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Strong Employer Brands and Employee Advocacy in Social Media



Exploring the Employee Perspective

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Abstract: Employer Branding activities in the competitive labour market are becoming increasingly interactive rather than a top-down exercise. Limited resources together with new technology is playing a role in this development. Little, but some research exists on Employee Advocacy or the *voluntary* promotion and defence of a brand by its employees. While some researchers suggest that strong Employer Brands fosters Employee Advocacy, there seem to be little empirical support or comprehensive models incorporating the supportive factors. Earlier studies have been primarily quantitative in nature, focusing on the corporate perspective. This research adds a qualitative angle with focus on the Employee Perspective.

The purpose with this thesis is to explore how employees in companies with strong Employer Brands practice Employee Advocacy in a Social Media context, Because of the subjectivist and abductive approach, the method was qualitative in form of interviews with employees of different companies in the service sector as primary data together with secondary data.

The findings indicate that Employee Advocacy, although largely driven by employee commitment, in practice seem to be a rather temporary phenomenon. The dominating intrinsic motives for Employee Advocacy does not seem to translate in a Social Media Context, where nature of expression ultimately seem to depend more on external or situational factors.

The limitations of this study are the small number of respondents made up of a convenience sample. The narrow theoretical base also limits the study to explore and broaden a phenomenon rather than developing an entirely new concept. The conceptual model could act as a basis for other studies with a combined qualitative/quantitative approach or as a basis for discussion in companies formulating their Employer Branding or Social Media strategies.

The original value of the conducted study is a comprehensive model of shapers and some new empirical insights regarding complexities of the Employee Advocacy phenomenon.

Keywords: Brand Citizenship Behaviour, Employee Advocacy, Employee Recommenders, Employer Branding, Online Employee Endorsement, Social Media, Personal Brand

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You may all be leaders one day or another, but remember:

“employees are the most effective advocates of a company’s reputation and a crisis is when the support of the work force/employees is critical” (Mazzei et al., 2012, as cited in Opitz, Chaudry & Wang, 2017, p. 68).

1. Introduction

In the labour market of today, many sectors are having problems in finding qualified staff and at the crossroads of human resource management (HRM) and brand marketing, Employer Branding (EB) or; a company promoting itself as an attractive employer, has become a way of gaining competitive advantage (Uen, Alstrom, Chen & Liu, 2015). According to survey made by LinkedIn in 2017, 80% of managers agree that EB has significant impact on recruiting ability, but since effects are difficult to measure, companies tend to keep small EB budgets.

Employee Advocacy refers to the voluntary promotion and/or defence of a brand by employees (Men, 2014), or; happy employees that voluntarily engage on behalf of a brand, i.e. “*living the brand*” (Maxwell, R. & Knox, S. 2009). In order to make employees “live” the brand, a company must “*have a healthy association and relationship with employees*” according to Natarajan, Balasubramaniam & Srinivasa (2016, p. 96). With prior work experience in banking, primarily in SEB, I have encountered employees acting as advocates in different networks, outside of office hours, not being formally appointed. One might wonder if Employer Branding efforts and new technology will support or stifle Employee Advocacy.

There are several Employer Brand rankings showing different results and there is also reason to suspect that prospective candidates are not getting similar brand messages from employers and employees. Also, it could be because the prospective and the current employees value different things. According to the mentioned LinkedIn survey, companies think candidates are mostly attracted by their culture, company reputation, challenges and career growth, but according to candidates themselves, values and culture, perks and benefits, mission and vision are the most important factors.

McLeod & Clarke’s (2009) research, as cited by Maria Kuutsa (2016) shows that when employees have a good relationship with the employer, they become motivated and engaged, twice as productive as their non-engaged colleagues and may account for 80 % of customer satisfaction. Then, one could assume that Employee Advocacy behaviour is something employers would appreciate and nurture, especially in the service sector. This is confirmed by Natarajan et al. (2016, p 97), who claims “*Service brands strive to accomplish emotional reciprocation from employees, as it is an obligatory part to make them live and deliver the desired brand*”. In order to achieve this, some companies offer solutions for employers to measure work-related employee social media activity and encourage them to become “influencers”. In addition to this recent trend, from a general marketing perspective, gaining a

deeper understanding of this topic is also interesting because Employee Advocacy is offering organisations a way of differentiating themselves from competition (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001; Kuutsa, 2016, p 58).

1.1 Problematization

Why is the study of Employee Advocacy in Social Media important? Several researchers have studied Brand Advocacy mainly from the employer view, only a few (e.g. King, C. & Grace, D., 2008) from employees themselves, so there seem to be a research gap in this area. Some research about employees has been made by branding consultancy firms, one example is a global online survey of 2 300 employees that was made in 2014 by Weber Shandwick and KRC Research. It shows that 50 % of employees post content about their employer in social media and 33 % do this without any employer encouragement. The study does not specify whether this content is supporting the brand or not, however. Many companies have policies about how to share work related content online, this is likely to hamper spontaneous sharing.

The participation of employees in Social Media is more important than ever, since brand messages being shared by employees reach 5-6 times further compared to the same message shared by brand official social channels (MSL Group 2012; as in Kuutsa, 2016, p 57). Brand messages are also re-shared 24 times more frequently when employees share them compared to the brand page (ibid). Interestingly, employees are perceived as being more trustworthy in social media (52 %) than the company CEO (46 %) or companies not familiar to the message recipient (32 %) according to the Global Edelman Trust Barometer in 2015 (ibid).

Employees are also representative of the organisation in the eyes of customers and thus, their behaviour will influence the organisation's external reputation and image (Dreher 2014, Gotsi & Wilson 2001, Lages 2012; as in Kuutsa, 2016) Since company culture is constantly being portrayed and communicated by current employees, they have become an important vehicle for their employers, since satisfied employees might reach out to not only to current or prospective customers, but also to current or future employees, which will affect the employer brand (Miles & Mangold 2004).

A couple of recent events further highlights the need to include employees in corporate social media communication *and* research, not only because staff retention is important for corporations, but also to ensure that Employer Branding efforts gives a correct picture. For example, SBAB, the fourth company on the latest Employer Branding ranking list "Great Place to Work" in Sweden has during the spring 2019 been criticized by former employees

and the labour union Finansförbundet for excluding staff from surveys and for punishing whistle blowers (De Lima F., A.,2019). At the same time, ordinary employees appeared in company ads in social media, reassuring that SBAB was indeed a “great place to work” at.

Giving praise in times of success seems easy, but the litmus test of true Employee Advocacy is what happens when the employer receives negative press. Standing up for your brand can at such times will have a large impact and scholars have already concluded that “*employees are the most effective advocates of a company’s reputation and a crisis is when the support of the work force/employees is critical*” (Mazzei et al., 2012, as cited in Opitz, Chaudry & Wang, 2017, p. 68). A recent example of this, in the spring of 2019 when the Swedbank CEO and chairman lost their jobs because of the ongoing money laundering investigation in the Baltics and the stock plummeted. Initially there was radio silence in social media, but soon thereafter one could observe how several managers and employees started making posts on LinkedIn and Instagram showing loyalty to the brand in the midst of turbulence. These posts also rendered support from employees in other banks and from former colleagues.

By highlighting these two recent examples from the banking sector, the point being made is that companies in the same sector are sometimes ahead, sometimes behind when it comes to Employee Advocacy and Social Media. Fully aware that the banking sector is not entirely representative for the study of this phenomenon in “ordinary” company setting, other companies will also be included in this study as well in order to contribute to a broader understanding of advantages and pitfalls with employee social media behaviour.

It has already been established by researchers (Piehler, King, Burmann & Xiong, 2016) that employee engagement and commitment lead to employee advocacy. According to Social Exchange theory (SET) (Akgunduz & Sanli, 2017), reciprocated supportive behaviour from employees have a positive brand impact. A recent study by Natarajan et al. (2016) has proven that having a favourable (strong) employee brand results in better brand endorsement (employee advocacy). Thus, if one wants to understand more about the phenomenon employee advocacy, individuals in different companies supporting their employers, overall and in a social media context, it appears likely to find individuals displaying such behaviour in companies with strong employer brands.

1.2 Aim of study

The aim of this study is to explore what triggers Employee Advocacy, if it is entirely voluntary and/or encouraged by employers. In a broader sense, the aim is also to increase

understanding of different aspects of the Employee Advocacy phenomenon from an Employee perspective.

By asking employees questions about how they identify with their employer brands and what triggers or hinders their advocacy, both offline and online, some patterns might emerge to indicate whether there may be new shapers to the phenomenon or “best practices” when it comes to retain and/or attract talent and maintain and/or increase brand value.

Since the link between Employer Branding (Internal Branding) and positive Employee Advocacy (Employee Brand Endorsement) have earlier been established by scholars (Natarajan et al., 2016) the aim is to see whether this relation can be empirically verified, to what extent employees are willing to live the brand if values are divergent, and also if respondents are acting in different manners, depending on the audience, in companies considered to have a strong Employer Brand. This leads to the research question:

1.3 Research question

In companies with strong Employer Brands, what are the motivators behind Employee Advocacy and how does this behaviour manifest itself in a Social Media context?

1.4 Research Purpose

- To explore how employees in companies with strong Employer Brands practice Employee Advocacy.

1.5 Definitions

Since Employee Advocacy is a relatively new area of research, there is no clear, single definition, this concept has not yet been extensively discussed in existing academic literature. A rather straightforward definition is made by Men (2014; as cited by Walden et al. 2018) as “*the voluntary promotion and defence of a company by an employee*”.

According to the digital agency Ciceron, awarded best branding agency in Sweden 2018, Employee advocacy [in Social Media] is: “*the result of engaged employees being empowered to speak on behalf of the brands for which they work. [They] are engaged and personally motivated employees who are empowered by their management to not only share company content, but to discuss current professional issues in social media*” (Ciceron 2015; as cited by Kuutsa, 2016 p. 96-97).

Social Media has been defined as “*a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content*” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; as cited by Jacobsson & Tufts, 2013 p 86) Social media is made up by different interactive Internet forums, social networks, blogs, vlogs etc. Social Media will in the following chapter be used as a group term when discussing the four largest social networks Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram and Twitter.

2. Theoretical Framework/Literature review

Branding literature emerged around 1950 and term Employer Brand was first used in the 1990s. In order to build a framework of Corporate Branding, Internal Branding, Employer Brand and Employee Advocacy and their relations, it is of importance to gain an understanding of the basic concepts and related terminology. The purpose of the following literature review is to explain some concepts, provide background knowledge and to discuss some relevant academic sources relating to different aspects of Employee Advocacy.

2.1 Resource Based View (RBV) and Social Exchange Theory (SET)

In the introduction, Employee Advocacy as a competitive advantage was briefly mentioned. According to RBV, (Wernerfelt 1984, as in G. Tomas & M. Hult., 2011, p 520) it is the superior resources and capabilities of an organisation that creates sustainable competitive advantage. The RBV holds the assumption that firms differ, even firms within the same industry. The differences occur in the firms’ resources, and the theory suggests that a firm’s strategy should depend on its resources. Or, as the same author elaborates in his later works “*if a firm is good at something, the firm should try to use it*” (Wernerfelt 2005, p. 17, as in Tomas & Hult, 2011, p 520). King et al. (2007) also refers to RBV in their research and argues that employees of an organisation contribute with hidden value to the brand and that their special knowledge creates competitive advantage. Especially in service-oriented firms (Natarajan et al, 2016) this kind of know-how also constitutes a large part of Brand Value. Employees who have high knowledge about the brand are considered as “*intellectual capital*” of an organization and employees with high commitment to the brand are considered being its “*emotional capital*” (ibid, p 97) and both are important for long-term viability of the firm.

Since Employer Branding is somewhere in the intersection between marketing and human resource management (HRM), much literature is found in the field of behavioural theory. Another theory that seems appropriate to highlight in conjunction with Employee Advocacy is

the Social Exchange Theory (SET). According to this theory, *all* promises made by the organisation towards their employees should be fulfilled, in terms of job benefits and other functional components that are associated with it (Natarajan et al., 2016). Then, when employees believe they are supported by the organization “*they may seek to return that support and influence the exchange*” (Akgunduz et al., 2017, as in Walden et al, 2018, p. 4). This reciprocation by employees will also occur as a result of the organisation’s fulfilment of promises made to them (Natarajan et al, 2016), in other words, the Employee Value Proposition (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004 as quoted in Anttila, 2019, p 11). The EVP, according to Universum, a global market leading company in employer branding (2019), comprises of company values, company culture, growth opportunities, vision and mission of the company together with perks and benefits.

Employer Branding is about building relationships with current and future employees, and as any relationship, this is a two-way street. Also, SET suggests that “*employees may enact behaviours like advocacy to repay organizations because the organizations have contributed value to the relationship and supported the employee*” (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005 as cited in Walden et al, 2018, p. 4). Employees’ delivery of desired brand image, as a return for the internal branding activities provided by the organisation has been examined by Natarajan et al. (2016).

Other types of reciprocation, such as employees’ commitment, job performance and other favourable behaviour have also been studied. According to Men’s study, “*employee-organisation relationships are mutually beneficial when they are characterised by trust, control, mutuality, commitment and satisfaction*” (Men, 2014, p. 271). The same study also highlights that frequent communication by leadership is important to employee advocates. The nature of reciprocal exchange is repetitive (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005, as in Natarajan et al., 2016) and these scholars emphasise the need for organisations to continue keeping their promises by rendering positive actions and benefits to employees, in order to ensure favourable reciprocation from them in long run.

