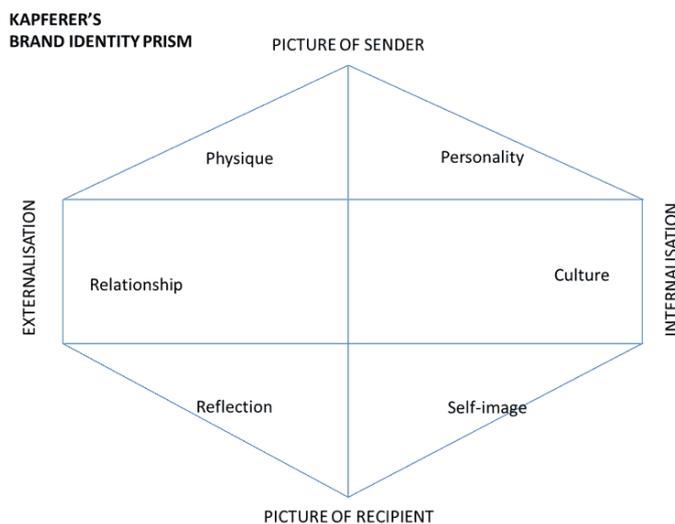


Figure 1- Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism (Kapferer, 1997)

Regarding the third concept, culture, it refers to the brand's core values and is mediated both within and outside the organization which is the main link between the brand and the firm. Moreover, it is the most visible sign representing an organization which further limits the organization's freedom since it needs to remain with its core values. The fourth concept, relationship, is especially relevant for service-oriented firms since it concerns the integration between people and does, together with culture, serve as a bridge between the sender and receiver. The fifth concept is reflection and includes how the brand should reflect the receiver's wishful image. Finally, the last concept, self-image, is the internal element of the receiver where the reflection should correspond to the receiver's identity and by that create a relationship to the brand. All of the concepts are interrelated and affect each other. If these concepts have a positive output and impact on its image, it can enhance a brand. Therefore, it is important that brands communicate a consistent message to the receivers explaining what the brand stands for in order to create positive brand image (Kapferer, 1997).

3.2.4 The Customer Brand Identity Model

The Customer Brand Identity Model (CBIM) was developed in 2013 by Mats Urde (2013) and aims to define the corporate brand identity. The model is a result of previous research as for example Kapferer's (1997) Brand Identity Prism and Aaker's (1996) findings, but also Urde's (2013) own findings. The model constitutes of nine elements that are divided into three categories namely, internal, external and internal/external (See figure 2). The elements together form the brand identity with the core as the centre of the framework. Moreover, the elements of the model are interrelated where the core is closely connected with the surrounding eight elements, and all these elements connect to the core. Firstly, the internal element of the model is reflected from the sender's side and concerns the organization's mission and vision, culture and competence. The mission and vision are characteristics of commitment where the mission is an important aspect of the brand identity since it, besides profit, determines the corporation's reason to exist. The vision, on the other hand, explains where the corporation is heading. Regarding the corporate culture, it is a broad concept including organizational attitudes, values and beliefs that affect the attitudes and behaviours of internal stakeholders. Urde's (2013) definition of culture partly relates to the one of Kapferer (1997) but is somewhat broader since it also takes other researchers' definitions into consideration. The last characteristic within the internal element is the competence which refers to a brand's competitiveness and the value it creates (Urde, 2013).

The characteristic pays attention to the organizational knowledge and in what way the brand can be unique as well as differed from its competitors (Urde, 2013). Secondly, the external element reflects the receiver's perspective and explains how the organization wants to be perceived. The external element includes the three characteristics such as value proposition, relationships and position which all influence the brand image. The brand identity is a corporation's ideal picture of how it wants others to perceive it whereas the brand image is how it is perceived. If the brand image coheres to the brand identity, the receiver can relate and reflect its self-image in the brand's identity which adds value to the brand. The value proposition element refers to communication of a brand identity that should appeal to the stakeholders and results in a favourable relationship. Therefore, the communication has to be consistent with the brand core and at the same time satisfy the receiver (Urde, 2013).

Yet another important factor affecting the corporate brand identity is the characteristic relationship. Relationship is related to value proposition and defines the corporate brand identity in the sense that a stakeholder's choice of a brand reflects the stakeholder's Code of Conduct and characteristics. A brand provides a service to the customer with added value which should reflect the corporate brand identity and might result in a relationship. The last characteristic, position, reflects how the corporate brand should be positioned in the market to capture the space in its stakeholders' minds. Positioning is related to brand identity but is rather how to differentiate the brand from competitors. Moreover, the positioning should consider both mission and vision as a guideline (Urde, 2013)

Finally, the internal and external element covers the middle characteristics of the model and creates a link between the internal and external elements. This element consists of expression, the promise together with core values and personality. In this part of the model, the brand core is presented which constitutes the heart of the corporation's values such as the promise and what the brand stands for. The core is both external and internal since the communication is directed externally but guided internally where the organization together with its employees, through the Code of Conduct, should reflect the corporate values. The second characteristic is personality which has more focus on the employees' personalities within the corporation. Personality refers to the corporate characteristics and personality traits which are communicated through expression. Concerning expression, the characteristic includes verbal and visual aspects as well as other possible forms of identification (Urde, 2013).

Moreover, the characteristic aims to define how the communication of the verbal and visual aspects can be differentiated in the market and more recognizable (Urde, 2013).

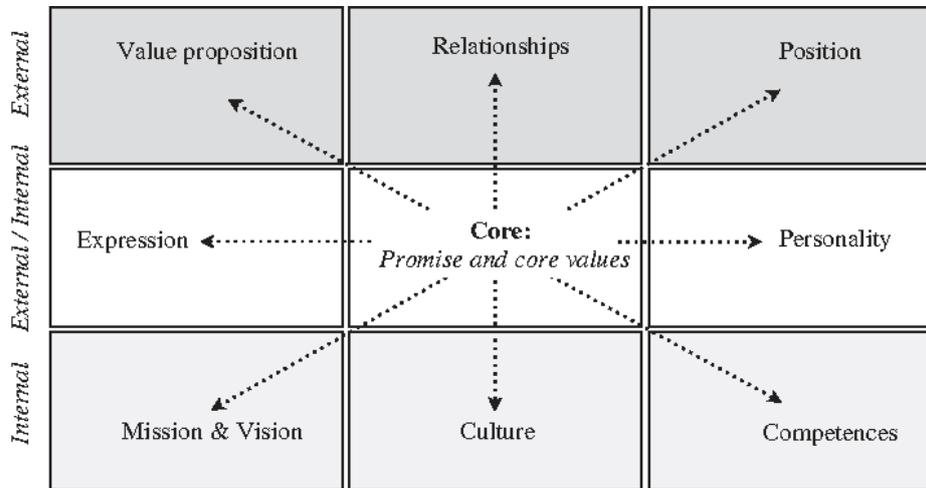


Figure 2 - Customer Brand Identity Matrix (Urde, 2013)

To summarize, the model results in different organizational strategies considering the corporate brand identity's internal and external aspects, both separately and combined. Consequently, the model guides whether to use a market-oriented, brand-oriented or combined approach in a brand strategy. Within a market-oriented approach, the organization focuses on the image rather than the identity where the external elements in the model are relevant to consider. However, a brand-oriented approach has an inside-out function which means that the identity rather than image constitutes the base for an organization's strategy (Urde, 2013). In the brand-oriented approach, the internal elements are considered where the core is highly relevant (Urde, 2013). The article of the Brand Identity Matrix by Urde (2013) has been cited by many researchers and is widely spoken of. For example, M'zungu et. al (2017) approach the market-based orientation, brand orientation and market and brand-based orientation of Urde (2013). The authors investigate how the combination of both brand and market-based orientation can be applied in real case scenario and relates to the brand identity model. Similarly, Muhonen et. al (2017) also refer to Urde's (2013) perspectives on market-based orientation and brand-orientation but in contrast to M'zungu et. al (2017), they approach de brand-oriented perspective and combine the elements in the brand identity model (Muhonen et. al, 2017)

3.3 Employer branding

Even though employer branding has gained increased attention by practitioners and within professional service firms, it is a field of scarce research, (Edwards & Edwards, 2013). The aim with employer branding is to create positive emotions towards the organization and enhance its employer attractiveness which is why firm's today have developed the interest for the topic (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Moreover, it is claimed that the focus in general is more directed to customers than employees because organizations assume knowing their employees which might not always be the case (Barrow & Mosley, 2005). The concept of employer branding is defined as "*the proactive management of an organisation's image as an employer, as perceived by current and potential employees, and, to a lesser degree, by the public*" (Rampl & Kenning, 2014, p. 219). According to Ambler and Barrow (1996), a successful employer brand is achieved when it is differentiated from its competitors and preferred by potential and current employees.

To continue, employees play an important role in the aspect of brand management since they are seen as a brand's ambassadors and can either reinforce the brand's image or make the communicated message less credible (De Chernatony & Harries, 2001). Consequently, employer branding does not only serve to attract new employees, but also to retain current employees and strengthen a brand (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). According to Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), employer branding consists of three elements where the first element includes developing a clear value proposition. The value proposition should reflect the organization's culture, management style, employment image and employment quality which represents the values offered to the employees. The second element in employer branding refers to consistency in an organization's branding efforts. A clear message that represents an organization's values and provides an understanding of the brand is important in order to be successful (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

The last element in employer branding includes the internal marketing which refers to that the organization should mediate its brand's value and culture internally in order to create a common image. Furthermore, internal marketing can increase employees' willingness to stay within the organization by creating common understandings (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). The nature of an employer brand determines whether employees relate to an organization's values or not which might influence employee retention (Ambler & Barrow, 1996).

An effective employer branding that both retains current and attracts new employees can create competitive advantages and value for an organization (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). In order to attract potential employees, the organization should engage in external marketing that will create a positive perception of the workplace (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). However, the marketing is stated to be counterproductive if the employees do not engage the corporate culture and values in their Code of Conduct. Consequently, it can implicate a failure in delivering a brand promise (Barrow & Mosley, 2005). The values of an organization should be reflected in the employees' characteristics and values (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Employer branding focuses on policies, value systems and behaviours that differentiate a brand from its competitors to become and stay attractive in the market. Therefore, it is important to market both within and outside the organization in order to communicate what makes the organisation desirable and different from its competitors (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

According to Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), employer branding generates two core assets which are brand associations and brand loyalty. The power of a brand lies in the corporate identity that should correspond to employers' and stakeholders' image. The image is based on associations to a brand which can further affect the employer attractiveness (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). If the employer image corresponds to the values of potential employees, these are more likely to identify their self-image with the brand which increases an organization's employer attractiveness. Employees' feeling of commitment to an organization's core values can enhance the organization's attractiveness since the employees should reflect the workplace in their Code of Conduct. Organizational commitment is closely related to brand loyalty since it includes living the brand with the goals and values incorporated into the brand (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

To continue, a successful management of an employer brand can increase the productivity and employer brand loyalty which in turn might affect the organizational identity and culture (Graham & Cascio, 2017; Backhouse & Tikoo, 2004). Employees can contribute to the brand image since they constitute the linkage between external and internal environment. Therefore, the brand image can be improved if employees communicate the workplace as attractive (De Chernatony & Harries, 2001). Employer branding is a long-term strategy in order to increase the awareness and perceptions of stakeholders (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

3.3.1 Link between quality of employees and quality of product/service

As mentioned before, employees are by some organizations viewed as the most valuable asset (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). According to Ambler and Barrow (1996), an organization that has the best employees will also be seen as the best organization. Furthermore, a positive reputation of a brand is important in order to attract potential employees since stakeholders' perception can enhance a positive word-of-mouth (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). Therefore, Ambler and Barrow (1996) created a model that shows the interrelation between an organization's employees, an organization's performance, its reputation and its workplace's attractiveness. If an organization has competent employees, its performance will increase which in turn improves its reputation which further attracts potential employees (Ambler & Barrow, 1996) (See figure 3).

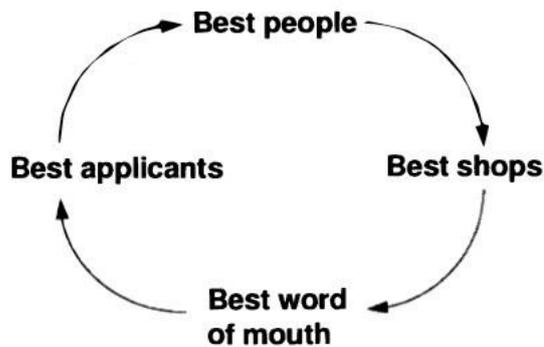


Figure 3- Link between quality of employees and quality of product/service (Ambler & Barrow, 1996)

3.4 Conceptual Model

The conceptual model is based on the theoretical discussion above and aims to explain how the different theoretical concepts cohere and are relevant in order to explore the purpose of the study (See figure 4). More specifically, it includes elements from the brand identity prism (Kapferer, 1997), the customer brand identity model (Urde, 2013) and finally the model of Ambler and Barrow (1996). However, accordingly with the purpose of the study, we do not aim to explore the direct influence of each element on the corporate brand, but instead how the coherence between brand image and brand identity might influence the corporate brand and its employer attractiveness.

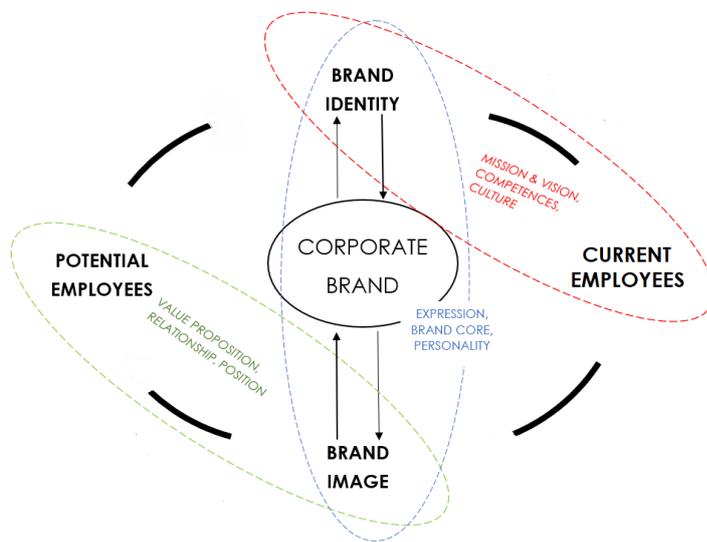


Figure 4 - The circle of employer attractiveness

Regarding the corporate brand, it is placed in the centre of the model since an organization's brand can be seen as the most important asset. A corporate brand's success might depend on many different factors which are aimed to be explored in this study. The four main elements within the model are *brand identity*, *brand image*, *current employees* and *potential employees* since we aim to explore the influence brand image and brand identity might have on employer attractiveness. As the theoretical discussion indicates, all of the four elements are interrelated and might influence each other as well as the corporate brand and its attractiveness. The arrows between brand image and brand identity both relating to the corporate brand aim to symbolize how brand image and brand identity are associated. As the theory implies, the brand image and brand identity together might influence the attractiveness of a corporate brand.

The model aims to illustrate an interplay between brand identity and current employees. For example, the brand identity might influence current employees to adopt the core values of the organization. Furthermore, the current employees are the ambassadors of the brand which makes it possible for them to influence the credibility of the organization's communicated message (De Chernatony & Harries, 2001). However, the current employees might also influence the brand image since the Code of Conduct expresses the organization's identity (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). If the current employees are competent, it might increase the performance of the organization and improve the brand image through a good reputation which in turn can attract new employees (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). Regarding the potential employees, their preferences and adaptation to new trends might contribute to a change in brand identity. As Roy and Banerjee (2014) argue, when brand image is coherent with the target segments' self-image, additional positive feelings can be created. To continue, the three spheres in the model illustrate how the elements can be seen from internal and external perspectives. Regarding the sphere around brand identity and current employees, it includes three internal factors, the mission, vision and competence. These factors need to be understood and shared within an organization in order to mediate a concise message that might enhance its brand's attractiveness.

The second sphere around brand image and potential employees aims to illustrate how an organization wants to be perceived through its value proposition, relationship with the stakeholders and position in the stakeholders' minds. These factors might influence potential employees' brand image and in turn a brand's attractiveness. The last sphere covering brand image and brand identity can have both an internal and external approach since the factors expression, core values and personality, are factors that are managed internally but communicated externally. As Nandan (2005) argues, the message is wrapped by the sender and unwrapped by the receiver. Therefore, it is important that the communicated message reflects what an organization stands for and its values in order for the brand to be perceived as attractive (Roy & Banerjee, 2014; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Kapferer, 1997; Urde, 2013). To summarize, if a brand identity has a positive influence on the potential employees' perception of the brand and if there is a coherence between the brand identity and its brand image, it might enhance the employer attractiveness.

4 Empirical Method

The following section presents the research design and data collection. Furthermore, the selection of participants is argued for and presented in order to explain why the method is suitable for this study. Regarding data collection, it is presented how the material was gathered and analysed. The section ends with a discussion concerning this study's trustworthiness followed by a presentation of the limitations in the empirical findings.

4.1 Research design

This study has a qualitative research design. The focus was to conduct interviews and focus groups on a small scale (Lind, 2014). The empirical material collected through a qualitative research design constitutes of words, pictures or things that have a visual history which are possible to analyse through their context (Denscombe, 2017). The qualitative design allowed us to obtain more nuanced information that is expressed verbally (Lind, 2014; Denscombe, 2017). This thesis is based on a case study since it focuses on the organization SAF and its current recruitment problem. A common method to collect empirical data for case studies is interviews rather than experiments or surveys. Since the aim was to collect more developed perceptions and opinions, interviews were to prefer. In addition, case studies often focus on interviews with a group of employees of an organization and since this study partly aims to explore the SAF's brand identity, it focused on the current employees of the organization (Bell, Bryman, & Harley, 2019). The study is exploratory in its purpose, since we aimed to explore the interplay between brand identity, brand image and employer attractiveness in the case of the SAF due to limited research within this field (Bell, Bryman, & Harley, 2019).

4.2 Collection of empirical material

The study is based on both primary and secondary data, where the primary data were information we collected from interviews and focus groups. The secondary data was based on information from the SAF's official website as well as different news articles concerning the case (Lind, 2014; Bell et. al, 2019). One of the SAF's recruitment commercials also constituted a part of the secondary data which aims to illustrate the SAF's marketing and attempt to attract potential employees.

The secondary data provided information about the history of the SAF, what the organization stands for and current debates concerning the organization which constitutes a good foundation for the empirical findings and the analysis. The empirical material was primarily collected through focus groups and interviews. The focus groups primarily considered the part that includes brand image and potential employees in *the circle of employer attractiveness*. The study partly aimed to explore the brand image of the potential employees and if it coheres with the brand identity of the SAF. Therefore, a focus group was to prefer since it enabled a discussion on why the participants felt the way they did, and it also made it possible to understand the underlying factors of the opinions (Bell *et al.*, 2019; Denscombe, 2017). An important act of focus groups is to understand how people think and feel, as opinions are questioned or agreed upon by participants (Lind, 2014; Bell *et al.*, 2019). The use of a focus group also provided a more comfortable environment since the respondents discussed with each other rather than participated in a one-to-one interview (Bell *et al.*, 2019).

The second data collection method was interviews with current SAF employees. The aim was to capture their perception of the brand identity and workplace related to brand identity and current employees in *the circle of employer attractiveness*. Since the SAF's employees live in different cities in Sweden, it was not possible to conduct a focus group for these participants and interviews were easier to arrange (Denscombe, 2017). Furthermore, interviews were also more suitable since the employees were able to answer questions based on their own experiences rather than feel expected to answer in a certain way. The interview format helped to reduce barriers (Lind, 2014). Additionally, since the respondents work for the same employer, the answers could be less credible in a focus group since the employees might affect each other, and answers might be biased in accordance with the organization's policy.

Bell *et al.* (2019, p. 464) claim, "*in one-to-one interviewing, interviewees are rarely challenged: they might say things that are inconsistent with earlier replies*". The citation refers to interviews allow the interviewees to answer independently from what the other interviews answer compared to focus groups. Therefore, information might be provided on whether the identity within the organization is consistent or not. The study partly aims to explore the employees' perception of the brand identity, and if it is shared within the organization. The structure of the interviews can either be structured, semi-structured or unstructured (Denscombe, 2017).

In this research, the interviews were semi-structured since this format allowed each interviewee to elaborate the answers but at the same time stay within the topic (Lind 2014; Denscombe 2017). Additionally, semi-structured interviews allowed the interviews to be different from each other, as the interview guide did not constitute questions with only fixed answers as in structured interviews (Lind 2014; Denscombe 2017). Furthermore, the interview guide aimed to structure the interview and to compare and categorize the different answers. The questions in the guide were based on the research model, *the circle of employer attractiveness*, that functioned as a way to guide the interview in the direction of the purpose of the research (Lind, 2014).

4.3 Participant selection

Regarding the participant selection of the interviews, the interviewees were handpicked. This means that they were selected with a purpose in order to provide information most relevant to the case of the SAF. More specifically, the interviewees were handpicked based on their competences and knowledge. For example, employees within the organization provided an understanding of the brand identity which is the reason for the use of the purposeful selection.

The interviewees were selected based on our social network with the aim to reach different military degrees and to achieve a variety. The interviewees constituted of five employees with different roles such as section commanders, officers, soldiers and R3 rescue soldiers. R3 rescue soldiers specialize in rescuing, clearing and repairing. The fact that some interviewees had higher positions than others allowed us to gain different perspectives about the identity within the organization. However, since the majority of the interviewees underlined the importance of anonymity, we do not reveal which role each interviewee had in this text. Regarding the focus groups, several participants were handpicked and purposefully selected since we categorized the SAF's potential employees into three main groups. The first group consists of people that consider training as a huge part of their lifestyle since they constitute the target segment of the SAF. The second focus group constituted of people aged 17 since this age-group includes future conscripts who are potential employees for the SAF. The third focus group included participants that are not directly targeted by the SAF but can still be potential employees for the organization.

According to Denscombe (2017), the ideal number of participants within a focus group is six to nine people in order to obtain different opinions but still be able to manage the discussion. Therefore, the focus groups of this study consisted of six to seven participants. In order to find participants suitable for each focus group, the snowball effect was applied. The snowball effect refers to that participants either ask other possible respondents to participate or provide information in order for the researchers to contact them (Denscombe, 2017). The new respondents can further ask other possible respondents to participate which creates a snowball effect (Denscombe, 2017; Bell et. al, 2019). However, all new respondents had to meet the criteria of the category for each focus group.

4.4 Interviews

Each interviewee received a fictitious name in order to respect the anonymity of the participants. Additionally, we did not disclose the exact role each interviewee had in the organization. Three interviews, with Amanda, Felix and Anton, were conducted face-to-face. The fourth interview, with Victor, was made through a video-call and the fifth interview with Simon was conducted through a phone-call for practical reasons (See table 1).