2.2 Corporate Branding

A brand is *the representation of an organisation’s promises to its customers* (Natarajan et al., 2016, p 96) in other words, it is about the total experience of a company and how it speaks to and sticks in the minds of people, not only through a company’s products and services, but its physical environment, their staff, and interactions in use of technology. At the turn of the

century, researchers (F. Harris & L. de Chernatony, 2001) argued that Corporate Branding calls for a different management approach; it requires greater emphasis on factors internal to the organisation and greater attention needs to be paid to the role of employees in the brand building process.

The activity branding, according to King et al. (2007, p 360) “*involves the creation of mental structures that help the target audience to organise their knowledge with respect to that particular product / organisation*”. This activity includes both external and internal efforts and it is of importance that the messages are coherent, especially when received by employees because it “*can fortify their understanding of the brand image and helps in advantageous brand delivery*” (Natarajan et al., 2016, p 97). These messages must reflect the organisation’s values, mission, and vision and clearly communicate what is expected from their employees to accomplish a full internalisation process (ibid).

2.3 Internal Branding

The primary aim of internal branding is to provide organisations exclusive competitive advantage through employees, which competitors cannot mimic or copy (Jacobs, 2003 as in Natarajan et al. 2016) In order to fulfil the brand promise and reinforce communication the brand in a clear manner, employees need to be aligned. They must also possess adequate knowledge about the brand and understand their role in delivering the brand promise, in tune with the brand image (Natarajan et al., 2016). Through internalising the brand, employees are better equipped to fulfil the explicit and implicit promises the brand entails (Berry 2000, Miles & Mangold 2004; as in King et al 2007, p 360).

To illustrate the steps of such alignment, King et al. (2007) suggest technical skills are not enough, employees will need training and exposure to customer/market information as well as the general work environment in order to reach the depth of brand knowledge necessary. Natarajan et al. (2016) describes the internalisation process as “*employees receiving messages through various systems and sources inside the organisation*”. And that “*these messages must reflect the organisation’s values, mission, and vision and communicate what is expected from employees to accomplish it*” (ibid). Together with other authors, they suggest that in a service organisation, employees represent the brand, as there is personal contact and interaction with the customers (Ahmed & Rafiq, 2003 as in Natarajan et al. 2016) and that this make internal promotion and living of brand by employees a necessity.

2.4 Employer Branding

The part of internal branding that has to do with turning employees into liking and promoting the brand as an employer is called Employer Branding, although the terms have grown closer and are sometimes used interchangeably. There are other ways in which external and internal/employer branding share features and processes. Similar to how organisations create external value propositions in order to attract customers, they will create an Employee Value Proposition or EVP in order to attract and retain employees (Backhaus & Tikoo et al., 2004, as in Anttila, 2019, p 11). Many researchers have proven the employer brand being a source of competitive advantage (e.g. Love & Singh 2011, Lockwood 2007, and Mosley 2007, as in Polvinen 2017).

In order to work, the Employer Brand needs to reflect what the company is really about. Many times, scholars have stressed the that employees' perceptions of their brand will not only be based on what the corporate brand team tells them, but also on their own internal and external experiences (Harris et al., 2001). In order to succeed in Employer Branding, it is therefore of essence that internal and external efforts in different channels are in sync. Ambler & Barrow (1996) and Uncles & Moroko (2005, as cited in Polvinen 2017, p. 16) support the opinion that *“employer branding can be used to align employee behaviour with the corporate brand promise when interacting with customers”*

2.5 Personal Branding

Just as brands aim to stand out among competition, people will do likewise, especially when competing in the job market. Developing a personal brand is about influencing what others will say about you when you are not being present. In a study about the motivators for non-commercial social media users posting content on Twitter, two main types of utility emerged: intrinsic utility and image-related utility. Lerner and Tirole (2002,2005, as in Toubia & Stephen, 2013) compare intrinsic utility that open-source developers derive from working on “cool” projects and image-related utility with (image-related) desire for peer recognition. The strongest of these two motivators was the image-related utility (Toubia & Stephen, 2013).

In the Master Thesis by H. M.Tuulikki Sonne, (2017, p. 60), an interesting finding is made: New employees (0-5 year) share more industry material on Social Media (i.e. the four largest Social Media platforms, as mentioned earlier), while older employees share more firm generated content, so called FGC. This seem to indicate that being new in an organization, before fully knowing the brand, could affect the way employees communicate the brand.

Older employees are perhaps more loyal or not as interested in portraying themselves as “experts” in the industry. On the other hand, one may also consider how Personal Brands might vary among individuals, irrespective of age. Sadly, though, for many of the active, and sharing employees, the difference between their work- and personal lives is sometimes very small (Weber Shandwick & KRC Research 2014; Kuutsa, 2016, p 46). Separating between Employer Brand and one’s Personal Brand is of importance since too much job involvement and personal connection to work may ultimately affect engagement negatively (Fernandez 2007, 52; Macey & Scheinder 2008, 10; in Kuutsa 2016, 42).

2.6 Branding in Social Media

What role does Social Media play in Employer Branding and Employee Advocacy? A whole lot, as it would seem. Getting hold of information about products and brands is one of the strongest driving forces behind being a member in social networks. In fact, more than 50 % of social media users in Europe follow brands and on average they follow 12,2 brands per person (Smith & Zook 2011, Van Belleghem et al. 2011; in Kuutsa, 2016, p. 27).

Apart from the function of connecting with others, another benefit is its sharing culture, in other words sharing information about phenomena, entertainment, society and events but also firm generated content, FGC. When talking about digital content, it is important to distinguish between user generated content, UGC and firm generated content, FGC (Polvinen, 2017, p 32). And since UGC is created by private individuals, it is close to impossible for firms to control what they publish. Therefore, if companies want to take care of their products, services, and brands, FGC makes communication more streamlined and manageable. This is, however, not always more efficient. According to Cheong & Morrison (2008) consumers trust UGC more than FGC (ibid).

Little research exists upon how frequently Employees use their Social Media accounts to communicate work-related issues, but one small study of 433 employees in different companies (Zoonen, Verhoueven & Vliegenhart, 2016) show that of Twitter content shared, 36,3% was work-related, half of those tweets was sent outside of office hours. Social Media use during office hours have both positive and negative effects. Research has found positive effects on Employee engagement due to increased accessibility, but there are also downsides such as a negative work-life balance (ibid, 2007).

Currently, with increasing development and availability of technology, decreasing the potential for sustained competitive advantage, managers are focusing more on differentiating

brands on the basis of unique emotional characteristics, rather than functional (Harris et al., 2001). Such emotional values of a brand are not just communicated by advertising, but also through employees' interactions with different stakeholders (ibid).

2.7 Employee Engagement or Commitment

Employees' brand commitment is explained as the psychological bond between the employees and the brand and this bond is also regarded as their emotional attachment to the brand (Burmann & Zeplin, 2005, as in Natarajan et al., 2016, p 97). Creating content in networks can be time consuming and true advocacy requires commitment. According to a survey, 67 % of the engaged employees would advocate for their company, compared to a mere 3 % of disengaged employees. Also, 78 % of the engaged employees would recommend their employers' products or services compared to 14 % of the disengaged employees (McLeod & Clarke 2009; Kuutsa, 2016 p 52).

Employee satisfaction does not equal employee engagement (merely being satisfied do not imply commitment) and that is why employee satisfaction should not be the only measure to help retain the best employees. While job satisfaction is more like a positive statement: "*I like my job*", the deeper concept of job involvement, including commitment, is more a cognitive belief state; "*I identify with my job*" (Fernandez 2007, 524; Kuutsa, 2016, p 41).

In her study, Kuutsa (2016) explore the relationship between Employee advocacy and employee engagement, concluding that there is a clear link, which has also been argued in earlier research (Gupta & Sharma 2016; McLeod & Clarke 2009; as in Miles & Mangold 2014). One of the more important findings in the study was that the empirical data also indicated a new element of engagement: value identification (Kuutsa, 2016, p 95). This concerns the level of identification between the Personal Brand and the Employer Brand: the more you identify, the more you engage. This reasoning makes it even more important that companies consider values in their employer brand when recruiting, in order to get a good fit.

Natarajan et al. (2016) also conclude that employee motivation (which in turn is a result of commitment or engagement) is a crucial element contributing to desired brand image delivery.

2.8 Brand Citizenship Behaviour (BCB)

Although organisations rely on their employees to deliver the desired brand image, the choice of behaviour depends on employees (Natarajan et al., 2016, p 98). If employees believe in the

brand one would imagine they will also act in its best interests. In corporate branding literature, there is a link between brand commitment and organisational commitment (Burmamann & Zeplin, 2005, as in Natarajan et al. 2016, p 98.). Accordingly, brand commitment of employees is regarded as an antecedent to the employees' citizenship behaviour towards the brand, brand performance and to the overall strength of the brand (Burmamann et al., 2005, 2008; Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007 as in Natarajan et al., 2016, p 97).

There is a difference between being a Brand Ambassador, a selected and trained employee (i.e. Top Talent, similar to the term Brand Champion as defined by Löhndorf, B. & Diamantopoulos, 2014) and being an Employee Advocate, since this could apply to anyone. King and Grace (2007) define Brand Citizenship Behaviour as "*extracurricular and voluntary employee activities on behalf of the brand/company for example, positive word of mouth*". Piehler et al. (2016) suggest that internal culture affects Brand Citizenship Behaviour, or in other words: the kind of behaviours that are in line with the brand promise and actively works to support the brand. Brand Citizenship Behaviour (BCB) in turn affects Employee Advocacy or Brand Ambassadors (ibid). For example, social activities or mentoring play a significant role in boosting internal culture, but the employees need to *voluntarily* identify themselves with a brand, it cannot be forced (ibid).

2.9 Employee Advocacy

In this section the concept Employee Advocacy will be discussed a little further. It is a concept associated with many favourable outcomes like enhanced employee performance, increasing cost efficiency of recruitments and sharing of knowledge of employment to prospective employees (Natarajan et al. 2016).

Employee Advocacy is a kind of BCB behaviour, closely related to word of mouth, or WOM. *Brand endorsement* is employees' *positive* word of mouth communication about the brand and their ready recommendation of those to others (King, Grace, & Funk, 2012 as in Natarajan et al., 2016). In their study, Natarajan et al. (2016) proved that, having a favourable employee brand (i.e. employer brand as perceived by employees) results in better brand endorsement (i.e. positive employee advocacy). The causes of WOM communication can be either intrinsic or extrinsic (Shinnar, Young & Meana, 2004). Employee referrals are made by individuals with positive attitudes who will engage in WOM due to intrinsic motivation (ibid).

Master student Ville Polvinen (2017, p 71) argues that in an employer branding context, employee advocacy becomes and/or creates WOM as employees discuss their organization as

a place of work. His case study about Employee Advocacy and Social Media, led to three main findings: Firstly, employees are more inclined to advocate for certain aspects of employer brands. Secondly, choice of Social Media channel is the main factor limiting advocacy, with Twitter and LinkedIn identified as more suitable channels for employer brand advocacy content than Facebook, which he deemed “*unsuitable for the purpose*” (ibid), and thirdly, he found that Employee Advocacy is mainly driven by two factors: altruism and ability to show expertise. “*Altruistic advocacy*” refers to employees that are less active on social media who will only give occasional support (ibid). The other motivating factor, “*showing expertise*” was based on similar analyses made by earlier studies related to employees wanting to strengthen their own brand as experts in the field (ibid).

2.10 Creating a model/proposition

In an effort to sum up the theoretical background, this section seeks to organize concepts or factors that seem to be shapers, that is: factors or circumstances that according to theory will affect Employee Advocacy. This will mean some repetition from previous theory chapters.

In order to fulfil the purpose and answer the research question, this study will seek to explore which the motivators and obstacles for Employee Advocacy for employees in companies with strong, or favourable, Employer Brands. Also: how does Employee Advocacy behaviour manifest itself in a Social Media context?

According to the Natarajan et al. (2016) study, having a favourable employer brand as perceived by employees results in positive employee advocacy. Since the study is also made on employees of strong/favourable employer brands, it will be interesting if this link can be found and, if not, try to explain why. In order to understand the individual employees view about the brand, questions about parts of the brand, the EVP, satisfaction and company reputation were asked and included in the preliminary research model.

Regarding the link between employee engagement and Employee Advocacy, which has been argued in earlier research (Gupta & Sharma 2016; McLeod & Clarke 2009; as in Miles & Mangold 2014), it would be interesting to verify how engagement or commitment plays a role. Therefore, commitment was included as a part of the preliminary research model.

“If a commitment to the brand can be established, is likely that this will also spur positive action, since there is a link between brand commitment and organisational commitment” (Burmamann & Zeplin, 2005, as in Natarajan et al. 2016, p 98.)

Since there will be no Employee Advocacy without the combination of satisfaction, commitment and some external audience, questions about these three areas will be posed to further establish understanding of triggers to Employee Advocacy behaviour.

Based on this rather broad, yet interlinked theoretical framework, three groups of shapers for Employee Advocacy emerged: Individual factors, company factors and external factors. For pedagogic reasons, the sub-themes of these groups will follow in the same order as previously presented, with a few exceptions. The following will also work as a sort of “checklist” when making the interview guide and as a ground for data analysis of the interviews.