Table 1 - The interviewees from the SAF

Location of the interview	Name	General role in the SAF	Years of employment
Lund	Amanda	Soldier	3
Kristianstad	Anton	Officer	7
Hässleholm	Felix	Soldier	2
Telephone	Simon	Officer	9
Video-call	Victor	Officer	6

Except from the telephone and video-call interviews, the interviews were conducted in different cities in Skåne, Sweden. The interview with Felix took place in Hässleholm at the library in a separate room with a quiet environment. The second interview with Amanda was conducted at the library in Lund which similarly to the interview with Felix, allowed a quieter and more comfortable atmosphere. Similar to the other two interviews, the third interview with Anton took place in a calm and undisturbed environment at Kristianstad's library. The interviews were semi-structured since they offer more flexibility in both questions and answers. Therefore, the interview guide served as a guideline concerning the topics we wanted to discuss (See appendix 1).

The questions were based on *the circle of employer attractiveness* where the headline, *purpose*, in the interview guide refers to what topic we expected the interviewees to concern. For example, the purpose of the question “*What does the SAF stand for and what are the core values according to you?*” was to see if the current employees are aware of the SAF’s brand core. Since the interviews were semi-structured, additional relevant information was obtained. Each interview took approximately 45 minutes and was conducted in Swedish since it was the interviewees’ native language. All of the interviewees received information included in the invitations where we highlighted that no preparation or previous knowledge was needed since we only aimed for the current employees’ own thoughts and opinions. The interviewees were offered something to drink and eat to make the atmosphere more relaxed and comfortable. The interviews were introduced by asking the interviewees for permission to record followed by an explanation of the topic. Additionally, the first question regarding the interviewees’ role in the SAF made them more comfortable and talkative (See appendix 1). We thanked the interviewees for their participation and wrote down our contact information in case someone would have further questions.

4.5 Focus groups

Similar to the interviewees, the respondents in the focus groups were given fictitious names in order to respect their anonymity. Two of the groups consisted of six people each and the third consisted of seven participants which results in a total of 19 respondents (See Table 2). The conscripts group took place at a high school in Lund and the training-lifestyle group took place in a group room at Lunds University. The general group was conducted in Hässleholm at the city library.

Table 2 - The names of the respondents in each focus group

The focus groups	Names	Age	Gender
The general group	Greta	25	Female
	Adrian	22	Male
	Fabian	22	Male
	Emil	24	Male
	Sofia	23	Female
	Jakob	22	Male
The conscripts group	David	17	Male
	Saga	17	Female
	Diana	17	Female
	Erika	17	Female
	Lucas	17	Male
	Sven	17	Male
The training-lifestyle group	Carl	23	Male
	Ola	25	Male
	Stig	24	Male
	Filip	24	Male
	Pia	23	Female
	Elin	25	Female
	Sara	22	Female

To continue, the format of the focus groups was semi-structured in order to provide a more flexible discussion but at the same time stay within the topic. Therefore, the focus-group guide was rather a guideline for the execution of the focus group. The headline *purpose* in the guide refers to which topics we expected the respondents to discuss (See appendix 2). It is based on both questions and activities where the activities allowed each respondent to answer subjectively since the activities aimed for the respondents' personal opinions. Furthermore, the opinions and statements were later discussed by the entire group. For example, one activity was to write down three characteristics describing the SAF if it would be a person. The respondents further ranked and discussed the chosen characteristics. Another activity was to show one of the SAF's recruitment commercials where the participants discussed its trustworthiness and content according to their own opinions.

Each focus group lasted approximately one hour, and the spoken language was Swedish since it was the native language of the respondents. All of the respondents received official invitations where information regarding the focus group's location, time and purpose was explained. Before each focus group started, we made it clear that we would not be a part of the discussion but instead guide it with activities and questions. We also highlighted that there were no correct or incorrect answers since we were interested in what the respondents thought and encouraged them to participate in the discussions. According to Ahrne and Svensson (2018), the location and environment of a focus group is important in order to assure that the participants feel comfortable and are not afraid to express subjective opinions. Consequently, we offered something to eat and drink to make the environment less tense. We also introduced ourselves and the topic in more detail. After the introduction, we asked for permission to record and started by letting everyone explain their first thoughts when they hear the name "*The Swedish Armed Forces*". Our main responsibility was to maintain a discussion and make sure that everyone felt included when sharing their thoughts and opinions. Finally, we thanked everyone for their participation and wrote down our contact information in case of further questions.

4.6 Data analysis

After the data was collected, the transcriptions of the focus groups and interviews were executed. The transcription of the data took approximately 25 hours and resulted in 86 pages. Furthermore, when the transcriptions were done, the next step was to analyse the material through an abductive coding which included both an inductive and deductive approach. Including an inductive coding refers to that we did not only base the coding on the theoretical discussion as deductive coding does, but also analysed the participant's statements and developed theory that can explain the patterns in the material. More specifically, an inductive coding moves from data to theory in order to capture the information which a deductive coding itself would not (Bell, Bryman, & Harley, 2019). The first step of the coding process was to make sense of all of the information and further highlight relevant information that could be analysed in the research. As Denscombe (2017) claims, it is important to capture the meaning of the discussion and the statements in order to make sense of the material. We used different colours and underlined concepts or statements that had the same meaning with the same colour. For example, we used the colour purple in order to mark the core sentences that were considered relevant for this study. Another colour was yellow that highlighted repeated statements of previous marked sentences.

The second step was to underline contradictory statements and differences with a blue colour between the respondents' opinions. We named the core sentences by their main meaning in each statement after the material got processed. Since some statements expressed similar opinions with different words, it led us to a second round of categorizing the core sentences. For example, "discipline" was similar to "strict". The core sentences with the same meaning were marked with the same colour. Gioia, Corley and Hamilton (2012) suggest that the core meanings from each statement can be categorized into broader themes which was similarly done in this data analysis and resulted in the main categories. The categorization was performed three times in order to avoid overlapping categories. The broad categories were later defined within certain dimensions where each dimension covered a part in *the circle of the employer attractiveness*. For example, the sub-category *weak* together with *small* and *no equality* was categorized as "*Perception of the organization*" and placed under the dimension "*The SAF's position in the potential employees' minds*" (See page 51).

When the material was organized, the tables in chapter 7 were created in order to generate an example of the coding. The illustrative examples aim to clarify the underlying purpose for both the categories and dimensions. Since some dimensions did not need any sub-categories, some tables only consist of dimensions and categories with illustrative examples (See page 54). Each dimension is created from deductive coding since it relates to the circle of employer attractiveness. However, some categories and sub-categories were inductively coded. For example, the dimension "The culture within the SAF" covers culture whereas the category "Atmosphere at the workplace" summarizes the inductively coded sub-categories (See page 40).

4.7 Trustworthiness

As Denscombe (2017) states, it is hard to measure validity since it is difficult to understand a social context externally. According to Bryman and Bell (2015), there are four different criteria within trustworthiness in order to show validity, namely *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability* and *conformability*. The first concept, *credibility*, means to what extent the findings can be considered as credible. In this study, five SAF employees were interviewed who possess knowledge about the organization.

Additionally, since the interviews were semi-structured, it allowed more open answers where the interviewees could concern topics that were not in line with the interview-guide. The interviewees could instead imply what they considered relevant and important (Bell, Bryman, & Harley, 2019). The respondents in the focus groups did generally not have any direct relation to the SAF which might have prevented biased answers. However, the respondents could be influenced by the answers of other participants in the focus groups, but since the focus-group guide had questions directed to each respondent, it also allowed the less dominant respondents to express their opinions.

The second concept, namely *transferability*, indicates the extent to which the results of the study can be generalized and applied to other organizations (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Since this research aims to understand the specific case and the issues the SAF is facing, transferability is not the aim of this study (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The third concept, *dependability*, refers to consistency in the research with, for example the transcripts, sources and data analysis in case peers want to review the material. Every part of the process, from recording and transcripts to coding, is stored on our devices and available in printed format. The last concept of credibility is *conformability* which explains if the researchers have acted in good faith and left out personal values. In this research, we strived to analyse the data objectively since we did not have any previous experience of the organization. If anyone is interested to take part of our data, it is available on request which also might increase the conformability (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

4.8 Limitations

This research has mainly three limitations in its empirical findings that might impact the credibility of the results. Firstly, the participants in the conscripts' group were from the same high school and shared the same social surroundings which might influenced their perceptions. Secondly, since one of the interviews was conducted through a phone call, it was hard to observe the body language or reactions regarding certain questions. Thirdly, since we interviewed people with high responsibility within the SAF, it is possible that their answers could be based on duty towards the organization rather than own opinions.

5 Case presentation

The following section provides information about the SAF's history regarding the organizational and recruitment changes followed by a presentation of the current situation of the organization. Finally, one of the SAF's commercials are described since it constituted a part of one activity with the focus groups.

5.1 The SAF's history

The Swedish Armed Forces has a hundred years long history. The SAF was under the King's leadership where the State Agency, the Royal Majesty, decided on behalf of the King. After 1939 it was decided to introduce the role of Supreme Commander in order to strengthen the defence with a leader that would have a greater insight in the different areas of the organization. Throughout the years the organization developed which increased the Supreme Commander's responsibility. In 1975, the constitution changed where the King lost his power over the SAF and in 1994, the organization became a government body. The compulsory military service was introduced in 1901 with an aim to turn boys into men. Women were not allowed to join the service (Försvarsmakten, 2019). In 1989, women were allowed to join the defence as the society developed. Since 1966, there was a significant decrease in conscription rate which later continued to decrease. In 2000, conscription fell to 17 000 each year (Försvarsmakten, 2003).

In 2010, after more than 100 years, Sweden was one of the countries that abolished the compulsory military service due to several factors. Some of those factors were the abolishment in other countries, an improved political safety situation and financial reasons (Schlaug, 1997; Säkerhetspolitik, 2015; Löwing, 2010; Försvarsmakten 2019). Another reason of the abolishment was that the SAF wanted to recruit employees that would apply voluntarily. Consequently, it resulted in a smaller recruitment base compared to the amount that was achieved through the compulsory military service. The people that applied voluntarily were expected to be fewer with greater interest of the SAF and of higher quality regarding the competences. Therefore, the SAF faced a new challenge: to compete with other employers in the market. The SAF expected to recruit less employees but of higher competence and focused all of its marketing efforts to attract potential employees. The objective was to recruit 4000 men and women each year which would equal one tenth of the military conscripts from previous years.

However, the SAF did not achieve the objective any of the years since the abolishment (Säkerhetspolitik, 2015; Tidningarnas Telegrambyrå). Moreover, in 2016, there was a lack of 800 soldiers in full-time service, and in the same year more than 60 percent of the Swedish population wanted the compulsory military service to be reinstated which became reality one year later (Björkenwall, 2016; Jarteg, 2016). In contrast to the previous compulsory military service the SAF continues to recruit employees that apply voluntarily as well (Lundin, 2016; Försvarsmakten, 2019).

5.2 About the SAF

For twelve years, the SAF has been registered as a brand. It has been a brand for much longer since the concept is no longer related to only products but also places, institutions and people (Uggla, 2006; Allabolag, 2019). The SAF is defined as a corporate brand since the expectations of its stakeholders are directed towards the organization as such rather than a specific product (Balmer & Gray, 2003; Druckenmiller & Argenti, 2004). In this study, the stakeholders of the SAF are potential and current employees

As the SAF is a Government body, it is highly dependent on the government's decisions where the SAF has to present a budget estimation each year which indicates how much money the organization needs. In 2018, the government provided the SAF with around 53 billion SEK and prognosticates to increase it with approximately 6 billion SEK during 2019 (Regeringskansliet, 2019). The Supreme Commander of the organization is Micael Bydén who leads the SAF in accordance with the Government's budget and guidelines. The Supreme Commander's task is to allocate the resources in a way that will solve the goals set up by the Government. Moreover, he also has a council which provides him with strategical advices in certain decisions. The SAF is based in 70 locations across Sweden with "organizational units" constituted of schools, centres and units that train and educate the employees to reach the goal of the organization which is to strengthen the military readiness of the SAF. The SAF also has different military degrees such as group commanders, soldiers, sailors, officers and specialized officers which results in a wide variety of additional jobs besides the civil service (Försvarsmakten, 2019).

The target group that the SAF has directed its recruitment marketing efforts to, are mainly people that consider physical training as huge part of their lifestyle (Lundin, 2016). The SAF also offers cooperation with organizations where it aims to share employees with other organizations as this is perceived as highly beneficial. More specifically, the SAF offers education for its employees which provides them with several competences and creates value for the partner, while the employees also become part-time employees of the SAF (Försvarsmakten, 2019). The mission and vision of the SAF is to defend Sweden and its citizens' rights, and the vision is to have a strong defence that responds to every threat. Consequently, the main responsibility of the SAF is to maintain the capacity to engage in armed combat. The SAF claims that *"We are in a state of readiness to defend Sweden against armed attack, guard Swedish territory, and provide societal support in various ways"* (Försvarsmakten, 2019). The quote implies that the SAF is to engage in various types of national emergencies such as forest fires, storms and flooding but also in the search of missing people.

The Code of Conduct requires the SAF to have transparency and co-operation in everything it does in order to become more effective, better and stronger. The core values are openness, results and responsibility, which in turn influence the Code of Conduct. Since SAF's employees operate in high-risk environments where lives are frequently at risk, it is crucial that all employees follow the core values of the organization. A question that has been highlighted in recent years is equality, and how the brand is often associated with a macho-culture (Försvarsmakten, 2019). Therefore, the SAF currently makes an effort to change the perception of the organization and strengthen its brand (Nilsson, 2019).

Today the SAF constitutes of 20 000 employees where 17 percent are women and 83 percent are men and the majority of the employees are officers (Försvarsmakten, 2019). Also, the SAF puts a lot of effort in recruiting more women to the organization where 17 percent is considered as too low. In the future, the SAF aims to constitute of 30 percent women and attract them to apply for the officer education program. Currently, there are generally only 20 women out of 131 that attend the program. Therefore, women are prioritized before men if they have the corresponding competences and merits (Tidningarnas Telegrambyrå, 2017). Additionally, the HR director has stated that it is necessary to consider the current requirements of the SAF towards the applicants, since those might need to be lowered (Sundberg, 2019).

In order to attract more women, the SAF tries to communicate that everyone is welcome no matter what sexual orientation, gender, religion or skin colour a person has. For example, one statement that has been published on its official webpage is “*no matter when or where we march, we always stand up for your right to live the way you want with whoever you want*” (Försvarsmakten , 2018). Furthermore, one attempt to express openness in today’s society was the SAF’s first participation in a Pride Festival in 2008 where the Supreme Commander places himself in the front of the parade since 2013 (Försvarsmakten , 2018). The Supreme Commander himself stated:

How can one of the most equal countries in the world have a defence constituting only of one fifth women? It is not viable. Our work to become more like our country we defend continues. An equal defence is a stronger defence. – (Bydén, 2019)

However, the engagement regarding equality within the SAF has created a public debate in both newspapers and social media where many people express concern and anger regarding that the SAF puts too much effort on equality instead of defending Sweden (Naess, 2018).

5.3 The SAF’s marketing campaigns

The SAF has several marketing campaigns available whereas the latest is called “Come as you are” which underlines that everyone is welcome to work for the organization. Consequently, the campaign has gained a lot of attention and created a debate in the Swedish society where people express dissatisfaction regarding the message the SAF wants to mediate (Försvarsmakten, 2019). Another marketing campaign focuses on the SAF’s recruitment which is especially highlighted in this study. The purpose of the video is to illustrate what the SAF stands for and create positive feelings towards the organization. Throughout the commercial, the SAF uses dramatic but calm music with a female narrator. The video shows different landscapes of Sweden and also different roles within the organization. The narrator explains how the Swedish citizens are seen as public principals for the organization. Furthermore, the narrator explains the main task of the SAF which is to defend Sweden’s long-standing tradition regarding the peace, freedom and independency in order to make sure that Sweden remains independent. She further explains that the SAF defends Sweden alone but also together with others, ready to do what it takes even in the worst situations.

The narrator also describes the organization's personality with the characteristics competent, determined and reliable in all situations. Another statement is that the SAF knows what is needed today, plans for what is required tomorrow and adjusts itself to the unpredicted changes. The feeling of honour within the SAF is also described since the organizations' mission is to protect Sweden and the citizens' freedom to live the way of their choice. The honourable feeling is followed by a statement of how proud they are to protect Sweden and that the employees together build up a strong defence in order to be able to face every threat and handle every challenge. The narrator continues by stating that every employee, volunteer and citizen in Sweden is in the centre of the organization since it defends everyone's country, lives and values. Lastly, the commercial shows different roles within the organization followed by the statement "*we are the Swedish Armed Forces*" and ends with the organization's logo (Försvarsmakten, 2015).

6 Empirical findings & Analysis

The aim of this thesis is to explore whether the brand image and brand identity of the SAF is coherent and how the interplay between these two concepts might influence the SAF's employer attractiveness. Therefore, this section presents the analysis and comparison of the empirical material based on the circle of employer attractiveness and the theoretical discussion. The chapter ends with a discussion regarding employer branding in conjunction with the empirical findings. Worth noting is that the interviewees will further be referred to as current employees whereas the focus group respondents are referred to as potential employees.

6.1 Current employees

The following part aims to create an understanding of the organisation's brand identity by presenting the empirical findings and analysis of the interviews with the current employees of the SAF. As Kapferer (1997) argues, it is important to understand the identity of a brand before determining what its brand image is. The analysis and empirical findings are based on the *circle of employer attractiveness* and aims to cover the part regarding brand identity and current employees as well as the centre of the model. The factors expression and competence are not directly covered in the empirical findings, something which is more explained in chapter 7.4 (See page 64). The tables in each section serve as examples of what the discussion in each section is based upon and the citations are only illustrative examples.

6.1.1 Culture

The concept culture includes how the employees perceive the atmosphere at the workplace and how they are expected to behave in regard to the SAF's Code of Conduct. One important aspect shared among the employees is the feeling of togetherness. For example, Anton says "*I searched for a workplace with team spirit and great unity with my colleagues [and] it is something I received very fast in the SAF*". Similarly, Amanda explained that the reason to why she wanted to continue to work for the SAF is because of the team spirit and unity the organization provides. Amanda explains "*It is about the team spirit, you become so close with your colleagues*". Victor also explains the organization's atmosphere as very open where all of the employees work closely with each other which in turn requires openness.

For example, Victor stated the following: *“we really work close with each other which requires openness, we cannot for example be disloyal or hide things from each other, no matter what”*. This is a shared perception since Anton states that the workplace is very open within the group and the platoon.

To continue, the atmosphere within the organization in general, is based upon discipline and hierarchy. Amanda explains that there is a lot of discipline within the organization by saying *“we always walk in formations and do the same things”*. Felix further adds that it is important to address higher ranked officers by their military titles where he argues, *“In the army you usually address your boss with his or her military degree, for example if someone is a captain you address him as captain”*. Another example is illustrated by Felix where he explains that the SAF is not an ordinary workplace concerning the hierarchy since there are several bosses on different levels, and you must know who is in charge. He argues that hierarchy is crucial in an military organization in order for it to be effective if something would happen. However, Amanda does not perceive the hierarchy as always positive since the soldiers do not receive the same amount of information as others placed higher up in the hierarchy. Amanda states *“We usually do not receive a lot of information, it is higher up in the hierarchy”* and if the soldiers in her regiment have made important work, they usually receive credit as *“good work!”* rather than information about what value it created for the society.

Regarding the second category within culture, namely Code of Conduct, the employees argue that the uniform provides them with certain requirements on how they should behave. Similarly, Urde (2013) claims, the culture influences the internal stakeholders' behaviours and attitudes. For example, Simon points out that it is important for employees to behave properly when in uniform since they represent the organization and become ambassadors. Simon says, *“when I wear my uniform, I have to behave properly [...] I cannot jaywalk or look dishevelled since I represent an organization that I look up to”*. He continues by saying that an employee in uniform becomes an everyday hero that is expected to intervene whenever it is needed which has also traditionally been a part of the culture. Amanda further argues that the officers are educated within the SAF and therefore have more responsibilities than the soldiers.

She explains that “*The officers have more rules on how to act and behave than soldiers [...] They should be role models for the newly employed since they need to act professionally*”. According to Kapferer (1997), the culture of the organization is the most visible sign and it is therefore important to act in accordance with the core values. Felix perceives the work itself as honourable by saying “*it is an honourable task to work for the SAF [...] We are making such difference through our work and we can therefore wear our uniform with pride*” (See Table 3).

Table 3- The culture within the SAF

Dimensions	Category	Sub-category	Illustrative examples
The culture within the SAF	Atmosphere at the workplace	Openness	Victor: <i>we really work close with each other which requires openness, we cannot for example be disloyal or hide things from each other, no matter what</i>
		Togetherness	Anton: <i>I searched for a workplace with a team spirit and great unity with among the colleagues [and] it is something I received very fast in the SAF</i>
		Discipline & Hierarchy	Amanda: <i>There is a lot of discipline within SAF [...] it is also very organised [...] we usually do not receive a lot of information, it is higher up in the hierarchy</i> Felix: <i>In the army you usually address your boss with his or her military degree, for example if someone is a captain you address him as captain</i>
	Code of conduct	Act properly	Simon: <i>when I wear my uniform, I have to behave properly [...] I cannot jaywalk or look dishevelled since I represent an organization that I look up to</i>
		Everyday hero	Simon: <i>it is a part of the culture, I feel that if you wear the uniform you become an everyday hero. If someone gets hurt, you are the first one the person will look at</i>
		Officers as role models	Amanda: <i>the officers should be role models for the new employees [...] should behave and act professionally</i>
		Honourable work	Felix: <i>it is an honourable task to work for the SAF [...] We are making such difference through our work and we can therefore wear our uniform with pride</i>

6.1.2 Mission & Vision

The mission and vision are characteristics of commitment and are important aspects of the brand identity which determines the reason to why an organization exists (Urde, 2013). The mission refers to why the organization exists and the vision is in what direction the organization is heading. The SAF's employees claim that the organization's mission is to defend Sweden which is further highlighted by Anton who states: *"we exist in order to defend the country's rights and all of its citizens rights"*. Amanda adds her view by arguing that she knows that the SAF can defend the country if something would happen. In order to defend Sweden, the employees express their readiness to sacrifice their lives for the country. This is something the majority of the current employees express through their statements. For example, Amanda claims that most of the SAF's employees are ready to die for their country and as Victor states *"When I go to work every day, I am ready to do it at risk of my life"*. Similarly, Anton argues *"I get to work with good people that are willing to sacrifice very much for others"* which the majority of the employees also express.

Another aspect that concerns the organization's mission and vision is that the organization's core values might have changed throughout the years which is confirmed by four out of five employees. The changes prove that the organization has adopted to today's modern society. For example, Amanda mentions *"I think that the SAF tries to adapt to today's society. People nowadays are easily aggrieved"*. Since the question of equality is evident in the Swedish society, it is considered "undefendable" that the organization that defends Sweden does not reflect this aspect. Simon discusses that the SAF wants to focus more on making its employees smarter rather than remaining in the traditional macho-culture where employees need to show how strong and dangerous they are.

The current employees state that the stereotypical view of the SAF seems to represent only strong men which the organization wants to change. According to Felix, *"The Supreme Commander has worked very hard with this, that it must disappear from the SAF, because people should not have that picture of the SAF, it is not how we want it to be."* The citation explains that women have been treated worse in the organization which is a view that the SAF wants to change and does not want to be related with. It is important that the meaning and purpose of the organization is reflected in its moral image since it affects the positioning of the brand (Janonis *et al.*, 2007).