Individual factors (related to the person)

- Background factors: age, work experience, customer contact, Social Media use
- Corporate Brand knowledge: about competitive advantages in relation to competitors
- Employer Brand awareness: internal/external brand congruence

Company factors (related to the company)

- Engagement/Commitment, meaningful tasks, support from leaders, internal network
- Brand Citizenship Behaviour: Support from colleagues, different hurdles/incentives
- Employee Advocacy programs (if applicable) and/or managerial support/surveillance
- Internal Events/recruiting/downsizing etc.

External factors

- External networks: strengthening/weakening Corporate and/or Personal Brand
- External laws, rules, regulations
- External Events/awards/crises etc.

Based on the research purpose and these shapers, I am building my own conceptual model of factors considered to affect Employee Advocacy, leading to a proposition concerning different “ideal” states of the phenomenon, depending on Employee or Employer perspective

Based on the mentioned factors above, the interview guide is formed in the next section.

Because of the abductive methodology used, research model and propositions may be adjusted or altered after proceeding with empirical research. Therefore, the following model is regarded as Preliminary Research model.

Figure 1, Preliminary Conceptual Model

This preliminary model includes the main concepts and their relations, according to my pre-understanding, based on the mentioned theory in form of scientific articles and other sources, i.e. Internet sources and student theses on Employee Advocacy. It depicts the reciprocal relationship between the Employer Brand, Employee Commitment and Employee Advocacy.

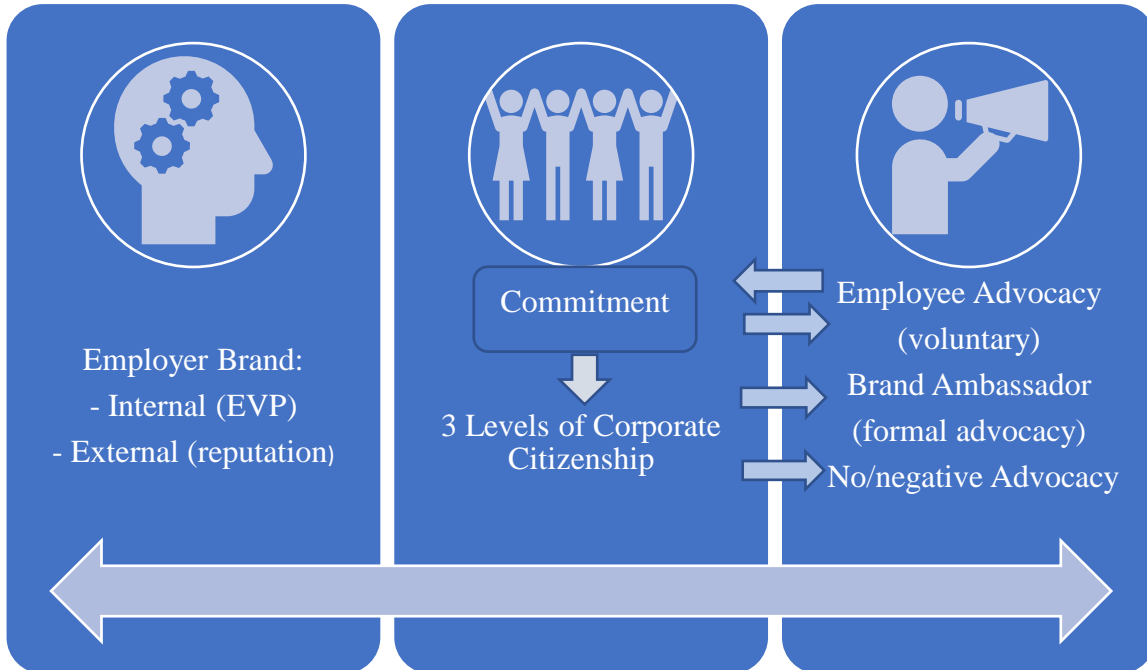


Figure 1, Preliminary Conceptual model

An “ideal state” from a company perspective seem to be the upper right corner of the model, where highly committed employees become voluntary co-creators of Employer Branding, a seemingly perpetuating state, provided that the employees do not deviate from brand values.

Proposition: Considering the fast changing job market, the “ideal state” from the employee perspective will likely differ from that of the employer, at least in the long term. Therefore, I argue, employees mostly commit in the short term, which will affect their level of Brand Citizenship, and thus Employee Advocacy, in a Social Media context.

3. Method

The following chapter will describe the ways in which this research will be conducted. In the first part of this section, theoretical method will be described, starting with general research philosophy, research approach, an account for the choice of qualitative method and relevant theory, sources critique and limitations of study. Then, sections describing empirical method will explain how data selection was made, how case studies are appropriate for this study,

how theory was selected, the operationalisation of concepts into different themes and questions in the interview guide and finally, some measures through which quality is ensured.

3.1 Research philosophy

There are two major facets when it comes to research philosophy, ontology and epistemology and they are about how the researcher perceives the world. Ontology is about different assumptions about the nature of reality (Bell, Bryman & Harley 2019). Within ontology there are two aspects, objectivism and subjectivism. Objectivism refers to how the world and social units exist independently from social actors (Bell et al., 2019). On the other hand, subjectivism entails that social actors' perceptions and actions create social phenomena. This research is in line with the latter philosophy, perceiving the world from a subjectivist view. The research question/model indicates that employees are social actors and their perceptions and choices create social phenomena that in turn have consequences for the social units that they are in.

Epistemology is the theory of knowledge and about how research should be conducted (Bell et al 2019). Depending on the field of study and the knowledge developed in the field, two main philosophical positions exist: positivism or interpretivism (Bell et al, 2019). Positivism is connected to the notion of an objective reality and is closely related to the natural sciences. Bell et al (2019, p. 30) describe positivism as “the role of research is to test theories and to provide material for the development of laws, collecting and analysing data in a way which enables generalizable propositions, in the form of hypotheses to be tested”. In comparison, interpretivism is almost the opposite of positivism, claiming that reality is constituted by human action and meaning making (Bell et al, 2019). Instead of explaining human behaviour, interpretivism is primarily about understanding viewpoints from different humans. (Bell et al., 2019). From an epistemological point of view, this research follows interpretivism in the sense that it tries to understand differences in humans as social actors. Interpretivism seems an appropriate research philosophy for this research because it focuses on actors, in this case employees, and their viewpoints about a phenomenon, Employee Advocacy.

3.2 Research Approach

In general, there are three main approaches that can be used: deductive, inductive and abductive. The former two are about either confirming old theory or making new theory. The third approach, abduction is in effect a combination of the inductive and deductive approach. Since older theory almost always exists, few scholars use a purely inductive approach,

according to Alvesson & Kärreman (2007), as quoted in Gioia Corley & Hamilton, (2012, p. 21): *“Upon consulting the literature, the research process might be viewed as transitioning from ‘inductive’ to a form of ‘abductive’ research, in that data and existing theory are now considered in tandem”*. This approach works best in qualitative studies with little or less developed theory, in which the researcher also may add their own models or develop concepts (Alvesson, M. & Sköldbberg, K. 2008, Flick, U. (ed) (2018), Bell et al., 2019, p. 24).

According to the reasoning above, this research will use abduction. The topic Employee Advocacy is a rather new concept, much literature is in the Human Resource Management sphere, either single case studies about firms adopting employee advocacy programs or quantitative by nature. There is existing literature so an entirely inductive approach is not relevant, neither does this thesis follow a deductive approach since the aim is not to test a particular theoretical model, rather to see if previous literature used together with new empirical data is able to increase understanding and further develop the concept.

3.3 Qualitative Method

Qualitative research, according to Bell, Bryman & Harley (2019) has more to do with words than with numbers. Through analysing and giving account for thick descriptions of events or phenomena, a qualitative researcher is trying to see the world through the eyes of those being studied and the goal is to understand or *“Verstehen”* (Bell et. al, 2019, p. 366). For this particular study, a qualitative method will be used to increase understanding of how employees acting as informal brand advocates (Employee Advocates) perceive their roles, how they act and what encourages or discourages their behaviour. In finding suitable employees to provide empirical data in form of qualitative interviews, I chose to look at four different rankings for 2019: Universum (students), Universum SBA (Sveriges Bästa Arbetsgivare), Great Place to Work and the Ranstad (Kantar Sifo) survey released 10 April 2019. Interviews were performed with employees of different companies with ranking 1-20, based on first and second professional contacts, representing different industries. Because of the small and not randomly collected sample, I will not make attempts to generalize any conclusions about individual companies, it is the employees that constitute the cases.

3.4 Choice of Theory

Not many relevant peer reviewed research articles about Employee Advocacy are available, so finding sources included some hoovering. By using keywords of related concepts "employer branding" and "social media" and "employee engagement" and "personal brand" in

Google Scholar, the search resulted in 29 hits. By adding “employee advocacy” the search resulted in 52 hits. Adding “personal brand” only gave 5 results although all of these were other Master and Bachelor Theses on the subject. I then expanded the search using HKR Library, Google Scholar, Web of Science and Research Gate using other combination of key words, e.g.: “employee recommenders”, “online employee endorsement”, “brand citizenship behaviour” and by also going through suggestions for related articles, I found some more, some of which constitutes a base for the literature review, plus non-academic sources to support the Introduction/Problematization.

3.5 Limitations

Since this study is focusing on employee behaviour in a Social Media context, a limitation for this context is also called for. There are different Social Media channels, but to limit this study the discussion will mainly focus on the four biggest ones, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram. The main reasons for this is based a global employee survey from 2016, claiming Facebook is the most popular channel (86%) to share the employer’s content (FGC) with, the next most popular sites are Twitter (52 %), LinkedIn (43 %) and Instagram (34 %) (Terpening et al. 2016, p. 17; Kuutsa, 2016, p. 98). Rédey and Klaudia Karwowski (2013) mentions that different social media platforms enable different functionalities and have a different kind of impact on engagement. Weidner et al. (2016) claim that motivations for use vary between sites. When people are using Facebook and Twitter they are motivated by different things than when they use sites like LinkedIn, that focuses on professional networking and career-related topics. On this site, users are looking to develop their career and their motivations will likely be about career advancement (Polvinen p 2017, p. 36).

The time horizon of this study is cross sectional, since interviews about attitudes and behaviour focuses on the present, because it would be harder to remember motives, thoughts and actions in retrospect and other factors might be involved. An Employer Brand is also a concept that may change rapidly, due to internal or external events, and not easily measured.

3.6 Case studies

There are different ways of performing case studies, see Yin, R.K., (2018). A case can be a single organisation, a single location, a single event or even a single person (Bell et al, 2019, p. 33). The research strategy of this study was to make a comparative case study of a sample of employees displaying Employee Advocacy characteristics or behaviour. They are all currently active on social media, they sometimes share and comment upon company/brand

related matters and they are working in a company regarded as being successful in their Employer Branding efforts. I regard these individuals as the cases and have collected empirics mostly in form of interviews with them. The aim is then to analyse the recorded interviews, mainly to explore the Employee Advocacy phenomenon from the employee perspective. Should an interviewee give answers that stand out or indicate gaps from earlier theory, this could either call for further questions to clarify standpoints or possibly indicate room for further study. If sufficient material was not able to be attained, the respondents were encouraged to suggest a colleague to respond, according to the snowball-sampling method.

3.7 Data collection and sample selection

Only primary data, not to be confused with first and second sources, in the form of interviews, scientific articles, books and few, but relevant Internet sources will be used in this study.

The explorative nature of this research demanded a phenomenological approach to data gathering. The sample selection of people to interview, apart from already mentioned company criteria, was made through using an initial convenience sample of my own personal professional contacts and either perform interviews with them and/or let them refer me to relevant targets through so-called snowball sampling (Bell et al. 2019, p. 395). Snowball sampling is a form of purposive sampling, a non-probability form of sampling where respondents are selected because of their relevance to the research question (Bell et al., 2019 p. 389). Many other studies (mostly about implementing formal Employee Advocacy programs) have interviewed managers to ensure a broader access, something I chose to avoid in order to collect the “essence” of Employee Advocacy from the employee perspective and not the views of managers or formally appointed ambassadors.

Getting access to respondents without managerial support has proven more difficult than could be foreseen, possibly because of the chosen topic. Those who declined interviews claimed they were too busy, too new in the organization, not very active in Social Media or were just not the right person to ask. Quite a few emails were left unanswered. Very few, but indeed some contacts, made efforts to suggest a colleague. Initial reflections on this difficulty in getting access are that either Employee Advocacy is a rare phenomenon that appear under certain circumstances, alternatively that many employees see Social Media activity as voluntary, something belonging to the private sphere that need not be questioned.

3.8 Operationalisation/Interview Guide

When formulating the interview guide, thematic questions were grouped according to theory into open questions around the phenomenon Employee Advocacy in order to get a richer material from which to create and understanding.

<i>Thematic questions (in italics):</i>	Follow-up questions:
<i>Describe your experience and current role.</i> Any managerial/HR experience? (Individual level)	How long have you been at the company? Do you work with clients B2B, B2C? Do you use social media part of your job?
<i>What makes your company different from others in the industry?</i> (Corporate level, Brand knowledge)	Local/National/International brand? cost/quality advantages, innovation/tech? employees, culture, vision/mission?
<i>What does attractive/strong Employer Brand mean to you?</i> (Internal/external brand)	Main reasons for joining the company? Main reason for staying in current job? Did you give/get any recommendations?
<i>Tell me about your company Brand Values.</i>	Do you agree with these values? Explain, in what ways do they manifest themselves?
<i>In what ways can employees support the brand?</i> <i>How support the Employer Brand?</i> (Brand Citizenship Behaviour)	Should they always? Why/why not? Is this being encouraged where you work? Are the incentives? Are they effective?
<i>What makes you feel engaged at work?</i> (Employee engagement, commitment) Connect to manager/colleagues in social networks?	Leaders? Meaningful tasks? Challenges? Benefits? Career plan? Tools and training? Praise from colleagues or customers?
<i>Do you have many activities outside of work?</i> (Corporate Brand vs Personal Brand)	Are external networks/events encouraged? Do you identify with your job?
<i>Employees acting as “influencers”- What are your thoughts? Age matters?</i>	Because of formal position/persons traits? Could there be other reasons? Drawbacks?
<i>Are there programs in place to promote and follow-up advocacy? (through Brand Ambassadors). Firm Generated Content?</i>	How are they perceived? If no, would they work? Is the employer keeping track of posts?
<i>Are there obstacles when publicly promoting or defending an Employer Brand? (In a crisis?)</i>	Why do many people refrain? (Personal brand, internal policies)
<i>Further questions?</i>	Something missing in previous answers?

3.9 The Base for making Analysis

It is important to remember that in qualitative research, the context matter and no interview stands alone, but has meaning depending on its relation to other interviews and observations, according to Whyte (1953, p 22, as quoted in Bell et al 2019, p 434).

For the purpose of this qualitative thesis, semi-structured interviews appeared to be an appropriate method, because they allow asking open-ended questions to a small sample and examine opinions or experiences of individuals concerning the phenomenon. Interviews are a flexible way of get a fuller picture of a complex phenomenon, i.e. Employee Advocacy, and also fits in qualitative research, when exploring a theme in depth (Bell et al. 2019, p 463).

Before making the interview guide, several academic articles and theses were studied. The concepts and their relations rendered open questions in order to comprehend different shapers and contexts affecting the concept of Employee Advocacy. With the main purpose of study as a starting point, related theories or relevant themes were collected and to each of them, various thematic questions and sub questions were formed, making up the interview guide.

Before performing any interviews, the questions were tested on fellow student peers, in order to get feedback on formulation of questions. A couple of respondents also expressed to have a look at the thematic questions before the interviews were to take place, in person or over the phone. Since the interviews were made in Swedish, a way of ensuring that I get nuances in language that might otherwise be lost, the interview guide was provided in Swedish as well.

In order to structure interviews in order to make them flow and to make later comparison easier, the questions are divided into different categories. Throughout the interviews, though, the order of questions was not always strictly followed. Due to the open character of the study, it makes more sense to allow the interviewees answer the questions in a less orderly manner, in order to make room for associations, thoughts and views related to the topic.

In Table 1 on the next page, basic characteristics of the interviewees are briefly illustrated, carefully not to expose individuals that want to remain anonymous, but enough in order for the reader to understand their backgrounds. Most of this information has been collected in the beginning of the interviews in order to make the respondents feel comfortable.

Table 1. Interviewee Characteristics

	Gender	Age	Position	Industry/Department	Interview method	Interview date & length
Participant A	Male	28	HR recruiter, 3 years	Home Furnishing	Phone call	08/05/2019 45 Mins
Participant B	Female	51	Corporate advisor, 1 year	Retail Banking	Face-to-face	09/05/2019 45 Mins
Participant C	Male	30	Pastry chef, 8 years	Food industry	Face-to-face	13/05/2019 35 Mins
Participant D	Male	41	Private advisor, 8 years	Retail Banking	Phone call	13/05/2019 45 Mins
Participant E	Male	46	Corporate advisor, 1 year	Retail Banking	Phone call	15/05/2019 45 Mins
Participant F	Female	40	Corporate advisor, 10 years	Corporate Banking	Phone call	16/05/2019 35 Mins

3.10 Evaluating Qualitative Research: Trustworthiness and Authenticity

The question about whether to use validity and reliability in qualitative research or not divide scholars. Validity refers to “whether you are observing, identifying, or ‘measuring’ what you say you are” (Bell et al., 2019; p 362) and reliability is about overall consistency in a measure. Since measuring is not of interest in a qualitative study, some researchers, e.g. Lincoln and Guba (1985, as cited in Bell et al., 2019) have therefore suggested that two other criteria: trustworthiness and authenticity should be used instead. Trustworthiness, in turn, is made up of four components: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. By giving a detailed account of all parts of the research process, including providing sources references, the aim is to fulfil these criteria as much as possible.

Two ways of ensuring trustworthiness and authenticity in qualitative research, mentioned by Bell et al. (2019, pp. 363-364) are Respondent validation (letting respondents take part of and confirm findings) and Triangulation (using more than one method or source of data). By letting respondents confirming findings after interviews validation is ensured. Due to the small number of interview respondents, of which at least two expressed requests to remain anonymous, the decision was made to make all respondent anonymous. The original idea of

complementing the empirical material with screenshots of Social Media activity was therefore abandoned, diminishing the possibility of triangulation in empirics.

In making the selection of respondents, individuals of my own 1st or 2nd degree professional network, working in a company ranked 1-20 in one of the mentioned Employer Branding lists that are non-managerial but visibly active in one or more of the four mentioned large social media channels were being asked to participate. In this manner, selection was made upon my own observations and a so-called convenience sample was drawn, because of practical reasons. After performing the interviews, I provided participants with written transcripts, to validate if I have understood the answers correctly and if they had anything additional to add.

In order to reach credibility for this study, I have been clear upon being a former employee of one of the companies represented and I have refrained from asking or using immediate former colleagues still working for the same common former employer, since this could possibly affect my own bias or the given answers in either one or the other direction and thus affect the credibility. Using personal contacts in order to gain access may in itself create ethical dilemma treated by Battacharya (2007) and Brewis (2014) (see Bell et al., 2019 p 127) and is no guarantee for achieving trustworthiness, although without mutual trust between author and respondents in the research process, not much relevant information would be extracted.

The amount and quality of literature sources will most certainly be questioned. However, the main arguments for including other students work as sources is also, in fact, an effort to gain methodological credibility in a young research field.

3.11 Ethical considerations

Bell et al. (2019, p.115) mentions the MRS Code of Conduct, which state that “*researchers should be particularly careful if sample sizes are very small (such as in business and employee research) that they do not inadvertently identify organisations or departments and therefore individuals*”. By choosing to study employees in large organisations, in which there are already several old professional contacts, the risk for exposure is minimized.

All interviewees have been given the option to remain anonymous, because some questions about how they perceive their employer or what they have chosen to share or not to share in Social Media could be regarded as sensitive when sharing negative experiences or discuss behaviours that might not be representative of the corporate brand or internal policies. During the interviews with the employees, some additional requests were made regarding secrecy

since a couple of the interviewees were not sure about company policies and has asked for their organization not to be mentioned by name. Therefore, the choice was made to omit company names and/or cities in where these employees work to avoid any possible damage. The reader might still be able to draw conclusions about the topic, the main purpose is to explore behaviours, not companies or individuals.

Before making interviews, the participants were also asked for their consent about the recording of interviews. Everyone was also offered the choice to make the interview on *or* outside of office hours, on or off company premises, since the questions in these interviews concern them more as individuals rather than corporate representatives.

4. Empirical material

The following chapters will give an account of the interviews, not in strict chronological order, since the aim was rather to present the content in a way that will make the structure of analysis easier. Each employee and employer will be introduced briefly. The rest of the content will be divided between the headlines Employee Advocacy and Social Media.

4.1 Employee A - Recruiting at home and living the brand

Mr A (28) is a man who has worked for six years in the same company in the home furnishing industry. He started working at the department store and then with mobility issues, i.e. helping employees moving from other parts of the world starting to work at Company A in Sweden. For the past three years he has worked as a recruiter in the HR department, where he has also been producing various recruitment advertisements and videos.

Currently, he is just about to enter a similar position, but abroad this time. Earlier experiences have been part time employment in a bank during his time as a student and, so far, he has no managerial experience. He openly expresses his job satisfaction, both in person and in Social Media and when asked if that is not just a part of his job, he replies:

“Firstly, I am pretty bad at lying, so if I were to end up with an employer where I did not feel that the values matched my own, I would probably have had quite a hard time to promote the employer. But I think it's something pretty special about Company A and I'm happy about that. Because it's something I can stand for. I believe in both vision, that is why we do things, but also values, that is, in the way we do it. And for me, I'm happy to talk a lot about the employer. And

there is no coercion in any way, but if I had felt differently, I would probably have acted differently too”.

4.1.1 Employer A

The company itself is a large furniture conglomerate, a well-known international brand with Swedish origin. Convenience and accessibility are important, as well as being humble and promoting diversity. The company values are incorporated in recruitment advertisements in order to attract the right people. The founder was also a well-known entrepreneur and his legacy still lives on. Employee A describes the founder as being a “*forerunner*”, making a business “*built to last*” and being “*socially responsible*”. Social responsibility and “*being part of something bigger*” is repeatedly mentioned.

There is a strong company culture and Mr A thinks that a good company brand is “*felt with the heart*” and also stresses that a corporate culture is something that should be “*in the walls*” and not be “*written on the walls*”. To fit into the company culture one needs to be “*open and [...] interested in other people's interests and needs and respects the ideas of others*”, while at the same time being “*curious and having some type of entrepreneurial spirit within*”. The employer is described as a company which in some way wants to represent the many people, which makes guidelines about looking or be or behaving in a certain manner unnecessary. The role of the recruiter is highly regarded inside the company, Mr A explains further:

“If you think about the recruitment profession [...], we probably have a rather large role in the selection compared to many other recruitment services. It sounds weird, because it sounds natural, but since we participate in all recruitment meetings from the start, we never lose track of the recruiting manager or the candidates but we are, literally all the time, checking... or checking... because it is also interesting as to how you can actually see a person's values, that is another matter. But somewhere, we are involved in securing it. We also train our managers in thinking based on our values”.

4.1.2 Employee Advocacy – A

Promoting the brand outside of work is not formally encouraged by the employer, in which case Mr A repeatedly insists he is unaware of any such guidelines. Yet, representing the brand outside of office hours still happens, he admits:

“not least now in this later role also as a recruiter, I meet people from everywhere all the time”.

When asking if he, in some way, display where he works outside of his office, Mr A explains:

“I try to dress myself in a personal way, but since I also associate myself with the company's brand [...], I am a recruiter in regular private contexts as well. But I can say I have no special clothes. I don't display, either, so to speak, the brand or the logo”.

How you should represent the brand *“depends on who you ask”* and being part of certain activities during leisure time are not actively encouraged, at least not formally. The voluntary nature of supporting the values is repeatedly being stressed. The only restriction mentioned is not to wear clothes with the logo while going out for drinks or *“revelling”*. Personally, Mr A likes to keep things under control.

“It's all from what types of profile pictures I represent in different media, do I express myself politically, do I express myself by talking about my employer or other employers, yes ... and, as mentioned, I would mostly say it's a private choice, rather than anything else”.

4.1.3 Social Media – A

Among recruiters at Company A, LinkedIn is seen as the primary a tool for communicating. When it comes to private sharing in Social Media among employees. There are no guidelines about Social Media use and the employer will not encourage staff to be or to appear in any particular forum, according to Mr A. When asking if certain individuals being more prone to be in the public eye than others, he says:

“We try to put out as much as possible, really with different types of [faces]. Now, diversity can be represented in very many different ways, but when it comes to pictures, absolutely, then it is people from different parts of the world that one wants to highlight”.

In official company communication, regarding displaying different employees, Mr A thinks that it is probably not about that the people want to be seen for their own sake but often linked to the fact that they have a certain role or that they have participated in some project. And, he continues:

“I personally feel somewhere that I represent my brand also on other social media. So that I feel well that I try to keep a moderately controlled private, what do you say "privacy" in what I communicate otherwise as well. Because it is quite easy to search my LinkedIn profile and at the same time see my name in some other context and then you have to think [...] and this is not a restriction from my employer but it is more that I see a self-worth, maybe, in keeping it as controlled as possible”.

About standing up for the employer in both good and bad times, Mr A concludes:

“I can probably defend the employer, as long as I feel like it, even on social media. But it would again be up to me, and if there was any serious problem then I would probably be restrictive about what to write, if writing anything at all. If I go to a party and someone asks where I work and I can boast about which positive aspects there are at Company A. And if I also make this person interested enough to apply for a job at Company A, even if they did not know so much about the background before or which opportunities that existed. Well, then I make my job easier. Because my job is to fill positions with good people”.

4.2 Employee B - When open communication and physical presence is of essence

Mrs B (51) is a woman who has worked in banking for 10 years in total, and for the past year as an advisor for business clients, dividing her time in between two branch offices, twenty minutes apart. She has had other employers, managerial experience and has also had her own business. She expresses her job satisfaction through being happy, humble and trying to encourage her co-workers. When asked how employees best can support their brand, she says:

“It is in the day-to-day events, that is, how we are towards each other internally. That we are present, that we help each other that we are involved in what is happening and make sure to be positive, I think it increases commitment, the more people who are working like that. I think I can see a great commitment in this bank and a positive involvement in many areas, even in social media [laughter].”

4.2.1 Employer B

This is a medium-sized Scanian bank “*from the soil*” which is owned by a foundation, meaning the bank is not on the public stock market. Hence, they have no shareholders that

expect profits. Instead, the bank is more focused on building long term relationships and giving back to the local area. Caring for the local area and businesses is an important part of their brand. The role as a business advisor means working both proactively with a client base and responding to clients seeking advice. Being a part-time-marketer is not formally specified or rewarded, yet staff are engaged in various local external activities and “*participation*” is one of their explicit values. Another company value is “*openness*” referring to open communication and honesty. When working outside of the office, representing the bank in one way or another, employees are encouraged to wear jackets with the company logo. The formal representatives of the company, appearing in different media are chosen depending on their special knowledge or message content. There are company guidelines and instructions for what is appropriate communication, also regarding Social Media, for safety reasons.