However, Victor argues that the soft values might have changed but the main values such as defending Sweden remains the same. According to some researchers, a strong and sustainable brand is highly dependent on its brand identity. The brand identity should in general remain unchanged concerning its core values instead of adapting to short-term trends (See Table 4). If a brand identity is changed, it might be hard for employees and stakeholders to really know who they are (Kapferer, 2012; Urde, 2003; Aaker, 2004; Balmer & Greyser, 2006; Burmann *et al.*, 2009).

Table 4- Mission and vision of the SAF

Dimensions	Category	Sub-category	Illustrative examples
Mission and vision of the SAF	Mission	<i>To defend Sweden</i>	<i>Amanda: I know that we can defend the country if something would happen</i> <i>Anton: We exist in order to defend the countries rights and all of its citizens' rights</i>
		<i>Put the life at risk</i>	<i>Amanda: I think that the most of us are ready to die for our country</i> <i>Victor: When I go to work every day, I am ready to do it at risk of my life.</i>
	Vision	<i>Modernize</i>	<i>Felix: The Supreme Commander has worked very hard with this, that it must disappear from the SAF, because people should not have that picture of the SAF, it is not how we want it to be.</i>

6.1.3 Brand core

Balmer and Gray (2003) state that the brand core represents what an organization stands for which is communicated through a promise. Regarding the SAF's brand core, a frequently repeated aspect among the employees is the importance to relate to the organization's core values. As Victor claims, if an employee does not stick to the core values, which are openness, results and responsibility, that person is not welcome to work for the SAF. Even though this is something the majority of the interviewees highlight, Amanda does not believe that the employees are aware of the core values and does not point out the importance of it. Amanda rather claims the opposite by saying that she is "only" a soldier and does not relate to the SAF to the same extent as the officers might do. However, the current employees are in general all aware of the main values such as openness is continuously highlighted. For example, Simon states "we should respect each other's opinions, ethnicity, religion [...] the thing about having a positive view on human life regarding equality and equity".

However, Simon claims that sometimes he feels like a robot who cannot always express his own opinions although the SAF encourages to respect everyone's opinions. Even though openness is advocated by the current employees, the core meaning in the statements is generally referring to that women are welcome to the organization. For example, Felix says *"If you want to defend the country you need to defend everyone's equal rights [and] it is especially good in order to attract women to the organization"*. Regarding gender equality, Felix further explains that the SAF works hard to attract women to join the organization and states that *"I think it is really good that the organization works hard to attract women and it makes the workplace better when it is equal"*. Similarly, Simon claims that if the SAF would only recruit men it would lose 50 percent of its recruitment base. Felix continues to explain that even though an equal workplace is important, it should not influence the SAF's requirements in order to attract more women. He argues:

I also do not think that it is very good, because I know it has been a little bit like that, that they want to lower the requirements for some positions [and] the ones that get employed on lower requirements become a burden for the group - Felix

Amanda also expresses the concern about lowered requirements and claims that it might affect a group's performance. However, Amanda is one of the women's' representatives within the organization and does not perceive the question of equality as important since she rather values competent soldiers regardless gender. She further argues that she might not live up to the core values as the SAF would like her to. Furthermore, not all employees express the same attitude towards the core values whereas Tarnovskaya and Bertilsson (2017) argue that there is a need of similarities among the employees in order to obtain a strong brand identity. Another important part of the brand core of the SAF is mentioned by the majority of the current employees which is responsibility. It is especially important since, as Anton mentions, the SAF has responsibilities towards the citizens of Sweden but also towards the organization as employees. For example, Victor explains the responsibility within the SAF as *"one should take responsibility for what one does [and] responsibility in solving the tasks and responsibility to be open towards each other"*. The majority of the current employees agree that they have a lot of responsibilities both towards the organization as well as towards the society (See Table 5).

Table 5- The brand core of the SAF

Dimension	Category	Illustrative examples
The brand core of the SAF	<i>Openness</i>	Simon: <i>we should respect each other's opinions, ethnicity, religion [...] the thing about having a positive view on human life regarding equality and equity.</i>
	<i>Responsibility</i>	Victor: <i>one should take responsibility for what one does [and] responsibility in solving the tasks and responsibility to be open towards each other</i> Anton: <i>We have responsibility as an organization, towards the citizens and personal responsibilities [and] I would say responsibility; it is a huge part of the SAF</i>
	<i>Gender equality</i>	Felix: <i>I think it is really good that the organization works hard to attract women and it makes the workplace better when it is equal</i> Simon: <i>we only have the half of the recruitment base if we only recruit men. If we recruit women as well it is great.</i>

6.1.4 Personality

Personality refers to certain characteristics that are associated with the SAF since it generates a broader understanding of the organization's brand identity. The majority of the employees associate the SAF with the characteristic loyal where for example Victor says, “*Loyal because the SAF takes care of its staff, since the staff is the most important resource*”. Similarly, Anton points out that even though the SAF does not manage the salaries too well, he perceives the SAF as loyal since his experience of the organization has been satisfying. According to Victor, there are other more important aspects that cannot be expressed in terms of money such as the education within the organization. Besides loyal, Simon describes the SAF as cooperative and problem-solving oriented since the organization is driven and actionable.

Victor also talks about the organization as driven, that the SAF changes to constantly become better by offering a good work environment and above all taking everyone's' equal rights into consideration. In similar manner, Felix describes the SAF as a person willing to work hard around the clock and one that is very flexible since the organization is huge and needs a lot of flexibility. Amanda defines the SAF as very organized and requires a lot of planning in order to solve the problems effectively.

According to Urde (2013), an organization's personality is a part of its brand identity which can be reflected through its employees' personalities. For example, Amanda defines the SAF by referring to the employees' personalities where she argues that everyone is very helpful and help each other when needed. Another characteristic that Anton suggests is that the SAF can be associated with a person that commands respect. He explains *"I think that the SAF both treats others with respect but at the same time commands respect since one should think about respect and show respect towards the SAF according to me. It should be visible that we are big, strong but kind"*. Victor argues that the SAF is protective since it always considers what is best for the country's defence regarding different political decisions since the organization possesses confidential information (See Table 6).

Table 6- The characteristics of the SAF if it would be a person

Dimensions	Category	Illustrative example
The characteristics of the SAF if it would be a person	<i>Loyal</i>	Victor: <i>Loyal because the SAF takes care of its staff, since the staff is the most important resource</i>
	<i>Ambitious & hard working</i>	Felix: <i>I would really say hard working. The SAF works around the clock and all people within the SAF work.</i>
	<i>Problem-solving oriented</i>	Simon: <i>a person that likes to solve tasks. Not someone that is lazy but rather a driven and actionable</i>
	<i>Cooperative & helpful</i>	Felix: <i>I would say a person that is cooperative.</i> Amanda: <i>The SAF is very helpful and if someone needs help, everyone tries to help one another since everyone cannot be good at everything.</i>
	<i>Commands respect</i>	Anton: <i>I think that the SAF both treats others with respect but at the same time commands respect since one should think about respect and show respect towards the SAF according to me. It should be visible that we are big, strong but kind</i>
	<i>Protective</i>	Victor: <i>Protective since it always considers what is best for the country and its defence, on different levels [...] regarding political situations, the SAF has always had a perspective and warned whether something was good or not for the country.</i>
	<i>Organized & flexible</i>	Felix: <i>I would also say a little bit flexible, yes, flexible since there are so many different tasks.</i>

6.1.5 Personal relationships

Besides the main findings that are covered according to *the circle of employer attractiveness*, an additional aspect concerning relationship was explored which regarded both the current and potential employees. Four out of five of the current employees have a previous relation to the SAF through relatives or through the compulsory military service. For example, Victor says “*I have many relatives that have been soldiers which is why I always think from a military perspective*”. Amanda has also a personal relationship that has encouraged her to work for the SAF since her father is a current employee of the organization. Similarly, Felix’s mother has worked for the organization whereas his father still does, which has influenced his choice of employer.

Simon explains that employees are ambassadors who can have an impact on the SAF’s reputation which in turn, can motivate people to apply to work for the organization. Simon also states that 95 percent of the reasons which motivates people to apply voluntarily comes through a positive word-of-mouth from either relatives or friends. However, Simon claims that it is difficult to attract volunteer applicants without having compulsory military service or personal relationships with the SAF’s employees. In his case, if it would not have been for the compulsory military service, he would not experience the actual benefits that the SAF offers (See table 7).

Table 7 - Personal relationships' influence on the employees

Dimensions	Category	Illustrative example
Personal relationships’ influence on the employees	Compulsory military service	<i>Simon: I did the compulsory military service. I had heard a lot of good about it [and] once I was in, it was so *** fun</i>
	Relatives in the SAF	<i>Viktor: I have many relatives that have been soldiers which is why I always think from a military perspective</i>

6.2 Potential employees

The following part generates an understanding of the organisation's brand image and whether it is perceived as an attractive employer. This section presents the empirical findings and analysis concerning the focus groups that constitute of potential employees of the SAF. As Aaker (1991) defines it, the brand image is the result of processed information of the brand by stakeholders which can create either positive or negative feelings towards the brand which further might influence its attractiveness. The discussion in the 17-year-old group is more focused on the compulsory military service. On the other hand, the discussion in the general group focuses more on the change within the SAF and how it has become weaker. Finally, the training-lifestyle group highlights the team spirit and the physical demand of the SAF. Since the brand image is rooted in the subjective perceptions of each individual, there can be multiple images of a brand (Tarnovskaya & Bertilsson, 2017). The tables in the following sections are based on *the circle of employer attractiveness* and give an overview of what each section discusses. However, the factor brand core is not considered in this part of the analysis but discussed in the critical review in chapter 7.4 (See page 64).

6.2.1 Value proposition

The dimension value proposition refers to how the SAF is perceived as an employer and whether it creates value for the potential employees. Among the respondents, one interesting aspect that is discussed is the view on spare time. The respondents perceive that there is lack of spare time if you work for the SAF. For example, Pia argues *"it feels like giving up a part of an ordinary life [and] it is hard to have family or be close to your family"*. Similarly, Saga and Erika think that they would lose all of their contact with family and friends if they would work for the SAF. Filip adds by saying that that an employee only has spare time once every second week. Another aspect that is brought to discussion is the perspective of the SAF as a boring workplace where Carl argued the following: *"I have no interest for it at all and I just think it seems really boring"*. Sven further claims that it does not feel like a fun career whereas Lucas adds that if nothing else works out in his life, the SAF can be his last resort. However, some potential employees perceive the organization as a fun workplace where Jakob argues for the possibility to climb the corporate ladder and states *"I perceive it as an attractive workplace, and you can have a lot of fun at work. And you can climb the corporate ladder."*

A value proposition should provide value for the potential employees and satisfy them which can later result in a favourable relationship (Urde, 2013). One aspect that is highly valued by everyone in the training-lifestyle group is that the workplace is physically demanding. This view is reflected by Ola who claims, “*the only reason to why it would be fun to try to work for the SAF is to see how far I would be able to push myself*”. However, the majority of the other two groups are not that appealed by the physical challenge but agree that it is an essential part within the SAF. Even though the SAF is seen as physically demanding by the potential employees, some of them perceive that the SAF has lowered its requirements and accepts applicants that do not really live up to the standards. Therefore, the potential employees perceive the workplace as less attractive where Carl shares his following view “*if everyone passes and gets accepted, it is not that cool and awesome anymore, if I would apply.*”. In similar manner, Emil, that considers working for SAF, claims that if everyone gets accepted, he can apply for something that is more fun and challenging. Furthermore, he also adds that if the requirements are lower, the employee somehow receives everything served on a silver platter while others within the organization have really worked hard to get there (See Table 8).