4.2.2 Employee Advocacy – B

In order to live the brand, internally or externally, Mrs B believes that communication is key. Being a front-line employee means representing the brand in the eyes of the customer, standing up for the “*good or bad*” decisions made by her and/or colleagues. On the other hand, she does not try to answer all questions from customers herself, depending on the nature of the question she will sometimes refer to colleagues. When making and/or communicating business decisions, both formal and informal factors are at play. To follow the rules, using correct figures and documents as a basis for decisions is necessary, but also to communicate in a personal, not too “*square*” manner, in order to build understanding and trust. Depending on the customers’ preferences, Mrs B will adjust her communication frequency and channel.

“I try to see how the customer wants to communicate. It is just like this, some think that one calls too rarely, some think that one calls too often, [laughter] so it is a bit of finding a balance there after all. So, I communicate on the phone, I can write a message, I can send an e-mail about what's going on, like that.”

Certain individuals working in the service sector are more public than others, for example experts that are invited to give their opinions in media. Mrs B thinks one reason for this is “*brand placement*”. However, being public is also important, for example in her own role, being a new employee, especially since she does not live in the area. In her leisure time, she does not actively promote her employer, and as the main reason for this, she states:

“When you are private you are private.” and *“It may well be that you have a bag or an umbrella or something like that, but I do not accentuate my employer*

in the private. Neither do I feel that: now I will run out on the town on behalf of [the bank]”.

4.2.3 Social Media – B

Official company communication through Internet and Social Media could potentially affect both the company and employee communication, according to Mrs B.

“I think it is important to think about having a good communication in social media. Because it also affects me as an employee, because if someone [from the bank] writes something very strange that does not match our values, not that it has happened, but if it would ...”

Therefore, Mrs B believes it is important that companies have skilled professional communicators, especially on Social Media in troubled times to provide “OK” answers for customers, without breaking any secrecy laws. When talking about Social Media and how it creates more transparent communication, where employees are able to look at, not only their own employer, but also how other actors, competitors, their customers and the general public interact, Mrs B admits that she also uses Social Media as a way of observing customers.

When comparing the different Social Media platforms, Mrs B is more active on Facebook than LinkedIn, mostly because she is not currently looking for new employment. She rarely gets work-related questions on Facebook and does not discuss bank related issues openly there, mainly because of bank secrecy and her own integrity. When it comes to LinkedIn, she does not create her own content, but might share articles or like posts.

“I’m not really active there. I have a decent network, but it is more like someone might want a reference or that I want to warn someone that I might be looking for a job or that I am interested in something.”

She does not send friend requests to or actively adds customers on Social Media, only sometimes upon their request and it would be because they are already old friends. She prefers one-to-one communication. As a result of rarely engaging in discussions online, she does not experience the company social media guidelines as an obstacle. Although being reluctant in this context, Mrs B is not unwilling to take on discussions about banking in general, even in her free time, sometimes:

“I can probably go in and defend or explain, at the same time it can sometimes be that you choose not to say so much. It depends on what mood I am in and on

what level the discussion is being conducted. Because sometimes it is just like no point and some people do not want to understand, then you can let it be. And sometimes it is positive discussions and then it is more fun. But otherwise I have to say that in Social Media, I choose not to go into discussions or defence, whether it is about banking or my employer or something like that, because I feel that it adds nothing, neither for myself nor anyone else. Someone else can do that instead.”

4.3 Employee C - At the end of the road, it is all about the dough

Being a skilled baker and pastry chef like Mr C (30) is a creative and competitive business. To avoid the regular night shifts, he decided to join Company C about eight years ago after having worked abroad for a year, and also as a baker/pastry chef elsewhere. Although fellow bakers and friends thought he played it too safe and “sold out”, he saw it as an opportunity to have a steady income as well as an opportunity to develop other staff. He believes that the main reason for Company C’s reputation of being a popular employer, taking care of their staff, has to do with that there is always an opportunity to take on extra responsibility. He has previously had a leadership role for six years and has also been part of building up a separate bakery & deli brand, in store. The reasons, up until recently, for staying with the same employer is the fact that they have developed him, not so much as a pastry chef, but when it comes to internal and external leadership training, economy, shop management, conversation techniques and coaching. When it comes to individual versus company values, it is unclear if they are in sync, since Mr C does not seem sure about what the company itself stand for.

“Yes, it may be that in the pile of all these educations it says what the values are. I know it is something we are talking about very much about during the education, but there is nothing written in any routines, it might be in the employment book one ought to read”

4.3.1 Employer C

The company belong to a chain of department stores for groceries and the brand is Swedish, but the owners also own other stores in and outside of Sweden. The local dealer usually owns most (90%) of the warehouse, therefore situations in different stores may vary a great deal. There is a high employee turn-over and the main reason for this, according to Mr C, is that many employees only get part time employment and will leave if they can find something else, full-time. Also, because the nature of the work in-store is highly routinized, mostly

unskilled and much of the staff are working to pay their way as students or to make ends meet. In order to earn a full-time position, you will both need to excel on your goals and also remain in the company for a number of years. Mr C thinks that because there are number of formal quality certifications, food & hygiene regulations as well as functioning management, the company have good routines and the rules are clear, most things run smoothly.

The company is popular in Employer Branding rankings and the chain itself is associated with values such as quality, diversity and sustainability. During the interview “*responsibility*” is often mentioned. According to Mr C there is a culture of making constant improvements and employees are expected to do more than what is in their written job descriptions.

“If you [only] do your job, you let [people] down. And when we talk about doing your job then it's really just doing your job”.

Mr C seem to take great pride in his job and explains the difference in between different vocational roles:

“Because I don't think there is anyone standing in a store and unpacking boxes that feel some pride in it. It's a little different when I stand in a bakery and actually produce what we sell, then it's a pride in it. If anyone comes and complains about it, then I will not take it lightly, since it is a piece of myself.”

In recent years, there has been an increased focus on environmental issues and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), but in the local warehouse, Mr C thinks these efforts are mostly about making more profits and claims that:

“one has added more, with environmental thinking. But much of the environment and CSR, what is it called... social...?[...] outwardly, you do not justify it in the same way as inward, the higher you get, the more you find out and see through it”.

He also thinks the company ought to focus more on personnel issues.

“I understand that such a large company is looking at results. I am absolutely convinced that if you only look at motivation and take care of [...] staff, the numbers will ultimately come. It will be much better in the long run.”

4.3.2 Employee Advocacy - C

Currently, Mr C is working part time, two weekends per month, because he is also a full-time student. In his opinion, the employer has not been fully supportive of him in taking the time off for personal development, they even removed responsibility areas, which in effect decreased his pay as soon as he announced he wanted to take a leave of absence because of studies. Currently the employee/employer relationship rather seem to be one of a more formal nature. The main reason Mr C gives for staying with his employer right now is money and security, because he is able to return to a full-time employment after his studies.

About defending the employer in front of unhappy or critical customers, he thinks that:

“whether they have an experience of something in store, against managers or against any other employee, I have not been in the situation and cannot speak on behalf of the company. I can only talk about what I myself have experienced. And I think most had not even gone into the conversation about their workplace and many of those who work at a Company C store knows no loyalty. A job is a job, because you work to get money”.

4.3.3 Social Media – C

Mr C is not especially active on Social Media, either privately or professionally so the discussion concerned mainly communication in between colleagues and the official company channels. He believes there is a line between managers and employees, but he thinks that, on each side, “they” are probably communicating with each other. When talking about social media guidelines and a potential event of an employee writing something unfavourable in Social Media, Mr C explains:

“Then you are immediately called to a manager. Where it is made very clear that it is not accepted. Then it depends on how dangerous it is if you get fired or not. So, because we are not allowed to talk about anything about the company. We have written a contract. But this applies primarily to the numbers. But should something come up on Social Media that is "bad" then the company, outwardly, will act in a friendly manner. They cannot act in any other way. Each store has its own Facebook page and its own website, it is very open and very exposed so you only have to act positively all the time and try to compensate, but I have not been involved in that there has been something on Social Media that has been bad from an employee, I do not think anyone is dares. [...] I don't think anyone would see the benefit of it either.”

In case the company itself make mistake or there is some form of scandal or there is a crisis, Mr C do not think that his colleagues would care to defend the brand.

“How do you act as an employee? I believe the loyalty extends as far as the nose. The employees will roll over and refer to the nearest manager. Such is the case with hierarchies, if you have no responsibility then you will take no responsibility”.

Working according to instructions seems to be the norm, so asking for favours outside of work hours seem to be out of the question.

“No, it is doubtful that they would even entertain that thought, because they cannot demand anything outside the job”. [However,] “they try to brand the shop with photos of staff, but there is never anything picked from your spare time. What you do at work, you will be photographed on the tasks you do at work to get a personal touch to the store”.

When asking if it is not encouraged to spread messages to friends and acquaintances, Mr C answers:

“No. To managers maybe. To regular staff, no. Then they had asked for responsibility; money”.

Since employees are not allowed to use their private mobile phones at work there is less probability that they would post work-related matters. On the other hand, there is no way of tracking or telling how they communicate in their spare time.

“Nothing they try to connect what the staff do in their spare time, no. Because you are two different people, you are a worker and a person outside the job.

You have to keep it apart. It also very rarely happens that they will call you in when you have a day off”.

4.4 Employee D – All about choosing the right club to reach the green

For the past eleven years, this 41-year-old man has worked in a bank in the medium-sized city of X-stad. He has long prior work life experience, both from in-store sales of golf equipment

“There we worked a lot with, really the same as I do today, needs-adapted sales. The right clubs for the right player.”

and from the national hockey league, where he has worked for, in total, fourteen years as an ice hockey referee, both in Sweden and abroad. In Bank D, he started out in 2008 in customer service, but he has mostly worked as an advisor for private clients, except from a 1,5-year period working as a manager in the same segment.

Mr D describes himself as a person that “*tend to question things quite a lot, which is not always so popular*”. At the same time, he thinks: “*if we do not question, then the development is not driven forward*”. Also, referring to his prior work experience, he describes from where this inquisitive attitude originates:

“I also think that I have my referee background to thank for having somewhere safe and stable in myself, which means that I can answer for myself in most situations, but it is clear, it depends a little on in which kind of situation. So, yes, it depends. It is probably my brand. Hard to define.”

His formal title is private advisor, a role that has changed over time, but he rather identifies himself as being a sales representative. He explains:

“I see it as if I work as a salesman, not as much as an advisor, because I believe that an advisor can also work with external products and we only work with Bank D's solutions. So, therefore, I believe that I am a sales representative for Bank D who is employed to sell the right things to our customers that we meet.”

The role now emphasizes different things than when he first started. In the past, the role was more about product sales, today it is about packaged solutions and meeting customer needs.

“In the past, we actually worked as investment advisors more than we do today, today we work much broader, much more with the whole. So, from one perspective I can miss how we worked before, at the same time it is much easier today to create a standard solution for a customer, but somewhere, well, it is the customer meeting which is the fun part.”

In his experience, today, more people are talk openly about their finances, about loans and so on, and that the competition has also become much tougher for banks today than it has been before. He says he still likes his job but does not seem overly committed, saying:

“I like it very much for the most part. Then I also have thought, somewhere, that I should not work in a bank for the rest of my life.”

4.4.1 Employer D

This bank is among the few large players with a long history, especially in the large corporate segment. Their brand, currently, is focusing a lot on sustainability issues and Mr D explains:

“Above all, the environmental work is something that we also work very hard to work towards[...] We want to be the green bank, not only because we have a green logo, but because we want to be the most environmentally friendly bank”

He predicts that the environmental impact of companies is something that, above all, the younger generation will look at even more in the future. The fund companies have been a forerunner when it comes to putting together green investments that are recently also made available for smaller private investors.

The vision is to deliver *“world-class service”* to the bank’s customers, and their mission can be summarized into *“care for ambition”*. The customer focus is mostly towards entrepreneurs and the bank aims to be their partner throughout different phases in life. Accessibility is important, as Mr D stresses:

“Whether we talk to the private person or if we talk to the entrepreneur, we should be able to help them everywhere, all the time”.

On the other hand, since many bank offices have been closed in recent years, physical meetings are not always provided. For the older generation, Mr D admits digitalisation may be more difficult, since they are not used to using the different media available, but he will take the time to help them.

A long term, relational perspective with customers is sought after, as in most similar organizations. When asked about other ways in which the brand stands out in competition, the brand itself also aspires to have an entrepreneurial nature, changing with the times, while maintaining a customer focus. Mr D sums it up in a sentence.:

“After all, it is somewhere with the customer when we can create good solutions that they didn't really know they needed.”

4.4.2 Employee Advocacy - D

In Mr D’s opinion, his employer is rather bad at promoting itself and its advantages and keeps a low, rather anonymous profile. Also, operations are very much controlled by laws, by the EU and by the Swedish Financial Supervisory Authority which limits and controls what banks

can and must not do. He agrees with the basics, what bank D stands for, which is similar to what he personally stands for:

“It should be simple, we should make it easy for the customers. [...] I still think, in large part, that it is very much in agreement with how the bank highlights it. Then I think the bank should highlight it even more than we do”.

He further reflects upon his role as a family father, regarding promoting sustainability:

“you started to think [...] when you got older, and not just me, both me and my wife, of course. We have two children. Hopefully there will be grandchildren and great grandchildren, and so on, so somewhere something has to change [...] And can we then begin to make better solutions for the various problems that exist, then I think it is very important to highlight it”.

About promoting the bank for future employees, Mr D talks about students working part time in the bank. When they ask about career opportunities:

“I usually say: if you want to work in a bank then my best advice is to move to Stockholm, because that's where everything happens. Unless you really care a lot about the local, the village where you [...] come from”.

When it comes to defending the bank, or the brand, he argues:

“Somewhere depends on what it is. In the past, I could go more in the defensive position, but today I let the customer more just talk about it. And if the customer is still annoyed, then you get to refer them to someone else who may more easily answer them, about what it might possibly be”.

He seems to be of the opinion that scandals are hard to avoid, they come and go and how to respond to them

“depends entirely on the person who is there right then, how he/she chooses to act. So, then it is more about building an extremely strong corporate culture where we can live up to the expectations that our employer places on us”.

He specifically mentions that, during a period of time, there was a heated debate in media about the CEO and bonuses:

“It was, again, yes, you got to sit and listen to the customers and say: I understand how you feel, but it is not I who have been involved and contributed to this. And somehow, often they usually calmed down quite quickly”.

Listening actively, in person, instead of communicating e.g. via email, something he describes as a “*threat*” to banks as well as other workplaces, Mr D means is a key to deflate criticism and misunderstanding.

“if you talk to a person where the person in turn confirms you as a person, then it is very difficult to get annoyed”.

When asked whether staff are in some way encouraged to “live the brand” or to propagate in their free time, he replies:

“No, I probably can't really say that, at least not where I am. I think that it is appreciated when we do, it is not that it is emphasized that we should propagate. And at the same time, I think it doesn't really fit into all kinds of situations either. I am both a handball coach and a football coach for both my boys and I feel that it is somewhere difficult to go around to act bank, but it has to be a bit dependent on where and when. So I think you have to do it when you are away on something private, I think. If the question is raised [...], then absolutely but it is not really that I raise it myself and I would not feel really comfortable doing either”.

4.4.3 Social Media - D

Occasionally, Mr D posts about his employer on LinkedIn, shares and makes comments on other posts. One activity that he recently highlighted was an event where the bank invited business clients to a padel tournament. An activity got attention from both existing and new clients as well as colleagues and was very appreciated.

The idea was “*to do something new, not always just do the same things, like going on these regular networking meetings*”.

Using employees as “influencers” in different ways in Social Media is not customary in the industry. There is also the need of being taken seriously if the content should somehow be regarded as too playful or silly.

“I think it is fun and it is fun with that kind of element, but I find it hard to see that it would be serious when a large financial actor would go out in this way, at least if you think of where I work, a big commercial bank. The question is how the big companies would receive it, if the bank's employees are doing such gimmicks back and forth. I don't know, I'm a little ambivalent”.

As his main reasons for sharing and caring on Social Media, Mr D maintains:

“it's really twofold, I'd say. Just as important it is to highlight... [...] It is very rare [that] anyone talk about things banks do which are really good, which social benefit a bank has, basically. Usually there are only negative things being highlighted and then I think it is important to highlight the things we do that are actually good. After all, this is one side of this with social media and the other is, actually, somewhere, my own brand. Somewhere, what do I stand for, what do I think is important, in the long run?”

4.5 Employee E - Comparing amongst competitors and when to let go

Mr E (46 years old) has long experience in the banking sector. He works as a business advisor since about a year at Bank E in X-by, which is also the town where he lives with his family. He has previously he has had roles as a business advisor, sales manager and office manager in two other banks in different cities and has worked in the industry since 1996. He recently made a fresh start in this bank, he claims, mainly due to their values and ways of working. Benefits such as living close to work and getting a higher salary he describes as “*side effects*”.

Being a banker “on the move”, rather than being loyal to a particular bank or brand is a common strategy for those who has had leadership roles. Internal mobility and career opportunities are not so easy to come by outside of the bigger cities.

About local career opportunities, Mr E says:

“I might think that the possibilities exist but that they are still, limited is well a strong word, but ...”

Feeling committed and engaged at work, according to Mr E, is when you:

“fill some function and are in a context where you feel that you contribute in some way”

but also when meeting customers, when you are satisfied and get confirmation from managers and management.

4.5.1 Employer E

This bank is one of the four large, traditional banks in Sweden and is known for being locally independent, customer-oriented but selective, not a bank for everyone. A traditional, old-fashioned, full-service bank that instead of spending a lot of money on advertisements rather stays out of the limelight. In addition to being selective, Mr E mentions stability, security and decentralised decision-making as attractive factors, where they also differ slightly from their biggest competitors.

“Thanks to having a very decentralised organization where the office has a lot of power, then [...] decisions are made close to employees and that creates a very good group feeling in each office and that, I think, gives very positive effects to employees in that you have a great opportunity to influence your daily activities.”

Apart from its competitors, Bank E tries to have a personal touch, for example, including its personnel with pictures and contact details in advertisements and when working out in the field, they believe that as many employees as possible should take part, not only certain departments. When posing the question how he separates work from leisure time, Mr E thinks that when present [at]

“activities outside of work, maybe you have to be clear about in what capacity you are there, in some contexts, [...] sometimes maybe one gets to clarify it, in what role one is. Everyone may not be aware of it or understand it.”

The employer will not interfere with personal hobbies or interests, as long as one is not part of any radical organisation incoherent with company values and democratic values.

4.5.2 Employee Advocacy – E

When asked how, as an employee, he can support his brand, he answers:

“this is done through various involvement in the local business community and in leisure time and so on. Especially in smaller towns we as people become very important perhaps, because you are after all a mirror of the brand and the company you work in. It applies to all companies perhaps, but especially to a

bank where you deal with business relationship creation and so on. In that sense, they [banks] are really important arenas.”

In order to openly endorse the employer, Mr E thinks it is necessary to be proud, open and being able to stand up for the company. That stance, however, may become more difficult in some situations.

“I remember during my time at Bank D and there were such parachute discussions. Customers came in and screamed and were angry. Of course, then it is much more difficult to stand for... then you might not run out those days and proudly tell people that you work at Bank D, that is for sure”.

There might be times when personal values will decide how (or if) to comment. For Mr E, it depends on what the criticism is about. If he assesses that it is justified criticism, then he thinks it is best to say so. And if he thinks that it is not correct or not the whole picture, then I would argue for that opinion. At his own employer, he recollects that:

“There were writings about some female employees who were harassed within the bank, being published in Dagens Industri, for example. Now, that was not something that affected the whole bank in one way, but it [...] can still affect our brand. Because such things are difficult to defend.”

In his leisure time, Mr E seldom talks about his job in public, should the topic be brought up, he feels more comfortable talking about his job with close friends in one-on-one conversations. One reason for this is secrecy laws, another reason is the general media image of banks.

“The general media picture of banks is perhaps not the most positive. It is [accepted] to beat the banks and I think many customers see us as institutions, there is no difference, it is bank as a bank. You bundle it together, a bit like politicians.”

However, when confronted by someone expressing something in line with the media picture of banks that he disagrees with, for example *“they are all the same”* he will contest that view and give his own version based on his own experience. When it is something positive, for example a new product or campaign, he will share general news.

“I believe that, generally speaking, you do not talk so much about finances and details with friends and acquaintances. Well, the secrecy issue is one part of it, but I think it [also] has to do with some form of trust. Then, if there is something general, new products, technology development and such, that can be emphasized.”

4.5.3 Social Media – E

When it comes to sharing work-related content on Social Media, Mr E generally refrains. He explains this is partly because he thinks Social Media belongs to the private sphere and even on his private Facebook page, he is very restrictive about posting or sharing content. He seems to have mostly opted for an observer status, but when being asked if he would comment on other people’s posts, he admits:

“Rarely. It depends a little on what it is about and what it is about. Well, I did it a little before, but, no, I'm trying to avoid it. And it probably depends precisely on my profession that I think there is a great risk, for example, because Social Media bring with it the risk that it is easy to place people in different compartments, so I still try to keep a lower profile.”

There are some internal regulations about using Social Media and the bank itself is restrictive because of the risks involved, which he thinks in turn probably affects his own stance.

“So, I think, in order to avoid doubtful situations then you might choose to leave it, then. One could certainly have done so [use Social Media] to a much greater extent, but one probably chooses to keep a lower profile because there are some limitations on how to act.”

The interactive nature of the media may clash with secrecy laws and internal regulations and this also makes it difficult. Mr E develops:

“At one former employer of mine, a Facebook account was set up, in order to keep a dialogue, so to speak. But as long as there are positive things then there is no problem. If it is negative stuff then you cannot, for reasons of confidentiality, respond to it. Thus, it will be very difficult to manage it in a good way, for them and for those who will read. Things being raised can be pure inaccuracies, then it will be difficult to describe it in detail in a good way

without revealing secrecy issues, so that is probably an important factor why you do not want to do so.”

The media itself also breeds polarized views, according to Mr E, who thinks:

“there is also no room for a wide spectrum of things and it may be that things that were quite OK a couple of years ago, you see quite differently now” and he maintains that *“as an employee and an employee in a trust industry then you probably choose to let go instead.”*

4.6 Employee F - Sticking with a brand across borders, through times of change

This last interviewee, Mrs F, has had 22 years of work experience with the same employer, a commercial bank, and is currently working in one of their offices located in Gothenburg. Starting out straight after college in one of the small offices in the countryside, she has made a journey both geographically and career-wise. Her clients are large corporations with an annual turnover in between 50-500 MSEK. If it were not for the bank providing her with growth opportunities, she would not have remained. For the past ten years, she enjoys working in a large unit with great development opportunities. The bank itself is visible and engaged in different events in the city. Being a mother of three, she is, apart from most of her colleagues currently not so active in external events outside of the office normal office hours.

“There is a lot to be involved in. I am very bad [at it], because I have three young children, but my colleagues are much better at it than me. But there are a lot of activities”.

4.6.1 Employer F

The bank is often portrayed as a large, international player with a long history and experience, that has worked with entrepreneurs ever since they started and that also have a large international network. For ambitious employees, there are opportunities for internal mobility and personal and professional development. Mrs F was recommended internally to seek her current position and the reasons for applying for the job was flexibility, being able to manage her own time and decide when to meet the customers. In her previous role, someone else had the main responsibility and thus decided when her customer meetings were to be held.

According to Mrs F, the bank has been quite a few missions and visions over the years. But she also believes it is necessary to change those from time to time, in order to follow the market. Having and/or working for a well-known brand has its advantages:

“I think it is easier for us, if we are to bring in a new customer, then it is easier if you have a strong brand behind it. You do not have to explain as much as we really do or what we are to people. I can draw a parallel when I worked for the same company outside of Sweden. Then we had to explain all the time what we stood for, because they didn't know. There we were a very small player”.

Since the brand is closely linked to its company values, the company has recently put in more effort into how those values are being upheld and communicated, at least internally. The values are increasingly being referred to when making business decisions, not only when trying to attract new business or attract or retain staff. Nowadays, if a prospective client fails to pass sustainability requirements, business may be turned down. About communicating the values, Mrs F feels that:

“Outwardly, I would say that we are not so good at it, but internally we have become much better at it lately. Before, it was just, kind of, a poster on the wall. Now it's something you talk about quite often. But what you talk a lot more with customers now is sustainability. What this company stands for in terms of sustainability and how we help with that in the market. You tend to raise that very much”.

Working with sustainability and helping vulnerable people in society has been added to the traditional main mission of helping entrepreneurs and growth minded customers. Mrs F thinks that this might inspire current and future employees, especially young people.

4.6.2 Employee Advocacy – F

Expressing support for the brand is not always about talking or writing or how you phrase things, it is being displayed in the daily actions of employees. Mrs F elaborates on how, in a customer meeting, the brand is being strengthened by employees:

“I think that if you feel comfortable, that is, it permeates the whole person. That one thrives and is well, I can take an example, when I and my colleague go out together and meet prospects, that we two are safe in each other and have fun together, this is noticed at the sitting table at the meeting and the customer feels

that we feel good. And that makes our brand even more positive than if we were two people who did not like each other, signalling that we did not feel good”.

Speaking of feeling well and work/life balance, it may be that in busy periods, over-time may occur since *“it is probably expected that you will work more”*. Mrs F thinks that when that happens, occasionally, it is manageable, since you are able to take time off as compensation.

Being in the public eye, as a banker, as already have been touched upon in some of the other interviews, can be complicated. Traditionally, employees have been encouraged to keep a low profile in order to maintain trustworthiness for the industry as a whole. Mrs F describes the situation in her department, one of the older parts within the company, as being traditional:

“We have a leader now who has worked very long, who is very visible, everyone has probably not taken that role, it probably depends entirely on what age you are. I think the younger leaders have embraced that you should be more active and outward looking, while the older ones are, well, old-fashioned and they do as they have always done”.

About defending the employer against negative comments or in discussions, Mrs F finds it hard taking on a defensive role.

“I think it is difficult to defend something that ... most often "the infantry" do not have insight into what has happened. And then it is difficult to defend anything or difficult to even talk about something when you do not really know”.

4.6.3 Social Media – F

Mrs. F consider herself as being *“extremely active”* in Social Media, through following some interesting companies or people, commenting on or reading posts. She interacts with and grows her professional network through personal messages. She will add people whom she has met with before, who initiates the contact does not matter. When it comes to producing her own content she draws a line, apart from re-posting the occasional activity on LinkedIn, she states (surprisingly):

“I probably wouldn't post anything on Social Media that has to do with my job”.