Table 8- The potential employee's perception of the value proposition

Dimensions	Category	Sub-category	Illustrative examples
The potential employee's perception of the value proposition	Perceived value	<i>Physically demanding</i>	Ola: <i>it would be fun to try to work for the SAF just to see how far I would be able to push myself</i>
		<i>Possibility to climb the corporate ladder</i>	Jakob: <i>I perceive it as an attractive workplace, and you can have a lot of fun at work. And you can climb the corporate ladder.</i>
	Negative perceived values	<i>Low standards</i>	Carl: <i>if everyone passes and gets accepted, it is not that cool and awesome anymore, if I would apply.</i> Emil: <i>if anyone can get accepted, it is like “damn, maybe I can apply for something that is more fun and challenging</i>
		<i>No spare time</i>	Pia: <i>it feels like giving up a part of an ordinary life [...] it is hard to have family or be close to your family</i> Filip: <i>I think they have time off once every second week</i>
		<i>Boring</i>	Carl: <i>I have no interest for it at all and I just think it seems really boring</i> Sven: <i>if I have to be honest, it does not feel like a fun career</i>

6.2.2 Relationship

The dimension relationship refers to the relationship between SAF and its potential employees through the service the organization provides. The relationship, if successful, can further create added value. Since the SAF is a service-oriented firm, relationship is important as it includes the integration between people and is, together with culture, seen as a bridge between the sender and receiver (Kapferer, 1997). One aspect that is generally shared among the potential employees and which might influence the relationship with the SAF is the lack of trust. Kapferer (1997) claims that in order for an organization to become attractive, a brand needs to lead to trust, respect, passion and engagement. The majority of the potential employees do not believe that the SAF would manage to defend Sweden where Greta claims the following “*to defend Sweden, our flag and our country, I do not have that much of trust*”. Furthermore, David states “*I do not think that we have many soldiers [...] So, I have no trust for our defence*”. Additionally, lack of trust is also reflected by Sofia’s statement:

I feel that it is more about focusing on own goals and dreams rather than for the country [...] It is less about fighting for each other and more about oneself [and] I do not think that they feel the same duty anymore, the duty does not exist as before, “we represent our country, we will fight for this and for the people”. - Sofia

Consequently, there are several potential employees who perceive a lack of loyalty since they do not believe that the current employees are ready to sacrifice their lives for Sweden. As for example Greta states, “*I do not feel at all that the SAF today is connotated with putting the life at risk. I really do not feel that the ones that work for the SAF would sacrifice their lives for me*”. Similar to Sofia’s statement about the absence of the duty to defend Sweden, Adrian claims that the employees’ duty to sacrifice their lives for their country has disappeared. There is a commonly shared thought among the potential employees in the conscripts group where the majority thinks that the SAF is pointless. As Sven argues “*I really think it feels unnecessary, Sweden has not been at war for a long period of time*”. Saga and Erika further question whether it is necessary to invest money into the SAF or not since war is a non-existing problem.

However, the two other groups wish for a strong defence and consider the SAF as too weak in today's political situation. Filip argues that *"In today's Europe it really feels like we need some kind of defence"*. For example, Adrian feels somehow betrayed since many regiments have closed in Sweden which makes him feel less secure. Even though some respondents argue for the need of a strong defence, the general interest in SAF as an organization and workplace among the potential employees is very low. As Saga states *"I am not that familiar with SAF and I do not know anything about it [...] it is not something that interests me."* According to Urde (2013), the potential employees, especially the target segment, can create positive feelings towards the brand if it corresponds to its self-image. In the SAF's case, the target segment refers to the training-lifestyle group which implies that these might be more aware of and positive towards the organization. However, Carl from the target segment states *"no matter how much the SAF would try to attract me, I would still not be interested"* (See Table 9).

As mentioned before, additional aspects within relationship were explored where the potential employees who have a previous relation to someone within the SAF have a more positive attitude towards the organization due to good reputation. For example, when Ola applied to become a policeman, he met soldiers from the SAF that he perceived as kind and talkative which gave him a better perception of the organization. Another apparent attitude that is influenced by good reputation is that some potential employees defend the organization even though the majority was criticizing it. For example, while some potential employees claim that the SAF is weak with less committed employees, Jakob argues against the group by stating that his relatives are very committed and passionate about their country. He states, *"If one chooses to continue within the organization, I really think that the person cares about its country and what is best for the citizens"*. He further argues that his relatives have climbed high on the corporate ladder and finds the workplace attractive which might have influenced his view on the SAF since he also finds it attractive (See Table 9).

Table 9- The relationship between the SAF and the potential employees

Dimension	Category	Illustrative examples
The relationship between the SAF and the potential employees	Pointless	<i>Sven:</i> I really think it feels unnecessary, Sweden has not been at war for a long period of time
	Feels betrayed	<i>Adrian:</i> They have closed a lot of regiments in Sweden which results in a weaker defence and less equipment. Therefore, I do not feel very secure if something would happen
	No trust	<i>David:</i> “I do not think that we have many soldiers [...] So, I have no trust for our defence”
	Unanswered loyalty	<i>Adrian:</i> you should be ready to sacrifice your life for your country, which I feel has disappeared
	Good reputation	<i>Jakob:</i> I have some relatives that climbed high on the corporate ladder and felt at home at their workplace [...] I also see it as an attractive workplace since you can have a lot of fun at work and feel comfortable.

6.2.3 Position

Position refers to how the SAF is positioned in the minds of its potential employees which affects their perception of the brand. One view regarding the organization, which is commonly shared among the potential employees’, is that the SAF is perceived as weak. For example, Diana states “*generally, I think the SAF is helpless*” and Erika claims “*Well, I think it is easy to beat us*”. Another commonly shared argument by the majority of the potential employees concerning the weakness of the organization, is that SAF is viewed as small. For example, Filip argues “*It is absolutely small. Of course, it depends on the context, but generally small*” and David claims that Sweden’s defence is much smaller compared to other countries. To continue, some respondents perceive that the equality that the organization promotes is non-existing at the workplace. For example, Sven states that it is not equal, and Erika supports his view by stating that there are more men than women within the SAF. Moreover, Sofia argues “*I think they might feel disappointed because they wish there were more women that would like to work for the SAF*”.

Regardless the fact that the potential employees' perceive the organization as weak, there are still some potential employees that consider the employees of the SAF as highly competent. For example, as Lucas says, "I think that people who work for the SAF are very competent". In contrast, some potential employees do not perceive that the employees make a difference through their work. Erika argues, "What it looks like, right now, it would not help with kids running around and shooting" and refers to that the employees' work is pointless. Emil even questioned the purpose of the employees' work by saying "what does it really mean to protect Sweden, what is it that they are protecting? What about our culture, freedom and what Sweden really is?". According to Urde (2013), if a positioning is successful, the potential employees should be able to identify both the mission and the vision of the organization. In addition, the majority perceive the employees as rather war-interested and generally associate the entire organization with war (See Table 9).

Table 10- The SAF's position in the potential employees' minds

Dimensions	Category	Sub-category	Illustrative examples
The SAF's position in the potential employees' minds	Perception of the organization	Weak	<i>Diana: generally, I think the SAF is helpless</i> <i>Erika: well, I think it is easy to beat us ["us" refers to the SAF]</i>
		Small	<i>Filip: It is absolutely small. Of course, it depends on the context, but generally small</i>
		No equality	<i>Sven: I do not think it is equal</i> <i>Sofia: I think they might feel disappointed because they wish there were more women that would like to work for the SAF</i>
	Perception of the employees	War-interested	<i>Statement from activity with focus group: it is good with SAF for the people that are interested in war</i>
		Competent	<i>Ola: I think they have high competence</i> <i>Lucas: I think that people who work for the SAF are very competent</i>
		Make no difference	<i>Erika: it should actually make a difference in case something would happen. What it looks like, right now, it would not help with the kids running around and shooting ["kids" refers to the employees of the SAF]</i>

6.2.4 Expression

The dimension expression implies how the potential employees perceive the SAF's expressed communication and marketing. The majority finds it non-credible and argues that it is something the SAF would like to be rather than who it really is. For example, Sven from the training-lifestyle group states *"I think it feels like SAF becomes less credible when they say things like that in their marketing"*. By "things like that", Sven refers to the statement of how good and strong the SAF is in the commercial. Moreover, Saga perceives that the SAF's message is not genuine and rather tries to fool her. The potential employees do not perceive the mediated message of the SAF as convincing since the marketing is not consistent with their perception of the organization. As Urde (2013) claims, the receiver might remember the communicated message more consistently if the core identity is mediated successfully. Greta questions the recruitment commercial by saying *"she talks a lot about "this is us, this is who we are" while we are sitting here on the other side with a totally different perception"*. The majority of the potential employees rather perceive the marketing as something the SAF would like to be instead of who they really are. As Roy and Banerjee (2014) claim, the brand image and the beliefs it contains are the true outcome of a communicated brand identity.

Another aspect regarding the marketing efforts is that the majority of the respondents perceive the SAF as desperate. For example, Sven says *"it feels like they try to build up a picture of how amazing they think they are in order to attract people which sounds desperate"*. Moreover, Filip argues that they sound desperate since they are excessively kind in order to attract people to the workplace. Additionally, Greta claims that the desperation might even affect the brand where she compares the SAF to companies that have offerings and discounts only to attract customers which she does not perceive as attractive. Kay (2006) argues that increased advertising will not change the perception of a brand if it is unsuccessfully positioned. To continue, some potential employees stated that the SAF's expression regarding the question of equality is exaggerated where Saga states *"You should not focus too much on gender in such a question, regarding the military"*. Similarly, Fabian does not think that the question of equality belongs in the military service where Adrian explains that the reason to why equality is not appropriate within the SAF is because everyone is not actually welcome as the SAF suggests in its current campaign. He develops his view on this topic by stating that since everyone cannot manage the requirements, the SAF cannot express openness and equality as it does (See Table 11).

Table 11- The potential employees' perception of the SAF's marketing and communication

Dimensions	Category	Illustrative examples
The potential employees' perception of the SAF's marketing and communication	<i>Exaggerated equality</i>	Fabian: <i>I do not think the question of equality belongs in the military service</i> Saga: <i>You should not focus too much on gender in such a question, regarding the military</i>
	<i>Non-credible</i>	Greta: <i>she talks a lot about "this is us, this is who we are" while we are sitting here on the other side with a totally different perception</i> Sven: <i>I think it feels like SAF becomes less credible when they say things like that in their marketing</i>
	<i>Desperate</i>	Greta: <i>Right now, it feels like they are very desperate</i> Carl: <i>I think that they sound little desperate</i>

6.2.5 Personality

Personality is a dimension that provides an additional understanding of the brand image and presents the characteristics that potential employees' associate the SAF's with. A common characteristic associated with the SAF according to the potential employees is old fashioned. As Sven states, "*it is like "it was better before" and things like that. A little old fashioned"*. Greta argues that the SAF is more traditional compared to the society in general. However, the fact that the SAF is more traditional is not considered as something negative and according to Greta it could be even more traditional. Another characteristic is authoritarian where Filip describes the leaders and officers within the organization as authoritarian. Pia further adds "*when you hear that someone works for the military, you immediately think they are authoritarian"*. The third repeatedly mentioned characteristic among the potential employees is weak. In the general group, weak is ranked as the second most associable characteristic to the SAF. The potential employees discuss that they would not feel secure in case something would happen. As Sofia claims, "*I think that our main common picture of the SAF is that it is weak, that we do not trust them"*. In contrast, the training-lifestyle group ranks competent as the most suitable characteristic and Elin argues, "*Regarding competence, it includes many years of experience and people that have worked with it their whole lives"*

Even though the organization is perceived as weak, the majority of the potential employees still associate the organization with a high level of discipline. For example, Adrian claims that although it is not as strict as it was before, the SAF still has some degree of discipline left. Jakob also claims: “*there are a lot of rules and things like that [and] they have to wake up early*”. The conscript group even considers strict and discipline as the most associable characteristics with the SAF (See Table 12).