When asked about her reasons of being restrictive in public she primarily refers to her own ignorance around not knowing what what to post. She is aware that there are guidelines, but not quite sure what they entail and because of rules not being clear or known, she opts out

from making her own input. She is also saying the if you should share something that is not correct or misleading, or written it in such a way that it can be misinterpreted, then it could be “*a real disadvantage*”. Social Media is not being talked about at work and Mrs F. sees it more as a channel for information and inspiration and closed rather than open communication. Being career conscious, she is also thinking about her own personal brand and future career opportunities when mentioning

“if you are going to hire a person that you do not know who it is, I do not know if it works like that with us, but I can imagine that they are looking for them both on LinkedIn, on Instagram and on Facebook to see how they are.”

5. Analysis and Thematical discussion

While analysing the interviews by re-structuring and summarising their content, in order to compare them, some patterns emerged. In the preliminary research model, three main outcomes, or Brand Citizenship Behaviours were depicted: 1) voluntary Employee Advocacy 2) formally appointed Brand Ambassadors, expressing support or 3) negative/no Advocacy

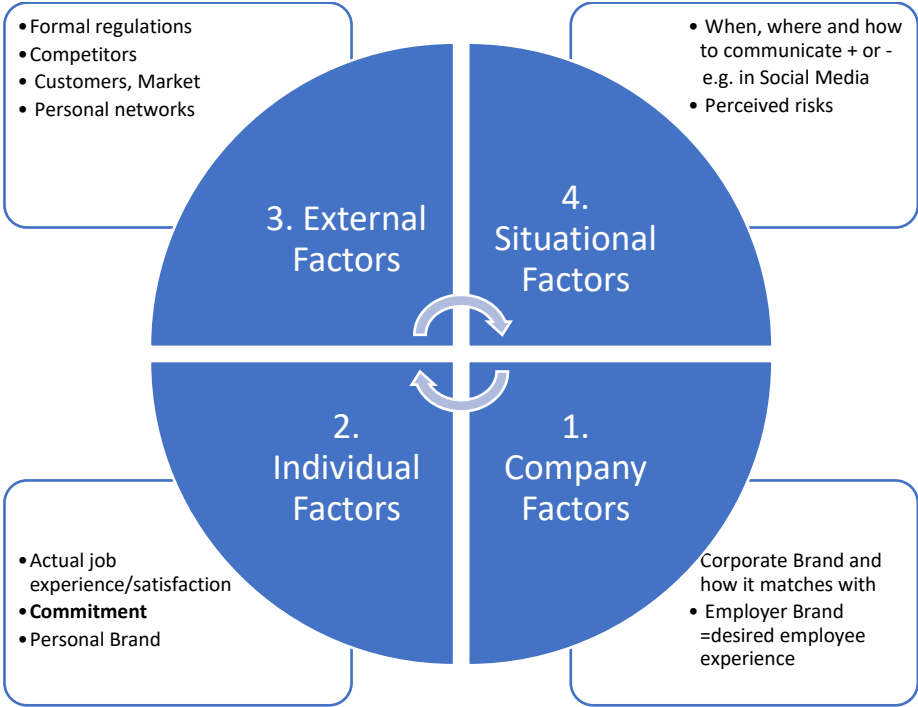
A quick analysis would be to argue that the two of the cases, A and C, best illustrate the first and the third of these three outcomes and that the other cases of bank employees, at least in Social Media context, will be grouped together. But since we want to avoid stereotyping, let us not fall into the trap of making a too simple analysis. According to the Resource Based View (Wernerfelt, 2005), firms differ, even within the same industry and so will the resources within firms. Not every employee sees the benefit of openly displaying support for their employer. For example, in the two cases of A and C, the seemingly happy employee A asked for both himself and the company to remain anonymous while the less motivated employee C did not mind if either the company’s or his own name were to be disclosed in this study. Perhaps a coincidence, but this illuminates one of the complexities of this topic.

Something that emerged across all the interviews was how knowledge and interpretation of rules of conduct, both formal and informal, differ among individuals in different companies and contexts. Employer Branding is about keeping employees aligned, which include how they think and express themselves about work. Even if you are “living the brand”, how you talk and act in public and/or your work environment will most probably be different from how you behave in private. Since most respondents seemed satisfied and committed to their jobs, yet displaying rather little Employee Advocacy behaviour, questions and answers did not only

lead into why one chooses to promote or defend the employer’s brand, but also when, where and how one should promote or respond to criticism against an employer, a brand or an industry. Social Media, in this context, appeared to be stifling the expression of support for brands rather than being a toolbox of opportunities. Therefore, instead of only making the analysis based on individual, company related and external factors, situational factors, were added as a fourth parameter of analysis and as a result, a new model was created.

Even though behaviours such as Employee Advocacy and Brand advocacy might be categorized, individuals may not be easily categorized, since behaviours also may vary depending on the situation. Instead of putting Employee Advocacy in Social Media in a quantitative, process-like figure, this figure better depicts the perpetuating nature of the phenomenon, driven by commitment and starting and ending with the Company Brand itself.

Figure 2, New conceptual model, shapers of Employee Advocacy:



5.1 Company factors, Corporate and Employer Brand

Starting the analysis in the bottom right corner of the model, tying to the earlier theoretical discussion about branding, in order for the Employer Brand to be perceived as strong or favourable for employees, it should be clear, it should permeate the entire organisation and go hand in hand with the Corporate Brand, or the way the organization is perceived by customers

and other external parties. Brand knowledge of what the firm is particularly good at is essential for employees since *“if a firm is good at something, the firm should try to use it”* (Wernerfelt 2005, p. 17). Sometimes, there might be differences and scholars have stressed that Employees' perceptions of their brand will not only be based on what the corporate brand team says, but also on their own internal and external experiences (Harris et al., 2001).

In the cases presented, sometimes employees have expressed situations of dissonance in between the Corporate Brand and the Employer Brand. To detect dissonance, brand knowledge is of importance, as stressed by King et al. (2007). In comparing between the individual cases, one is also able to detect that there are differences in levels of knowledge and understanding of the brands and how they permeate each organisation.

When Employee C, for example, is asked about brand values, he mentions that *“Yes, it may be that in the pile of all these educations it says what the values are. I know it is something we are talking about very much about during the education, but there is nothing written in any routines, it might be in the employment book one ought to read”* and during the interview it is also mentioned that the company vision is written on the wall of the staff room, although he is still not able to recollect what is says.

With this in mind, Employee A might have a valid point in stressing that corporate culture is something that should be *“in the walls”* and not be *“written on the walls”*. Employee F describes that where she works, missions and visions have changed over the years, in order to keep up with the market. They are now more modern, being discussed and put in effect, internally at least. *“Outwardly, I would say that we are not so good at it, but internally we have become much better at it lately. Before, it was just, kind of, a poster on the wall. Now it's something you talk about quite often.”* She gives an example in how sustainability is becoming an important factor when making decisions about clients and budgets.

Employee D seems genuinely knowledgeable about the company mission and vision and he also describe a recent event where they were discussed and displayed among colleagues. Not all employees are as clear about their company mission or vision or even believe it is something that the company wants to expose in public, as in the case of Employee E. Others might even question if the official values are being put there to improve the corporate image, or as Employee C expresses: *“one has added more, with environmental thinking. But much of the environment and CSR, what is it called... social...?[...] outwardly, you do not justify it in the same way as inward, the higher you get, the more you find out and see through it”*.

5.2 Individual factors, RBV, levels of value identification and job satisfaction

The empirical section in this study has clearly shown how different individuals have different ways of identifying with their role, industry or product (if applicable). This identification or “fit” will in turn be a base for commitment the deeper concept of job involvement, a more a cognitive belief state (Fernandez 2007, 524; Kuutsa, 2016, p 41). The level of value identification, or, how Personal brands of Employees and the Corporate brands share the same values (Kuutsa, 2016, p 95) seem to play a role for the respondents.

Employee A “*feels at home*” at work, is proud of his job, but as “*being humble*” is both a personal and a corporate value, he does not like to show it off. He will defend the employer if needed, but only if he feels like it, saying it is “*up to me*”. Employee B describes both herself and her employer as being “*happy and caring*” towards both customers and colleagues and for her, work is about communication and building relationships “*not just about doing business*”. In the case of Employee C, he cares about and is proud of his craft and should anyone have feedback about it, he will not take it lightly as “*it is a piece of myself*”. Employee D describes himself having different roles, a sales representative, an advisor, a referee, a husband, a father and a sports coach and summarily describes his Personal Brand as “*it depends*”. Employee E, an experienced banker declares that he is attracted by decentralised decision making and more conservative and traditional values. He recently changed employer, and the comfort of working closer to home is being mentioned as a “side effect”, which based on his values is assumed being an understatement. Employee F also clearly separates between her professional role and her private role as a mother of three. She cannot always participate in company activities outside of office hours, but she is “extremely active” in Social Media, where she also keeps in contact with some of her customers.

Since job satisfaction is one of the prerequisites of Employee Advocacy (Yeh, 2014), it is also interesting how satisfaction can be described in different ways. Only two employees, A and B expressed their job satisfaction as “being happy” and in addition, Employee B expressed this happiness by laughing on several occasions during the interview. It is possible that different individuals might express happiness or satisfaction in different manners, for example Employee D mentioned in more general terms that when managers give credit, that creates satisfaction. And Employee E also, in a way, covertly admitted his satisfaction with compensation and benefits when entering a new job as being pleasant “*side effects*”.

When asked about what creates satisfaction, both employee C and F especially mentions personal development and as long as they were given repeated opportunities in terms of courses or new roles in which they can excel, they remain(ed) happy, or at least satisfied, which connects to the SET theory that “*The nature of reciprocal exchange is repetitive*” (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Employers of growth-minded individuals may therefore consider giving them new opportunities and challenges from time to time to maintain their interest and commitment.

According to the Resource Based View, employees who have high knowledge about the brand are considered as “intellectual capital” of an organization and employees with high commitment to the brand are considered being its “emotional capital” (Natarajan, 2016, p 97) and both are important for long-term viability of the firm. In the light of the cases presented, it seems harder in reality to keep intellectual capital with high brand knowledge. For brands keeping their values rather constant, it would also appear easier to attract new employees, since it both will take time to develop intellectual capital and/or to create a new brand image.

Employee F has shown commitment to the brand where she has been working for 22 years, in terms of by moving abroad to work for the same firm and she mostly agrees with their values, thinking they are “*fine*” but at the same time, she mentions that there has been many visions and missions through the years. Reflecting upon her statement “*I think it is difficult to defend something that ... most often "the infantry" do not have insight into what has happened. And then it is difficult to defend anything or difficult to even talk about something when you do not really know*”: at times, in event of crisis or media scrutiny, being clear about what company values are and what they mean might be helpful in order for employees to take a stand.

It is not always evident which factor is the strongest. Toubia and Stephen (2013) mention two main reasons, or utilities, that makes individuals display their job satisfaction in Social Media (Twitter): intrinsic and image related utility. They claim the strongest of these reasons is image related i.e. seeking peer recognition. In the interviews, few examples of seeking this utility can be detected. When Employee D is posting about a customer activity “*to do something new, not always just do the same things, like going on these regular networking meetings*” he rather seems to be seeking (mainly) intrinsic utility and mentions extrinsic (image-related) peer recognition more as a bonus, similar to the argumentation made by Shinnar, Young & Meana (2004). In this case, it seems, the search for peer (or managerial) recognition is a secondary explanation for online Employee Advocacy.

5.3 External factors, interacting with the public, written and unwritten rules

As formerly mentioned, in order to succeed in Employer Branding, it is of essence that internal and external efforts in different channels are in sync. Ambler & Barrow (1996) and Uncles & Moroko (2005, as cited in Polvinen 2017, p. 16) support the opinion that “employer branding can be used to align employee behaviour with the corporate brand promise when interacting with customers”

When interacting with customers or other external parties, the employees represent the brand. The different respondents have also touched upon how interactions in between colleagues can improve or weaken the brand in the eyes of a customer. The best example of creating a good customer experience whilst strengthening the brand is made by employee F, who describes one case of showcasing the brand is when she and a colleague will go as a team to meet a prospective customer:

“that we two are safe in each other and have fun together, this is noticed at the sitting table at the meeting and the customer feels that we feel good. And that makes our brand even more positive than if we were two people who did not like each other, signalling that we did not feel good”.

Employee B has also commented upon the importance of sometimes standing up for both “good and bad” decisions made by colleagues in front of customers, while other strategies have also been expressed, for example by Employee C, meaning that if a customer is having a complaint regarding a colleague he will not interfere if he is not been in the situation. Again, situational factors might apply. It is not always easy to know how to handle external criticism.

5.4 Situational factors, Brand Citizenship and handling risks

Sometimes, there are no clear guidelines for employees on how to act in some situations and when Corporate and Private values are not aligned, employees will need to choose what is most important. This study has uncovered a few examples. Brand Citizenship Behaviour, as defined by King and Grace (2007) as “*extracurricular and voluntary employee activities on behalf of the brand/company*” or the expression “*Living the brand*” (Maxwell & Knox, 2009) and others is about showing how values are put into actions, which is not easily observed.

Although, an example of this that became clear in the interview with Employee A, who is working in an organisation where convenience and accessibility are highly regarded. Having

described how he is willing to combine his formal and private role, this was most clearly illustrated when in the middle of the interview, he excused himself while going downstairs to collect his laundry, while still performing the interview.