Table 12- The perceived characteristics of the SAF

Dimensions	Category	Illustrative examples
The perceived characteristics of the SAF	<i>Old Fashioned</i>	Sven: <i>it is like “it was better before” and things like that. A little old fashioned</i> Greta: <i>I really think that SAF sticks to the traditional roots, more than the society in general</i>
	<i>Authoritarian</i>	Pia: <i>when you hear that someone works for the military, you immediately think they are authoritarian</i>
	<i>Weak</i>	Sofia: <i>I think that our main common picture of the SAF is that it is weak, that we do not trust them</i>
	<i>Disciplined</i>	Stig: <i>Discipline, to be on time is very important and you cannot come late</i> Adrian: <i>even though it is not as strict as it was before, but there is still a degree of discipline left...</i>
	<i>Competent</i>	Elin: <i>Regarding competence, it includes many years of experience and people that have worked with it their whole lives”</i>

6.3 Comparison of brand image & brand identity

Since the aim of the thesis is to explore whether the SAF’s brand image coheres to its brand identity and how it might influence its employer attractiveness, it is necessary to compare the two concepts, brand image and brand identity. It is important that the brand identity is perceived in a similar manner by the potential employees as the organization wants them to. Additionally, the brand has to appear attractive to the potential employees. Consequently, there are some similarities in the empirical findings between the current and potential employees’ statements. Both the current and the potential employees describe the work for the SAF as physically demanding. The physical demand is positively perceived mainly by the current employees and the training-lifestyle group.

Another similarity concerns the SAF's employees' competence. The potential employees consider the organization's employees as highly competent due to many years of experience. This is something that is indirectly expressed also by the current employees since their expertise is reflected in many of their statements. When the current employees define the SAF with characteristics, they sometimes indirectly refer to the employees within the organization. As Urde (2013) claims, an organization's employees usually reflect the personality of the brand they represent. The last main similarity concerns the negative view on the lowered requirements that aim to attract women to the organization. The potential employees perceive that lowered requirements might affect the standards of the organization and also make the work less challenging. Therefore, working for the SAF becomes less attractive. The lowered requirements are similarly perceived by some of the current employees and they also add that it can constitute a burden for the organization. As Roy and Banerjee (2014) explain, a coherence between brand identity and brand image is not enough in order for the brand to be successful since the coherence should have a positive impact on both the organization and the brand image.

Even though there are similarities among the current and potential employees, there are also several important differences that need to be taken into consideration. One difference that indicates inconsistency concerns the characteristics associated with the organization. The current employees associate the SAF with positive characteristics such as strong, loyal, protective and helpful. On the contrary, the potential employees describe the SAF with characteristics such as weak, old fashioned and authoritarian. There are also differences concerning the work of the SAF since the majority of potential employees either consider it as boring, time consuming or pointless. On the other hand, the current employees present many benefits that the workplace can offer. For example, the majority of the potential employees question whether they would be able to maintain the contact with their family and friends. In contrast, the current employees generally consider that the spare time is one of the many benefits that the workplace offers. The spare time is commonly valued by both the current and potential employees but might influence the employer attractiveness differently in both cases.

The current employees consider that the question of spare time increases the attractiveness of the workplace whereas the potential employees argue that the absence of spare time makes the workplace less attractive. The question of spare time is therefore, an example of inconsistency between the brand identity and brand image. To continue, another difference concerns the changes within the SAF's core values. The majority of the current employees perceive the changes as positive whereas some of the potential employees argue that it might have overshadowed what the organization really stands for. One relatively new and highly discussed core value that appears visible for the potential employees is the question concerning gender equality.

Many of the potential employees express a dissatisfaction about the SAF's efforts to become more equal. Some of them even argue that the question does not belong within the military service. In contrast to the potential employees, the current employees do not perceive the question of equality as something negative and instead argue that it has become an important aspect within the organization. However, the increased attention on gender equality might have went out of control and overshadowed the other core values. Even though the SAF and the current employees focus their attention on gender equality, it seems less important for the potential employees. The potential employees seem to be more curious about other values that for them are unknown. There is yet another difference regarding the SAF's mission and vision. Both the mission and vision constitute an important part of a brand's identity since it determines an organization's reason to exist and its direction. In this case, the SAF's mission it is to defend Sweden which all of the employees are aware of. Additionally, the mission implicates that the work within the SAF puts life at risk. Although all of the current employees claim that putting life at risk is an obvious part of their duty, the potential employees do not believe that the current employees would be ready to sacrifice their lives to defend Sweden. For example, Greta claims *"It does not feel that it is taken so seriously anymore [and] that people join the SAF just because they think it is a fun thing to do"*. More specifically, the potential employees do not trust that the SAF would be able to defend Sweden in case something would happen.

Consequently, the potential employees find the work rather meaningless while the current employees' claim that their work is an essential contribution to the society. As Roy and Banerjee (2014) argue, there is a risk for brand failure if the brand identity and brand image are incoherent which might harm the brand's competitiveness and attractiveness.

6.4 Employer brand

The following section presents an analysis of the SAF as an employer brand since the purpose of the thesis is to explore the coherence between brand image and brand identity through an employer brand perspective. As Ambler and Barrow (1996) explain, it is important to differentiate an employer brand from its competitors and make it preferred by potential employees in order to obtain a successful employer brand. In the SAF's case, the potential employees do not consider it as a preferable employer and even view it as the last resort in case something else would not work out as planned. Moreover, some of the potential employees do not experience it as a career path or even perceive the SAF as an employer.

The value proposition in employer branding is relevant to consider since it should reflect the organization's culture, employment image and employment quality. The potential employees perceive this as absent in the case of the SAF. More specifically, the potential employees are not aware of the benefits the workplace offers. For example, the lowered requirements are considered to decrease the standards of the organization and by that, the employment quality. Through employer branding, positive emotions can be created towards the brand and attract potential employees which the SAF might struggle with due to the difficulties with their recruitment (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). As the potential employees perceive the purpose of the SAF as unclear, it might be difficult to create positive emotions towards the brand. However, some of the potential employees have relatives or friends working for the SAF and perceive the workplace as more attractive. According to Ambler and Barrow (1996), a positive reputation is important in order to attract potential employees which can be achieved through a positive word-of-mouth.

As Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) claim, it is crucial that the employees feel committed to the organization by living the brand with its goals and values in order to enhance the workplace's attractiveness. The general reputation of the SAF among the potential employees is rather negative which might make the role of the employees crucial (De Chernatony and Harries, 2001). For example, De Chernatony and Harries (2001) claim that the employees are seen as a brand's ambassadors and can reinforce the brand's image. This is reflected among the potential employees who have some kind of previous relation to the SAF's employees. Additionally, as mentioned earlier, it is stated that 95 percent of the reason to why people apply voluntarily to the SAF is based on good reputation from relatives or friends. Moreover, if the employees mediate the workplace as attractive, it might improve the brand image since the employees constitute a link between the internal and external environment (De Chernatony and Harries, 2001). On the other hand, the employees can also make the communicated message less credible if they do not engage the corporate culture and values into their Code of Conduct (De Chernatony and Harries, 2001; Barrow & Mosley, 2005). For example, Amanda perceives that the SAF's Code of Conduct mainly concerns officers and expresses a negative attitude towards some core values which might influence the reputation of the organization negatively.

The SAF advocates gender equality and considers it as an important aspect for the organization whereas Amanda, as an employee and woman, does not always live up to these values. As Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) argue, the consistency in all branding efforts is highly important to provide a clear message which might also be lacking within the SAF. The SAF's current campaign communicates that everyone is welcome. However, some of the potential employees question whether the message of the campaign is credible. They argue that not all are welcome to apply to the SAF due to several requirements regarding health and physical aspects. According to Ambler and Barrow (1996), in some organizations, employees can be viewed as the most important asset which is the case of the SAF. If the employees relate to the core values of the organization, it might determine if the employees want to stay within the organization or not (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). The majority of the current employees expressed that they share the organization's values and could not imagine working for another organization.

7 Thesis conclusions

The following section shortly summarizes the different chapters of this thesis followed by a conclusion of how the coherence between the SAF's brand image and brand identity might influence its employer attractiveness. Furthermore, possible research implications are presented on how this thesis might contribute in both theory and practice. The chapter ends with a critical review of what could have been done differently and provides suggestions on future research within the field of branding.

7.1 Summary of dissertation

In order to conduct the research, a conceptual model was created based on previous research concerning the concepts brand image, brand identity and employer branding. The model helped to apply the employer branding perspective on brand image and brand identity in order to explore how the interplay between these concepts might influence employer attractiveness. The empirical material is based on five semi-structured interviews with current employees of the SAF as well as three focus groups with potential employees. The interviews aimed to provide information and understanding of the SAF's brand identity and the employees' perceptions of the workplace. The aim with three focus groups was to obtain a perception of the brand image among potential employees and how they perceive the SAF as a workplace. The results indicate that the brand image does not often cohere with the brand identity of the SAF since the potential employees perceived the organization as for example weak, old fashioned, boring, lacking employee commitment and not trustworthy. However, some perceptions were positive such as the competent employees, but the main positive attitudes were found among potential employees who either had a previous experience of the SAF or relatives who work for the organization. Since the general picture of the SAF was negative and did not cohere to the brand identity, it could be a part of the reason to why the respondents did not consider it as an attractive employer.

7.2 Conclusion

To conclude, the aim of this thesis was to explore how the coherence between brand image and brand identity could influence employer attractiveness where the case of the Swedish Armed Forces was applied. In general, the existing employees express a coherent perception of what the organization stands for which indicates that the employees are generally aware of the brand identity. However, not all of the existing employees feel fully committed to the SAF's core values. The hierarchical differences and the lack of reconnaissance are two factors that might indicate the reason to the absence of commitment to the core values. For example, one soldier argues that the soldiers do not have the same duty to relate and act according to the core values as the officers have. One of the officers expresses that he feels like a robot who cannot always have his own opinions even though the SAF urges to act according to the core values. Therefore, the credibility of the brand identity might be questioned. Tarnovskaya and Bertilsson (2017) argue that there is a need of similarities among the employees' values in order to obtain a strong brand identity. This study signals that not all of the current employees share the same opinions regarding the SAF's values. Consequently, one conclusion can be that the brand identity might have become weak.

When it comes to the coherence between brand image and brand identity, the results reveal that there are some similarities but also important differences to consider. This in turn might indicate inconsistencies between the two concepts. One similarity is that the workplace requires physical capabilities and appreciation for challenges. However, the similarities are not always positive which leads to employees perceiving the SAF as less attractive. For example, the lowered requirements and by that lowered standards even discourages one of the potential employees to apply to the organization. Regarding the differences, the brand image does generally not cohere to what is perceived as the SAF's brand identity in this study. The potential employees' perception of the organization, excluding the ones that have relatives within the SAF, is rather negative. As Kapferer (1997) states, the real value of a business lies in the minds of current and potential stakeholders. Since the potential and current employees have different perceptions of the organization, it might be difficult for the potential employees to create a strong relationship with the organization. In addition, it might also influence the potential employees' perception of the SAF as an attractive employer. For example, both the mission and vision are differently perceived by the current and potential employees.

The potential employees lack trust regarding the SAF's mission and dislike the direction the organization is heading towards. According to Urde (2013), if a positioning is done successfully, the potential employees should be able to identify both the organization's mission and vision. However, there are indications that imply that the mission is non-credible since the potential employees perceive the SAF as too weak and small to fulfil the mission whereas the vision does not appeal to the potential employees. Consequently, this study indicates that the SAF's positioning might have created the opposite effect of what the organization aspired to.

The changes in the core values and the focus on the question of gender equality might overshadow the other core values of the SAF and create additional difficulties for its recruitment which is an essential aspect to consider. Since the gender equality and modernization has influenced the SAF's core values, it might even imply a loss of control of the brand core. Many potential employees express a confusion regarding what the organization really stands for and do not value the question of gender equality to the same extent as the SAF does. Additionally, the gender equality is not even of importance for some of the current employees which might indicate that the SAF's changes lead to wrong actions regarding its brand. As many researchers argue, there is a risk in changing the core values and adopt the identity to short-term trends. Such changes can cause confusion among the current and potential employees concerning what an organization stands for, which might be the case of the SAF (Kapferer, 2012; Urde, 2003; Aaker, 2004; Balmer & Greyser, 2006; Burmann et al, 2009). As Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) claim, it is crucial that the employees feel committed to the organization by living the brand with the goals and values in order to enhance the workplace's attractiveness. This in turn might constitute a problem in the case of the SAF, based on the findings in this thesis.

Regarding the SAF's marketing, it might be mediated too desperately and hence create a possible implication to why the SAF fails to attract more employees. As Kay (2006) argues, increased advertising will not change the perception of a brand if it is unsuccessfully positioned. For example, many potential employees perceive the marketing as desperate and non-credible and compare it to an organization that "Pumps out" discounts. Since the potential employees are aware of the SAF's recruitment issues, they consider the marketing as exaggerated and desperate. Therefore, the message is not perceived as credible and some of them even argue that a military organization should not market itself that much.

If the message is seen as less appealing, it might affect the attractiveness of the workplace and also result in a brand failure which is worth considering the SAF's case (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). Finally, another conclusion is that the employees' role as ambassadors might be a crucial influential factor on the potential employees' perception of the organization since it might enhance a positive brand image. The potential employees who have a positive attitude towards the SAF or perceive the workplace as attractive have relatives or friends working for the organization. This implication strengthens the arguments of De Chernatony and Harries (2001) regarding employer branding since they claim that the employees play an important role as ambassadors in brand management. Therefore, the SAF's marketing efforts might be insufficient and urge for greater focus on word-of-mouth in order for the employer brand to become known and appeal attractive to potential employees,

7.3 Research implications

Considering the theoretical implications, employer branding has not been approached in the context of both brand image and brand identity in previous research, to the best of our knowledge. Therefore, this study has contributed to the research on employer branding together with brand image and brand identity. More specifically, the thesis has explored if the interplay between brand image and brand identity can be approached through an employer brand perspective and how this might influence an organization's employer attractiveness. Several researchers have approached the concepts of brand image, brand identity or employer branding but none, to the best of our knowledge, has considered these concepts together in a context. For example, Kapferer (1997) is the father of brand identity where Urde (2013) has based his research on the findings of Kapferer but also considered the concept of brand image. Additionally, Roy and Banerjee (2014) discuss the gap between brand image and brand identity but have not adopted an employer branding perspective. As mentioned earlier, Ambler and Barrow (1996) were the first to approach topic on how marketing can be applied in conjunction with recruitment where the research regarding employer brand, is still rather limited.

To continue, as the SAF mainly targeted people who consider training as a big part of their lifestyle, one practical implication from this study is that this segment is not perceived more enthusiastic towards the organization compared to the other potential employees. In contrast, there are rather persons in each group who show interest to work for the SAF.

Yet another implication for the SAF is to increase its focus on the employees' role since the potential employees with positive attitude towards the workplace had relatives who worked for the SAF. A positive word-of-mouth through the employees' as ambassadors might enhance the brand image but also increase the SAF's employer attractiveness. Another implication worth considering concerns the SAF's adaptation and modernization of the core values according to the society. In order to avoid a confusion between brand identity and brand image, it is important to not adapt to short-term trends since it might harm employer attractiveness. This study indicates that changes should be considered more carefully to maintain consistency in the brand identity. The last implication concerns reduction of marketing efforts since the potential employees might find it too desperate and as Kay (2006) claims, increased marketing efforts will not change the perception of a brand. Finally, we hope to contribute with an additional insight of what might be a possible reason to the SAF's recruitment and brand building issues.

7.4 Critical review & future research

As mentioned in chapter 6, there were some factors in *the circle of employer attractiveness* that were not directly considered in the empirical findings and analysis. As Urde (2013) claims, the factors are all interrelated and affect one another which makes some factors incorporated in other parts of the model. However, since the SAF's employees have not worked for any other employer, they did not express any elaborated opinions regarding the competences of the organization and how it differs from other employers. The employees did not comment in detail about the SAF's marketing which reflects the factor expression since they were not familiarised with the subject. The last factor that was left out was the brand core and concerned the potential employees. The reason to why the brand core was not covered is due to the fact that the potential employees did not have any knowledge or perception about what the SAF stands for which made it difficult to discuss. Therefore, an implication for future research can be to investigate these factors that were left out in this study. Another critical factor is that it is difficult to determine whether the current employees actually feel committed to the core values of the SAF or if it is a part of their duty.

Since this study has a qualitative approach, future research can adopt a quantitative approach in order to make the results generalizable. Furthermore, since the study is based on a case concerning one service firm, future research could take other service firms into consideration. Finally, the empirical material indicated that the current employees in this study have a perception of the SAF's brand image but not how it affects their attitudes towards the organization which is the last suggestion for future research.

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Appendix 1 – Interview Guide

Introduction	
We start by presenting ourselves and the topic of the interview without revealing the purpose of the study in order to avoid biased answers. Moreover, we ask for permission to record the interview and assure anonymity. The interview will take approximately one hour, and we offer coffee and cookies.	
Questions	Purpose <i>(based on figure 4)</i>
1. What is your role in the SAF and what is your main task? - For how long have you worked in the organization?	An introductory question in order to make the respondent feel comfortable.
2. What made you want to work for the SAF?	<i>Introductory question</i> (possible contribution to brand image since the current employees were potential before)
3. What were your expectations on the organization before you started to work there and did the SAF meet your expectations??	<i>Personality, position & expression</i> (possible contribution to brand image since the current employees were potential before. Additionally, it can reveal the perception the employee had and has of SAF.)
4. How does it feel to put on the uniform when you start to work?	<i>Expression & Personality</i> (We hope to explore the implication of the employees within SAF and if they live the brand)
5. What does the SAF stand for and which are its core values? - What is the mission and vision of the organization?	<i>Core values, Mission & Vision</i> (The answer of this question can reveal the employees' perception of the core values within the organization and analyse whether the employees share the same perception of the values)
6. Which three characteristics would you associate the SAF with if it would be a person?	<i>Personality & expression</i> (This allows us to create an understanding on how the employees perceive the SAF and if this is perceived in the same way by the respondents in the focus groups)
7. What do you think is the reason to why people want to continue or start working for the SAF?	<i>Competences, Core values, Expression, Value proposition, Position, Brand identity & Brand Image</i> (This question can reveal the perception of how the organization internally thinks it is perceived as a workplace, which competences it has that makes it better than competitors and the incentives that motivate employees to remain within the organization)
8. Does the SAF market itself internally for you employees? If yes then how? (For example education regarding core values, mission and vision) - Does it provide any value for you?	<i>Internalisation</i> (This question is relevant since it can provide a perception whether SAF has internal marketing or not and how it is done. Through this answer, we can explore if the core values are transmitted internally)

<p>9. Do you feel proud to work for the SAF? Why/why not?</p>	<p><i>Brand Identity</i> (Aims to explore whether the employee is living the brand and is proud to represent the organization)</p>
<p>10. How do you think people externally perceive the SAF as an employer and organization? - What is the typical reaction you receive when you say that you work for the SAF?</p>	<p><i>Brand image & employee's perception</i> (Aims to explore if SAF is aware of the brand image that it has and possibly how the employee itself sees it)</p>
<p>11. Do you feel that the SAF's core values are similar to your personality and in what way?</p>	<p><i>Personality, Core values & Expression</i> (Again, trying to investigate whether the employees live the brand and share the values of SAF)</p>
<p>12. How would you say that the SAF differs from other employers and what makes the SAF unique?</p>	<p><i>Competences & Core values</i> (This question provides a perception on how current employees perceive the workplace and what makes it unique compare to competitors)</p>
<p>13. Do you think that the SAF's core values and what it stands for has changed throughout the years? If yes then why?</p>	<p><i>Brand Identity</i> (exploring if the brand identity has been consistent throughout the years or if it has adopted because of extraneous factors)</p>

Appendix 2 – Focus-group guide

Introduction	
<p>We introduce the focus group by welcoming everyone and explaining the topic without revealing the exact purpose of our study in order to not bias the answers or influence the participants' opinions. Additionally, we answer if we can record the discussion in order to ask for their permission and assure the participants' anonymity. Furthermore, we explain that we will not participate in the discussion but instead guide it through questions and activities. There is no correct or incorrect answer which allows each respondent to be creative and answer what he/she thinks and feels. The focus group will take approximately one hour, and we offer both coffee and cookies.</p>	
Questions	Purpose <i>(based on figure 4)</i>
<p>1. What is the first thing you think of when you hear the name "The Swedish Armed Forces"?</p> <p>(The question will be answered by each respondent and can also be questioned by the other participants) (5 minutes)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Brand Image</i></p> <p>(By asking this question we expect the respondents to get introduced to the topic and start to analyse about their own thoughts of SAF)</p>
<p>2. Activity: Write down three statements that you associate the SAF with and place it in the jar. We will discuss one note at a time where each respondent has to express its opinion. The author of each note will be anonymous if wished for. (15 minutes)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Expression, Core values, Position & Value proposition</i> <i>(Brand Image)</i></p> <p>(By doing this activity we aim to investigate the participant's thoughts about SAF and opinions and how they are positioned in their minds)</p>
<p>3. Activity: Write down three characteristics that you would associate the SAF with if it would be a person? Every respondent writes down three characteristics each and later ranks it from one to six together with the other respondents. The ranking is based on which characteristic is considered most associable to the SAF. Thereafter, a discussion is done regarding the choices. (15 minutes)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Personality (brand image)</i></p> <p>(This activity can contribute to an understanding of what defines SAF's personality and perceived core values. Through a discussion on why certain characteristics are dominant over others regarding SAF, it can provide an understanding on why people perceive SAF positively or negatively)</p>
<p>4. Do you trust the Swedish defence regarding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regarding its work 	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Relationship & Position (Brand Image)</i></p> <p>(This allows us to explore whether the respondents trust what SAF communicates and</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What it stands for - The SAF as an organization <p>(5 minutes)</p>	<p>stands for, if they see SAF as a credible organization as they communicate in their marketing)</p>
<p>5. Discuss the SAF as an employer. Do you perceive it as an attractive workplace? Why/Why not?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you see it as a potential future workplace? Why/Why not? <p>(5 minutes)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Brand Image</i></p> <p>(Through this question, we expect to receive an answer that regards the topic of SAF as an attractive employer or not)</p>
<p>6. Have you seen any of the SAF's marketing or commercials before? If yes, what did you think about it? If not, why do you think you have missed it? (Thereafter, the commercial is shown)</p> <p>After the commercial is shown, the respondents discuss what they think of it, if they perceive that it matches their perception of the SAF and what they think the SAF wants to communicate?</p> <p>(10 minutes)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Relationship & Position (Brand Image)</i></p> <p>(We think that this question can summarize the whole discussion of the focus group and by showing the commercial of what SAF wants to communicate, we can see the reactions and hear the thoughts on whether the participants perceive it as credible or not)</p>