In the somewhat unknown terrain of Employees and Social Media, risk avoidance seems to be a stronger force than conscious brand strengthening and relationship building activities by these individuals. Many of the participants express they sometimes refrain from making public posts or statements online, but their uncertainties seem to stem from different places:

Employee A has not got any formal restrictions for private Social Media use but will let self-censorship decide whether or not to post in some situations. In his opinion, how you should represent the brand outside of work “*depends on who you ask*” and the only restriction mentioned is do not to wear the logo while going out for drinks or “revelling”. He has not worked in the company long enough to having experienced a media crisis, but if such an event occurred, he would be restrictive about writing online about the matter, if at all.

Even though Employee B is rather new in her organisation, she has at least 10 years prior knowledge in a similar organisation, handling of internal or external matters and mistakes, talking and listening and “*a sense of what will work or not*”, indicating intellectual capital, as described by Natarajan (2016). She will adapt to what kind of and how frequent communication the customer prefers and communicate in different channels depending on the nature of questions. Because she is not being openly active in Social Media with customers, who has only contacted her once or twice, she is not feeling limited by secrecy regulations. She thinks it is important that those responsible for Social Media channels keep good communication, because it could affect her in her work if a colleague should write something “*strange*”, not that it has happened.

In interviewing Employee C, he often referred to written contracts limiting expression, but also mentioned unwritten rules, and the general impression was since he used to have a managerial role in the past, he is not so involved in internal Social Media discussions. Employer C is governed by formal hierarchies, seemingly trusting routines more than trusting people. Should customers complain in official Social Media channels, the company would not disagree openly but somehow try to reply in a polite manner and, if necessary, suggest some compensation.

Employee D will happily share firm generated content (FGC) such as campaigns, product launches, events, especially if they connect with sustainability, which seem to be in line with

his Personal brand. He is not so often a representing the bank outside of office hours. Instead of writing e-mails, which he considers a risk, he prefers personal communication through meetings or phone-calls. He is ambivalent when it comes to being too creative in messages, thinks it may differ depending on the industry, timing or consistency in messages, in general.'

Risk aware Employee E keeps a very low profile in Social Media, in order to minimize internal/external risks for both himself and his employer: *"I think, in order to avoid doubtful situations then you might choose to leave it, then. One could certainly have done so [use Social Media] to a much greater extent, but one probably chooses to keep a lower profile because there are some limitations on how to act."* He mentions reasons being both secrecy regulations and to maintain trust. Should he react on different articles, it would depend on the content, since he sees a risk of *"being placed in a compartment"*.

Employee F has shared some experience in how promoting a brand may depend on in which country you work. She will re-post the company's activities, possibly. In general, she is reluctant because she is aware that there are restrictions, but not sure about what they entail. In her immediate organisation, which is old and traditional, Social Media is not even being talked about. In her case, the extrinsic peer support clearly affects her Advocacy behaviour.

5.5 Employee Advocacy and SET, reciprocating support in good and bad times

According to SET theory, all promises made by the organisation towards their employees should be fulfilled, in terms of job benefits and other functional components that are associated with it (Natarajan et al., 2016). In the case C, it was described how the employee not feeling supported in taking time off for personal development in form of studies and that they formally removed responsibility areas, decreasing his pay, while he felt that they informally still expected him to perform the same duties. His lack of motivation clearly affect how he describes his employer. Although he might not outright mention negative aspects in public, at least in Social Media. Plus, he may not be willing to defend the brand in interactions with customers, declaring: *"whether they have an experience of something in store, against managers or against any other employee, I have not been in the situation and cannot speak on behalf of the company. I can only talk about what I myself have experienced"*.

In sharing positive news in general about their employer, few of the respondent seemed reluctant, yet no one expressed that they were formally encouraged to do so by the employer. Employee D mentions that the reaction for sharing company material would be a positive one,

Employee A is a somewhat special case, since he produces job advertisements, but no other mentioned any positive responses from making Social Media posts from their employer.

5.6 Social Media, strengthening, weakening or complicating professional relationships

Since most of the employees in the study seemed rather vaguely aware of what company policies, if any, regarding employee activity in Social Media entailed, this could be a reason for refraining from expressing support for the Employer's brand online. About interacting with customers, the respondents had some different strategies. While some could imagine keeping old personal friends as customers, someone else would refrain. One employee would never actively add a customer to a professional network, another would not mind who would initiate contact, as long as they had already met in person. One employer makes rules about a phone-free environment but will simultaneously turn a blind eye for deviations. The others are perhaps in the process of consulting with their HR and legal departments on how to formulate restrictions in employment contracts or recommendations in guidelines.

6. Conclusions/Summary

Based on this study, it seems reasonable to conclude that in order for Employee Advocacy to occur, several interconnected parameters are at play. The phenomenon does not seem likely to manifest itself simply because employees are identifying with a brand through commitment and satisfaction, as suggested by some scholars (Fernandez, 2007 or Yeh, 2014). Nor does it seem that simply being an employee in a company with a favourable Employer Brand will automatically lead to Employee Advocacy behaviour (as suggested by Natarajan, 2016).

The empirical findings rather indicate support of the result of Men's study, claiming "*employee-organisation relationships are mutually beneficial when they are characterised by trust, control, mutuality, commitment and satisfaction*" (Men, 2014, p. 271). In addition to these components, frequent communication with management will create/strengthen Employee Advocacy (ibid). To verify the findings, more studies would need to be conducted. For example, since there were few indications in the interviews upon managerial support and its effects. At the same time, too much control bordering on trespassing on the privacy of employees will probably not be attractive either. In order to gain trust from employees, the employer needs to show trust in them.

Although the aim was not to draw general conclusions, it appears as if these individuals' different experiences of media, their age and other background factors appear to play a role.

Younger employees, many of whom cannot remember a life without the Internet, will perhaps be more aware of the risks connected with their online behaviour, especially when being new on the job market. Others may already be employed, but about to change jobs and therefore less willing to put themselves under public scrutiny. Only one or two respondents explicitly mention their Personal Brand, yet one can discern how this plays a role.

If you are willing to display your opinion about your employer in public, you may either be a genuine Employee Advocate, although judging by the difficulties in collecting empirics, it is not likely to assume that such individuals exist, it rather seem to be a temporary behaviour. Most people seem to express themselves carefully to be on the safe side. Employees may be disgruntled for different reasons, but few would want to risk both their own reputation and a possible lawsuit or termination.

Context also matters, e.g. which industry the organisations are in or Social Media channel. One parameter that has not been addressed in earlier research is how the size and organizational structure of employers also may play a role. In large organisations there are most likely formally appointed Brand Ambassadors or experts to represent a brand and their formal/informal advocacy will likely affect the behaviour of “ordinary” employees. The larger the organisation, the more likely it might be for people to refrain from extracurricular activities, arguing, as Employee B puts it: “someone else can do that”.

Since the original focus was on the visible, interactive part of Social Media, the former assumptions did not take the non-visible one-on-one online communication fully into account. For example, even if you do not communicate visibly in your networks, you might still be, in the words of employee F “*extremely active*”. Also, people have different interpretations of what being “active” means. Some might argue that actively observing other actors is being active, although they are not, in fact, producing content or regularly interacting with them, but possibly calculating and waiting for the right moment to make contact. More than one employee admitted that they in some ways keep track of customers via Social Media.

Showing no response or silence in Social Media, as in real life, might not be the same as having no interest or emotion, it could also be a strategy to “avoid harm” in a perceived negative or unknown situation. Another option, of course, is that you are currently not online. However, being offline will probably not be an option to most employees of today, where flexibility, being able to manage one’s own time and decide when and where to meet

customers is an attractive feature, being confirmed in the interviews by Employees A, B, C, D and F.

Last, but not least, in order to answer the research question:

In companies with strong Employer Brands, what are the motivators behind Employee Advocacy and how does this behaviour manifest itself in a Social Media context?

In the analysis, different factors or motivators for Employee Advocacy were mentioned. Among the company specific factors Corporate and Employer Brand congruence was touched upon. Among the Individual factors, the levels of value identification, *commitment*, by scholars Yeh (2014) and Piehler, King, Burmann & Xiong (2016) regarded as the most important driving factor together with job satisfaction were discussed. Two kinds of committed employees were lifted, the ones with intellectual capital and deep brand knowledge and the ones with emotional capital, often based on many years of serving the same brand. Under External factors were mentioned public interaction by employees, written and unwritten rules. When re-evaluating the model after performing the interviews situational factors were added as the fourth and final step, including communication channel, timing and risk assessment made by individuals. The main idea was to clarify different aspects of communication in Social Media and overall, such as timing (when) location (where) and choosing different channels (how). Separating Employee Advocacy in between different levels of Brand Citizenship Behaviour seemed less important in the last model since Employee Advocacy is a practice that both formally appointed employees and others may perform.

6.1 Theoretical and Practical Contributions

This study gives an account of the Employee Advocacy phenomenon and some of its triggers and obstacles, from the Employee perspective, systematically analysed through a conceptual model that was refined based on existing and new theory, clarified by empirical examples.

The link between strong Employer Brands and Employee Advocacy is not always so clear on the individual level. In this study, this link mainly seems to depend upon Brand knowledge and to what degree the employee identify him/herself with Brand values. In order to verify if the link in between strong employer brands and Employee Advocacy exists on a larger scale, one could further explore the matter by interviewing a larger number of individuals or perform a quantitative study in the form of an anonymous questionnaire.

Since the study indicate that individuals make different interpretations and choices and the fact that new laws (GDPR) recently has been made about keeping customer registers plus the fact that different secrecy laws apply, Social Media use ought to be of interest for companies to discuss with their employees, regardless of industry.

6.2 Limitations

Apart from limitations already mentioned in the Abstract and elsewhere, methodologically, the research paper would have been somewhat different if the primary focus would not have been on finding material related to both Employee Advocacy and Social Media. Hence there are room for improvements in the literary section, finding more theoretical sources would have strengthened the models. Additionally, when researching a sensitive topic such as the relationship Employee - Employer, a mixed qualitative/quantitative method might have helped to confirm some findings or help to make some generalizable conclusions.

6.3 Suggestions for Future Research

Employee Advocacy seems easier when not having to do so in the public eye. Since the level of value identification is important for commitment as well as satisfaction, which in turn forms a base for Employee Advocacy, it would also be of interest to study individuals, their motives and behaviours from a single organisational perspective. Access might prove difficult, yet it ought to be in the interest of a company, since satisfied employees will create satisfied customers, as the McLeod & Clarke's (2009) study has shown.

The study did not specifically investigate how the voluntary advocacy by formally appointed Brand Ambassadors affected the behaviour of ordinary employees, but that may also be an interesting area for further research.

A couple of studies have discussed how the motivations for engaging online on behalf of a brand are both intrinsic and extrinsic, similar to the drivers of WOM (Shinnar, Young & Meana, 2004) yet this study has not managed to find clear evidence for which of these motivations are the strongest for Employee Advocacy in a Social Media context, that could be yet another interesting research path.

The possibilities for future research in this area apart from these examples are many. Hoping that the reader by now have a broader idea about this phenomenon, keeping in mind that the Social Media context in relation to this phenomenon, at large, still remains to be explored.

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Appendix 1, strong Employer Brands, according to rankings.

This study has collected its empirics from employees of five companies on how they relate to employee advocacy. These large companies of Swedish origin are all in the Top 20 among some well-established annual ranking lists. They have some similarities, for example they are all in the service sector and most of them offer banking services. In other ways they are different, they sell different products and services, emphasise different social media channels and have different strategies for Employer Branding and growth. However, the intention was not to draw any general conclusions about single companies or industries, rather to gain an understanding of how Employee Advocacy can be viewed from different perspectives by talking to a handful of their employees, in particular when it comes to actively promoting or defending the employer in Social Media.

Universum the company that goes under the slogan “The global leader in Employer Branding” was founded by Lars-Henrik Friis Molin, while still a student in 1988. He wrote and distributed the first student survey in Stockholm and since then the company has grown and expanded to annual surveys of 1.500.000 students and employees in 60 countries.

Another Universum survey, Sveriges Bästa Arbetsgivare is executed among employees of large companies (minimum 250 employees) and will reveal how they assess their employer according to three factors: internal identity, satisfaction/recommendation and loyalty (www.universum.se) and the factors are explained as follows:

- Internal identity: how well the employees think that their employer is doing when it comes to employer reputation and image, job qualities, people and culture, compensation and benefits and advancement possibilities.
- Satisfaction/recommendation: how satisfied the employees are in general and how prone they are to recommend the employer to their friends.
- Loyalty: how likely it is that employees will stay with their current employer.

According to another ranking list, Great Place to Work, rankings are based on companies that has gone through a more thorough certification process. Companies that participate and reach an international standard are given certificates that are valid for 12 months. Great Place to Work will support the company in the start and implementation of the evaluation process. The evaluation itself entails for employees to answer a survey called Trust Index and for the board to carry out a culture audit. The certification process demands genuine commitment by CEO

and members of the board of directors to work on creating a good workplace environment and culture (source: www.greatplacetowork.se).

In both Universum and Great Place to Work rankings the employer has to register and pay a fee to enter and one could therefore question the neutrality of the rankings. In order to include employees of brands that do not participate in these EB rankings, a couple of companies are instead found on the Randstad Award list, which is the biggest independent employer brand ranking of the most attractive employers in 32 different countries. Apart from the annual ranking they also have Hall of fame for extraordinary performance (source: www.randstad.se).